

Wednesday, 2 November 2:00-4:00 pm

RESEARCH SEMINAR IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF NATURAL SCIENCES

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The Purpose of van Fraassen's Relevance Relation

Abstract

In van Fraassen's theory of the pragmatics of explanation he reminds us that for any question there are multiple correct answers. He argues that we can isolate the kind of answers to which the particular question is directed, if we can articulate aspects of its context: the contrast class and the relevance relation. Some have argued that with respect to scientific explanation we must be able to specify in advance, genuine from spurious relevance relations. In this paper I want to look at Larry Wright's work on reasoning and Gadamer's work on interpretation, to first better articulate what's involved in van Fraassen's relevance relation, and secondly to look at the extent to which specifying relevance relations makes sense. Finally I will look at some of the consequences this may have for science as well as social scientific research.