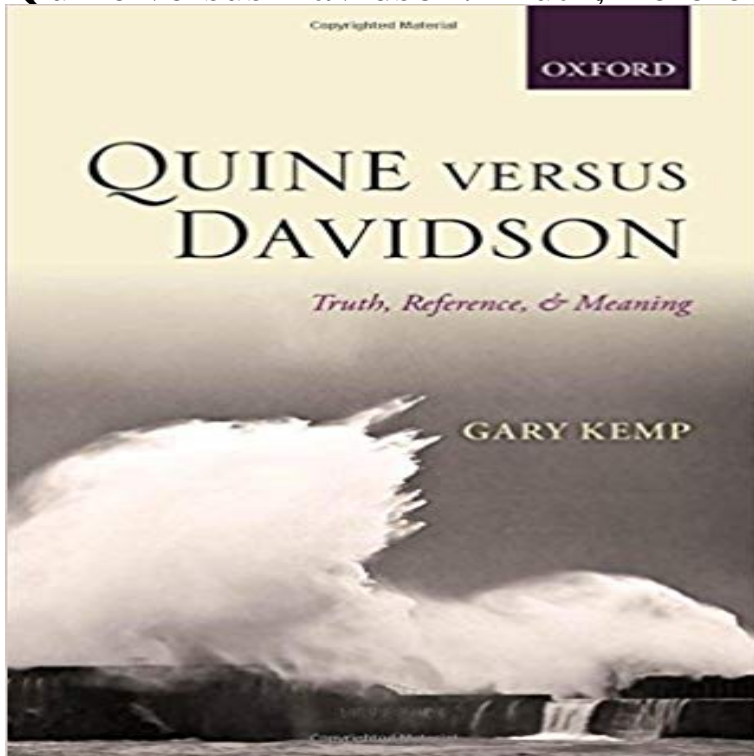


Quine versus Davidson: Truth, Reference, and Meaning



Gary Kemp presents a penetrating investigation of key issues in the philosophy of language, by means of a comparative study of two great figures of late twentieth-century philosophy. So far as language and meaning are concerned, Willard Van Orman Quine and Donald Davidson are usually regarded as birds of a feather. The two disagreed in print on various matters over the years, but fundamentally they seem to be in agreement; most strikingly, Davidsons thought experiment of Radical Interpretation looks to be a more sophisticated, technically polished version of Quinean Radical Translation. Yet Quines most basic and general philosophical commitment is to his methodological naturalism, which is ultimately incompatible with Davidsons main commitments. In particular, it is impossible to endorse, from Quines perspective, the roles played by the concepts of truth and reference in Davidsons philosophy of language: Davidsons employment of the concept of truth is from Quines point of view needlessly adventurous, and his use of the concept of reference cannot be divorced from unscientific intuition. From Davidsons point of view, Quines position looks needlessly scientific, and seems blind to the genuine problems of language and meaning. Gary Kemp offers a powerful argument for Quines position, and in favour of methodological naturalism and its corollary, naturalized epistemology. It is possible to give a consistent and explanatory account of language and meaning without problematic uses of the concepts truth and reference, which in turn makes a strident naturalism much more plausible.

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