



Workshop: Themes in Philosophical Explanation

Adi Lautman Interdisciplinary Program for Outstanding Students
Cukier-Goldstein-Goren Center for Mind, Cognition, and Language

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Description: There is a salient contrast in how we regard theoretical representations. Some representations are assumed to reveal the nature of whatever they purport to represent. Other theoretical representations represent without such further revelatory pretension. A clear case of the former kind is the way we regard the representation of gold as a transition metal within physical chemistry. The substance is thus represented under the assumption that being a transition metal is part of what it is to *be* gold – it figures prominently in our account of the nature of the substance. A case of the latter kind is the way we regard the representation of gold as a standard for pre-20th century monetary systems within economics. The substance is thus represented without an accompanying presumption that being a standard for pre-20th century monetary systems is part of what it is to be gold even if being such a standard is crucial to the explanation of gold's economic significance. So despite playing an important role in revealing the nature of the economy, being a standard for pre-20th century monetary systems it is not presumed to reveal the nature of the *substance*. Call the first attitude towards a theoretical representation *realist* and the second attitude *instrumentalist*.

Philosophical explanation purports to reveal the nature of whatever falls within its purview, so it would appear that a realist attitude towards its representations is a natural default. A principal aim of this workshop is to articulate reasons for skepticism about such default realism that emerge from attending to several case studies of philosophical explanation and identifying a common etiological thread that runs through them: the origination of the deployed theoretical representations from semantics broadly construed. In speaking of reasons for skepticism about a default realist attitude the emphasis is on 'default'. The upshot is not meant to be that philosophical explanation is not after all in the business of pondering the nature of things. It is rather that theoretical representations wielded within contemporary philosophical explanation should not be taken as a matter of general policy to reveal the nature of whatever they purport to represent. A second major aim of the workshop is to address a pressing follow-up question: Why is there in fact a general presumption to the contrary, a presumption in favour of the opposing thought that the representations of philosophical explanation *should* be taken in a realistic spirit?

Workshop outline:

Week	Content
Week 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Philosophical Explanation (1): Metaphilosophical Instrumentalism (lecture)• Seminar following lecture
Week 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Philosophical Explanation (2): When is a Realist Attitude Towards Theoretical Representations Justified? (lecture)• Seminar following lecture
Week 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Philosophical Explanation (3): Instrumentalism and the Metaphysics of What is Said (lecture)• Seminar following lecture