

Philosophical cartography

Rasmus Grønfeldt Winther

Introduction

In *When Maps Become the World* (Winther 2020a) I showed how: (i) mapping is a strategy—ubiquitous across the sciences—for representing, imagining, and controlling space; (ii) mapping and the map analogy (“a scientific theory is a map of the world”) deserve—and have received—sustained philosophical attention; and (iii) the cartographic impulse to map and interact with our worlds spatially lies deep in human cognition, and in our history, across all cultures.

In this contribution, I focus especially on (ii) and (iii), among the various aims I had in my 2020 book. Different philosophical cultures have drawn on the map analogy: analytic philosophy, continental European philosophy, and pragmatic philosophy. In order to further the charge of this edited volume, and highlight some of my other work, I also discuss case studies of the cartographic impulse across the globe.

Analytic philosophy

Analytic philosophers emphasize clarity and identify conceptual assumptions in everyday language. In this methodological practice, they tend to analogize any propositional attitude (i.e., beliefs, desires, and intentions) to a map. For instance, the philosopher Frank P. Ramsey (1990, 146) defined “belief” as a “map of neighbouring space by which we steer.” The philosopher Gilbert Ryle moved beyond mental content as analogical referent, instead generalizing in a different way: he sees the philosopher’s practices and goals as analogous to the cartographer’s (Ryle 1949, 7). In one essay, he analogizes the relationship between a philosopher and a competent speaker of a language to that between a mapmaker and a village inhabitant (Ryle 1971, 440–445): the second of each pair engages in concrete pursuits, while the former studies the activity abstractly. For Ryle, the philosopher is a mapper of language. Other analytic philosophers also employ map analogies, for varied purposes (Armstrong 1968; Godfrey-Smith 1996; Ismael 1999, 2007; Millikan 1984; Sellars 1981; Stich 1990).