SKEPTICISM AND SEMANTIC QUASI-SKEPTICISM IN W. V. O. QUINE: THE CONFLATION OF A THEORY OF MEANING WITH DEEP SCIENTIFIC PROBLEMS OF TRUTH-DETERMINATION

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ABSTRACT: We argue that Quine's skepticism about the theoretical potential of semantics to control the division between analytic and synthetic is the platform he uses to formulate a new dimension of the problem of meaning determination. The problem of meaning determination merges with the problem of scientific discovery and translatability. Introducing heuristics and holistic interpretations to the semantic issue of identifying extensional interpretations, the American philosopher breaks the mentalist and computational cycles of semantic explanation. This is quasi-skepticism, for it does not eliminate the meaning problems. It only pushes them into non-trivial (mentalistic and computational) regions. The paper intends to unfold a reading of Quine's intellectual process in three phases: 1. His aversion to intensionalism, coordinated to a non-trivial extensional theory about complex identity statements. 2. his holistic theory of extensional revision, which might be called programmatic extensionalism or, following Nimrod Bar-Am (2008), semantic heuristics, and 3. His social theory regarding the learning of meaning and the naturalist fusion of the problem of meaning with the solution of empirical problems.
KEY-WORDS: Quine. Semantic Skepticism. Semantic dynamism. Semantic Heuristics. Naturalism.

CETICISMO E QUASE-CETICISMO SEMÂNTICO EM W. V. O. QUINE: A CONFLAÇÃO DE UMA TEORIA DO SIGNIFICADO COM PROFUNDOS PROBLEMAS CIENTÍFICOS DE DETERMINAÇÃO DA VERDADE

RESUMO: Argumentamos que o ceticismo de Quine sobre o potencial teórico da semântica para controlar a divisão entre analítico e sintético é a plataforma que ele usa para formular uma nova dimensão do problema da determinação do significado. O problema da determinação do significado se funde com o problema da descoberta científica e da traduzibilidade. Introduzindo heurísticas e interpretações holísticas à questão semântica de identificar interpretações extensionais, o filósofo americano rompe os ciclos mentalistas e

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computacionais da explicação semântica. Isso é quase ceticismo, pois não elimina os problemas de significado. Apenas os empurra para regiões não triviais (mentalistas e computacionais). O artigo pretende desdobrar uma leitura do processo intelectual de Quine em três fases: 1. Sua aversão ao intensionalismo, coordenada a uma teoria extensional não trivial sobre declarações de identidade complexas. 2. sua teoria holística de revisão extensional, que pode ser chamada de extensionalismo programático ou, seguindo Nimrod Bar-Am (2008), heurística semântica, e 3. sua teoria social sobre a aprendizagem do significado e a fusão naturalista do problema do significado com a solução de problemas empíricos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Quine. Ceticismo Semântico. Dinamismo semântico. Heurística Semântica. Naturalismo.

1. THE DOMINANCE OF EXTENSIONAL REDUCTIONISM IN EARLY ANALYTIC PHILOSOPHY: INTRODUCING QUINE AS SUBVERSIVE WITHIN A PARADIGM

The founding events of analytic philosophy occurred so long ago that they can be told from a venerable and canonical perspective. However, they can also be told through ironic stories. One of the conceptual elements that contributed to the intellectual engine of this tradition, extensionalism, can be described today through one of these narratives. Gottlob Frege (1879, 1892) sketched a theory of meaning that took up the distinction between extension and intension (Reference and Sense) without having a clear project of merging them. With his interest in explaining identity operations richer than those of extension formalism, Frege began a struggle against George Boole[2] that culminated in a variety of theories about the organic character of inferential-conceptual integration in a system. In the more recent academic period, this theory underpins a pragmatic inferentialism that finds its full expression in Robert Brandom:

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[2] According to Bar-Am, although "Frege did not mention Boole by name in this particular paper, his attack on the traditional theory of meaning as extension is clearly directed against the most basic tenet of Boolean logic: its undaunted extensionalism" (2008, p. 9). As a matter of fact, the attempt to find the right interpretation to code sentences whose identity is not trivial sparked a professional campaign that has impacted the academic environment of analytical philosophy; however, we can trace this effort back to Kant and his presentation of the problem of necessary non-trivial identity via a priori synthetic judgments, and to the "Aristotle's, somewhat nebulous, denial that coextensive terms (such as "rational" and "featherless biped") are synonymous. It is significant, then, that Frege reformulated the Aristotelian intuition (1) as a direct and explicit criticism ofextensionalism, that Aristotle didn't pay much attention to, and (2) using no mention of the muddled notion of essence" (p. 9).

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His seminal first work, the Begriffsschrift of 1879, takes as its aim the explication of "conceptual content" (begriffliche Inhalt). The qualification "conceptual" is explicitly construed in inferential terms (BRANDOM, 2001, p. 50)

Carnap (*Meaning and Synonymy in Natural Languages*) held that the identification of synonymous and analytic phenomena involves an extra-extensional theoretical part in which not only actual but also possible cases are considered: "all possible cases are taken into account in the determination of intensions" (CARNAP, 1955, p. 38)

The irony is that a broader type of extensionalism emerged from the efforts of thinkers interested in the distinction between intension and extension, or sense and reference. In this updated format, we can see reductionism at work. Reductionism from intension to extension can be seen in weak and strong forms. The weak form is the thesis that a theory of the phenomenon of referential identity and the difference between Sense and absurdity does not involve reified entities. The strong form is that no theoretical awareness of the problem of intensionality is required. At most, what is required is the idea of rule-following. In Wittgenstein's (1969) words:

> One must clarify: the concepts of understanding, wanting to mean (meinen), and thinking. For then it will also become clear what can lead one to think that whoever pronounces a sentence and gives it meaning is performing with it a calculation according to certain rules (PI 81).[3]

How is this irony to be explained? It is not so complicated. The intensional phenomenon is already so impoverished when told from the Carnapian perspective that not much remains to resist its complete absorption by a theory of reference or extension. The first phase of analytic philosophy conceived of the intensional phenomenon in the following reductive way: the relevant content for acquiring a sense is a model for predicting the non-inversion of semantic value. Thus, what is called understanding of sense would be nothing more than the ability to follow rules. This ability to give a sentence nonreversible and cumulative semantic content can also be called the comprehensive ability to understand a language: "We call a proposition to what we apply the calculation of truth functions in our language" (PI 136). This is a development of the theory of meaning that is not entirely incompatible with one of the pillars of Frege's thesis, for "On this way of seeing things, a mode of presentation is what we get qua cognitive state when we bring a sense to

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[3]Abbreviation: PI = *Philosophical Investigations*.

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consciousness" (MAY, 2006, p. 143). This ability to master the patterns of a language was highlighted by Davidson as one of the main aspects that are not explained by a pure theory of extension: "Davidson claims that the main aspect of the concept of truth that is left out by Tarski's extensional theory is its role as part of a framework for empirical semantical theories of individuals (...) and linguistic competencies" (BURGE, 2005 p. 583).

In the words of Davidson, the relevant ability to identify intensional phenomena is only the ability to determine the learnable features of a language: "we can regard the meaning of each sentence as a function of a finite number of features of that language, (...) we have an insight (...) into what there is to be learned" (DAVIDSON, 2001, p. 8). No ontology of attributes is required here. Intensional determination can be programmed in a well-formed language. To Carnap's credit, the problem of attribute identity has taken on an anodic format, and cognitive scientists can set about developing a computational theory of language competence. The second half of the twentieth century found this area of study to be a highly prosperous field for the fusion of interests of linguists, philosophers, and logicians. According to Barbara Partee: "Linguists at least since the Chomskyan revolution have been concerned with human linguistic competence – what's "in the head" of the speaker of a language, and how it's acquired" (2011, p. 2).

But this project of unifying study paradigms is not without controversy. Bjørn Ramberg gives an ingenious characterization of Davidson's limitations:

> Talking as if any particular, more or less complete, theory of truth might represent a level of semantic competence might lead us to seriously misconstrue the nature of this competence, by ignoring the essentially dynamic character of semantic understanding (RAMBERG, 1989, 78).

Quine never contributed to the stability of this discussion or to the formation of a peace zone for the presuppositions of this linguistic-mentalistic paradigm. On the contrary, it was this state of peaceful paradigm on the subject of semantics, as well as its stable relations with linguistics and cognitive science, that Quine found difficult to accept. In our article, we will explore how Quine has stirred up this issue by renewing the skeptical options and removing the merely anodic layer of the idea of "meaning" In this way, he not only goes beyond Carnap, but also explores a terrain of skepticism - towards a naturalistic and heuristic view of meaning construction - that is omitted in Davidson's theory of linguistic competence.

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2. QUINE AND THE WEAKENING OF THE EXTENSIONALIST APPEAL

Here, a doctrinal consensus is polemized in the exegesis of the analytical tradition. W. V. O. Quine, the philosopher traditionally regarded as one of the harshest critics of the theory of intensions, is introduced as a reformer of the extensionalist thesis. To outline a parameter, it is useful to describe what we mean by extensionalism. According to Andrew Ward, extensionalism reduces to the claim "that any sentence in a non-extensional language is translatable (without loss of meaning) into a sentence in some extensional language" (1982, p. 262). Now, it is well known that Quine was an enthusiast of one version of extensionalism. We find in his *Confessions* that "I am neither an essentialist nor, so far as I know, an existentialist. But I am a confirmed extensionalist" (2008, p. 498). His motives, however, were less aligned with the reductionist greed of the logical positivists and physicalists, and more in line with a kind of awareness of the paradoxical danger of ontological inflation. He refrains from admitting entities that are not reducible to their instances, and the consequent risk of dogmatic use of the identity predicate to define these extra-extensional entities. In *Grades of Modal Involvement*, the author says that "the policy of extensionality has more behind it than its obvious simplicity and convenience, and (…) any departure from that policy (…) must involve revisions of the logic of singular terms" (1994, p. 164). Furthermore, in his response to Professor Barcan Marcus, Quine says that "the effect of our general rule for singling out an identity predicate is a mild kind of identification of indiscernibles" (1994, p. 181). For the author he is in a favorable position over Marcus, because "I talk in terms not of names or descriptions, but of 'x' and 'y'" (1994, p. 181) and, as we know, for him "To be is to be a value of a bound variable" (QUINE, 1961, p. 15). In *Two Dogmas*, a famous quote by the author asserts that extensional agreement is, for the most part, the best we can come up with to explain the identity of meaning. That article compiles Quine's thesis on the explanatory circularity of intensional notions such as "synonymous", "definable", "necessary" and "interchangeable in all contexts without changing truth value".

Despite all this evidence, however, our article argues that Quine helps to support strong points of Intensionalism. The reason is indirect: he weakens extensionalism. First, it must be understood that Quine sympathizes with the puzzling fact that moved Frege to a theory of Sense. The puzzling fact is the violation of Leibniz's law - the preservation of truth

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value under permutation - in complex identity contexts (when we refer, for example, to descriptions or names that unlock more than one semantic value depending on the context). Unlike Frege, however, the author takes this puzzle as evidence that identity statements between coextensive terms are no more analytic than synthetic, since they may encode empirical discoveries. They can express scientific laws. As we will see, these contexts also encode layers of semantic alignment not computable by a truth-functional theory, such as the alignment between different languages (where the reference is inscrutable). Second, Quine has shown that extension has clarity advantages over intension only within the same language, and sometimes not even there. When we need to derive something translinguistic from a linguistic generalization apparatus, extension becomes as problematic as intension: "At the level of radical translation, (...), the extension itself goes inscrutable" (QUINE, 1969, p. 35). Strictly speaking, this argument weakens anti-intensionalism if we understand it from the point of view of the ambiguity that intensions supposedly entail for problematizing meaning. This ambiguity now seems unavoidable. The problem of indeterminacy is not only with attributes, ideas, and essences. It is also with reference itself. This is indeterminate whenever we have to extend the determination guaranteed in one language to another.

The third point is that Quine rejects the impoverished and reduced version of the intensional phenomenon in contrast to Carnap. He is still doing it on the basis of his thesis of the indeterminacy of translation. Quine rejected Carnap's attempt to make the intensional problem something that can be solved by a robot programmed to follow rules. As there is an under-determination of the theory of translation by the available behavioural facts, a robot can be programmed in a number of ways – often incompatible – to solve an interpretation problem. Quine believed that the abandonment of uncritical semantics or the"myth of the museum" of meanings (1969, p. 27) was also renouncing the guarantees of determination (1969, p. 28). Quine thinks that "The inscrutability of reference runs deep, and it persists in a subtle form" (1969, p. 41), and we can give a clear meaning to the question about the reference "only relative to some background language" (1969, p. 48). Of course, the fact that Quine thinks of the determination of the meaning of propositions on the basis of the different readiness of natives to affirm or deny them may lead to the assumption of an affinity with Carnap's program of determining intensions. What separates the two authors, however, is that

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for Quine a robot is incapable of making arbitrary adjustments when necessary (*Speaking of Objects*): "He [the linguist] has had to decide, however arbitrarily, how to accommodate English idioms of identity and quantification in native translation." (QUINE, 1969, p. 3)

The unforeseen effect of this argument is that Quine introduces a dimension of the discussion in which the extension problem is no more easily solved than the intension problem. For when a linguist has to solve identity problems that are not extensionally reduced, "his data leave off and his creativity sets in" (QUINE, 1969, p. 4). Questions about reference identity intertwine with other problematic layers about the degree of similarity between languages in which that reference is identifiable. It is not easy to find a point of ideal simplicity at which the sentences of two languages agree and exclude the same anti-extension. Even for seemingly simple sentences like "the emerald is green" and "a esmeralda é verde", we do not know *a priori* how they are programmed to behave semantically in their respective languages. Even though both sentences seem to be used identically so far, they may react differently to new evidence. There is no indication that both statements prefigures the exclusion of "the emerald is blue" (or "a esmeralda é azul"), which would be the minimum necessary to make a modestly coherent translation. This is because in one of the languages the color green can be subsumed by Nelson Goodman's famous color "grue" (green before t and blue after t), while in the other there is no such predicate. In that case, instances of 'green' and 'verde' will not model the same anti-extension. In the language with the grue predicate, instances of blue and green can confirm the same rule: "the prediction that all emeralds examined will be green and the prediction that all will be grue are aliked confirmed. But if an emerald subsequently examined [after t] is grue, it is blue and hence not green" (GOODMAN, 1983, p. 74). The translation of our two "simple" sentences would be inaccurate (the truth conditions of "x is green" and "x é verde" are different because they are not false under the same conditions). The question of similarity between languages turns into the question of the extent to which the divergence between the categorical terms of these languages affects the identification of the reference in possible or counterfactual scenarios, leading to translation losses and incommensurability problems.

This state of the problem does not inspire despair, but concludes that translation problems are not solved mechanically. The solution to meaning problems requires the

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interpreter's ingenuity and creativity to reprogram sentence extension. It could also be used to solve assignment problems for sentences that depend on context to infer one semantic value or another. The possible switching of the truth value of sentences in intensional contexts - violations of Leibniz's permutation law - can thus be solved without extension inconsistency, although the price is to tie the understanding of the sentence to an artificial referential framework or programmatic extension:

> Whenever the context invites the discussion of possible novelty, possible extension of context, Quine endeavors to portray it as a subtle case of reprogramming. But as the person who notes the novelty, as the programmer who executes the reprogramming, Quine is no extensionalist, he cannot be: discussing the reasons for the need to adjust a theory is dwelling in a nonextensional context. And so whenever Quine endeavored to portray the epistemic limits to any extensional context (the indeterminacy of translation for example) he inevitably yielded to nonextensional considerations in his attempt to find the new extensional representation of the situation (BAR-AM, 2010, p. 17).

In contrast to Carnap, Quine develops a semantic theory that requires creativity and wit to make adjustments and determine the translingual identity of meaning. It is a semantic heuristic. In this dimension, Extensionalism (and Intensionalism as weakened by Carnap) loses most of the appeal it seems to have. For the artificial extension of modal propositions and intensional contexts comes at a price if they are to be understood in language. It is not impossible to understand them semantically by decoding a single value corresponding to their assertion. However, the semantic mapping of these values is no longer as straightforward as in the correlation of sense data or computation. It involves a theoretical enrichment that cannot be predicted by Tarski's disquotation scheme, and it cannot be subsumed by a mentalistic or computational view of interpretation solutions.

3 – NECESSARY TRUTH IN NON-SEMANTIC TERMS

In *Two Dogmas of Empiricism* the academic world experienced one of the hardest blows against the cleavage between truths which are *analytic*, or grounded in meanings independently of matters of fact, and truths which are *synthetic*, or grounded in fact. However, the article contains a complex argument line. The argument shows that no intensional notion is in a better shape than the notion of analyticity to explain the latter. Therefore we lack a respectable empirical test for that notion. For the author, the loss is not severe, because this

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notion only serves as a substitute for the dogmatic division between *a priori* and *a posteriori* truths. Using a commentator who explained it better, we quote Andrew Lugg:

> Quine continues, on the account of the paper I am defending, to question the possibility of introducing an empirically acceptable notion of analyticity that captures the philosophical conception of the *a priori*. In "Two Dogmas" he suggests that some seemingly plausible ways of filling the bill are no such thing and implies this is no great loss (LUGG, 2012, p. 236).

The intricate nature of the argument, in our view, is not accidental. It represents the author's attempt to mask some paths that the text leaves open for the legitimation of the notion of analyticity. It is only in the last breaths of the article that the author hints at how he describes the process that takes place when one insists on these obscure and superstitious notions of meaning and analyticity. Although we do not have an empirical criterion to test the use of the predicate "is analytic", there is a suggestion in these excerpts that it is possible to guarantee some rationality to distinguish analytical statements. The author suggests – in our reading – that there are languages in which the intensional circle works organically:

> If a language contains an intensional adverb 'necessarily' (...) then interchangeability Salva Veritate in such a language does afford a sufficient condition of cognitive synonymy; but such a language is intelligible only in so far as the notion of analyticity is already understood in advance (QUINE, 1963, p. 31).

For him, although the predicate "is analytic" is not empirically verifiable, and despite being defined in terms of no less complicated concepts – and therefore with little explanatory value – we can still recognize criteria for the enunciation of analytic sentences in languages without pairs of extra-logical synonyms, such as *bachelor* and *unmarried man.* This theory was also developed in other articles by the author. According to Quine (*Carnap and Logical Truth*):

> One quickly identifies certain seemingly transparent cases of synonyms, such as 'bachelor' and 'man not married' (…). Conceivably, the mechanism of such recognition, when better understood, might be made the basis of a definition of synonym and analyticity in terms of linguistic behavior. On the other hand, such an approach might make sense only of something like degrees of synonym and analyticity (1994, p. 129).

We have now reached a point of further complications. What we learn from Quine's critique is that any appropriate test for the notion of analyticity and synonymy involves

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identifying the *degree* of analyticity of the sentence, depending on the parts of the language that must be reviewed if that property (the necessity of the co-extension) fails to hold. It therefore involves examining parts of the language that are similar in terms of the revision method to which they are sensitive.

We must then select the necessary connections between sentences that can behave as logical truths in a language in a sustainable or organic way. In a way, this does not change the author's state of aversion against the assumption of underlying meanings. Justice to the 'academic code' also compels us to confess that, for the author, this assumption represents an untenable metaphysical prejudice, to which no empiricist should yield. But we're here to examine the paths the author himself did not close concerning the notion of analyticity: what can still be derivable from natural science when scientists work to make its categories conscious for themselves in a semantically representable way, coding its necessary truths in a way that is semantically representable. When, in *Two Dogmas,* the author states that there is no statement immune to revision, he is conditioning the "meaning" of the statement to its place of greater or lesser priority within a language system. As different languages and scientific systems will have different theoretical priorities, some sentences that seem like precise translations will not have the same truth-conditions. We may say that analyticity is a phenomenon of selection of logical truths, namely, those that are organic to the fusion between all languages involved in the cultural consensus production and scientific paradigms, depending on what necessary truths those scientific paradigms and those translinguistic consensuses can sustain. In 1963 (1994) (*Necessary Truth*), Quine advances this thesis more rigorously, showing its dependence on scientific naturalism. In an ironic illustration, Quine demonstrates the miserable condition of a scientist conditioned by a semantic theory:

> . . .imagine a physicist with some unexpected experiment findings to provide for. (…) now suppose the physicist hits upon a particular neat repair, which involves revising slightly the law that momentum is proportional to velocity (…). Will his colleagues protest that he flying in the face of logical necessity? Will they protest that he is departing from the definition of momentum? (QUINE, 1994, p. 74).

What we can learn from this passage is further evidence of Quine's naturalistic protests against the isolation of the scientist from his ability to determine the "meaning" of his terms. Why is it not the prerogative of every science to create safe places for distinguishing

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truth from falsehood, meaning from nonsense? Why should a scientist have to invoke the semantic techniques of Tarski to redeem the meaning of dispositional terms like "water-soluble"? Why do we need to ask the category builder, language grammar, or even artificial language for help? The question that drives Quine's critique of the separation between analytical and synthetic is: why do we have to supervene the scientific production of meaningful knowledge with a prior theory of meaning? If science can independently drive the evolution of its categories to maximize the consistency and completeness of its empirical results, we need not subject it to either philosophical theory or semantics (of the Tarskian kind). This is the premise of the naturalistic demise of semantic positivism. In this configuration, the philosophical project is embedded in empirical science, which constructs its rational legislation for the logical systematization of empirical knowledge: "Quine seeks to convert philosophy into something continuous with, and indeed included in, natural science" (KEMP, 2006, p 2).

4 – DEEPENING THE MEANING RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE NATURAL SCIENCE GOALS OF EMPIRICAL PREDICTION: NEW EMPIRICISM ALONG WITH A NEW SEMANTIC STUDY

We call Quine's thesis semantic quasi-skepticism. This thesis is not intended to deny the obvious skeptical tendencies in the author's presentation of linguistic theories. Rather, it aims to describe a conditional aspect of Quine's semantic skepticism. Quine's critique of the synthetic and analytic distinction in *Two Dogmas*, according to this reading, does not involve the elimination of analyticity. Instead, it merges the problem of analyticity into brand-new questions. One of Quine's most significant contributions to philosophy concerns his description of the radical nature of these questions: problems of translation and empirical discoveries. For the author, analytical relationships cannot be reduced to extensions or computational models that would predict the difference between extension and anti-extension. Quine warns us in *Naturalized Epistemology* that the belief that set theory can serve this purpose "is a drastic ontological move" (1969, p. 73) based on the fact that "mathematics was once believed to reduce to logic, that is, to an innocent and unquestionable logic, and to inherit these qualities" (1969, p. 73).

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In this dimension of challenge, the congruence of analyticity with logical truth is not guaranteed. Bringing them into congruence may be a goal, but it is a problematic goal and not something we can take for granted. Reductionism is once again rejected. Quine understands that analyticity is a revisable state of maximizing consistency. This describes the stability state of a language or scientific theory that is able to codify its notion of necessary truth and possibility without provoking antinomies and paradoxes.

Quine (*Necessary Truth*) thinks that there is "no higher or more austere necessity than natural necessity" (1994, p. 76). Gary Kemp understood what this conception implies for the relationship that Quine saw between semantics and ontology:

> As a non-semantical matter concerning what exists, ontology is a legitimate enterprise; as a semantical one concerning the global relation between words and the world, it is not. The only objective and scientifically discoverable word–world relation is the relation between observation sentences and stimulation, which is a straightforward causal relation, and not a semantical relation (KEMP, 2012, p. 49).

Thus, meaning research does not need to be eliminated; it needs to emancipate itself from the separation between analytic and synthetic in order to provide a theoretical understanding of the real problem of necessity: the problem of determining the synchronicity between the establishment of analytic relations and the predictive goals of empirical science, which must maximize the consistency of its solutions at each stage of the process of investigative strategy.

According to this view, science does not need *a priori* semantics to tame the instability of the truth predicate. Without a doubt, science needs stability and that stability will come when its true sentences can be expressed semantically. But this does not mean that there is *a priori* semantics conditioning scientific truth. What is semantic about our knowledge of scientific propositions is not the mere ability to produce interpretations consistent with Tarsk's bi-conditionals. It offers a complete knowledge of the defensive platforms in our categorical framework. This is a form of heuristical knowledge, or a dynamic take of meaning. Because it is aimed at explaining changes in analytical knowledge depending on the scientific field. Thus, semantic reasoning is rather the independent work of any empirical science, as the adjustment between its more theoretical parts and its less theoretical parts (which are most susceptible to empirical testing) is operated to consolidate the categories that legislate empirically (to predict empirical phenomena).

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Quine does not support the proliferation of non-classical logics and their attempts to quantify over intensional and modal entities. His motives can be explained as a labor-saving invitation. Since these logics encode representations of truth for contexts with extended or non-straightforward extensionality, they would only be remaking the work of empirical science or metaphysics. Quine does not seem to perceive anything special about this work of axiomatic expansion that is different from the prerogative of any science that advances in categorical adjustments that allow it to enrich its predictions of conclusions and to pragmatically reconcile breaks of consistency.

> The consistency of the extensional worldview is thus threatened whenever it is invited to discuss, within the same framework, a possibly surprising reality and some nontrivial expectation regarding it (BAR-AM, 2010, p. 15).

Quine's pragmatic side, therefore, allows him to find a much more prosaic solution to the phenomenon of paraconsistency. He would grant that some contradictions do not need to explode the system, making it derive the truth of any sentence. Not every true proposition would follow from a contradiction. If the system can adjust organically to that contradiction, it will not produce the explosion, i.e., the inconsistency will result in a mere revision. It will be a controlled revision and not a pure explosion of arbitrary consequences. That revision will predict only those true sentences that are compatible with the organic or sustainable categorical profile of the system-language. Each category profile is vulnerable to revision and adjustment in a different way. This vision of the progressive and historical standardization of scientific and linguistic patterns of meaning demystifies the notion that mathematical, metaphysical, or logical essentialism precedes the emergence of our meaningful expressions and connections.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article is to situate Quine within the philosophical and linguistic scene that was heading toward a unified paradigm. We want to identify him as a unique discussant. While he is not a paradigm breaker, he is at least an alternative thinker. Unlike other thinkers interested in the coordination of linguistics, cognitive sciences, and semantics, Quine did not view semantics as a distinct science with its own ontology. There is

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undoubtedly something called "meaning," but it is not the subject of an *a priori* theory about pure categories, computational competence (mastery of language), or mathematical objects. The study of "meaning" caused Quine discomfort because it seemed to him that there was no conventional object to that study. Determining meanings is a heuristic operation that can be taught, but not in the simple way of observation or calculation. For Quine, mastery of the linguistic particles that allow us to talk about objects - "the same," "another," "that," "it" - develops through gradual adjustments, until (*Word and Object*) "a coherent pattern of usage is evolved matching that of society" (1960, p. 93). Society, in turn, depends on the transmission of something across time. And thus it codifies its experience in various cultural articles and each generation uses language to build its past, arriving at something that can be passed over as "meaning". It is possible to predict that the acquired standards will also coincide with those developed in the most rigorous institutions of debate. Empirical science will be one of the main sources of standardization of meaning. We thus find a coincidence between semantic heuristics and naturalism.

Rather than confronting the researcher with philosophical or mentalistic conundrums about "competence" or entertaining the "normativity" of syntactic-grammatical projection forces, Quine thinks of semantics as a kind of study of the programming strategies of extensional interpretations that characterize the ability to anticipate scientific breakthroughs and the ability to translate with ingenuity. For Quine, semantics cannot be reduced to a branch of the theory of intentionality or computation. This is because there is a wide scope of indeterminacy and inscrutability in our patterns of correlation that can only be resolved heuristically, through holistic revisions.

Quine is quasi-semantic skeptical because his theory involves a choice: to drop the synthetic/analytic distinction in favor of a social and naturalistic theory of meaning-making. In short, Quine invites philosophy to think about meaning in its radical form. It involves the problematization of more than just meaning, i.e., it involves 1. the problem of empirical predictions that meaning is supposed to represent, 2. the commensurability of these predictions with other theoretical frameworks, 3. the translatability of this meaning to another languages.4. the passage of meaning through time, creating historically revisable patterns. Quine is responsible for making these troubles inevitable and bringing the semantics out of the Carnapian paradise. The rational parameters for dealing with theoretical competitors on

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meaning cannot be given by a metaphysical museum of intensions. Nor can it be given by *a priori* mentalistic semantics. Parameters of rationality evolve along with the history of science and revolutions.

Quine's lesson passes through semantic skepticism only as a stage of his thinking. The problem of meaning need not be eliminated. The analytic philosophy of the first phase misplaces this question. What is meaningful, and analytic, evolves in the historical continuum of languages and scientific paradigms. These concepts devise solutions to adjust their *intensional core* to the defensive needs of an institutional age. When we achieve "meanings", instead of mere extensions, we have reached the point where natural science and semantics fuse their problems, and the scientific enterprise assumes control over their categorical apparatus for the production of normative stability for its necessary truths. Natural science actively contributes to the deepening of the theoretical conditions that constitute its built-in framework for defending itself against other theories. This defensive property is not extensionally determinable because it must be sensitive to potential cases that are *recalcitrant, i.e.,* that are not yet classified within the theory (*Two Dogmas*): "a recalcitrant experience can, I have urged, be accommodated by any of various alternative reevaluations in various alternative quarters of the whole system" (QUINE, 1963, p. 44).

These recalcitrant cases present problems of incommensurability and intranslatability that cannot be solved by a robot. The author admits creativity and holistic revision in order to account for novelty and nontrivial expectations. But that implies a step beyond extensionalism. He engages in programmatic extensionalism, in order to fuse semantic determination with scientific discovery. Quine:

> ...abandons undaunted extensionalism and with it extensionalism as a theory of meaning. He replaces it by programmatic extensionalism, by extensionalism as heuristic: the constant search for adjustments of theories in an effort to recover their extensionality (and hence consistency) in the face of surprising discoveries (BAR-AM, 2010, p. 14).

We have outlined so far the unfolding of the conclusions that we believe are supported by the article. But the conclusion of academic work is also the place where possible developments of the theme are set forth. We are doing that in these final moments, including a brief register on the reflective doors that Quine shares with traditions foreign to analytic philosophy. Quine's conception of semantics tends to foster new puzzles. The key puzzle of

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semantics is that these heuristic strategies for solving problems of communication and interpretation tend to become superstructural layers in (at least) two moments: when they become official public and collective strategies that haunt a society with defined norms, and 2. when they become paradigms of scientific thought that assign a single extension (the anti-extension of "is absurd") to the predicate "is meaningful" for an entire culture.

The final question we can ask is how Quine suggests that a critical mind may adapt to these moments of reifications and normativization of what is "meaningful" and "absurd." The clues in his text reveal that the author values a public and social view of language: "Once we understand the institution of language in this sense, we see that there can be no private language in any meaningful sense" (1969, p. 27). If we follow these indications, we can assume that he believed in the power of collective stability to develop rules that take into account holistic revisions. But the author also fears the dogmatic consequences of this power of language. In reaching a categorical theory or a metaphysics of scientific language, another undesirable step was taken: the reification of analytical reports and the blind perpetuation of strategic interpretative solutions. The result is the emergence of the myth of "proposition," or the abstract expression of the place of stability that a sentence occupies within its intensional paradigm, in order to project the difference between Sense and non-sense. Quine views this second phase as unwanted. Meaning stability is not non-reviewability.

The intellectual conditions in which Quine develops his theory open up the possibility of powerful intersections between traditions of study engaged with the philosophy of language discussion. To quote George Steiner, an author tuned to hermeneutics and other continental reflections: "no semantic form is timeless. When using a word we wake into resonance, as it were, its entire previous history" (1975, p. 24). Quine's critique of semantics has a similar lesson. For him, we don't need to perpetuate heuristic solutions as if they were ahistorical determinations of a fixed and immutable extension. Yet we can admire the most brilliant solutions, like those found in canonical translations and those that occur in theoretical adjustments of empirical science to reconcile new predictions to its axiomatic core.

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