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*Anti-Realist Semantics and the Psychologism Debate*

Psychologism blurs the distinction between logic and psychology by defining the rules of logic as "patterns of human thinking, often as psychological laws displaying the nature of the human mind" (Baker & Hacker 1989, 85). While, at the turn of the century, "psychologism" was a term of theoretical derision, Kusch contends that the debate surrounding psychologism has been "abandoned rather than resolved" (Kusch 1995, 277) and abandoned for reasons that are sociological rather than philosophical. My doctoral research seeks to provide some philosophical resolution to the psychologism debate. Such a resolution is not merely valuable for the segregation of academic disciplines, but for the clarification of the nature of thought and inference, and the specification of a coherent methodology in the study of thinking.

I propose to begin my dissertation research with a historical analysis, conducted for the purpose of articulating what was (and remains) at stake in the psychologism debate, viz. the proper foundation and subject matter of logic. I plan to achieve this by separating psychologism from the theoretical positions of (a) subjective idealism (Mohanty 1989), (b) the essential normativity of logic (Philipse 1989), (c) the essentially empirical nature of psychology (Shanker 1998) and (d) the viability of a realist (Platonist) semantics (Dummett 1978; Mohanty 1989). I will argue that the psychologism debate remains abandoned and unresolved precisely because it has not been sufficiently distinguished from debate surrounding the four other theoretical positions. Thus, it is not, as Kusch contends, for sociological reasons that the psychologism debate remains unresolved; rather the reasons are philosophical, and any possible resolution must approach the debate in philosophical terms.

The theoretical component of my dissertation will do precisely this. In so doing, it will address a conspicuous gap in the contemporary literature on the psychologism debate. Instead of

## DISSERTATION GRANT PROPOSAL

following Kusch's empirical, sociological methodology, I will situate the debate over psychologism in terms of the distinction between realist and anti-realist semantics. That is, I propose to adopt the post-Wittgensteinian direction of Dummett's thesis that "Any justification for adopting one logic rather than another...must turn on questions of meaning" (1978, 215). Frege and Husserl are generally remembered as refuting all psychologistic positions. Yet, their realist semantics, while philosophically resolving the psychologism debate, is no longer widely accepted (Shanker 1998, 63). Both Frege and Husserl distinguished between the act and the content of thought, judgement and assertion (Frege 1918; Husserl 1900). Each argued that the laws of logic are about a set of objective entities --'thoughts' (or 'judgeable contents') for Frege, and 'concepts' (or 'propositions') for Husserl. Problematically, such an account of meaning gives rise to such questions as "How do everyday entities such as arguments participate in the formal reality of such abstract entities as thoughts and concepts?" Conversely, "how [are] 'thoughts', which are objective but not spatio-temporal or perceptible,...apprehended and communicated" (Shanker 1998, 94)? The theoretical disputes clouding these issues are just as controversial and contested as those of the psychologism debate itself. With such residual, vexed questions as these, a semantically realist reply to psychologism has come to be called "an explanation of the obscure by the more obscure" (Philipse 1989, 67). Therefore, the dissertation will address the question "Can anti-realist semantic theory conclusively resolve the philosophical debate surrounding psychologism?" I will approach this question by arguing that an anti-realist semantics (a) gives a complete and systematic account the meanings of the sentences of a language, (b) offers both a coherent and plausible account of our linguistic behaviour (as must any theory of meaning), and (c) that it convincingly accounts for the meaning of such terms as "inference" without relapse into a psychologistic explanation of the subject matter and foundation of logic.

While it is not within the scope of the proposed project to explore the ramifications of my research in adjacent fields of inquiry, any conclusions I provide will be relevant and valuable to their success. The dissertation, then, is situated in a continuing project, and would serve as a basis for future endeavours. Contemporary theory in a variety of disciplines is fraught with

## DISSERTATION GRANT PROPOSAL

ambiguity regarding the relationship of logic and psychology (Shanker 1998). For instance, in the field of argumentation theory, Blair and Johnson write that argumentation theorists have overcome their "obsessive fear of psychologism" (1987, 149). Yet, their remark does not clarify whether theorists have overcome this obsessive fear because psychologism is no longer regarded as a mistaken view, or simply that theorists are so aware of it that they would not be caught making that mistake. My recent conference paper "Psychologism in Contemporary Argumentation Theory" (1999) established that psychologism in current research and methodological theory advocates an exclusively empirical and psychological analysis of argumentation. While such a methodology may be necessary, it cannot hope to provide a complete analysis or evaluation of argumentation. By conflating the logical nature of rules of inference, with their contingent application in various argumentative contexts, a purely psychological study of argument effectively misconstrues the evidentiary nature of reasons. The acceptability of a reason as entailing a claim (or justifying an action) is not explained by some fact about us; rather we accept reasons on the basis of their logical relations with the claims or actions they purport to justify. My conference paper not only contends with some of the very issues evincing my motivations for the proposed research project, but the paper itself is exemplary of the methodology and results possible in my dissertation research.

My doctoral studies in Philosophy began at McMaster University in September 1998, and extend the project of my M.A. (Philosophy, York, 1997) research on the nature of language and communication. That research, a portion of which was recently published as "Language and Acquisition in Chomskian Theory," established that, in addition to being an incomplete account of linguistic behaviour (and thus incomplete as a theory of meaning), Chomsky's account of language is essentially psychologistic in that it grounds the nature of thought and inference in the structure of the Language Acquisition Device – an 'organ' of the human brain. Yet, the conclusions of my M.A. research were primarily negative in that they merely rejected a psychologistic account of meaning, without exploring the viability of a successful non-psychologistic, non-realist account of meaning.

## DISSERTATION GRANT PROPOSAL

At the time of the tenure of the fellowship, I will have completed all of the course work and area requirements pertaining to my doctoral degree. These courses will serve not only as the preliminary guidelines for my thesis research, but will provide me with the scholarly skills required for the dissertation's analytic component and the philosophical foundations necessary to complete the argument of its theoretical portion. Having already taken courses on non-classical logical theory (N. Griffin, D. Hitchcock) and the semantics of normative discourse (S. Najm), I have concentrated my current course work on the historical beginnings of analytic philosophy (N. Griffin) and anti-realist language theory (P. Kremer). By exposing the linguistic presuppositions shared between such early analytic thinkers as Russell and Frege and such contemporary, psychologistic thinkers as Kant and Mill, I will be able to show how an anti-realist theory of meaning overcomes the theoretical inadequacies of those presuppositions. Finally, the guidance and expertise of my supervisor Prof. N. Griffin, combined with access to the McMaster Russell Archive, provides me with a unique opportunity to complete original research in the formulation of a thesis to be completed in the summer of 2002.