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- Simple Search
- Advanced Search
- Browse by Subject
- Browse by Year
- Browse by Conferences/Volumes
- Latest Additions

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- Home
- About the Archive
- Archive Policy
- History
- Help
- FAQ
- Journal Eprint Policies
- Register
- Contact Us

News

- Guide to new PhilSci-Archive features.

How to Study Scientific Explanation?

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Abstract

This paper investigates the working-method of three important philosophers of explanation: Carl Hempel, Philip Kitcher and Wesley Salmon. We argue that they do three things: (i) construct an explication in the sense of Carnap, which then is used as a tool to make (ii) descriptive and (iii) normative claims about the explanatory practice of scientists. We also show that they did well with respect to (i), but that they failed to give arguments for their descriptive and normative claims. We think it is the responsibility of current philosophers of explanation to go on where Hempel, Kitcher and Salmon failed. However, we should go on in a clever way. We call this clever way the "pragmatic approach to scientific explanation." We clarify what this approach consists in and defend it.

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