

HPSC Graduate Student Conference

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Title: A Historicist Defense of Scientific Realism

Abstract: A central element of a defense of scientific realism is to motivate the ongoing use of inference to the best explanation (IBE) despite its past failures to generate knowledge. This paper develops a novel historicist response to this “pessimistic induction” from the history of science. A historicist approach to IBE argues that IBE comes in several forms, and that a given form is apt to generate knowledge only in a restricted historical context. Two arguments for this historicist response are developed. First, the traditional “ahistorical” approaches fail to address the pessimistic induction. Second, a historicist can explain why the failures of the past are not relevant to the current use of IBE: our form of IBE has been deliberately revised to avoid the failures of the past.