Quine and His Place in History

Editors' Introduction, by Frederique Janssen-Lauret and Gary Kemp

I

A central aim of the historical study of philosophy is to gain a certain type of intellectual self-consciousness. Retracing the paths of our forbears, we see decisions being made, sometimes tacitly or implicitly; we see the routes not taken and often the reasons why; confusions avoided or fallen into and insights won or lost; we gain a sense of things we now take for granted as optional. We learn more about who we are.

This point holds all the more for the historical study of analytic philosophy by analytic philosophers. Of course analytic philosophers of a historical frame of mind have long displayed extensive interest in Frege, Russell, Moore, Carnap, and the early Wittgenstein. They've become increasingly aware of and interested in the history of their discipline, turning their thoughts to key philosophers of various established branches of analytic traditions, including logicism, logical positivism, Wittgensteinianism, and pragmatism; those views became less the order of the day and more the products of their particular time and place, and therefore proper objects of historical study.

But the historical study of analytic philosophy was until recently confined to the early stages of its development. Now that the twentieth century has given way to the twenty-first, the field is broadening to include not just the earliest beginnings of analytic philosophy, but the mid-20th century. And one of the pivotal figures of this epoch is W.V. Quine (1908-2000). Many analytic philosophers now at work came of age only after the publication of his final two books in the 1990s; their teachers in turn came of age when his celebrated early works were already receding into the past. And the point made in the opening paragraph looms especially large when it comes to Quine. For all that Quine's output is voluminous, Quine's work is above all systematic; and the systematic nature of his work is largely lost on the student struggling to cope with individual works such as 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism', 'Quantifiers and Propositional Attitudes', or the second chapter of *Word and Object*. It's too big, and too alien. Despite Quine's being a seminal figure in analytic philosophy, much of his work stands opposed to the framework—possibly merely tacit—in which the analytic philosopher is trained and works. More historical awareness of Quine is urgently needed.

Not that this is a thoroughgoing exegetical and historical study of Quine in all philosophical aspects. Quine's famous intellectual relationship with Carnap, which began in earnest with Quine's 1933 visit to Carnap in Prague, has already been examined in detail, notably by Richard Creath in his *Dear Carnap, Dear Van* of 1991. Nor have we touched on Quine's career as a logician and set theorist; but of course that subject by its nature is much less susceptible to the obscuring mists of history (the set theory of Quine's 'New Foundations for Mathematical Logic' remains a live research topic; see Randall Holmes' *New Foundations Home Page*, http://math.boisestate.edu/~holmes/holmes/nf.html). More generally we take for granted the reader's knowledge of the basics of Quine's career (for those not satisfying that condition, we recommend Quine's compact Intellectual Biography in the Schilpp volume on Quine in the *Library of Living Philosophers* of 1982; for those wanting more, his book length autobiography—*The Time of My Life* of 1985—is an excellent source); and we take for granted the reader's grasp of the very basics of Quine's philosophical system. Our primary aim here is to fill in some major gaps in the historical narrative, scholarship and exegesis of Quine. This volume of papers on Quine and his historical context brings together notable Quine scholars from around the world to provide their different

perspectives upon the development of Quine's philosophy, the philosophers and scientists who influenced him, and some of the ways in which historical investigation can shed light upon the details of his accounts of language, knowledge, and metaphysics (or his attitude towards metaphysics). It also provides certain papers with a fine-grained exegetical purpose, which it is hoped will not only answer some important and lingering interpretational questions, but serve the above aim of our seeing more clearly our historical position, of furthering our intellectual self-consciousness.

II

We feel very fortunate to be able to present to the world, in Part I of this volume, three previously unpublished short papers by W.V. Quine. Little did we suspect, when we sent out a call for papers, that the eventual book would feature not just one, but three posthumous pieces from the hero of our tale. The first paper, "Levels of Abstraction", was generously provided by Rolfe Leary, keeper of the Nachlass of Ed Haskell. Quine was a formative influence on the Unity of Science movement and a close friend of Haskell, who was himself the founder of the Council for Unified Research and Education, a defender of some of the key principles of pragmatism, and a formidable proponent of his own distinctive form of scientific realism (others active in the movement include Philip Frank, Otto Neurath, Charles Morris, and, if somewhat reluctantly, Rudolf Carnap). Haskell's relation to Quine is discussed in this volume by Ann Lodge, Rolfe Leary, and Douglas Quine. Haskell had not only been one of the instigators of the Unity of Science movement, but he was also Quine's housemate while they were undergraduates at Oberlin College. Haskell went on to postgraduate study at the University of Chicago, where Leary (in conversation) hypothesises he came across Neurath, Carnap, and Morris doing research into the Unity of Science. He organised a symposium on the theme in 1948 at the American Association for the Advancement of Science. From this event sprang the formation of a loose-knit group of sympathisers, drawn from across several disciplines, meeting up at irregular intervals over the years under the banner of CURE (Council for Unified Research and Education). In 1972 Haskell, having made contact with the Unification Church (the "Moonies"), used their financial support to host the First International Congress on Unified Science in the grand style at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City. Quine, by this point rather sceptical of Haskell's Unified Science project, as well as of organised religion, reluctantly agreed to give a paper on abstraction. In the audience was a mathematically inclined research forester and supporter of unified science, Rolfe Leary. He took his copy of Quine's handout home with him, and stored it in a filing cabinet in the house he shared with the psychologist, and fellow member of the Unity of Science movement, Barbara Buckett Leary. For the next forty-two years, it was assumed that no copies of the paper had survived at all, until Douglas Quine found out about the existence of Leary's copy. Douglas Quine has transcribed and edited the original typescript, not typed by W.V. Quine himself, which contained several inserted errors.

Two further papers, dating from the mid-1990s, were kindly bestowed upon us by Gary Ebbs. The first is a short draft paper responding to Ebbs' review of Quine's *Pursuit of Truth*, the second a revision of it which shows an intriguing glimpse into the usually covert influence upon Quine of Burton Dreben. These two papers were typed by W.V. Quine on his trusty old typewriter which appears in our cover image, many of whose standard-issue keys he had replaced with logical symbols. Since this means the originals are of historical interest, scans of them appear in our Appendix. The main text of the book contains versions of these two papers edited and transcribed by Gary Ebbs. These letters and manuscripts were reprinted with permission of Dr D. Quine, W.V. Quine Literary Estate.

Part II provides a historically interesting glimpse into Quine's complex relationship with the Unity of Science movement and its founder, Quine's good friend Ed Haskell. This paper's authors saw events unfold in real time. Ann Lodge, a psychologist, was married to Haskell for several years, and was besides the daughter of G.T. Lodge, also a psychologist and central member of the Unity of Science movement. Rolfe Leary, the literary executor and regular correspondent of Harold Cassidy and Ed Haskell, is the keeper of these two men's literary estates and is currently in the process of editing a volume of their collected works, begun by Haskell and Cassidy but also incorporating works by Quine and other collaborators.

Lodge, Leary, and D. Quine draw upon the extensive correspondence between W.V. Quine and Haskell, as well as correspondence with other members of the movement such as G.T. Lodge, and the brothers Fred and Harold Cassidy, to paint a picture of Quine's influence upon that movement. Although the movement had its roots in a meeting of minds between these men while they were students at Oberlin College, overall Quine's contributions consisted mostly of tempering Haskell's exuberant optimism. Haskell had high hopes, not just for finding a set of classificatory principles applicable in equal measure to social and natural science, but also for deriving normative insights from such principles to cure the world's ills. Quine grew increasingly sceptical of, and subsequently frustrated with, Haskell's efforts. Still he persisted in reading his old friend's work and offering suggestions, urging him towards a better informed conception of mathematical rigour and clearer distinctions between unification at the level of explanation versus description, and thereby exerting a sobering influence.

Many of the papers in Parts III and IV derive novel insights from negotiating intersections between Quine and other significant thinkers of the late 19th and early to mid-20th century—to some familiar giants of analytic philosophy (Wittgenstein, Russell, James, Peirce), and to some comparatively under-researched, like C.I. Lewis and Ruth Barcan Marcus. Another theme that is shared between several of the contributions to this volume is the historical context and development of Quine's naturalism, considered from different angles: its connection to pragmatism, potential challenges to or from scientific realism, and Quine's replies to alternative versions of naturalism such as those offered by the Unity of Science movement or classic nominalism. Still we've separated Part II from Part III according to genre: Part III is more purely historical; it contains papers on Quine's relationship to his pragmatist forebears and on the younger Quine in dialogue with his pragmatist and Unity of Science contemporaries. Part IV is more exegetical and critical; it concerns some difficult or insufficiently noted aspects of Quine, though still frequently by comparison to other historical figures.

Ben-Menahem considers Quine's pragmatist epistemic holism in connection with the views of James. She argues that similarities between the two have been overlooked owing to a widespread misinterpretation of James as holding there is nothing to truth and rationality except usefulness, and that the differences between them are largely due to the different kinds of positivism each was responding to. She aims to locate Quine more squarely in the pragmatist tradition dating back to James by elucidating affinities between Quine's and James's views on metaphysics, scepticism, and the social dimension of knowledge.

Sinclair's paper traces Quine's pragmatism to a previously unremarked source: the influence of Quine's postgraduate supervisor C.I. Lewis. Focusing on the pragmatist conception of the a priori which is a key component of Lewis's work, Sinclair examines Quine's unpublished student work for signs that the early Quine employed Lewis's view, attempting to modify it to suit his own needs in a way that foreshadows developments in the mature Quine.

Hylton discusses the little known split in Quine's philosophy of language between ontology and regimentation, on the one hand, and the understanding of language on the other. The split is revealingly contrasted with the philosophy of language of Russell, for whom the notion of acquaintance provides the meeting point: what is required for the understanding of a sentence is precisely acquaintance with those entities which must exist for the sentence to be meaningful. For Quine, these are different subjects: The understanding of a sentence is just the having of certain linguistic dispositions, and does not require awareness of reference or ontology. The latter are scientific or technical subjects, involving regimentation, into mere first-order predicate calculus, of scientific theory.

Ebbs offers an alternative reading of Quine's famous claim in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" that no statement is immune to revision. He notes that fans and detractors of Quine alike generally interpret this as meaning, as he puts it, that 'for every statement S that we now accept, there is a possible rational change in beliefs that would lead one to reject S'. Ebbs argues that this standard interpretation fails to take account of Quine's views on translation, which problematise the idea of homophonic translation on which the standard interpretation relies, and that it is at odds with the context in which the claim is made, in which there is no reference to homophonic translation or belief revision. He proposes, instead, that Quine's aim in section 6 of "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", where he makes his claim that no statement is immune to revision, is to propose a naturalistic revision of the notion of empirical confirmation. The claim itself, in its proper context, is linked to Quine's efforts to make clear that empirical confirmation as he conceives of it, as opposed to the traditional notion, is not conducive to dividing statements into the analytic and the synthetic. So Ebbs puts forward an improved reading of Quine's claim: 'No statement we now accept is guaranteed to be part of every scientific theory that we will later come to accept.'

Janssen-Lauret explores the diametrically opposed nominalistic naturalisms of Quine on the one hand and Ruth Barcan Marcus on the other. While both favour an ontology composed entirely or primarily of concrete physical particulars, their epistemological motivations for this choice and their respective meta-ontologies differ radically. For Quine, ontological commitments must always be analogous to positing in science: existential assumptions result from solutions to questions about the best overall descriptions that fit our observational patterns. Barcan Marcus, by contrast, thinks of physical particulars as encounterable, and nameable, directly via knowledge by acquaintance. The paper examines their resulting differences in their interpretations of quantification and identity.

Lugg considers the influence of Quine's scientism in his attitude towards the 'abyss of the transcendental', attempting to rescue what we can from the chasm, by contrasting this attitude with Wittgenstein's complementary but opposing attitude of diving straight into the abyss and exploring the transcendental territory. Lugg aims to shed light upon the deep methodological differences between Quine and Wittgenstein by exploring their different attitudes here, and argues that Quinean and Wittgensteinian approaches are not completely incompatible, but can each in their way guide other thinkers who are sceptical of the transcendental.

Kemp considers the apparent tension between two commitments in Quine—one that was adopted subsequent to 'On What There Is' and 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism', and one that was present in his thought from the beginning of his career: His Realism (the newer one) , and the Underdetermination of Theory (the older one). On the face of it, it seems that one cannot hold that our wholesale account of nature could in principle be exchanged for another, wholly different account of nature, without impugning one's claim that our actual account provides us with knowledge of nature,

nature as it really is. As so often is the case with Quine, the Quinean resolution involves his naturalism, and in particular his naturalistic account of language. But it is a delicate balance; to maintain it requires a careful coming to terms with the concepts of transcendental metaphysics, of words such as ‘reality’, ‘the world’, ‘existence’, and the like.