

A Curve Fitting Approach to Ceteris Paribus-Laws

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Abstract

Law-like generalisations hedged with a ceteris paribus-clause are incomplete strict laws. They can be “fleshed out” by adding a set of enabling, or completing, conditions to their antecedent. The nature of such completers must be subject to non-ad hoc constraints, however, failing which putative ceteris paribus-laws will be trivially true. The simplest and most plausible constraint is that relevant completers also occur in the antecedents of other laws. Apparent counterexamples to this proposal can be disarmed by interpreting the epistemology of cp-laws as a curve-fitting problem, which yields the required distinction between spurious and genuine hedged regularities. It also suggests answers to common objections to cp-laws, in particular to the claims that they are vacuous, or that they cannot be fleshed out in the way suggested.

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