

Murray G. Murphey

The Development of Quine's Philosophy.

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Since his death in 2000, W. V. Quine's philosophy has increasingly been viewed as an object for careful scholarly work rather than simply a set of views to be critically appraised (and largely rejected). This has resulted in a deeper understanding of Quine's philosophical system and its place in late-20th-century Anglo-American philosophy. Murphey's volume continues this recent trend by providing a detailed account of Quine's philosophical development from his early days at Oberlin, through his famous midcentury critique of the analytic-synthetic distinction, and ending with the last revisions to his philosophy. This discussion is based on published and unpublished writings, enabling Murphey to provide a thorough narrative of the various influences and problems that led to Quine's often controversial philosophical claims. While I have reservations with aspects of Murphey's account, it contains a wealth of detail that remains useful for assessing Quine's legacy within 20th-century American philosophy.

The book begins with an introduction that sketches the historical context of Quine's emerging philosophy, briefly discussing 19th-century scientific advances, the waning of idealism and rise of realism in American philosophy, developments in modern logic, and the views of the Vienna Circle. Then follow chapters on Quine's early work in logic and his later turn to semantics and ontology. Chapter 3 chronicles Quine's work from his magnum opus *Word and Object* to his Carus lectures titled *Roots of Reference*. Murphey discusses the last revisions to Quine's thought in a penultimate chapter before offering his conclusions that summarize the main claims defended in the book. The following offers only a brief sketch of this detailed discussion. I focus mostly on lesser-known events discussed in the book's first half.

Murphey begins by emphasizing that Quine graduated from Oberlin with some of the main features of his philosophy already in place. This includes his behaviourism, a "hard headed empiricism", and Quine's attraction to nominalism (227–228). His honours thesis in mathematical philosophy used the logical resources of Russell and Whitehead's *Principia Mathematica*, resulting in Quine's early commitment to the logicist position that mathematics is reducible to logic. He is then faced with question of how to reconcile his preference for nominalism with logicism, which depends on the existence of abstract objects (6). This is an issue that he will struggle with until around 1948, when, after attempting to secure a nominalist basis for mathematics with Nelson Goodman, he grudgingly accepts classes as needed for both mathematics and science (65).

Murphey discusses Quine's time as a graduate student at Harvard, where he took courses with C. I. Lewis and read the latter's influential book *Mind and the World Order*. Quine's graduate papers show a thorough understanding of that work, and Murphey's discussion helps to support the view that Lewis's conceptual pragmatism was an important influence on Quine's developing epistemological perspective (see my 'Quine and Conceptual Pragmatism', *Transactions of the C. S. Peirce Society* 48 [2012], 335–355). After finishing his two year PhD

with a dissertation on *Principia Mathematica*, Quine was off to Europe as Sheldon Traveling fellow where he famously met with Carnap, the leading influence on his philosophical development. Murphey recounts Quine's careful study of Carnap's *Logical Syntax of Language* in draft form, but finds a deeper influence with Quine's reading of the earlier *Der Logische Aufbau der Welt* (11–14). He suggests that Quine's early commitment to epistemological phenomenalism can be traced to this study of the *Aufbau*. Further support for this claim is found in unpublished notes from the 1940s where Quine seeks to reconcile his phenomenalism with the more realistic physicalism found in science (53–55). This reconciliation would have to wait until Quine became more self-consciously naturalistic in treating epistemology as science self-applied.

Quine returned to Harvard as a junior member of the newly formed Society of Fellows. His enthusiasm for Carnap's thought was captured in his 1934 lectures on Carnap to the Society. Murphey claims that these lectures present Carnap's philosophy as Quine understood it, where he still accepts the concepts of analyticity and synonymy but "interprets them in a non-Carnapian way" (19). Here he suggests that Quine uses Lewis's pragmatic view of the a priori to make sense of analyticity, where truths of arithmetic are seen as a priori because we choose to hold them no matter what experience may reveal. Quine begins to adopt a more critical stance in his 1936 'Truth by Convention', in which a behavioral criterion for the a priori is used to reject the thesis that logic and mathematics are true by convention. Nevertheless, Murphey explains that Quine still holds that a priori truths are analytic, since Lewis's pragmatic view has been reinterpreted in behavioural terms, leaving analytic truths as those most firmly held (21). The debate over analyticity intensified in 1940–1941, when the issue was fiercely debated between Quine, Carnap, Tarski, and others visiting Harvard. Murphey discusses how this debate further developed through correspondence between Quine, Nelson Goodman, and Morton White in the late 1940s. While Quine's perspective continued to be critical, Murphey makes the perhaps surprising claim that he never gave up on the concept of 'analyticity' (not even in 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism'), but adapted from Lewis a view of the a priori that denied any sharp difference between the analytic and the synthetic (31). Quine would later redefine 'analytic', helping to explain his later comment that it is rather the epistemological significance of the analytic-synthetic distinction that is at issue rather than its proper delineation.

On Murphey's reading 'Two Dogmas' consists of a set of promissory notes for future work rather than a well worked out doctrine discrediting analyticity in favor of Quine's epistemic holism. This programmatic statement is then further developed in such works as *Word and Object* and *Roots of Reference*. A key element in this development is Quine's move from phenomenalism to his famous naturalized account of knowledge. It is with Quine's adoption of 'observation sentences', utterances conditioned to neural input but which do not report observations, that Murphey sees as crucial for this transition (88–89, 230–231). With his insistence on the scientific fact that contact with the outside world is mediated through sensory input Quine reconceives epistemology as the scientific study of how science is acquired. In carrying out this project, Murphey provides a detailed description of Quine's genetic account of how humans can come to utter cognitive sentences on the basis of this sensory stimulation (161–176).

One arguably important omission is found with Quine's lecture notes on Hume from his 1946 Harvard summer course. Perhaps Murphey judges these to be less important for

understanding Quine's development, however, they offer a history of empiricism that informs Quine's remarks at the start of 'Epistemology Naturalized' and those found in *From Stimulus to Science*. Placing such lectures within the context of Quine's development helps to explain how he arrived at this historical understanding of empiricism (See Michael Pakaluk's 'Quine's 1946 Lectures on Hume' *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 27 (1989), 445–459). They also indicate some early underdeveloped signs of Quine's view of epistemology as best situated internal to science, which predates Murphey's claim that it is around 1953 that Quine gave up first philosophy in favour of science self-applied (92–93, 230).

There are also important changes to Quine's understanding of the connections between theory and observation that Murphey fails to highlight. For example, Quine's claim that observation sentences are the repository of evidence conflicts with his further view that our theory implies its evidence. Observation sentences are 'occasion sentences', true on some occasions and not others, while theoretical claims are standing sentences that are true regardless of time or place. There are no direct inferential relations between these two kinds of statements. So, if a theory implies its evidence, observation sentences alone cannot count as evidence. This inferential gap between theory and observation is addressed with Quine's introduction of 'observation categoricals' such as "Whenever it rains, it pours" or "Wherever there's smoke, there's flame". These categoricals have observation sentences as parts that are linked to sensory stimulation. But the entire categorical is a standing sentence that can be inferred from prior scientific theory. The inferential gap is bridged with the implication of a categorical that has observational components tied to sensory input. Moreover, in some of his very last writings Quine accepts the theory-ladenness of observation; Murphey, however, offers no discussion of this change or how it might impact Quine's final view concerning observation and evidence.

Another potential problem concerns Murphey's insistence that in his later thought Quine gives up on physical objects. This apparent change takes place in several papers from the 1970s, where Quine considers an ontology that contains only numbers that are then reduced to sets. This 'hyper-Pythagoreanism' receives scant attention in the rest of Quine's work, and in his last book he returns to speaking of physical objects as the 'ground elements' of our ontology. More importantly, Murphey seems to miss the real moral of these papers, which concerns not the repudiation of physical objects *per se* but the claim that it does not matter whether our ontology contains only physical objects or sets. Quine is moving to the view that what is empirically significant about ontology is the structural contribution objects make to theory and not the nature of the objects themselves (see Peter Hylton, *Quine*, Routledge 2007).

Despite these and other problems found largely in its second half, the book makes a compelling case for the value of treating Quine's ideas in their historical and developmental context.

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