QUINE AND HIS PLACE IN HISTORY

Edited by
Frederique Janssen-Lauret
and Gary Kemp
History of Analytic Philosophy

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During the first half of the Twentieth Century, analytic philosophy gradually established itself as the dominant tradition in the English-speaking world, and over the past few decades it has taken firm root in many other parts of the world. There has been increasing debate over just what ‘analytic philosophy’ means, as the movement has ramiﬁed into the complex tradition that we know today, but the inﬂuence of the concerns, ideas and methods of early analytic philosophy on contemporary thought is indisputable. All this has led to greater self-consciousness among analytic philosophers about the nature and origins of their tradition, and scholarly interest in its historical development and philosophical foundations has blossomed in recent years, with the result that history of analytic philosophy is now recognized as a major ﬁeld of philosophy in its own right.

The main aim of the series in which the present book appears, the ﬁrst series of its kind, is to create a venue for work on the history of analytic philosophy, consolidating the area as a major ﬁeld of philosophy and promoting further research and debate. The ‘history of analytic philosophy’ is understood broadly as covering the period from the last three decades of the Nineteenth Century to the start of the Twenty-ﬁrst Century, beginning with the work of Frege, Russell, Moore and Wittgenstein, who are generally regarded as its main founders, and the inﬂuences upon them, and going right up to the most recent developments. In allowing the ‘history’ to extend to the present, the aim is to encourage engagement with contemporary debates in philosophy, for example, in showing how the concerns of early analytic philosophy relate to current concerns. In focusing on analytic philosophy, the aim is not to exclude comparisons with other – earlier or contemporary – traditions, or consideration of ﬁgures or themes that some might regard as marginal to the analytic tradition but which also throw light on analytic philosophy. Indeed, a further aim of the series is to deepen our understanding of the broader context in which analytic philosophy developed, by looking, for example, at the roots of analytic philosophy in neo-Kantianism or British idealism, or the connections between analytic philosophy and phenomenology, or discussing the work...
of philosophers who were important in the development of analytic philosophy but who are now often forgotten.

Willard van Orman Quine (1908–2000) was one of the leading figures in the second generation of analytic philosophers. Born in Akron, Ohio, he studied mathematics at Oberlin College before doing his PhD under the supervision of A.N. Whitehead at Harvard on Whitehead and Russell’s *Principia Mathematica* 1910–1913. He spent the academic year of 1932–33 in Europe, taking part in meetings of the Vienna Circle and visiting Rudolf Carnap (who was in Prague at the time). He returned to Harvard in 1933 as Junior Fellow and remained there for the rest of his life, becoming Professor in 1948 and Edgar Pierce Professor of Philosophy in 1956 until his retirement in 1978. His most important works include *Mathematical Logic* (1940), *From a Logical Point of View* (1953), which contains two of his most famous papers, ‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism’ and ‘New Foundations for Mathematical Logic’, *Word and Object* (1960), *The Ways of Paradox and Other Essays* (1966, 1976), *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (1969), *Theories and Things* (1981), and *Pursuit of Truth* (1990).

‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism’, first given as a paper in 1950, heralded the critique of logical empiricism that was such a central feature of analytic philosophy in the 1950s and 1960s. The two dogmas that Quine attacked were the analytic–synthetic distinction and reductionism, and Carnap’s views were certainly one of the targets. Quine came to develop a form of naturalism, in which philosophy was seen as continuous with natural science, and to take seriously ontological questions, which led to the return to metaphysics after its repudiation by both logical positivism and ordinary language philosophy. All of these themes are addressed and explored in the present collection, edited by Frederique Janssen-Lauret and Gary Kemp, especially in Part IV.

As the editors note in their Introduction, it is now time for detailed historical study of the development of analytic philosophy in the second half of the Twentieth Century. In the case of Quine, this involves not just investigation of the intricacies of his engagement with logical empiricism but also of the influence upon him of pragmatism, which has been a powerful tradition – and arguably, the dominant tradition – in American philosophy throughout the Twentieth Century. There are two papers on Quine’s connection to pragmatism in Part III, and an interesting account of Quine’s contact with the Unity of Science Movement, integral to the logical empiricist tradition, in Part II. We are also delighted to include some previously unpublished papers by Quine, with accompanying commentary, in Part I. With this volume, history of
Quinean philosophy can be seen not only to have come of age but also to have taken its rightful place in history of analytic philosophy, with which it is undoubtedly continuous.

Michael Beaney
June 25, 2015
Acknowledgments

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We owe a great debt to Rolfe Leary and Gary Ebbs for allowing us to include in this volume the previously unpublished W.V. Quine papers in Part I. We are also most grateful to Douglas Quine for his many helpful suggestions, for his design of the front cover, and for granting us permission to reprint ‘Levels of Abstraction’, ‘Preestablished Harmony’, and ‘Response to Gary Ebbs’.

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**Rolfe A. Leary** worked 35 years as a research scientist with the USDA Forest Service Research developing mathematical models of the dynamics of Northern USA forests. He began collaborating with Edward Haskell in 1970, and wrote a book about his application of Haskell's ideas to his work in 1985; raleary@comcast.net.

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W.V. Quine arrived at Harvard University in 1930, earned his PhD in two years, and died in 2000 as the Edgar Pierce Professor of Philosophy Emeritus. His prodigious eloquent literary output in mathematical logic, set theory, epistemology, and the philosophy of language was recognized worldwide and inspired this Glasgow Conference.

Robert Sinclair is Associate Professor of Philosophy in the Faculty of International Liberal Arts, Soka University, Tokyo. His work examines themes from the American pragmatist tradition focusing especially on the philosophies of John Dewey and W.V. Quine.
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 forebears, 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-Twentieth 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. There is a real danger of the student's thinking of herself as a follower of Quine without understanding what it means to say so. 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* (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](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* (1982); for those wanting more, his book-length autobiography – *The Time of My Life* (1985) – expands on the Intellectual Biography); 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) hypothesizes he came across Neurath, Carnap, and Morris doing research into the Unity of Science. He organized 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 sympathizers, 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 grand style at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City. Quine, by this point rather skeptical of Haskell’s Unified Science project, as well as of organized 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 42 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 the permission of Dr. Douglas Quine, W.V. Quine Literary Estate.

Part II provides a historically interesting glimpse into Quine’s complex relationship with Haskell and the Unity of Science movement. This paper’s authors saw events unfold in real time. Ann Lodge, a psychologist, was married to Haskell for several years, and was also 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 skeptical of Haskell’s efforts, and subsequently frustrated with them. Still he persisted in reading his old friend’s work and offering suggestions, urging him towards a better informed conception of mathematical rigor and clearer distinctions between unification at the level of explanation versus description, and thereby perhaps 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 Nineteenth and early to mid-Twentieth 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 III from Part IV 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 especially 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 that 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, skepticism, 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 seldom observed 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 problematize 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 favor 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.

Kemp considers the apparent tension between two commitments in Quine: his Realism, and the Underdetermination of Theory. 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.

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 incompatible, but can each in their way guide other thinkers who are skeptical of the transcendental.
Part I

Previously Unpublished Papers
by W.V. Quine
Forty-two years ago, as a biology student and news reporter for the Princeton University radio station WPRB, I sat in the audience at the Waldorf Astoria hotel in New York City and heard my father give a talk entitled ‘Levels of Abstraction’. Since then, I knew of no copy of the text of that talk in any journal, book, university, or family archive. Even the title of the talk was forgotten until two months ago when Dr. Rolfe Leary, a co-author of our companion paper at this conference, casually mentioned that he had retained a copy of Quine’s paper from the New York conference. He provided the typewritten preprint to me which I transcribed last month in Antarctica – the one continent that my father never visited. Philosophy and mathematics often lead the way for computer science and I believe this paper takes on a new level of relevance in an era of computer programming and big data. It is with great pleasure that I present the unpublished ‘Levels of Abstraction’ today and provide it finally for publication in the proceedings of this conference.
Levels Of Abstraction

Some terms are more abstract than others. Some terms are not more abstract than any others, and they constitute the zero level of abstraction. Some terms are more abstract than those of zero level, but not more abstract than any others, and they constitute the first level of abstraction. Some are more abstract than those of level one and zero, but not more abstract than any further ones; and they constitute the second level of abstraction. And so on up. I seem thus to have defined the levels of abstraction, but it is not much of a definition, for it assumes that we know what it means for one term to be more abstract than another. This I shall not define, but I shall point out some confusions over it.

Is the word ‘mammal’ more abstract than ‘rodent’? Is ‘rodent’ more abstract than ‘mouse’? Is abstractness thus merely a question of inclusiveness? Surely not. Surely ‘apple’ is not more abstract than ‘winesap’, nor ‘sugar’ more abstract than ‘levulose’. Inclusiveness is one thing, abstractness another.

Sometimes what is conjured up by talk of abstraction is rather the hierarchy of naming. At the bottom there are things; next above them there are names of things; next there are names of those names; and so on up. Lewis Carroll touched on this.