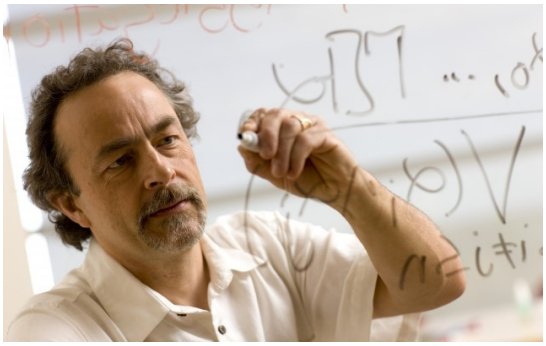
Philosophy Department Colloquium Series



Friday, January 31, 2020
3:00 p.m.
C-630
Everyone is welcome

Remarks on Laws of Nature

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Abstract: Recent philosophical accounts of laws of nature vary widely, as a small sample of proposed accounts illustrates: Marc Lange imposes a special truth condition for "counternomic" counterfactuals: true counterfactuals whose consequents are counternomic (violate a law of nature) must have a counternomic antecedent: on Lange's account, the laws of a world w form a logically closed system of generalizations which are true at w, and for which this condition holds. Others, including Fred Dretske, David Armstrong and Michael Tooley, have argued that true law statements express contingent, second-order relations between the universals involved; for example, if the laws of Newtonian mechanics were laws of our world, the universals force, mass and acceleration would be related to each other by the equation, F=ma. And John Bigelow, together with Brian Ellis and Caroline Lierse proposed that natural necessities at a given world w are grounded in what *kind* of world w is. More austere (i.e. less metaphysical) views have also been defended, for example, by David Lewis and F. P. Ramsey, both of whom held that the laws of a world w are the generalizations that do the best job of *systematizing* regularities that hold at w.

But a different approach, due to Wilfrid Sellars, has been neglected in these debates. Sellars's view of laws derives from his treatment of predicates. In first order logic, the extensions of predicates are treated as *independent* of each other. But in (Sellars, 1948) and other work, Sellars argued for a richer treatment of predicates, grounding their identities in rules of "material reasoning." I present an account of material reasoning and its implications for predicates and laws of nature, connecting them to a general logical result showing how to generate representations of 'possible worlds,' in the form of maximal consistent sets of sentences, from a monotonic, reflexive and transitive consequence relation.

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