

Quine and his Place in History. Edited by Frederique Janssen-Lauret and Gary Kemp
(Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015. Pp. xii + 224. Price £63.00, eBook £49.99.)

Until the very end of his extraordinary philosophical career, Quine used a 1927 Remington typewriter—a machine that was perfectly adapted to his scholarly needs because he had replaced many of its keys with logical symbols. Famously, one of the keys Quine removed was the question mark. Asked about his curious typewriter by an inquisitive reporter, Quine quipped that he did not require a question mark because he dealt in certainties.

Quine's Remington graces the cover of this handsome volume of essays, which grew out of a joint Glasgow-Campinas conference held in Glasgow in 2014. The cover photo reveals that Quine sacrificed the question mark for a reversed epsilon ('3'); the volume's essays "fill some major gaps in the historical narrative, scholarship and exegesis of Quine" (p. 2).

In their introduction to the collection—which appeared in Palgrave's excellent *History of Analytic Philosophy* series—Frederique Janssen-Lauret and Gary Kemp argue that "[m]ore historical awareness of Quine is urgently needed" (p. 2). I wholeheartedly support their call. Although virtually every self-respecting analytic philosopher will be able to recite some of Quine's most influential theses and arguments, the way in which his views hang together is still widely misunderstood. The situation is even worse when it comes to the historical context in which Quine developed his ideas. For although most of his views originate in the 1930s and 1940s,

scholars often ignore the philosophical, scientific, and mathematical background of Quine's work.

So how do we assess Quine's place in history? If there is one thing this volume shows, it is that there are many instruments in the historian's toolbox. Perhaps one of the most important tools is the study of previously unpublished papers, lectures, and correspondence. This volume includes three such previously unpublished documents. The collection opens with 'Levels of Abstraction' (transcribed, edited, and introduced by Douglas Quine), a paper Quine presented at the First International Congress on Unified Science in 1972. In the paper, Quine dissolves some "confusions" surrounding the question "what it means for one term to be more abstract than another" (p. 12). He examines and dismisses various solutions—discussing hierarchies of inclusiveness, hierarchies of naming, and hierarchies of classes—and eventually concludes that the psychologically most significant dimension of abstraction has to do with "cyclic principles of generation, and cyclic principles of generation of cyclic principles of generation, and so on up" (p. 17).

The remaining two unpublished papers, both responses to Gary Ebbs' review of the second edition of *Pursuit of Truth*, exemplify another important instrument in the historian's toolbox. Quine is well known for continuously updating the details of the framework he first comprehensively set out in his *magnum opus* *Word and Object* (1960). Many of these revisions were sparked by his discussions with Burton Dreben as is evinced by the frequency with which Quine mentions him in his acknowledgements. Even in one of his very last papers, "Progress on Two Fronts" (PTF), Quine updates his "views on two epistemological matters" and thanks Burton Dreben for their discussions, mentioning that the "paper has been much improved

through several drafts” (1996, 473). Normally, both the nature of these improvements and the extent of Dreben’s influence would have been hidden for the curious historian. Not in this case however, as the volume includes both “Preestablished Harmony”, Quine’s first draft of the first section of PTF and “Response to Gary Ebbs”, a revised draft of this section, written approximately one week later after he had discussed the first draft with Dreben.

A third significant instrument is revealed in the second part of the volume, which contains a paper by Ann Lodge, Rolfe A. Leary, and Douglas Quine about the background of the 1972 Congress on Unified Science mentioned above. In their paper, the authors discuss Quine’s lifelong friendship with Edward Haskell, a synergic scientist and philosopher who organized the Congress with the financial support of cult leader Sun Myung Moon. Where historians of philosophy usually focus on a philosopher’s ideas and arguments, this paper illuminates Quine’s character as a scientist and as a friend by showing how these ‘two Quine’s’ came into conflict when he had to comment on his best friend’s scientific papers. In a letter to their joint friend Harold Cassidy, for example, Quine sketches the dilemma he was facing:

You know, more vividly than I, how friendship and science can conflict. Here is a close friend whose ideas are his life. Up to a point you can serve science and him by arguing him out of his worst ideas and into some better ones. But when he can’t be dissuaded from an idea which your scientific standards compel you to reject, then the fundamental conflict sets in between the friendly determination to see him prosper and the scientific determination to see truth prevail. (p. 47)

Finally, the volume contains exegetical papers by seven leading and upcoming Quine scholars. One of the most surprising papers is Gary Ebbs' "Reading Quine's Claim That No Statement Is Immune to Revision". Although he is commenting on what is perhaps the most discussed passage in the history of analytic philosophy, Ebbs succeeds in developing a novel, and more plausible, reading of the famous sixth section of "Two Dogmas of Empiricism". Where Quine's universal revisability thesis is usually interpreted as the claim 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 convincingly shows that Quine's thesis is much less contentious: "No statement we now accept is guaranteed to be part of every scientific theory that we will later come to accept" (p. 123). The essential difference between the two is that the latter formulation does not require homophonic translation between languages before and after revision. The upshot of Ebbs' argument—although he himself does not draw this conclusion—is that Quine's universal revisability thesis is almost trivially true. After all, no one will deny that no statement is immune to revision on the second interpretation. As such, Ebbs' paper sheds new light on Quine's 1962 claim that his thesis is "probably trivial" and that he has not "advanced it as an interesting thesis as such".

The other essays in the volume discuss C. I. Lewis' influence on Quine's interpretation of the analytic-synthetic distinction (an excellent essay by Robert Sinclair), the similarities between the views of Quine and William James (Yemima Ben-Menahem), the split in Quine's philosophy of language (Peter Hylton), Quine's debate with Ruth Barcan Marcus about the interpretation of quantification and identity (Frederique Janssen-Lauret), the tension between Quine's realism and his

underdetermination thesis (Gary Kemp), and the methodological differences between Quine and Wittgenstein (Andrew Lugg). This volume, in sum, covers a wide range of topics and an equally wide range of approaches to assessing Quine's place in history.

Literature

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