

# PHILOS 290 – GRADUATE SEMINAR: EXPLANATION

Ezra Rubenstein (rubenstein@berkeley.edu)

UC Berkeley, Spring 2024

W 2–4, Philosophy Hall 234

Office hours: TBD

## DESCRIPTION

This course is an introduction to the vast philosophical literature on explanation. We will focus on the following questions:

- What is it to give a scientific explanation of something, and how (if at all) does this relate to causation, laws, and counterfactuals?
- What is it to give a philosophical explanation of something, and how (if at all) does this relate to grounding, naturalness, and identification?
- What is inference to the best explanation, in what sense (if any) is it rational, and how does it relate to induction and to Bayesianism?

## READINGS

All readings will be available in pdf format through the bCourses site. Please try to get through the required readings before class, and post any (short) questions or comments you have on the discussion thread. I expect the required readings to take you around 2–3 hours each week.

## COURSEWORK

- One short paper (~1500–3000 words) or in-class presentation (~20 minutes), by Sunday March 31<sup>st</sup> (end of Spring break). The idea is for you to focus narrowly on presenting one of the readings (or even some part of the reading), and your own response to it, without any pressure to make a substantive original point. This may (but doesn't have to) serve as a foundation for your final paper.
- A final paper (~5000–8000 words), due Friday May 10<sup>th</sup> (last day of the semester). Here is a suggested timeline:
  - By March 31<sup>st</sup>: meet with me to discuss initial ideas.
  - By April 14<sup>th</sup>: submit a paper plan for comments.
  - By April 28<sup>th</sup>: submit a first draft for comments.

## OVERVIEW OF SCHEDULE

A detailed schedule (with the readings for each week) is posted on the bCourses site. This schedule is provisional and will be updated during the semester.

### **Unit I: Explanation in Science**

Week 1: The D-N Account (Hempel & Oppenheim, Salmon, Cartwright)

Week 2: The Causal Account (Lewis, Skow)

Week 3: Unificationism (Kitcher, Strevens)

Week 4: Interventionism (Woodward & Hitchcock, Franklin-Hall)

Weeks 5–6: The Kairetic Account (Strevens, Potochnik, Weatherson)

### **Unit II: Explanation in Philosophy**

Weeks 7–8: Grounding (Fine, Rosen, Bennett, Schaffer)

Week 9: Metaphysical Semantics (Sider)

Week 10: Identification (Dorr)

[Week 11: Spring break]

[Week 12: No class]

### **Unit III: Inference to the Best Explanation**

Week 13: IBE and Induction (Harman, Lipton)

Week 14: Non-Bayesian IBE (Douven, Climenhaga)

Week 15: Bayesian IBE (Weisberg, Henderson)