W.V. Quine, *Pursuit of Truth*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1990, 113p.

In the preface, Quine writes that his aim was *to update, sum up, and clarify (his)- variously intersecting views on cognitive meaning, objective reference, and the grounds of knowledge* (vii). What the reader has to expect is nothing more than a curbed exposition off things already belabored in Quine's other books (ibidem). Stated differently, *nil novi sub sole.*

Pursuit of Truth counts a hundred pages, more or less equally divided in five chapters, respectively titled: evidence, reference, meaning, intension and truth. The concept of this book is a cumulative one, although an encyclopaedic use remains possible. The text consists of forty-three paragraphs, with almost the dame length and very accurately titled. But less convenient and most annoying are Quine's frequent cross-references, in particular those of the 'forward'-kind.

Not amazingly, Quine emphasizes the fact that there are two worlds, namely reality as it is and reality as man perceives it. Ultimately, the author of *Pursuit of Truth*, states *that there are various defensible ways of conceiving the world* (102). So in view of his first corroboration, there are more *worlds* possible, though not from a modal-logical point of view. The main question is: what links these two world, the stimulating and the stimulated one(s), together? How does science work? What yields *the evidential support of science? How is our knowledge of the external world possible* (18)?

Quine clings to the sentential view. *Theory of sentences, and logic connects sentences to sentences*(2). So whatever connects the stimulated world to the stimulating one, scientifically speaking, has to do with language. The link between languages and the so-called real world, is named an observation sentence (implying a logical necessity): *the means of verbalizing the prediction that checks a theory* (4). According to Quine it's very advantageous to begin with sentences rather than with terms. In summing up the resulting boons, Quine shows his momentary interest doesn't differ much from his old one: the burden of the ontological commitment. Nor does his view of scientific progress reveal any new insight: a hypothesis may be true and become part of a theory *after* a proper experiment has confirmed it. In addition, there's no conclusive verification, but only refutation. Quine finds it however necessary to stress explicitly the fact he's supporting Popper's view.

Regarding the scientific progress, his proposals become purely metaphysical. Three maxims are postulated: a researcher heeds a minimum mutilation of the theory when questioned, pursues simplicity of the resulting theory, strives to maximize future success in prediction. Unfortunately, no recipe is given. Quine definitely adheres to holism and reaffirms his five virtues to seek in hypotheses: conservatism, generality, simplicity, refutability, and modesty, first listed in *The Web of Belief* (Quine W.V. and J.S. Ullian, New York: Random House, 1970, Rev. ed. 1978).

Properly speaking, the whole is a discourse about reification: bodies 'materialize' when a focal observation categorical is uttered. In other words, commit yourself to an ontology. To be is to be the value of variable. Quine repeats himself, clarifies but accepts relevant criticism: he does *recognize that the question of ontological commitment is parochial, though within a much broader parish than that of the speakers and writers of symbolic logic* (28).

Quine shudders at the very thought of modal predicate logic: he would rather have to posit abstract objects than to choose for the alternative course, involving modal operators. But positing objects isn't so horrible at all. According to Quine, reference and ontology recede to the status of *mere auxiliaries* (sic. 31). True observational and theoretical sentences are *the alpha and omega of the scientific enterprise* (ibidem). Ontology becomes obviously completely redundant, when Quine introduces the so called *proxy functions* (concerning the reinterpretation of sentences regarding to objects). Two ontologies could be interchangeable with no empirical ground to differentiate between them.

The tenet that *we learn short -sentences as wholes* suggests the thesis of *indeterminacy of translation* (37). It's Quine conviction that in linguistics one has to be a behaviourist: *we depend strictly on overt behaviour in observable situations* (38). When making a manual of translation, a linguist can rely only on observational sentences, bearing in mind that the obvious linkage to a situation isn't necessary at all and hasn't be unique. How then to lay down the meaning of a sentence? Stimulation can't be rigorously intersubjective: it would assume an approximate homology of nerve endings from one individual to another to be even similar - a fairly exaggerated opinion. One could say that the stimulation itself belongs to the environment (Donald Davidson, conference at Stanford, 1986). But Quine asserts that stimulation has to be located at the neural input and nowhere else, just for epistemological reasons. It's even possible to do

without intersubjective likeness of stimulation, because according to Quine empathy governs the learning of language: *we all have an uncanny knack for empathizing another's perceptual situation, however ignorant of the physiological or optical mechanism of his perception* (42). At the level of a language, intersubjectivity comes into play. Making a translation manual is a sort of practical psychology, based on behaviourism. The indeterminacy of translation stands, although it is unlikely to obtrude in practice, even in radical translation, for the first subject imposes his own ontology and linguistic patterns of the second wherever compatible with the latter's speech and other behaviour. Altogether, *the (radical) translator is bound to impose about as much as he discovers* (49). Amazingly, the indeterminacy seems to be merely a syntactical matter (50).

In the last chapter, Quine proposes a rather important hypothesis concerning truth, the main theme of his book: *truth is disquotation* (80). The point is that a proposition is called true if, once stripped of quotation marks, it stands, 'p' is true, iff p. *The truth predicate is an intermediary between words and the world (...) What is true is the sentence, but its truth consists in the world's being as the sentence says* (80–81). It is obvious that this account particularly holds for eternal sentences. Further restrictions are still needed, for otherwise paradoxes will occur. As regards open sentences, Tarski's two-place predicate of satisfaction is invoked: *an assignment of objects to variables satisfies a sentence if the sentence is true for those values of its free variables* (85). All relevant paradoxes are then skirted. The definition of the word 'satisfies' is inductive and safeguards against Grelling's Heterological Paradox, whereto a direct definition would lead. The satisfaction predicate is 'defined' by recursion and can't be eliminated. Set theory can provide merely a *quasi*direct definition by means of hierarchies.

Quine enumerates some seemingly deviant notions about truth. One is that a prediction is neither true nor false until events have occured that causally determine it. The author doesn't state explicitly the paralellism with Michael Dummett's rough idea that a sentence of natural science is neither true nor false if no procedure is known for making a strong empirical case for its truth or falsity. He just opposes it to the holistic view *that makes it doubtful what sentences should be retained (...) as eligible for truth or falsity* (94). Observational categoricals are clear candidates for retention, as Quine puts it. But what about mathematical expressions which never make it to get applied in natural science? Considerations of simplicity, economy and naturalness come to the rescue. *It is a matter of tightening*

and streamlining our global system of the world (95).

Naturalized epistemology is what Quine pursues: he dissociates himself form the Cartesian dream of a foundation of scientific certainty, more firm than scientific method itself. His device is that of traditional epistemology: *nihil in mente quod non prius in sensu*. A normative point, so he stresses, *warning us against telepaths and soothsayers* (19). Nonetheless, Quine sees science as an Wittgensteinian game, with prediction as a particularity. And although he just had a cut at them, he would describe telepathy and clairvoyance as *scientific options* (sic, 21): include them, and science would still be science. Evidently, multiple scientific theories, jointly true, will be brought into consideration. Seeing that a theory is just like a translation manual, several theories can be incompatible but still consistent and relevant, in brief: empirically equivalent. They are different ways of expressing one and the same theory. It is thus possible *that a theory can vary its ontology* (96). Not in the least astonishing. A conclusion easily generalized to the book as a whole.

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