

'Saving the Phenomena' and Saving the Phenomena

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Abstract

Empiricists claim that in accepting a scientific theory one should not commit oneself to claims about things that are not observable in the sense of registering on human perceptual systems (according to Van Fraassen's constructive empiricism) or experimental equipment (according to what I call "liberal empiricism"). They also claim scientific theories should be accepted or rejected on the basis of how well they save the phenomena in the sense delivering unified descriptions of natural regularities among things that meet their conditions for observability. I argue that empiricism is both unfaithful to real world scientific practice, and epistemically imprudent, if not incoherent. To illuminate scientific practice and save regularity phenomena one must commit oneself to claims about causal mechanisms that can be detected from data, but do not register directly on human perceptual systems or experimental equipment. I conclude by suggesting that empiricists should relax their standards for acceptable beliefs.

Keywords: data, phenomena, constructive empiricism, empiricism

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

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