Midterm Paper: Optional Passages

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Here are three passages. For your midterm paper, you can write about one of these passages, or about a passage of your choice from the course readings. Note that the passages below do not include footnotes from the original readings.

1 Quine on Interchangeability

"A natural suggestion, deserving close examination, is that the synonymy of two linguistic forms consists simply in their interchangeability in all contexts without change of truth value interchangeability, in Leibniz's phrase, salva veritate. Note that synonyms so conceived need not even be free from vagueness, as long as the vaguenesses match.

"But it is not quite true that the synonyms 'bachelor' and 'unmarried man' are everywhere interchangeable salva veritate. Truths which become false under substitution of 'unmarried man' for 'bachelor' are easily constructed with the help of 'bachelor of arts or 'bachelor's buttons'; also with the help of quotation, thus: 'Bachelor has less than ten letters' " (pp. 27-28).

2 Hempel on Observation Sentences

"Let it be noted that we do not require an observation sentence to be true, nor to be accepted on the basis of actual observations; rather, an observation sentence expresses something that is decidable by means of the accepted techniques of observation; in other words: An observation sentence describes a possible outcome of the accepted observational techniques; it asserts something that might conceivably be established by means of those techniques. Possibly, the term 'observation-type sentence' would be more suggestive; but for convenience we give preference to the shorter term. An analogous comment applies, of course, to our definition of an observation report as a class or a conjunction of observation sentences. The need for this broad conception of observation sentences and observation reports is readily recognized: Confirmation as here conceived is a logical relationship between sentences, just as logical consequence is. Now whether a sentence S_2 is a consequence of a sentence S_1, does not depend on whether S_1 is true (or known to be true), or not; and analogously, the criteria of whether a given statement, expressed in terms of the observational vocabulary, confirms a certain hypothesis cannot depend on whether the statements in the report are true, or based on actual experience, or the like. Our definition of, confirmation must enable us to indicate what kind of evidence *would* confirm a given hypothesis *if* it were available; and clearly the sentence characterizing such evidence can be required only to express something that might be observed, but not necessarily something that has actually been established by observation" (pp. 24-25).

3 Longino on Peer Review

"The concern over the breakdown of peer review, while directed at a genuine problem, is also exaggerated partly because of an individualist conception of knowledge construction. Peer review prior to publication is not the only filter to which results are subjected. The critical treatment after publication is crucial to the refining of new ideas and techniques. While institutional bias may also operate in the postpublication reception of an idea, other factors, such as the attempt to repeat an experiment or to reconcile incompatible claims, can eventually compensate for such misplaced deference. Publication in a journal does not make an idea or result a brick in the edifice of knowledge. Its absorption is a much more complex process, involving such things as subsequent citation, use and modification by others, et cetera. Experimental data and hypotheses are transformed through the conflict and integration of a variety of points of view into what is ultimately accepted as scientific knowledge" (p. 149).