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Anvendt udgave: Louis Hjelmslev og hans kreds

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Is a structural treatment of meaning possible?

Rulon Wells

1. Possibility of discovering structure. In the present discussion I assume that the only kind of treatments we are interested in are those that discover structure in the data, as contrasted with ones that impose a structure; in other words, with treatments that are natural, as contrasted with ones that are artificial, arbitrary, or conventional. And I further assume that so far as the data do have a natural structure, science can sooner or later discover it and describe it.

In our attempts to discover structure we should pay more attention to continuities than we have done in the past. Where we have thought in terms of dichotomies--of a property being either definitely present or definitely absent, with no borderline cases, let us be more willing to look for and to recognize differences of degree, where the same property is present in lower or in higher degree.

Continuities may be looked for in the manifold we are describing, and also in our methods of description themselves. A continuum of methods that is particularly important is the continuum of accuracy. Our methodology should make provision for science to advance in stages, earlier stages giving first approximations to the truth and later stages refining on these. Above all, we should not require description to be compartmentalized in such a way that each earlier stage must be finished perfectly and definitively before any later stage is commenced. A methodology that permits earlier stages to be repeated, the repetitions using the results of later stages, has proved to be more fruitful in practice.

2. Some major conceptions of structure. We use the word 'structure' in various ways. (1) The organic sense. A set or manifold is said to have structure insofar as it has parts unified into a whole. Everyone recognizes that unity or unification admits of degrees, ranging from loose to tight, and that