Essay One

Requirements

You are to submit one 4-6 page research paper (8 pages if taking the class for writing credit) on Monday 17 March, addressing one and only one of the questions listed below. A hard copy of the paper must be submitted in class.

Guidelines


Some additional comments on the assignments:

• Do not hand in a first draft of your essay—read it through at least once before submitting, if only to check spelling and grammar and assess the overall coherency of your prose.

• Do not submit anything over the page length.

• I don’t mind which referencing system you use, as long as it is consistent. If you are not already committed to a particular style, my preference is for the Harvard system.

• Use footnotes if necessary, but do not use endnotes.

• When researching, it is better to read one paper many times than many papers once.
Questions

• Explain and evaluate the Deductive-Nomological theory of scientific explanation, addressing at least one of the following problems with the theory:
  – Explanatory asymmetry.
  – Explanatory relevance.

• Scriven (1959); Scriven (1962) argues that the symmetry thesis regarding explanation and prediction implied by the Deductive-Nomological theory of scientific explanation is false. Explain and evaluate his argument.

• Woodward (2003) argues that the Deductive-Nomological theory of scientific explanation is committed to an implausible thesis concerning the epistemology of explanation he calls “the hidden structure strategy”. Explain what this problem is, and evaluate Woodward’s argument.

• Explain and evaluate the Inductive-Statistical theory of probabilistic explanation, addressing at least one of the following problems with the theory:
  – The requirement of maximal specificity.
  – Explanations that cannot be formulated as inductive arguments.

• Strevens (2000) argues against what he calls “egalitarian” accounts of probabilistic explanation on the grounds that they cannot justify explanations in statistical mechanics. Explain and evaluate his argument.

• Lewis (1986) gives an account of causal explanation that leaves the determination of explanatory relevance to pragmatic factors. Explain and evaluate Lewis with respect to this issue, considering whether Hitchcock (1995) provides grounds for rejecting his account.

• Sober (1983) argues that equilibrium explanation provides a counterexample to causal theories of explanation. Explain and evaluate his argument.

• Woodward and Hitchcock (2003a); Woodward and Hitchcock (2003b) develop a counterfactual account of explanation that they claim improves upon the Deductive-Nomological account in several respects. Explain and evaluate their account, comparing it with the Deductive-Nomological account in at least one of the following respects:
  – Explanatory asymmetry.
  – Explanatory relevance.
  – Explanatory depth.
References


