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Quine' s 1934 " Lectures on Carnap"

Hardcastle, Gary (2006) *Quine' s 1934 " Lectures on Carnap"* . In: [\[2006\] GAP.6 Workshop on Rudolf Carnap \(Berlin, September 2006\)](#).



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Abstract

In November of 1934, over successive Thursdays, the 26-year-old Willard van Orman Quine gave three " Lectures on Carnap" at Harvard University, the ostensive aim of which was a presentation of the " central doctrine" of Carnap' s *Logische Syntax der Sprache*, " that philosophy is syntax." These were among Quine' s very first public lectures, and they constituted the American premier of Carnap' s *logische Syntax* program. As such, these lectures are of considerable significance to the history of analytic philosophy. They show, for example, one way Carnap' s syntactical program was presented and understood in the 1930s, and indeed they show how Quine, emerging even in 1934 as one of America' s brightest logicians, understood that particular project. Moreover, they promise to tell something about how Quine himself was thinking about central philosophical issues—the a priori, analyticity, and philosophy itself—early in his career, before he wrote the papers and books on those topics that established his reputation. This paper takes up this last topic. My aim is to reconstruct and understand how Quine was thinking about the a priori, analyticity, and philosophy itself in 1934, what he aimed to accomplish in the " Lectures on Carnap," and the considerable extent to which he accomplished that aim. What Quine accomplished, in short, was the outline of a fascinating and original anti-metaphysics, with conventionalism (specifically, implicit definition) at its heart. This was an anti-metaphysics that invited (but, significantly, could not demand) adoption of a particular conception of philosophy.

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Item Type: Conference or Workshop Item (UNSPECIFIED)
Keywords: Quine, Carnap, Analyticity, Logical Syntax
Subjects: [General Issues > History of Philosophy of Science](#)
[General Issues > Conventionalism](#)
[General Issues > Logical Positivism/Logical Empiricism](#)
Conferences and Volumes: [\[2006\] GAP.6 Workshop on Rudolf Carnap \(Berlin, September 2006\)](#)
Depositing User: [Gary Hardcastle](#)
Date Deposited: 11 Sep 2006
Last Modified: 07 Oct 2010 11:14
Item ID: 2908
URI: <http://philsci-archive.pitt.edu/eprint/2908>

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