

How to be a Scientific Realist: A Proposal to Empiricists

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Abstract

The thought that there is a way to reconcile empiricism with a realist stance towards scientific theories, avoiding instrumentalism and without fearing that this will lead straight to metaphysics, seems very promising. This paper aims to articulate this thought. It consists of two parts. The first (sections 2 and 3) will articulate how empiricism can go for scientific realism without metaphysical anxiety. It will draw on the work of Moritz Schlick, Hans Reichenbach and Herbert Feigl to develop an indispensability argument for the adoption of the realist framework. This argument, unlike current realist arguments, has a pragmatic ring to it: there is no ultimate argument for the adoption of the realist framework. The guiding thought here is that fundamental ontic questions are not dealt with in the same way in which questions about the reality of ordinary entities (be they stones or electrons) are dealt with—the ontic framework must already be in place before questions about the reality of specific entities are raised. The second part (sections 4 and 5) will articulate reasons for avoiding instrumentalism. Most space is given in offering reasons to refrain from adopting P. Kyle Stanford's (2006) neo-instrumentalism—a very sophisticated version of instrumentalism that seems to work within the realist framework and promises empiricists a way to avoid scientific realism. Scientific realism is alive and well because of Ti(a)na: there is (almost) no alternative. However, in section 6, it will be argued that there is room for rapprochement between contextualist instrumentalism and scientific realism. The paper is accompanied by an appendix in which Reichenbach's argument for scientific realism is presented and discussed.

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

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