

BRIEFER BOOK REVIEWS

The Nature of Things. By Anthony Quinton, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973. Pp. 394.

This book represents an unusual attempt by a philosopher educated in the Anglo-American analytic tradition to present a point of view comparable in scope to the famous systems of the past. Quinton discusses topics ranging from individuation to valuation, from perception to predication, and much else in between. The book has numerous virtues. It applies a broadly coherent (materialist) point of view to a wide range of interesting topics. It makes frequent good use of the history of philosophy, relying on or criticizing relevant arguments from the tradition without undue deference or patronization. It develops parallels among different philosophical positions—parallels which one usually finds mentioned only parenthetically (cf. for example, the discussions of phenomenalism, behaviorism, and instrumentalism). And it abounds in thought-provoking arguments that are presented in a clear, straightforward style.

As one might expect in a book of such breadth, depth is sacrificed. Most of the discussions should be regarded as high-level introductions to a point of view. Although some of the arguments in the book are original, these are not often developed enough to be satisfying. Still, the discussions, as far as they go, are usually stimulating and worthwhile. Sometimes a passage is perfunctory or not to the point, but this is the exception rather than the rule.

The book is unified by treatment of traditional issues surrounding notions of substance. The first section is devoted to discussions of issues concerning individuation and reidentification: substance as individuator and substance as that which underlies change.

Quinton asks, "Why should it be supposed that a thing is more than its properties?" (12). It develops that an answer counts as positive and satisfying only if it cites something other than the thing's properties that necessarily individuates it. Quinton holds that if properties are limited to qualities, then a positive answer cites a thing's position. If location counts as a property of a thing, then there is a set of properties that is sufficient (necessarily) to individuate a thing. But, he argues, things cannot be "decomposed" into such sets because potential properties can be specified only relative to a demonstratively specified point of origin ("here") (18-20). Quinton makes some insightful points in the course of the discussion—e.g. that the above-mentioned question was historically important largely because of a conflation of properties with perceptual appearances, which were taken to be epistemologically basic (9, 25-28). But his own handling of the issue has some drawbacks. There is no adequate explication of the notion of property or of its relation to that of a demonstrative. (A property is said to be "the possibility of a predicative term"

(14); later, qualitative properties are given a qualified explication in terms of synonymy (79), but there is no explication of that controversial notion.) The principle that no two things can occupy the same place at the same time is asserted to be a necessary truth (17) and relied on throughout. But a hammock and a rope from which it is woven (or a statue and a piece of bronze that constitutes but pre-existed the statue) are different things that occupy precisely the same position. Finally, the conclusion to the chapter, "A concrete individual or Aristotelian substance is a set of qualities manifested at a position" (28), seems to be misstated: concrete individuals are not sets of any sort.

The chapter on individuation is followed by a compact discussion of theories of singular terms. There are signs of haste in the treatment of the latter subject. Without careful argument, Quinton associates Quine's view that singular terms are eliminable with the theory that individuals are bundles of qualities (4); and he repeats the common misunderstanding that Quine's elimination of singular terms is intended as an elimination of demonstratives (20-22, 34).

With Strawson, Quinton holds that demonstrative reference is needed to give generalizations an application to particulars (42). He differs from Strawson in claiming that the notion of a particular can be acquired from relating thing predicates (count nouns) to positions via the demonstrative 'here' (43), rather than from mastering demonstrative reference to individuals. This is an interesting suggestion, but it needs elaboration to clarify how it helps explicate singular reference to particulars. Quinton also argues that 'here' unlike 'this' fulfills Russell's requirement that a "logically proper name" never fail of reference. He regards his view as an answer to Russell's felt need for guaranteed singular reference in order to justify the assertion of existential generalizations (37-38). But it is unclear how guaranteed reference to positions would satisfy Russell's worry any better than fallible reference to individuals.

Quinton's discussion of reidentification of individuals over time is brisk but to the point. He holds that spatial continuity, qualitative continuity and identity of substantival kind jointly constitute our criterion of identity through time (69). (It would have been advisable to test this account against cellular division and seasonal rivers.) The discussion of disassembled and reassembled artifacts leads Quinton to "add" a compositional criterion to the continuity criterion just articulated (69). The logic of the relevant addition is left a little obscure. But it appears that the criteria sometimes compete and should be seen as related disjunctively. A generalization about the application conditions of these rough but intuitive criteria (or appropriate qualifications of them) would be worth trying for. I think that such a generalization would not be altogether easy.

The book's mid-section deals with the notion of substance as that which underlies appearances and the notion of substance as that the knowledge of which is foundation for all other knowledge. This epistemological section seems to me to be the best in the book.

A body of knowledge is seen as resting on first principles—those with no ground for justification within the system (109). Roughly, the standard laws of logic and mathematics and certain "basic" empirical statements are counted first principles for (current?) human knowledge. A basic empirical statement is one made with an ostensive sentence (a sentence introduced into discourse

by correlation with the world [126]) in circumstances where its assertion is intuitive (does not require justification [119]) (135). The notion of an intuitive assertion is invoked in response to the familiar argument from the regress of justification. The notion of an ostensive sentence is invoked in response to an analogous argument intended to show that not all sentences can be introduced by explication in terms of other sentences. The latter notion seems unclear, and not only because of unclarity in the notions of introduction and correlation. An ostensive sentence is supposed to contrast with a sentence introduced into discourse via other sentences which are already understood and which are jointly identical in meaning with it. But surely very few if any sentences are "introduced" into our discourse in this way. It would appear that the notion of a sentence involving a demonstrative construction would suit Quinton's general epistemological purposes better than his notion of an ostensive sentence. What is important is not whether the sentence is introduced by definition or by correlation with the world, but how it is correlated with the world.

Quinton argues that no empirical statements—even statements about immediate sense experience—are incorrigible in the sense that their truth follows from the fact that they are believed. The general argument (165) is that sense-experience statements involve predicative terms which are subject to general semantical rules and which may therefore be misused; and further, that there is no reason why such misuses must be verbal slips rather than factual mistakes (or even why a sharp distinction exists between slips and mistakes). These considerations, which seem to me to be telling, are backed by a number of examples of purportedly mistaken sense-experience beliefs, such as the momentary mistaking of the sensation of a sudden douse of cold water for a sharp pain. None of the examples are very convincing, though they are likely to make one uncertain. This suggests that sense-experience statements may be incorrigible in some weaker sense—for example, that there are no presently accepted means of overriding such statements in a clear-cut way, if they are assumed to be sincere.

Quinton further argues that basic statements are not necessarily or even primarily subjective, private, or phenomenological. Rather, he holds that basic statements are typically non-inferential perceptual statements about material things (173). Thus, substances as contrasted with appearances are not to be differentiated from substances as the foundations of knowledge. The argument for this view rests on a distinction between three "senses" of 'appears': epistemic ('They appear or seem to be away'), perceptually minimal ('What I see appears to be a cow since I see something with a cow-shape, etc.') and phenomenological ('There appears a cow to me now'). The argument develops the theme that statements involving the first two senses of 'appear' are typically about physical objects, whereas statements involving the phenomenological sense of 'appear' do not play a primary role in justifying statements about the physical world. This general line is made reasonably attractive.

The final chapter of the epistemological section deals with coherence theories of justification. Quinton presents two main arguments against such theories (213). The first is the claim that there might be a plurality of equally coherent but mutually incompatible theories. It is not made evident why such a point, even if accepted, should count against such theories. The second objection is that whereas only the rules of evidence and laws of logic can provide a

definite sense for 'coherence', these cannot themselves depend on coherence for their acceptability, on pain of regress. This latter argument, together with the claim that the laws of logic fix the sense of our factual beliefs, is used against the view that such laws are subject to experiential test in a way analogous to the way empirical hypotheses are (216-17). It would seem though that an intuitive, unformalized notion of coherence (both deductive and inductive) must motivate and judge our formalizations. And it is doubtful that the indefiniteness of such a notion makes it disreputable, as Quinton implies. The results of Gödel and Tarski suggest that our ordinary generalized notions of consistency and truth are not fully formalizable and hence are indefinite in this sense. (Of course, coherence is at present considerably less clear than consistency or truth; and this makes it difficult to assess "coherence theories" as well as objections like the first one mentioned above.) The play between intuition and formalization and the fact that intuition may be schooled by experience suggest that the logical laws of a system might well be subject to question and thus require justification. Quinton's view that such laws are conventional (273) appears to ignore the fact that choice of one logic rather than another to organize empirical beliefs is not always obvious or arbitrary. Sometimes it is subject to complicated theoretical considerations.

Nevertheless Quinton's view that logical laws have a special status within a system of knowledge is quite plausible. Perhaps part of its plausibility derives from the fact that logic is topic-neutral and from the fact that procedures for choosing among apparently alternative logics are less well agreed upon than procedures for testing empirical hypotheses. I suspect that the view's plausibility also owes much to assuming a temporally and practically circumscribed notion of "system."

The view that certain singular empirical statements have a special status in justifications is also intuitive (cf. the worthwhile points on 121, 191-92, 210). But Quinton's claim that such statements require no justification (within "the system") raises doubts. In the first place, his account (215) of the conditions under which singular statements support generalizations is a virtually unqualified and apparently unacknowledged revival of Nicod. Dissatisfaction with the unintuitive consequences of this account has been a primary stimulus for holistic theories of justification. In the second place, Quinton recognizes (191) that certain empirical statements are basic in his sense only relative to uses under certain standard conditions. But it would seem that we could in principle require for any such statement under standard circumstances a justification of the presupposition that the circumstances are standard. These points suggest that justification is far more complicated than Quinton's view indicates. But his qualified version of the traditional hierarchical account of the structure of knowledge is a healthy antidote to widespread complacency (in America) over a highly metaphorical, scarcely articulated holism.

The last section of the book argues that material objects alone are "logically independent existences" (249). Briefly, Quinton holds that talk of abstract objects, causal connections, and values reduces to talk of physical entities and that mental entities and the theoretical entities of science are identifiable with physical entities. A frustrating aspect of this section is that the ground-rules governing such reductions and identifications are never spelled out.

The discussion of mathematical entities is unsatisfactory. It is conducted

under the undefended assumption (255-57) that elementary number theory is the only part of mathematics a nominalist need worry about. No attempt is made to deal with the apparent objectivity of set theory or with the apparent reliance of statements of measurement in physics on the real numbers. Moreover, even the problem presented by the infinity of the natural numbers is left unmentioned. The discussion of other universals is primarily aimed at showing that properties are not required in a theory of knowledge or learning. The points that are made along this line are plausible. But the brief discussion of apparently true sentences apparently involving indefinite reference to properties (254) is uncharacteristically obscure. Necessary truths are held to be analytic in the sense of being true by virtue of the meanings of their words (267). But the arguments for this view are peculiarly isolated from discussions of it during the last twenty-five years. There is no defense of the notion of analyticity, no explanation of how truths can result from convention, no examination of treatments of necessity inspired by quantified modal logic.

The discussion of theoretical entities is well-written and contains several interesting critical points. It is based on the premise that something could not be a material object and be "radically unobservable" (286-87). Quinton argues that most of the theoretical entities of science are not "radically unobservable," in the sense that it is in principle possible to construct instruments whereby one could come to form non-inferentially justified perceptual beliefs about them (304-5). The notion of non-inferentiality is explicated in terms of requiring no further justification within the system. Quinton intends his notion of non-inferentiality to be liberal enough to include assisted observation, but conservative enough to rule out perceptual reports of elementary particles on the basis of use of cloud-chambers. I find this distinction appealing, but perplexing. Immediate agreement over singular demonstrative sentences seems to be the clearer criterion for observability, but it misses the distinction; the present criterion does not help explicate the distinction and runs up against our previously discussed questions about freedom from justification. Quinton's discussion further implies (304) that the most elementary particles of the universe (assuming there are such) are "radically unobservable" and hence not material objects. This should lead one to wonder about the truth as well as the intended interpretation of the initial premise.

Except for a good treatment of apriori objections to locating mental states or events, the discussion of mind is sketchy. Quinton backs an identity theory largely out of consideration for dualism's causal and epistemological afflictions (319) and out of dissatisfaction with definitional behaviorism's accounts of introspective knowledge. The argument in defense of an identity theory (331-34) roughly recapitulates Smart's article on the subject. (Theories identifying states and those identifying events are not distinguished.) There is also a discussion of intentional idioms and some suggestive remarks on the relations between convention and intention (344) and between learning and meaning (345-46). The book concludes with a lively defense of hedonistic naturalism in value theory. Quinton's point of view provides interesting links between normative judgments as to health and efficiency and the more usually cited valuations in aesthetics, morality, and prudence.

The book is well-edited, and there is a useful index.

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