

A Philosopher's Guide to Empirical Success

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Abstract

The simple question "What is empirical success?" turns out to have a surprisingly intricate answer. The paper begins with the point that empirical success cannot be equated with goodness-of-fit without making some kind of distinction between meritorious fit and fudged fit. The proposal that empirical success is adequately defined by Akaike's Information Criterion (AIC) is analyzed in this light. What is called cross-validated fit is proposed as a further improvement. But it still leaves something out. The final proposal is that empirical success has a hierarchical structure that commonly emerges from the agreement of independent measurements of theoretically postulated quantities.

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