

NOTES, QUERIES & DISCUSSIONS

DISCUSSION:

REVIEW OF A REVIEWER: REPLY TO WOLENSKI

by

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Modern Logic recently published a three-page review by Jan Wolenski of *Reflexivity: A Source Book in Self-Reference* (Amsterdam: North-Holland, 1992), edited by Steven J. Bartlett. It is customary for authors and editors seldom to respond to reviewers: It is to be expected that some reviewers of a work will be positive in their assessments, and others negative. Often it is clear from a reviewer's comments that his or her judgment is no more, no less than a reflection of personal or professional interests or prejudices. Certainly, as any author can testify, impartial, well-qualified reviewers are a comparative rarity.

In the case of Wolenski's review, however, neither personal nor professional predispositions appear, at least on the surface, to be involved, but rather a fundamental lack of familiarity with the pertinent literature and recent research. Readers of his review who are not themselves specialists in the field of study in question will not be served by a reviewer's "decisive evaluation," when that evaluation is based on an acquaintanceship with the pertinent literature and research that is limited and fragmentary, and hence narrow.

The judgment Wolenski expresses in his review is fundamentally impaired because he appears only to be aware of technical discussions of self-reference in logic, the literature of which forms only a small albeit important area of studies relating to self-reference. As a reviewer, Wolenski therefore expresses perplexity over the relationship between reflexivity and self-reference, an understanding of which was to be assumed on the part of readers of this technically challenging collection of papers. Apparently unknown to Wolenski, a previous volume, *Self-Reference: Reflections on Reflexivity* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987), edited by Steven J. Bartlett and Peter Suber, made clear that the narrowly defined meaning of self-reference, as it emerges from technical studies in logic, comprises but a small part of a larger universe of research. This latter volume includes the first, and I believe the only, compilation, by Professor Suber, of a comprehensive bibliography of works on reflexivity, including more than 1,200 citations. Any researcher consulting this listing will quickly realize two things: that the extension of the application of the term 'self-reference' beyond its restricted meaning in logic is already a well-established fact, and that the perplexity expressed by Wolenski over the relationship between self-reference and reflexivity disappears once a wider familiarity with the existing literature is achieved.

Although Wolenski avers, toward the end of his review, that he wishes to restrict his remarks to self-reference in logic, this is very much like an art critic wishing to evaluate art in various media, by confining his remarks to criteria appropriate only to sketches. And so it should come as no surprise that Wolenski judges the historically seminal papers by Weiss and Jørgen-sen "obsolete," the historically important exchange of views among philosophers O'Connor, Cohen, Alexander, and Duncan-Jones "marginal" (what this vague characterization is intended by Wolenski to convey is unclear), and the innovative works of R. M. Martin and Grant, in a word, irrelevant. Pronouncements such as "obsolete," "marginal," and "irrelevant," taken together, most frequently are psychologically revelatory of a limited perspective.

In connection with the editor's own specialized area of research, Wolenski is further mystified by the editor's justification in using the terms 'metalogical self-reference,' when in fact a series of numerous papers, research monographs, and books by him, published over a period of twenty years, has amply provided just such a justification of usage.

Since what is in question in this Reply is fundamentally the competence of a reviewer to evaluate a group of papers by many well-known authors, I would like to suggest to any reader interested in the emerging

field of research in reflexivity to take a few moments to look at the extensive bibliography in the Bartlett-Suber volume mentioned earlier. He or she will immediately notice that the name of the reviewer has not been associated with a single publication in any one of some 28 classifications of research relating to reflexivity. To avoid any interpretation of a potentially tendentious intent by this author, it should probably be said that he had no hand in the preparation of Professor Suber's bibliography, and secondly, with no desire for immodesty, that readers will discover that among contemporary authors, few have published as extensively about reflexivity. The degree that a scholar is involved in a given field of research is usually fairly reflected in his publications. Beyond this, it is commonly granted that extensive scholarly publication in a single area of research establishes authority in the field, and certainly close familiarity with its literature. And in the field of reflexivity, the reviewer is neither known, nor does he appear to be well-acquainted with its basic literature.

Reviewers' work seldom is held up to public scrutiny, while the books that reviewers review continue to benefit, or to suffer, at their hands. In the present instance, any well-informed researcher in the emerging area of study of the multiple varieties of reflexivity will be struck by the limited scope of knowledge expressed by the reviewer in question. An individual reviewer's views, in the end, are obviously only as sound as his mastery in the context in which he is privileged to express his putative authority. The richness of contemporary research in reflexivity and the growing realization of the involvement of reflexivity in a wide range of disciplines are not done justice when evaluated by standards that reflect and propound a narrowed comprehension of the phenomenon.