GOCHET, Paul, Ascent to Truth. *A Critical Examination of Quine's Philosophy*. Munchen: Philosophia Verlag, 1986.

It is hardly an exaggeration to claim that Paul Gochet is very familiar with the work of W.V.O. Quine. His previous book *Quine en Perspective* (Paris: Flammarion, 1978 ; German translation *Quine zur Diskussion*, Berlin: Ullstein, 1984) and the related *Outline of a Nominalist Theory of Propositions* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1980) are clear indications of his interest in Quinean matters. As the author indicates in the introduction, *Ascent to Truth* is to be considered a companion volume to *Quine en Perspective*.

Any philosopher who is somewhat familiar with the *oeuvre* of Quine knows that writing about him is a difficult and labyrinthine task. His philosophical system is complex, it has gone through several stages, reformulations, revisions, and improvements. Quine clearly enjoys to listen to his critics, to reply to them, to accept convincing arguments. Praiseworthy as these qualities surely are, trying to formulate a coherent framework that deserves the label "Quine's System" is a real challenge. One of the important and successful features of the book is the combination of a detailed analysis of specific arguments and counterarguments and of an integrated presentation of Quine's philosophy. Each problem treated generates the next one. In terms of a geometric metaphor, the connected chain of discussions is a curve filling the Quinean space. The titles of the seven chapters give a clear indication of the itinerary. Starting with a discussion on the famous "Two Dogmas" (chapter I), the theory of meaning should come next (chapter II). The problems encountered necessitate a discussion on ontology (chapter III) and epistemology (chapter IV). But that gets you straight into the problem of the demarcation of logic (chapter V) and the related problem of the status of deviant logic

(chapter VI) and finally this leads to one of Quine's favourite
topics, quantified modal logic (chapter VII).

The characteristics of the presentation are uniform throughout
the book : (a) a precise formulation of a problem, (b) an overview
of the main counterarguments raised in the literature, (c) analy-
sis of these arguments, (d) formulation of an answer leading to an
improved version of Quine's view. The book is clearly written in
sympathy with and in defence of Quine. Only if all possibilities
have been proved unsuccessful does Gochet admit that a genuine
problem is present. As mentioned, he takes into account the con-
siderable evolution in Quine's philosophy. Whether or not the
reader agrees with the intricate arguments and the beautifully
constructed examples and counterexamples, the presentation itself
is an exemplar case of clear, detailed, and careful philosophical
analysis.

The importance of *Ascent to Truth* resides in the fact that most
of the well-known arguments *contra* Quine taken for granted by most
philosophers are here shown either to be lacking in precision or
to be refutable after all. This implies that Quine's philosophy is
more resistant to criticisms than is usually assumed. Let me pre-
sent three examples as illustrations.

It is usually assumed that Quine's rejection of reductionism as
expressed in the "Two Dogmas" leads to a rejection of the analyt-
ic-synthetic distinction. But as Gochet shows, this need not be
the case. It all depends on what the distinction is supposed to
be. The strong claim is that the distinction should be context-
independent and should imply an effective algorithm. But abandon-
ing the strong claim does not exclude weaker claims. If attempts
to draw a sharp boundary between analytic and synthetic statements
are unsuccessful, this does not imply that in some cases we may
have very good reasons to claim that a particular statement surely
is to be considered the one or the other. Priest's idea of gramma-
tical entrenchment provides us with such good reasons : "A good
grammar should systematize and predict the judgments of well-
formedness and of ill-formedness that native speakers give on
particular sentences of natural language. In the same manner, a
good logic should systematize and predict the judgments of vali-
dity and invalidity that reasoners have already." (p.27). Hence
the weak claim is compatible with the rejection of the two dogmas.

Vuillemin's critique of Quine's ontological commitment notion
seems conclusive : there are non-quantified expressions that carry
an ontological commitment (p.76). To be is therefore not to be the
value of a variable. In a few words, his argument is this : even
the statement

(a)   (Ex)(Ey)(x is to the left of y)

implies an ontological commitment to the existence of relations and classes although (a) does not quantify over such entities. For, in formal terms (a) requires that we should be able to express that x and y occur in a specific order, hence we must suppose statements of the form

(b)   ⟨a,b⟩ is an element of R

But ⟨a,b⟩ commits us to the existence of classes. Gochet's solution consists in an appeal to a quite different part of Quine's philosophy, viz. his theory of virtual classes and relations. The basic idea is to interpret the statement 'a is an element of b' not as a dyadic predicate with arguments a and b, but as a monadic predicate 'is-an-element-of-b' with argument a. Thus it is quite literally impossible to quantify over b since b is only virtually present. Hence b does not carry an ontological commitment.

Quine's view that quantified modal logic is problematic because it commits you to Aristotelian essentialism, seems pretty tight. One of the arguments is that in terms of possible world semantics, one must suppose that identification of individuals across worlds is possible and this requires some notion of essence. Gochet draws our attention to a beautiful counterexample of Ocuzoglu Salmon that shows that although two objects share the same essence, still we can identify them as *this* object and *that* object and hence consider them as different objects. In fact, according to Kaplan, one does not need essences at all. His non-essentialist account of identification, which he calls haecceitism is according to Gochet, "nothing more than an innocuous semantic theory dealing with the use of demonstratives." (p.163)

The sketchy formulation of these three examples may also serve as an illustration of the richness of this book. Ascent to Truth is an important addition to the literature on Quine. As a final remark, I think it is important to emphasize that the book is on many occasions open-ended. As such it is an invitation for further discussion.

Jean Paul Van Bendegem

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