Overview

In the first reading for this unit, Hempel argued for four requirements for adequacy of scientific explanations. The fourth of these is the empirical condition of adequacy, which states that the sentences in the explanans must be true. (In particular, this means any laws used must be true.) Nancy Cartwright disputes this claim and argues that not only do the laws not have to be true, but that they (almost?) never are.

Reading Questions

The following questions are meant to guide and assist you in reading Cartwright’s article. They will draw your attention to key passages and challenge you to think about what Cartwright is really trying to say. Although no page numbers are given, the questions come roughly in the order that you will find their answers in the text.

1. How does Cartwright characterize the simplest version of the D-N model?
2. What is Cartwright’s chief objection to covering law models of explanation?
3. What does Cartwright mean by Ceteris Paribus laws?
4. What does Cartwright mean when she says Ceteris Paribus laws are false?
5. Why, then, is it that they still play a role in explanation?