

Thursday, June 24 PM 1:30-4:30, Room 100

Session 2 (room 100): **19th Century Influences on the Philosophy of Science**

Jean Leroux, "On the Neogrammarians' Revolution in Linguistics"

Trevor Pearce: Hugo Reimann's Kantianism

Warren Schmaus, "Was Renouvier a Positivist or a Spiritualist?"

"On the Neogrammarians' Revolution in Linguistics"

Jean Leroux

A series of works from Osthoff, Brugmann, Paul and Delbrück appeared in the years 1878-1880 that gave rise to one of the most heated controversies in the history of linguistics. A group of distinguished historical comparative linguists, known as the Neogrammarians [*Junggrammatiker*], announced a decisive break from the scientific tradition in which they were trained. A manifesto proclaimed two basic principles that were to underlie the scientific status of the study of language. The first principle stated that sound laws suffer no exceptions at all, and the second principle secured an important role to analogy in linguistic change, namely in all stages of the development of languages. They also put forward general views on methodology (insisting on phonetic science as basis) and language theory (breaking up with both the general views of language as living organism and language evolution as decay); moreover, they denounced as metaphysical the attempts at reconstruction of the presumed original Indo-European language that were so dear to their predecessors. We want to comment on the theoretical, methodological, and epistemological aspects of the so-called *Lautgesetz*-controversy with a view to showing that a) the Kuhnian views and categories on scientific revolutions meet here with important difficulties, and b) that Imre Lakatos' "Methodology of Scientific Research Programs" seems better suited as analytic apparatus. In particular, Lakatos' notions of "hard core" and "negative heuristic" seem to provide an adequate rendition of the epistemological functioning of the first and second principles respectively.

Recourse has been taken to Thomas Kuhn's model of scientific change in the historiography of linguistics (Wilbur 1977, Koerner 1982). A need was felt to supplement Kuhn's notion of paradigm with a cognitive component (Koerner 1982, Amsterdamska 1987). In its sociological substance, a paradigm's main function is to ensure the cohesion of the scientific community, which would obviously lead one to assess the Neogrammarian movement as "revolutionary". But the Kuhnian approach seems inadequate in view of the absence of any "crisis" at the empirical level prior to the Brugmann/Osthoff manifesto, and of any ensuing relation of "incommensurability" between paradigms, granted that a paradigmshift did occur. We argue that the Neogrammarian movement is better construed as having operated a change of "scientific research program" - albeit mostly at the epistemological level. We suggest that the Neogrammarians, while aiming with their first principle at strengthening the notion of explanation in linguistic theory, integrated the second principle of analogy (which formerly functioned as "negative heuristic") within the "hard core" of their scientific research program.

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Literature:

Olga Amsterdamska, *Schools of Thought. The Development of Linguistics from Bopp to Saussure*. Dordrecht: Reidel, 1987.

Konrad Koerner, "The Neogrammarian Doctrine: Breakthrough or Extension of the Schleicherian Paradigm", in J. P. Maher *et al.* (eds.), *Papers from the 3rd International Conference on Historical Linguistics*. Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 1982, 129-152.

Terence H. Wilbur (ed.), *The Lautgesetz-Controversy: A Documentation (1885-85)*. Amsterdam: J. Benjamins, 1977.

"Hugo Reimann's Kantianism"

Trevor Pearce

-Insert abstract here-

"Was Renouvier a Positivist or a Spiritualist?"

Warren Schmaus

Gutting (2001:9ff) characterizes Charles Renouvier (1815 - 1903) as a somewhat radical member of the "spiritualist" movement, by which he means the philosophical tradition of René Descartes and Pierre Maine de Biran that is rooted in an assertion of the primacy of mind and thought. However, Renouvier calls himself a "positivist" (1875, vol. I, p. xvi). To be sure, Gutting also tries to dismiss categories such as "spiritualist" and "positivist" as not all that useful for analyzing an individual's thought. Nevertheless, these categories are helpful in achieving a historical understanding of the development of philosophy of science in nineteenth-century France.

Spiritualism and positivism were opposing French responses to the philosophy of Kant. The spiritualists, like some of Kant's earliest German critics, regarded the critical philosophy as posing a challenge to find a new foundation for metaphysics. Maine de Biran's spiritualism sought this foundation in the apperception of willed effort. This philosophy was promoted by Victor Cousin, the leader of the eclectic school, which controlled academic appointments in philosophy and the philosophical curriculum in the lycées and the university system. Positivists, on the other hand, who tended to be outside of academic philosophy, followed Kant in his rejection of metaphysics and took mathematics and the natural sciences as their models for knowledge. Both Auguste Comte and Renouvier had studied mathematics and engineering at the École Polytechnique, and neither ever succeeded in securing faculty appointments in philosophy. Renouvier understood the critical philosophy as denying the existence of any reality other than the phenomenal world of our representations. Far from seeking to ground knowledge in the introspection of the will or soul, in the manner of Maine de Biran or Cousin, Renouvier thought that the surest foundation for the sciences was in our

representations, and regarded the Cartesian self and the will as nothing more than assemblages of relations among our representations.

Unlike the spiritualists, the positivists, due to their first-hand knowledge of the sciences, appreciated the importance of hypotheses for directing research. They thus helped to bring about a major change in French philosophy of science. The early eclectic spiritualists, led by Cousin, had followed Thomas Reid's Newtonian turn in dismissing the use of hypotheses in science. Positivists like Renouvier and Comte, on the other hand, defended the use of hypotheses. Renouvier regarded science as largely hypothetical, arguing that induction was just hypothesis under a different name. He was among those who influenced the later generation of spiritualists to adopt a more conjectural view of science and to move away from the notion of science as based on an eclectic mix of Cartesian certainties and empirical generalizations. Like Comte, he also promoted a new concept of scientific explanation based on laws governing the phenomena and free of what they regarded as the metaphysical concept of causation. However, Renouvier was more influential than Comte, perhaps in part because his liberal politics were more conducive than Comte's authoritarian schemes to academic philosophers in the Third Republic.