Science's Shadow:
scientism in philosophy and semantics

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Recent topics:

New Wittgenstein

Relation cognitive science - semantics

Observation:

Role of 'scientism' (materialism, reductionism)

Plan:

Sketch of two topics

Discussion of similarities

Main authors:

Cora Diamond, James Conant, Thomas Ricketts

Mains claims:

Nonsense in TLP is 'austere nonsense'

Only function TLP is therapeutic, there is no philosophical substance

Continuity: late work is also 'therapy only'

Body versus frame:

> Example body proposition:
>
> > The world is everything that is the case (TLP 1)
>
> Example frame proposition:
>
> > My sentence elucidate in this way that he who understens me sees in the end that they are nonsensical, when through them –on them– he has climbed up beyond them (TLP 6.54)

No 'significant showing':

> What we can't say, we can't say, and we can't whistle it either (Ramsey)
>
> When one truly philosophizes in Wittgenstein's spirit, early and late, nothing gets said, and nothing gets shown either (Read & Deans)

Critics of 'New Wittgenstein':

> Ian Proops, Peter Hacker, H.O. Mounce, Stephen Mulhall
>
> Emphasis on textual and/or internal-systematic arguments

Hardly any discussion of basic assumptions:

> Conception of philosophy
>
> The role of 'arguments'; the relation argument - content
>
> Scientism and reductionism

Content in late Wittgenstein:

private language argument; rule following considerations; TLP-critique; reflections on certainty; criticism of Frazer, Freud; reflections on foundations of mathematics, psychology; etc

Other methods (than just argumentation):

descriptions of actual language use, thought experiments, observations on our 'natural history', normative judgements, …

The role of 'pictures':

I wanted to put that picture before him, and his *acceptance* of the picture consists in his now being inclined to regard a given case differently; that is, to compare it with *this* rather than *that* set of pictures. I have changed his *way of looking at things*. (PI 144)

Observation:

 Dual nature of central concepts: natural & cultural

 Cultural component is performative: reflection is a constitutive element

 Division between natural and cultural is permeable

Philosophy and science as complementary, but interacting ways of access to reality:

 Empirical facts play a role in philosophy

 Philosophical elucidations play a role in science

 'Self-conception' may change

Observation:

Many divergent approaches

Hardly any debate

Suggestion:

Due to lack of pretheoretical agreement about what semantics *is*

Source of inspiration:

Hamm, Kamp & Van Lambalgen, 'There is no opposition between formal and cognitive semantics'

Central idea:

Marr-hiërarchy

Computational structures represent 'cognitive reality'

Computational approach in semantics is necessary 'to establish a truly productive interaction with cognitive (neuro)science'

Question:

'I've seen the future of rock and roll and its name is ...'?

Reasons for doubt:

'The choice of invariants'

Limitations of the cognitive paradigm

Aspects of meaning:

referential

inferential

intentional

conversational

individual

collective

informational

expressive

constitutive

...

Semantic theories are choices for particular invariants based on external considerations

Central feature :

Individual-based, and hence principally reductionistic

Claim:

For semantics this feature is a limitation

Pragmatic approach:

Debate should not be about what semantics *is*, but about what we want semantics to *do*

Illustration:

plural anaphora & quantificational structure; representation or denotation?

HKL-view: empirical issue:

'to think that representationalism could be eliminated just by relocating information that is contributed by the describing discourse in this manner would clearly be an illusion'

Alternative view: methodological difference

structure in model: theory *models* competence

structure in representation: theory *describes* competence

Similarities New Wittgenstein - HKL:

Material = fundamental

'Inside out': brain - 'mind' - individual - community

Claim:

Pluralism as a necessary alternative

Motivate semantic framework in terms of its application

Question:

Is that possible for 'classical' formal semantics?

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