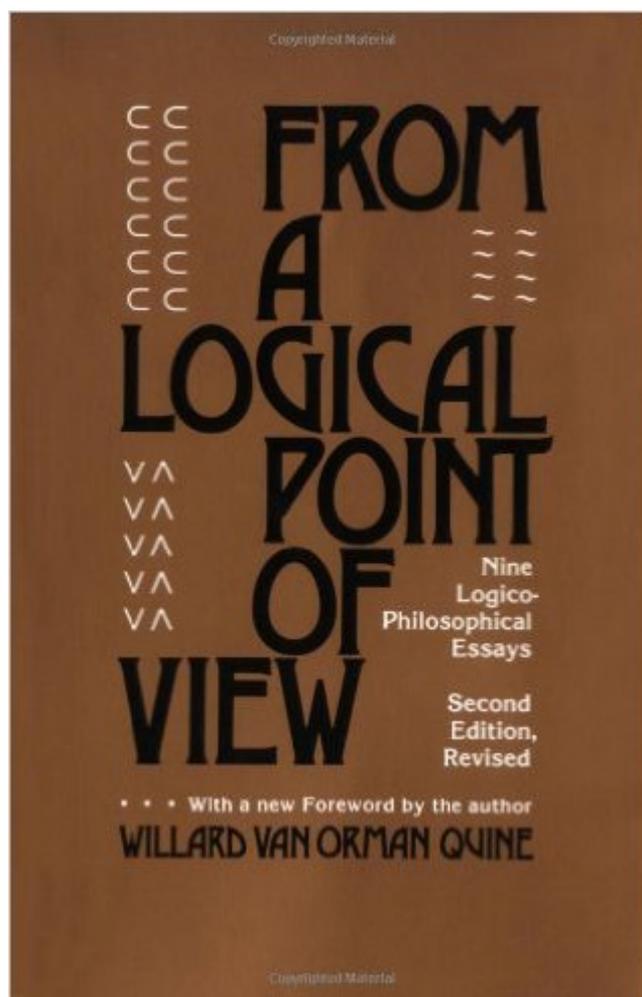


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# From A Logical Point Of View: Nine Logico-Philosophical Essays, Second Revised Edition



## Synopsis

These nine essays are largely concerned with the theory of meaning and referencesâ• semantics. At the same time adjacent portions of philosophy and logic are discussed. To the existence of what objects may a given scientific theory be said to be committed? And what considerations may suitably guide us in accepting or revising such ontological commitments? These are among the questions dealt with in this book, particular attention being devoted to the role of abstract entities in mathematics. There is speculation on the mechanism whereby objects of one sort or another come to be posited, a process in which the notion of identity plays an important part.

## Book Information

Paperback: 200 pages

Publisher: Harvard University Press; Revised edition (May 15, 1980)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0674323513

ISBN-13: 978-0674323513

Product Dimensions: 5.4 x 0.5 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.5 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 starsÂ• See all reviewsÂ• (10 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #436,732 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #109 inÂ• Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Philosophy > Aesthetics #206 inÂ• Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Philosophy > Logic #314 inÂ• Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Aesthetics

## Customer Reviews

With this book, Quine bursts onto the scene of analytical philosophy with claims the boldness and insight of which dealt a deadly strike to the orthodoxy of logical positivism. Being published for the first time in 1953, *From a Logical Point of View* followed hot on the heels of Wittgenstein's *Philosophische Untersuchungen* and although its approach is quite different from that of Wittgenstein's work, it has received less attention than *P.U.* Quine's arguments are transparent and yet very substantial in their claims. Better than anyone before or after him Quine realised that the rejection of traditional metaphysics has much graver consequences than it was imagined by the logical positivists. Quine tries to reconcile empiricism with metaphysics-criticism through a pragmatic view of the theory of reality. The result; - the conceptual scheme, is a fascinating and extremely controversial idea, but it has changed the face of metaphysics and epistemology forever. Long since philosophical classics, the essays "On What There Is" and "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" are still the

best and most readable expositions of the views, which saw Quine elevate theoretical philosophy to a level of thinking, of which it still benefits tremendously.

The philosophical issues treated in this book are very important indeed. In fact, they explain nothing less than what really exists in our universe and how mankind can deal with this universe through pragmatism (language).

**On What There Is** Universals of bound variables (e.g., redness) are useful myths. They don't exist really (they are not there). Physical conceptual schemes simplify our accounts of experience, because myriad scattered sense events come to be associated with simple so-called objects.

**Two Dogmas of Empiricism** There is no fundamental cleavage between analytic (grounded on meanings independent of fact) and synthetic (grounded in fact) truths. The truth of a statement cannot be split into a linguistic and a factual component. Reductionism, the theory that each meaningful statement is equivalent to some logical construct upon terms which refer to immediate experience, is a dogma. The unit of empirical significance is the whole of science. Reductionism is only pragmatic.

**The Problem of Meaning in Linguistics** This text treats the problem of significant sequences (phonemes and morphemes) in speech and the notion of synonymy.

**Identity, Ostension and Hypostasis** Concepts in an unconceptualized reality are not more than language. Their purpose is pragmatic. The ultimate duty of language, science and philosophy is efficacy in communication and prediction.

**New Foundations** In this text, Quine reduces the logical foundations of Russell's *Principia Mathematica* to a three-fold logic of propositions, classes and relations: membership ( $x$  is a member of  $y$ ), alternative denial (a statement is false if and only if both constituent statements are true) and universal quantification (a prefix of a variable).

**Reification of Universals** Quantification is a criterion of ontological commitment: an entity (a value) is presupposed by a theory if and only if it is needed among the values of the bound variables in order to make the statements affirmed in the true theory.

**Notes on the Theory of Reference** In this text Quine explains Tarski's solution for the paradoxes in the theory of reference (e.g., the liar paradox).

**Reference and Modality** In this text, Quine gives comments on the theory of reference and modal contexts (e.g., possibility, necessity).

**Meaning and Existential Inference** In this essay, Quine treats the difficulties arising out of the distinction between meaning and reference, logical truth and singular terms. Although the problems (and the reasoning behind them) are not always easy to understand for the layman, Quine's language is exceptionally clear (an example for all true philosophers). These essays are a must for all those interested in philosophy and for all those who want to understand the world we live in.

Willard Van Orman Quine (1908-2000) was an American philosopher and logician who taught at Harvard University, and wrote many books such as *Word and Object*, *The Web of Belief*, etc. He wrote in the Preface, "Several of these essays have been printed whole in journals; others are in varying degrees new. Two main themes run through them. One is the problem of meaning, particularly as involved in the notion of an analytic statement. The other is the notion of ontological commitment, particularly as involved in the problem of universals." He states, "We commit ourselves to an ontology containing numbers when we say there are prime numbers larger than a million; we commit ourselves to an ontology containing centaurs when we say there are centaurs; and we commit ourselves to an ontology containing Pegasus when we say Pegasus is. But we do not commit ourselves to an ontology containing Pegasus or the author of *Waverly* or the round square cupola on Berkeley College when we say that Pegasus or the author of *Waverly* or the cupola in question is NOT. We need no longer labor under the delusion that the meaningfulness of a statement containing a singular term presupposes an entity named by the term. A singular term need not name to be significant." (Pg. 8-9) Later in this essay he adds, "We may say... that some dogs are white and not thereby commit ourselves to recognizing either doghood or whiteness as entities. 'Some dogs are white' says that some things that are dogs are white; and, in order that this statement be true, the things over which the bound variable 'something' ranges must include some white dogs, but need not include doghood or whiteness. On the other hand, when we say that some zoological species are cross-fertile we are committing ourselves to recognizing as entities the several species themselves, abstract though they are. We remain so committed at least until we devise some way of so paraphrasing the statement as to show that the seeming reference to species on the part of our bound variable was an avoidable manner of speaking." (Pg. 13) He begins his famous article, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" with the statement: "Modern empiricism has been conditioned in large part by two dogmas. One is a belief in some fundamental cleavage between truths that are analytic, or grounding in meanings independently of matters of fact, and truths which are synthetic, or grounded in fact. The other dogma is reductionism: the belief that each meaningful statement is equivalent to some logical construct upon terms which refer to immediate experience. Both dogmas, I shall argue, are ill-founded. One effect of abandoning them is... a blurring of the supposed boundary between speculative metaphysics and natural science. Another effect is a shift toward pragmatism." (Pg. 20) He elaborates, "It is obvious that truth in general depends on both language and extralinguistic fact. The statement 'Brutus killed Caesar' would be false if the world had been different in certain ways... Thus one is tempted to suppose in general that the truth of a statement is somehow analyzable into a linguistic component and a factual component. Given this

supposition, it seems reasonable that in some statements the factual component should be null; and these are the analytic statements. But... a boundary between analytic and synthetic statements simply has not been drawn. That there is such a distinction to be drawn at all is an unempirical dogma of empiricists, a metaphysical article of faith." (Pg. 36-37) He continues, "The dogma of reductionism... is intimately connected with the other dogma... We have found ourselves led, indeed, from the latter problem to the former through the verification theory of meaning. More directly, the one dogma clearly supports the other in this way: as long as it is taken to be significant in general to speak of a confirmation and infirmation of a statement, it seems significant to speak also of a limiting kind of statement which is vacuously confirmed, ipso facto, come what may; and such a statement is analytic." (Pg. 41) He states, "As an empiricist I continue to think of the conceptual scheme of science as a tool, ultimately, for predicting future experience in the light of past experience. 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. 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." (Pg. 44) He argues, "We can improve our conceptual scheme, our philosophy, bit by bit while continuing to depend on it for support; but we cannot detach ourselves from it and compare it objectively with an unconceptualized reality. Our standard for appraising basic changes of conceptual scheme must be, not a realistic standard of correspondence of reality, but a pragmatic standard. Concepts are language, and the purpose of concepts and of language is efficacy in communication and in prediction. Such is the ultimate duty of language, science and philosophy, and it is in relation to that duty that a conceptual scheme has finally to be appraised." (Pg. 79) He observes, "Russell had a no-class theory. Notations purporting to refer to classes were so defined, in context, that all such references would disappear upon expansion... Russell's no-class theory uses propositional functions ... as values of bound variables; so nothing can be claimed for the theory beyond a reduction of certain universals to others, classes to attributes. Such reduction comes to seem pretty idle when we reflect that the underlying theory of attributes itself might better have been interpreted as a theory of classes all along, in conformity with the policy of identifying indiscernibles." (Pg. 122-123) This book will be virtually "must reading" for most students of analytic philosophy.

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