

Scientific realism and the history of science

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Abstract

The paper considers the two main challenges to scientific realism, stemming from confirmation holism and the underdetermination thesis as well as from semantic holism and the incommensurability thesis. Against the first challenge, it is argued that there are other criteria besides agreement with experience that enable a rational evaluation of competing theories. Against the second challenge, it is argued that at most a thesis of local incommensurability can be defended that is compatible with a minimal version of scientific realism, namely conjectural realism. However, in order to establish a fully-fledged scientific realism, one has to refute the local incommensurability thesis as well, showing how a comparison is possible on the level of the proper concepts of the theories in question. The paper examines the prospects for such a comparison, distinguishing three cases.

Subjects: [General Issues: Realism/Anti-realism](#)

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