

George Boole

Selected Manuscripts on Logic and Its Philosophy

Science Works. Historical Studies, vol. 20

Ivor Grattan-Guinness & Gérard Bornet, eds.

Basel/Boston/Berlin: Birkhäuser Verlag, 1997

lxiv + 236 pp. ISBN 0-8176-5456-9 € 37.30

REVIEW

VOLKER PECKHAUS

George Boole, the founder of the algebra of logic, did not stop working on logic after having published his seminal *An Investigation of the Laws of Thought* (1854). Among his aims was to write a philosophical complement to his writings in the algebra of logic, but he died before he was able to finish it. All this was known already to his contemporaries, and although leading authorities like Augustus De Morgan, Bertrand Russell, Philip E. B. Jourdain and Louis Couturat were involved in attempts to publish Boole's posthumous logical papers, only bits and pieces from his logical manuscripts have been published up to now. This insufficient situation comes now to an end with this scholarly edition by Ivor Grattan-Guinness and Gérard Bornet. The editors have compiled a selection of about 40 % of Boole's unpublished manuscripts on logic "from a scattered and chronologically unclear textual universe" (p. xxv).

The bad condition of the manuscripts is due to Boole's working style. He usually started each time from scratch producing not really substantial texts but notes and further work-plans. This is explained by Boole himself when he reported his plans to Augustus De Morgan in March 1859 (quoted p. xxxiv):

I have written at different times as much as would make two or three books but when returning to a subject I can seldom make much use of old materials. They have lost their freshness & I can only begin again *ab novo*. And that is what I am doing—but—with a modest plan before me, having certain things to say & only desiring to say them. I