IN MEMORIAM: WILLARD VAN ORMAN QUINE
1908–2000

W. V. Quine, one of the most eminent philosophers and logicians of the twentieth century, died December 25, 2000 at the age of 92. He was Edgar Pierce Professor of Philosophy, Emeritus, at Harvard University, an institution with which he was affiliated for seventy years. He was a founding member of the Association for Symbolic Logic and served as its Vice President from 1938 through 1940 and President from 1953 through 1955.

Quine was born June 25, 1908, in Akron, Ohio. The name "Quine" is Manx; his paternal grandfather had emigrated from the Isle of Man. Possibly this aspect of his ancestry stimulated Quine's lifelong interest in languages. He grew up in Akron and attended Oberlin College, where he received the A. B. in mathematics in 1930. He was already interested in logic and philosophy and had studied Whitehead and Russell's ***Principia Mathematica*** (hereafter PM). He completed the Ph. D. at Harvard University in two years. Up to this time he was largely self-taught in logic.[1] He spent 1932–33 in Europe and encountered the Vienna Circle, Carnap in Prague, and Tarski in Warsaw. These encounters were decisive for his future work. That with Carnap was more important for his philosophy, but his own account indicates that for logic the visit to Warsaw was the most significant. In 1933 he was elected a Junior Fellow of the new Society of Fellows at Harvard. He was Faculty Instructor in Philosophy at Harvard from 1936 to 1941, associate professor from 1941 to 1948, professor from 1948 to 1956, and Edgar Pierce Professor from 1956 until his retirement in 1978. During World War II he worked in a Navy unit that decoded, translated, and analyzed coded messages from the German submarine fleet.

In his earlier years Quine's research and writing were mainly in mathematical logic. His 1932 dissertation reformulated the theory of relations of PM so that the object language could talk of relations of any number of arguments, but the object language itself is formulated more precisely than in PM, and the simple theory of types is adopted. He already aimed at greater ontological clarity. Throughout the 1930s Quine worked on the program of developing a comprehensive system of logic that could develop mathematics. Several papers proposed different axiomatizations, in general aiming at simplifying the theory of types.

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[1]On this subject see Dreben [1990].