

Quine's Original Sin: A Pragmatist Analysis of a Category Mistake in Logic

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Abstract

In his critique to modal logics, Quine argues that strict implication proposed in these systems was conceived in the sin of confusing mention and use (Quine, 1960; 1961). According with this accusation, in his proposal to opt for strict implication in the face of the weakness of material implication, Lewis falls into the grammatical misreading of Whitehead and Russell's material implication -the original transgressors (Marcus, 1961)-, viz, the mistake of confusing material implication with material conditional. Thus, strict implication inherits sin from its progenitor: Lewis interprets $\Box(p \supset q)$ as 'p strictly implies q' and is explained as 'necessarily not (p and not q)' (Quine, 1960).

The presentation approaches Quine's distinction of material implication and material conditional in his critique of modal logic since a pragmatist point of view. We argue that this distinction is founded in a category mistake, derived from his conception of logic. To illustrate this, in first place, we address author's arguments for the distinction between material implication and material conditional in his critique of Whitehead and Russell's *Principia Mathematica*. Second, we place his argument in the framework of his conception of logic as an input to trace the formalist grounds of his position and its relationship with the alleged distinction. Finally, on the basis of a pragmatist reading of Saint Augustine's conception of sign, we show that Quine's distinction falls in the paradox -the Augustinian paradox- of treating as truth-bearers entities that cannot be so.

References

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