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Metaphysics and the Sciences

Elements in Metaphysics

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Abstract: This Element presents and critically examines the relationship between metaphysics and the sciences. Section 1 provides a brief introduction. Section 2 looks at the methodological issues that arise when metaphysics and science get into contact, which is a much-debated aspect of the larger dispute concerning philosophical 'naturalism' and 'anti-naturalism'. A taxonomy of possible views is offered. Section 3 looks more specifically at milder forms of naturalism about metaphysics, which attempt in various ways to make it 'continuous' with science while preserving some degree of autonomy for it. Section 4 adds some reflections on what might be regarded as the most pressing open problem when it comes to doing scientifically oriented metaphysics (but also when practising metaphysics or science in isolation): the problem concerning theory choice and the value of non-empirical factors in determining which explanation of certain phenomena should be preferred.

Keywords: metaphysics, naturalism, science, theory choice, theoretical virtues

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