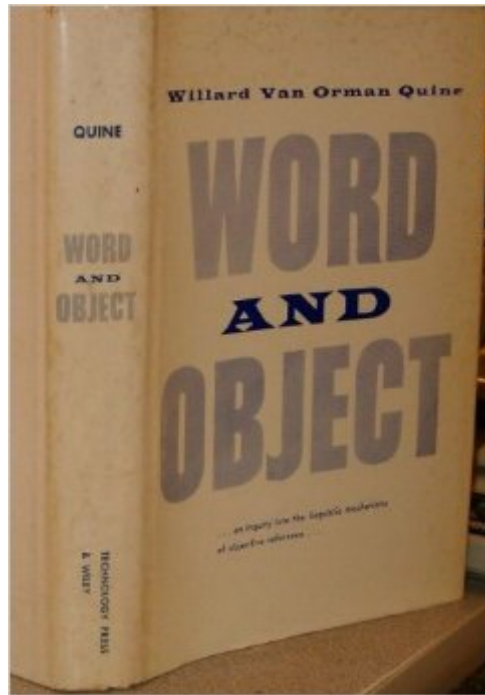


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Word And Object



Synopsis

2013 Reprint of 1960 Edition. Full facsimile of the original edition, not reproduced with Optical Recognition Software. Willard Van Orman Quine begins this influential work by declaring, "Language is a social art. In acquiring it we have to depend entirely on intersubjectively available cues as to what to say and when." With "Word and Object" Quine challenged the tradition of conceptual analysis as a way of advancing knowledge. The book signaled twentieth-century philosophy's turn away from metaphysics and what has been called the "phony precision" of conceptual analysis. In the course of his discussion of meaning and the linguistic mechanisms of objective reference, Quine considers the indeterminacy of translation, brings to light the anomalies and conflicts implicit in our language's referential apparatus, clarifies semantic problems connected with the imputation of existence, and marshals reasons for admitting or repudiating each of various categories of supposed objects. A profoundly influential work. --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book is Quine's first full-length book, and it sets forth his most elaborate statement of his wholistic thesis of language. Instead of the metaphorical statement in "Two Dogmas" written a decade earlier, here in Word and Object Quine expresses his thesis in the literal vocabulary of behavioristic psychology with his idea of "stimulus meaning". Much of the book is an exposition of his thesis of semantic indeterminacy as it is manifested in translation between languages, which thus appears as his indeterminacy of translation thesis sometimes called his "radical translation" thesis.

In fact there is nothing radical about it; linguists have long known of such translation problems. As has long been said: traduttore, traditore. But Quine uses it to critique positivism, and it is essential to his pragmatism. In the translation situation he portrays the field linguist in the same situation that the positivist Carnap postulates in "Meaning and Synonymy in Natural Language", where Carnap attempted to describe how the field linguist can ascertain a term's "intension" or meaning by identifying its extension or range of application from the observed behavior of native speakers of an unknown language. Carnap admitted that this determination of extension involves uncertainty and possible error due to vagueness, but he excused this uncertainty and risk of error, because it occurs even in the concepts used in empirical science. While this admission of extensional vagueness in science made the fact unproblematic for Carnap, it had just the opposite significance for Quine. For Quine extensional vagueness is an inherent characteristic of language that he calls "referential inscrutability", and which he later calls "ontological relativity".

Willard Van Orman Quine (1908-2000) was an American philosopher and logician who taught at Harvard University, and wrote many books such as *From a Logical Point of View: Logico-Philosophical Essays*, *The Web of Belief*, etc. He wrote in the Preface to this 1960 book, "Language is a social art. In acquiring it we have to depend entirely on intersubjectively available cues as to what to say and when. Hence there is no justification for collating linguistic meanings, unless in terms of men's dispositions to respond overtly to socially observable stimulations. An effect or recognizing this limitation is that the enterprise of translation is found to be involved in a certain systematic indeterminacy | The indeterminacy of translation invests even the question what objects to construe a term as true of. Studies of the semantics of reference consequently turn out to make sense only when directed upon substantially our language, from within. But we do remain free to reflect, thus parochially, on the development and structure of our own referential apparatus" (Pg. ix) He points out, "We cannot strip away the conceptual trappings sentence by sentence and leave a description of the conceptual world, and man as a part of it, and thus find out what cues he would have of what goes on around him. Subtracting his cues from his world view, we get man's net contribution to the difference."

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