

# Preface

Sometimes it seems as if the debate over the analytic/synthetic distinction didn't get resolved, so much as left behind. At its zenith, the tussle was between the Carnapians and the Quineans. For those in the Carnapian camp, the distinction was a consequence of some apparently obvious facts about language; it seemed amazing that the Quineans couldn't see that. For Quine and his followers, the disappearance of the distinction was a consequence of the drive to import scientific rigour into philosophy; some things that had seemed fine—or even obvious—to the naked eyes of Kant, Bolzano and even Frege, dissolved under the microscope of precision; the world, at base, wasn't quite as it seemed, and among the mere illusions were the “obvious facts” supposed to support the analytic/synthetic distinction. Of course, this is too simple a sketch, but I think it will do for the preface.

The view of language that makes the existence of analytic sentences seem inevitable is a very intuitive one: expressions (both sentences and subsentential expressions like words), have *meanings* and an expression's meaning plays three roles; i) it is what a speaker has to grasp or know in order to count as understanding the expression; ii) it determines what objects in the world the expression applies to (less colloquially: it determines a function from possible worlds to extensions); iii) it is what the expression says or what it contributes to *what is said* (a proposition) by a sentence which contains it.

That's all but, with this picture in the background, the analytic/synthetic distinction emerges very naturally. Suppose we stipulate that a new word *tove* is to mean the same as a word already in our language, say, *cluster*. Given the assumptions above, the sentence *all toves are clusters* seems to have some special properties. First, *tove* and *cluster*, having the same meaning, must pick out the same objects in the world, by ii), which, given the meanings of the rest of the expressions in the sentence, is enough to guarantee its truth—we might call it *true in virtue of meaning*. Now by iii) the sentence's meaning is the proposition it expresses. Since that is such that it cannot be false, the sentence expresses a necessary proposition. Finally, since its truth follows from the meanings of the expressions it contains, and by i) a competent speaker has to know those meanings, we might expect a competent speaker be in a position to work out that the sentence is true, even if he has no particular experience of the world. Sentences with these three properties—truth in virtue of meaning, necessity and something like a priority—seem special, and it isn't unnatural to

mark that specialness by calling them *analytic*.

The Quinean camp raised a lot of problems for this picture of analyticity but in the meantime, the “obvious” picture of meaning that supported it started to slip for relatively independent reasons. In three astonishingly influential pieces of philosophical writing, Putnam (Putnam 1985/1973) argued that meaning couldn’t be *both* what a speaker grasped *and* what determined extension, Kaplan (Kaplan 1989*b*) argued that what determines extension (character) and what got contributed to what a sentence said (content) came apart in the cases of indexicals and demonstratives, and Kripke (Kripke 1980) argued that what determined the extension of a name or natural kind term need not be known in order for a speaker to understand the expression, nor was it what was contributed to the proposition expressed by a sentence containing one. Each was suggesting that the roles attributed to a single thing—the expression’s *meaning*—in the picture above, can be played by distinct things.

If that is right, then the expression *meaning* requires some disambiguation, and in this book I use the following terminology for that purpose:

<b>character</b>	—	what a speaker must know in order to understand an expression.
<b>content</b>	—	what an expression contributes to the proposition semantically expressed by a sentence containing it.
<b>reference determiner</b>	—	a condition which an object must meet in order to be the referent of, or fall in the extension of, an expression.

With this terminology it is still possible to express the old view, on which character, content and reference determiner are all names for the same thing, but it is harder to pass that view off as inevitable, since it is easier to express views that run counter to it. Given that the old view provided intuitive support for the traditional conception of analyticity, perhaps it is unsurprising that Putnam, Kaplan and Kripke each produced examples of sentences that aren’t easily classified as either analytic or synthetic on the old conception: Putnam can be construed as arguing that the putatively analytic *all cats are animals* is true in virtue of meaning if it means what we think it means, but (since we don’t know for sure that it means that) it is not a priori and not necessarily true, and hence not analytic. Kaplan’s *I am here now* seems analytic, but it is not necessary, and *Hesperus is Phosphorus* seems true in virtue of meaning in some sense (and so not synthetic), but not a priori (and so not analytic). With the obviousness of the picture supporting the distinction gone, and the extension of the distinction newly unclear, the analytic/synthetic distinction might seem to be based on substantial—and questionable—assumptions after all. One might

even be tempted to think that it was an artefact of a view of language that we have left behind.

My aim with this book is to tempt you with something else. As I like to think of it, our old view of analyticity was based on a naive theory of meaning, and some Quinean challenges to it were basically right. *But our new theories of meaning will support a new picture of analyticity*, one which—being based on a better theory of meaning—admits of a more robust defence.

To this end, the first part of the book develops an account of analyticity that is intended to sit better with the kind of view that one might loosely call an externalist and contextualist approach to language. It is also designed to take account of a number of developments and improvements that have taken place since the heyday of the original Quine-Carnap debate: I try to be more careful about things like the objects of analyticity, about distinguishing between analyticity, necessity and a priority, and one of my main goals from the beginning was to explain how *I am here now*—a contingent sentence—could be analytic, while *Hesperus is Phosphorus*—a sentence that might be thought to be necessary and true in virtue of meaning—was not.

Though this was my main aim, I hope that by the end it seems plausible that an account of analyticity—an account of truth in virtue of meaning—will always be parasitic on a theory of meaning: given different accounts of the meaning of a sentence, we may get different answers to the question of whether the sentence is analytic. Though I will tend to use simple versions of some currently well known pictures to illustrate my view, there's no reason why the same account of analyticity couldn't be adopted to for use with opposing views, and the plausibility (or lack of it) of the results would bear on the plausibility of both that theory of meaning and my account of truth in virtue of meaning.

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g. k. r.