Essay One

Requirements

You are to submit one 5-7 page research paper on Wednesday 27 October, addressing one and only one of the questions listed below. A hard copy of the paper must be submitted in class.

Guidelines

An excellent resource to read before starting your essay is James Pryor’s “Guidelines on Writing a Philosophy Paper”. You might also find his “Philosophical Terms and Methods” and “How To Read a Philosophy Paper” useful.

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.

- 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 for the Deductive-Nomological theory, and explain and evaluate Woodward’s argument.

- Lewis (1986) gives an account of causal explanation according to which to explain is to provide information about causal history. Explain and evaluate the theory developed by Lewis, considering the following questions:
Does more information always entail better explanation?

Are there non-causal explanations?

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

- Woodward and Hitchcock (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


