

Special Sciences, Conspiracy and the Better Best System Account of Lawhood

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Abstract

An important obstacle to lawhood in the special sciences is the worry that such laws would require metaphysically extravagant conspiracies among fundamental particles.

If, for example, Malthus's Law of ecology really is a law, and if the rabbits whose reproduction rates it describes in some way supervene on more fundamental kinds, then it can seem highly mysterious that the fundamental rabbit-constituting objects end up moving, projectibly, in ways consistent with Malthus's Law. How, short of conspiracy, is this possible?

In this paper we'll review a number of strategies for solving the conspiracy problem --- i.e., for allowing for the projectibility of special science generalizations without positing outlandish conspiracies. Some of these strategies turn on accepting accounts of laws (e.g., non-Humean pluralist and classical MRL theories) on which the problem of conspiracy cannot arise in the first place.

Alas, we'll argue, these accounts do less than we should want a theory of laws to do, and so should be rejected. Next we'll take on a recent strategy, due to Albert and Loewer, that aims to solve the conspiracy problem by treating special science regularities as probabilistic corollaries of statistical postulates over low-level initial conditions. We'll argue that, while this view may obviate conspiracy, it rests on unrealistic and insufficiently general assumptions about the relation between special and fundamental sciences.

Finally, we'll consider the conspiracy problem through the lens of our preferred view of laws, an elaboration of the MRL view that we call the Better Best System (BBS) theory.

BBS offers a picture on which, although all events supervene on a fundamental level, there is no one unique locus of projectibility; rather there are a large number of loci corresponding to the different areas (ecology, economics, solid-state chemistry, etc.) in which there are simple and strong generalizations to be made.

While we expect that some amount of conspiracy-fear-inducing special science projectibility is inevitable given BBS, we'll argue that this is unobjectionable.

It follows from BBS that the laws of any particular special or fundamental science amount to a proper subset of the laws. From this vantage point, the existence of projectible special science generalizations not guaranteed by the fundamental laws is not an occasion for conspiracy fantasies, but a predictable fact of life in a complex world.

Keywords: laws, laws of nature, lawhood, Humeanism, MRL, Mill-Ramsey-Lewis, Albert, Loewer, Best System, Better Best System, BBS, reduction, emergence, conspiracy, special sciences

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