

UNIV

PHILOSOPHY COLLOQUIUM

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Friday, May 3, 2019

Time: 3:00 pm

Location: BEH 217

Department of Philosophy, New York University

Michael Strevens

The Practical Value of Causal Understanding

We philosophers give explanations for the sheer intellectual satisfaction of it. But many writers have supposed that the urge to explain has in addition a more practical payoff. Learning the nature of this payoff might help us to understand why the criteria for correct causal explanation have the form they do. The first part of this paper considers and rejects one popular thesis about the practical payoff, that the primary function of causal understanding is to help us to answer "What if things had been different" questions. The second part of the paper advocates an alternative, that the primary function of causal understanding is to help us to discern "fine-grained variation" in simple statistical regularities, or if you like, the ability to discern the "ceteris paribus conditions" of simple statistical generalizations.