

An alternative to Kitcher's theory of conceptual progress and his account of the change of the gene concept

Brigandt, Ingo (2004) An alternative to Kitcher's theory of conceptual progress and his account of the change of the gene concept.

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Abstract

The present paper discusses Kitcher's framework for studying conceptual change and progress. Kitcher's core notion of reference potential is hard to apply to concrete cases. In addition, an account of conceptual change as change in reference potential misses some important aspects of conceptual change and conceptual progress. I propose an alternative framework that focuses on the inferences and explanations supported by scientific concepts. The application of my approach to the history of the gene concept offers a better account of the conceptual progress that occurred in the transition from the Mendelian to the molecular gene than Kitcher's theory.

Keywords: concepts, conceptual change, gene concept, reference

Subjects: [Specific Sciences: Biology: Molecular Biology/Genetics](#)
[Specific Sciences: Biology](#)
[General Issues: Theory Change](#)

ID Code: 2053

Deposited By: [Brigandt, Ingo](#)

Deposited On: 04 November 2004