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Pierre Duhem' s Good Sense as a guide to Theory Choice

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Abstract

This paper examines Duhem' s concept of good sense as an attempt to support a non rule-governed account of rationality in theory choice. Faced with the underdetermination of theory by evidence thesis and the continuity thesis, Duhem tried to account for the ability of scientists to choose theories that continuously grow to a natural classification. I will examine the concept of good sense and the problems that stem from it. I will also present a recent attempt by David Stump to link good sense to virtue epistemology. I will argue that even though this approach can be useful for the better comprehension of the concept of good sense, there are some substantial differences between virtue epistemologists and Duhem. In the light of this reconstruction of good sense, I will propose a possible way to interpret the concept of good sense, which overcomes the noted problems and fits better with Duhem' s views on scientific method and motivation in developing the concept of good sense.

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