PHILOSOPHICAL READINGS

ONLINE JOURNAL Ɽ OF PHILOSOPHY

Editor: Marco Sgarbi

ARTICLES

PHILOSOPHICAL READINGS
ONLINE JOURNAL OF PHILOSOPHY

Quine's *Meaning Nihilism*: Revisiting Naturalism and Confirmation Method

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Abstract: The paper concentrates on an appreciation of W.V. Quine's thought on meaning and how it escalates beyond the meaning holism and confirmation holism, thereby paving the way for a 'meaning nihilism' and 'confirmation rejectionism'. My effort would be to see that how could the acceptance of radical naturalism in Quine's theory of meaning escorts him to the indeterminacy thesis of meaning. There is an interesting shift from epistemology to language as Quine considers that a person who is aware of linguistic trick can be the master of referential language. Another important question is that how could Quine's radical translation thesis reduce into semantic indeterminacy that is a consequence of his confirmation method. I think that the notion and the analysis of meaning became hopelessly vague in Quine's later work. I further argue on Quine's position of meaning that I call, following Hilary Putnam, 'meaning nihilism'. It seems to me that Quine had no belief like 'meaning consists in', or 'meaning depends on' something. Through this argument, I would like to challenge the confirmation holism that was foisted by Fodor on Quine's thesis. My attempt would be to scrutinize Putnam's point of view that Quine was neither a confirmation holist nor a meaning holist. I think that both Putnam and Quine denied the concept of constitutive connection of meaning as a second grade notion not only from the realm of semantic, but also from the perspective of epistemology. So, linguistic meaning cannot be formed by any sample of its uses. For Quine, the concept of meaning in metaphysics is heuristic and need not be taken seriously in any 'science worthy' literature.

Keywords: Quine**,** Meaning Holism, Meaning Nihilism, Naturalism, Putnam, Confirmation Method

1. Introduction

The most conspicuous part of Quine's philosophy seems to me that his note on the theory of meaning has various dimensions. He tries to treat a theory of meaning, but his acceptance of the radical naturalism leads a unique turn that compels him to accept an indeterminacy principle and also the thesis of inscrutability of meaning and reference. Putnam writes:

As for "meaning holism", I have noticed something peculiar: I have noticed that whenever a passage from "Two Dogmas" is quoted to show that Quine is a "meaning holist", the passage isn't ever about *meaning*. What is cited are passages that display Quine's "Duhemianism", that is, the view that our bodies of scientific theory confront "recalcitrant" experiences as wholes. This is a form of holism—calls it "evidential holism", but it doesn't concern meaning.[1]

2. Naturalism and its consequences

Quine, (I suppose) was the first philosopher who probably used the term "naturalism" from an empiricist point of view holding that science serves a standard paradigm for all knowledge. He considers the idea of 'First Philosophy' as an imprecise issue. In fact, for Quine, 'naturalism' is not a separate claim that can be regarded as a foundation of the sciences, but it is just like a proclamation about the truth that 'science is all' and something that aims to transcend science become meaningless. Quine's stance on science and philosophy looks as if highly exclusive. He does not impose science upon philosophy and believes that without a standard base in natural science a philosophical method can't be pertinent. Quine was initially influenced by empiricism and Vienna circle in his earlier age though later he has changed his mind. However, Lockean empiricism taught him that one needs to deduce the truths of nature from the sensory evidences and should define the truth in terms of the logico-mathematical auxiliaries and observation that can be confirming and also infirming it. Quine mainly follows the Tarskian model of truth. Here one may ask Quine that "When a people claims that 'snow is white' is true just as well as I understand 'snow is white' is true, in this case what did he/she mean by using the term 'understand'? Quine's answer would be, the process of understanding a sentence depends on the conditions under which it is true. It does not construct any progress at all. Putnam believes,

But Quine's account of understanding does not use the notion of truth (which is how circularity avoided). To understand an observation sentence is to be conditioned in such a way that appropriate sensory stimulations will prompt one's assent to the sentence. And to understand a non-observational sentence is to master its role in the system...... Calling a sentence that someone (myself or someone else) utters (or thinks) "true" is just an indication that I would currently include that sentence in the system I use to predict.[2]

Quine is very much cautious about the fact that we cannot formulate all the statements of the world into the same boundary of verificationism. He was well aware

about the failure of radical empiricism which emphasizes that only immediate experiences can validate science. Here Quine's purpose is to reorient 'modern empiricism' by challenging two tenets of empiricism. Quine writes,

Two cardinal tenets of empiricism remained unassailable, however, and so remain in this day. One is that whatever evidence there is for science is sensory evidence. The other, to which I shall return, is that all inculcation of meaning of words must rest ultimately on sensory evidence.[3]

"What is the basic nature of natural science that Quine admitted?", I did not find any exact answer from Quine's writing. He has several ideas about the natural science and its outcomes in philosophy. Some of the prominent ideas are as follows:

First, He claims about an evidential checkpoint of science like Wittgenstein, who once cited a quite similar thought in his 'Language game' hypothesis. Quine thinks, "A sentence's claim to scientific status rests on what it contributes to a theory whose checkpoints are in prediction."[4]

Secondly, For Quine, the checkpoints must be 'inter-subjective' that shows the evidential background of the third person perspective.

Thirdly, All the theoretical claims rest on the experiments and observations.

Fourthly, Quine considers that the 'web of belief' should be in a 'single language' and also followed by the same logic. One can ask, 'What is the utility of this view'? Gary Kemp clarifies Quine's position from a different point. He writes,

...all the evidence point to a single reality, not two or more, it ought to be possible to have a single theory describing it, where each part of it coheres with the rest on the score of explanation, where this in turn is a matter, in the best cases, of subsuming the explanda under maximally general quantified statements.[5]

We have already noticed that the naturalism is not just a rigorous science. Quine himself admits that from the impacts on sensory surfaces we can derive a theory of the external world with more or less successful prediction. For testing a theory the predictions become the pointers or evidential checkpoints. Observation is considered as an evidence of a theory that has two notable features, one is 'inter-subjectivity' and the other is called 'correspondence to stimulation'. Quine thinks that an observation sentence, like 'it is raining' or "that's a cow" are based on the occasional sentences. Here the observation sentences of the speakers would be true or false on the basis of occasion sensitivity. The conception of 'inter-subjectivity' refers to the thesis that evidence must be public. In addition, the observation sentences are holophrastic ones, i.e. they could be formed out of any conjunction. It seems to me that one can link between an observation and a theory through a prediction. To clarify the important features of observation sentences, Quine thinks,

The observation sentence is the means of verbalizing the prediction that checks a theory. The requirement that it command a verdict outright is what makes it a final checkpoint. The requirement of inter-subjectivity is what makes science objective.[6]

He also believes that the observation sentences are considered as a vehicle of our scientific evidences as well as also an entering wedge of language. There is a sort of naturalistic perspective engaged on the issues of language as a social art in Quine's writings. It sounds to me very unique. Here one can ask whether the observation sentences are theory laden. Actually observation sentences have two roots – language and science and it fits with these two ways excellently. Another relevant question is "how could an observation sentence be relative to the linguistic community?" Quine holds that the observation sentences are that on which the members of the community agreed outright on witnessing the occasion. In a word the observation sentences are not theory laden. An observation sentence in Quinean sense is associated with the stimulation to an extent. Even words in an observation sentence may recur in other sentences on the basis of some theoretical contexts. This is the link that is also a relevant part of any scientific theory. But Quine writes,

Seen holophrastically, as conditioned to stimulatory situations, the sentence is theory free; seen analytically, word by word, it is theory laden. Insofar as observation sentences bear on science at all, affording evidence and tests, there has to be this retrospective theory lading along with the pristine holophrastic freedom from theory.[7]

It is undoubtedly true that for Quine the conception of 'theory laded' or 'not theory laden' do not play any significant role in the case of observation sentences, the reason is that there is no fact of the matter as to what it means. If we accept a translation manual then we should somehow admit that the words in an observation sentence contained 'theoretical terms'.

Quine's naturalistic epistemology is inseparable from his naturalistic conception of language. Natural science can be regarded as a building stone in Quine's philosophy. But it is startling that he does not deny the relevance of the conceptual analysis of common sense that is also based on experience or evidences, though these are slipshod, piecemeal, and comparatively unsystematic ways of knowledge. Quine argues,

Science is not a substitutive for common sense but an extension of it. The quest for knowledge is properly an effort simply to broaden and deepen the knowledge which the man in the street already enjoys...[8]

Actually, Quine tries to give a naturalistic account of knowledge that outpaces knowledge of knowledge. It is not only concerned about the mere justification of knowledge, but also gives importance to its explanation, whereas the traditional epistemology is concerned about 'skepticism' and tries to find out the 'certainty of knowledge' in general. Epistemological inquires have two dimensions. The first side is called by Quine the 'conceptual side' and the second side is called the 'doctrinal side'. The 'conceptual side' of traditional epistemology defines the various concepts of phenomenal knowledge. In addition, the 'doctrinal side' copes with the justifications that confirm those concepts raised in the 'conceptual side' of epistemology. The 'conceptual side' is more close to the theory of meaning whereas, the 'doctrinal side' is close to the theory of truth and reference too. In the beginning part

of the paper "Epistemology Naturalized", Quine writes that epistemology is worried about the foundations of the sciences. Even he is not happy to accept the Cartesian quest for certainty and suggests that it is a sort of 'lost cause'. But Kim shows,

In urging naturalized epistemology on us, Quine is not suggesting that we give up the Cartesian foundationlist solution and explore others within the same framework-perhaps to adopt some sort of 'coherenist' strategy, or to require of our basic beliefs only some degree of 'initial credibility' rather than Cartesian certainty...Quine's proposal is more radical than that. He is asking us to set aside the entire framework of justification-centered epistemology. That is what is new in Quine's proposals. Quine is asking us to put in its place a purely descriptive causal-nomological science of human cognition.[9]

Kim furthermore suggests that Quine's epistemology chiefly focuses on the vital question 'how does evidence relate to reality?' This kind of empiricist account tries to explain the world from the outlook of naturalism but the fact is that our interpretation of the world is expressed by the set of sentences and words. Here the part of language is to mingle with naturalized epistemology. I think that though it is true that Quine is interested in the eventual acquisition of the scientific knowledge, yet language as a vehicle of knowledge takes a crucial position in his regimented naturalistic theory. Here we find a shift from talking of reference to talking about words. Quine calls this shift as a 'semantic ascent'. Quine believes that a person who is aware of the linguistic tricks can be a master of referential language. He in no way denies the dispositional use of reference fixation. Language of reference becomes suitable when an agent says 'my cat' is to refer to his/her own cat. Here the relation between language and the world depends on the observational sentences and the reference is just a capacity that is bonded with certain linguistic apparatus (which is complex) that is also conjoined with observation sentences.

3. Indeterminacy of Translation

We know that through the limited words, we can construe unlimited sentences. Therefore, we should have a comprehensive grasp of the meaning of the words in general. Quine thinks that, except these kind of situations, actually the words get their meaning in terms of the sentences. He writes,

We learn short sentences as wholes, we learn their component words from their use in those sentences, and we build further sentences from words thus learned.[10]

From this discussion Quine mainly indicates two points that are worth mentioning here:
  a) The notion of meaning is inextricably related to the sentences that together constitute language as a social art. This is called by Quine 'holistic standpoint', a very controversial issue that I will elaborately discuss later.
  b) The meaning of a sentence is not independent. The sentential meaning of one language can be derived when we translate it into another language. Quine

calls this startling argument as "radical translation" that also indicates the translation of object language that does not depend on any type of pre-existing aids. One can set up more than one set of translation manuals for an object language that leads to accept a thesis of indeterminacy of translation.

Quine admits that the 'indeterminacy of translation' thesis is a consequence of his behaviourism that is mandatory for linguistic. He argues,

In psychology one may or may not be a behaviourist, but in linguistics one has no choice. Each of us learns his language by observing other people's verbal behaviour and having his own faltering verbal behaviour observed and reinforced of corrected by others.[11]

In Quine's thought, an experiment (indeterminacy of translation) of the source language comes from the *jungle*. It is obviously a sort of jargon and here the "target language" of the translator is not other than English. In such a situation, where language becomes inaccessible, there we can receive the data by observing native's utterances and behaviours. The communicating process that is dependent on the queries (expedient) of assent or dissent sounds purely a conjectural and observational science. The case of attempt to translate a native language and the fact assent and dissent can be considered as the modes of rudimentary linguistic behavior. I will discuss on this aspect in detail later.

Quine's 'indeterminacy of translation' thesis that is perhaps best discussed in his well-known book *Word and Object* can be regarded as a thought experiment. Quine believes that it is easy to find out a resemblance between two kindred languages like, French and English as in the case of their translation, we find a kind of similarity of their cognate word forms. Even translation equations have also been possible between two unrelated languages like English and Hungarian because of their shared culture and beliefs. But Quine is vexed about the translation manual where there is no such cultural similarity or similarity in their cognate word forms. Putnam suggests,

A point which many critics missed is that Quine was arguing at least as much for the determinacy of translation in the case of observation sentences as for indeterminacy. True, Quine wants us to see that the use of a sentence need not fix its *exact* translation into another language, or even determinate what objects the sentence is about.[12]

Let us imagine a linguist who visits a jungle, where the native language is totally different from his/her own language (English) and there is no pre-existing aids of translation. Let us also imagine that a rabbit is passing by a field and a native suddenly utters the word 'gavagai'. Just by hearing the word 'gavagai' and seeing that a rabbit scurrying by, a linguist can note down the sentence 'rabbit' as a tentative translation of the native word 'gavagai'. But this is doubtlessly a kind of rough approximation. The linguist cannot ask to the native speaker what he means by using the word 'gavagai'. Is it a 'rabbit' or a 'rabbit passing by' or is it something else? Their intercommunication is impossible as they individually pos-

sessed a different vocabulary for their communication. Quine writes,

Only by taking the initiative and querying combinations of native's sentence and stimulus situations so as to narrow down his guesses to his eventual satisfaction...... what he must do is guess from observation and then see how well his guess work.[13]

Here one must see the expressions of assent and dissent of a native speaker that will help us to predict the speech disposition of the native speakers. Next time when a linguist notices that by catching an animal into a cage, the native utters the same term 'gavagai', then he can predict from this situation that 'gavagai' cannot mean *a rabbit is scurrying by* or that 'gavagai' means the same as 'rabbit'. Here, in terms of the stimulus conditions a linguist or a translator can share or translate the speaker's utterances (a process of assent and dissent). Quine in his early writing claims that there is a sameness of stimulus meaning that we find between speakers, but in his later work he modifies his thought on stimulus meaning and says 'If querying the sentence elicits assent from the given speaker on one occasion, it will elicit assent likewise on any other occasion when the same total set of receptors is triggered; and similarity for dissent.'[14]

Quine tries to accept the concept of single speaker regarding the sameness of stimulus meaning. But he does not try to avoid the jargon of "inter-subjective sameness of stimulus meaning" in his naturalism. "Inter-subjective sameness of stimulus meaning" applies only to the observational sentences that demonstrate the evidences, which should be accessible to the third person perspective. Quine strives to avoid the jargons of the studies of translations. Later Quine believes that if each members of a community observes a sentence, then spontaneously this sentence becomes an observation sentence for the whole community, while Davidson argues that "intersubjective likeness of stimulation"[15] is possible only if we accept the stimulus to be not just as a bodily surface but as a share situation or 'a shared cause of the pertinent' behaviour of the two subjects. But Quine does not support Davidson's view as his 'naturalized epistemology' taught him to find out evidences. Quine says,

My naturalism does allow me free reference to nerve endings, rabbits, and other physical objects, but my epistemology permits the subject no such starting point.[16]

Quine accepts both the stimulus meaning and private stimulus meaning at the subject's surface in his philosophy. My point is that the stimulus meaning strictly depends on the individual speaker, for example, 'rabbit', and this observational sentence is the sort of "stimulus meaning" for the field linguists whereas 'gavagai' has its stimulus meaning for the natives. We find that the concept of 'inter-subjective liken' also make a challenge to the possibility of communication. One can think it as a direction to the thesis of indeterminacy of translation. A linguist observes the assent of the term 'gavagai' by the natives when he looks that a 'rabbit' is passing by the field. Later, he tries to assign his stimulus meaning 'rabbit' to native's stimulus meaning 'gavagai'. Quine considers,

Empathy dominates the learning of language, both by child and by field linguist..... In the field linguists case it is empathy on his own part when he makes his first conjecture about 'gavagai' on the strength of the native's utterance and orientation, and again he quarries 'gavagai' for the native's assent in a promising subsequent situation.[17]

Quine thinks that 'radical translation' is a continuous process of use. He is mainly revisiting the translation manual that lights agent's success or failure of communication with the native language. In the field situation, where a radical translator does not follow the native's speech, there the translator tries to extract meaning from the native's behaviour. Even the native's behaviour is amenable to the various translation manuals. In this case, meaning loses its actual uniqueness and this kind of speech disposition leads to an indeterminacy thesis as the same expressions of the natives can express different things in different situations. Quine claims,

Their manual might be distinguishable in terms of any native behaviour that they give reason to expect, and yet each manual might prescribe some translation that the other translator would reject. Such is the thesis of indeterminacy of translation.'[18]

This kind of indeterminacy of translation not only occurs in the field situation (native's speech) but it can be applied in our ordinary language. There is a very important point where Quine indicates that, except some contrary evidences; actually the linguist takes a native's ways of beliefs or thoughts to be similar to his beliefs or thoughts. The translator even tries to impose his/her own linguistic patterns on the natives to find out the compatibility of their behaviors and speeches, which also shows a similarity between the linguist's own attitudes or speeches with the native's attitudes or speeches. This doctrine is known as 'principle of charity'. Quine thinks that in the case of indeterminacy thesis a linguist or translator should find out similarities in more cases between his stimulus meanings with natives stimulus meaning. So in the location of the jungle, there are many chances to be misled because of the indeterminacy of the translation that leads some time to the striking simplification of referential directness. Quine clarifies his thoughts to suggest,

It is the unsurprising reflection that divergent interpretations of the words in a sentence can so offset one another as to sustain and identical translation of the sentence as a whole. It is what I have called inscrutability of reference; 'indeterminacy of reference' would have been better.[19]

In his book *Pursuit of Truth*, Quine for the first time clarifies his very long controversial and obscure thought regarding 'Ontological relativity'. Quine says,

It is relative to a manual of translation. To say that 'gavagai' denotes 'rabbit' is to opt for a manual of translation in which 'gavagai' is translated as 'rabbit', instead of opting for any of the alternative manuals.[20]

In the case of 'word for word' translation we need to see how much the sentences lead the speaker to believe in the concept of universal. But this would be unfeasible in the case of non-observational sentence as things become here much more indeterminate because of the lack of the

sharing reference. If we construct the world predicting from the realm of sensation, then it would be obscure for us to posit some non-empirical entities like, idea or meaning in our systems. The sameness of meaning depends on the role of similarity of the sentences play in two different languages. We cannot deny the usefulness of sameness of meaning in our ordinary language, but the first class scientific theory does not bother about it. Hilary Putnam tells us a story about his experience when he delivered a talk in a Chinese university (Fudan University) in 1984. He says that in Chinese language there is no special suffix that can distinguish '*mo*' (cat) from '*mohood*' (cathood). 'Cat here' and 'Cathood there' are similar in the ordinary Chinese language use. But Quine does not give importance to this question. Quine thinks that the conceptual scheme of the English people and the Chinese people work on the 'observational categories' but the sentences they (Chinese) express are not exactly isomorphic compared to our sentences. The 'parochial ontology' of the English language that talks about particulars and universals can be expressed in Chinese sentences in more than one way as we found in Putnam's example. Here we will find the ambiguities in the case of using the different words. Analytic philosophy that gives more importance on the notion of meaning is tremendously refuted by Quine to suggest that the 'notion of meaning' and the 'analysis of meaning' are hopelessly vague.

4. Critical Analysis

Rosa and Lepore in their joint paper "Quine's Holism"[21] argue in favour of a new thesis of "confirmation holism" regarding Quine's position on meaning. Is Quine a meaning holist? This is a very controversial question. I will thrash out my own observation later. Here, let me see first that how could the two philosophers Rosa and Lepore attempt to establish their claims. For them, Quine's meaning holism can derive from his other associated thesis that is called 'confirmation holism' and 'verificationism'. 'Confirmation holism' subsumes the thought that no empirical content can exist in isolation. We can identify an empirical content only through the theory as a whole. The possibility of knowing a hypothesis does not merely depend on knowing the evidence and counter-evidence in the case of observation. They justify their words by quoting Quine's dictum that 'The meaning of a statement is the method of empirically confirming or infirming it.'[22] For Quine to know the meaning of a sentence is to recognize its evidence. Even Quine also believes,

To learn a language is to learn the meaning of its sentences, and hence to learn what observations to count as evidence for and against them. The evidence relation and the semantical relation of observation to theory are co-extensive.[23]

Depending on the mentioned points, Rosa and Lepore articulate Quine's thesis on 'Meaning Holism' as follows:

Premise 1. Meaning of a sentence consists in its confirmation evidences. This is called verificationism about meaning. We can call it a scientific practice argument. The general form of this hypothesis is that the truth value of the auxiliary assumption is based on the observational

evidences in a certain condition where it will be true. If in any situation, it turns out as false, then the scientists do not refute the whole theory/hypothesis, rather they refute the antecedent of the observational categories.

Premise 2. A scientific theory cannot confirm its evidence or experiences individually, but it works only as a corporate body. This is called Duhem's thesis. This theory tells that the observational sentences are mingled with the theoretical sentences and construct a whole scenario where the meaning of a particular sentence is related to a unit of other sentences. If any case one of our linguistic prediction turns out as false, then we should revise the sentence to avoid the false prediction.

Conclusion. The sentence of a language do not have meaning individually or in isolation, but as a corporate body or whole it depends on the other sentences of the language. This is a kind of meaning holistic approach.

Another very important point close to 'meaning holism' is Quine's thesis on natural science. For this reason, Quine claims,

With Dewey I hold that knowledge, mind and meaning are part of the same world that they have to do with, and that they have to study in the same empirical spirit that animates natural science.[24]

Quine investigates the meaning as a social art of language that has the public recognizable circumstances. Even his framework of meaning can be emphasized as a property of behaviour. Behaviour as a public evidence can verify 'meaning holism' from the context of indeterminacy of translation. We find in Quine's *Word and Object* that the conception of stimulus meaning cannot determine the various stages of 'rabbit' and 'rabbit' to as a translation of 'gavagai'. Rosa and Lepore suggest,

The moral of radical translation is then that meanings are not language-transcendent entities (propositions, mental or platonic entities); on the contrary, to understand a sentence is to understand a language and the meaning of a sentence is determined by the meaning of the other sentences in the language.[25]

In the case of radical translation, Quine holds that the dichotomy between analytic truth and synthetic truth lead to a confusion regarding the picture of how language links to the world. Because, we know that the analytic truth takes care of language (especially on synonymy) whereas the synthetic truth reports on the world (informative). Language has no piecemeal relation to the world but the sentences are connected to the world in terms of the relation to other sentences.

Now the most important question is that "Is Quine a strong or moderate holist?" Before considering Quine as strong or moderate holist, we should first define the concept of strong or moderate holism separately and afterwards we need to focus what will be the suitable area for Quine's thesis. Actually 'strong holism' emphasizes that the meaning of any sentence of the language is determined by its (evidential or inferential) relation to the other sentences; here the unit of meaning is the whole language. Rosa and Lepore say,

That is, there are no statements whose truth values remain untouched by revision made in response to contrary experiences

(namely, there are no analytic statements). These two claims required that no sentence has meaning in isolation from every other of the language.[26]

Rosa and Lepore try to defend this type of strong holism.

Besides, 'moderate holism' considers that the meaning of any sentence of a language consists in its evidential relation to many other sentences and the units of meaning are regarded as the fragment of the language. In "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", we find that Quine tries to refute the conventional distinction between the analytic and the synthetic statements. As we are aware that in an analytic statement the predicate term is contained in the subject term. So the analytic sentences become true in virtue of the meaning of the component words. Here the relation of the world does not take any relevant role. So he refutes to accept the analytic statement to consider that the meaning of any sentence of a language is determined by its (observational/evidential) relation to every other sentence. Quine holds, 'Our statements about the external world face the tribunal of sense experience not individually but only as a corporate body.'[27] This turn can be recognized as a strong holistic framework. But in Quine's later writing like *Word and Object* (1960), and "Epistemology Naturalized" (1969), we can find that his strong holistic framework becomes quite fixable. One can ask whether later Quine moves toward 'moderate holism' by thinking that the observational sentences do not have any interconnectedness of sentences as they independently carried the stimulus meaning of the rest of the language. Even the essential process of language learning and the observational sentences are based on 'the repository of evidence for scientific hypotheses'. Quine rightly points out,

In this matter of understanding language, there is thus a subtle interplay between word and sentence. In one way the sentence is fundamental: understanding a word consist in knowing how to use it in sentences and how to react to such sentences. Yet if we would test some one's understanding of a sentence, we do best to focus on a word, ringing changes on its sentential contexts.[28]

It's very fascinating that Putnam challenges the premises raised by Rosa and Lepore and also once supported by Jerry Fodor. Putnam does not believe that Quine had a belief that a) Meaning consists in its empirical content or b) Meaning of a sentence is dependent on the corporate body of sentences. Putnam considers,

I don't believe Quine ever said anything like a) or b). His position was that the notion of "meaning" is too unclear to be usable in serious science and philosophy. He had no position of the form "Meaning consists in X" and no position of the form "Meaning of a sentence depends on X". To ascribe positions like that to him is to totally misunderstand *Word and Object*. He did regard "stimulus meaning" as a science worthy notion, and perhaps empirical content (identified with an observation-conditions implied by a theory) but "stimulus meaning" is not supposed be meaning and 'empirical content' is not supposed to be meaning either, which ("meaning") is at best a notion of "heuristic" value; needed for practical purposes, but to be discarded when our interests are theoretical.[29]

Some philosophers think that Quine takes his 'meaning holism' depending on associating meaning with con-firmation, and since confirmation for him includes (in fact, consists in) empirical confirmation, so his 'meaning holism' is incompatible with the notion of *a priori*. But just holding that the meaning of every term or sentences is constitutively connected with the meanings or uses with all other sentences or terms don't in itself state an epistemic position. I think that 'meaning holism" in either Quinean form or the more general form just stated is incompatible with analyticity, unless one holds that all sentences are analytic (something Leibniz did hold). If the meaning of every sentence depends on connections to the meanings of all other sentences, and some of the other sentences have meanings that become true relying on the connection to the world, then it looks that all sentences have meanings turn true in virtue of at least indirect relations to the world. I agree with Putnam that there is no property of (some) sentences can assure that a sentence will never need to be revised, or in other words, there is no usable notion of a priority, unless you speak of "a priority relative to a framework of ideas". Putnam seems right on the claim that Fodor and Lepore have foisted Quine as a semantic holist. Putnam also considers like Quine that "meanings" aren't objects. The dictionary meaning of a word can give us information, but that information does not determine the truth-evaluable content of a sentence in a context. He accepts that what sentences are used to mean always depends on connections to the world, even in the case of logical or analytic sentences the same rules have been followed. But that is not because of some supposed grand theses of "meaning holism", but because of the collapse of the unrelativized a priori.

It is quite true that in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" Quine tries to reject the mentalist theory of meaning by denying the traditional analytic-synthetic distinction. The first dogma as Quine puts it is the cleavage between the analytic propositions that are grounded independently of matters of fact and the synthetic propositions that are grounded only on facts or empirical contents. Critics consider that this rejection of mentalist theory vindicates the thesis of externalism which paves the way for semantic holism. Here one thing is significant to mention that the heart of semantic holism is that the meaning of a sentence is defined in favors of the totality of nodes and paths in its semantic networks. Another important point, I assume that can help to show how meaning holism can compatible with externalism is as follow. Meaning holism depends on semantic externalism hypothesis. It is an acceptable fact that we can have holistic externalist semantics and also non-holistic externalist semantics. Let us try to understand what I mean by holistic externalist semantics. It particularly means two things-

First, meanings are not in the head (Externalism) and secondly, meanings of linguistic units depend upon the meaning of the entire language (Holism). Let us take a simple example of the determination of the meaning of a predicate. Suppose we have a sentence which uses a natural kind term in its predicate, viz. the sentence "Jimmy is a tiger". In order to understand the sentence we have to know which particular thing denotes by the name "Jimmy" and which property or bundle of properties are denoted by the predicate "is a tiger". Further, we need to know if 'Jimmy' is indeed an instance of those properties. But this we need to know only if we are interested in de-

termining the truth of the sentence. How do we decide which properties will be denoted by the predicate. Here we shall have to depend upon the socio-linguistic practices of the community in which this sentence is uttered. We are looking at the socio-linguistic practices of a community and so the meaning can not be located "in the head" of the speakers. However, the meaning of a single predicate rest on the entire socio-linguistic practices that are related to the entire language. This hypothesis illustrates the ground of sematic holism. In this way, I would like to show how a *holistic externalist semantic theory* can work.

But my further query is 'Does the contribution of the theoretical sentences depend on the contribution of the other sentences or not?' It seems to me that if a sentence can causally be related (not inferentially) to the other sentences or social characters of meanings, then we can understand the meaning of the sentence or words. The problem is that when a person know a sentence, then is it not possible for him/her to know the entire meaning of the sentence at a time. Though I agree with Quine that our statements face the tribunal of sense experiences only as a corporate body, yet it seems to me that it is quite impossible for a learner to grasp the total related body of the sentences. Here, a learner tries to grasp the sentences which are much more relevant to know the expression (that she/he wants to know) but not the whole scheme. It is a reliable process of a speaker to know partially the knowledge of the meaning of an expression and later the learning process of the knowledge can be gradually increased.

The philosophers who quoted a passage from "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" to prove that Quine accepted 'meaning holism' has committed a mistake as Quine's thesis never talks about the meaning here. So it would be an injustice for us to call him 'meaning holist' that paves the way for externalism. Quine supported Duhem's scientific theory of "evidential holism" that gives importance on the bodies of the scientific theory that confront on some recalcitrant experiences as a whole. No one can claim that Duhem was a meaning holist as he was less bothered about the fact of meaning. Some philosophers like Dummett called Quine 'moderate holist' as in his philosophy, we find a relation between theory and evidence. He like a positivist believes that empirical statements can be verified. But I agree with Putnam that Quine was not a verificationist in the Positivists sense. Fodor and Lepore called him verificationist in a holistic sense where the whole theory is presented to experience for validation. They think that the confirmation of an empirical theory doesn't only depend on its relation, but also related to the other factors like availability of alternative theories, simplicity or plausibility etc. that is Quine's holism. They believe that "Quine-Duhem" thesis is the standard proof of their claim. Fodor made a great mistake to consider "verification" and "confirmation" as synonyms from an ordinary sense that Quine did not. I think that Quine is not a 'confirmation holist', he is a confirmation rejectionist. For Quine, the body of theory can confirm some of our beliefs in a good sense, but it does not follow that the body of the theory itself is confirmed by our observation. The reason is that Quine does not believe in the 'science-worthy' conception of confirmation. Quine does not accept mean-

ing as a 'science-worthy' notion, rather it is a *second grade notion*. So, it would be a mistake to call him a 'meaning holist' as he was a 'meaning nihilist'.

We know that in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" Quine tries to refute the claim that the theory of verification and confirming and disconfirming is relevant for language. He shows that the method of verification of an individual sentence is impossible. In *Word and Object* Quine claims that without the positing of meaning, our communication procedure can be well granted. Actually, he gives importance on the verbal behavior that is rooted from Skinner. For Quine, the notion of analyticity and the notion of verifiability are both in troubles. In "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", we will find that he does not talk about any acceptable conditions (identity) for meaning. But in *Word and Object*, Quine emphasizes on 'science-worthy' terms "stimulus meaning" and "translation manual" just to explain that the communication (speaking and translation) may be possible without accepting meaning as an entity. There is no 'meaning' in a single utterance or as a whole according to Quine.

It's true that semantic holism depends on the associating meaning with confirmation, and since confirmation consists in the empirical confirmation, therefore semantic holism is incompatible with a priority. But just holding that the meaning of every term is constitutively collected with the meaning of all other terms in the sentence. I think, it construes an epistemic stand. Putnam believes that semantic holism is incompatible with *a priority* and he also thinks that the history of science proves that there is no property of sentences seem assure a sentence that will never need to be revised. Putnam does not accept the view that the meaning of every sentence/term is constitutively connected with the meaning of all other terms/sentences that does not in itself state an epistemic position. He argues that the literal linguistic meaning that insists the sense of whatever a speaker supposes to know cannot be determined from any fixed sample of its uses. Putnam called this thesis simply 'interpretation' whereas Quine called it 'radical translation'. Both of these do not deal with meaning. Actually, Quine denied the notion of constitutive connections of meanings. For him meaning is regarded as a second grade notion.[30]

Putnam thinks that there is a good sense in which we can claim that some of our beliefs are confirmed relative to our body of theories. However, he does not believe that Quine accepted 'science-worthy' sense of confirmation where the body of theory itself is confirmed by observation. Quine thinks that the propositional attitudes and mentalist terms that certainly include beliefs about meaning are not 'science-worthy'. When the meaning is not regarded as a 'science-worthy' notion for Quine, then, how can Quine possibly have a theory of meaning? I firmly admit with Putnam that for Quine, the notion of meaning has no place in serious scientific metaphysics. Even I chime in with Putnam that Quine considers 'stimulus meaning' as a science-worthy notion identified with the observation conditionals which implied by a theory. But for Quine, these are regarded as a notion of 'heuritic value'. The important thing is that we will find a puzzling line in Quine's famous book *The Roots of Reference*[31], where he claims that 'To learn a language is to learn the meaning of its sentences, and hence to learn what obser-

vation to count as evidence for and against them. The evidence relation and the semantic relation of observation to the theory are co-extensive.' For me, it sounds like meaning holism. But the problem that one will notice that (1) "the semantic relation" is not a relation of theoretical sentences to their referents (e.g. of sentences about electrons to electrons, or sentences about genes to genes), which is what a philosopher of language would normally mean by a semantic relation, but only a relation of theoretical sentences to the observations that are connected to them by stimulus-response conditioning (which is no other philosopher would count as a "semantical" relations at all-here Quine is influenced by his friend Skinner's behaviourist account of language); and (2) in the very next section, Quine says we should drop the talk of observations in favour of the talk of observation sentences! So we are left without a semantical relation to observations as well, because we have dropped observations.

Still a clue that I think mistakenly raised by some philosophers is that Quine's approach to semantic has two parts: a. Verificationism and b. Holism. These two theories are mingled with each other. I think that in his later writings, Quine extremely changed his mind and moved away himself from the boundary to admit the indeterminacy of meaning and reference too. His translation manual leads him to accept the inter-subjective sameness of stimulus meaning in his naturalism. For him, the concept of inter subjectivity can be regarded as a checkpoint that shows that the evidence should be available to the third person perspective. But some philosophers like Fodor, Lepore and Rosa called Quine a verificationist in a holistic sense where the whole theory presented to experience for validation. Fodor and Lepore think that the confirmation of an empirical theory doesn't only depend on its relations to data, but also related to the other factors like availability of alternative theories, simplicity or plausibility etc. That is Quine's confirmation holism and they claim that the 'Quine-Durkheim theses' is the standard proof of their work. Fodor made a great mistake to consider verification and confirmation as synonyms from an ordinary sense as I illustrated earlier that Quine did not. Quine is a meaning nihilist in the ontological sense as he clearly denies that there are such objects as meanings (and that sentences are not given meaning by links to objects like Propositions). But to say that is not to say that words and sentences lack meaning because Quine already considered meaning as second grade notion. I believe Quine's view is that words and sentences have meaning, or are meaningful, but in a way that can be explained naturalistically and in a way that does not make us believe in meanings as mental entities. The way that they are meaningful (through verification and confirmation, etc.) is a holistic way, thus meaning holism, because verification and confirmation are holistic where the meaning of a sentence depends on the corporate body of the other sentences and doubtlessly similar for a word.

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Acknowledgment

Notes

[1] I am personally thankful to my mentor Hilary Putnam for this valuable notes.
[2] Putnam, Hilary, 1992, 271.
[3] Quine, W.V, 1969, 75.
[4] Quine, W.V, 1990, 20.
[5] Kemp, Gary, 2012, 18.
[6] Quine, W.V, *1990, 4-5*.
[7] Quine, W.V, *1990, 7*.
[8] Quine, W.V, 1966, 229.
[9] Kim, Jaegwon, 2008, 304-305.
[10] Quine, W.V. *1990, 37*.
[11] Quine, W.V. *1990, 38*.
[12] Putnam, Hilary, 1992, 272.
[13] Quine, W.V, 1960, 29.
[14] Quine, W.V, 1981, 25.
[15] Quine, W.V, 1990, 41-42
[16] Quine, W.V. *1990, 42*.
[17] Quine, W.V. *1990, 42*.
[18] Quine, W.V. *1990, 47-48*.
[19] Quine, W.V. *1990, 50*.
[20] Quine, W.V. *1990, 51*.
[21] Rosa, Raffaella De & Lepore, Ernie, 2006,18-45.
[22] Quine, W.V, 1963, 37.
[23] Quine, W.V, 1974, 38.
[24] Quine, W.V, 1969, 26.
[25] Rosa, Raffaella De & Lepore, Ernie, 2006, 23.
[26] Rosa, Raffaella De & Lepore, Ernie, 2006, 28.
[27] Quine, W.V. "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", 42.
[28] Quine, W.V. *1990, 58-59*.
[29] I am personally indebted to Hilary Putnam for this discussion.
[30] Hilary Putnam once wrote to me that 'I have been writing to you that Quine is not a meaning holist, but a semantic nihilist. He does not believe that there is any such thing as 'meaning' in the semantic sense. The term 'empirical meaning' is widely used in philosophy of science, but does not refer to anything semantic. In Quine's version, the empirical meaning of a theory is the 'observation categorical' it implies. 'Empirical meaning' is holistic by definition, trivial, but it is not what anyone calls the meaning of sentences and words. Fodor sometime paints Quine as a meaning holist by pretending that what Quine says about the holism of empirical meaning has to do with the holism of 'meaning' in the semantic sense, but that is a mistake. There are no meaning and no semantic nodes – no semantic *anything* - for Quine. Semantic talk is heuristic and not to be taken seriously in metaphysics, according to Quine.' I am personally thankful to Hilary Putnam for this note.
[31] Quine, W.V, 1974, 38.