# Quine on de re modality, take 2

Quine, like Ayer and many others at the time, uses "necessary" to mean "analytic." By "analytic" we mean, roughly, "capable of being transformed into a logical truth by substituting synonyms for synonyms. The view that necessity just is analyticity is of a piece with the idea that all necessity is really logical necessity — even if some of the analytic truths don't wear their necessity on their sleeve.

Let's ask: given this view of necessity, does de re necessity make sense?

Let's use, as is standard, '□' to express 'necessarily.' For a de re modal claim to be true is for some claim of the form

  ∃x □ Fx

to be true. What does it take for a sentence of this sort to be true? It means that there must be some object, call it *o*, such that it 'has F' necessarily; which it turn, given the equivalence of necessity and analyticity, means that *o* must 'have F' analytically. But what does it mean for an object to 'have F analytically'?

Analyticity is a property of sentences. So what it is for an object to 'have F analytically' must mean that some sentence or other which ascribes 'F' to *o* is analytic. But how exactly should we formulate the requirement?

*First attempt:* ⌜F⌝ *holds analytically of o iff* <u>some</u> *sentence of the form* ⌜n is F⌝*, which* ⌜n⌝ *is a name for o, is analytic.*

The problem here arises from the fact that this makes every true sentence analytic. Consider some property I have — say, the property of being born in Cincinnati. Then we can construct a name for me, like

  the Cincinnatian teacher of PHIL 83104

which will give us the analytic sentence

  The Cincinnatian teacher of PHIL 83104 was born in Cincinnati.

But this entails, absurdly, that I am essentially from Cincinnati.

*Second attempt:* ⌜F⌝ *holds analytically of o iff* <u>every</u> *sentence of the form* ⌜n is F⌝*, which* ⌜n⌝ *is a name for o, is analytic.*

This fails for the opposite reason. Take some property which I do seem to have essentially, like the property of being human. Now suppose that I am named by

the largest object currently in Malloy 205

which gives us the decidedly non-analytic sentence

The largest object currently in Malloy 205 is human.

which yields the surprising result that being human is not among my essential properties.

One can see the failure of these two attempts to define de re modality as flowing from two sources:

(1) The fact that modal contexts are opaque, in the following sense: two sentences can differ only in the substitution of co-referential singular terms, and yet one can be necessary and the other not.

(2) The idea that necessity must be explained in terms of analyticity, which in turn requires us to make sense of quantification into modal contexts in terms of the analyticity of sentences.

Where else might the opponent of Quine turn? One idea would be to define a special class of canonical names for objects, and say that de re necessity can be explained in terms of the analyticity of sentences containing those names:

*Third attempt:* ⌜F⌝ *holds analytically of o iff every sentence of the form* ⌜n is F⌝, *which* ⌜n⌝ *is a* <u>canonical</u> *name for o, is analytic.*

The problem here is with how we can define the class of canonical names. One might want to rely on the distinction between names and descriptions here, and say that ⌜n⌝ must be a genuine name. But problems arise here which are exactly parallel to the problems which arise above. Consider the predicate 'is Phosphorus.' But then consider 'is Phosphorus'; the above will give us the result that it is not true of Phosphorus that it is necessarily Phosphorus, on the grounds that

Hesperus is Phosphorus

is not analytic.

is analytic and a priori, which it certainly does not seem to be.

We might say instead that ⌜n⌝ must be a description which reveals the essence of the object. But then we're simply assuming that de re modal claims make sense by assuming 'Aristotelian essentialism' rather than explaining de re modality in terms of analyticity.