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Inferential role semantics and the analytic/synthetic distinction.

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This paper is part of a symposium on a book by J. A. Fodor and E. LePore [Holism: a shopper's guide, Blackwell, Oxford, 1992]. The author's aim is to defend the meaning theory called "conceptual role semantics" from Fodor and LePore's attack. The key idea of conceptual role semantics is that an expression means what it does by virtue of participating in one set of inferences rather than another. According to Fodor and LePore, if Quine is right about the analytic/synthetic distinction, then this semantics should be false: the whole idea of a purely inferential role of an expression rests on the notion of analyticity rejected by Quine forty years ago.

The author openly acknowledges that to this day no one has succeeded in providing an acceptable answer to the question of which inferences are constitutive of an expression's meaning, but he rejects the claim that the constitutiveness can be rendered in terms of analyticity as Fodor and LePore do. His argument relies upon the ambiguity of the notion of analyticity, between pure analyticity (logical inferences) and impure analyticity (obvious inferences), but the fundamental question of how to establish the difference between the meaning-constituting and the non-meaning-constituting inferences remains unanswered. The author refers for more details to his forthcoming paper "Analyticity" [A companion to the philosophy of language, to appear].

{See also the following second review.}

{For the entire collection see MR1276752 (94m:03010)}

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