

Scientific Realism and the ‘Special Sciences’

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In this talk I consider the notion of “special science” in the context of the scientific realism debate, arguing that realist commitments towards the theories and explanations of the “special sciences” (e.g. biology, neurology, economics) are no different from the realist commitments towards physics. Traditionally “special sciences” have been contrasted with (fundamental) physics, but I will argue that there’s nothing to this contrast that is of relevance to scientific realism in the light of our current understanding of: (i) what “fundamental” physics amounts to, (ii) the relationship between the “special sciences” and physics; and (iii) the nature of explanations in physics and the special sciences. In other words: there is no difference in the realist attitude towards well-confirmed explanations and theories of the “special sciences” (so-called), on the one hand, and “fundamental” physics, on the other.

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