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Progress as Approximation to the Truth: A Defence of the Verisimilitudinarian Approach

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Abstract In this paper we provide a compact presentation of the verisimilitudinarian approach to scientific progress (VS, for short) and defend it against the sustained attack recently mounted by Alexander Bird (2007). Advocated by such authors as Ilkka Niiniluoto and Theo Kuipers, VS is the view that progress can be explained in terms of the increasing verisimilitude (or, equivalently, truthlikeness, or approximation to the truth) of scientific theories. According to Bird, VS overlooks the central issue of the appropriate grounding of scientific beliefs in the evidence, and it is therefore unable (a) to reconstruct in a satisfactory way some hypothetical cases of scientific progress, and (b) to provide an explanation of the aversion to falsity that characterizes scientific practice. We rebut both of these criticisms and argue that they reveal a misunderstanding of some key concepts underlying VS.

1 Introduction

The nature of progress has traditionally been a central concern for philosophers of science (see, e.g., the surveys by Dilworth 2008; Losee 2004; and Niiniluoto 2011a). Starting from the mid-1980s, a new approach to this old-age issue has emerged, based on the view that scientific progress can be accounted for in terms of the *increasing verisimilitude* or, equivalently, *truthlikeness*, or *approximation to the truth*, of our theories. More specifically, the supporters of this approach claim that

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