It is the purpose of my monograph to assess the cogency of [Quine's] arguments and to isolate what is of lasting value in Quine's position.

I will not restrict myself to the role of an umpire. Rather, I will enter the arena and offer positive or negative criticism of my own. As I share Quine's general standpoint, i.e. his relative empiricism, my criticism will be mainly internal criticism: it will consist in pointing out the stresses, strains and inner tensions which reveal themselves as soon as one tries to put together Quine's sundry doctrines and positions. (p. 13)

So begins Paul Gochet's *Ascent to Truth: A Critical Examination of Quine's Philosophy.* The text is composed of seven chapters and a conclusion which, altogether, consist of some 59 short sections. Given the culling task he has set for himself, this is not a bad way to proceed. And, somewhat like a prize fighter whose best punch is his jab, Gochet relentlessly jabs his way through 173 pages. Sometimes he spars with Quine, sometimes with Quine's critics, but spar he does. I shall return to examine some of the details of Gochet's pugilistic performance, but first I should like to note what I take to be two of the book's major contributions towards providing a correct understanding of Quine's philosophy.

First, Gochet correctly stresses the importance of Quine's distinction between observation sentences as unstructured wholes versus parsed (or theory-laden) observation sentences (p. 33). This distinction is the key to understanding (i) why Quine does not lapse into radical holism, at the expense of his empiricism (p. 31), (ii) why he believes that sentences can remain true even though the reference of the terms they contain can be systematically changed (viz., inscrutability of reference and ontological relativity), and (iii) why Quine advocates underdetermination of physical theory and indeterminacy of translation.

Second, Gochet fully appreciates Quine's commitment to naturalism. Or, to put the point differently, he fully appreciates Quine's conception of the reciprocal containment of ontology and epistemology. Gochet expresses this very important point by saying that ontology is

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1 *Ascent to Truth: A Critical Examination of Quine's Philosophy*, by Paul Gochet (Munchen Wien: Philosophia Verlag, 1986), 202 pp., bibliography, index of names, index of subjects, $34.00.
immanent while epistemology is transcendent. Whatever the termin-
ology, the point is that the ontology of natural science (our best theory of
what there is) is projected from the epistemology of natural science
(our theory of method and evidence), and, conversely, our theory of
method and evidence (epistemology) is contained in our best theory of
what there is (ontology).

All too frequently, purported expositions and criticisms of Quine’s
philosophy that have found their way into print fall short of the mark
because their authors do not fully appreciate the import of the two
doctrines noted above (viz., the dual aspects of observation sentences
and the reciprocal containment of ontology and epistemology). It is to
Gochet’s great credit, therefore, that he more than once brings the
import of these doctrines to the attention of his readers.

True to his opening remarks, Gochet ends up accepting various of
Quine’s doctrines and positions while rejecting others. Among the latter
are three major departures from Quine’s philosophy: Gochet defends
“the analytic-synthetic distinction” (p. 171); he maintains “that in-
determinacy [of translation] and inscrutability [of reference] can be
reduced to a phenomenon of very limited importance if the constraints
of language learning are brought to bear on the issue” (p. 171); and, he
suggests “that we should abandon [the underdetermination thesis] as ill-
founded” (p. 172). Let us briefly examine each of these three major
departures from Quine’s philosophy.

The Analytic-Synthetic Distinction. Beginning with Quine’s “Two
Dogmas of Empiricism” and Grice and Strawson’s “In Defense of a
Dogma”, Gochet works his way through some of the current literature
concerning the analytic-synthetic distinction. His sympathies lie with
those philosophers who argue against Quine and for the distinction. He
is especially sympathetic to the argument in favour of the distinction put
forth by Graham Priest in his engaging essay “Two Dogmas
of Quineanism”. According to Gochet, “Priest agrees with Quine’s
generalized holism: everything is revisable” (p. 28), but he “subscribes
to a Wittgensteinian account of validity which Quine would reject” (p.
28).

I have my doubts about the claim that Priest and Quine share the
same view of holism, but I agree with Gochet’s claim they have different
conceptions of validity such that ‘All bachelors are unmarried’ is
analytic for Priest, but not for Quine. What is left unclear is which
conception Gochet accepts. Instead of addressing that issue squarely, he
adopts a more modest position:

Even if one sides with Quine and takes up the standard [model-theoretic]
conception of validity, there is an important lesson to be learned from Lewis
Carroll and Priest, namely that rules of inference – and analytical sentences
(at least the logical truths among them) do not belong on the same level as
With respect to the 'web of belief', they enjoy an autonomy to which Quine does not do full justice when he merely grants them the privilege of lying in the center of the web of belief. Priest's elaboration of Lewis Carroll's insight strikes a blow to Quine's gradualism and supports the dichotomy between logical truths and factual truths. (p. 28)

However, until the shroud of obscurity surrounding 'level' and 'autonomy' is lifted, it is difficult to measure the philosophical impact of this 'blow to Quine's gradualism'. As things stand, this is a pretty weak defense of the analytic-synthetic distinction.

Before leaving Gochet's treatment of the topic of analyticity, there is an associated matter of interpretation that ought to be clarified. Gochet correctly understands Chomsky as claiming that Quine surely does not abandon "the distinction between verbal disagreements and disagreements in belief" (p. 36). However, Gochet thinks Chomsky is mistaken: he believes that Quine does in fact question "this very distinction . . . precisely because of his rejection of the distinction between analytic and synthetic statements" (pp. 36–37). Subsequent to the publication of Gochet's book, however, Quine has clarified his view on this distinction, and we might as well enter that clarification in the record here:

There is still a distinction, heedlessly and needlessly linked to analyticity, that is indeed important both daily and enduringly for the methodology of science. It is the distinction between verbal and substantive issues. Verbal issues are the ones that can be bypassed by some paraphrase. But no synonymy relation is presupposed here; what matters is just that the paraphrase be acceptable to all parties for purposes of the continuing investigation.²

So, Quine, at least, does not regard himself as having abandoned the distinction in question. There may very well be particular instances where the distinction is without a difference, but not in all instances.

Indeterminacy and Inscrutability. In order for Quine to establish the truth of the indeterminacy of translation thesis, he must, according to Gochet, establish both (a) that alternative manuals for translating native utterances are constructable and (b) that there is no objective reason for preferring one such manual over another. Moreover, Gochet contends that Quine has established (a) but not (b):

He has proved, that is, that there is an epistemological under-determination of translation manuals with respect to behavioural data, but he has in no way established point (b), i.e., shown that there is an ontological indeterminacy which is both different from and additional to epistemological under-

determination. And it is (b) that is needed to distinguish analytical hypotheses from ordinary scientific ones, and to show that the indeterminacy of translation, with respect to behavioural data of the appropriate kind, differs from the under-determination of physical theories with respect to observations. (p. 55)

This is an old and frequently made charge against Quine’s indeterminacy thesis – probably originating with Chomsky.

Gochet attempts to support his charge by appealing to Moravcsik’s learnability requirement as a means for adjudicating among rival translation manuals (pp. 56-57). He hopes thereby to show that the analytical hypotheses of translation are not more arbitrary than the genuine hypotheses of physics. However, Moravcsik’s learnability requirement would be decisive in this matter only in the unlikely event that the language being translated has but one optimally learnable grammar-cum-semantics. Barring this unlikely eventuality, but accepting the constraints of the learnability requirement, the indeterminacy thesis now simply says that it is possible to construct translation manuals for some language that are equally simple, equally learnable, and equally correct. Nor does the addition of the learnability requirement by itself establish Gochet’s conclusion that ‘indeterminacy and inscrutability can be reduced to a phenomenon of very limited importance if the constraints of language learning are brought to bear on the issue’.

In discussing Quine’s view of the difference between underdetermination and indeterminacy, it is crucially important to realize that he does not draw the distinction between underdetermination and indeterminacy, physics and translation, genuine hypotheses and analytical hypotheses, on epistemological grounds. Physics and translation are on a par, epistemologically. Rather, he draws the distinction on ontological grounds. Thus, it is useless to try to undercut Quine’s distinction by appealing to epistemological considerations like Moravcsik’s learnability requirement. By the same token, it is useless to try to explain Quine’s distinction in epistemological terms as Gochet attempts to do when he writes: “We have good grounds to posit particles [in physics] . . . but we lack reasons of the same strength to post meanings [in translation]. Meanings have no explanatory power, contrary to particles” (p. 62).

For Quine, physics, though underdetermined, is not indeterminate, because physics, our physics, is the measure of what there is (remember, for the naturalist there is no first philosophy, physics is the ultimate parameter). On the other hand, translation is indeterminate because equally successful (i.e., simple, learnable, adequate), but incompatible, translation manuals can be consistent with the same totality of physical facts. This is one of the chief – and difficult – lessons of Quine’s naturalism and of the reciprocal containment of ontology and epistemology.
Gochet wonders how it is “possible for Quine to start from a fact which has been widely acknowledged by linguists since Ferdinand de Saussure, i.e. the fact that meaning is internal to language, and to reach a conclusion which no translator would subscribe to, i.e. that translation is indeterminate” (p. 63). His answer is that Quine does so because of “his tendency to blur the distinction between language and theory” (p. 63) and because he “ignores the constraints of surface syntax” (p. 64). However, I believe this answer is vitiated by Gochet’s mistaken assumption that Quine’s distinction between underdetermination and indeterminacy is drawn on epistemological (rather than ontological) grounds. The correct, albeit short, answer to Gochet’s question is: it is possible because linguists aren’t philosophers. A longer version of the philosopher’s defense involves mentioning naturalism, the rejection of first philosophy, the fact that physics settles questions of what there is, and the reciprocal containment of ontology and epistemology.

**Underdetermination.** Quine’s doctrine of underdetermination of physical theory claims that if it is possible to obtain one global theory of the world that entails all possible true observation categoricals, and no false ones, then it is in principle possible to obtain more than one such theory. Further, some of these global, empirically equivalent theories can be logically incompatible and incapable of being rendered logically equivalent by a reconstrual of their predicates. Lately, following Davidson’s lead, Quine has suggested a way of rendering all such logically incompatible theories logically compatible (but not logically equivalent). This involves the trivial expedient, as Quine calls it, of changing the spelling of key terms belonging to certain sentences of one of two incompatible theories so as to remove the incompatibility.

But now a pressing question arises: are the now reconciled theories *both* true? After all, they both entail all and only true observation categoricals. Consistent with his naturalism (and robust realism), Quine has claimed that only one of the reconciled theories is true. He calls this his sectarian position. However, consistent with his empiricism, Quine has claimed that both theories are true. He calls this his ecumenical position. Over the last few years he has moved from the sectarian position to the ecumenical position and back to the sectarian position. Gochet does a nice job of spelling out Quine’s vacillation.

In the end, Gochet has no use for Quine’s doctrine of underdetermination, largely because he sees it as the outcome of Quine’s “too static” (p. 124) account of science. “Quine’s static picture of science does not do justice to the relation of mutual dependence which holds between the intended scope or field of application of the theory and the set of possible observations relevant to its confirmation” (p. 125, note omitted). Apparently, the difficulty that Gochet sees with the doctrine of underdetermination is that it cannot adequately account for changes in scientific theories: “The very notion of a complete set of possible
observation conditionals [or categoricals] does not do justice to the way science evolves" (p. 124, note omitted). This latter claim is certainly true, but I wonder if it is not beside the philosophical point that Quine intended to make with his doctrine of underdetermination? I thought that the doctrine of underdetermination pertained to global, idealized theories (or theory formulations), not to fragmentary, historically evolving physical theories. I did not understand the doctrine's philosophical point merely to be that some historically developing physical theory could have developed in a way which is logically incompatible with the way in which it actually did develop. Rather, I took the doctrine's philosophical point to be that if there were one global, ideal theory of the world, then there would be more than one. Therefore, so much the worse for the philosophical doctrines of a Ding an sich and metaphysical realism. If this is the philosophical message of the doctrine of underdetermination, then the charge that it is static and does not account for changes in scientific theories is beside the point.

In conclusion, Gochet's book is a welcome addition to the ever burgeoning collection of monographs focusing on Quine's philosophy. The book is learned, clearly written, up to date, and makes judicious use of quotations. (However, some of the background discussions drawn from the secondary literature on Quine are a little too sketchy and, as a result, are difficult to follow.) Furthermore, Gochet's critical discussions of Quine's criterion of ontological commitment, his demarcation of logic, his criticisms of quantified modal logic, and his views on the revisibility of logic are all quite informative. Finally, I should mention just one small irritant: the book contains no fewer than twenty misprints, including one on the dust jacket. One justifiably expects better from a $34.00 book.

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3 Regarding the matter of the revisibility of logic, I recommend that Gochet's readers look at Quine's reply to Michael E. Levin in " Replies to Eleven Essays", Philosophical Topics (1981), pp. 231-233 before making up their minds on the matter.