Isaac Newton's Scientific Method: Turning Data into Evidence about Gravity and Cosmology

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Isaac Newton's Scientific Method examines Newton's argument for universal gravity and his application of it to resolve the problem of deciding between geocentric and heliocentric world systems by measuring masses of the sun and planets. William L. Harper suggests that Newton's inferences from phenomena realize an *ideal of empirical success* that is richer than prediction. Any theory that can achieve this rich sort of empirical success must not only be able to predict the phenomena it purports to explain, but also have those phenomena accurately measure the parameters which explain them. Harper explores the ways in which Newton's method aims to turn theoretical questions into ones which can be answered empirically by measurement from phenomena, and to establish that propositions inferred from phenomena are provisionally accepted as guides to further research. This methodology, guided by its rich ideal of empirical success, supports a conception of scientific progress that does not require construing it as progress toward Laplace's ideal limit of a final theory of everything, and is not threatened by the classic argument against convergent realism. Newton's method endorses the radical theoretical transformation from his theory to Einstein's. Harper argues that it is strikingly realized in the development and application of testing frameworks for relativistic theories of gravity, and very much at work in cosmology today.

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