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ON DUHEM AND QUINE AGAIN

Interpretations of Epistemological Holism and
Complexity of Scientific Reasoning

Abstract

The paper aims first of all to reconstruct the essential features of epistemological holism, originally upheld by Duhem and then re-proposed by Quine. In doing so, sometimes I critically take sides towards some interpretations, quite common in the literature on the subject, as to the “genuine” Duhemian thesis (1), the relations between Duhem’s and Quine’s holistic views and their consequences on the respective general epistemological positions and methodological proposals (2-4). In the last paragraph (5) I suggest to consider holism as an essential step on a line of thought in epistemology which, emphasizing the amount and kind of the (almost tacit) assumptions, presuppositions and provisoes underlying scientific reasoning (prediction and explanation) and consequently the remarkable complexity of this very reasoning, shows some serious difficulties for methodology.