

Explanatory particularism and interdisciplinary understanding

Melinda Fagan
University of Utah

Explanatory particularism is a new philosophical approach to scientific explanation, which takes scientific practice as primary. On this approach, a scientific explanation is an achievement that advances understanding in a particular scientific field. Explanations so conceived are localized to particular contexts; i.e., the scientific communities in which they are constructed and used. Interdisciplinary research offers a prima facie challenge for this view. How are explanations from two (or more) distinct fields possible? I show that explanatory particularism can meet this challenge. The core idea is to analyze interdisciplinary explanation as a form of collaborative social activity. This collaborative analysis has several interesting philosophical consequences and the potential for broader impacts.