Science-based Activism Under a Cognitive Microscope:
the case of *The Battle of the Beetles* (M.G. Leonard, 2018)

Genetic modification has regularly evoked public debate that questioned the limits and values of science. Research shows that science acceptance or skepticism is not only determined by knowledge about science, but also by political ideology, religiosity and morality. Both proponents and opponents of genetic modification refer to scientific findings, but above all, the controversies lay bare how other elements are at play, such as a schema of purity or the HUMAN IS MACHINE metaphor.

The strong interplay of science and society also shapes the plot of several children's books, among which M.G. Leonard's bestselling and widely translated *Beetle*-trilogy. Building on a cognitive framework, and more specifically, the concepts of mind-modelling and empathy, I will explore the relationship between science, activism and morality in the final book, *The Battle of the Beetles* (2018). I will show how seemingly unrelated scripts and schemas interact in order to build social groups that influence the representation of science. While empathy among characters initially feeds the urge to act against the 'bad' scientist, the motivation for what is undertaken gradually shifts to moral beliefs. Also, intended empathy with specific characters is used to create an 'Us vs Them' division, rather than to offer insight into an array of possible perspectives. That way, the ideas that 'Them' characters represent are criticized. My findings illustrate how science as a resource for activism and citizenship is thoroughly influenced by other schemas and scripts, and urges for a careful evaluation of the role of empathy in children's literature.

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