

**INFERENTIALISM, CONTEXTUALISM, RELATIVISM:
NEW DIRECTIONS IN PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE**

A workshop on the connections and similarities between inferentialist, contextualist, and relativist approaches in contemporary philosophy of science.

MONDAY 8 FEBRUARY 2016

Seminar Room A-217, Faculty of Philosophy, Complutense University

Programme:

10.00- 11.00: Kareem Khalifa (Middlebury College): Explanation or Inference: Which Comes First?

11.00 – 11.30: Coffee Break

11.30 – 12.30: Mauricio Suárez (UCM, Madrid): The Contextual Character of Causal Evidence

12.30 – 13.30: Katherina Kinzel (University of Vienna): De-idealizing Disagreement: From Relativism to Contingency and Back

For further info and registration: msuarez@filos.ucm.es

Directions:

Faculty of Philosophy, Complutense University of Madrid

Metro: Ciudad Universitaria

Google map:

<https://www.google.com/maps/place/Facultad+de+Filosof%C3%ADa/@40.446546,-3.730693,16z/data=!4m2!3m1!1s0x0:0x11b03e05be2f49a7?hl=es-ES>

Funded and Sponsored by the Spanish Ministry of Economics and Competitiveness (project FFI2014-57064-P)



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ABSTRACTS:

KAREEM KHALIFA (Middlebury College): “Explanation or Inference: Which Comes First?”

Inferences to the Best Explanation (IBE) are not good because of their formal vocabulary (the “best explains operator”), but instead are good only because of thicker vocabularies (causal, nomological, etc.) Furthermore, these thicker vocabularies do not warrant inferences because of some feature shared by all of our best explanations. Consequently, IBE is not a fundamental rule of inference, and the order of analysis favored by IBE’s proponents should be reversed. In other words, inferences are not good because of their explanatory credentials; rather, explanations are good because they play the appropriate inferential role.

MAURICIO SUÁREZ (UCM Madrid): “The Contextual Character of Causal Evidence”

I argue for the thesis that causal evidence is context-dependent. The same causal claim may be warranted by the same piece of evidence in one context but not another. I show this in particular for the type of causal evidence characteristic of the manipulability theory defended by Woodward (*Making things happen: a theory of causal explanation*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2003). My thesis, however, generalises to other theories—and at the end of the paper I outline the generalization to counterfactual theories. The paradigmatic form of causal evidence in the manipulability theory is provided by tests of the functional invariance of the relation between putative cause and effect under interventions (on the putative cause). I show that such evidence exhibits at least two kinds of context-relativity: personal, or epistemic; and situational, or objective.

KATHERINA KINZEL (University of Vienna): “De-idealizing Disagreement: From Relativism to Contingency and Back”

Current literature on relativism discusses disagreement with reference to a set of highly idealized examples, such as conflicts about matters of taste (“x is tasty” vs. “x is not tasty”), or confrontations between different epistemic systems (science vs. religion). These examples are used as “intuition-pumps” for analyzing the possibility of genuine yet faultless or irresolvable disagreement. The philosophical controversy then focuses on whether relativism is the best option available for making sense of these examples.

We argue that the high degree of idealization in current debates on relativism leads philosophers to misconstrue the very phenomenon that relativists and anti-relativists are concerned about: disagreement and the possibility of resolving it. We contrast the idealized examples with more complex historical cases. Drawing on case studies from the sociology of scientific knowledge, we develop an alternative picture of disagreement. In particular, we highlight two features that are frequently overlooked in the current literature. First, disagreement is dynamic rather than static – it leads to negotiation between the conflicting parties, and to the emergence of new epistemic principles. Second, disagreement is always entrenched in a specific socio-historical context – and often, conflict about factual matters is tied to conflict over questions of social organization.

We argue that close attention to these features leads one to view the outcome of a disagreement as an open-ended issue. Whether a disagreement is resolvable or not, and how it will be resolved, is determined in and by the process of negotiation and conflict. It is not predetermined as an implication of the logical structure of the disagreement. In order to motivate relativism, we suggest focusing on the contingent character of the resolution of actual disagreements rather than on idealized cases of irresolvable or faultless disagreement. This shift of focus also leads to a reconsideration of relativism as a philosophical problem.