Framework theories in science

by

Leah Henderson

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Abstract
This thesis consists of three papers on the nature of scientific theories and inference.
In many cases, scientific theories can be regarded as organised into hierarchies, with
higher levels sometimes called 'paradigms', and lower levels encoding more specific or
concrete hypotheses. The first chapter uses hierarchical Bayesian models to show that the
assessment of higher level theories may proceed by the same Bayesian principles as the
assessment of more specific hypotheses. It thus shows how the evaluation of higher level
theories can be evidence-driven, despite claims to the contrary by authors such as Kuhn.
The chapter also discusses how hierarchical Bayesian models may help to resolve certain
issues for Bayesian philosophy of science, particularly how to model the introduction of
new theories.
The second chapter discusses the relationship between Inference to the Best Explanation
(IBE) and Bayesianism. Van Fraassen has raised the concern that the explanatory
considerations in IBE go beyond the Bayesian formalism, making IBE incompatible with
Bayesianism. The response so far has been that the explanatory considerations can be
accommodated within the Bayesian formalism by stipulating that they should constrain
the assignment of the probabilities. I suggest a third alternative, which is that the extra
explanatory considerations have their origins in the relationship between higher and
lower level theories and can be modelled in Bayesian terms without directly constraining
the probabilities.
The third chapter discusses an aspect of the debate over scientific realism. The No
Miracles argument and the Pessimistic Induction are often seen as the primary arguments
for and against scientific realism. Yet recently it has been alleged that both of these
arguments commit the base-rate fallacy. I argue that both arguments can be formulated in
a non-fallacious manner, so neither should be dismissed on the grounds of faulty form
alone.

Thesis supervisor: Robert Stalnaker
Title: Laurance S. Rockefeller Professor of Philosophy