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# Modern Major General: A Tribute to W. V. Quine

*Warren Goldfarb*

*I wrote these lyrics for Van Quine in May, 1978, and presented them to him at the occasion honoring him upon his retirement from the Harvard faculty. Quine's liking for the Gilbert and Sullivan operas was well known.*

I am the very model of a modern neo-positivist  
The only word I take is that of the atomic physicist  
Who tells us what ontology, that is, the range of quantifiers  
Meets up with our demand for truth (and more than truth we can't require).  
'Tis theory-bound I know full well—it is the state that we are in  
There is no first philosophy, we can't be Archimedean  
Thus my concerns are all within a framework that is naturalized  
What's natural here is given us by what our science has surmised.

Good views are hence continuous with news from the laboratory  
It's only mental myth that makes us think there is another story  
Upon a raft of Neurath's sort, in open sea we are adrift  
And so I am the model of a modern neo-pragmatist.

On language, too, I've thought a bit—to most it was a bitter pill  
There are no grounds I said to talk of truths called "analytical"  
To back this up I wrote some words on reference inscrutable  
And on the different options that can make translations suitable.  
This holds at home in what we do, not just in projects radical  
Homophony and charity are opposites that matter still,  
Our manual is settled just by some amount of wantonness  
And minds are shaped by practices likes bushes elephantinous.  
With structure fixed we can research transparency and opacity  
The latter leads to total loss of reference-capacity  
But attitudes and modals here I'd like to excise from my list  
And so I am the model of a modern neo-positivist.

I've put some work into those fields that are more purely logical  
Though ML fell NF may do, despite its aspect magical  
Ax Inf implied, full choice denied, and for the rest we'll wait and see  
On whether there's a relative proof that gives us its consistency

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More recently I've spent some time on quantifiers objectual  
And whether substitution might be just as much effectual.  
These logic matters mean a lot, they're at the center of our scheme  
And so a neo-positivist had better look past what they seem.

My interests extend yet more, to things not philosophical  
I've toured throughout the world in places temperate and tropical  
I know the roots of words and all the op'ras penned by G & S  
And so I am the model of a modern neo-positivist.