

# Phenomenology, Empiricism, and Science

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Harald A. Wiltsche  
Department for Philosophy  
University of Graz, Austria

[harald.wiltsche@uni-graz.at](mailto:harald.wiltsche@uni-graz.at)

# 1. Husserl's Critique of Empiricism

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“[E]mpiricist naturalism springs from the most praise worthy motives. In contrast to all ‘idols’, to the powers of tradition and superstition, of crude and refined prejudices of every sort, it is a radicalism of cognitive practice that aims at enforcing the right of autonomous reason as the sole authority on questions of truth. [T]o judge rationally or scientifically about things signifies to conform to *the things themselves* [...]” (Ideas 1, §19)

# 1. Husserl's Critique of Empiricism

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“[Empiricism] *destroys the possibility of the rational justification of mediate knowledge*, and so destroys *its own possibility* as a scientifically proven theory. It admits that there is mediate knowledge, the product of various validating connections, and it does not reject principles of validation. [...] If, however, all proof rests on principles governing its procedure, and if its final justification involves an appeal to such principles, then we should either be involved in a *circle* or in an *infinite regress* [...]” (Prolegomena to LI, p. 59)

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- VII. Therefore, empiricism cannot account for mediate knowledge.

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“The essential fault in empiricistic argumentation consists of identifying and confusing the fundamental demand to the ‘things themselves’ with the demand for legitimation of all cognition by [sense] *experience*. [...] It is easily recognized that by defending this identification, and by contesting the validity of purely eidetic thinking, one arrives at a skepticism which [...] cancels itself out by a countersense. We need only ask the empiricist about the source of the validity of his universal theses (e.g., ‘All valid thinking is based upon [sense] experience as the only presentive intuition’), and he becomes involved in demonstrable countersense.” Ideas 1, §19, §20 (Prolegomena to LI, p. 59)

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## 2. From Experience to Intuition to Rationality

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“If ‘*positivism*’ is tantamount to an absolutely unprejudiced grounding of all sciences on the ‘positive’, that is to say, on what can be seized upon originally, then we are the genuine positivists. In fact, we allow *no* authority to curtail our right to accept all kinds of intuitions as equally valuable legitimating sources of cognition – not even the authority of ‘modern natural science’.” (Ideas 1, §21)

## 2. From Experience to Intuition to Rationality

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“The essential homogeneity of the function of fulfillment, as of all the ideal relationships necessarily bound up with it, obliges us to give the name ‘perception’ to each fulfilling act of confirmatory self-presentation, to each fulfilling act whatever the name of an ‘intuition’, and to its intentional correlate the name ‘object’.” (Logical Investigations, p. 280)

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“[T]he posited characteristic has as its own a specific rational character if and only if it is a position on the basis of an intuitively fulfilled, originally presentive sense and not merely on the basis of just any sense.” (Ideas 1, pp. 315-316/327)

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General condition of rationality: It is rational to believe that p if and only if it is possible that an intention towards p can be intuitively fulfilled.

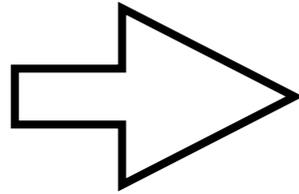
# 3. *Wissenschaftlichkeit* and *Wissenschaft*

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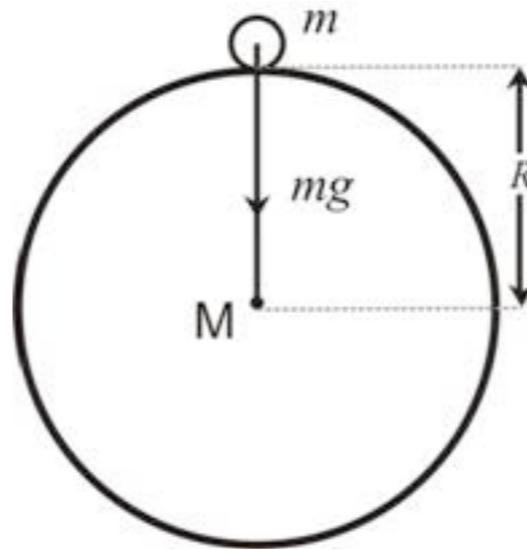
theoretical core

$$F=mg$$
$$F=GMm/r^2$$

...



model



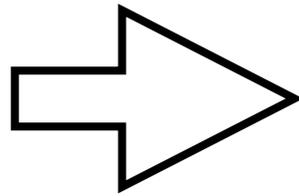
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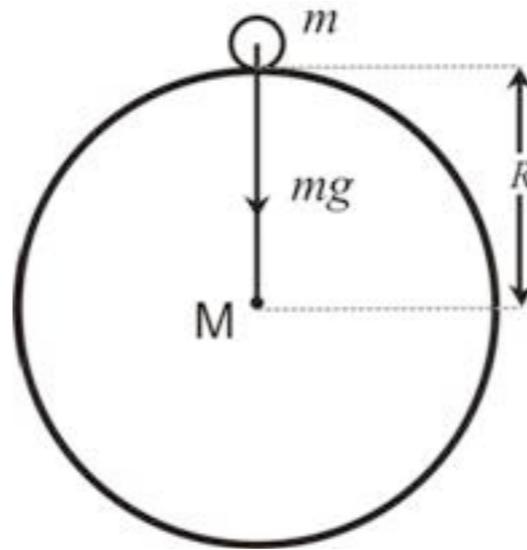
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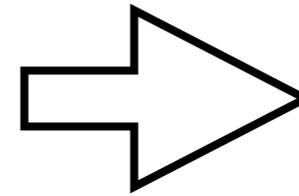
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model



hypothesis



target system



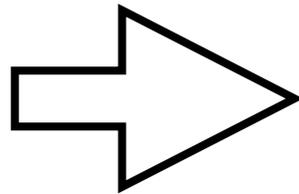
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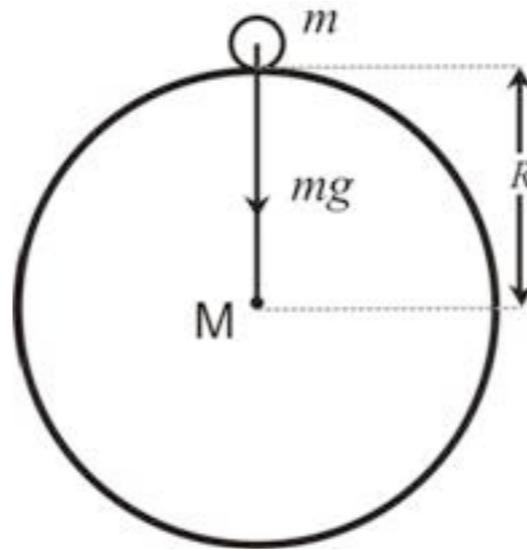
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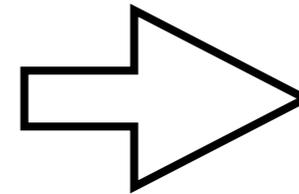
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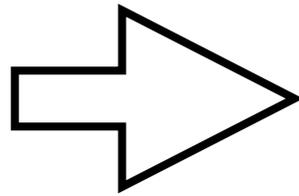
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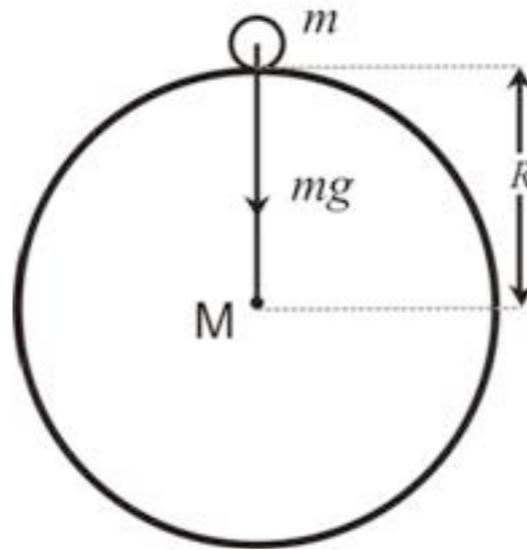
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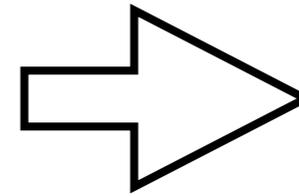
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Is it epistemically relevant what theories tell us about unobservable aspects of empirical reality, i.e. about forces, electrons and quarks?

Or is all that matters what models tell us about the observable world, i.e. about mercury columns, planets and sunspots?

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Any understanding that runs counter to this “absolute norm for all rational discourse about physical things [...] is countersensical in the strictest signification of the word” (ibid., p. 111/118)

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Thank you for your attention!