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The Case of Regularity in Mechanistic Causal Explanation

Andersen, Holly (2011) *The Case of Regularity in Mechanistic Causal Explanation*. In: [\[2011\] Mechanisms: Les Mécaniciens: Salon des Refusés \(Pittsburgh; 9 April 2011\)](#).



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Abstract

How regular do mechanisms need to be, in order to count as mechanisms? This paper addresses recent arguments for dropping the requirement of regularity from the definition of a mechanism. I provide an expanded taxonomy of kinds of regularity mechanisms may exhibit. This taxonomy allows precise explication of the degree and location of regular operation within a mechanism, and highlights the role that various kinds of regularity play in scientific explanation. I defend the broadened regularity requirement in terms of regularity's role in individuating mechanisms against a background of other causal processes, and by prioritizing mechanisms' ability to serve as a model of scientific explanation, rather than merely as a metaphysical account of causation. It is because mechanisms are regular, in the expanded sense described here, that they are capable of supporting the kinds of generalizations that figure prominently in scientific explanations.

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