

Review of: "Vicious cycles and questions without answers"

Katarzyna Filutowska

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The text offers an inquisitive and highly inspiring approach to the topic of decision-making problems and questions without answers. As far as I understand, and as the author mentions in chapter 2, this is not the full paper, but rather a draft (a research note), so let me focus mainly on the presented theory and skip the issues such as structure.

From the very beginning, the author uses a rather "formal" methodology and method of presenting his thesis and subsequent conclusions, somewhat reminiscent of early Wittgenstein. Already in the first sentence, in which the author writes that "agents live in a nature that contains atoms in the form of questions", we have a lot of Wittgensteinian spirit and his effort to distinguish atomic facts in reality and sentences in a language that refer to them (see Wittgenstein 1961). However, as the author points out in point 2, the theory presented is not very formal and uses only "the most elementary logic". I definitely agree with this. In fact, the whole concept is interesting precisely because the author does not limit himself to the purely logical toolkit, but also uses concepts and methods of explanation derived from completely different traditions of thought. Correct me if I misinterpret something, but such notions as the symptom, the possibility of learning by interpreting the symptom of low utility, recurrent symptoms, a motivation to learn, and so on, seem to me to be taken from psychoanalytic philosophy, which obviously has little to do with typical logical analysis (even if it has its own internal logic, it is definitely not propositional logic). The author combines these traditions in a very convincing way, so this is not a reproach. However, although the author refers (perhaps indirectly) to the psychoanalytic approach in the paper, the whole concept is based on the assumption that reality, nature, and even an agent who is part of nature, are somehow rational. The author emphasizes this several times, and his final conclusion, that if we do not feed vicious cycles, they do not exist, seems to result from the same premise. But if we are rational persons, and nature is rational, how is it possible for anyone to have a symptom of low utility and be involved in a vicious cycle? How is it possible for the agent to have a recurring symptom? In other words, what is the relationship between the rational and the non-rational in this theory? I think this should be explained somehow in the paper. Similarly, if I am right and the author is somehow referring to psychoanalytic theory, this should be literally stated.

My last comment concerns the issue of "questions without answers" and "decision problems without solutions". In chapter 5.1 the author states that "Human beings are conceptualizers, and this gives us tools to talk about things we experience. But it can also lead us into tangles and logical knots that only cloud our visions. (...) sometimes when we aim to fix a problem, it becomes even worse" (p. 5). In some linguistic concepts, such as so-called garden path sentences (see for instance Huang and Ferreira 2021), which are formulated in such a way that the reader will most likely interpret them incorrectly (will go down the "wrong path"), we are dealing with a quite similar scheme. For example, if there is no answer to a given question, does that not mean that the question was wrongly asked? Or if there is no solution to a given

problem, does that not mean that this problem is perhaps wrongly posed?

I also wonder if the author could not find any valuable inspiration for his research in the theories of action, including narrative theories of action (see, for example, Ricoeur's remarks on Elizabeth Anscombe's "Intention"; Ricoeur 1994).

References

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