Review of “Quintessence: Basic Readings From the Philosophy of W.V. Quine”

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Imagine you have a twenty-five day vacation in Hawai‘i planned. You’ll go surfing, snorkel, see a volcano or two, visit lush gardens, waterfalls, sample the Native food, bask in the nurturing weather, and read a little philosophy. Why not take this book? It has a chapter for every day you’ll be there.

_Quintessence_ is nothing other than Quine’s greatest hits. Or so says Harvard University Press. The five sections into which the papers are divided are pretty much as expected: “Analyticity and Reductionism,” “Indeterminacy and Inscrutability,” “Ontology,” “Epistemology and Philosophy of Mind,” and “Extensionalism.” The papers reprinted in this volume are:

- Truth by Convention
- Two Dogmas of Empiricism
- Two Dogmas in Retrospect
- Carnap and Logical Truth
- Speaking of Objects
- Reference
- Translation and Meaning
- Progress on Two Fronts
- On What There Is
- The Scope and Language of Science
- On Simple Theories of a Complex World
- Ontic Decision
- Things and Their Place in Theories
- On Carnap’s Views on Ontology
- Epistemology Naturalized
- Naturalism; or, Living Within One’s Means
- The Nature of Natural Knowledge
- Five Milestones of Empiricism
- On Mental Entities
- Mind and Verbal Dispositions
- Confessions of a Confirmed Extensionalist
- Quantifiers and Propositional Attitudes
- Intensions Revisited
Reference and Modality
Three Grades of Modal Involvement

Unless you are a Quine maven, it is unlikely that you will have all of these works. Only about half of them are reprinted in previous anthologies published under Quine’s name, such as *From a Logical Point of View*, *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays*, *Pursuit of Truth*, and *The Ways of Paradox and Other Essays*. The others come from many other publications, e.g., *The Journal of Philosophy*, *The Journal of Symbolic Logic*, *Philosophical Review*, *Review of Metaphysics*, *Word and Object*. Each of the papers is the last revised version.

Gibson doesn’t give much explanation for why just these papers, and not others, were included in the book. He does say, however, “One of the considerations affecting the contents was our desire to produce a book which would be useful to the Quine specialist and yet accessible to the Quine novice.” From this perspective, the choices are pretty good, it seems. While a different editor may have reasonably included such notable essays as “Ontological Relativity,” “Natural Kinds,” and “The Ways of Paradox,” their exclusion does not much diminish the value of this book. On the other hand, it does seem to me a bad call not to have included at least one or two of Quine’s many works on logic. Even if one wouldn’t want to read logic papers on a Hawa‘ian vacation, at least having the option would have been nice. Seriously, though, Quine’s logic papers are pretty easily got in most bookstores of any repute and it is easy to admit that this aspect of Quine’s body of work is least known and perhaps least attractive to both the Quine specialist and the Quine novice.

The real value of the volume, apart from the amazing work found there, lies in the convenience of having so much of Quine’s important, one might say essential, papers in one place. For a class with a focus on Quinean issues, this is the perfect text. For the scholar wishing to cross-reference readily, again, this is a valuable tool.

While the index is not completely comprehensive, it is very good and appears to list every reference in the book for each of its entries. In the front matter, Gibson gives a bit of the secondary literature and what he refers to as “important anthologies.” The list of secondary works cited is not comprehensive by any standards, though it is unclear that Gibson need be faulted for this. The number of works, including papers and books, on Quine is huge and even if one knew where to begin, one would not know, easily, where to end.

There is no introduction, analytical or otherwise, either to the volume itself or to any of the papers. This, in my judgment, is really the only serious fault of the book. If not to the Quine specialist, at very least Gibson should have thrown this bone to the novice.

Notwithstanding my last comment, in Hawa‘i or not, this is a welcome book for many of us and I think it will prove a valuable tool.

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