

# Quine and the Abortive Scientific Revival of Metaphysics

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## ABSTRACT

A critical analysis of Quine metaphysics leads to the idea that nothing exist independent of natural sciences. This obliges us into the question: can metaphysics be reduced to a natural science? To tackle this question Quine dismantles First Philosophy by considering it as prior philosophy which is meaningless in the context of natural sciences. Affirmatively, he adopts naturalism whose locus is science. In line with this, he revived metaphysics from its speculative or abstract nature to a discipline that is continuous with natural sciences. This is attained through the pragmatic value of metaphysics. That is, via its application in the scientific processes. But in the final analysis metaphysics cannot be accommodated by natural sciences because it would be the loss of its essence of speculation and abstraction. The abortive revival of metaphysics is also explained by the fact natural sciences have a common denominator which is the scientific method and metaphysics is not structure on this method.

**KEYWORDS:** *metaphysics, naturalism, abortive and revival*

## INTRODUCTION

In Quinean naturalism, Quine endeavours to render the entirety of knowledge to succumb to the dictates of nature. This shoulders the fact that the entirety of science must be empirical. In the modern parlance, we can talk of experimentation. Quine shall put in place strategies to render all disciplines natural. The sciences here range from social, human and natural sciences. In Quine's natural sciences we have terminologies such as abstract objects which include: numbers, classes and functions. It is understood that Quine will attempt to reduce all abstract objects to be in line with the precepts of naturalism. These abstract objects usher us into metaphysics. In the Quinean context metaphysics which by definition is essentially abstract and speculative is transformed into a natural science. It is no more independent from science, but continuous with it. In this light the problem that surfaces is to determine whether metaphysics is reducible to natural sciences without reservations. At this point, the question that crops up is: can metaphysics be reduced to a natural science? Or can metaphysics be a discipline in natural sciences?

### 1. Quine's Conception of metaphysics

#### 1.1. Critique of First Philosophy: Naturalism as limitation

The history of philosophy remarkably in authors such as Parmenides, Plato, Aristotle, Bacon, John Locke, is replete with the spirit of the establishment of an a priori basis for

science.<sup>1</sup> But our focus here will not be on the historical development of First Philosophy in history of philosophy, but specifically, First Philosophy as professed by Rene Descartes, since he is the negative impetus to William Van Orman Quine's naturalism.

#### 1.1.1. Cartesian First Philosophy

Descartes schooled in La Fleche that was dominantly scholastic and had the pretensions of producing great minds, and Descartes hoping to tap from their excellence, ended up in total dissatisfaction as his knowledge was still replete with falsehoods and the fact that, philosophers were in perpetual conflict, disillusioned him with regard to philosophy. It is in this light that, Descartes observed that

As soon as I had finished my course of study, at which time it is usual to be admitted to the ranks of the well educated, I completely changed my opinion, for I found myself bogged down in so many doubts and errors, that it seemed to me that having set out to become learned, I had derived no benefit from my studies, other than that of progressively revealing to myself how ignorant I was.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For Parmenides and Plato foundationalism is structured on reason as the acceptable instrument in science. To Aristotle, Bacon and Locke experience takes pride of place.

<sup>2</sup> DESCARTES R., A Discourse of Method of Correctly Conducting one's Reason and Seeking Truth in the Sciences, Translated with an introduction and Notes by Ian Maclean, Oxford, Oxford University PRESS, 2006, P. 5.

The disappointment in the discovery of his ignorance was the catalyst to Descartes search for a *First Philosophy* on which the entirety of science could be built. In effect, Descartes will employ methodic doubt, but he shall not focus on this method, but on the outcome of the method. The consequent of the Methodic doubt was the First truth that Descartes baptized the Cogito. To attain this goal, Descartes emphasizes the skeptical approach to all thoughts suspicious of doubts. Descartes outlines that

I was trying to think all things being false in this way, it was necessarily the case that I, who was thinking them, had to be something; and observing this truth: I am thinking therefore I exist, was so secure and certain that it could be shaken by any of the most extravagant suppositions of the skeptics I judged that I could accept it without scruple, as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking.<sup>3</sup>

Descartes' First Philosophy is observed as founded on indubitable basis. That is, it is secured and certain, because from Descartes perspective, it cannot succumb to skepticism. From a functionalist dimension, the first truth is antecedent to a couple of others such as metaphysical, theological and epistemic truths. Descartes outlines that

I am thinking, therefore I exist'. From these few words ... derives a proof of his existence, but also seeks to discover his own essence, to demonstrate the existence of God, and to provide the criterion to guide the mind in its search for truth. No wonder that every word of the Cogito has been weighed a thousand times by philosophers.<sup>4</sup>

From the above excerpt, it is comprehended that, it leads us to: the discovery of human essence, rationalization and demonstration of God's existence, and finally the discovery of the epistemic rules meant for the guiding of the mind.

We are plunged here into the sphere of the dictatorial aspect of First Philosophy. It pretends to devise the rules on which science functions. Our major task, is not the examination of this criteriology, but what in Quinean perspective was problematic in it. In this vein, Kabadayi in "W.V.Quine's Naturalistic Approach to Epistemology", observed that Cartesian First Philosophy collapsed because "... the Cartesian program fails in its aim of finding anything of substance which is in fact justified beliefs and the strength of justification required by reference"<sup>5</sup>. According to Kabadayi, Cartesian *First Philosophy* could be granted if its claimed rationality was also identified in its foundation. Orman Quine will not relent to demonstrate that this Cartesian *First Philosophy* was doomed to failure by its deviation from the scientific method.

### 1.1.2. Quinean critique of first philosophy

From the above development, we may believe that Quine is out targeting only the Cartesian philosophy, but this is far from being true, for he estimates that epistemic malaise

<sup>3</sup> Ibidem., p. 28.

<sup>4</sup> Idem.

<sup>5</sup> KABADAYI, T. , "W.V.Quine's Naturalistic Approach to Epistemology", <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/214906> consulted on 13/2/2007, pp199-209

commenced with Descartes to Rudolf Carnap. In this light, he describes the malaise as

"Various epistemologists from Descartes to Carnap had sought a foundation for natural sciences in mental entities, the flux of raw sense data. It was as if we might first fashion a self-sufficient and infallible lore of sense data, innocent of reference to physical things, and then build our theory of the external world somehow on that finished foundation."<sup>6</sup>

From Quine's point of view, the crime of the empiricist and the rationalist epistemologists is simply their attempt in abandoning physical things in the establishment of the foundation of science. In other words, the rejection of First Philosophy is due to the discarding of the scientific method as Quine asserts that

"Naturalism needed not cast aspersions on irresponsible metaphysics, however deserved, much less on soft sciences or on speculative reaches of the hard ones, excerpt insofar as a firmer basis is claimed for them than the experimental method."<sup>7</sup>

The employment of the scientific method canalizes us into the problem of prioritization of epistemology over science, which Quine baptizes the "...old enigma of epistemological priority."<sup>8</sup> Quine's goal is to deliver science from this enigma and assign it a novel function, as he states that "The epistemologist thus emerges as defender or protector. He no longer dreams of First Philosophy, firmer than science can be based; he is out to defend science from within against its self-doubts"<sup>9</sup>. The question of internalism in science is raised at this level. Science demands an introspection rather than externalism for its development. Quine invites here, the imagery of the boat and the mariner that, he "...rebuilds his boat while staying afloat"<sup>10</sup>. This imagery emphasizes the autonomy of science vis-à-vis disciplines that discard the scientific method. Science itself is the source of raw materials for its reconstruction. This is explained by the fact that the scientific theories, facts, and method are reemployed for the resolution of scientific difficulties, because they are already given some credibility still based on the same aforementioned instruments. Consequently, Quine decrees that "no firmer basis for science than science itself; its roots. It is a matter as always in science, of tackling one problem with the help of our answers to others."<sup>11</sup> To examine this conception dished to science, it is necessary to have a brief examination of Quine's epistemology naturalized. But

<sup>6</sup> QUINE, W.V.O., Naturalism, or, Living Within One's Means" in Roger F. Gibson. Fr., *Quintessence: Basic Reading from the Philosophy of W.V. QUINE*, Cambridge: The Belkap press of Harvard University press. Pp. 275-286.

<sup>7</sup> Idem.

<sup>8</sup> QUINE, W.V.O., Epistemology Naturalised" in Roger F. Gibson. Fr., *Quintessence: Basic Reading from the Philosophy of W.V. QUINE*, Cambridge: The Belkap press of Harvard University press, pp. 259-274.

<sup>9</sup> QUINE W.V.O. The Roots of reference, Open Court, la Salle, Illinois, 1973, P3.

<sup>10</sup> QUINE W.V.O. "Epistemology Naturalized", op.cit., pp. 259-274.

<sup>11</sup> QUINE W.V.O. *From Stimulus to Science*, Massachusetts, London: The MIT Press, 1995, p.16.

epistemology naturalized will be suspended and rehabilitation of metaphysics handled first before epistemology naturalized.

## 1.2. Rehabilitation of metaphysics

In logical empiricism speculative metaphysics is meaningless and warrants elimination. But Quine does not admit this idea of absolute elimination of metaphysics and proposes to rehabilitate it by giving it a naturalist orientation. It is in this perspective that Peter Ibwagen in *The Neo-Carnapian*, reiterates that in the last four decades the revival of metaphysics took central stage in analytical philosophy and attention paid to ontological debates<sup>12</sup>. Reflections on abstract notions such as numbers, attributes, propositions and concrete objects were in high esteem. One famous group that oriented their philosophy in this dimension was the *neo-Quineans*, who considered Quine's *On What There is* as the basis of ontological method. This was contrary to Jonathan Shaffer's view that philosophers should not be concerned with the ontological questions.

Quine in line with the revival of metaphysics crusaders indulges in the domestication of metaphysics by natural sciences, and this will earn him, Huw Price qualification as "...friendly fire for too criticised traditional metaphysics"<sup>13</sup>. He does not terminate at this point, but emphasises Quine's reservation of metaphysics by giving salvation to ontology as he holds that "...Quine alone – who reserved metaphysics from positivism and other threats in those dark days after the Second World War. With the one hand, Quine wrote 'On What there is', and thus gave ontology a life-saving transfusion"<sup>14</sup> To accomplish this goal he provides metaphysics with a connotation that differs with the traditional conception. This revival was against Carnap's consideration of metaphysics as poor and likely to collapse. The death of metaphysics according to Carnap is orchestrated by the fact that it does not succumb to verificationism. Thus, Quine will endeavour to make this possible.

The reduction of metaphysics to a discipline that yields to verificationism costs Quine the elimination of the distinction between internal and external questions. The former are scientific but the latter are metaphysical. Quine attacks this distinction through his criticism of the analytic-synthetic distinction. Quine advocates that since the analytic-synthetic distinction on which that between internal and external questions is couched has collapsed then the only logical consequence is the collapse of the latter. External questions in the Carnapian thoughts are pragmatic and the internal ones are not, but through Huw Price we understand that with his project of domestication of metaphysics, Quine holds that internal questions are pragmatic as Price declares that "Quine argues that in virtue of the failure of the analytic-synthetic distinction, even internal questions are ultimately pragmatic."<sup>15</sup> Thus, it follows that if external and internal questions are both pragmatic then the logical conclusion is

the non-distinction between metaphysics and natural sciences.

Moreover, Quine dismantles the Carnapian view that external questions are not situated within a given language framework whereas internal questions are. Internal questions are verified depending on the rules of language, but external questions are meaningless because they are not verified. It is in this light that Andrei Moldovan concludes that

In sum, I take it that Carnap's (1950) anti-metaphysical argument can be reconstructed as having the following structure: the first premise is that metaphysical claims, such as 'There are numbers', are meant in the external sense (as theoretical external questions and answers). The second premise is that all theoretical external sentences are meaningless. Therefore, comes the conclusion, the sentences of metaphysics are meaningless<sup>16</sup>

To let metaphysics have meaning, Quine endeavours to demonstrate that truth is not language dependent. This is contrary to the Carnapian truth which is based on the linguistic framework. This implies those external questions are void of any truth value because they are external to language contrary to internal questions that depend on the linguistic framework for their truth. This is an indication of the fact that truth in the Carnapian context is language based, but Quine fails to see light in this view as he argues that it is instead ontological commitment that is language based. To cement his view of ontological commitment Quine argues that

I am not suggesting a dependence of being upon language. What is under consideration is not the ontological state of affairs, but the ontological commitment of a discourse. What there is does not in general depend on one's use of language, but what says there is does.<sup>17</sup>

From the above excerpt, it is vivid that the reality or truth is not determined by language and, the internal and external questions are all on a par. Since language has been eliminated, it is splendid that a discipline should be responsible for harbouring reality on which the truth depends. This discipline is metaphysics which harbours reality on which the truth depends. But it should be understood that metaphysics here is still in Quine's context of reviving metaphysics and not under the canopy of speculative thoughts.

Quine conceives metaphysics here as structured on the search for reality, but unlike speculative metaphysics that prioritised reason, as in Descartes, he considers it as the preoccupation of science. This is cemented in *Naturalism: or Living within One's Means* as Quine concludes that "... that it is within science itself ...that reality is to be identified and

<sup>12</sup> [http://andrewmbailey.com/pvi/Neo\\_Carnapians.pdf](http://andrewmbailey.com/pvi/Neo_Carnapians.pdf) consulted on 25th/-6/-2019.

<sup>13</sup> <http://prce.hu/w/preprints/metameta.pdf>, Consulted on 25/-6/-2019.

<sup>14</sup> [http://andrewmbailey.com/pvi/Neo\\_Carnapians.pdf](http://andrewmbailey.com/pvi/Neo_Carnapians.pdf) consulted on 25th/-6/-2019.

<sup>15</sup> Idem.

<sup>16</sup> MOLDOVAN A., "Carnap's External Questions and Semantic Externalism" in *Prolegomena*, University of Barcelona, 2014. Pp. 253-268.

<sup>17</sup> QUINE W.V.O., "Logic and the Reification of Universals" in *From a Logical Point of View*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., New York: Harper and Row publishers, 1961. Pp. 102- 129.

described"<sup>18</sup>. From the consideration of metaphysics as a branch of natural science, Quine is indirectly informing us that there is no distinction between internal and external questions.

We cannot limit naturalisation of metaphysics to the closure of the gap between internal and external questions, but also to the notion of abstract objects. The question posed here is to understand how Quine transforms elements that are not sensible into those that can be empirically determined. That is, the role of abstract objects in science. The abstract objects highlighted here include numbers, functions, classes, attributes and propositions. Quine does not admit all these objects but only the first three. The acceptance of the first three is based on two reasons<sup>19</sup> and the others rejected are also explained by two reasons.<sup>20</sup>

The pragmatic nature of abstract objects renders them absolutely necessary in natural sciences. The pragmatic role of abstract objects in natural sciences is orchestrated by the desire to quantify and measure scientific facts and laws. If numbers do not exist then physical objects would be in absolute disorder. In effect, Quine concludes that

...physical objects in this generous sense constitute a fairly lavish universe, but more is wanted-notably numbers. Measurement is useful in cookery and commerce, and in the fullness of time it rises to a nobler purpose. The formulation of quantitative laws<sup>21</sup>

One at this point poses the question to know how Quine reconciles physical objects and abstract objects. But it astonishes that Quine holds that the employment of abstract objects to guarantee our intension of bringing order in physical objects. Ipso facto, Quine explains that "So we assume abstract objects over and above physical objects."<sup>22</sup>

Numbers are conceived as values of variables and variables. This implies that numbers actually exist as independent realities. This explains why Quine's ontology shall embody them as he advocates that "Pure numbers, then apparently belong in our ontology"<sup>23</sup> If numbers are values of variables, then how can variables be accepted in natural sciences which demands only the inclusion of empirical realities.

Although language is not considered as the source of truth, it is pertinent to note that Quine does not completely discard it because he does not accept the possibility of science without language. To Quine, science is framed on language. Consequently, language is the values but the variable of language. It is in language that Quine observes the role of the

<sup>18</sup> QUINE, W.V.O., "Naturalism, or, Living Within One's Means" op. cit. pp. 275-286

<sup>19</sup> Kemp, G., *A Guide for the Perplexed*, New York: Continuum International publishing Group, 2006. P. 132. The first is that they are needed in science and the second anchors on the fact that they admit of satisfactory criteria of individuation.

<sup>20</sup> Idem. They are not needed in science and secondly, they admit no satisfactory criterion of individuation. That is, they are not referential.

<sup>21</sup> Quine W.V.O., *Theories and Things*, Cambridge: Belknap press of Harvard university press, 1981. P. 13.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem. P. 15.

<sup>23</sup> Ibidem. P. 14.

bound variable. The vitality of language and variables is observed as Quine outlines that "It has been objected that what there is is a question of fact and not language. True enough. Saying or implying what there is, however, is a matter of language; and this is the place of the bound variable."<sup>24</sup>. The problematic here lies on the fact that variables are abstract and naturalism is opposed to abstraction. But Quine informs us that science is couched in variables and cannot survive without it as he decrees that "...to be is to be the value of a variable"<sup>25</sup>. Consequently, variables gain the show in science through their pragmatic role.

Under the notion of abstract objects we are left with mathematical and logical truths that are termed abstract, but they have a vital rule in natural science. The gain influence and acceptability through their pragmatic role in the systematisation of science, as Quine holds that "... safeguard any purely mathematical truths; for mathematics infiltrates all branches of our system of the world, and its disruption would reverberate intolerably."<sup>26</sup> It should be noted that, before Quine, mathematical and logical truths were scorned because they were perceived as lacking empirical content. But with the revival of metaphysics by Quine, they benefit from holism to have empirical content. Mathematics has no independent content, but it obtains its content through its applicability in natural sciences, as Quine asserts that "Holism lets mathematics share empirical content where it is applied, and it accounts for mathematical necessity by freedom of selection and the maximum of minimum mutilation"<sup>27</sup>

It is observed from this subsection that Quine does not totally evacuate metaphysics from the domain of science, but has reformulated aspects that were under attack in naturalism. Metaphysics gains its naturalistic flavour through the applicability of elements such as mathematics, variables, classes, functions etc. Negatively, its naturalistic quality is observed in the rejection of aspects such as attributes, propositions etc. In addition to the negative, First Philosophy is completely discarded from the sphere of natural sciences.

## 2. Quinean naturalism as alternative to speculative metaphysics

To concretise his intension of rendering metaphysics a science, Quine Proposes naturalised epistemology as an ideal to shoulder the former questions tackled by metaphysics.

### 2.1. Notion of naturalized epistemology

Quine commences his article *Epistemology Naturalized* with the question of the foundation of natural sciences. The examination of this foundation is through an analogy with the foundation of mathematics that already has a remarkable improvement. The goal is the exposition of the absurdity of the foundation of natural sciences, by demonstrating that the most advanced science, that is mathematics, was also in the same scenario. Natural sciences like mathematics is

<sup>24</sup> Quine, W.V.O., *The Pursuit of Truth*, U.S.A.: Harvard University press, 1992. P. 27.

<sup>25</sup> Ibidem. P. 26.

<sup>26</sup> Quine, W.V.O., *The Pursuit of Truth*, op.cit., p. 15.

<sup>27</sup> Idem.

dichotomized into the doctrinal and the conceptual sides.<sup>28</sup> Quine treats this bifurcation in mathematics with a lot of desperation. The desperation is explained by the death of the normative aspect of mathematics. In order to examine this view in natural sciences, Quine is not original as he magnified the Humean stance. The bifurcation on natural sciences is structured on the fact that Quine is an empiricist and, as a result, it will be constructed on the basis that science is based on sense experience. In effect, Quine concluded that:

Just as mathematics is to be reduced to logic, or logic and set theory, so natural sciences. This means explaining the notion of body in sensory terms; here is the conceptual side. And it means justifying our knowledge of truths of nature in sensory term here is the conceptual side. And it means justifying our knowledge of truths of nature in sensory terms; here is the doctrinal side of the bifurcation.<sup>29</sup>

Quine holds that epistemology is structured on the empirical creed that "One is that whatever evidence there is for science is sensory evidence. The other...is that all inculcation of meanings must rest ultimately on sensory evidence."<sup>30</sup>In this line, it is questionable to admit Quine as contrary to the empiricist doctrine of reducing everything in science to immediate experience. Through pragmatism the non-empirical statements<sup>31</sup> obtain their empirical contents that make them empirical. Relative to justificationism, Quine like Hume is faced with the inductive problem. Hume's desperation on the doctrinal side gained Quine's admiration as he acknowledged that "The Humean predicament is the human predicament".

From the above, the comparative approach to the foundation of mathematics reveals that the conceptual side witnessed amelioration whereas the doctrinal side since Hume is stagnant. The despair that characterizes the doctrinal side, orchestrates Quine to indulge in a sort of psychology or behaviorism, with the intension of ensuring a deviation from sensory terms as the point of reference.

Before indulging in reciprocal containment, the differentiation of the novel and old epistemologies is warranted. Old epistemology as earlier earmarked is based on devising an a priori standard for science that takes pride of place over science. For the clarification of epistemology in its new frame, Quine stipulates that "The old epistemology aspired to contain in a sense, natural sciences, it would construct it somehow from sense data. Epistemology in its new setting conversely is contained in natural sciences, as a chapter of psychology."<sup>32</sup> Epistemology in the old frame was

established based on senses as exemplified in the thoughts of John Locke, Berkeley and David Hume. Experience was a determinant of the content and criterion of the evaluation of natural sciences. Epistemology in the novel Quinean frame is streamlined to reciprocal reduction that will be discussed subsequently.

It should be noted that reciprocal containment is geared towards the elimination of the priority enigma that characterizes the link between epistemology and science. Epistemology henceforth will be the description of the procedure that is involved in the construction of scientific theories, and not the construction of norms to that effect. But Quine may sound contradictory as he grants contrary positions as he further acknowledges the old mannerism as still pertinent in the new dispensation. As a result, he reaches the conclusion that

...the old containment remains valid too, in its way. We are studying how the human subject of our study posits bodies and projects his physics from his data, and we appreciate that our position in the world is just like his.<sup>33</sup>

Old epistemology's pertinence lies in the priority given to the physical objects and their relation with scientific theories. Another ingredient of validity lies in the fact that, it valorizes the essentiality of experience that was the creed of old epistemology with the continental empiricists. Quine may not be contradictory as earlier mentioned because he still deals with the various elements that were previously used but focus is on the process than rules as was in the former epistemology.

It is worthy of note that, in the old as well as the new, it is purely a human construction. In epistemology, the pivotal rule of man is yet insurmountable. The reciprocal containment is considered human production because it is *via* stimulations of the sensory receptors that it is established. This is explained by the Quinean conception:

"Our very epistemological enterprise, therefore, and the psychology wherein it is a component chapter, and the whole of natural sciences wherein it is a component book- All this is our own construction or projection from stimulations like those we were meting out epistemological subject."<sup>34</sup>

Epistemology is reduced to social creation through reciprocal containment that is founded on stimulations, but the question that emanates here is to devise the explanation for this containment. The explanation of the containment is outlined by Joseph Spencer. One of the reasons is the fact that the epistemic preoccupation is the establishment of the foundation of science. Spencer observes to this effect that, "...it seemed only natural to Quine that epistemology should be linked with a field of science."<sup>35</sup>The linking of epistemology to science is to render it rational and

<sup>28</sup> The conceptual side is concerned with meaning while the doctrinal side is concerned with truth. The conceptual side translate the mathematics to logic and the doctrinal side translate the truth of mathematics to that of logic.

<sup>29</sup> QUINE W.V.O. "Epistemology Naturalized", op.cit, pp. 259-274.

<sup>30</sup> Idem.

<sup>31</sup> The non-empirical statements here include mathematical and logical statements which obtain their empirical content through their participation in science.

<sup>32</sup> QUINE W.V.O. "Epistemology Naturalized", op.cit, pp. 259-274

<sup>33</sup> Idem.

<sup>34</sup> Idem

<sup>35</sup> SPENCER J. "Naturalism and Opponents" in Undergraduate Review, vol. 6, Bridgewater State university, 2010, pp. 164-168, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/48824805.pdf> consulted on 19/12/2019.

intelligible because scientific results are useful for epistemology.

Consequently, epistemology becomes an apt foundation of science since it succumbs to the exigencies of naturalism, which holds that the basis of science is scientific and not a priori. Here, we are in the second justification for the containment. The intelligibility of epistemology lies in it as a department of psychology, as Spencer decrees that "...the appeal of science lies in the fact that it is intelligible, which epistemology had not been, Quine believed, until he linked epistemology with psychology."<sup>36</sup>

Reciprocal containment is also explained by the fact that through it, the possibility of attaining certitude is not doubtful. The reduction of epistemology to a department of psychology leads to real knowledge. Spencer in this context reiterates that "another reason is that Quine believed, as Hume had, that if we brought fields of philosophy into fields of science, we would be able to come to know what, in this case, knowledge actually is."<sup>37</sup> But why does Quine believe that, it is through this containment that knowledge becomes actual?

The reciprocal containment is characterized by the fact that there exist a kind of exchange between science and epistemology. That is, each is a donor as well as a receiver. It is thanks to this relation that Quine conceived the containment as "There is thus reciprocal containment, though containment in different senses: Epistemology in natural sciences and natural sciences in epistemology."<sup>38</sup> From the theory of sets in mathematics, it is impossible to understand the Quinean doctrine of reciprocal containment. The question is: how can a subset to a given universal set be a universal set to that universal set? The issue here is that, one runs into a dilemma of deciding which one takes the commanding posture. The confusion that is eminent in Quine's thoughts is the explanation of epistemology as part of natural sciences. This containment implies that epistemology succumbs to the strictures of natural sciences; but what remains problematic is the specificity of epistemology. This question may also be posed in relation to the containment of natural sciences in epistemology. Epistemology which is conceived as discourse on science, how can it suddenly become the universal set to which natural sciences is just a may compartment?

To tackle the above conception, Quine will probably resort to the notion of continuity between epistemology and natural sciences. But the question that one poses is to understand whether the relation is horizontal or vertical. It is certain that, Quine advocates the linear approach since epistemology and natural sciences are rated as replete with mutual relations. Then from what I term the set theory which questions the reciprocal containment, the popular critic entitled the circularity threat is devised.

The interplay between natural sciences and epistemology ushers us into Quine's solution to the circularity issue. The circularity issue is fuelled by the primacy of sense data. To

overcome the circularity problematic, Quine deviates epistemology from First Philosophy to science as an institution. Epistemology ceases to be an a priori source of instructions to science but a science. This is the source of the eradication of the priority enigma. The enigma cropped up from the element of consciousness that characterized epistemology as Quine stated that "...epistemological context the conscious form had priority, for we were out to justify our knowledge of the external world by rational reconstruction, and that demands awareness."<sup>39</sup>

It is vivid that, naturalized epistemology is a campaign to eradicate the element of awareness in epistemology which was the brain behind the priority enigma. This is because the element of awareness aided in rational reconstruction and the collapse of rational construction is automatically the elimination of consciousness. This is the goal of Quinean logical empiricism. The elimination of consciousness is justified by the fact that "What count as observation now can be settled in terms of the stimulation of sensory receptors, let consciousness fall where it may."<sup>40</sup> Priority at this moment, will be linked but to proximity to the sensory receptors. This conception falls on deaf ears to great minds such as Kim, Putnam etc.

## 2.2. From stimulation to theory

If consciousness is pulled out of the system then naturalism will be left with the option of demonstrating the modus operandi of the construction of theory formulation. Old epistemology was preoccupied with the construction of theories from external objects. In other words, science was out for the construction of evidence based on physical things. This is the *raison d'être* for which, within the sphere of empiricism, physicalism dominates and specifically in the unity of science movement. In Quine, the relation between stimulation and science is developed in *Word and Object*, *Roots of Reference*, and *The Pursuit of Truth*. Quine narrows the question of evidence to that of "theory formulation". The formulation is obtained through psychology. Quine presents this project as follows:

It would address the question how we, physical denizens of the physical world, can have projected our scientific theory of that whole world from our meager contacts with it: From mere impacts or rays and particles on our surfaces and a few odds and ends such as the strain of walking uphill.<sup>41</sup>

Epistemology from this posture departs from prescription of norms in science to the description of the procedure involved in the construction of theories. The major question lies in the fact that, scientific theories comparatively to the stimulations are quantitatively incompatible. At this point, the input is not only minimal but the concept of receptors echoed in epistemology for the first time. The departure from physical objects to "stimulation of sensory receptors"<sup>42</sup> is tagged a pillar of naturalism. Quine narrows the link between stimulation and theory, to Linguistic acquisition

<sup>39</sup> Idem.

<sup>40</sup> Idem.

<sup>41</sup> QUINE W.V.O., *From Stimulus to Science*, London, The MIT press, 1995, P. 16.

<sup>42</sup> QUINE W.V.O., *Theories and Things*, Cambridge: Belknap press of Harvard University Press, 1981, p., 24.

<sup>36</sup> Idem.

<sup>37</sup> Idem.

<sup>38</sup> QUINE W.V.O., "Epistemology Naturalized", op.cit., pp. 259-286

and development. In this context, the development of cognitive language is our object of reflection.

### 2.3. Cognitive language and theory

Language in the Quinean context is the mirror of theory formulation. The logical empiricists of the 1930s established a liaison between science and language. It is in this line that, Quine reduces science like language to a conceptual frame as he outlines that "...that language is a conceptual bridge of our making, linking sensory stimulation to sensory stimulation; there is no extrasensory perception."<sup>43</sup> In this context, scientific theories are dependent on human activity. This human nature of science is explained by the fact that, the systematization of science and the construction of theories is styled on man's activity. The artificial nature of science is explained in Quine's linguistic conception of language as a social product. Quine concludes to this effect that, "language is a social art which we all acquire on the evidence solely of other people overt behavior under publicly recognizable circumstances."<sup>44</sup> The reduction of cognitive language to an empirical venture and the whole of science to natural sciences make us to question the place of metaphysics as an element of naturalism.

### 3. Necessity of speculative metaphysics

It is pertinent to note that one of the main themes of logical empiricism and naturalism in particular was the destruction of metaphysics. Quine as a naturalist is not exempted from this anti-metaphysical drive. Although, it is embarrassing to still witness the term metaphysics in the philosophy of William Van Orman Quine. It is probable that Quine's diction is not uncalculated. But one may conceive the employment of the word "metaphysics", as probably, an attempt to sugar-coat his philosophy with the intension of escaping the intellectual wrath or criticism of the metaphysicians. This could also render his philosophy palatable to the metaphysicians. This attempt by Quine to render metaphysics continuous with natural sciences is flawed because of the following reasons:

From ancient philosophy we are nurtured with the view that metaphysics had its origin from the works of Aristotle. As the founder of this term he attributed it to his works that came after physics. In this context, physics refers to the class of all things, processes and methods that emanate from the realm of the senses. The prefix *meta* is a Greek Word which means beyond. In effect, metaphysics is conceived as that which is transcendental or beyond the physical world. In the modern parlance physics will be conceived as science and to extremes natural sciences. The modern science will not limit the physical only to the sensible, but that which can be determined by the experimental method. But from the etymology of the word, we expect elements that transcend the physical world and, as such, non-scientific. This attribute alone should be capital in eliminating metaphysics from physics, comprehended from both its ancient and modern connotations. Thus, from its etymology it is absolutely non-scientific.

But when we observe that Quine maintains metaphysics in his work with the pretensions that it is not speculative, one is astonished to whether there exist a metaphysics that is void

of speculation. Metaphysics from its origin is purely an abstract or speculative discipline. Consequently, one questions the use of aspects such as numbers, classes, and functions in science. Numbers are human creations and this explains why they differ from language to language although with the same quantitative reference. It holds same to other aspects such as classes and functions. They are not subjected to empirical evaluation and as such should be eliminated from the domain of science. This leads us into the examination of the basis on which Quine considers the abstract elements as empirical.

From the earlier developments, it was conceived that abstract objects with mathematics and logic inclusive gained their verification or empirical content within the context of holism. They are empirical according to Quine, thanks to their pragmatic role in science which range from their role in systematization, evidence and theory formulation, etc. Nevertheless, the question that arises here is to determine whether pragmatism can be the basis of any object to be considered as empirical or natural. Pragmatism examines things from their functions, roles or values. This implies that it may not take into consideration the aspect of its empirical ontology. We may observe that even the biblical lies from Abraham and Isaac with regards to their wives were of pragmatic importance, but without ontological commitment. As a result, it is logical to conclude that pragmatism does not render necessarily any object natural or empirical. Pragmatism is superlatively linked to axiology, but the natural or empirical is directed towards ontology. The transforming of the abstract objects to the natural or empirical objects through pragmatism is aimed at rendering them succumb to the scientific method, which may be chaotic.

Quine fails to determine how abstract objects are treated with regard to scientific methodology. According to Quinean holism abstract objects are scientifically studied as part of a system, but physical objects are individually treated. This implies that the criterion for the determination of scientific objects suffers from a multitude of fundamentum divisionis. Physical objects succumb sensibility or experimentation and abstract objects submit to speculation

In sum, metaphysics has elements that the exigencies of natural sciences cannot accommodate. Thanks to this, metaphysics can never be in harmony with Quinean natural sciences or naturalism.

### Conclusion

In the examination of Quinean metaphysics in the context of naturalism, our preoccupation has been to evaluate Quine's attempt to domesticate metaphysics. In effect, the question that was earlier posed was to understand whether metaphysics can be reducible to a natural sciences. In the final analysis, Quine attains this through the critique of First Philosophy and advocacy of naturalism with regard to metaphysics. The naturalizing of metaphysics is attained through the rehabilitation of metaphysics. But in the final analysis, one conceives that metaphysics cannot be accommodated or reduced to natural sciences because metaphysics from etymology is eternally abstract and speculative. This speculative and abstract nature is justified by the fact that metaphysical elements are irreducible to the empirical. We further observed that metaphysics cannot be

<sup>43</sup> Ibidem., p. 2.

<sup>44</sup> QUINE W.V.O., *Ontological Relativity*, op.cit. p. 26.

rendered natural through pragmatism because it does not render abstract objects empirical, but it exposes only their axiology or practicability. Lastly, the fact that Quinean theory of naturalism is centered on methodological monism, which is the scientific method, as Ruth Paul exposes that “The substance of Quine’s naturalism derives from his account of the “method of science”<sup>45</sup> natural sciences incapable of incorporating metaphysics which does not yield to the precepts of this method.

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<sup>45</sup> **RUTH P.**, “Epistemology Naturalized” in *Dialectica*, vol. 53, No. 2, 1999, pp. 87-109. <https://about.jstor.org/terms>.