

# PUTTING THE BITE BACK INTO “TWO DOGMAS”

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## *Abstract*

*Recent Carnap scholarship suggests that the received view of the Carnap-Quine analyticity debate is importantly mistaken. It has been suggested that Carnap's analyticity distinction is immune from Quine's criticisms. This is either because Quine did not understand Carnap's use of analyticity, or because Quine did not appreciate that, rather than dispelling dogmas, he was merely offering an alternate framework for philosophy. It has also been suggested that ultimately nothing of substance turns on this dispute. I am sympathetic to these reassessments and their rejection of the received view, but argue that they fail to pay proper attention to Carnap's metaphysical deflationism. For it is there that Quine's arguments ultimately make contact with Carnap, undermining his metaphysical deflationism. Moreover, the viability of deflationism is directly related to the viability of Carnap's view of philosophy as methodologically distinct from science. Hence, Quine's criticisms make contact with the deepest aspects of Carnap's views.*

## **1. Introduction**

W. V. Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (1951/1980) is typically taken to have undermined the logical positivists'—and especially Carnap's—philosophical program. The received reading sees this as a result of that article's criticisms of analyticity and verificationist reductionism. The issue, however, is not so simple. The flourishing of Carnap and Vienna Circle scholarship in the past fifteen or twenty years has led to a deeper understanding of Carnap's aims and approaches. On this deeper understanding it is far from clear that Quine's arguments against the analytic/synthetic distinction have the decisive force we have been taught to believe in.<sup>1</sup> The general thrust of these reassessments of the debate is that Quine's arguments fail to account for

Carnap's most central philosophical motives—tolerance, framework explication, and the deflation of metaphysics. The failure of Quine's arguments is attributed to either Quine's failure to fully understand Carnap, or, more sensitively, to a deep and apparently irreconcilable difference between Carnap and Quine on the nature of philosophy.

To take three examples: Richard Creath, in his "Every Dogma as Its Day" (1991) has argued that, because 'analytic' is a technical term for Carnap, analyticity is fully intelligible in his system, and we must view Quine, not as dispelling dogmas, but as offering an alternate epistemology. Paul O'Grady, in his "Carnap and Two Dogmas of Empiricism," (1999) has argued that, since Carnap took a deflationary stance toward the analytic/synthetic distinction itself, Quine's arguments simply miss their mark. And Alexander George has argued, in "On Washing the Fur Without Wetting It," (2000) that since both Quine and Carnap can accommodate the Quinean arguments against analyticity, the dispute is traceable to fundamentally different views about what constitutes meaningful philosophical dispute. George then puts a final twist in the tale by persuasively arguing that even Quine must ultimately agree that whether there is any substantial disagreement between himself and Carnap is "a question on which nothing hangs" (George 2000, p. 22). Such reassessments disabuse us of the received reading and shed much-wanted light on a dispute which has acquired all the obscurity fostered by its mythic status.

I will argue, however, that a crucial piece of the puzzle is still missing. The sort of reassessments I have in mind tend to focus on Carnap's epistemological views—tolerance, framework explication—without fully considering whether these can support his metaphysical deflationism, a key element of his overall philosophy—indeed, a key difference between him and Quine. Moreover, these readings tend to overlook or undervalue certain arguments from Quine's "Truth by Convention" and "Carnap and Logical Truth" (1976a; 1976b). These arguments, I shall contend, show that insofar as Carnap can maintain his analyticity distinction, his metaphysical deflationism is undermined, collapsing into a view much like Quine's. I conclude, first, that Quine's arguments against analyticity make forceful contact with Carnap's conception. Second, while Quine can endorse something very

much like Carnap's explicationism, the metaphysical deflationism must be cast out. Third, since analyticity and its support of metaphysical deflationism are directly tied to Carnap's conception of philosophy as methodologically distinct from science, I conclude that the nature of philosophy and the choice between two distinctly different naturalisms hangs in the balance.

## 2. The Arguments Against Analyticity

Without sacrificing too much detail, Quine may be understood as arguing that there is no account of analyticity which is either general or grounded. By 'general' I mean an account of analyticity which can apply across languages; an account which is not language-specific. By 'grounded' I mean an account which determines the set of sentences analytic for a language in virtue of either linguistic behavior, some clearly definable semantic feature, or some non-arbitrary logical feature. In particular, §§2-3 of "Two Dogmas" argue that neither definition, nor synonymy, nor necessity provide an explication of analyticity without already presupposing it. §5 argues that verificationist reductionism fails, and so fails to provide an understanding of analyticity. §4 argues that while appeal to artificial languages yields 'analytic-for- $L_0$ ' for a specific language,  $L_0$ , this does not aid us in understanding analyticity. First, there is no indication of how this relates to linguistic behavior or natural language analyticities. Second, it gives us no understanding of analyticity for artificial languages generally. And, third, even within a given artificial language the specification of analytic sentences (or semantic rules) is arbitrary, constrained only by our ability to effectively define a set. "Truth by Convention" and "Carnap and Logical Truth" each contain arguments to similar effect that there is no behavioral, semantic, or logical criterion which can ground an analyticity distinction. Thus, according to Quine, neither a general nor a grounded account of analyticity is available.

Let me note as an aside that an argument based in holism and radical revisability is often attributed to Quine on the basis of the second paragraph of §6 of "Two Dogmas." The attributed argument runs

thus: since there are no unrevisable sentences, and since conversely any sentence may be held true come what may (with sufficient revision elsewhere), then no distinction between analytic and synthetic is to be had. But, while this is telling against a conception of analytic sentences as unrevisable, unrevisability was no part of Carnap's conception of analyticity. So, a simple appeal to revisability cannot be the whole argument here. Indeed, if we read the whole paragraph, we find Quine appealing not to revisability tout court, but to the absence of a principled difference in kind of revision—a point which, I shall argue, does bear against Carnap.

### 3. The Potential Irrelevance of the Arguments

To see how the preceding arguments may well be irrelevant, we must take into account Carnap's notion of framework explication, the tolerance that is to reign, and the deflation of metaphysics that is to result. Contrary to the received reading, indeed, contrary to the way in which Quine often reads him, Carnap was not after a fixed set of analytic truths to form the non-empirical cement of an empiricist foundationalism. Rather, Carnap was interested in analyticity for the purposes of what he eventually called framework explication.<sup>2</sup> Explication of a particular theoretical or methodological framework consists in formally specifying the vocabulary, syntax, and analytic truths of the framework. The goal here is clarification of the fundamental claims and structure of a particular theory or methodology, especially with respect to how it contrasts with competing frameworks. Carnap's Principle of Tolerance<sup>3</sup> requires that each clearly specified framework proposal be judged, not on the basis of philosophical or metaphysical prejudice, but on its pragmatic efficacy as a tool for inquiry. We are free to choose from among alternate frameworks—alternate sets of analytic sentences. Beyond the demand for clarity and tolerance, such choices are constrained only by our pragmatic decisions regarding the efficacy of the framework.

Framework explication and tolerance with respect to framework proposals serve a number of closely related but distinct purposes for

Carnap. First, in situations of philosophical dispute (or fundamental theoretical change) explication of competing frameworks shows how opposing parties are talking past each other and clarifies the available framework choices. This fosters the advance of knowledge by eliminating purely verbal squabbling, so energy can be focused on truly relevant considerations. Second, framework choices, being logically prior to meaningful inquiry and constrained only by pragmatic concerns, do not constitute genuine judgments of truth. Hence, they lack metaphysical import. Only given a framework can there be genuine judgments of truth. Many a traditional philosophical dispute is then seen as meaningless, consisting only of competing framework proposals in need of explication so their pragmatic merits can be considered. The apparent metaphysical import of such disputes is a symptom of the disputants' failure to appreciate this. Thus, much traditional metaphysics is deflated to the status of pragmatic framework decision. This metaphysical deflationism and the use of explication in order to avoid fruitless dispute are, of course, mutually reinforcing aspects of Carnap's view. When disputants come to share this deflationary attitude towards their own proposals, clarity, tolerance, and pragmatic assessment are supposed to foster the continuation of fruitful inquiry.

Finally, and perhaps most deeply, framework explication and metaphysical deflationism support a view of philosophy as methodologically distinct from empirical science, while still allowing philosophy a clear, rigorous, and progressive role in the advance of knowledge.

Obviously, analyticity plays a central role in the view just outlined. Frameworks consist in sets of analytic claims. Effective explication involves identifying which claims a disputant proposes to take as analytic. And the deflated status of a claim depends on whether it is analytic or not. Yet it appears Carnap's explicative and deflationary aims require neither a general nor a grounded analyticity distinction. First, the conception of analyticity required need not be grounded in natural language or linguistic behavior. The pretheoretic notion of natural language analyticity is too inexact to serve Carnap's purposes. His goal is to explicate competing framework proposals through the development for each of an artificial language, each with its own set of analytic sentences explicating the framework's fundamental commitments.

For this, he need not be held accountable to an imprecise, pretheoretic conception. Second, since it is only within a particular artificial language that a notion of analyticity can clearly be defined, lack of generality across artificial languages cannot be cited as problematic. Nor, third, need the conception of analyticity be grounded in some semantic or logical feature. Again, it is not a question of attempting to determine a unique set of analytic truths in virtue of some translinguistic criterion. It is a matter of effective explication of a framework. All that is required is that each explication be clear, and that each disputant be satisfied with the treatment of her fundamental commitments.<sup>4</sup> Thus, it appears Carnap does not need a general, grounded analyticity distinction, and Quine's arguments lose their bite.

These considerations seem to be reinforced when we turn the doctrine of tolerant framework explication back on itself. In a sense, Carnap's whole project, including the notion of analyticity, is itself a proposed framework for a philosophical methodology. Insofar as it satisfies its own criteria of pragmatic success, it is to be recommended. Quine, in complaining that Carnap's doctrine of analyticity is empty and devoid of empirical significance, is apparently blind to Carnap's aims and methods, for this is exactly the desired consequence.<sup>5</sup> In his piece "Quine on Logical Truth" Carnap chides Quine with gentle irony:

[L]et me refer to a philosopher whose work I esteem very highly, although I cannot agree in all points with his views. This philosopher once undertook to destroy a certain doctrine, propounded by some other philosophers. He did not mean to assert that the doctrine was false; presumably he regarded it as true. But his criticism concerned its particular kind of truth, namely that the truth of the doctrine was of the analytic kind. To be sure, he did not use the word "analytic," which he did not seem to like very much. Instead, he used other expressions which, nonetheless, clearly seem to have essentially the same meaning as "analytic." What he showed was that various attempts to assign experimental, empirical meaning to this doctrine remained without success. Finally he came to the conclusion that the doctrine, even though not false, is "empty" and "without experimental significance." (Carnap 1963, p. 922.)

Thus, what Quine, from his view of philosophy and its relation to empirical science, took to be a critical failing, is for Carnap, from his view of philosophy and its relation to empirical science, a central feature in harmony with the overall view. Such are the main features which encourage authors such as O'Grady, Creath, and George to see in this debate a deep misunderstanding, or two fundamentally different proposals, or "a question on which nothing hangs" (George 2000).

#### 4. Putting the Bite Back in Quine's Arguments

If, however, there were reason to suppose that either Carnap's explicative or deflationary goal cannot be achieved without a grounded or general analyticity distinction, then Quine's arguments in "Two Dogmas" and elsewhere would be directly relevant to Carnap's views. Indeed, while Carnap's explicative aim survives only slightly altered, considerations drawn from "Truth by Convention" and "Carnap and Logical Truth" suggest that without some general or grounded distinction Carnap's metaphysical deflationism is undermined.

The seeds of this point are buried deep in Quine's 1934 "Lectures on Carnap" (1990). The lectures were delivered at Harvard in November of that year, and introduced Quine's colleagues to Carnap's forthcoming *Logical Syntax of Language* (Carnap 1937). In the lectures, Quine points out that while Carnap restricts his circumscription of analytic sentences to the truths of logic and mathematics, we could just as easily choose to include empirical truths normally considered synthetic. Indeed, we could define the whole of science as analytic. Though he does not use my terminology, Quine fully appreciates the fact that Carnap's analyticity distinction is neither general nor grounded. But in that piece no criticism is made. In fact, in the "Lectures on Carnap" the young Quine has nothing but applause for Carnap's views:

Analytic propositions are true by linguistic convention. But it now appears further that it is likewise a matter of linguistic convention

which propositions we are to make analytic and which not. (1990, p. 64.)

Then two pages later:

Carnap's thesis that philosophy is syntax is thus seen to follow from the principle that everything is analytic except the contingent propositions of empirical science. But like the principle that the *a priori* is analytic, Carnap's thesis is to be regarded not as a metaphysical conclusion, but as a syntactic decision. This conclusion should be gratifying to Carnap himself: for if philosophy is syntax, the philosophical view that philosophy is syntax should be syntax in turn; and this we see it to be. (1990, p. 66.)

And, finally, Quine concludes the lectures:

Views will differ as to the success of Carnap's total thesis that all philosophy is syntax. Carnap has made a very strong case for this thesis; but it must be admitted that there are difficulties to be ironed out. We cannot be sure that we have found the key to the universe. Still Carnap *has* provided us, at worst, with a key to an enormous part of the universe. He has in any case shown conclusively that the bulk of what we relegate to philosophy can be handled rigorously and clearly within syntax. Carnap himself recognizes that this accomplishment stands *independently* of the thesis that *no* meaningful metaphysics remains beyond syntax. Whether or not he has really slain the metaphysical wolf, at least he has shown us how to keep him from our door. (1990, p. 103.)

As I shall argue in the remainder, the metaphysical wolf was already in the house, still in sheep's clothing at this point and not fully realizing his own identity.

Quine's 1936 "Truth by Convention" (1976b) is quite similar to the "Lectures on Carnap," but it takes a significantly more critical tone. Quine argues there that the best sense to be made of the conventional acceptance of a set of sentences—e.g., the choice of a set of analytic claims—is through the notion of explicit postulation. After demonstrating how even clearly empirical truths may be explicitly



postulated, he suggests that restricting conventional status to logical and mathematical truths amounts to very little. If we mean that we *can* lay down explicit postulates in order to capture logical and mathematical truths (up to Gödel incompleteness), then the claim is empty, since we can do this for other truths as well. If we mean that we *do* adhere to the conventions explicitly postulated, then the claim is uninteresting, for it tells us that we take to be true what we take to be true, without illuminating the supposed conventionality of those truths. If we mean that we engage in explicit postulation in logic and mathematics *alone*, then the claim is false. He then reflects that one might restrict conventional or analytic status to logic and mathematics in order to reflect the behavioral fact that we have not revised, and are highly unlikely to revise, our commitment to those bodies of truths. This would have the benefit, Quine claims, of "forestall[ing] awkward metaphysical questions as to our a priori insight into necessary truths" (1976b, p. 102). But rather than being a key to an enormous part of the universe, such a view, Quine now claims, "is perhaps neither empty nor uninteresting nor false." Quine is beginning to express some dissatisfaction with the view.

In "Two Dogmas," as we have seen, Quine's arguments implicitly demand a grounded and general distinction. Moreover, the holism which first appears in "Two Dogmas" accounts for our unwillingness to revise logic and mathematics, and it does so without any appeal to a notion of analyticity. And by 1954, in "Carnap and Logical Truth" (Quine 1976a), the minimal concession of 1936 has completely disappeared. Quine sees no value in conventionally circumscribing logic and mathematics as analytic.

Thus, there is clear recognition on Quine's part that Carnap's conception of analyticity is neither general nor grounded. And the tendency of Quine's arguments, as he continues to insist on a general or grounded distinction, is that this is a problem rather than the asset Carnap saw it to be. Is Quine simply talking past Carnap, as some authors have suggested? No. Is Quine, as others have suggested, simply offering a different framework proposal such that in the end this is a dispute on which nothing of substance turns? This is perhaps closer to the truth, but it overlooks the potent criticism of Carnap's deflationism

which can be drawn from the combination of “Truth by Convention,” “Two Dogmas,” and “Carnap and Logical Truth.”

So long as we focus on Carnap’s explicative aims, and view analyticity in artificial languages as a tool for generating clarity and promoting inquiry, then the ungrounded nature of the analyticity distinction is no handicap. It is, therefore, hard to see Quine as doing much more than proposing an alternate style of explication. If, however, we focus on Carnap’s deflationary metaphysics, then Quine’s aversion to an ungrounded distinction and demand for a grounded one are understandable, and carry force.

Analyticity is supposed to support the deflation of metaphysics by distinguishing sets of sentences whose acceptance is a matter of pure pragmatic decision from sets of sentences whose acceptance constitutes a judgment of truth (Carnap 1956). But an ungrounded analyticity distinction allows us to cast every accepted truth as analytic. In this case, every acceptance or rejection of a sentence or set of sentences counts as merely a pragmatic decision of framework choice, carrying no metaphysical import. Quine makes this explicit in “Carnap and Logical Truth.” Regarding the explicit and conventional adoption of (in particular, set-theoretic) postulates on the basis of pragmatic concerns of elegance and convenience, Quine writes:

And do we not find the same continually in the theoretical hypotheses of natural science itself? ...For surely the justification of any theoretical hypothesis can, at the time of hypothesis, consist in no more than the elegance or convenience which the hypothesis brings to the containing body of laws and data.

...Hence I do not see how a line is to be drawn between hypotheses which confer truth by convention and hypotheses which do not, short of reckoning all hypotheses to the former category save perhaps those actually derivable or refutable by elementary logic from what Carnap used to call protocol sentences. (Quine 1976a, p. 121.)

The deflationism is overextended. All sentences have the same metaphysical import—none. Conversely, we can withhold analytic status from every accepted truth. In this case, *every* acceptance or rejection of a sentence or set of sentences counts as a genuine judgment

carrying metaphysical import. The deflationism is undermined. In either case there is no real distinction between the analytic and the synthetic, between purely pragmatic framework decision and genuine metaphysical judgment.

Of course these aren't the only two alternatives. Without some general or grounded distinction, we can deflate or inflate the status of just about any set of claims we wish, depending on how we draw the analyticity distinction. And Carnap, in some sense, is aware of this.<sup>6</sup> After all, in a case of apparently metaphysical dispute a disputant's beliefs are explicated by rendering them in a formal language in such a way that those she takes to be most fundamental come out as analytic truths. In order for explication to be flexible enough to accommodate disputants' differing fundamental commitments, the analytic/synthetic distinction cannot be general or grounded. It is accountable only to clarity and the intuitions of the disputant. This is perfectly fine for Carnap's explicative aims.

But see again what happens to the *deflationary* aims. If we treat the whole theory as analytic, any change we make will count as a pragmatic decision in response to the overall simplicity, coherence, and empirical fit of the theory. But, since the whole theory is analytic, there is no other kind of change we can make, so there is no distinction here between pure pragmatic decision and genuine metaphysical judgment. If we treat the whole theory as synthetic, any change we make will also be in response to overall simplicity, coherence, and empirical fit. Hence, again, there is no distinction here between pure pragmatic decision and genuine metaphysical judgment. If we eschew these extremes, then nearly any proper portion of the whole theory may be cast as analytic. That is, any proper portion of the theory may be accorded a provisional protected status, such that we consider revising *there* to be a more fundamental sort of revision than revising elsewhere. But depending on current pragmatic and empirical concerns, including the intuitions of the parties involved, we can vary exactly which portion is so protected. On such a view there is no distinction of metaphysical status, but only a distinction of the degree of our current willingness to revise certain portions of the whole as opposed to others. That is, Carnap's metaphysical deflationism undermines itself and collapses into a

view which is nearly identical to that of §6 of “Two Dogmas”—a view which accords equal metaphysical import to all truths of the theory, distinguishing them mainly by our willingness to revise.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, while a non-general and ungrounded analyticity distinction supports Carnap’s explicative goals, it simultaneously undermines his deflationary goals. Or so I have cast Quine as arguing. Further, this reading of Quine allows us to put the bite back into “Two Dogmas,” since the arguments there are a crucial part of the overall critique.

## 5. Conclusion

Quine’s criticisms of analyticity should not be seen as a misunderstanding of Carnap. For Quine was aware from early on that Carnap’s analyticity distinction was neither general nor grounded. Nor should Quine be seen as merely advancing an alternate proposal, making no critical contact with Carnap’s views. For, as I have argued, at least one successful thrust of Quine’s criticisms is that Carnap’s metaphysical deflationism collapses for lack of a grounded or general analyticity distinction.

Nor, finally, should this dispute be seen as one on which nothing substantial hangs. It may well seem an insubstantial difference in styles of explication. For both Carnap and Quine advocate philosophical explication in service of the advance of knowledge. But this overlooks the issue of metaphysical deflationism and its role for Carnap in distinguishing philosophy from empirical science. This is the focus of deep disagreement between Carnap and Quine. Carnap wanted to view philosophy as rigorous, progressive, and *methodologically distinct* from empirical science in virtue of its dealing with analytic structures and being free of metaphysical import. The metaphysically deflated status of philosophical explication and framework decision supported this view. But Quine undermines Carnap’s deflationism by arguing that a general or grounded analyticity distinction is required but unavailable. He thereby undermines Carnap’s view of philosophy. And he arrives at his own view of philosophy as rigorous, progressive, full of metaphysical import, and methodologically continuous with empirical science.

We have put the bite back into "Two Dogmas."

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### Keywords

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### Resumo

Comentários recentes sobre Carnap sugerem que a concepção aceita sobre o debate a respeito da analiticidade entre Carnap e Quine é equivocada em grande medida. Tem sido sugerido que a distinção de analiticidade de Carnap é imune às críticas de Quine. Isso seria ou porque Quine não entendeu o uso de Carnap da analiticidade ou porque Quine não considerava que ele estivesse apenas oferecendo uma armação alternativa para a filosofia, em vez de desfazer dogmas. Também foi sugerido que, em última instância, nada de mais substancial resulta dessa disputa. Temos simpatia por essas reavaliações e sua rejeição da concepção aceita, mas argumentamos que elas deixam de prestar atenção apropriada ao deflacionismo metafísico de Carnap. Pois é aí que, em última instância, os argumentos de Quine atingem Carnap, abalando seu deflacionismo metafísico. Além disso, a viabili-

*dade do deflacionismo está diretamente relacionada com a viabilidade da concepção de Carnap da filosofia como algo metodologicamente distinto da ciência. Logo, as críticas de Quine atingem os aspectos mais profundos das concepções de Carnap.*

### **Palavras-chave**

*Quine, Carnap, analítico, analiticidade, metafísica, deflacionismo, Dois Dogmas*

### **Notes**

<sup>1</sup>See, e.g., Coffa 1991, Creath 1991, Friedman 1999, George 2000, O’Grady 1999, Uebel 1996.

<sup>2</sup>See Carnap 1956, Friedman 1999, Uebel 1996, O’Grady 1999.

<sup>3</sup>Carnap 1956, §5; 1937, §17.

<sup>4</sup>See Carnap 1956, Carnap, 1990 #50, Carnap, 1963 #444, O’Grady 1999.

<sup>5</sup>O’Grady 1999, George 2000.

<sup>6</sup>See Carnap 1990, 430.

<sup>7</sup>My paper (Gregory 2003) discusses this further.