

## QUINE: A NATURALIST IN A PHYSICALIST WORLD

– Adam Tamas Tuboly –

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Readers of the history of analytic philosophy have recently witnessed a renewed interest in W.V. Quine. Interpretations of his life and works are increasingly diversified, with Quine emerging as a multi-faceted-scholar; works have appeared on Quine the logician (Quine 1944/2018), Quine the naturalist (Verhaegh 2018), and Quine the philosopher of mathematics (Morris 2018). Both the young and the mature Quine are treated equally; old works are being reinterpreted and new (often archive) materials have been brought into the scholarly discussions. The latest addition to this growing body of literature is the English edition of Quine’s 1980 Immanuel Kant Lectures, *Science and Sensibilia*, edited by Robert Sinclair.

Quine delivered four lectures on February 4-14, 1980 at Stanford. The manuscript has been unpublished to date (although a German translation appeared in 2003). Besides contributing new elements to our overall and comprehensive knowledge of Quine’s career, their significance is that they show the transition from *The Roots of Reference* lectures in 1973 to Quine’s last work, *From Stimulus to Science*. The publication of *Science and Sensibilia* is thus more than justified and Sinclair has made an excellent job with this edition, bringing together leading scholars of Quine.

Quine’s lectures neatly exemplify how the philosophy of mind could be done scientifically, or if you wish, how one could pursue scientific philosophy to deal with the issues of mind and cognition in a broad sense. Quine is a committed physicalist “from the start” (p. 20), and he aims to show how one should put physicalism into practice. In Lecture One (“Prolegomena: Mind and its Place in Nature”), Quine pursues physicalist questions about the world, especially how the mind interacts with it, and how that interaction results after all in the neat complexity of knowledge-making.

In the second lecture (“Endolegomena: From Ostension to Quantification”), Quine goes into details and challenges some earlier conceptions of observation sentences. He

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argues for his version, one which is based on ostension and a social way of mastering language. Here and there he smooths out some of the rough edges and tries to improve his former theories. Lecture Three (“Endolegomena Loipa: The Forked Animal”) considers the problem of other minds, and after this traditional question he moves forward to the problem of propositional attitudes, or rather, to the problem of how to construct them in such a way that a physicalist could understand them as well. Lecture Four (“Epilegomena: What Is It All About?”) develops some new structuralist ideas about how to deal with ontology and the referential genealogy of our knowledge.

The details of these questions and lectures could be discussed separately here, but it might be better to limit the discussion to some general observations and move on to the individual essays of the volume. Before doing so, however, something that may be especially interesting to the general reader is that Quine took such notions and conceptions that are usually not discussed by analytic philosophers and put them back on the table. One such issue is innatism, the idea that human beings are born with some innate items from the start. In the classic rationalism of the modern era, these innate elements were either ideas of God, numbers or logical relations. Since Locke, Hume, and others attacked all of them, innatism became like a red rag to a bull for radical empiricists. Nevertheless, here in the Kant lecture – and in other places as well – Quine accepted a weakened form of innatism, arguing that to master language and to find our way in the world by producing adequate reactions, we are born with certain *abilities, dispositions, or capabilities*.

Another example might be the problem of “pre-established harmony” which becomes a meaningful expression, actually the very precondition of learning and gaining knowledge. Quine thought that our success in establishing similarities in the intersubjective field – starting from a subjective strain of stimulus and world-connectedness – is related to the idea that our inner standards of what to count as perceptual similarity and how to extrapolate from the personal anchoring to intersubjective patterns, is somehow explained by a certain pre-established harmony. As he says in the lectures, “[t]he widespread success of such checks testifies to a general intersubjective harmony in standards of perceptual proximity: people generally come out alike in extrapolating their terms from one checkpoint to another. It is a pre-established harmony without which the learning of words would be impossible” (p. 31). Old school thought in a new dress. (For more on the problem of pre-established harmony, see Gary Kemp’s chapter in the volume, and the exchange between Quine and Gary Ebbs, published in Janssen-Lauret and Kemp 2016, pp. 21-36.)

Another issue is the interpretational question (unfortunately, one which is not discussed in the second part of the volume), namely whether most, if not almost all, of the Quine’s argumentation is just a minutely sophisticated form of the well-known “analogical reasoning”. He often alludes to the idea that as we acquire sensations through our private channels, we produce certain reactions to them and, as they enter the public arena, further reactions are prompted from our fellow-looking creatures. As we are conditioned by the reactions, we extrapolate the usage of terms and sentences to further, previously unknown cases and situations. That is, our knowledge of the external world and other minds are based on analogical considerations. As Quine claims, “[w]e are ready to see our own ways replicated in another person” (p. 54). That is, my behavior

is followed by certain pattern-like linguistic elements and when I see similar behavior, I will produce the same pattern-like linguistic elements. To know what similar behavior is, Quine's answer is the abovementioned pre-established harmony (those who can recognize the similarities are more successful in the long run). What is interesting, and might prompt new philosophical discussions, is that Quine does not seem to appreciate the dialectical twist in the process; namely that our linguistic behavior and reactions also seem to shape what we count as similar.

In the first exploratory and interpretative paper of the second part ("Quine and the Kantian Problem of Objectivity"), Gary Kemp addresses the "old fashioned question" of what makes objectivity possible and examines Quine's answer from the Kant lectures. After a short guide of post-Kantian treatments of objectivity in (scientific) philosophy (ending with Carnap), Kemp turns to Quine's positions on observation and the relation between the world, our experience, and our reports of those experiences prompted by the external elements of the world. He provides a detailed study of how the later Quine conceives the route from the world to us and how to understand our linguistic reactions to this process. Nevertheless, the paper might be somewhat harder to follow without some background in Quine's terminology and his style of reasoning.

However, whilst Kemp finishes his paper with a note on naturalism, Gary Ebbs takes up an earlier challenge to Quinean naturalism in Chapter 7 ("Quine on the Norms of Naturalized Epistemology"). Quine seems aware of this issue as well in his lectures; what remains from the old normative character of epistemology if it is to be naturalized in Quine's terms? That is, if the traditional normative enterprise of what counts as knowledge and how to revise our beliefs according to the right norms of cognition are transformed into empirical questions of the sciences (mainly psychology and cognitive science) and their actual practice of what they count as knowledge, then epistemology seems to lose one of its characteristic features. Ebbs, following Quine, distinguishes two tasks of epistemology, namely the conceptual and the doctrinal. The former issues questions of meaning and it is a form of critique of ideas. The latter concerns with truth and is a critique of the evidence for the truths of the sciences.

Ebbs tries to show – on the basis of Quine's brief remarks in the lecture – that Quine was still able to include some sort or form of normativity into his naturalism on the doctrinal side. The idea is that, although science has its methods, it effects our decisions about *what to accept* and *how to understand* certain reports. Even though experiences of ghosts might be described as genuine experiences resulting in the acquisition of new pieces of knowledge by sociologists and anthropologists who are interested in the emic reports of the subjects, a more general scientific method (perhaps from the side of psychologists) could explain the alleged experiences without the disadvantage of having to fall back on strange and shadowy entities. Here we reach the idea of how to weigh and check evidence and truth, and how science might revise our acceptance of experience-reports.

Thus, normativity seems to be a conditional or hypothetical issue for Quine. By accepting certain stances, you should follow all the consequences of that view and you have in order to remain consistent. Science has its claims, forcing certain consequences normatively. That is, if science is normative, or has any normative force, then in a nat-

uralist setting epistemology will be as normative as science. Where these norms came from are out of the question for Quine. How these norms are changing and utilized are also not discussed. We only know that such norms are pragmatic (p. 130) according to Ebbs, and “the norms of Quine’s epistemology fall exclusively on the doctrinal side – they are norms for theory constructing, inseparable from scientific method itself” (p. 131). However, normativity on the conceptual side is left unresolved.

Although Quine claims in the lectures that normativity “loom equally large” on the conceptual side as well (p. 34), Ebbs claims that it is hard to see how Quine intended that remark. Quine’s explanation relies on the idea that some sort of conceptualization is required in such cases when the anchor lines between mentalistic terms and the physical world run to excessive lengths (p. 35). Ebbs tries to show that this might not do the job, since actually what is required here is done on the doctrinal side. He concludes that Quine’s claim about the normativity of the conceptual side “is false, or, at best, highly misleading” as the “conceptual side of Quine’s epistemology is purely descriptive” (pp. 133 and 134). Nonetheless, one could perhaps imagine such cases where a conceptual link could be offered for certain mentalistic terms that drive to the physical world, where a doctrinal link cannot yet be issued due to the contemporary setting of science. If something similar could be envisioned, then perhaps one could say that in this case also the conceptual side, revealing certain relations between meanings, has a normative effect of what mentalistic terms could be accepted with the promise of providing physicalist correlates in the distant future.

Epistemology is indeed the main concern of the lectures. Paul A. Gregory, in Chapter 8 on “Quine’s *Ding an Sich*: Proxies, Structure, and Naturalism”, follows Gary Kemp in addressing the question of objectivity, linking it now to structuralism (the topic also of F. Janssen-Lauret in Chapter 10). Gregory scrutinizes Quine’s so-called proxy function argument for structuralism and how it leads to anti-transcendentalism.

Physicalism and our place in the physicalist world requires further consideration. Quine is often tagged as a behaviorist, but this needs to be refined, as Sander Verhaegh shows in Chapter 9 (“‘Mental States Are Like Diseases’: Behaviorism in the Immanuel Kant Lectures”). It is well-known that Quine was a linguistic behaviorist, that is, he claimed that language (its mastering and its maintenance) is a social art. But what about psychological behaviorism? According to Verhaegh, the lectures published in the volume shed some new light on how we should consider Quine’s position. Verhaegh distinguishes three types of psychological behaviorism; while all three are against mentalism, that is, the unconstrained or uncritical use of mental entities or terms in psychological explanations, they do still differ significantly. Ontological behaviorists deny the existence of mental entities or, perhaps better, they reduce them to something else, something non-mental. Logical behaviorists also choose a reductionist procedure, they reduce mentalistic-talk to non-mentalistic talk, usually conceiving the question of the existence of mental entities is a pseudo-question. Finally, epistemological arguments purport to show that in the end, mental entities are just redundant and useless in the process of explaining and understanding human behavior.

Quine argued that claims that human behavior would ultimately be explained by reference to physiological processes, thus in most cases of science, mentalistic issues are

simply redundant. Nonetheless, he did not rule out the usage of mental terms as they are almost indispensable in both our everyday practices and in the social sciences. Also, he thought that even though we learn the mentalistic terms through public events and overt behavior (this is a point in favor of any form of behaviorism), in time we extrapolate along private channels, thus their usage became more comprehensive and even more theoretical. Although they are anchored in physicalist phenomena, they are related to them only loosely after a while (as it was mentioned before) and therefore Quine is not an exact match for epistemological behaviorism.

Verhaegh also shows that Quine does not accept logical behaviorism due to his constraints on reduction in general, and thus he claims that for Quine “the acceptability of a mental term depends on the question whether or not adopting the term contributes to our overall theory of the world” (p. 164). Thus Quine once again does not rule out the legitimacy of mental entities entirely. If they contribute to our best systematization, they should be used. But Quine did not believe in the existence of mental entities, thus even if they could be used, we have no worldly right to utilize them; physicalist ontology suffices for our general needs. But it seems to be the case that Quine is then a nice catch for ontological behaviorism; and Verhaegh is somewhat silent about this. He seems to indicate that Quine’s physicalism is “non-reductionistic” (p. 168), partly due to his arguments against radical reduction in general, it seems to be not at all obvious whether two things are conflated or not. Verhaegh argues (p. 167) that although Quine equates ontologically individual mental states with individual bodily states, “we can only *specify* these bodily states in mental terms” (original emphasis). But in this case, Quine is still a full-blooded ontological behaviorist since his specification sits on the epistemological side.

Questions of ontology and physicalism, as the major issues of the Kant lectures, deserved another chapter in the volume. In the last essay, Frederique Janssen-Lauret considers the development of Quine’s ontological view and his views on ontology (“Quine, Ontology, and Physicalism”). We see how Quine moved from his earlier ontological commitments to a more structuralist view of the Kant lectures that culminated in global epistemic structuralism (p. 182). The author provides a detailed reconstruction and interpretation-in-context of Quine’s physicalism, opposing it with his ontological commitment, and we learn how he wavered between the views of his students, Donald Davidson and David Lewis.

The most interesting part of Janssen-Lauret’s paper is the final section on “A Tension in Quine’s Late View”. In a structuralist view, such as Quine’s, what matters are theoretical roles that could be fulfilled in a given structure and which are described by a neutral Ramsey-Carnap sentence. But as Quine accepted Davidson’s anomalous monism at certain points, either physical or mental entities could fulfill those roles, determined by the structure. However this does not seem to amount to Quine’s naturalism and physicalism and thus there is still much to do to iron out the inherent tensions.

As can be seen, these papers address crucial topics from Quine’s Kant lectures and they place these issues in a broader context of Quine’s career and philosophical development. Although some editorial notes, further references, and more details would have been better on the main Quine-text, we do not have much to complain about. Sinclair’s editorial introduction is helpful in contextualizing the text to some extent and also

orients our understanding of Quine's title (referring to John Austin and Jane Austen). The book contains almost no typographical errors, is well-structured with a nice cover and a useful index, and easily readable in most cases; or at least as it is possible in any volumes on Quine's philosophy that is often somewhat cryptic and filled with scientifically-posed terms. Any graduate student, and especially scholars of the history of analytic philosophy, would like to have it on their bookshelves. Whether working on either logical empiricism or the late Wittgenstein, this book will frequently be encountered.

## References

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