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Fictions, Inference, and Realism

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Abstract

Abstract: It is often assumed without argument that fictionalism in the philosophy of science contradicts scientific realism. This paper is a critical analysis of this assumption. The kind of fictionalism that is at present discussed in philosophy of science is characterised, and distinguished from fictionalism in other areas. A distinction is then drawn between forms of fictional representation, and two competing accounts of fiction in science are discussed. I then outline explicitly what I take to be the argument for the incompatibility of scientific realism with fictionalism. I argue that some of its premises are unwarranted, and are moreover questionable from a fictionalist perspective. The conclusion is that fictionalism is neutral in the realism-antirealism debate, pulling neither in favour nor against scientific realism.

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