

Assessment of Zuzanna Rybarikova Ph.D. Dissertation: The Reconstruction of A. N. Prior's Ontology

Zuzana Rybarikova's (ZR) dissertation consists of a monography on 109 pages together with an abstract. The dissertation contains four parts which deals with Arthur Norman Prior's view on the ontology of possible worlds, quantification, propositions and individuals. It is primarily a historical treatment with emphasis on a reconstruction of the ideas which influenced Prior on these areas. With regard to Arthur Norman Prior's contribution to philosophical logic, most historians and logicians has focused on his invention of tense logic and defense of presentism, and rightly so. However, the philosophical foundation of Prior's work, with regard to the nominalism and intensionalism has not received much attention. ZR dissertation therefore fills an important need with promising effect for Prior research in general.

The dissertation has four parts. The first is a discussion of Prior's work on possible worlds, which contains an important and very relevant assessment of the likely inspiration from Wittgenstein and Polish logicians on his view. ZR argues that Prior's concept of possible worlds is characterized by two features: Possible worlds are propositions, and like time instants, they lack real existence. ZR goes on to expound Wittgenstein's view of possible worlds, and argues that Prior's view, with regard to the propositional character of possible worlds, was "undoubtedly inspired by Wittgenstein. ZR argues this with a reference to page 99 of Prior's *Past, Present and Future (1967)*. The argument is persuasive, but the reference is mistaken. The correct reference would be to page 78 of the same book. This is a minor detail, but none the less confusing to an otherwise well argued point.

The work of ZR on Prior's view of Possible Worlds contains a fine treatment of Prior's view on Meredith's System of Logic, and relates to recent research by Aneta Markoska-Cubrinovska on Prior's unpublished manuscript *The Craft of Formal Logic*, which documents that Prior's view on possible worlds was greatly influenced by Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*. Furthermore ZR treats Prior's view on World-Proposition as an important step toward Prior's invention of hybrid logic. ZR's treatment of the work of Bräuner and Blackburn argues that the origins of the hybridization of his systems of logic is connected with Prior's ontological view on time. These are important points to focus on, and ZR gives a fine historical treatment of the relationship between hybrid logic to Prior's ontology.

The second part of the dissertation focus on various theories of quantification as they relate to Prior's view on the ontological commitment of the quantifiers. ZR provides a fine overview over the problem of ontic commitment with regard to Quine's dictum *To be is to be a value of the variable*. As, ZR also argues, Quine is perhaps the key opponent in Prior's writings, and given Quines influence, ZR's treatment is important for research related to Arthur Norman Prior, with regard to assessing Prior's take on ontological commitment in quantification. Of especial value is ZR's exposition of Lesniewski's ontology and the historical treatment of how Lesniewski's work influenced Prior. ZR has here done important, already published work elsewhere. A point stressed by ZR several places throughout is Prior's comparison of quantifiers and modal operators. It is stressed that Prior even in his later works focus on this. Given the nature of the dissertation and ZR's emphasis on quantification it could have been fine with a more thorough walk-through of this comparison from his earlier writings in *Formal Logic (1955)* to the later.

The third part of the dissertation focus on Prior's view on the ontological status of propositions. The work of Frege is rightly given due attention by ZR. The inclusion of a brief history of the development of Prior's view is fine, and wraps up a good overview over Frege, Quine and Ramsey's influence on Prior. The attention given to Prior unpublished and early manuscript *The Craft of Formal Logic*, together with his later thoughts published after his death provides a persuasive framework for the conclusion reached regarding Prior's view on a topic where he surprisingly found himself more in agreement with Quine than Frege struggling to find a formulation in line with nominalism and intensionality.

The fourth, and final part of the dissertation, treats Prior's view on Names and Individuals. ZR points out that this is a topic where Prior didn't reach a final conclusion, and conclusions must be based on a reconstruction. ZR gives due attention to the role Russell's concept of names played, which is the most central inspiration behind Prior's own view. The influence of Lesniewski is again an important emphasis provided by ZR. The treatment given by ZR focus on Prior's treatment of the topic in *Time and Modality* (1957), and his later thoughts in *Objects of Thoughts* (1971) published after his death. While ZR does mention Prior's discussion of the matter in *Past, Present and Future*, one could have hoped for a more thorough treatment of Prior's various solutions to the existence of individuals and names in that book. It seems however that ZR has misunderstood what Prior means with sempiternalism. According to ZR an individual is sempiternal if it began to exist at a certain moment and ceased to exist sooner or later afterwards (93). She rightly points out that Prior and Jack Smart discussed this matter in a correspondence, but sempiternal should be understood the other way around. An individual is sempiternal if it's existence is eternal, and Prior claimed that this would be the case in tenseless logic and if the Barcan formula is accepted in tense logic.

A note on the English

A few places it is difficult to decipher the English of ZR as on page 40 line 2, where the meaning can make a difference:

"Pegasus is not present in reality but still can be, if the development of the world was different."

Here a correct English of what ZR most likely want to say would require the use of "would have" and "could."

A few lines later on page 40 line 22:

"This theory is able to describe each entity in its uniqueness without any condition of postulation of some way of its existence."

And on page 77 in line 5:

"Prior to suggesting an analysis in which he was inspired by Ramsey:"

And on page 68 line 18:

"Therefore, if there is not a certain bed I am looking for a group of sloops which can be taken into account, the sense of a propositional attitude is only notional."

While such mistakes are egregious to the overall appearance they do not in any way stand in way of a proper understanding of the argument provided by ZR.

Conclusion

A major strength of ZR's dissertation is the story of the inspiration Prior found in his project of defending nominalism and intensionality in Polish logician of the Lvov-Warshaw school, and here especially Lesniewski. ZR's tracing of the roots of nominalism and intensionality in Prior's philosophy is very helpful in providing a deeper understanding and appreciation of Prior's work in general, especially his invention of tense logic. ZR provides this together with a fine overview of A.N. Prior's work as well as the work of important logicians and philosopher's such as Wittgenstein, Frege and Quine. The conclusions reached stand strong and are worth defending. There are errors which taints the overall picture a little, like the above mentioned misunderstand of Prior's view on sempiternality and at times the English is difficult to decipher, but these in no way take away the overall strength of the dissertation. I am therefore of the opinion that the dissertation should be accepted.