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RESEARCH ARTICLE

On Two Underappreciated Motifs of Quine's Naturalism; Or, Quine on Reality and Naturalistic Philosophy

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Abstract: This essay deals with two often underappreciated Quinean naturalistic motifs. The first motif concerns the metaphysical status of reality under naturalism, by examining what can be viewed as Quine's attempt to dissolve realism and idealism into each other; the second motif concerns the metaphilosophical dimension of naturalized epistemology. I aim to demonstrate that Quine's way of approaching these two motifs turns out to be not only complementary, but also highly indicative of his overall naturalistic outlooks as well as professional preferences. As a result, this essay re-assesses Quine's influence on the development of naturalism and naturalistically conceived philosophy from the second half of the 20th century onwards.

Keywords: Quine; realism; naturalism; naturalized epistemology; naturalistic philosophy.

Introduction

Naturalism is nowadays without a doubt understood in many different ways (see, e.g., Bryant 2020; Rosenberg 1996; cf., Danto 1967). Part of the

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reason for this may be the fact that the subscription to at least a very broad naturalism is a standard for present-day philosophers. As David Papineau pointedly states: "For better or worse, 'naturalism' is widely viewed as a positive term in philosophical circles – only a minority of philosophers nowadays are happy to announce themselves as 'non-naturalists,'" (Papineau 2021). So, in recent years, we have witnessed several instructive attempts to (re)define naturalism anew (I choose Price 2011 and De Caro & Macarthur 2004). Many of these attempts go, whether directly or indirectly, in the footspets of the two well-known naturalists writing in the second half of the 20th century, W. V. O. Quine and Wilfrid Sellars (see, e.g., Peregrin 2023; Roth 2020). The aim of this essay is to contribute to contemporary debates about naturalism by dealing with two often underappreciated motifs of Quine's naturalism.

In the first part of the essay, I focus on the first motif which concerns the metaphysical status of "reality" under naturalism, by examining what can be viewed as Quine's attempt to dissolve realism and idealism into each other. In the second part, I move on to parse the second motif which concerns the meta-philosophical dimension of naturalized epistemology.

Moreover, as will gradually become evident, I present Quine's naturalistic legacy in a manner that makes Quine much more complementary to thinkers such as John Dewey, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Wilfrid Sellars, Stephen Jay Gould, or Richard Rorty than usually acknowledged in print. Put another way, although there are certainly many differences between Quine and the thinkers just mentioned, the similarities highlighted in this essay, however local they might seem, challenge the widespread view that these thinkers radically broke away from Quine's very own naturalistic framework.

1. Dissolving Realism and Idealism into Each Other

> *Natural selection the great solvent. Dissolved final cause into efficient cause. Dissolves realism and idealism into each other. Dissolves disparateness of neural input into a like output. Kinds are projected for terms, and terms are vague, applying in degrees.*

> *Relative similarity is what is objective; not natural kinds. Biological species are atypically clean-cut. Similarity is projected on the world from our associations.*
>
> –W. V. O. Quine[1]

1.1 A Realist Quine

A lot has been written on Quine and real*ism* and no wonder (see, e.g., Jaksland 2024; Pils 2020; Keskinen 2012; Dreben 1992; Rorty 1976).[2] Let me start right in the middle and introduce the basics of Quine's position on this matter. Quine's naturalistic, intra-theoretic position holds that the "objects" laymen as well as scientists talk about (e.g., atoms, genes, stones, bodies, and numbers) are to be regarded as linguistic posits. Qua posits, objects of our discourse are then seen as conceptual tools we develop and utilize to accommodate and make sense of our experiences (of our causal interactions with the world). Then, for both laymen as well as scientists, any idea of "reality" must be worked out in a theory-internal way.

We inherit and invent concepts and theories about the world which commit us to a certain ontology; they commit us to positing certain kinds of objects. For us humans, the existence of specific objects with their specific characteristics is thus always theory-dependent. To ask what objects

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[1] (Quine 2008, 179–80)

[2] I purposely refrain from providing the reader with a concrete delimitation of realism and anti-realism here to effectively highlight the fact that Quine's own position is quite idiosyncratic. A very minimalistic delimitation should do; *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* instructively states: "[Realism and anti-realism are] primarily directions, not positions. To assert that something is somehow mind-independent is to move in the realist direction; to deny it is to move in the opposite direction. No sane position is reached at either extreme. Not everything is in every way independent of minds; if there were no minds, there would be no pain. Not everything depends in every way on minds; if I forget that Halley's comet exists, it does not cease to exist. Many philosophical questions have the general form: Is such-and-such mind-independent in so-and-so way? Given specifications of such-and-such and so-and-so, one may call someone who answers 'Yes' a realist. Since different philosophers take different specifications for granted, the word 'realism' is used in a bewildering variety of senses…" (Honderich 1995, 746–47).

there are independently of any concepts and theories is hopeless, according to Quine. Without theories there are no things-in-themselves, but only blooming, buzzing confusion (Quine 1995a, 225). Also, due to Quine's well-known commitment to holism, the identity conditions for particular objects are dependent on a bundle of theories taken as a whole; they depend on *science as a whole*. Quine often also speaks of our "web of belief" or "total theory of the world" (Quine 1961a; 1961b; cf., Quine & Ullian 1978 and Quine 1987, 108ff). Note that this all applies to "physical objects" as well. In this sense, physical objects are also science-dependent:

> Physical objects are conceptually imported into the situation as convenient intermediaries – *not by definition in terms of experience*, but simply as irreducible posits comparable, epistemologically, to the gods of Homer. Let me interject that for my part I do, qua lay physicist, believe in physical objects and not in Homer's gods; and I consider it a scientific error to believe otherwise. *But in point of epistemological footing the physical objects and the gods differ only in degree and not in kind. Both sorts of entities enter our conception only as cultural posits.* The myth of physical objects is epistemologically superior to most in that it has proved more efficacious than other myths as a device for working a manageable structure into the flux of experience.…
> Total science, mathematical and natural and human, is…extremely underdetermined by experience. *The edge of the system must be kept squared with experience; the rest, with all its elaborate myths or fictions, has as its objective the simplicity of laws.* (Quine 1961a, 44, 45, emphasis mine)

For many thinkers, these postulations have anti-realist or even idealist undertones. Nevertheless, Quine still wants to be an empiricist; he holds that for an experience to be *evidence of/for* something there must be some inter-subjective, observable/behavioral criteria at work. So, the objects, to whose existence we are committed, are in fact dependent not only on our theories but also on "the world" (given causal contexts) (see Quine 1969a; 1992, 5ff; cf., 1987, 159–161). Quine of course never denies this, ipso facto, he never denies that *the world exists independently of us*. The only difficulty here is that, according to him, our human knowledge of this world is co-determined

by our conceptual choices and the facts of the matter at the same time, with no unambiguous way of separating these two elements. This is a result of dismantling the fundamental distinction between analytic and synthetic beliefs/truths (cf., Roth 2020, 115, 169, note 2; and Danto 1967).

One of the early commentators dealing with Quine's holistic view of language and scientific knowledge, Albert Hofstadter, who moreover pointedly labels Quine's position as "holistic pragmatism," contemplates that, in Quine's theoretical system, there is no room for a philosophically significant distinction between scientific invention and discovery. And although Hofstadter in the end to a large degree diverges from Quine on this point, he instructively summarizes Quine's outlook as follows:

> The consequence for the invention-discovery distinction is that while science depends upon both human and non-human factors, one can not distinguish the two factors within science.…Both operate *in* a kind of functional relation to each other and *on* the whole of the language of knowledge. There are no empirical tests or conventional decisions regarding statements individually. Every test and every decision reverberates through the whole, affects and is affected by the whole, so that in every empirical test the whole of our knowledge is tested and in every decision the whole fabric is decided on. *Or perhaps better, the distinction between test and decision also breaks down*" (Hofstadter 1954, 401; cf., 412ff).

One could say for now that, for Quine, our world, the world we live and theorize in, is both invented and discovered; made and found.

However, especially due to Quine's insistence on the observable/behavioral notion of evidence, is not Quine then committed to a position taking, e.g., observable "items" (however holistically conceived) as in some sense primary, or even as the ones that are *really real*? The answer to this question is negative, as Quine explicitly subscribes to a view that all objects are theoretical objects. If there is a difference between positing the existence of moles and molecules, it is a difference in degree and not in kind (e.g., Quine 1961c, 18; Quine 1969a, 87). Again, without our sentences (or generally conceptual frameworks), there would not be any objects or facts for us to talk about (see, e.g., Quine 1981a, 20). But, interestingly enough, this does

not discourage Quine from declaring, in the next breath, that he endorses "robust realism," i.e., "unswerving belief in external things – people, nerve endings, sticks, stones." And then continues by stating: "I believe also, if less firmly, in atoms and electrons and in classes," (Quine 1981b, 21). But the belief in physical objects is firmer, among other things, only insofar as the words for them are acquired ontogenetically *earlier* than for abstract objects when one acquires a first language, so physical objects are "more deeply rooted in our formative past." In this particular regard, the vocabulary of physical objects is considered primitive, as it is directly tied to our interactions with the causal realm (Quine 2013, 215).

1.2 Naturalistic Reconfiguration of "Reality"

With respect to the traditional disputes about the philosophical forms of realism and anti-realism, Quine finds himself in an outlandish situation insomuch as he prima facie saves the most fundamental beliefs of both of these isms; Quine does not deny that the world itself (the causal realm) exists independently of us, and simultaneously, grants us significant creative freedom in imposing our conceptual frameworks on this world.

Nonetheless, insomuch as Quine is resolute in denying the theory-*independent* existence of objects for us human cognizers and agents, I contend that he is much closer to anti-realism than to realism, at least to any naïve forms of realism; for Quine, the identity conditions and/or truth values for categorizing and describing objects are theory-*dependent*. Also, I think that the vast majority of realists would want to hear more, for example, that the world possesses its own unifying and/or knowable structure as well as rules/principles. In other words: its own integrity (cf., Wright 1993).

I thus want to proceed by defending Quine, even if somewhat indirectly, against the accusation that his holism forces him to embrace a form of idealism. Hofstadter, for example, adverts Quine's "holistic pragmatism" as "an empiricist equivalent of the Idealistic Absolute" (Hofstadter 1954: 416). Doing this will, I hope, help to establish what kind of anti-realist Quine actually is. Because indeed, according to Quine, the *reality* we recognize and live in is co-created by us, because "all ascriptions of *reality* must come…from within one's theory of the world; it is incoherent otherwise," (Quine 1981a, 21). Quine a bit later sums up his views in this way:

> *The objectivity of our knowledge of the external world remains rooted in our contact with the external world, hence in our neural intake and the observation sentences that respond to it.* We begin with the monolithic sentence, not the term. A lesson of proxy functions is that our ontology, like grammar, is part of our own conceptual contribution to our theory of the world. *Man proposes; the world disposes*, but only by holophrastic yes-or-no verdicts on the observation sentences that embody man's predictions (Quine 1992, 36, emphasis mine).

It is obvious, and fully comprehensible from a naturalistic vantage point, that Quine's "solution" (I use quotation marks, as Quine himself never addresses this issue directly) to the problem of "reality" is motivated by understanding our human position in the world; *our human epistemic condition*. We are always *in* the world and all our beliefs about this world are always determined by our cognitive faculties and vocabularies interacting with the world. After all, that is what our current science (numerous branches of biology and anthropology) tells us. We are animals/beings sharing the world with other animals/beings. We "antecedently acknowledge" the external world in everything we do, hence also when inquiring into and describing the world (Quine 1992, 19).

One must always take into account that Quine thought of himself as a Darwinian (see, e.g., Quine 1996). However, in this particular regard, Quine is also very close to the pragmatism/naturalism of John Dewey who, inter alia, forcefully advanced an anti-representational view of our knowledge of the world (cf., Quine 1969d, 27ff). Dewey was convinced that many thinkers, and philosophers especially (see Dewey 1911), make a pragmatically impotent and theoretically unnecessary question from the relationship between our cognition and the world. Louis Menand fruitfully summarizes Dewey on this point as follows:

> The pragmatist response to this question is to point out that nobody has ever made a problem about the relation between, for example, the hand and the world. The function of the hand is to help the organism cope with the environment; in situations in which a hand doesn't work, we try something else, such as a foot,

> or a fishhook, or an editorial.…*Dewey thought that ideas and beliefs are the same as hands: instruments for coping. An idea has no greater metaphysical stature than, say, a fork.*…Dewey's point was that "mind" and "reality," like "stimulus" and "response," name nonexistent entities: they are abstractions from a single, indivisible process. It therefore makes as little sense to talk about a "split" that needs to be overcome between the mind and the world as it does to talk about a "split" between the hand and the environment, or the fork and the soup (Menand 2002, 360–361, emphasis mine).

This is a broadly naturalistic approach, since it openly draws on the Darwinian insight that we are ultimately organisms *coping* with our environments, and not necessarily *copying* its metaphysical structures (cf., Rorty 2021; 1998). With this starting point, it is very hard to conceive an argument claiming that we might not be in touch with the (external/real) world. The only possibility seems to be claiming that we are not in touch with the world *as it is in itself*. But I do not think that there actually is a conclusive counter-argument to this Kantian move, i.e., an argument that makes a pragmatic difference to our everyday life and/or various forms of theorizing. It will always be possible to insist on the possibility that there is a "really real" world we cannot reach for some reason or other.

In view of this, I argue that one cannot satisfactorily answer the question "what is the metaphysical status of reality in Quine's theoretical system?," unless one takes seriously his naturalistic viewpoints. That is to say, our relationship to the world is, in principle, empirically explainable, meaning causally and/or historically (genealogically). In contemporary idiom, one could say that the inquiries into our phylogeny, ontogeny, and cultural history offer the most fundamental understanding of the human condition in the world.[3]

[3] However, this is not to say that these inquiries produce some "objectively" fundamental starting points. They are obviously also scientific theories. In other words, e.g., while developing specific evolutionary explanations, scientists make many conceptual choices and commitments, at minimum with respect to "science" and "evolution." Also, as the survey study of Tuomisto et al. (2018) tentatively shows, the inquiry into the origin of exclusively human traits across the scientific fields such

Just like Darwin, Quine does not strive to identify an essence of human beings/cognizers; his strategy is ethological and ecological; he is interested in behavioral patterns and principles typical for us as a biological and social species, which are the result of our modus vivendi (of our living conditions). This directly implies that we, as humans, always approach the world *from within our theories about it*. There is neither a profound nor fundamental level of the world. We cannot go beyond a posited world to understand *who we are* and *what world* we actually inhabit. This is a conceptual leap most of the naïve realists will simply not accept.[4] This leap, moreover, undermines any philosophical, and I would also say any pragmatic, substance of the distinction between *the world in itself* and the *world for us*.

For Quine himself, the most valuable naturalistic insight into "the nature" of the world comes from the study of our acquisition of first language and of our language use in general, since any genuine observation is a linguistic matter (it presupposes inductive agreement on our basic categories). Inter alia for this reason, our common sense, science, and rationality itself comprise one cognitive and epistemic continuum. As is well known, Quine

as paleoanthropology, paleontology, ecology, evolution, and human biology is very diverse, meaning that it is possible to identify popular hypotheses, but there is no universal consensus. Joseph Heath and Catherin Rioux in the same vein reflect on the current state of affairs in evolutionary ethics and write: *A common mistake made by philosophers working under the banner of "evolutionary ethics" has been to suppose that the evolutionary science on this question is settled* – that we have an answer to the question, not just how human morality is possible, but even how it evolved. *If this were correct, then the only task remaining for the philosopher would be to draw out the normative implications of this body of science. Unfortunately, there is no such scientific consensus. Indeed, the evolution of human ultrasociality – whether it be altruistic or cooperative – is one of the most important unanswered questions in the life sciences*," (Heath and Rioux 2018, 1–2, emphasis mine). Of course, it is also necessary to ask whether the consensus on these matters is possible/desirable, but I leave aside that here.

[4] See, for example, the recent attempt to endorse naïve realism by Mitrović (2022). Typically, as treated again in *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, naïve realism amounts to "a theory […] that holds that our ordinary perception of physical objects is direct, unmediated by awareness of subjective entities, and that, in normal perceptual conditions, these objects have the properties they appear to have…," (Honderich 1995, 602).

is not interested in any ahistorical demarcation criterion of science (see especially Quine 1995a; 1957).

That is the proper context for understanding Quine's much-quoted passages on ontology from his notorious essay "On What There Is." Consider now these samples:

> *To be assumed as an entity is, purely and simply, to be reckoned as the value of a variable.* In terms of the categories of traditional grammar, this amounts roughly to saying that *to be is to be in the range of reference of a pronoun.* Pronouns are the basic media of reference; nouns might better have been named propronouns (Quine 1961c, 13, emphasis mine).

> We can very easily involve ourselves in ontological commitments by saying, for example, that *there is something* (bound variable) which red houses and sunsets have in common; or that *there is something* which is a prime number larger than a million. But, this is, essentially, the *only* way we can involve ourselves in ontological commitments: by our use of bound variables (ibid., 12).

> Viewed from within the phenomenalistic conceptual scheme, the ontologies of physical objects and mathematical objects are myths. *The quality of myth, however, is relative; relative, in this case, to the epistemological point of view. This point of view is one among various, corresponding to one among our various interests and purposes* (ibid., 19).

However, it is easy to underestimate, or just forget, that Quine's theoretical interests and interpretations are constantly driven by pragmatic hence primarily epistemic concerns. Ontology follows epistemology, not vice versa. Or, as one of the two epigraphs for *Word and Object* (2013) has it; "ontology recapitulates philology."[5] Quine memorably opens his essay "Ontological Relativity" by this announcement: "With Dewey I hold that knowledge, mind, and meaning are part of the same world that they have to do with, and that they are to be studied in the same empirical spirit that animates natural science" (Quine 1969d, 26). This announcement, however, can be read in several ways, each of which is relative to a particular understanding

[5] The author of the epigraph is an American biologist James Grier Miller.

of the key concepts ("the world," "empirical," and "natural science") as well as to our interests and purposes. Put another way, although it is not obvious on first reading, or on contextless reading, it is a conceptually hence ontologically plastic announcement.

The ontological relativity, as Quine construes it, arises from the appreciation that

> there be no ultimate sense in which [the] universe can have been specified.… *Ontology is indeed doubly relative*. Specifying the universe of a theory makes sense only relative to some background theory, and only relative to some choice of a manual of translation of the one theory into the other.…We cannot know what something is without knowing how it is marked off from other things. *Identity is thus of a piece with ontology*," sums up Quine (1969c, 50, 54–55, emphasis mine).

Also, nothing prevents us in these settings from utilizing the Wittgensteinian conception of "language games," as Quine himself has done occasionally since the 1990s (see, e.g., Quine 1992, 20).

Now, to rebut the reading of Quine as being an idealist of a solipsistic kind, one must ask how the causal realm (the world) constrains our linguistic practices of posit*ing* objects. One also must agree with Davidson that: "It is reasonable to call something a posit if it can be contrasted with something that is not. [For Quine] the something that is not is sensory experience – at least that is the idea," (Davidson 1973–1974, 16). But since Quine denies that there is a possibility to unambiguously detect the empirical content of individual fact-stating terms and sentences, one must reformulate the question.

Let me try. For starters, it would be more useful to ask, "what makes some posited objects *better* than others and/or what makes them *genuinely scientific*?" (meaning simply what distinguishes them from our everyday/common-sense positing).

The straightforward (but only partial) answer would be, of course, that the answer to this question will always remain relative to our interests and purposes, but Quine in fact offers more than that. And, in this particular sense, Quine's dealing with the problem of positing is a special instance of (scientific) hypothesizing (cf., Quine 1995b, 49–50). Quine appreciated

very soon that abductive inferences, or what is sometimes called "the inference to the best explanation," is a very useful and in fact indispensable tool for our hypothesis making.

> Hypothesis, where successful, is a two-way street, extending back to explain the past and forward to predict the future. What we try to do in framing hypotheses is to explain some otherwise unexplained happenings by inventing a plausible story, a plausible description or history of relevant portions of the world

writes cogently Quine and Ullian (1978, 66). An instructive example at several levels is Quine's dealing with the concepts of "meaning" and "mental state" (believing, wishing, intending, etc.). Nowadays, it is hardly controversial that Quine refuses mind-body dualisms of Descartes' type and subscribes to "anomalous monism" (see Davidson 2002): "The point of anomalous monism is just that our mentalistic predicate imposes on bodily states and events a grouping that cannot be defined in the special vocabulary of physiology. Each of those individual states and events is physiologically describable, we presume, given all pertinent information," explains Quine (1995b, 88; cf., Quine 1992, 71ff).[6] However, *as a naturalist*, Quine cannot simply dogmatically start with this kind of physicalist ontology. Such an ontology must be a result of empirical/scientific considerations in order to be a naturalistic ontology.

So, the question here for us ultimately is: "why does Quine not think that meanings and mental states should be considered as (scientific) posits?" Roth offers a lucid summary of Quine's take on this matter in the form of an argument:

Pr. 1: For posits to have claim to reality, they must be justified as part of an explanatory theory within a naturalized epistemology.

[6] Quine is very consistent on this point, consider this telling passage of his: "Descartes' dualism between mind and body is called metaphysics, but it could as well be reckoned as science, however false. He even had a causal theory of the interaction of mind and body through the pineal gland. *If I saw indirect explanatory benefit in positing sensibilia, possibilia, spirits, a Creator, I would joyfully accord them scientific status too, on a par with such avowedly scientific posits as quarks and black holes*," (Quine 1995a, 252, emphasis mine).

Pr. 2: In order to be a justified part of an explanatory theory, the posits must either be necessary for (constitutive of) stimulations being evidence (as in quality spaces), or must provide an observable mark marking them as the things they are, i.e., there must be an objective basis for ascertaining that some behavior has been rightly or wrongly categorized a behavior of a certain type,

Pr. 3: But mental states and concepts have yet to be shown to be necessary for or even robustly explanatory of observed stabilities in behaviors; in addition, nothing marks a behavior as objectively categorized correctly or incorrectly,

C: Meanings and mental states have no claim to reality (because no claim to any genuine explanatory function). Whatever has no place in our best scientific scheme of explanations is not real. Whatever is not real does not belong to the realm of facts, i.e., constitute a fact of the matter. (Roth 2003, 275)

Premise number two has principal significance for understanding Quine's concept of posit. "Posits can be constitutive of the possibility of stimulations being evidence, or they can be kinds made objective by accepted theoretical explanations," (ibid.). The only objective, better said intersubjective, criteria for ascribing mental states to people are observable, i.e., physicalist/behavioral, criteria.[7] Note that this is merely an alternative way of acknowledging the "reality" of sensory experience, as Davidson alludes to in the quote above.

[7] "Quine charts what falls by the way in an advancing scientific picture of what there is. His view of epistemology as science self-applied, and his corresponding conclusion about the explanatory utility of meanings, has interesting parallels here to Kantian themes. *For at least one important link that connects a tradition that runs from Kant to Quine studies how human minds come to constitute a shared and mutually intelligible world. Kant, in this regard, assigns the inquiring mind a strongly constitutive role. But how concepts and percepts come together to form understanding remains an unsolved problem, a problem which finds its modern incarnation in questions of finding rules that guide behavior. Quine despairs of the task of using philosophical analysis to find such rules. He proposes, instead, to turn that job over to empirical psychology*" (ibid., 278, emphasis mine).

What we then actually do when speaking about mental states is *imposing mentalistic predicates on bodies*. Quine's argument is thus not reductionist, nor *primarily* ontological. It is a pragmatic and explanatory argument. So, according to Quine, to say that "ontology recapitulates philology" also means that *ontology recapitulates epistemology*.

To put it crudely, Quine argues that when explaining or interpreting human behavior, one does not need to assume "meanings" and "mental states" as ontologically distinct entities existing somewhere in the causal world (or in our heads, for example). However, he does not directly reject the idea that mentalistic or intentional vocabulary can sometimes serve as a satisfactory means for explaining and interpreting particular cases.

That is the key pragmatic difference here; to work with mental states (ascribing them to people) might be useful for interpreting human action, but positing a sui generis ontology of the mental does not, in itself, add to their explanatory force (unless, of course, positing an autonomous realm of the mental proves to be explanatorily beneficial, too). Recall that, Quine ultimately holds that all vocabularies function "merely" as conceptual tools for navigating our experiences of the world. This stance certainly differentiates Quine from other influential naturalists, e.g., from Wilfrid Sellars, when it comes to its ontological implications. However, how much difference this stance makes for our conception of empirical inquiry as such remains an open and often-discussed question (to learn more, one can start with Rosenberg 2007; Borradori 2008; and Roth 2023).

For the purposes of this chapter, the key point is that Quine's epistemology-first stance intricately aligns ontology with empirical and pragmatic concerns.

1.3 Fusing Idealism with Instrumentalism

At this point, another way of resuscitating the realist element of Quine's ontology reappears. Quine could be seen as a *scientific* realist. It could be argued that, because science is ultimately very successful technologically, it must provide us with at least some truths about the real nature of the world around us.

However, in Quine's intra-theoretic/intra-linguistic system, such a realism loses its metaphysical bite and is still only a form of instrumentalism,

meaning a *methodological* position emphasizing the usefulness of posits/concepts qua tools. Be that as it may, Quine is very far from admitting the meaningfulness of the Platonic assumption of seeing our theories as "carving nature at its joints." Strictly speaking, for Quine, one can only "know" (intelligibly state) that there is nature (independent causal realm); whether nature has *its own* joints cannot be known unambiguously. It is simply hard to imagine what it would mean to know that *in pragmatic terms*. And to proclaim our "best" scientific posits as really real is at least problematic, due to all kinds of semantic indeterminacies and evidential underdeterminations Quine famously introduces (cf., e.g., Quine 1975a, 302ff). If the history of science teaches us anything, it is the fact that from both synchronic and diachronic perspectives, there is more than one way of conceptually carving the world.

To summarize: according to Quine, our view of the world with its particular objects is always interwoven with our theoretical and other pragmatic choices.

> *To call a posit a posit is not to patronize it.…Everything to which we concede existence is a posit from the standpoint of a description of the theory-building process and simultaneously real from the standpoint of the theory that is being built. Nor let us look down on the standpoint of the theory as make-believe; for we can never do better than occupy the standpoint of some theory or other, the best we can muster at the time.* What reality is like is the business of scientists, in the broadest sense, painstakingly to surmise; and what there is, what is real, is part of that question. The question how we know what there is is simply part of the question…. *The last arbiter is so-called scientific method, however amorphous* (Quine 2013, 20–21, emphasis mine).

On my reading then, Quine performs a flight *from realism,* but it is not a flight *from reality* (hence nor *to any kind of idealism*). The metaphysical nature of our world and its objects are indeed "only" hypothesized; but the hypothesizing is our practical doing, it is hypothesizing via and against our interactions with the world/the causal contexts.

So, despite Davidson's intermittent suspicions, Quine would quite happily condone that:

> In giving up dependence on the concept of an uninterpreted reality, something outside all schemes and science, we do not relinquish the notion of objective truth – quite the contrary.…*In giving up the dualism of scheme and world, we do not give up the world, but re-establish unmediated touch with the familiar objects whose antics make our sentences and opinions true or false* (Davidson 1973–1974, 20, emphasis mine; cf., Quine 1984).

True, Quine's holistic notion of evidence implies, inter alia, that no single experience or scientific experiment will ever resolve an ontological dispute (cf., Quine 2013, 254). But why would one even expect that? It is certainly not licensed, for example, by our everyday experiences. Quite the opposite suggests itself. Consider the following quote from Roth, who briefly but pointedly explicates, in the Quinean/naturalistic attitude, what depending on theoretical and pragmatic choices means for our lives and our (scientific) understanding of the world:

> Background beliefs regarding social status or religious affiliation might influence which individual beliefs count or how they count. In addition, which beliefs might be open to revision will be determined by perceptions regarding how those beliefs connect to religious or political views deemed important. *Consideration such as these makes the "unit of empirical significance" culture-size* (Roth 2020, 125).

Of course, Quine's, in a sense instrumental, belief in/accepting of physicalism is also of this parochial kind. Physicalism, in Quine's view, keeps our science going; it provides science with many sometimes verifiable and sometimes falsifiable *hypotheses* on which we then gradually construct the rest of our web of belief/our total theory of the world.

Thus, although "we are now seeing ontology as a more utterly human option than we used to," the options are not infinite, precisely because we are regulated by the world and limited by our natural capabilities (Quine 1995a, 260). Naturalism in fact embraces these limitations. "Naturalism need not cast aspersions on irresponsible metaphysics, however deserved, much less on soft sciences or on the speculative reaches of the hard ones, except insofar as a firmer basis is claimed for the experimental method

itself" (ibid., 252, "experimental method" here simply stands for the inter-subjective/third-person perspective).

Therefore, contra Hofstadter's interpretation, nothing in Quine justifies claiming that "whatever view I want is a view of the Universe." A naturalistic corrective of this idealistic vision of the world could be: "There is the view of the universe which sees it as it is."[8] However, an obligatory note for those still under the spell of Kantian visions: here, "as it is" refers to "as it is for us, the beings of the universe," rather than "as it is in itself."

2. Naturalizing Philosophical Inquiry

> I see philosophy not as an a priori propaedeutic or groundwork for science, but as continuous with science. I see philosophy and science as in the same boat – a boat which, to revert to Neurath's figure as I so often do, we can rebuild only at sea while staying afloat in it. There is no external vantage point, no first philosophy. All scientific findings, all scientific conjectures that are at present plausible, are therefore in my view as welcome for use in philosophy as elsewhere.
>
> –W. V. O. Quine[9]

2.1 The Continuity of Philosophy and Science

Despite many misunderstandings, Quine's naturalistic approach to various forms of inquiry is not by any means hostile towards philosophy itself. Even philosophy is part and parcel of his naturalized epistemology. Philosophy only loses its special, grounding status towards science as Quine does not think that there is any purely philosophical method, meaning *epistemologically privileged philosophical perspective*, such as first-person perspective, introspective insight, etc. Methodologically-wise, *philosophy is continuous with science* (e.g., Quine 1969a; 1995a). As I also revealed in the previous section, for Quine, all forms of explication and explanation are science-dependent, or one could say result-driven; they must be formulated from

[8] I borrow these two characterizations from Peregrin (1999).

[9] (Quine 1969a, 126–27)

within a third-person perspective, otherwise the intersubjective, direct or indirect empirical checks, would simply not be available.

Philosophy thus also relies on the synchronic and diachronic developments of our web of belief; of our total theory of the world. So, Quine generally seems to oscillate between saying that philosophy and science are continuous (when he speaks in a disciplinary and methodological sense) and saying that philosophy is a part of science (when he means by science "our total theory of the world"). Consider in this light these two paragraphs:

> The naturalistic philosopher *begins his reasoning within the inherited world theory as a going concern*. He tentatively believes all of it, but believes also that some unidentified portions are wrong. *He tries to improve, clarify, and understand the system from within*. He is the busy sailor adrift on Neurath's boat (Quine 1981a, 72, emphasis mine).

> *Naturalistic philosophy is continuous with natural science. It undertakes to clarify, organize, and simplify the broadest and most basic concepts, and to analyze scientific method and evidence within the framework of science itself.* The boundary between naturalistic philosophy and the rest of science is just a vague matter of degree (Quine 1995a, 256–257, emphasis mine).

However, the pragmatic and intellectual purposes of philosophy as a distinct discipline are not specified in greater detail by Quine himself. As is clear from the quotes above and from one of the epigraphs I have chosen for this essay, Quine often only casually lists the general purposes of explication (clarifying and organizing concepts), methodological considerations, and aiming at understanding our web of belief/our total theory of the world as a whole. All the same, Quine can be read simply as emphasizing that philosophy can continue doing what it has always been doing as long as it respects the practices and results of other relevant disciplines and their theories, i.e., Quine can be read as not restricting the specific aims of philosophy in naturalism in advance of formulating given pragmatic or intellectual needs (cf., Churchland in Quine 2013, xiv).[10]

[10] Quine at one point also likens his idea of *philosophical explication* to Wittgenstein's vision of philosophy. He writes: "According to an influential doctrine of

On the other hand, I think that one must be very careful and always distinguish between the very consequences of Quine's naturalism for philosophy, and Quine's own philosophical preferences and personal tastes. From a certain perspective, Quine is a conservative thinker immersed in analyzing a very specific subset of scientific and philosophical problems, where the latter are separated from the former only by their higher degree of generality and abstractness. Quine is simply not a philosopher who would engage in substantial debates concerning, for instance, the nature of morality or the problem of free will in our deterministic world. That being said, one has good reasons to suppose that Quine considered these problems as important empirical problems, but just not problems he is particularly invested in as a professional philosopher.

Another clue to interpreting Quine on this matter is provided by the BBC television interview with Bryan Magee in 1978 (see Philosophy Overdose 2021).[11] Magee asks Quine if he includes or excludes from philosophy "the age-old questions" like "how the world got here in the first place" or "how life began". Quine quickly and resolutely answers "I exclude these from philosophy." For Quine, the question of the beginning of the world is a question for physicists and astronomists and their "conjectures" and the question how life began is a question for biologists. No surprise here. However, then Quine adds that these two questions are in fact "pseudo-questions" (after that, the camera moves to Magee and his mischievous smile). Quine perceives these questions as meaningless as he "can't imagine what an answer would look like."

According to Quine, meaningful questions and their respective answers are articulated from within a theoretical framework, so what "world"

Wittgenstein's, the task of philosophy is not to solve problems but to dissolve them by showing that there were really none there. *This doctrine has its limitations, but it aptly fits explication.* For when explication banishes a problem it does so by showing it to be in an important sense unreal; viz., in the sense of proceeding only from needless usages," (Quine 2013, 240, emphasis mine). I see this as yet another argument for interpreting Quine's view of philosophy as a very general view, adaptable to many different aims and purposes.

[11] Quine in this interview even briefly addresses the problem of free will, thanks to Magee's interest in the broader consequences of his philosophical system.

or "life" is depends on the chosen frameworks. Put another way, we cannot speak of life without already having some beliefs, i.e., assumptions, about what life is, or generally what it is to exist. In "The Limits of Knowledge," Quine writes:

> We have to work within some conceptual scheme or other; we can switch schemes, but we cannot stand apart from all of them. It is meaningless, while working within a theory, to question the reality of its objects or the truth of its laws, unless in so doing we are thinking of abandoning the theory and adopting another" (Quine 1976a, 65).[12]

Therefore, one could also say that the more internal a question to a conceptual framework is being asked, the more specific an answer will follow. Consider this example to illustrate the sense of gradability proposed here; a question "what causes genetic mutations?" will be answered from within the conceptual frameworks of genetics/evolutionary biology. For all that, the question "what is the nature of causality?" requires a more abstract answer that will not be associated with only one particular framework. One can clearly understand how the abstract answers impact the more specific ones. So, one clearly sees the place of philosophy on the continuum with science; indeed, to ask and answer abstract and general questions is a substantial contribution to (re-)wiring our web of belief, too. It could be argued that the answers to the most important general questions comprise the very wires of this web. Therefore, I claim that to deny a unique epistemic position of philosophy does not mean to deny the cognitive division of labor

[12] "Meaningless" must thus be read very loosely in this context, *and with the knowledge that it is Quine's pragmatism that displaces the residues of positivistic thinking from his philosophy.* Meaningfulness is not, for Quine, necessarily linked directly to empirically verifiable conditions (see Quine 1995b, 49). So, Quine is here simply being at one with Wittgenstein and emphasizes that some question may sound "meaningful," or even "philosophical," and yet be strictly speaking pseudo-questions in the sense that they push our language to its very limits, where it is not possible to make clear sense of our words. Let alone to specify how some of these questions are related to our technological and intellectual goals (I thank Paul Roth for forcing me to comment on this issue, and for reminding me of the parallel with Wittgenstein here).

between traditionally recognized intellectual disciplines. And we, the post-Quine philosophers, can obviously exploit this division of labor in ways that were not available or desirable to Quine.

I thus also think that Quine's understanding of naturalistic philosophy is perfectly compatible with the synoptic and synthetizing aims of philosophy as (in)famously introduced by Wilfrid Sellars: It is...the "eye on the whole" which distinguishes the philosophical enterprise" (Sellars 2007, 371). Or more forcefully and distinctively put:

> *The aim of philosophy, abstractly formulated, is to understand how things in the broadest possible sense of the term hang together in the broadest possible sense of the term.* Under "things in the broadest possible sense" I include such radically different items as not only "cabbages and kings", but numbers and duties, possibilities and finger snaps, aesthetic experience and death. To achieve success in philosophy would be, to use a contemporary turn of phrase, to "know one's way around" with respect to all these things, not in that unreflective way in which the centipede of the story knew its way around before it faced the question, "how do I walk?," but in that reflective way which means that no intellectual holds are barred (Sellars 2007, 369, emphasis mine).

For Quine, the synthetizing aspect of philosophy is inevitable. Absent a special method or the possibility to step out of all the conceptual frameworks, philosophers depend on the beliefs/knowledge generated, inter alia, by the special sciences. That is the principal assumption of Quine's intratheoretical – *from within* – approach. And, although Quine is a much more prosaic thinker than Sellars, he endorses the synoptic vision of philosophy. See again the quotes concerning philosophy above. If one reads the word "science" or the phrase "the conceptual scheme" in these passages as "the total theory of the world," one gets very close to Sellars' eye-on-the-whole designation of philosophy.

I would argue that this similarity is obscured, among many other things, by the fact that Quine often unfortunately hides in his writing style and rhetoric the assumption that he conceives science very broadly and unorthodoxly. One possible example is that, most of the time, Quine uses the

terms "natural science," "hypothetico-deductive method," "empirical checks," or "prediction" actually interchangeably. Or he also casually uses the adjectives "soft" and "hard" for sciences. But he himself does not offer any special demarcation of "natural" and "hard" science (cf., Quine 1976b, 76; Quine 1975b, 314).

In the BBC interview I referred to earlier, Magee effectively translates from Quine's austere language and takes from Quine the following synoptic message:

> So, in other words, you regard the central tasks of philosophy as the analysis and elucidation of concepts *that are central to various fields of human activity*, and also, in particular, notions like what it is for something to be a cause of something else, what it is for something to exist, what it is for something to be, shall we say, a scientific law. *The most general notions that are, as it were, the connecting tissue of thought and that we have to use and have to employ in the specific activities that people like scientists – or it could even be politicians, lawyers and so on – are engaged in.* Is that a correct way of putting your view?
>
> [Quine laconically replies:] Yes, yes. I would agree with that. (Philosophy Overdose 2021, transcribed and emphasized by me)

In light of what has been said so far, I claim that even Quine is the child of the 20th century (philosophy of) science when it comes to the vocabulary.

2.2 Science is Not the Only Game in Town

If one also seriously takes into account Quine's inclination to view science as a Wittgensteinian language game – one among several such games – it follows that other human linguistic practices, such as poetry and fiction writing, exemplify other and legitimate language games. Additionally, for Quine, our modern science game has already moved past its *primary* evolutionary purpose of predicting our experiences, and its two dominant purposes are currently "technology" and "understanding," meaning specific pragmatic purposes and specific intellectual purposes (Quine 1992, 20). I will put aside the technological purposes, as I think no one in their right mind would deny the technological advances of our present-day sciences.

However, if one takes on board the plurality of language games, one is entitled to ask how to account, in the Quinean spirit, for the difference between "understanding" from within science and, for instance, from within fiction writing (and, for that matter, from within any kinds of writings that were deemed non-scientific at the time). If fiction qua a form of art also "teaches" and "enlightens" us, as Quine unproblematically holds (Quine & Ullian 1978, 4), when should we adhere to science and when, for instance, to a novel? Again, these sorts of questions are off Quine's radar most of the time, so I am aware that my answers cannot be supported by Quine's explicit reflections.

However, I am not particularly interested in interpreting Quine as in interpreting his naturalistic legacy. Put another way, from now on, I engage in the Quinean naturalistic explication, without necessarily arguing that it is an explication Quine himself would have defended. The main purpose of this explication is to clarify the relationship between science, the arts, and various forms of second-order inquiry – often referred to as "philosophy" but also by other names, such as "ethics." Fiction writing thus represents the limit case, as Quine does not go so far as to claim that even fiction is *cognitively* worthless. So, secondarily, the explication should clarify why and in what sense Quine does *not* have scientistic inclinations.

I will start in a roundabout way by deliberating on the difference between factual and non-factual discourse. Then, I will briefly discuss fictional discourse in the artistic sense. Stephen Jay Gould argued some time ago that, if perceived properly, science and religion are not in any conceptual or explanatory conflict.

> No such conflict should exist because each subject has a legitimate magisterium, or domain of teaching authority – and these magisteria do not overlap (the principle that I would like to designate as NOMA, or "nonoverlapping magisteria"). *The net of science covers the empirical universe: what is it made of (fact) and why does it work this way (theory). The net of religion extends over questions of moral meaning and value. These two magisteria do not overlap, nor do they encompass all inquiry (consider, for starters, the magisterium of art and the meaning of beauty* (Gould 2011a [1997], 274, emphasis mine).

> The attainment of wisdom in a full life requires extensive attention to both domains – *for a great book tells us that the truth can make us free and that we will live in optimal harmony with our fellows when we learn to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly* (ibid., 271, emphasis mine).

As an evolutionary scientist and left-wing liberal, Gould was sympathetic to many kinds of intellectual and ideological movements; Gould understood very well that to agree with NOMA is easier than to actually practice it. The vast majority of questions central to our everyday lives cannot be moved too far away from the boundaries of the given magisteria. In this respect, for Gould, the friction surfaces between science and religion represent the paradigm of NOMA in practice. Therefore, although Gould primarily speaks of science and religion, he undoubtedly intends to extrapolate from these two to say something general about our human epistemic condition. In this sense, I regard NOMA as a naturalistic thesis.[13]

> *Many of our deepest questions call upon aspects of both for different parts of a full answer – and the sorting of legitimate domains can become quite complex and difficult.* To cite just two broad questions involving both evolutionary facts and moral arguments: Since evolution made us the only earthly creatures with advanced consciousness, what responsibilities are so entailed for our relations with other species? *What do our genealogical ties with other organisms imply about the meaning of human life?* (ibid., 274, emphasis mine).

Now, at face value, Quine and all like-minded naturalists would certainly agree that science is a theory-driven, fact-stating discourse (a language game). Similarly, naturalists have no problem recognizing what Gould hints at here; scientific discourse does not, in itself, imply any normative guidelines. By explaining our origins in evolutionary terms, scientists are not prescribing anything. Their explanations do not directly translate into

[13] I use "naturalistic" here in its most basic sense, referring simply to the aim of reconfiguring the relationship between scientific discourse and other forms of discourse. However, I consider this sense to be a properly understood interpretation of Quine's perspective as well (see again, e.g., Quine 1995a).

value-stating discourse; in other words, these explanations are not direct value claims. The "ought" cannot be derived from the "is" directly without further background assumptions and aims, such as chosen ethical frameworks or societal values that guide and ground our interpretations.

For the type of holistic naturalism I derive from Quine, this follows, inter alia, since the very constituting and communicating "facts" are already inseparable from our historical cultures/scientific communities, i.e., inseparable from many other (background) beliefs, interests, and purposes. Let alone any further attempts to explain or theorize the facts. "Only theologians and unthinking ideologues imagine that normative conclusions can be read off some recitation of the facts" (Roth in Domańska et al. 2019, 544; cf., Gould 2011a [1997], 282).

At any rate, Quine and Gould are in agreement that "science" has a monopoly in determining what counts as facts, i.e., monopoly in generating meaningful fact-stating statements. This monopoly, however, is not tied to any methodological ownership. Nor to any unity-of-science trusts. In Quine's view, science has no ahistorical demarcation criterion from other commonly recognized *non-fictional* practices and discourses. The monopoly is rather grounded in the appreciation that the general intersubjective criteria (of individual sciences) has been the most successful tool for settling, i.e., rationalizing, our beliefs about the world, and the most effective tool for manipulating the world.

So, the claim so far is that as long as religion/theology, or any other non-fictional discourse for that matter, does not claim to be more fundamental or accurate than science with respect to factual matters, no conflict arises. For the naturalist of the Quinean kind, this does not necessarily mean that theology must abruptly accept, e.g., all the conclusions and conjectures of up-to-date physics. In this regard, respect for the facts is enough, regardless of how loosely one demarcates them. Take as an example the concept of "soul." This implies that understanding the concept of the soul dualistically (as a sui generis non-material entity) would need to be based on some form of intersubjective criterion and/or epistemologically-pragmatic purposes. The dualism of body and soul could, in principle, be empirically vindicated if it would give us some explanatory or technological benefits (for example, in sociology, medicine, etc.). The

same would hold for concepts such as "prayer," "miracle," "revelation," or even "God."

Gould, however, seems to primarily target an additional issue; the nature of non-factual discourse, i.e., typically ethical/value discourse. As he further clarifies:

> NOMA also cuts both ways. If religion can no longer dictate the nature of factual conclusions properly under the magisterium of science, *then scientists cannot claim higher insight into moral truth from any superior knowledge of the world's empirical constitution. This mutual humility has important practical consequences in a world of such diverse passions* (Gould 2011a [1997], 281–282, emphasis mine).

It is obvious that theology exemplifies only one of the possible ethical and value discourses in Gould's understanding of NOMA (cf., Gould 2011b [1999]). So, if anything, Gould can be charged with the intention of narrowing down the role of religion and theology exclusively to their ethical dimensions, and interpreting the existential (ipso facto factual) statements of theology in a *non-literal* way. But that is a problem for another day. Now, against this background, instead of science and religion, one could just speak of fact-stating discourse and ethical/value discourse, or generally of factual and non-factual discourse.

NOMA then certainly does not imply, as for example Richard Dawkins (1998) incorrectly infers, that the non-factual (ethical) discourse of theology can "unproblematically" work with *transcendental* concepts or notions (e.g., heaven, life after death, etc.). That would indeed amount to making *super*-natural existential claims, however implicitly. On the other hand, NOMA does not prevent us from working with transcendental concepts in metaphorical ways, e.g., operationalizing transcendental concepts qua Kantian regulative ideas.

This fact also seems to be one of the main motivations for Gould when introducing NOMA:

> While I cannot personally accept the Catholic view of souls, *I surely honor the metaphorical value of such a concept both for grounding moral discussion and for expressing what we most value about human potentiality: our decency, care, and all the ethical and intellectual struggles that the evolution of consciousness*

> *imposed upon us* (Gould 2011a [1997], 282, emphasis mine, cf., 271).

Interestingly, Quine, when parsing the notion of the "absolute truth," also states that "metaphor is perhaps a handy category in which to accommodate transcendental concepts, from a naturalistic point of view" (Quine 1995a, 261). In general, it could be said that *non*-factual use of language simply serves different purposes and tackles different problems in which one is interested. It addresses different kinds of questions, e.g., "what is worth living for?," or "why should I stay healthy?" Therefore, even though Rorty actually thinks otherwise, I argue that Quine allows for considering our diverse uses of factual as well as non-factual language as tools, or in Rorty's own words, "techniques of problem solving" (Rorty 2021, 184). On my reading then, Quine's *functional* view of our human discoursing also leads to the pragmatist stance Rorty himself sharply depicts this way:

> Democritus, Newton, and Dalton solved some problems with particles and laws. Darwin, Gibbon, and Hegel solved others with narratives. Carpenters solve others with hammers and nails, and soldiers still others with guns. *Philosophers' problems are about how to prevent the words used by some of these problem-solvers from getting in the way of other words used by other problem-solvers* (ibid., emphasis mine; cf., Thomasson 2024 for a more focused take on this matter).

I am also convinced that the functional view of discourse gives us a suitable conceptual bridge for comprehending the cognitive component of the arts. Due to space constraints, I briefly focus on fiction writing/novels. It is common sense that fiction writers can always use the language to confront us with "what ifs" or "as ifs" propositions related to our "real" lives. They can always imaginatively (re-)construct dialogues between two "real" persons or simply compose entirely fictional worlds and events to educate and/or entertain us. Also, this nicely illustrates that the first-person perspectives, although strictly speaking not scientifically useful in the naturalistic sense, can often be valid and valuable with respect to our human needs, interests, and purposes.

So far so good, but one might still wonder how to satisfactorily differentiate between artistic, and in some sense scientific usage of language.

Take, for example, someone like Kendall L. Walton and his methodically naturalistic explicatory attitude towards all the art forms. Walton conceives of the artistic modes of expression as "games of make-believe:" "I take seriously the association with children's games – with playing house and school, cops and robbers, cowboys and Indians, with fantasies built around dolls, teddy bears, and toy trucks. We can learn a lot about novels, paintings, theater, and film by pursuing analogies with make-believe activities like these" (Walton 1990, 4).

Construed as such, the games of make-believe cannot be limited only to arts (or solely to discursive activities), but are rather

> *a pervasive element of human experience.*…There is nothing distinctively "aesthetic" about make-believe itself at all.…I suspect that make-believe may be crucially involved as well in certain religious practices, in the role of sports in our culture, in the institution of morality, *in the postulation of "theoretical entities" in science, and in other areas in which issues of metaphysical "realism" are prominent*… (ibid., 7, emphasis mine).

This approach is moreover congenial to Quine's metaphysically *anti-representational* view of reality. As I have already established, Quine often stresses that the objects science postulates are, from the epistemological vantage point, useful myths or fictions (see again the previous section). And it also seems to be a quite expectable conclusion when the demarcation criterion of science is being abandoned.

Therefore, even though one cannot hope to identify a universal and unambiguous demarcation between scientific works and, e.g., novels, this does not mean that there are not pragmatically useful criteria for adjudicating individual instances. As naturalism dictates; the demarcation of scientific propositions will always have to be done empirically and intratheoretically, i.e., always ad hoc. Walton himself offers an illuminating exemplification of this type of constraint. Consider in this light the following passages:

> An important symptom of the difference between *The Origin of Species* and works like *Gulliver's Travels*…is that what is said in *The Origin of Species* does not of itself warrant assertions like "Species evolved by means of natural selection." *It justifies such assertions only insofar as it provides good reason to think they*

> *are true*. But the sentences in *Gulliver's Travels* warrant the assertive utterance "A war was fought over how to break eggs," *quite apart from whether they give us reason to think such a war actually was fought* (Walton 1990, 71, emphasis mine).
>
> If we are to believe the theory of evolution, it is because that theory is true, or because there is good evidence for it, not because it is expressed in *The Origin of Species* – although of course *The Origin of Species* might convince us of the theory's truth or inform us of evidence for it. *Darwin's book itself does not prescribe believings. So we cannot conclude that it prescribes imaginings, even if believing involves imagining* (ibid., 70–71, emphasis mine).

Consequently, the very purposes of scientific works and novels can be, in principle, very similar or even identical. They can aim at the same goals via different means. Again, no principled reasons exist for identifying the universal purposes of either scientific or artistic works.[14] Whether or not a statement has a scientific status must be decided against the background of other beliefs; it must be done from within our web of belief, to use the Quinean expression once again. Let me return to the example of the novel; it is obvious that every writer works, explicitly or implicitly, with the purposes of their work in manifold, and in principle, open-ended ways. And

[14] Especially not for evaluating single, isolated statements. It is also a dialectical process; dispositions as well as expectations of the audience matter. Walton addresses this point via speech-act theory: "*The fundamental disanalogy between illocutionary actions and acts of fiction making comes out in differences in the roles of agents' intentions*. A crucial question for a person on the receiving end of an illocutionary action is almost always, Did he mean it? Did he intend to assert this, to promise that, to issue such and such an order or apology? But one may well read a story or contemplate a (fictional) picture without wondering which fictional truths the author or artist meant to generate. Photographers, especially, can easily be unaware of fictional truths generated by their works. Authors and other artists may be surprised at where extrapolation from the fictional truths they intentionally generated leads. *This need not make any particular difference to the appreciator – unless he is concerned with what the artist might be asserting in producing the fiction, what illocutionary actions she might be performing in the process of, and in addition to, producing it*" (ibid., 88, emphasis mine).

these ways can intersect (or be wholly interwoven) with other purposes of other intellectual endeavors and disciplines. It seems to be an understandable consequence of our human condition and of our linguistic modalities. To give one specific example, Milan Kundera in his *The Art of the Novel* explicates the "spirit of the novel" at one point as follows:

> *As a model of [the] Western world, grounded in the relativity and ambiguity of things human, the novel is incompatible with the totalitarian universe.* This incompatibility is deeper than the one that separates a dissident from an apparatchik, or a human-rights campaigner from a torturer, because it is not only political or moral but ontological. By which I mean: *The world of one single Truth and the relative, ambiguous world of the novel are molded of entirely different substances. Totalitarian Truth excludes relativity, doubt, questioning; it can never accommodate what I would call the spirit of the novel* (Kundera 2020, 10, long emphases mine).

Kundera also thinks that the novel is inherently historical. "Novels take place in a time that has a date and is thoroughly historical," (ibid., 20). But one must carefully distinguish between "*the historical dimension of human existence*," and "*the illustration of a historical situation*;" meaning "popularizations that translate non-novelistic knowledge into the language of the novel." Kundera then concludes: "Well, I'll never tire of repeating: The novel's sole *raison d'etre* is to say what only the novel can say" (ibid.). So, for him, there are several principles distinguishing novels from scientific (e.g., historiographic) works. One of them being a different point of focus:

> *Historiography writes the history of society, not of man. That is why the historical events my novels talk about are often forgotten by historiography.* Example: In the years that followed the 1968 Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia, the reign of terror against the public was preceded by officially organized massacres of dogs. *An episode totally forgotten and without importance for a historian, for a political scientist, but of the utmost anthropological significance!* By this one episode alone I suggested the historical climate of *The Farewell Party.* Another example: At the crucial point of Life Is Elsewhere, History intervenes in the form of an

> inelegant and shabby pair of undershorts; there were no others to be had at the time; faced with the loveliest erotic occasion of his life, Jaromil, for fear of looking ridiculous in his shorts, dares not undress and takes flight instead. *Inelegance! Another historical circumstance forgotten, and yet how important for the person obliged to live under a Communist regime* (ibid., 21, long emphases mine).

This is one of the many possible approaches, compatible with the Quinean approach I develop and defend here, to distinguishing between the purposes and cognitive components of scientific works (in our case above historiographical works), and novels (in our case above of novels dealing with the history of humanity).

When taken together, it represents an inquiry into the human "soul" in a manner that would be appreciated by not only Gould but Quine as well. True, Quine writes at the very end of his autobiography: "*I have little bent for soul-searching.*...My way of coping with the spells of nostalgia, loneliness, anxiety, or boredom over the years has been to escape into my projects" (Quine 1985, 475, emphasis mine).[15] However, his naturalizing project, which emphasizes the role of the third-person perspective over the first-person one, nevertheless creates a space that preserves all the typically acknowledged and appreciated purposes and cognitive functions of the arts, or so I have argued with the assistance of Walton and Kundera above.

To conclude, in this section, I have proposed that Quine's functional view of our language use (hence also scientific, philosophical, ethical, and artistic discourse) empowers naturalists to see human linguistic practices as tools for specific pragmatic and intellectual purposes. Such a view also

[15] Quine then continues: "I am deeply moved by occasional passages of poetry, and so, characteristically, I read a little of it. I respond similarly to passages of grand opera, and this is due to the libretto as much as to the music. Otherwise I have a poor memory for fiction, for it resists integration with my system of the world. I appreciate style more than plot. I enjoy the eighteenth-century brand of humor that we get in Fielding's prefaces and belatedly in Dickens; also the humor of W. S. Gilbert and Wodehouse and, in moderation, zany S. J. Perelman. Encouraged by the indulgent interest of readers who have read all the way to here, I am evidently accomplishing some soul-searching after all" (ibid., 476).

sheds light on the relationship between and different functions of third-person perspective (paradigmatic for but not exclusive to science); and first-person perspective (utilized often but not uniquely within the arts).

In addition, my own attempt to interpret Quine on this matter exemplifies a case of philosophical exemplification under natural*ism*.

3. Resumé

The first section of this essay gave an explication of Quine's hint that, under naturalism, realism and idealism are dissolved into each other. The second section explicated Quine's dictum that (naturalistic) philosophy is continuous with (natural) science. As I reveal, both these motifs are dealt with by Quine's characteristic *from within* approach, i.e., they are dealt with by emphasizing the intra-theoretic and intra-linguistic nature of all human empirical inquiry. As Quine himself always accepted: "I philosophize from the vantage point only of our own provincial conceptual scheme and scientific epoch, true; but I know no better" (Quine 1969d: 25). Such an approach is the hallmark of the Quinean type of naturalism, and so this essay attempted to further clarify it in concrete and contextual terms.

Additionally, since Quine is commonly considered to be an intellectual father of all current forms of naturalism, my partially historical and partially conceptual exegesis of his views in this essay can also further contribute to a better understanding of naturalism and pragmatism of today.

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