

The Upward Path to Structural Realism

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In a recent PSA paper (2001a), as well as some other papers (1995, 2000, 2001b) and a book chapter (1999, Chapter 7), Stathis Psillos raised a number of objections against structural realism. In this paper I am concerned with two of these, namely:

1. ESR faces a dilemma: On the one hand, the H-W principle by itself can only establish a relation of embeddability between the external world and the ‘world’ of percepts, not a relation of isomorphism as required by ESR. Without a relation of isomorphism, the structural realists cannot establish inferential knowledge about the structure of the external world. On the other hand, H-W and its converse, viz. different stimuli or physical objects imply different percepts, allow for the establishment of isomorphic relations but, in doing so, concede too much to idealism (2001a, S13–S16).
2. ESR cannot justify the claim that the first-order properties and relations of unobservables are unknowable in principle (1999, 156; 2001a, S20–S21).

My aim is threefold: (1) to evaluate part of Psillos’ offence on the Russellian version of epistemic structural realism (ESR), (2) to elaborate more fully what Russellian ESR involves and (3) to suggest improvements where it is indeed failing.