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BOOK REVIEWS

Quine. By Peter Hylton. (London: Routledge, 2007. Pp. x + 405. Price £50.00.)

The latest volume of the *Arguments of the Philosophers* series is on Quine. The author is a leading Russell and Quine scholar, and this particular book has been keenly anticipated over the last few years. Hylton's earlier book on Russell, *Russell, Idealism, and the Emergence of Analytic Philosophy*, is widely acknowledged as one of the best currently available, so it is natural to expect high-quality material in this case too. Readers will not be disappointed. But there is an important difference: whereas the book on Russell contains analysis and historical reconstruction, this one offers 'a unified, sympathetic, and comprehensive treatment' (p. 1) of Quine's philosophy. The first half dwells mostly on Quine's epistemology (chs 4–7), whereas the second half is mostly on metaphysics, or the 'the structure of reality' (chs 9–13). There are three introductory chapters, the first an overview of Quine's naturalism, the second on his historical background, and the third on the analytic–synthetic distinction. There is also ch. 8, on indeterminacy of translation, and a concluding section.

The book as a whole covers nearly all of Quine's work; the only major topic left out is his more technical contributions to logic. It is elegantly written and presents his philosophy in terms that are favourable and reasonable; Hylton renders Quine's arguments as cogent as possible, and in this regard it is hard to find another book quite like this one. But apart from these matters of style and intent, the book also stands out in more substantive ways. I shall briefly comment on three topics on which Hylton is particularly incisive and differs most from other authors.

1. Quine is often portrayed as a negative thinker whose main purpose is to destroy traditional doctrines, especially those associated with meaning, modalities and analyticity. Against that kind of approach, Hylton construes him as a systematic philosopher whose approach to traditional notions can only be properly understood within the context of his positive philosophical project. Quine's philosophy, according to Hylton, contains two main strands, 'epistemic' and 'metaphysical'. Both are set out by Quine's naturalism, 'the recognition that it is within science itself, and not in some prior philosophy, that reality is to be identified and described' (*Theories and Things*, p. 21).

Quine's epistemology is an attempt to explain how we have come to acquire the sophisticated theories of the world which we now have. Hylton calls this a 'genetic project'. As with anything else in Quine's philosophy, this project is to be carried out within natural science: it is natural science (broadly construed) investigating its own origins. Because the project is undertaken at a very high level of abstraction and

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generality, it is called 'philosophical', and that is all there is to the distinction between science and philosophy, on this view.

Quine's metaphysics is an attempt at 'limning the true and ultimate structure of reality' (*Word and Object*, p. 221). Again this is to be carried out from within the confines of our current best theories of the world, or natural science broadly speaking. According to Hylton, this is a project of systematization and clarification, hence the goal of finding the simplest and clearest framework (or 'canonical notation') for science. As in the case of the genetic project, the philosophical nature of Quine's contributions here lie not in any peculiarity of method or goal, but in their high level of systematicness, abstraction and generality.

That Quine's philosophy is to be conceived as having a metaphysical strand alongside its epistemology is something of a novelty in the literature. Hylton himself calls attention to this, by contrasting his reading with that of another important author (Roger Gibson Jr) who construes Quine's philosophy as centred predominantly on epistemology (Hylton, p. 370, n. 3). Certainly this is not metaphysics of the traditional kind, but rather 'metaphysics naturalized' (p. 367).

2. In a paper published 25 years before this book, Hylton argued that Quine's qualms about the analytic–synthetic distinction should be set apart from his indeterminacy of translation arguments. This claim, new at the time, is restated in the book. Discussion of the two topics is spaced four chapters apart (chs 3 and 8). This purports to show that they can be treated independently. Hylton's view in this regard is not shared by some other authors, e.g., Gary Ebbs, *Rule-Following and Reason*. Indeterminacy of translation is often thought to affect nearly all of Quine's philosophy. Hylton argues that it 'is of relatively little significance': 'If translation were determinate then we could use that fact to define a notion of synonymy, and hence of meaning. But *that* kind of notion of meaning would play neither of the roles which have chiefly led philosophers to invoke the term "meaning". It would not explain language-acquisition or language-mastery. It would not underpin a notion of truth by meaning which would play a fundamental epistemological role' (p. 230).

3. Hylton also stresses that there is no argument in Quine *against* the analytic–synthetic distinction. This is a point often misread. Quine himself traces the distinction in *Roots of Reference* (pp. 78–80) and elsewhere. His criticisms have to do not with the distinction, but with the use Carnap and others tried to make of it. What Quine rejects is the idea of a set of epistemologically privileged sentences that are not justified empirically. Even if one grants that there are sentences true in virtue of meaning (analytic), their truth-values still hinge on how the world is, and in this sense they are not epistemologically privileged. Ultimately their justification is empirical, like that of any other any sentence. This is because the way we use each word (what it means) is tied to the overall theory of the world we happen to have. That whales are mammals and not fish is not just a matter of meaning, but an empirical fact about the world. That energy and matter can be inter-defined is an empirical claim of the theory of relativity, and not just a terminological stipulation. The main support of Quine's view is holism, the thesis that sentences are not in general justified one at a time, but as a 'corporate body' (large sets of sentences at a time). This is a thesis which Quine takes to be trivial and obvious (see *Pursuit of Truth*,

p. 16), but it has deep consequences. Because sentences are in general justified collectively, any reason one might have for accepting an individual sentence must depend on whatever reasons one has for accepting the portions of the theory to which it belongs. This is true even of analytic sentences: a choice of vocabulary (a taxonomy) is part of what contributes to the empirical success of a theory as a whole.

Michael Friedman, in his *Dynamics of Reason*, has put forward a neo-Carnapian view in which some sentences are *constitutive* of the meanings of others. He argues that scientific practice is more structured than Quine suggests: different sentences play different roles. But on Hylton's reading, Quine's account is set at a higher level of generality and abstraction than Friedman's, and does not deny any structuring of the sentences within a theory. The point is merely that all sentences, including Friedman's constitutive sentences, are subject to empirical justification in so far as the overall theory of which they are part is subject to confirmation by observations.

I shall finish with something that might be considered a drawback to the book. While providing a detailed and sympathetic treatment of Quine's philosophy, the author has chosen to avoid nearly all comparisons with other philosophies. The concluding chapter does have a short but very interesting discussion of three ways in which Quine's philosophy may be found wanting (pp. 365–9). But the discussion is abstract and does not engage directly with others. This is a trait that runs through most of the book: the actual historical debates in which Quine figured so prominently are mostly left out. There is also not much on Quine's general influence on contemporary philosophy, or what his legacy might be. In other words, this is an insider's account of the arguments; reckoning how they fare in relation to others was not the author's goal. The main achievement of the book is to show how forceful and compelling Quine's philosophy can be when it is understood systematically.

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