A Synthesis of Grice-Strawson's, and Putnam's Arguments in Defence of the Analytic-Synthetic Distinction

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Abstract

Critical debates on the analytic- synthetic distinction[1] started with W. V. Quine. He questioned all the grounds upon which the analytic-synthetic distinction is founded. After his critical assessment of the grounds upon which the purported distinction is based, he found out that all these grounds are not sufficient to justify the distinction. He then declared the analytic-synthetic distinction unjustified. Grice and Strawson, Putnam, and other proponents of the distinction have made serious attempts to defend it. This paper critically researches into the arguments of the opponents of Quine with a view to assessing the strength and weaknesses and then come out with a synthesis of the arguments. In other words, the paper intends to attempt an alternative defence of the analytic-synthetic distinction from the synthesis of the arguments.

Key Words: Semantical rule, Satisfactory explanation, Analyticity, Formal language, Web of belief.

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[1]Prominent among the proponents of Analytic-synthetic distinction is Rudolf Carnap. He argued that there is a sufficiently established distinction between the analytic statements and the synthetic statements. For Carnap, analytic statement is explained as "A sentence S_1 is L-true in a semantical system S if and only if S_1 is true in S in such a way that its truth can be established on the basis of the semantical rules of the system S alone, without any reference to (extra-linguistic) fact." Example is 'All men are rational'. Synthetic statement, for him, is explained as "A sentence is factual (meaning synthetic), if and only if there is at least one state-description in which it holds and at least one in which it does not hold." Example is 'All human are featherless biped'. See Carnap R, *Meaning and Necessity, A Study in Semantics and Modal Logic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1947), p 10

Positioning

Quine's argument in the *Two Dogmas of Empiricism* is that defending the analytic-synthetic distinction will be insufficient. This is because all the grounds upon which the distinction is established are inadequate to support the claim. To show this, Quine identified some grounds, which the proponents of the distinction have used to defend it. The analytic- synthetic distinction is established based on such grounds as *lexicographers' definition, synonymy, interchangeability and semantical rule.* But he argued that none of these grounds could suffice as a sufficient defence of the distinction and therefore the analytic-synthetic distinction is not justified. The reason is that any of these grounds in the final analysis will presuppose a pre-existing synonymy, which rests upon how it is used in natural language. Grice and Strawson, Hilary Putnam, Graham Priest, and some others have individually, put up arguments in defence of the analytic-synthetic distinction. It has been found out that some of the arguments of each of the proponents are not strong enough to handle Quine's notorious arguments. The focus of this work is to examine some of the proponents' arguments, synthesize them with a view to finding an alternative but stronger defence for the analytic-synthetic distinction.

Quine's Questions on Definition and Satisfactory Explanation

The first ground identified by Quine is definition. Defenders of the analytic-synthetic distinction support their arguments with the lexicographers' definition of concepts. They then use these definitions as the basis for the distinction. For instance, the lexicographers define 'bachelor as unmarried male'. The proponent then argue that since 'bachelor' has been defined as 'unmarried male', which presuppose that 'bachelor and 'unmarried male' are synonyms, the statement "bachelors are unmarried males" is analytic. Quine argues that lexicographers' definition rests on a pre-existing synonymy of terms, and pre-existing synonymy of terms rests upon usage. Synonymy of terms should be first justified in natural language before it can be used to justify analyticity.

Grice and Strawson's argument to counter Quine is that analyticity and synonymy have enjoyed pre-established philosophical usage in language, and there has not been any disagreement among

philosophers on their use. Then, it will be erroneous for Quine to declare this usage unjustified. The problem with this argument is that it is fallacious. It contains an irrelevant move from "P has been the tradition for so many years without any disagreement" to the conclusion that "P is justified to be used." The fact that a certain concept has enjoyed an established usage over a period of time does not imply that it is justified. There must be a stronger premise why the analytic-synthetic distinction is accepted in language. What can we do to make this argument stronger? This will come up under synthesis section of this work.

The argument above could serve as a basis for dealing with Quine's question on satisfactory explanation of any concept in the analyticity group. Having argued that definition does not prove analyticity, Quine argues that analyticity lacks any satisfactory explanation. This is because no explanation of any one of the members of the analyticity group can be given without begging the question. This is what is meant by an explanation forming *a close curve in space*. Putnam, in his paper "The Analytic and the Synthetic",[2] did not make any attempt to touch on this argument. This is probably because he took note of the superficiality of what the argument demands, or else he thinks that it is not an issue to be brought to the discussion in natural language.

The way to understand the question is that Quine wants an explanation of any of the analyticity concepts, which will not include any others. This is like demanding a satisfactory explanation of an individual without including his/her parental or family background. But, no individual exists in a vacuum, without including the person's parents in the explanation, so many things that may be important to know about the person will not be known. A sufficient explanation of a person, at least, includes his behaviour, description, disposition, etc. It must be accepted that most of the answers to these aspects of a person's life are traceable to his family. These are referred to as hereditary properties. The properties of complexion, being introvert or extrovert, being tall or short, etc, are all traceable to the parents. All

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[2]Putnam H., "The Analytic and the Synthetic", In: Rosenberg J. F. and Travis C., (ed) *Readings in the Philosophy of Language* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1971), p *94 – 125*

these cannot be excluded from the explanation of a person, if it is going to be satisfactory.

Now, the relationship among concepts can be likened to that of human beings. This is because in language no single concept has an independent meaning. A thought of one concept implies the thought of another. For instance, thinking about the days of the week, the thought of Monday implies the thought of both Sunday and Tuesday. The thought of a husband presupposes the thought of wife. The concept "up" presupposes the concept "down," etc. It is not possible to give a satisfactory explanation of one concept without implying others. But, nobody declares the use of any of these concepts unjustified. In addition, this fact does not affect their use in the language. This is also the case with the analyticity group. Therefore, Quine is not justified in rejecting the analytic-synthetic distinction because its explanation employs some members of the analyticity group.

Quine's demand of satisfactory and non-close-curve explanation of analyticity is a strong argument. Therefore, a sufficient argument with clear examples is needed to weaken the grip of Quine's argument. In that case, another example is this. It is like asking a football referee to give a satisfactory explanation of the role of player number 9 in a team without connecting it with the role of the other players. The answer is simply that such explanation may not be practically possible.[3] It is not impossible that for other concepts or terms, satisfactory explanation may be possible. However, the way Quine specified this case of satisfactory explanation in the case of analyticity, this may not be possible. This is because the role of a player on the field is understood in relation to the other players. For instance, there is no way you want to satisfactorily explain the role of any of the players in isolation. His role is explainable in connection

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[3]This may be in consonance with the position of Grice and Strawson in their paper 'In Defense of a Dogma'. They also maintained that such a satisfactory explanation might not be possible to come by. However, their rejoinder is that the absence of Quine's satisfactory explanation does not mean that those expressions are senseless or cannot be explained at all. Grice H. P. and Strawson P. F., "In Defense of a Dogma", In: Sleigh R. C., (ed) *Necessary Truth* (New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1972), pp 75 and 80

with other players. Assume that a critic insists on getting a sufficient explanation of each player, then, the kind of explanation he demands goes beyond the practical. Perhaps the question includes going to the fundamentals of the football game.

Understanding the issue this way makes it clearer. Then it becomes simpler to assess the arguments either for or against Quine. Grice and Strawson's attempt to explain logical impossibility through natural impossibility may be seen as irrelevant to the issue. Quine is a pragmatist who believes in explaining natural events by making use of any linguistic scheme that works. For instance, it is believed that it is logically impossible for the statement "The four year old child is a grandparent of his father" to be true no matter what. Logically it means that 'a child is not a child'. But this will amount to a logical contradiction in terms. Practically, therefore, since "logical impossibility" works in language, the best way to explain logical impossibility is the way it functions in language. Quine could not, consistent with his pragmatism, seek an explanation of a concept beyond the way it works in the language.

Therefore, no attempt should have been made by Grice and Strawson to provide any satisfactory explanation to Quine, if they had understood Quine this way, even if anyone can be offered. This is because any explanation of a concept that goes beyond the way it works is superfluous. However, strictly speaking, I doubt if a satisfactory explanation of a concept can be given; since this will include everything about that concept, including its future possible natures. How then can such an explanation be given? Human understanding is closed to issues such as this.

Grice and Strawson's Mistaken Assumption about Quine's Question

Most important, the mistake Grice and Strawson made, it seems, is in following Quine to take the Model Language as a paradigm for justifying natural language. Had they been able to disconnect the two languages, it would not have been difficult for them to discover Quine's mistake as early as possible. Quine raised the issue about the satisfactory explanation of the analyticity concept in and about *formal*

language. It is rather doubtful if a satisfactory explanation can be given of any concept even from Quine's standpoint. However, Grice and Strawson attempted to provide it.[4] This error confused them into thinking that they can provide such an answer through an explanation in a *natural language*. This is the reason why Glock refers to them as "Quine's dogmatic opponent"[5] who helped him make his point. In my view, they provided their explanation within natural language because they used all the terms that Quine already rejected and they presupposed that sentences in language are determinate. They used 'mean', to imply meaning as if 'meaning' is a determinate term. This is their mistake and this is why their explanation does not meet Quine's demand.

Given the foregoing clarification, supposing that Quine's satisfactory explanation is provided, would it have solved the problem? It does not seem so to me. This is because Quine demands a satisfactory explanation of any concept in the analyticity group. If the explanation is possible at all, it will only be applicable and therefore be useful in the formal model of language. It will fail to be useful in or applicable to analyticity in natural language. This has been sufficiently argued, by Putnam, that the formal principles are not necessarily applicable to the determination of the truth-values and meaning of the statements in natural language.

Again, Quine fails to provide an argument to justify the application of the formal principles to statements in the natural language. So, if a satisfactory explanation is found, it becomes contextual, that is, applicable only to formal model. That is, it will only be useful to

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[4]See this in Grice H. P. and Strawson P. F., "In Defense of a Dogma", In: Sleigh R. C., (ed.) *Necessary Truth* (New Jersey, Prentice Hall, 1972), p 82. While attempting to meet Quine's standard, they wrote, "Now of course this type of explanation does not yield a formal statement of necessary and sufficient condition for the application of the notion concerned. So it does not fulfill one of the conditions which Quine seems of a satisfactory explanation. On the other hand, it does appear to fulfill the other. It breaks out of the family circle."

[5] Glock H., 1993 "The Indispensability of Translation in Quine and Davidson," *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Volume 43, Number 171, p 195.

explain analyticity in the formal structure alone. However, it is evident that this is problematic. Quine himself already rejects contextual explanation of these concepts. This strictly follows that if Quine's kind of satisfactory explanation is possible, it will not be satisfactory, since it cannot be taken as a universal criterion of analyticity.

To explain the above further, Putnam, in *Meaning Holism*, acknowledges, "Ordinary language and scientific language are different but interdependent".[6] This implies that model language has an independent existence from the natural language. But this is not true. Model language came out of and is therefore an offspring of natural language. The explanation of the existence of the model language should be sought in natural language, the same way as the explanation of the existence of the cloned person is sought in the natural person from which it is cloned. Their principles may inter-depend, but this must rest on the fact that scientific language is a model of natural language. This clarification will go a long way in helping us to better understand the nature of their inter-dependence. For instance, while a property in natural language may be used to justify the same property in model language, it is not the other way round. In the same way, a certain gene in a natural person may be used to justify the behaviour of a cloned person, but not the other way round.

Synthesis of the Arguments on the Analytic-synthetic Distinction

Let me now attempt to bring out a synthesized position for the defence of the analytic-synthetic distinction in natural language. At the positioning section of this paper, I presented Grice and Strawson's fallacious argument against Quine. The argument is that because P has been the tradition for so many years without any disagreement then P is justified to be used. I asserted that this argument needs to be substantiated with an additional premise to make it sufficient. Since this argument deals with natural language, a stronger premise is needed to prove the analytic-synthetic distinction. For Putnam, the

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[6]Putnam H, "Meaning Holism", In: Hahn L. E. and Schlipp P. A., (ed) *The Philosophy of Quine* (Illinois, Library of Living Philosophers, 1986), Volume XVIII, p 409

analytic-synthetic distinction is justified in natural language because it is accepted as valid for usage and has satisfied the criterion that makes a statement analytic.[7] This premise should make Grice and Strawson's argument stronger. The argument may now be that the analytic – synthetic distinction is justified because, it has a preestablished usage in language and also satisfies the criterion to make some statement analytic.

However, the critic of the argument may still not be convinced about the strength of the argument. Then, the argument may be strengthened by the premise which is based on the functionality of the statement. An analytic statement is a functioning statement in natural language. This is because it is possible for a statement to satisfy all the Putnam's criteria and still not be functioning in the language. For instance, suppose the sentence "All otiose objects are unnecessary" satisfies Putnam's criterion, it would still not be justified. This is because it is not functioning in language. This premise based on functionality will strengthen Putnam's argument and therefore Grice and Strawson's.

Let us also consider the argument about synonyms. Synonyms are used in natural languages and never has there been any friction in language for misunderstanding the use of synonyms. 'Circle' is used as a synonym for 'round', 'bachelor' is used and accepted as synonym for 'unmarried male'. Apparently, this is the point being made by Putnam, Grice and Strawson, etc. If synonymy is being accepted to be used in language, then it is true as Quine noted, that there is a pre-existing synonymy in language. However, demanding a satisfactory explanation of the pre-existing synonymy becomes unwarranted. This is because there is no other satisfactory explanation to be given than

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[7]Putnam's criteria are the following; (1) The statement has the form: 'Something (someone) is an A if and only if it (he, she) is a B', where A is a single word. (2) The statement holds without exception, and provides us with a criterion for something being the sort of thing to which the term A applies. (3) The criterion is the only one that is generally accepted and employed in connection with the term. (4) The term A is not a law-cluster word. This is the criterion to be satisfied for a statement to pass for analytic. See Putnam H., "The Analytic and the Synthetic," In: Rosenberg J. F. and Travis C., (ed.) *Readings in the Philosophy of Language* (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1971).

its validity engendered by its usage. The analytic-synthetic distinction makes language work and perhaps the lack of Quine's satisfactory explanation about the distinction is not enough to argue against it. There is no need for such an explanation.

The point just made is important because so many terms and concepts in scientific enquiry have not been satisfactorily explained, but they are not denied by Quine, perhaps because they are useful in science. For instance, Elliot Sober and Peter Hylton [8] have argued that the question of satisfactory explanation should also be raised about some concepts such as 'atomic theory' and 'set theory' in science. This is not a *Tu quo que*[9] fallacy but an issue with the usefulness or not of a concept in scientific enquiry. Therefore, the fact that these have not been satisfactorily explained does not warrant denying them because they are relevant in the workings of scientific enterprise. That is why to them, "The question, then, should not be whether analyticity can be defined, but whether the concept is useful in science." [10]

Now the positive answer is that the analytic-synthetic distinction is also useful in natural language and the lack of Quine's *satisfactory explanation* is not enough to declare it unjustified. For instance, a driver would not be expected to give up his distinction between the left and right hand sides of the road because the Bureau of Highways

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[8]Sober E. and Hylton P., 2000 "Quine", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes*, Volume 74, pp 237 – 299.

[9]An example of *Tu quo que* fallacy is when a person is accused of stealing government's money. But he argues that he is not guilty simply because his accusers are also guilty of the same offence.

[10]Sober E. and Hylton P., "Quine", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Supplementary Volumes, opt cit*. This is the same point that Putnam is making about Quine's attitude to analytic-synthetic distinction. The issue that Quine does not want is in his scientific model; may be Quine wants to see whether there is a way that philosophers will be challenged to provide a stronger footing for the analytic-synthetic distinction in science. But this has committed him to so many other problems. The phrase *useful in science* makes it clearer in most philosophical literature that Quine is only defending the scientific enquiry at the expense of other enquiries of human endeavours.

has neglected to authorize white stripes down the middle of a the road.[11]

Putnam, Grice and Strawson, etc, argue that Quine's model is not sufficient to declare the analytic-synthetic distinction unjustified. For Putnam, a parallel model can be structured where the analytic-synthetic distinction is justified. It becomes unjustified for Quine to disprove of this model just because it is a parallel model to his own. For Grice and Strawson, Quine's model is actually preserving the analytic-synthetic distinction it tends to reject. This is because if "any statement can be held true come what may, if we make drastic enough adjustment elsewhere in the system,"[12] then at any particular moment, there will be analytic statements and synthetic statements in the model. The only proviso is that the kind of analytic statement becomes necessary within the existing structure. Then, Grice and Strawson accuse Quine of conflating issues. For them, what Quine should have said is that the analytic-synthetic distinction is subject to revision but not that it is untenable.

Graham Priest on the Analytic-Synthetic Distinction

However, Graham Priest [13] sees Quine's confusion in a more complex form. He also ran into the mistake made by Grice and Strawson. He followed Quine to assume that the model language can be used to justify the natural language. This may not be far away from the fallacy of affirming the consequent. However, Priest presents a more plausible argument on the issue of the analytic-synthetic distinction. His argument can be represented as follows. Assume that A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, etc, are accepted as statements of belief in a model.

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[11]This example is an adaptation of what Arnold Kaufman used to argue the same point. Arnold Kaufman, 1953 "The Analytic and the Synthetic", A Tenable Dualism, *The Philosophical Review*. Vol. 63, no. 3: p 423.

[12]Quine W. V. O. *From A Logical Point of View*, p 43

[12]Priest G., 1979 "Two Dogmas of Quineanism", *The Philosophical Quarterly,* Volume 29, Number 117, p 293, The content of the model, for him, are the statements of belief while the structure are the rules of inference. This is also the root of his belief-rule distinction.

[13]Priest G., 1979 "Two Dogmas of Quineanism", *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Volume 29, Number 117, pp 289-301

Suppose that these statements are interconnected. Then there must be a way to state the rules that guide their relationship. For instance, the statement; 'P so Q' cannot be a statement of belief but rather a rule of inference guiding the relationship among the statements of belief. The logical statement; from the affirmation of the negation of the consequence of a conditional statement, you can infer the negation of the antecedent, is a rule. It is called the *modus tolens* rule of logic, not a statement of belief. Rules are either applied or violated in the model. These rules are referred to as the rules of inference. And they cannot be members of the set of statements of belief in the model. This is how Graham Priest arrived at the belief–rule distinction.

Graham Priest's argument is that Quine mixed all these together by assuming that rules of inference are also statements of belief in the model.[14] Graham may be assumed to make a good point here. This is because we have positive numbers starting from 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, to infinity. But the statement of the relationship between or among these numbers cannot be a number. For instance, the statement; "if 2 is multiplied by 2, then we get 4", is not a number. Also the statement; "$15 \div 3 = 5$", is not a number, but a rule of relationship among those numbers. Then, for Priest, the beliefs may provide the content of the web of belief but rules provide the structure.[15] The content –structure distinction accounts for the functioning of the model.

For Graham Priest, there are some conditional statements that correspond to these rules in the system. These are called the corresponding conditionals. These statements are true if the rules of

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[14]For him, Quine mixes this up when he says "Reevaluation of some statements entails reevaluation of others, because of their logical interconnections – the logical laws being in turn simply certain further statements of the system…" **and again in** "Even a statement very close to the periphery can be held true in the face of recalcitrant experience by pleading hallucination or by amending certain statements of the kind called logical laws". See this in W. V. O. Quine, *From A Logical Point of View* (Harvard, Harvard University Press, 1953), pp 42 and 43

[15]Priest G., "Two Dogmas of Quineanism", *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Volume 29, Number 117, Oct. 1979, p 290

inference are valid. They are not the statements that the rules are valid. He refers to these true conditional statements as analytic. Those that do not correspond to the rules are synthetic. Priest is aware of the danger that this kind of argument will limit analytic statement to conditional statements only. He then had to broaden the definition of analyticity further. Therefore, any statement which may be qualified as analytic, it must be such that it can be validly inferred from the corresponding conditionals. [16]

However, it may be argued by a critic that the point made is not so much different from the one made by Quine. The point is that these rules of inference, though not statement of belief, are also part of the model. Quine's argument is that statements of belief in the structure are subject to revision. There may be two possibilities here. First, it may then imply that these rules of inference are not subject to revision. Again, second, it may imply that since they are also part of the system, they are subject to revision. Then, if they are also subject to revision, this has not made the point about analytic statement. But, Priest argues that if the content-structure distinction is understood, let us admit the possibility of revision, then it becomes easier to discover that the revision of the rules of inference will be different from that of the statements of belief. For him, therefore, it is important to see that a change in structure is different from a change in content.[17] It is the occurrence of conflicting empirical evidence that propels the corresponding revision of the statement of belief in the web, but of course, experience is not the propelling force of the revision the rule of reference. It is therefore that thing that propels the revision in the rule of reference that explains the analytic-synthetic distinction.

Assume a critic agrees that the rules of inference, as stated, are not further statements of belief. But, he may argue that for those rules to be rules of inference, they must also be justified. This objection will

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[16]Priest G., "Two Dogmas of Quineanism", *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Volume 29, Number 117, Oct. 1979, p 292

[17]Priest G., "Two Dogmas of Quineanism", *The Philosophical Quarterly,* Volume 29, Number 117, Oct. 1979, p 293, The content of the model, for him, are the statements of belief while the structure are the rules of inference. This is also the root of his belief-rule distinction.

be based on the assumption that rules of inference need to be justified. However, the reply is that rules of inference need no further justification.[18] This is because they are rules. This is like asking a judge to justify the law he used to prosecute the offender. He need not justify the law so long as it is the law. Or it is like asking a referee to justify the rules he used to referee a football match. The rules used are already presumed to be justified. The same thing applies to rules of inference. They need no further justification to be valid. They are valid rules.

They are valid rules of inference, they agree with human rationality, and are then accepted to be used for guiding communication in the language. Their agreement with human rationality and their acceptance to be used in language may perhaps be the justification for their validity. For this reason, they can in turn be used to justify the analytic-synthetic distinction in the model. From Putnam's, Grice and Strawson's, and Priest's arguments on the structure of Quine's model, it may be observed that the analytic-synthetic distinction does not lack justification as Quine harshly put it.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have attempted to establish an alternative defence of the analytic-synthetic distinction through a synthesis of the arguments of the prominent proponents of the analytic-synthetic distinction. To do this I made a critical presentation of Quine's arguments where he argues that the analytic-synthetic distinction is not justified because the grounds are not satisfactory. I argue that if Quine is consistent in his pragmatism, his extreme demand of satisfactory explanation of the analytic concept is unwarranted. This is because a pragmatist believes in the linguistic scheme that works. To show this, I establish that 'logical impossibility' as one of the analyticity concepts works in language and the scheme is not disrupted. With this Quine becomes inconsistent to demand other explanation beyond this and such demand is seen as superfluous.

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[18] Hellman G., "Logical Truth by Linguistic Convention", In: Hahn L. E. and Schlipp P. A., (ed) *The Philosophy of Quine* (Illinois, Library of Living Philosophers, 1986), Volume XVIII, p 191. Hellman claimed that Carnap argued that logical truths or rules need no further justification.

I attempted to carry out a synthesis of Putnam's, and Grice and Strawson's arguments in defence of the analytic-synthetic distinction in natural language. The premises are that the analytic-synthetic distinction satisfies Putnam's criterion, is accepted as valid for use in language and communication, and is functional in natural language. I also noted that given the conceptual understanding of a satisfactory explanation, it might be difficult if not impossible to provide one. Graham Priest theory is used to expand Grice and Strawson's objection that Quine mixes up issues in his model. For priest, Quine conflates rules of inference with statements of belief. The Belief-Rule distinction is a strong basis for the defence of the analytic-synthetic distinction.

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