Verificationism - Lecture 4

Quine & Verificationism

1A Meaning

Annie Bosse

Today: Quine

- Influential criticism of verificationism as defended by Logical Positivists & Michael Dummett

- New proposal: web of belief

W.V.O. Quine

- 1908-2000
- American philosopher
- Spent 1932-33 in Europe, including a visit to Vienna and the Vienna Circle
- Systematic
- Naturalism

Two Dogmas of Empiricism

Quine: the second dogma is "at root identical" to the first (1951:38)

NEGATIVE PART

- First dogma: analytic/synthetic distinction
- Second dogma: reductionism

POSITIVE PART

- Confirmation within web of belief

Dogma 1: Analytic/Synthetic distinction

There is an analytic/synthetic distinction

analytic	Bachelors are unmarried men	True in virtue of meaning alone
synthetic	Dogs bark	True in virtue of meaning and the way the world is

Dogma 1: Analyticity

- Quine: A sentence that is true in virtue of meaning alone is made up of **synonymous** parts.
- [Bachelors] are [unmarried men]
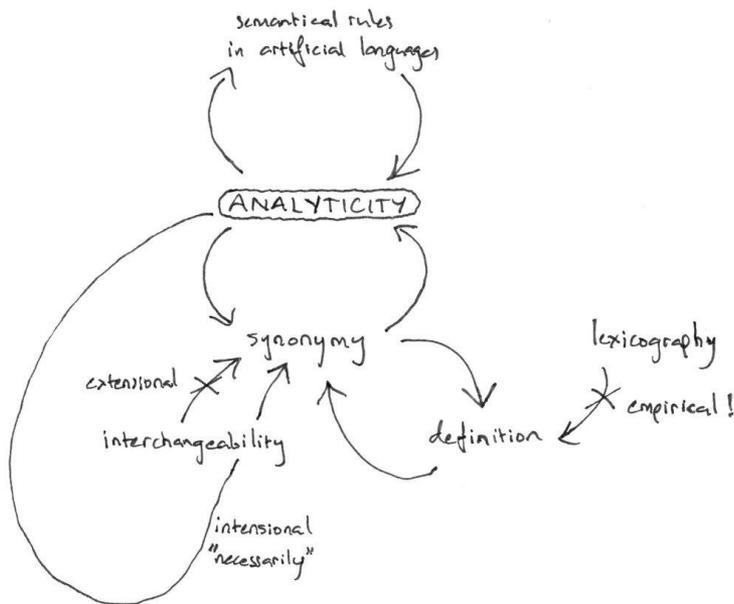- Quine: can't make sense of synonymy

Dogma 1: Synonymy

1. **Definitions**: lexigraphical, explications, and abbreviations
2. **Substitutivity:** expressions are synonymous iff they can be substituted for one another without change in truth values.
   - 'Bachelor' has 8 letters, 'unmarried man' doesn't so substitutivity not necessary
   - 'Creature with a heart' and 'creature with a kidney' are intersubstitutable but not synonymous, so substitutivity not sufficient

Dogma 1: Necessity and Analyticity

3. **Necessary substitutivity:** two terms are synonymous just in case substituting the one for the other necessarily preserves truth. Quine: Necessity presupposes analyticity so cannot be used it explain it. 'Bachelors are unmarried men' is necessarily true because it is analytic.

- Kaplan: necessity and analyticity can come apart:

  - *I am here*

  - Understand necessity in terms of possible worlds

- Historical background: necessity is mysterious so empiricists understood it in terms of a priority/ analyticity, but then obviously can't understand analyticity in terms of necessity

Dogma 1: The method

semantical rules
in artificial languages

ANALYTICITY

synonymy

lexicography

extensional

interchangeability

definition

empirical!

intensional
"necessarily"

- Quine's asks: What is analyticity?
- No good explanation
- Several notions defined in terms of one another. Can't understand any because no
- Example: *being pious* defined as being loved by gods vs *being loved by gods* defined as being pious

Dogma 2: Reductionism

- **Confirmation of sentences in isolation**
  - Subtype: Carnapian translation of sentences into sentences containing only logical terms + empirically verifiable predicates
  - "the belief that every meaningful statement is equivalent to some logical construct upon terms which refer to immediate experience"

- Reference to Carnap but more general target is semantic atomism: sentences (as opposed to clusters of them) are the units to be confirmed/disconfirmed

Semantic Atomism

- Sentences can confirmed/disconfirmed in isolation

Confirmation holism

- Statements don't get confirmed/disconfirmed **in isolation**

- Background assumptions needed to generate prediction that can be tested

  - e.g. mathematical theories needed to generate hypotheses amenable to numerically measurable tests

  - Any hypothesis requires background assumptions, including about status of observations

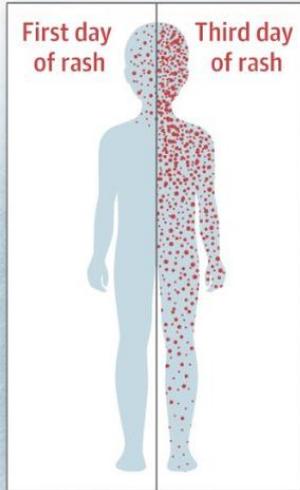- Can always give up any of a number of background assumption
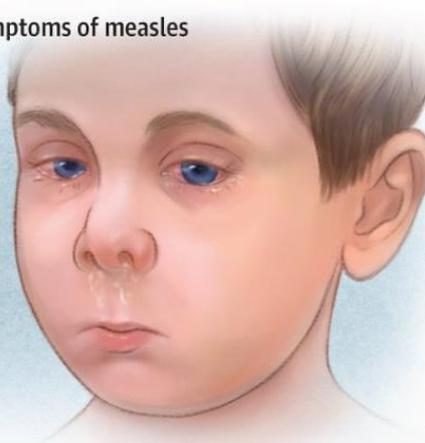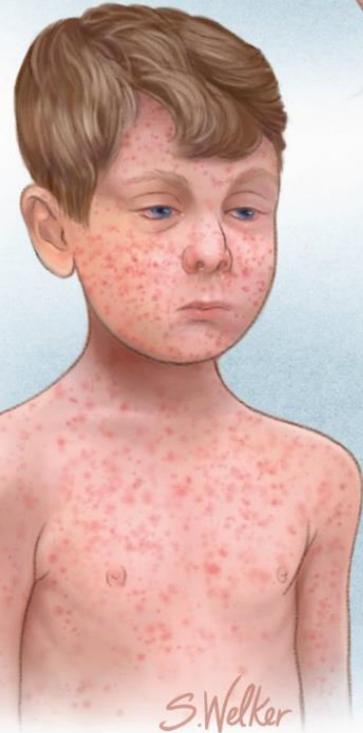
Example

- *Alba has measles*

- Observation: Alba doesn't have a rash

- Background assumptions:

  - List of measle symptoms exhaustive, rash symptoms essential

 - Assumptions required to make sense of observation
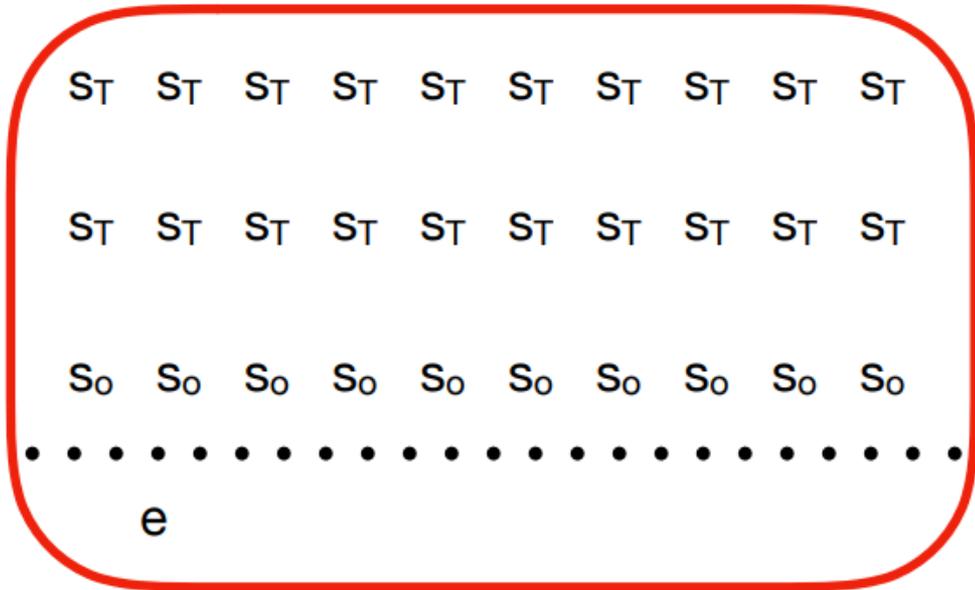
- semantic holism: whole theories get confirmed/disconfirmed
- Any belief is revisable

Semantic Holism

And back to the first dogma

- Supposedly analytic sentence often required as background assumptions to produce hypotheses

  - Mathematical statements

  - Logical laws

- Can't define analyticity in terms of confirmation either

- motivates positive picture

Quine's web of belief
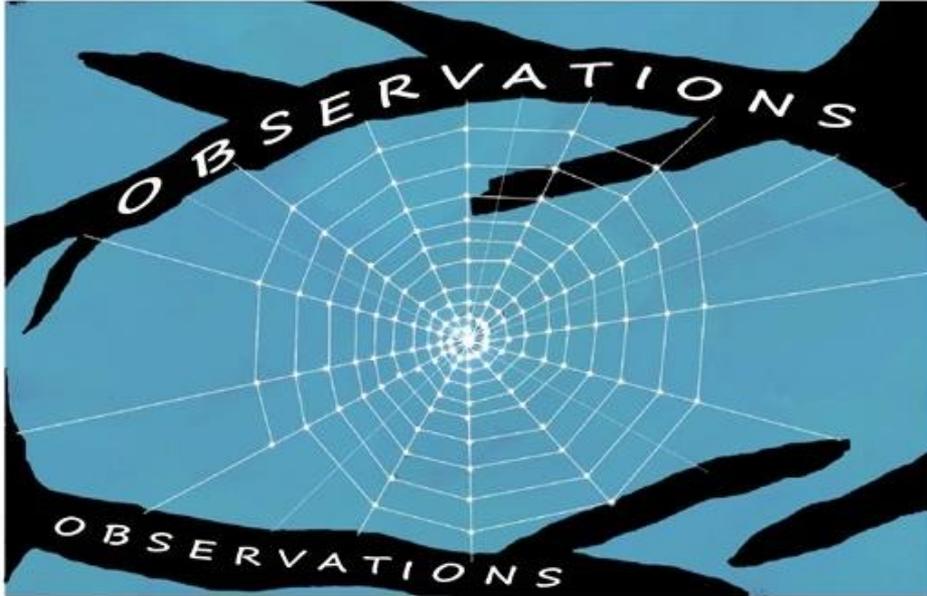
- Different positions of beliefs within web dependent on how likely to be revised

- Logical & mathematical statements inside web of belief and therefore revisable

- Pragmatic considerations about revision

- Link to meaning: because link to empirical verifiability still required for meaning, sentences in isolation don't have meaning
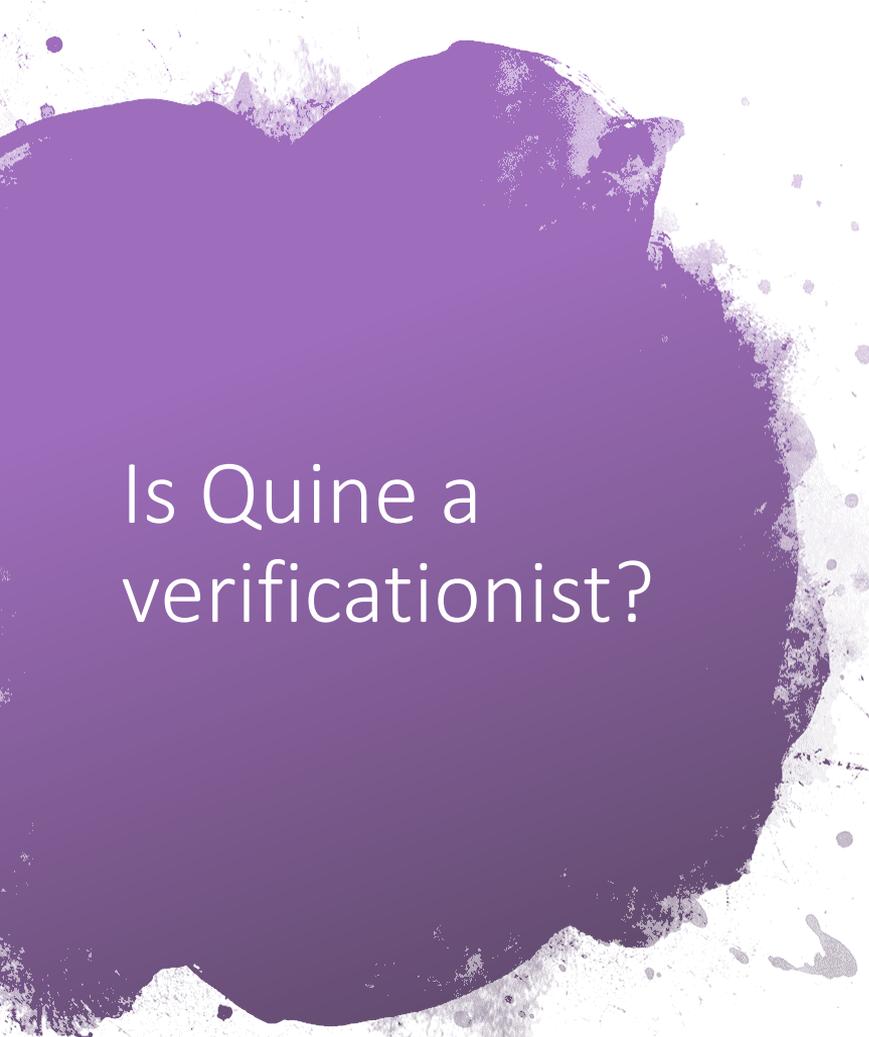
Is Quine a verificationist?

- Rejects verificationism of logical positivists and Dummett

  - Logical Positivists require analytic/synthetic distinction

  - Both Dummett and logical positivists reductionists

- Provide alternative empiricist-friendly theory of confirmation/disconfirmation and thereby meaning: the web of belief

Reading

- **Quine, W.V.**, 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism', Philosophical Review, 60, no. 1 (1951): 2043. http://www.jstor.org/stable/2181906. Reprinted in his From a Logical Point of View (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953; 2nd rev. ed. 1963).
- **Russell, Gillian**, 'Quine on the Analytic/Synthetic Distinction', in G. Harman and E. Lepore, eds., A Companion to W. V. O. Quine (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2014), pp. 181202. Also available online at: https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118607992.ch9.
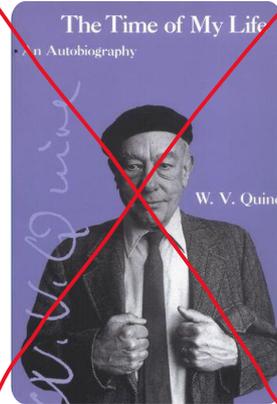
Note

- If questions arise e-mail me at ab2436@cam.ac.uk, but do so now because I will be working elsewhere in Easter term
- Guide to Church on Moodle