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To Save the Semantic View

Cunningham, Thomas (2008) *To Save the Semantic View*. In: [\[2009\] Models and Simulations 3 \(Charlottesville, Virginia: March 5-7, 2009\)](#).

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Abstract

Proponents of the semantic approach to scientific theories (e.g. Giere 1988, 2004; French and Ladyman 1999) cite a number of critical publications as the origins of their positions. While the semantic view experienced widespread adoption by philosophers of science in the decades leading up to the 1990s, over the last two decades opposition to the view has increased demonstrably (e.g. Downes 1992; Cartwright et al. 1995). This growing disaffection suggests a two-part question: What exactly are the objections to the semantic view of scientific theories, and does the view have the conceptual resources to combat its opposition? This essay seeks to answer this question by performing a careful analysis of the positions of both advocates and adversaries of the semantic view. In addition, it is argued that to save the semantic view it is necessary to locate the source of the position's problems and to retool its conceptual foundations. To ensure that the semantic approach has the resources to meet objections to it, exegetical analysis is performed, which demonstrates that the source of the view's present-day woes lies in a subtle conflation contained in one seminal articulation of the view, van Fraassen's The Scientific Image. It is argued that supplanting central aspects of that work with ideas from Suppes is the remedy needed to provide the semantic view with the necessary resources for becoming wholly defensible against its oppositions.

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