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Lauren Ross (University of California, Irvine)

Distinctions among causation: Causes with material continuity

Abstract:

In the philosophical literature on causation recent projects have focused on clarifying distinctions across types of causal relationships. These distinctions include stability, specificity, and proportionality (Woodward 2010; Lombrozo et al. 2018). In this talk I suggest that there is another distinction among causation that has yet to receive attention in this literature. This distinction has to do with whether a causal relationship has material continuity or not. Causes with material continuity are related to Aristotle's notion of "material cause" and they are often said to have "passive power" when compared to other causal factors. I provide an analysis of causal relationships with this feature and I argue that these relationships (1) figure in distinct explanations, (2) are studied with unique methods, and (3) provide special types of causal control.