
BOOK REVIEW

Willard Van Orman Quine: *The Significance of the New Logic*

Translated and edited by Walter Carnielli,

Frederique Janssen-Lauret, and William Pickering

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Analytic philosophy is not filled with critical editions, with formerly unpublished archive materials that are edited by professionals, or with recently translated texts that were available previously only for a restricted circle of native-speaker scholars. Though there were some nice exceptions recently (as Gregory Frost-Arnold's transcription and edition of the famous Quine–Tarski–Carnap Harvard-discussions), it still counts as an important event in the profession if something like that appears. These hardly accessible materials are important for various reasons, but they are of utmost concern to anyone who is interested in the history of philosophy because without these what one might produce are philosophically motivated histories (in worst case fictions), while with their help historically supported philosophies could be produced as well.

The recent publication of Quine's *The Significance of the New Logic* is thus more than welcomed in the community. What is that we are dealing with now? Quine was invited to hold a seminar in São Paulo for a few months in 1942. After delivering his lectures in Portuguese, Quine left there his prepared notes and the manuscript appeared as *O Sentido da Nova Lógica* in 1944. It functioned as the major textbook for philosophers and logicians in Brazil for decades (p. viii–xii). This book—the second edition of which has appeared in 1996—has been translated and edited by Walter Carnielli, Frederique Janssen-Lauret and William Pickering and published by Cambridge University Press.

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The book consists of four major parts. At first, there is a short informal editorial introduction summarizing the contents of the book, providing some Brazilian background and noting the editorial conventions used throughout the translation. It should be noted right at the beginning that the editors did an amazingly great and conscious job by providing explanatory notes and comparisons with Quine's other works. The second part is a longer historical-philosophical introductory essay by Janssen-Lauret (I will discuss it below) about Quine, his book and its significance. These introductions are followed by the actual translation and text of Quine's small (less than 150 pages) logic-book. The final section of the book is another translation: when Quine taught his seminar in São Paulo, he was invited to give a short summarizing-like lecture about the new logic and the United States. The short paper (12 pages), "The United States and the Revival of Logic," translated by the editors of this book, is the Appendix that is followed by a helpful list of editorial notes and a detailed index of names and subjects.

The reader is struck by the fact that many-many passages of Quine's book are just summaries or paraphrases of his back then recent two logic-textbooks that appeared in English, *Mathematical Logic* (1940) and *Elementary Logic* (1941). Though it surely made good sense for him to patch together the most valuable insights and methods of logic from previous materials in order to introduce the subject to an audience that starts from almost zero (especially in war-time when Quine did not have much time and energy to construct *entirely* new lectures), from our current point of view it makes the material a bit more usual or casual than especially revealing.

Quine's small textbook consists of an introduction and four parts. The first part is called "Theory of Composition" and it is basically a general introduction to the theorems and techniques of what is called recently propositional or sentential logic. Quine goes through all the connectives, their reduction, sentence formation and truth tables. It is quite understandable why this book was used frequently and widely in Brazil as the introductory text of logic: Quine's presentation is short, precise, explicit, and always points to the heart of the matter. Writing already three other books (the first one was his Ph.D. dissertation) on formal logic has its mark on this text. The next part is about the theory of quantification with the usual subjects of quantifiers, variables, their relation to truth, validity, proofs and implication. Part three is entitled "Identity and Existence" dealing furthermore with intensional contexts as well; finally, the fourth part is devoted to "Class, Relation, and Number", that is, to Quine's summary of his recent philosophy of mathematics.

A huge part of the text could be read as a simple introduction to logic that might be really interesting to historians of logic to see how notions, ideas, techniques and presentations evolved around the 1940s. There are certain passages, however, that might have further significance. In part two, Quine discusses, for example, the practical application of the theory of quantification (based on his less-known paper from 1939, “Relations and Reasons”), and argues that the new logic could be highly useful in the context of insurance. By translating natural language into logical form, reducing equivalent claims to simpler ones and then translating them back into natural language, clauses of insurance contracts could be simplified and shortened (pp. 78–79). This is a highly interesting form and mode of argument in favor of the new logic as reasoning about its application was mainly restricted to the natural sciences that time and even translations into natural languages (or as Quine said, “everyday language”) was not a major concern of logicians.

In “Identity and Existence” Quine discussed many such ideas that became definite for him in the forthcoming years, and in cases, decades. We find here a detailed argumentation of why intensional contexts do not obey the rules that govern extensional contexts, how purely and non-purely designative occurrences influence the questions of identity, and in general, how meaning is to be approached with regard analyticity and synonymy. Furthermore, Quine also talks a lot about quantification, values and existence, relating Russell’s theory of descriptions to the idea that the burden of ontological commitments is related to values and not to the use of names (as they are always eliminable). The importance of this part (§§32–41) could not be overestimated as Quine devoted much of his energy to discuss these questions in the forthcoming years. We should be thus more than thankful to have this text translated finally into English as the mark of Quine’s transitory phase during the war, after his appearance as a logician and before his return as the leading philosopher of the States.

Quine knew the significance of these passages as they were noted and emphasized in his correspondence with Rudolf Carnap. Nonetheless, our happiness has certain limits and bitterness since almost the entire part of the book about these questions was translated into English by Quine already in 1943; it became the famous “Notes on Existence and Necessity” paper. While there are, of course, certain differences, omissions and changes between the original Portuguese text and the English article, and all of these are noted both in Janssen-Lauret’s introduction (pp. xxxiv–xl) and in the editorial notes (pp. 159–161), these seem

to be rather minor developments and corrections to the details than major ruptures in Quine's position.

The appendix to the volume, the translation of Quine's single lecture about the United States and the status of logic, could have been an important one as well. Nonetheless, almost four pages from the twelve are reproductions from Quine's introduction to his Portuguese textbook. The other materials in the lecture—however short, rudimentary and sketchy they might be—are more interesting. Quine notes, for example, “[t]he questions of the foundations of logic, like those of any other science, cannot be answered within psychology itself (according to some authors) without our falling into an infinite regress. The problem of avoiding this regress, if indeed it exists—or of explaining why it doesn't exist, in the negative case—belongs to philosophy rather than to any of the natural sciences” (p. 146). While obviously, Quine does not formulate explicitly his commitment to the famous thesis of his later paper about naturalized epistemology, his highly cautious formulations (“if indeed,” “according to some”), also do not testify the claim that he rejected the naturalization of epistemology through psychology. Be as it may be, this is an interesting note (especially in the context of presenting the nature and results of modern logic), but this is not discussed further by Quine, or by the editors in any of the introductions.

The strangely transitional character of the article is also shown by the remark that deduction plays a crucial point in the natural sciences as well (and not just in mathematics) since “[i]f we can derive from the hypothesis [...] a sentence which conflicts with established facts, then we know that we will have to abandon the hypothesis” (p. 147). This indeed sounds like a quite naïve formulation of falsification and shows no clear or hidden sign of the revisable character of logic and observational statements that became so important for Quine just within a few years. Perhaps both the above and this remark could be explained due to the nature of being a popular lecture and thus sacrificing certain ideas on the altar of understandability and dissemination became a risk that was worth to take. If that is true, then it is still interesting why these ideas and why in that form were mentioned but not elaborated on in more details.

Nonetheless, none of these topics are discussed in the introduction to the volume. We also do not get to know whom exactly invited Quine to Saõ Paolo and why was he invited at all. Maybe all traces of this have been lost, but that should have been important to note as well for historians. What is discussed in greater detail is Quine's relation to Carnap and the various aspects of that relationship. Janssen-Lauret shows—and that is a point that was not emphasized

sufficiently in the literature—that “[u]nlike Carnap, Quine did not have cause to associate metaphysics with dangerous political authoritarianism. He always favored a modest, empirically informed ontology” (p. xix). Quine made this explicit at various points in the lecture (both with respect to natural sciences and to logic and mathematics), and that seems to be indeed an important diverging point from Carnap during the early 1940s.

Nonetheless, it is not at all evident, not even from this text, that Quine and Carnap meant the same thing by “metaphysics,” especially with regard “dangerous political authoritarianism” (that would fit Otto Neurath’s concerns much better). Quine’s acceptance of metaphysics is especially interesting given his American milieu: in pragmatist circles, metaphysics was regarded by many (e.g. Dewey) as the expression of feelings, ways of lives, and an approach to regulate human conduct; metaphysics had a practical and pragmatic aspect. (Later in the 1950s it was Philipp Frank, another important logical empiricist, who emphasized the same pragmatic character of Carnap’s critique of and approach to metaphysics as the expression of *Lebensgefühl*). How Quine ended up with the conception of metaphysics as ontology is a further historical question that might be important especially, as Janssen-Lauret emphasized (p. xxx), that the Portuguese book contains many arguments for ontology and ontic-commitment for the first time.

Quine’s critique of Carnap’s and in general the Vienna Circle’s (alleged) conception of conventionalism as the empiricist approach to logic and mathematics was noted in the introduction (pp. xxxviii–xxxix) as well. In the book, Quine made quite explicit and sharp statements about the drawbacks of conventionalism and about his own stance toward the matter as he did a few years before in “Truth by Convention.” The translation is thus indeed highly valuable for these passages (mainly on pp. 14–15, 152–153 as this entry is missing from the index).

I have talked only about what is missing from the general and long introductory essay; but it should be noted as well that what is there is highly informative, well-structured and revealing about the book and Quine’s context and influence in the history of analytic philosophy. The reviewer’s concern shall be taken, thus, only to indicate that perhaps there is even more from a philosophical and historical point of view than was taken up by Janssen-Lauret. Thus, it may be the case that even if the book is not that much of a surprise and significant as it was envisioned before its English translation, we still have a nice material in our hands that deserves to be on our shelves as well. The perfectly edited pages and the highly personal cover of the book make it an even more appealing Cambridge volume.