SCIENCE AND SENSIBILIA
BY W. V. QUINE
THE 1980 IMMANUEL KANT LECTURES
EDITED BY
Robert Sinclair
History of Analytic Philosophy

Series Editor
Michael Beaney
King’s College London
Humboldt University
Berlin, Germany
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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 last 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 fig-
ures or themes that some might regard as marginal to the analytic tradi-
tion 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 dis-
cussing the work of philosophers who were important in the develop-
ment of analytic philosophy but who are now often forgotten.

One of the most important analytic philosophers in the second half of
the twentieth century—and arguably the central figure in North American
analytic philosophy—was W. V. O. Quine (1908–2000). His most
widely read essay is ‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism’, first published in 1951,
which famously attacked the analytic/synthetic distinction and gave
expression to the scientific naturalism that was to inform the rest of his
life’s work, a view according to which philosophy was conceived as part
of the broader scientific enterprise. A series of major books followed:
From a Logical Point of View (1953), a collection of papers which included
‘Two Dogmas’, Word and Object (1960), Ontological Relativity and Other
Pursuit of Truth (1990), and From Stimulus to Science (1995), to mention
just some. In February 1980, however, he gave a series of four lectures at
Stanford University which were never published in his lifetime, although
German and Italian translations appeared and parts found their way into
other works, such as Theories and Things and Pursuit of Truth.

It is these lectures that are now published, for the first time, in their
original English form, in the present volume. As the editor, Robert
Sinclair, explains in his introduction, they enable us to see how Quine
developed his physicalist programme from the account he had given in
The Roots of Reference. Quine called the lectures ‘Science and Sensibilia’,
an allusion to J. L. Austin’s lectures ‘Sense and Sensibilia’, and Sinclair
offers a helpful account of the relationship between Austin’s and Quine’s
views on sense perception and the notion of ‘sense-data’, in particular.
Quine’s ‘naturalized epistemology’ was his alternative to Austin’s approach, which Austin himself (in his 1956 paper ‘A Plea for Excuses’) had called ‘linguistic phenomenology’. We get a neat picture here of the contrast between one central tradition in American analytic philosophy and the Oxford ‘ordinary language’ tradition.

The volume also contains five essays by leading Quine scholars that place these lectures in context and draw out their implications for our understanding of Quine’s philosophy and its development. The lecture series was officially called ‘The 1980 Immanuel Kant Lectures in Philosophy at Stanford University’, and Quine makes explicit reference to Kant, albeit briefly, at the beginning and end of his lectures. Central Kantian themes are also implicitly addressed in these lectures, as some of the contributors to this volume bring out. Gary Kemp takes the Kantian question ‘What makes objectivity possible?’ and considers how Quine would answer it. Gary Ebbs discusses the norms of naturalized epistemology, and Paul Gregory continues the Kantian theme by exploring Quine’s rejection of the idea of the ‘thing in itself’ as part of his grounding of objectivity without any appeal to such a transcendental notion. Sander Verhaegh offers a helpful account of Quine’s views on behaviourism, and Frederique Janssen-Lauret sees an early form of what she calls Quine’s ‘global epistemic structuralism’ in his lectures, which shows how his views on naturalism and ontological commitment come together. By focusing on these lectures, much light is shed on Quine’s philosophy, and on behalf of all scholars in the growing history of analytic philosophy community, I thank Robert Sinclair and the other five contributors for their excellent work in finally making these lectures properly available and drawing out their significance, both historically and philosophically.

Berlin, Germany

Michael Beaney

December 2018
This volume grew out of the idea that publishing the English version of Quine’s Immanuel Kant lectures would be of interest to students and scholars. I would like to thank Douglas Quine for his early support of this idea and the contributors to this volume for their willingness to write essays that further explore the various issues discussed in Quine’s lectures.

My sincere thanks to Michael Beaney, the editor of this series, for his support of this project and to April James and Brendan George, Philosophy editors at Palgrave Macmillan for their guidance from the proposal stage until publication. Many thanks to Sachie Togashiki for her work on transcribing the lectures and compiling the index. Additional thanks to Douglas B. Quine, Ph.D., executor, W.V. Quine Literary estate for his permission to publish his father’s lectures. The editorial work on this volume was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant number JP17K02269.
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Gary Ebbs is Professor of Philosophy at Indiana University, Bloomington. He is the author of *Rule-Following and Realism* (Harvard University Press, 1997), *Truth and Words* (Oxford University Press, 2009), and *Carnap, Quine, and Putnam on Methods of Inquiry* (Cambridge University Press, 2017), and co-author, with Anthony Brueckner, of *Debating Self-Knowledge* (Cambridge University Press, 2012). He has also published articles on a wide range of topics in the philosophy of language, logic, and mind, and well as epistemology and the history of analytic philosophy.

Paul A. Gregory is an Associate Professor of Philosophy and Head of the Philosophy Department at Washington and Lee University in Lexington, Virginia, USA. Professor Gregory’s scholarship centers on the work of W.V. Quine and, more generally, the justification of naturalized approaches to philosophical questions. His book, *Quine’s Naturalism: Language, Theory, and the Knowing Subject*, was published by Bloomsbury Continuum, while other work on Quine’s naturalism has appeared in *Principia—an International Journal of Epistemology and Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. His recent ‘Quine’s Deflationary Structuralism’ is forthcoming in the anthology *Quine: Structure, and Ontology*.

Frederique Janssen-Lauret is a Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Manchester, specializing in philosophy of logic, women in logic, and history of analytic philosophy. She is co-translator of Quine’s *The Significance of the New Logic* (Cambridge University Press 2018), editor of *Quine: Structure and Ontology*
(Oxford, forthcoming), and co-editor of Quine and His Place in History (Palgrave, 2015). She has published papers on Quine in Synthese, The Monist, and in edited volumes published by Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, and Palgrave.

**Gary Kemp** is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Glasgow. He is the author of several papers on Quine (and on Davidson, Frege, Wittgenstein and Russell), and the books Quine versus Davidson: Truth, Reference and Meaning (Oxford University Press 2012) and Quine: A Guide for the Perplexed (Continuum 2006).

**W. V. Quine** (1908–2000) was Edgar Pierce Professor of Philosophy, Harvard University. His work in theoretical philosophy has gained worldwide recognition for its depth, clarity and systematic import. The lectures contained in his volume provide a succinct overview of his systematic approach to philosophical issues in the areas of language, knowledge and reality.

**Robert Sinclair** is Professor of Philosophy in the Faculty of International Liberal Arts at Soka University, Tokyo. His research examines themes at the intersection between pragmatist philosophy and the history of analytic philosophy focusing especially on the work of Dewey and Quine. He has published several papers on Quine’s naturalism and is currently at work on a book manuscript that examines the influence of C.I. Lewis’s conceptual pragmatism on Quine’s early philosophical development.

**Sander Verhaegh** is Assistant Professor at the Tilburg Center for Logic, Ethics, and Philosophy of Science (TiLPS) at Tilburg University, The Netherlands. He has published a book on the nature and the development of Quine’s naturalism (Working from Within, OUP 2018) and further work on Quine’s philosophy in the *Journal of the History of Philosophy, Erkenntnis, the Australasian Journal of Philosophy, Synthese* and the *British Journal for the History of Philosophy.*
I. Quine’s Kant Lectures

Delivered at Stanford University in February 1980, Quine’s Immanuel Kant Lectures titled *Science and Sensibilia* have, until now, remained unpublished.¹ Taken as a whole these lectures fill an important gap in understanding the development of Quine’s later thought, especially as they mark the middle point between his earlier *The Roots of Reference* (1974) and his later *Pursuit of Truth* (1992). In general, the lectures further develop Quine’s physicalistic program of tracing the links from sensory stimulation to our scientific speculations about the world, better known as his naturalization of epistemology, but it does so by framing the discussion in terms of two further, more ‘traditional sounding’, sub-questions in epistemology. These questions concern our knowledge of the external world and our knowledge of other minds. Obviously, this familiar philosophical rendering of such questions will need to be modified in order to fit the standards appropriate to the physicalist perspective.

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R. Sinclair (✉)
Faculty of International Liberal Arts, Soka University, Tokyo, Japan
e-mail: sinclair@soka.ac.jp
found in these lectures. In Quine’s hands such questions are transformed into a concern over how on the basis of sensory stimulation we have come to make statements about the world and other minds. But Quine’s willingness to use these questions within his lectures suggests a somewhat more concerted effort on his part to highlight how his interests remain connected to the traditional questions of epistemology. Even when, as we will see, his discussion significantly departs from these more familiar formulations and in the methods used to address them (Fig. 1.1).
The lectures begin with Quine’s own familiar rendering of the epistemological question in this slightly new setting: “How, on the strength of the mere sporadic triggering of our sensory receptors, is it possible to fabricate our elaborate theory of other minds and the external world?” (Quine, This volume, 19). With this as his overarching concern, Lecture I lays out the basic framework within which he plans to address this question. He begins by briefly arguing for the merits of a monistic physicalism and wonders to what extent our mental talk, or “mentalistic” vocabulary, can be captured within, or adapted to such a physicalist framework. He gives the following standard for physicalist adequacy: “A supposed mental state or event qualifies as physically genuine if it is specifiable strictly by physiological description, presumably neurological, without recourse to mentalistic terms” (Quine, This volume, 24). Quine then extends this discussion to perception, where he assesses the physicalist credentials of ‘perceptual events’ by arguing that they can all be grouped under a neurological formulation (Quine, This volume, 25–31). Moreover, because the subjective similarity between perceptual events yields similar behavioral responses, it is assumed that similar perceptual events will also be similar in their neural mechanisms (Quine, This volume, 27).

With this physicalist rendering of perception in place, Quine begins to discuss the route from perception to scientific theory, where this turns on an examination of the acquisition of cognitive language. Lecture II continues this account tracing the steps from the learning of observation sentences through ostension to standing sentences and lastly predication and relative clauses. With Lecture III Quine directs his attention to the second sub-question mentioned above concerning our knowledge of other minds. Here, we learn that observation sentences, sentences that are primarily about features of the external, physical world and not sensations, rather easily yield mentalistic counterparts that are observation sentences about other minds. Quine then explores how to make sense of such sentences within his physicalist framework. Of special interest is how he attempts to make physicalist sense of the objects of perception, a topic that I will return to below. Lecture IV then concludes with Quine’s reflections on ontology where we see him moving closer to his mature position that emphasizes the significant role of structure rather than objects for our ontology.
Much of the lectures are then aimed at locating mentalistic discourse within a scientific, physicalist framework, where this is offered as a scientific, if abstract explanation of how we come to know the external world and other minds, without an appeal to mental entities or other sensibilia. Quine mentions at the outset his gratitude for the resounding title of his lectures, *Science and Sensibilia*, to John Austin’s take on Jane Austin (Quine, This volume, 20). Here, of course he is referring to Austin’s *Sense and Sensibilia*, which famously criticized the concept of ‘sense-data’ and the so-called argument from illusion. A somewhat closer look at Austin’s criticisms will, I think, be useful for understanding why Quine adopted this title for his lectures, while also serving to help clarify his approach in these lectures.

**II. Sense and Sensibilia: Austin on Perception**

Austin’s focus on ordinary language analysis is central for his attempt to eliminate the philosophical errors introduced by the misuse of words and mistaken accounts of the features of the world picked out by descriptive terms. The careful regard for the way expressions are used in everyday language is presented both as a necessary prelude to guard against philosophical error and for providing a proper account of the phenomena under consideration (Berdini and Bianchi 2018; Longworth 2017, 2.1).

This method is on full display in *Sense and Sensibilia*, where Austin seeks to discredit the general view that claims “we never see or otherwise perceive (or ‘sense’), or anyhow we never directly perceive or sense, material objects (or material things), but only sense-data (or our own ideas, impressions, sense, sense-perceptions, percepts, etc.).” (1962, 2). Much of the supposed support for such a position stems from what is often called the argument from illusion. In cases of illusion we have a sensory experience of seeing something with certain specific traits or features, but where nothing has these specific traits. This might be because the experienced object in question lacks these features, or that we simply do not experience such an object whatsoever. Now in such experiences it is often thought that there must be something that has these experienced features, usually called sense-data. Because in such cases there are no material
objects of the required sort experienced, sense-data are themselves not material objects, nor parts of the surrounding environment that are independent of our individual experiences. What are then experienced directly are these sense-data, which themselves are taken to be distinct from material objects. A further inference is now made to the conclusion that every experience (whether illusory or not) has a similar character, so our experience of material things always has sense-data as its object. It is never the case that we directly experience material things.2

Consider the classic case of refraction. The stick which normally looks straight appears bent when seen in water. But the stick does not change shape when it is placed in water and therefore it cannot be both bent and straight. One of these visual appearances must then be delusive, but even when what is seen is not a real feature of an object, it is still the case that we see something. And it is this sense-datum that we are taken to be directly aware of in sensory perception (Austin 1962, 21). Or consider the case of mirror-images, that is, mirror reflections. When someone sees themselves in the mirror, their body appears to be some distance behind the glass, but they cannot actually be in two places at once. Once again, these perceptions cannot all be accurate, so our image is not in the place it seems to be. We must be perceiving something else, which is a sense-datum.

In addressing this view Austin begins by emphasizing that there is no single way in which we may be ‘deceived by the senses’ (that is, perceive something unreal or not material), and further that “things may go wrong [...] in lots of different ways—which don’t have to be, and must not be assumed to be, classifiable in any general fashion” (Austin 1962, 13). He further wonders if we tend to speak of ‘illusions’ with reference to dreams, photos, mirror-images or pictures seen on the cinema screen. By pointing out the familiarity of the circumstances where we meet these phenomena and the ordinary methods used to consider them, Austin aims to show how the distinction between sense-data and material objects, and between illusory perceptions and veridical ones, offers us false alternatives, when compared with our prior ordinary methods for dealing with ‘illusions’ (Berdini and Bianchi 2018).

We can further expand on this idea by considering an additional element of Austin’s response to the sense-data theorist. Here he makes appeal
to two components present within our ordinary perceptual judgments involving what has been described as the “opportunity afforded by sensory perception” and our general expertise and abilities in forging appropriate judgments given those opportunities (Longworth 2017, 3.2). This further enables him to clearly distinguish the difference between illusion and delusion and how this helps to explain the above cases without any appeal to sense-data. In the case of the bent stick, the sense-data theorist claims that the false perceptual judgment is dictated by the sensory experience, which looks as if the stick is bent. But because it isn’t really bent, what we experience must be the relevant sense-data. Austin places special emphasis on our ordinary ability to make perceptual judgments, thereby denying sensory experience by itself must dictate our perceptual judgments (1962, 29–30). Consider this basic fact: A stick when placed in water looks bent, but it doesn’t look like a bent stick when not in water. A key question here concerns whether it is the case that something that is straight must always look straight? Our ordinary perceptual practice suggests not, since we willingly admit that the same thing can look different depending on a variety of different possible circumstances. The idea that we must see something different in all cases when things look different is an unwarranted philosophical distortion of commonsense experience (Lawlor 2018).

This provides further resources to explain cases of illusion. Austin accepts that the stick looks bent, even though in fact it is not. But these looks are not simply features of our private experiences, since they have an independent status that allows others to see them as well. This occasion, the way the stick looks, just like the stick’s straightness, can further be used as a basis for more refined perceptual judgments. The explanation for why people mistakenly take the stick to be bent, is because it looks that way and given the way our abilities to form judgments can be negatively influenced by these looks. There is nothing in particular about a feature of our experience that explains why someone would make a mistaken judgment about what they experience. This is because such an explanation depends not only on what is experienced, but on our ability to form correct judgments and the circumstances that give rise to the judgment. So, for example, not everyone would be inclined to judge that the stick is bent, and as mentioned above, in many ordinary cases, we
quite easily and readily admit that a straight stick can look bent under different circumstances (Longworth 2017, 3.2).³

In responding to the argument from illusion Austin presents it as resting on unconvincing departure from commonsense perceptual situations. Furthermore, the language we use to talk about perception, how things appear or look, does a good enough job of marking relevant differences in our perception of things (Martin 2007, 4). It is important to note that Austin’s response does not attempt to answer the question ‘What are the objects of perception?’, but to show that the argument from illusion is a misconception in so far as it rests on a false dichotomy between sense-data and material objects. Austin challenges the claim that our experience of illusory perceptions does not differ from normal ones by examining different kinds of perceptions and different ways in which we may go wrong in making perceptual judgments. For Austin these cases illustrate that “there is no one kind of thing that we ‘perceive’ but many different kinds, the number being reducible if at all by scientific investigation and not by philosophy” (Austin 1962, 4; Berdini and Bianchi 2018).⁴ From the standpoint of commonsense, the question ‘what is the direct object of perception?’ is presented as a bad question, further suggesting that Austin intends to move away from addressing metaphysical questions concerning perception (Lawlor 2018).⁵ This seems to follow from the way his use of ordinary language (which includes its basic distinctions and commitments) enables us to make sense of illusions and other perceptual mistakes without an appeal to sense-data. But even if this question is ill-posed perhaps there remain related concerns about the nature of perception which are legitimate. For example, what explains the difference between when you perceive the mirror image of the bowl, from the perception of it sitting on the table? As we will see further below, Quine attempts to answers questions of this sort, and while he does not attempt to reduce the kinds of things we perceive, he thinks that the disjointed nature of perception can be understood as physicalistically unified through the learning of language.
III. The Physicalist Project of Quine’s *Science and Sensibilia*

One might view the current widespread rejection of sense-data theories and the turn away from phenomenalism in favor of physicalism as a general vindication of Austin’s approach and his critical conclusions. The physicalistic monism that Quine defends in these lectures and elsewhere, which, as he says, “is the framework in which I intend to pursue something like epistemology” could be viewed as an example of this general trend (Quine, *This volume*, 25). Quine welcomes the rejection of sense-data and its standard epistemological role, as he himself has offered arguments for why we should reject a phenomenalistic basis for epistemology (1960, 1976). The lectures then repeat Quine’s brief for the priority of physical objects over sensation, emphasizing that “The stream of experience, if not organized and conceptualized in terms of bodies as it generally is, would be unmanageable. Even memory would be unavailing, for it hinges mostly on conceptualization in bodily terms. Raw sense data do not keep; they have to be processed” (Quine, *This volume*, 20).

Given this perspective, one might think that Austin’s explanation is good as far as it goes. That is, attention to perceptual occasions and our ability to form perceptual judgments shows how we can make mistaken perceptual judgments without any additional need to posit our awareness of sense-data between us and material objects. In addition, we can recognize the methodological value of proceeding carefully with the ordinary uses of terms found in familiar sense perceptual circumstances in order to establish that the argument from illusion and the introduction of sense-data represents an unnecessary and unconvincing departure from that perspective.

However, it is not, I suggest, difficult to see how the physicalist orientation of Quine’s naturalism would cause him to remain dissatisfied with Austin’s conclusions. From his viewpoint, there remains room for other sorts of philosophical inquiry, especially the attempt to provide a more scientifically informed view that accounts for relevant differences in our perceptual experiences. It would, for example, explain why we are capable of perceiving two objects as the same, whether seen though a mirror or when sitting on the table. Such an account remains of epistemological interest.
since it would provide a scientifically based account of how we come to perceive similarities and differences in our experience of things. Moreover, we can agree with Austin that asking for the direct object of perception is ill-posed and the appeal to sense-data as unnecessary. However, given the physical reality of perception, we can inquire about what explains perceptual differences and similarities between objects. Attention to common uses of words themselves, and their circumstances of use while helpful in weaning is away from sensibilia, does not account for such perceived similarities and differences, especially in terms of the physical reality relevant for Quine’s epistemological concerns. This reflects not a philosophical shortcoming in Austin’s proposed methods but a possible limitation, where other philosophical approaches and questions remain unanswered. Perhaps our everyday language and ordinary perceptual practices do not embody all the distinctions which could be relevant for other kinds of philosophical inquiry (Berdini and Bianchi 2018). Even granting the importance of commonsense and ordinary language in rejecting sensibilia, we might still view this perspective as not making the right distinctions, or having a clear enough philosophical vocabulary to address this type of inquiry, which explores the physical basis of perception in noting differences in our perceptual experiences.

We can recognize this in somewhat more detail by turning to Lecture III where Quine attempts to locate perception within his physicalist perspective. When we perceive an object in our visual field that object gives rise to what Quine calls a ‘perceptual event’ defined as “…neural events that result from the impinging, on the subject’s nerve endings, of forces emanating from the environment” (Quine, This volume, 26). What makes such an event perceptual is that it comes with awareness, which, can be noted by the outward physical movements of an individual, such as a look of recognition, startled movement or exclamation. The awareness is not this behavior but remains an unexplained feature of a neural event and can be present without being manifested in behavior (Quine, This volume, 26). In the current case, causal forces from an object trigger an individual’s sensory receptor catching their attention. To illustrate this, Quine turns to the example of seeing a bowl. Clearly seeing a bowl involves the light that the bowl reflects to the eye. However, Quine notes that the light may come from several sources, from the sun, or the lamp, by means of the bowl.