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UNDERSTANDING QUINE'S FAMOUS 'STATEMENT'

ABSTRACT. I argue that Quine's famous claim, "any statement can be held true come what may", demands an interpretation that implies that the meanings of the expressions in the held-true statement change. The intended interpretation of this claim is not clear from its context, and so it is often misunderstood by philosophers (and is misleadingly taught to their students). I explain Fodor and Lepore's (1992) view that the above interpretation would render Quine's assertion entirely trivial and reply, on both textual and philosophical grounds, that only this "trivial" reading is consistent with Quine's famous denial of analyticity. I also explain briefly how the "trivial" reading lends support to meaning holism, which, regardless of one's views of its consequences, is an important position in the philosophy of language and mind.

One of the most famous assertions in all of twentieth-century analytic philosophy is that "Any statement can be held true come what may, if we make drastic enough adjustments elsewhere in the system" (Quine 1980, 43). We are all taught, when first exposed to Quine's ground-breaking essay, 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism', that this statement, together with the considerations Quine offers in its favor, constitutes a sea-change in the very nature of philosophy, and in its relation to science. Unfortunately, all too many philosophers, from professors to undergraduates, are prone to misinterpret Quine's assertion – his adaptation of a thesis he attributes to Duhem.

In their extremely influential book, *Holism: A Shopper's Guide* (1992), Jerry Fodor and Ernest Lepore offer very good reasons for accepting what is in fact a misinterpretation of the Quine-Duhem ('Q-D') thesis. Their concern is to show that there are no good arguments for meaning holism, and that all the versions of meaning holism proposed so far face insuperable difficulties. Meaning holism can be expressed, for present purposes, as the view that the meaning of an expression is determined by its entire inferential role, and that inferential roles are holistic. In this essay, I shall challenge the primary warrant for Fodor and Lepore's view that Quine's rejection of the analytic-synthetic ('a/s') distinction provides no support for meaning holism. I will do so by showing that their interpretation of the Q-D thesis – a very common and indeed well motivated reading – is mistaken. I am not, however, concerned to defend meaning holism here. That



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is, I shall steer clear of their claim that meaning holism is fundamentally flawed.¹ In fact, I believe that many of Fodor and Lepore's best arguments do reveal significant difficulties that one lands in once one accepts meaning holism.

Many philosophers take Quine's rejection of the *a/s* distinction to be the crucial premise in the argument for meaning holism. They also take the Q-D thesis to be the ultimate expression of Quine's rejection of the *a/s* distinction. Fodor and Lepore attack the strategy of grounding meaning holism in the denial of the *a/s* distinction by confronting the would-be holist with a dilemma. On one horn, if one interprets the Q-D thesis substantively, it has no semantic implications. *A fortiori*, it provides no grounds for meaning holism. On the other horn, if the Q-D thesis is trivially construed – an interpretation I shall explain presently – it appears philosophically uninteresting. Thus Fodor and Lepore reject the trivial reading out of hand. I shall argue on both philosophical and (quite obvious) textual grounds that Quine intended the trivial reading, a reading which is essential for the prospects of meaning holism. Now, even if one finds reasons for rejecting meaning holism other than that it cannot be grounded in Quine's denial of the *a/s* distinction, as do Fodor and Lepore, this paper serves the useful purpose of setting the historical record straight. Since Fodor and Lepore's book, many philosophers have reconsidered the arguments for and against analyticity, focusing primarily on the Q-D thesis. I think it only fair that we actually look at Quine's own interpretation of that thesis.

Our discussion begins with the *a/s* distinction. It says that some statements – the analytic ones – are true solely in virtue of meaning, and others are not.² By way of example, we can transform this into a thesis about meaning constituting and non-meaning-constituting inferences. Suppose the statement 'All bachelors are unmarried' were analytic. It would follow that the inference 'If *x* is a bachelor, then *x* is unmarried' would be constitutive of the meaning of the expression 'bachelor'. Quine's rejection of the *a/s* distinction, however, says that there is no distinction between those inferences that constitute the meaning of an expression and those that do not.

Here is why this is important to meaning holism. If only some particular inferences in which an expression figures constitute that expression's meaning, then it is false that meaning is holistic. That is, it is false that the meaning of an expression is constituted by all of the inferences in which it figures. If, on the other hand, Quine is right that there is no *a/s* distinction, it makes the view that an expression's meaning is constituted by all of its inferential relations a live option. Again, if meaning is inferential role, and no particular inferences are meaning constituting exclusive of the

others, then it is plausible to think that all of the inferences in which an expression figures constitute its meaning.³ Of course, there are conceptions of meaning according to which *many* but not *all* of an expression's inferential connections are constitutive of its meaning, and these may also be considered holistic. Though the general idea seems plausible, it would be difficult to justify one's acceptance of such a version without tacitly accepting an *a/s* distinction. Thus I shall focus on the version whereby an expression's entire inferential role constitutes its meaning. (One must still furnish the fundamental premise that meaning is inferentially constituted. As I suggested above, many of Fodor and Lepore's best arguments attack the implications of, not the arguments for, meaning holism. In the end, because of these problems, Fodor (at least) rejects all versions of inferential role semantics.)

For better or worse, Fodor and Lepore take the main consequence of the rejection of analyticity to be essentially captured in the Q-D thesis. This in itself is not necessarily problematic, but their consequent exclusive focus on the Q-D thesis precipitates their mistaken interpretation. For present purposes, we can use Fodor and Lepore's favored construal of the Q-D thesis: "[Y]ou can hold onto any statement, if confronted by recalcitrant data, by making compensatory adjustments elsewhere in your theory" (Fodor and Lepore 1992, 39–40).

This "revisability" version of the Q-D thesis, which I shall sometimes call 'the revisability thesis', is straightforwardly epistemological. It says that confirmation relations are holistic in the sense that *all* of the empirical evidence for a theory is potentially relevant to the confirmation or disconfirmation of any particular statement. As my purposes demand, I will sometimes call the Q-D thesis 'confirmation holism'. (Each of these labels and glosses is consistent with Fodor and Lepore's claims, so no part of my criticism hangs on them.) Roughly, any statement can be held true come what may because all statements are inferentially connected. Put differently, Duhem pointed out that theoretical statements are testable only together with a number of auxiliary assumptions, many of which are also simply hypotheses. Recalcitrant data, therefore, do not uniquely determine which theoretical statements – *mutatis mutandis*, which inferential relations – need revision. Data that conflict with expectations may be explained away either by denying one or more auxiliary assumptions or by denying the theoretical statement under consideration.

Fodor and Lepore deny that this epistemological view – one they claim to accept – has any semantic implications. They argue that it cannot ground meaning holism, a metaphysical thesis about what constitutes meaning. Only a trivial interpretation of the revisability thesis could lend support to

meaning holism. But many philosophers take Quine's revisability claims in 'Two Dogmas' to be anything but trivial. Thus Fodor and Lepore reject the trivial reading out of hand. This is their mistake. Let's turn to their motivation for refusing the trivial reading.

Fodor and Lepore complain that Quine never makes clear what he means by 'statement' in 'any statement can be held true come what may' (Quine 1980, 43). Here they are undoubtedly correct; Quine doesn't. They consider essentially two possible interpretations of 'statement'. (*Three* if we count the interpretation of 'statement' as *proposition*, but that reading is obviously un-Quinean. In any case, the primary difficulty in taking 'statement' to mean *proposition* arises also on the second reading, below.) First, if we read 'statement' as *formula*, then of course any statement can be held true – just reinterpret what it means. But that seems to trivialize totally an otherwise interesting view about revisability, since it comes to no more than saying that we can change the meanings of our expressions. Second, we could take 'statement' to mean *formula together with its conditions of semantic evaluability*. If those conditions are verificationist, then perhaps a view of meaning holism emerges. Verificationism (broadly construed) says, roughly, that a statement's meaning is its method of confirmation. If the Q-D thesis, i.e., confirmation holism, is true, then, given verificationism, a statement's meaning is holistically constituted. This would seem to allow for a substantive reading of the Q-D thesis, insofar as verificationism holds that a statement has its conditions of semantic evaluation *essentially*, unlike formulas, which are not essentially semantically evaluable. Fodor and Lepore nevertheless reject this view on the grounds that "confirmation holism and verificationism are true of *different things*" (Fodor and Lepore 1992, 53). Confirmation holism, or revisability, is an epistemological thesis about the holistic relations among already meaningful entities, whereas verificationism is a semantic thesis about what constitutes the meaningfulness of, for instance, linguistic forms, which are non-meaningful entities.

This, then, is the dilemma I briefly described above. Let's flesh it out a bit. On the first horn is the trivial reading of the Q-D thesis, where 'statement' means *formula*. The primary reason for thinking that the Q-D thesis has to be about statements whose meanings are constituted independently of their confirmation relations, rather than about formulas, is that one cannot give an account of confirmation relations among statements unless one knows what the statements mean. A simple way to put the point, as Fodor and Lepore do, is to ask, "What is it for a form of words to be confronted by data (recalcitrant or otherwise)?" (Ibid. 47) They give some compelling examples to dramatize their complaint:

It's only epistemologically interesting that you could hold onto 'Burning is the liberation of phlogiston' in the face of Lavoisier's results if 'Burning is the liberation of phlogiston' means that burning is the liberation of phlogiston. It's no news that you could hold onto it in the face of those results if it means that Greycat has whiskers.

If statements are just formulas, you don't need to "make compensatory adjustments elsewhere" in order to hold onto them; if a formula that you like gets into trouble, use it to mean that two and two is four and leave the rest of the theory alone. (Ibid.)

In short, it does not take a philosopher to see that we can change the meanings of expressions in any statement that we want to hold true. (Although, as we will see, this is pretty close to *Quine's* reading of the Q-D thesis!)

Accepting Fodor and Lepore's view of what is "epistemologically interesting" for argument's sake, they are right to say that 'statement' cannot simply mean *formula*, for the reasons just cited. So we ought to look carefully at their objections to reading 'statement' as *formula together with its conditions of semantic evaluability*, a reading which forms the second horn of the dilemma.

As we just saw, an interesting reading of 'hold true come what may' requires that a statement's meaning does not change due to revision elsewhere in the system. To honor that constraint, we can say that statements are not formulas – which are individuated syntactically (they are essentially syntactic) – but instead they are individuated by their conditions of semantic evaluation (they are essentially semantic). The conditions of semantic evaluability are given by confirmation relations, holistically construed according to the Q-D thesis, among statements. Thus, on this strategy, "statements have their confirmation relations to one another essentially" (Ibid. 50). The trouble with this view is that it conflicts with Quine's thesis that confirmation relations among statements depend on what we find out about the world, i.e., they are contingent. This follows from Quine's views about revisability *however* we interpret them: confirmation relations are always revisable (unless, of course, one believes there are Kripkean a posteriori necessities, which, of course, Quine does not). But if a non-trivial reading of revisability requires that statements have their conditions of semantic evaluation essentially, then those conditions cannot be confirmation relations, because Quine says confirmation relations are revisable in light of new evidence; they are contingent. But then we have no argument for meaning holism, for it was supposed to be the holism of confirmation that made meaning holistic. (As I suggested earlier, this argument also works against reading 'statement' as *proposition*, because propositions, by definition, have their meanings essentially.)

There is no avoiding the dilemma. But, happily, I do not think Quine would have tried to avoid it. In fact, Quine accepts the “trivial” reading of revisability, though I seriously doubt that he believes its philosophical impact is trivial.

Now, I suppose that there is a significant obstacle to accepting the trivial reading of revisability, namely, that most of us are taught that Quine’s talk of revisability in ‘Two Dogmas’ constitutes one of the most important events in analytic philosophy. On its face, the idea that “any statement can be held true come what may” (Quine 1980, 43) sounds absolutely radical. It is because philosophers (and their students) take this claim to be substantial in the way demanded by Fodor and Lepore that they find Quine’s work ground-breaking. But Quine’s claim is in fact not substantial in *this* way.

Our dilemma, then, is that either Quine’s claims about revisability are trivial, or Quine’s view about the contingent nature of confirmation relations lends no support to any constitutive thesis about meaning. For reasons that will emerge presently, I suggest that we (1) take ‘statement’ to mean formula, (2) concede that, after revisions, formulas take new meanings, and therefore (3) concede that Quine’s claim that “any statement can be held true come what may” is not substantial in the way demanded by Fodor and Lepore.

On this interpretation of the Q-D thesis, it turns out that a statement, *qua* formula, does not have its conditions of semantic evaluation essentially. Indeed, it has *no* conditions of semantic evaluation. Any meaningful (or interpreted) statement, on the other hand, does have conditions of semantic evaluation essentially. If any of its confirmation conditions change, it (necessarily) takes on a new meaning. The confirmation conditions are themselves contingent, but the statements on which such conditions confer meaning have their meanings determined by those conditions.

There are at least two independent sources of evidence that the trivial reading is the proper interpretation of the Q-D thesis. Exhibit One: Quine’s reply to a similar objection, put forth by Grünbaum, to the trivial reading. Grünbaum writes:

[U]nless Quine restricts in a very specific way what he understands by ‘drastic enough adjustments elsewhere in the (theoretical) system’ the Duhem-thesis is a thoroughly unenlightening truism. For if someone were to put forward the false empirical hypothesis *H* that ‘Ordinary buttermilk is highly toxic to humans’, this hypothesis could be saved from refutation in the face of the observed wholesomeness of ordinary buttermilk by making the following “drastic enough” adjustment to our system: changing the rules of English usage so that the intension of the term ‘ordinary buttermilk’ is that of the term ‘arsenic’ in its customary usage. Hence a *necessary* condition for the non-triviality of Duhem’s thesis

is that the theoretical language be semantically stable in the relevant respects. (Grünbaum 1962, 20)⁴

Quine's response explicitly denies Fodor and Lepore's "substantive" and Grünbaum's "non-trivial" reading of the revisability thesis: "For my own part I would say that the Duhem-Quine thesis as I have used it is probably trivial. I haven't advanced it as an interesting thesis as such" (Quine 1976a). He goes on to say, "I bring it in only in the course of arguing against such notions as that the empirical content of sentences can in general be sorted out distributively, sentence by sentence, or that the understanding of a term can be segregated from collateral information regarding the object" (Ibid.).

Now, one might wish to dismiss exhibit one if one is inclined to think that Quine has simply gone soft on an otherwise interesting reading of revisability. But exhibit two provides proof beyond a reasonable doubt that the substantive interpretation of revisability is wrongheaded. The substantive reading of 'any statement can be held true come what may' would seem to imply a local distinction between meaning constituting inferences and non-meaning-constituting inferences, which is the very distinction Quine has taken pains to deny at least since 1936.⁵ How *could* we hold a statement true even though we revise other statements to which it is inferentially (or confirmationally) connected while retaining that statement's original meaning? Surely the only answer is: only if the statements we are revising have no bearing on the meaning of the original statement. And that is just to say that there must be a distinction between meaning constituting and non-meaning-constituting inferential relations. Put differently, a simple formulation of Quine's rejection of analyticity easily clinches the fact that Fodor and Lepore's substantive reading of the Q-D thesis is implausible: there is no principled meaning-theory distinction; or, meaning and belief are inextricable. As a result, a change in theory brings change in meanings. If, like Fodor and Lepore, one demands a substantive reading of the Q-D thesis, it flat out contradicts the rejection of analyticity. Recall, however, that Fodor and Lepore (1) claim to accept Quine's rejection of the *a/s* distinction, (2) claim that this implies the Q-D thesis, and (3) argue that the Q-D thesis must be construed substantively. If, like many philosophers, Fodor and Lepore really do accept the rejection of the *a/s* distinction, then they are wrong to reject the trivial reading of revisability.⁶

There remains the worry of utter triviality, for instance, changing the meaning of 'buttermilk' to *arsenic* or 'Burning is the liberation of phlogiston' to *Greycat has whiskers*. For starters, however, this would fail to take Quine's epistemological holism seriously. The expression 'buttermilk' has many inferential and confirmational relations, say, 'Buttermilk comes

from cows', 'Buttermilk makes good pancakes', 'Buttermilk is fattening', and 'That [pointing to a container in the refrigerator] is buttermilk', etc. Changing the meaning of 'buttermilk' to *arsenic* would sever all of these inferential relations, creating incoherence among one's beliefs, and with no apparent motivation. Still, Quine's remarks concerning constraints on meaning and theory change are notoriously vague. The only principles he suggests are such like simplicity and conservatism. Nevertheless, whatever content these notions have,⁷ presumably it is enough to rule out these examples of utter triviality. A brief reconsideration of the 'buttermilk' example will help us to see how.⁸

Suppose that, until this morning, I had accepted all of the following statements: 'Buttermilk is fattening'; 'Buttermilk comes from cows'; 'Buttermilk makes good pancakes'; 'Buttermilk can be made with the aid of a bacterial culture' (from my dictionary); and 'That [pointing to a container in my refrigerator] is buttermilk'. Among all of these statements, I had associated its being fattening most closely with buttermilk (or 'buttermilk'). Given its very name (and what I continue to believe about what I call 'butter' and 'milk'), I believed that something surely (necessarily) is not buttermilk unless it is fattening. Suppose also that, later in the day, I am told by a reliable source that buttermilk is largely non-fattening. I am completely incredulous. But after a long explanation I manage to be convinced. Something I only this morning considered well-nigh analytic – something I could not imagine to be untrue – I now indeed accept as false. (This actually happened the first time I delivered this paper.)

Included in the set of statements that I now accept is 'Buttermilk is non-fattening'. Now, this is an exemplification of the "triviality" of the Q-D thesis. The meanings of my expressions 'buttermilk' and 'fattening' have changed because their inferential relations have changed; indeed, their extensions (in my idiolect) have changed. This morning any fat-free item that I might have encountered would not have come under the extension of 'buttermilk', but that has since changed. What about the other statements that I had previously accepted? Why, when I overturn my most closely held belief about (what I call) 'buttermilk', do I not thereafter accept statements such as 'Buttermilk is poison' or 'Buttermilk is (really) arsenic'? (If I cease to accept 'Buttermilk is fattening', then hasn't my 'buttermilk' concept totally broken down?) The answer, though one that accords with no hard and fast principle, is obvious. I deny these statements and continue to accept most of those that I have always accepted because it is simpler and more conservative to hold on to the latter than to revise them.⁹ Simplicity and conservatism do not dictate which statements I will hold true.

However, they do keep me from revising 'buttermilk' to mean, say, *arsenic*, or from revising the law of non-contradiction.

Perhaps an even better, though all too often used, example is the revision of the statement 'Whales are fish'. That the whale is a fish was originally thought to be constitutive of the concept of *whale*. Indeed, the word 'whale' has roots in the Latin for 'fish'. When it was "discovered" that whales are mammals, the original statement that 'whales are fish', whose falsity was almost inconceivable, was in fact deemed false. In turn, with no *a/s* distinction, the meanings of 'whale' and 'fish' changed. (This is controversial, but here I am illustrating what one who denies analyticity would say.¹⁰) I suggest, then, that if the Q-D thesis is correct, this is a nice example of Quine's claim that "no statement is immune to revision" (Quine 1980, 43), which he proposes as a corollary to "Any statement can be held true come what may" (Ibid.). It also exemplifies Quine's claim about the inextricability of meaning and belief – the new statements one accepts involve both meaning and belief change. But with regard to the present point, when we changed our beliefs about whales, we did not thereby throw up our hands and wildly revise the inferences in which the expressions 'whale', 'fish', and 'mammal' figure. Indeed, these expressions continue to apply largely to the same sets of creatures. Simplicity and conservatism ruled the day.

These examples are not intended to show that Grünbaum and Fodor and Lepore are necessarily wrong in their complaints about triviality. Rather, they are intended simply to illustrate the other resources in Quine's epistemology that can take the sting out of such complaints. Revisions are licensed only insofar as they contribute to the overall coherence of theory.

In conclusion, notice that I have not actually defended the denial of the *a/s* distinction. Thus I am not claiming that one is compelled to accept the Q-D thesis with its intended "trivial" interpretation. I have simply shown that, within a Quinean framework, one cannot accept the former, as Fodor and Lepore claim to, without the latter.¹¹ Of course, many philosophers do accept that there is no *a/s* distinction. So I suppose, whether they know it or not, many philosophers must be committed to the *prima facie* viability of meaning holism.

NOTES

¹ There is a further, excellent reason for not defending meaning holism on Quine's behalf: Quine is not a meaning holist. Quine understands his denial of analyticity as part of a larger attack on the commonsense notion of meaning itself. This is especially clear in his thesis of the indeterminacy of meaning, which he develops in response to Carnap's proposal for

a behavioral criterion of meaning. (See Quine 1960, Chapter 2.) The meaning holist is one who accepts Quine's rejection of analyticity, but concludes that the meaning of an expression is determined by all of its inferential connections, rather than that expressions have no determinate meaning.

² It has been pointed out by many, including Quine, that the idea that some statements owe their truth exclusively to their meaning is implausible on its face. See, for instance, Boghossian (1996), where he attempts to resuscitate a more reasonable, *epistemological* version of analyticity: "a statement is 'true by virtue of its meaning' provided that grasp of its meaning alone suffices for justified belief in its truth" (363).

³ Boghossian argues that the correct implication of the denial of analyticity (or at least of implicit definition for logical constants) is indeterminacy, not holism. (See his 1996, 382–85.) His argument is interesting, but again, my aim here is not to defend meaning holism *per se*. Rather, I want to show that arguments to block holism which depend on a particular reading of the Q-D thesis are mistaken, and that recognition of this fact revitalizes the chances for meaning holism. There is, perhaps, a serious inconsistency between, first, the Quinean argument against logical conventionalism that Boghossian cites and, second, the main implication of Quine's denial of analyticity. It is hard to see how *any* view of logic is compatible with the rejection of the *a/s* distinction, but that is a topic for another paper. (But see Sher (1999) for an interesting account of the compatibility of Quine's claims (1) that there is a distinction between "central" and "peripheral" statements in a body of theory and (2) that there is no such distinction because there are no analytic statements.)

⁴ A more formal articulation of Grünbaum's complaint can be found in note 2, p. 130 of Grünbaum (1976). There he spells out more specifically what is required for non-triviality, not taking seriously the idea that the thesis might be intended trivially.

⁵ I am referring to Quine's rejection of conventionalism as an account of the analyticity of logic and mathematics in 'Truth by Convention' (Quine 1976b), first published in 1936.

⁶ Fodor and Lepore do, in fact, provide reasons for rejecting holism. In their discussion of conceptual role semantics in chapter 6 of *Holism*, they argue convincingly that conceptual (or inferential) role semantics, plus the rejection of the *a/s* distinction, is compatible with the compositionality of language only if it turns out that all inferences are analytic, a view they find "perfectly mad" (Fodor and Lepore 1992, 182). Fodor's favored view, it is clear, is that inference has nothing to do with how expressions get their meaning. But that is a result he gets from having rejected the unfavorable *consequences* of meaning holism. Of course, one could view Fodor's compositionality argument as a *reductio* of the trivial reading of the Q-D thesis. But as we have seen, not even Quine, its principle author, would have accepted Fodor and Lepore's substantive reading. In addition, in fairness to the conceptual role semanticist, it should be pointed out that the right-minded meaning holist was aware all along that the rejection of the *a/s* distinction makes every inference, and every true statement, analytic (in the meaning-constitutive sense). The holist just has to stick to her guns in face of Fodor and Lepore's complaints.

⁷ Creath (1992) argues that, insofar as these notions are vague and yet are the *only* principles Quine provides for theory change, then we ought to think them in no better standing than analyticity. It's an interesting objection and not terribly easy to defeat. But perhaps it can be defanged. Analyticity was supposed to give us a hard and fast distinction between truths of meaning and other truths. If that notion turns out to be vague (which, by the way, is not Quine's considered view; rather, it's that the notion has no non-circular or presuppositionless explanation, vague or otherwise) its principal use breaks down. On the other hand, simplicity and conservatism are not necessarily vague (the fewer the theoretical

commitments the better; save old working theories if you can); it's just that they are not conclusive. But that is exactly what we should expect without an a/s distinction. Where Carnap claimed that the framework part of science – the analytic part – is exclusively conventional (though perhaps influenced by theoretical considerations, as Quine notes, 1976c, 132), Quine claims that there is no interesting difference between kinds of sentences (framework and theoretical) or between our reasons for accepting them.

⁸ One might think of the revision of 'Burning is the liberation of phlogiston' as a better illustrative example here. But if Kuhn's (1996) analysis is correct, the scientific community's revision of this statement was neither simple nor conservative, but revolutionary. As I argue in Author (MS), Kuhn's account of science lends credence to Quine's rejection of the a/s distinction, but, interestingly, it also vindicates Carnap's distinction between framework questions and empirical questions. Thus Kuhn's work can be used to show that the debate between Quine and Carnap about the a/s distinction is much subtler than ordinarily recognized.

⁹ Isn't it simply that I accept these statements because they are *true*? There is something to this reply. However, were one to revise enough of these sentences such that 'buttermilk' is inferentially related to 'poison' and 'arsenic', and hence to apply these terms to new and different objects, then these new statements might also be true, but of different things. Quine's point, albeit sketchy, about simplicity and conservatism, is that we simply do not normally make such wholesale changes in the inferences we associate with expressions. Doing so would create epistemological messiness.

¹⁰ Of course, the meanings of these expressions would have changed even if there were an a/s distinction.

¹¹ Fodor accepts the former but not the latter because he denies that inference has anything to do with meaning. But again, he denies this because he is unsatisfied with the holistic *consequences* of inferential role semantics coupled with no a/s (see note 6). This still leaves open the Quinean strategy of grounding meaning holism through the rejection of analyticity. Though Fodor and other meaning atomists deny that Quine's rejection of the distinction between *truths of meaning* and *empirical truths* has important semantic implications, it is actually somewhat difficult even to state Quine's view without seeing that it is likely to have an impact on the theory of meaning.

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