

Review of Paul Gochet, ASCENT TO TRUTH: A CRITICAL EXAMINATION OF QUINE'S PHILOSOPHY

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(*Dialectica*, Vol. 42, No. 1 1988, pp. 45-58)

This book focuses on issues in epistemology, semantics and logic with Quine's views always setting the themes, even if Quine does not always remain quite at center stage. Gochet, Professor at Liège and Secretary to the Editorial Board of *Logique et Analyse* is a prominent of Quine's views in Europe. The author does not aim to take up the whole of Quine's philosophy here. Rather, the aim is to "focus on a few central themes...and to treat them thoroughly." Continental Europe not only recognizes Quine's importance, then, but it is prepared to talk back: a point which has become increasingly evident in the wake of several recent works on Quine by W.K. Essler (1975), J. Largeault (1980) and Henri Lauener (1982). Gochet has made an earlier contribution to this in the form of his *Quine en Perspective* (1978) and its German translation (1984). But the present volume is not a further translation of the earlier work. Rather, the author "tried to avoid overlap."

Gochet has produced here a series of interrelated studies of central Quinean positions and arguments, where the author's own views, along with those of other philosophers (both Anglo-American and continental European), are quickly brought to bear. Criticisms are "mainly internal" since Gochet professes to share Quine's relative empiricism. What is most stimulating about this book is the emphasis upon "strains and inner tensions which reveal themselves...as one tries to put together Quine's sundry doctrines and positions." Gochet is by no means shy of independent interpretations or criticisms, two elements which intimately interwoven throughout the book. The reader must review his own interpretations and positions in coming to grips with Gochet's development of the topics considered. This is, therefore, a challenging book. One suspects, especially on first reading, that some of the "strains and tensions" must be attributed to Gochet rather than Quine. But this is a passing distraction. Readers whose primary interest is in answering philosophical questions will find the book not merely stimulating but also useful. It takes us once again through the Quinean labyrinth. If the approach to Quine is not that common in Harvard Yard, all the better. It contributes to the *Aufhebung*.

ANALYTICITY AND MODAL LOGIC

In his discussions of analyticity and quantified modal logic, Gochet's positions seem least convincing and more external. I find no fault in the author's treatment of Quine's technical arguments against quantified modal logic, as presented in the final chapter. Rather, the motivation and perspective seem external. One wants to know more about why we should go to the trouble of saving quantified modal logic. This goes as well for the notion of analyticity.

Gochet stipulates that "everything is revisable." Why, then, should it be comforting if we need only agree to the meaningfulness of essentialism, not its truth, in order to establish an anti-Quinean resolution of the "sling-shot argument"? Why again, should we be comforted if identification across possible worlds requires not essentialism but merely Kaplan's haecceitism —a view which emphasizes a persisting "thisness" but "without reference to common attributes and behavior." (Gochet, p. 163) Once it is allowed that we do not know how to tell when we have the same individuals across possible worlds, has Quine not, then, won his point —by epistemic exhaustion as it were?

Without compelling applications for quantified modal logic, why do we need a technical defense of it in any case? Gochet approaches this basic question most closely in the last couple of pages of the book, arguing that perceptual reports cannot be accommodated within Quine's extensionalist framework. He also cites (but does not explain) arguments that special relativity requires a logic with both modal and tense operators. The latter point may seem especially doubtful to some since general relativity leads many philosophers (Quine included) to treat time as completely parallel to space by means of temporal predicates. The former argument might just lead the Quinean to say "Well, so much the worse for perceptual reports."

But the main point is simply that the need for modal logic is not unquestionable, and much more needs to be said about possible alternatives. Our mathematically spirited logicians too often jump quickly over the issue of applications in order to carry on their laudable impulse for spinning out formal systems. But won't the relative empiricist take a skeptical eye to this and wonder if this impulse does not sometimes get out of hand?

The questions of applications have been unduly neglected –and perhaps misconceived. Surely one alternative might be a theory (not logic) of perceptual reports formulated in (more or less) standard logic. Perhaps Davidson's treatment of indirect discourse could serve as a model here. Gochet emphasizes that a logic with tense operators does not seem to be open to the criticisms connecting identification across possible worlds with essentialism. But, if there is even a hint of truth in Quine's claim that tense logic amounts to a "towering triviality," does this not suggest the possibility of representing even natural language (totally or in significant degree) by means of standard logic together with temporal predicates? Moreover, if our concern is for the formal representation (or translation) of natural language, more attention needs to be paid to the methodology of translation. What empirical methods might lead us from certain sentences of natural language to given formalizations? Even intuitively plausible formalizations need a thorough and systematic treatment by reference to the methodology of empirical semantics. Otherwise, we are left in the end merely insisting upon contrary intuitions. It is *prima facie* plausible to hold that there is more in those possible worlds than was ever dreamed of in every day speech or even scientific theory. So, are we not justified, in degree, to suspect that modal logic involves us in speculative paraphrase of ordinary speech rather than anything like translation or interpretation? It is not even clear that fully adequate systems for semantic representation must be able to capture all of what is said in natural language. For example, if natural languages contain their own truth predicate, this is not something we want to take up in a formal representation.

Contrary to Gochet, Quine's rejection of the analytic-synthetic distinction does not turn primarily upon the question of how to demarcate the analytic truths. Rather the central issue is whether there is any justification of the purportedly linguistic or stipulative character of the analytic truths in light of the appeal of epistemic holism. Since he takes up Quinean holism, why does Gochet want to save the notion of analyticity?

In "Two Dogmas," the circularity argued for serves to demonstrate that the very notion of linguistic meaning had been adapted to the epistemic uses of the analytic-synthetic distinction. Such a notion of meaning has proved incapable of any independent motivation or criterion. The epistemic uses of the analytic-synthetic distinction include the positivists' version of foundationalism : start out with epistemically privileged observations or perceptual reports and build upon this making use of incorrigible (because stipulative) general principles in order to transfer the epistemically privileged status of observation to all of knowledge. Quine's claim that the two dogmas are "at root identical" can be construed as pointing out that, as employed in this foundationalism, they presuppose each other. Radical reductionism attempts to show that all significant discourse must be

analytically equivalent to reports of perceptual fact. Thus, it presupposes both ‘analytical equivalence’ and ‘perceptual fact.’ But, if we ask for an explanation of analyticity, then, after going through a circle including ‘necessary truth’ and ‘meaning’ we come to see that the distinction is made to rest upon the viability of radical reductionism –two sentences have the same meaning if and only if they have the same method of verification. Gochet objects against Quine that he cannot hold that the two dogmas are at root identical, if he also holds that they support each other “unless we are prepared to commit the fallacy of begging the question.” (p. 21) But clearly, it is the views Quine criticized which threaten to beg the question —ultimately to beg the question against epistemic holism. As the positivists attempted to formulate and illustrate the verificationist conception of meaning, they themselves uncovered a version of holism in the form of the persistent result that scientific theories and laws are not logically implied by any amount of evidence and that theories as wholes (rather than particular laws or generalization) will at best logically imply relevant observation sentences.

If we are willing to stipulate, in this holistic spirit, that anything can be revised, then the analytic-synthetic distinction loses its point. Gochet’s conclusion that analytic sentences “enjoy an autonomy to which Quine does not do full justice when he merely grants them the privilege of lying in the center of the web of belief,” (p.28) seems unsupported here. Surely this called for autonomy cannot merely consist of the formal demarcation made possible by restricting analyticity claims to the logical truths, nor in the relationship of such truths to the need for rules of inference. We can also give a formal demarcation (by means of axioms) of sets of sentences which are clearly empirical, corresponding rules of inference “inference tickets” might also be employed –so long as we have reason to accept the sentences in question. But surely, such sentences will not then count as analytic. I fail to see an argument for analyticity here –only the suggestion that a notion of analyticity might be allowable if we can make sense of free choice of language. Otherwise, in what does the claimed autonomy consist?

SEMANTIC AND EPISTEMIC HOLISM

Talk of autonomy reappears in Gochet’s treatment of holism and observation sentences. He cites and argument of Dummett’s to the effect that Quine must either abandon holism or empiricism. Simply stated, if experience impinges upon theories as wholes, then, this subverts the metaphor of periphery and interior, i.e., we cannot grant a privileged epistemic status to observation sentences—an argument from holism to idealism, perhaps, and thus one with some historical standing. But more specifically, the argument seems to presuppose that if we can save a theory on occasion by rejecting apparently contradictory evidence, then observation can have no special role at all. Clearly this does not follow, given any reasonable assumptions. An answer here merely requires emphasis upon a very Quinean point. Cases where observation may safely be disregarded are relatively rare (for instance, where experimental results cannot be duplicated) and call for very strong systematic grounds. Observation is minimally fallible, then, but not so fallible as the general laws and hypotheses which have a more theoretical character.

Rather than adopting such a relatively simple solution, however, Gochet uses Dummett’s argument in order to bring in a distinction between observation sentences interpreted behavioristically, i.e., as unstructured wholes which are not theory-laden, and observation sentences interpreted in terms of a logical analysis and segmentation, i.e., as required to relate them to theory. Observation sentences viewed in the former way, Gochet asserts, “have autonomous meaning.” More specifically, “occasion-observation sentences are learned and verified individually.” Hence, “holism can therefore be maintained without restriction,” since, “no sentence belonging to a

theory...has its own autonomous contents.” (p.46) This distinction is offered as an interpretation of Quinean texts. It is also offered in order to give sense to the claim that while truth is immanent to theory, empirical evidence remains transcendent to theory. (Cf. p. 113)

What this is, then, is an attempted explanation of the privileged epistemic status of observation sentences, and of Quine’s reconciliation of epistemic holism and empiricism. Can we understand, in this fashion, why observation sentences are relatively reliable in such a way as to be able to exercise control upon theory? The claim is that occasion-observation sentences, interpreted as unstructured wholes do not meet the test of experience as part of a larger corporate body of sentences, but rather individually. But consider cases of illusion, for example the classical case of a stick in water. Clearly, if we are merely involved in conditioning assent to sentences in the face of appropriate stimulation, then we could teach someone to assent to ‘the stick is bent’ employing both sticks in water and those which are bent but not in water. Assuming that unstructured observation sentences are open to evaluation at all, then, their relative reliability is not simply a function of their being learned and verified individually. Moreover, if we reject, ‘the stick is bent’ regarding the situation where a stick is partly in water, then this does involve a bit of theory.

In order to explain the relative reliability of observation we must go beyond Gochet’s distinction between the two ways observation sentences may be interpreted. Quine himself assumes an innate quality spacing built into the species as a result of biological evolution. This is to say that nature teaches us to generalize in terms of some similarities and to ignore others. Observation is then generally reliable because if too many illusory similarities were induced by our innate quality spacing, then survival becomes problematic. The point is, I take it, we are not going to get a justification or explanation of the reliability of observation reports based on narrowly semantic considerations. For Quine, empiricism, naturalized, is part of the theory of nature. Gochet elsewhere emphasizes such points.

We have seen that Gochet himself attributes epistemic autonomy both to observation sentences as to analytic truths. Both of these points bear upon the topic of epistemic holism and the Quinean inseparability of language and theory. These points suggest corresponding semantic autonomy, in some sense, a choice of language which is independent of choice of theory.

Free choice of language may sound reasonable to many where free choice of truth and theory, or free choice of ontology appears darkly Quinean. Gochet’s notion of autonomy seems to involve him in talk of free choice of language. Though there are no unrevisable principles, Gochet sympathizes with Grice and Strawson when they explain that analytic truths first appear once the decision has been made to adopt a given language or conceptual scheme. (Cf. pp. 25-26) Though, it is “quite another thing to say that there are no necessities within any conceptual scheme we adopt or use.” (Cited in Gochet, p. 26) The decision to adopt a given language with its conceptual scheme appears, then, to be unconstrained by the needs of theory and empirical-theoretical developments generally. This might give us an explanation of Gochet’s talk of the autonomy of analytic truths, but it also restricts holism. If adoption of a language and certain analytic truths is unconstrained by empirical-theoretical developments, then why should we regard such analytic truths as revisable? What could lead us to revise them? On the other hand, if they can be revised on the basis of empirical-theoretical developments, then their autonomy seems to be lost. —there are no analytic truths. Thus we see again how rejection of the analytic-synthetic distinction is tied up with an unrestricted holism. Further, this epistemic holism would appear to be the most important reason for holding to a semantic holism.

Regarding observation sentences, even when viewed as unstructured wholes, we have already

seen that there is little reason to hold them epistemically autonomous –rather if talk of truth or falsity applies here at all, then such evaluations may require mediation by theory. One might be tempted to talk of free choice of language in the case of observation sentences as well, though. For, as long as different observation sentences are keyed to different observable circumstances, and as long as relevant theory is not yet available or not brought into consideration, then the actual sounds uttered are a matter of indifference –in principle a matter of free choice. The multitude of natural human languages might seem to testify to this. Still, even here there is little reason to think of this much free choice as semantically relevant. Such choice of language might be regarded as mere relexicalization rather than reinterpretation, from a semantic point of view. What seems to be more to the point, semantically, is the kind of interpretation and segmentation Gochet mentions and which is required in order to bring observation-occasion sentences into contact with theory. Semantic holism is applicable here if we think of the meaning and/or reference of observation sentences as tied to their integration to theory. The same observation sentences, behavioristically interpreted, may support alternative theories, but this may also call for alternative reinterpretations of the observation sentences.

Coming to grips with semantic holism, one is led to reflect on Gochet's puzzling claim that for Quine language and theory, though not identical, are nonetheless "at most indiscernible and at least inseparable." (p.36) The unsettling formulation may be taken as a sign that there are some difficulties afoot here. What then are we to make of the inseparability of language and theory in Quine? Moreover, is Gochet's view that observation-occasion sentences have their own autonomous content consistent with his endorsement of the inseparability of language and theory?

These questions and the larger topic of semantic holism are best approached by taking up Follesdal's concept of a language-theory, along with Gochet, but then by taking this notion an important step further: adopting the thesis that holism implies the relativization of sentence meaning (and the interpretation of relevant expressions generally) to object language theories. Such a view can, in part, be supported by appeal to Quinean texts, e.g., where he says that "a sentence S is meaningless except relative to its own theory; meaningless intertheoretically," (Cf. Gochet, p. 110) One can go beyond Follesdal, however, by denying that "sentences do not generally have meaning one by one." (Cited in Gochet, p.34)

Once meaning is relativized to theory, we can take the meaning of a particular sentence S, relative to its embedding theory, as simply the logical implications which would be lost from a theory by removing the sentence in question. Without the relativization, of course, we get no definite set of sentences, since a given sentence, syntactically identified, will have different implications in different theories. Indeed, this point helps to account for the lack of clarity in traditional notions of meaning linked to the analytic-synthetic distinction. For, under the optics of the analytic-synthetic distinction, sameness of meaning was taken to be intertheoretic, or better put, supra-theoretic. Sentences have no meaning to call their own only if considered supra-theoretically.

Language is inseparable from theory, on this view, in that interpretations of expressions of a language are always given relative to a theory in the object-language. This is a lesson to be drawn from the standard semantics of logical theory, and surely the best hope for a theory of meaning must be in forsaking the traditional connections between meaning, analyticity and necessary truth: pursuing empirical semantics within the Tarskian theory of referential notions. One clarifies the claim that language is inseparable from theory by claiming that *interpreted* language is inseparable from theory. Expressions of the same language, syntactically identified, can of course appear in different theories with (slightly or greatly) different interpretations. But what is meant by 'language' when we talk of choice of language is so strongly linked to semantics that choice of interpretation

involves choice of language in this sense.

On this view, supposed analytic truths are certainly not autonomous in the sense of having meaning independent of theoretical context. Rather, the question of what follows, even from a logical truth, is tied up with what other sentences are available as axioms. Otherwise, it would make no sense at all to suggest simplification of theory, as in quantum mechanics, by means of a change of logic. Since choice of interpreted language depends upon choice of theory, free choice of language, in any semantically relevant sense, appears to be limited by our free choice of theory.

Regarding the autonomy of meaning of observation occasion sentences, one can agree with Gochet that this does not really conflict with an unrestricted holism. The meanings of observation sentences, considered as unstructured wholes, are just their stimulus meanings. Stimulus meanings, or something quite similar, need to be considered in empirical semantics certainly, but such are primarily of interest as a means of arriving at an account of the further interpretation which a native community puts upon observation sentences and sentences generally. The autonomy attributed to observation-occasion sentences, at the level of stimulus meaning, is consistent with the inseparability of language and theory, if we are willing to countenance one-sentence theories and indeed to extend the term 'sentence' to such unstructured wholes. The "free choice" of language involved at this level seems not to be a matter of deep semantic concern, since semantic theory will consider observation sentences primarily with an eye to interpreting and eliciting an overall language-theory (or idealization of a belief-system) and observation sentences enter into this only having sacrificed their once pristine autonomy. Surely, it is clear that we do not even understand the observational part of a language if we have only determined the stimulus meanings of available observation-occasion sentences. On that basis alone, we could not even distinguish 'It's raining' from 'Liquid H₂O is precipitating from the atmosphere.' Yet, whether a given culture contains enough chemistry to justify our use of a term such as 'H₂O' in translation is surely not a matter to which there is no fact.

Two topics Gochet takes up at the end of his discussion of language and theory could profitably be treated together from the present perspective. First is Chomsky's complaint against Quine that inseparability of language and theory appears to imply that "two monolingual speakers of the same language cannot disagree on questions of belief." (p. 36) The second is the much discussed problem of theory incommensurability arising out of Kuhn and Feyerabend. Both problems stem from resting with an intuitive but unworkable notion of 'same language,' or more specifically, in Chomsky's case, from taking the syntactically characterized language as the object of semantic investigation. Strictly, if two speakers differ in beliefs, then their language-theories differ. Their words must differ in interpretation however slightly. This is a simple implication of taking seriously Quine's challenge to provide identity conditions for meanings. But, two points can be made in reply to Chomsky's worry. First of all, not all difference in belief is equally of interest from a semantic point of view. The pragmatics of empirical research strongly suggest concentrating upon beliefs massively prevalent in important linguistic communities. There is nothing which forces investigators to give exhaustive attention to belief-systems which differ only in minor details. Rather, one may concentrate on large areas where speakers agree, including certainly sentences which one might be tempted to classify as analytic. Secondly, if semantic theories for idiolects (semantic dialects of individual speakers) show that different speakers attach distinct meanings to the same expression, it by no means follows that we cannot see them as disagreeing. Our judgments concerning when we have genuine disagreement need not be limited by the meanings speakers attach to their expressions. Meaning can be thought of as a matter of the purported reference of expressions as seen from within a particular language-theory, but where purported reference differs, we need not on that ground alone rule that reference differs. We can and do make convincing determinations that

expressions belonging to different theories (even with clearly different meanings) have the same reference. So, if Jones says that France is bigger than Sweden and Smith says Sweden is bigger than France, there is clearly a disagreement. This might be taken as grounds to hold that the reference of Jones' expression 'France' is different from that of Smith's expression 'France,' but we are not forced to this conclusion in the least. Rather, given substantial agreement on what they elsewhere say about the two countries, there is sufficient grounds to hold that they do indeed disagree.

Much the same point holds regarding the problem of incommensurability. For example, Einstein and Newton can be supposed to disagree even about the definition of a word such as 'energy' because of a very substantial continuity in the physical laws making use of this term. This continuity underlies our confidence in claiming a continuity of reference through a shift in definition. Nor should we resist talk of a change of meaning in such cases, for fear it will turn out that Einstein did not reject what Newton asserted. Again, it is primarily our judgments concerning continuity of reference which are important when it comes to judging of relevance. Thus, I will insist, contrary to Hesse (Cited in Gochet, p.38) that changes in interpreted theory do coincide with changes in meaning (much as they coincide with changes of usage) with thanks to Gochet for raising this question.

Finally, the evaluation of Quine on inseparability of language and theory turns out to be a larger question. It is not clear that Quine always insists upon such inseparability so that every change in theory will become a change in meaning.