

Empiricism Unchained: Debunking the Instrument Conspiracy

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Observations made through instruments that cannot also be made with our unaided sensory organs lack epistemic credibility, claim the constructive empiricists. One well-known challenge to this view draws attention to the fact that distinct types of instruments have been known to yield the same or at least highly similar observational outputs. The implication, of course, is that the convergence of output is evidence of the ability of those instruments to detect real features of the world. To meet this challenge, the constructive empiricist attempts to argue that the convergence is an artefact of the practice of calibration. In this talk, I argue that this is desperate, conspiratorial, attempt to rule out the veridicality of the output of instruments. My inquiry is framed around a broader discussion of what makes unaided sensory organs epistemically credible. Surprisingly, constructive empiricists say nothing on this matter. Against this background, I put forth a proposal for what lends unaided sensory organs epistemic credibility and, unsurprisingly, argue that the same credibility is extended to several types of instruments.