

EINLADUNG ZUM KOLLOQUIUM

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(Cincinnati)

“It’s all relevant”

One of the questions philosophers pose about scientific explanations regards relevance: what sorts of relationships can be explanatory and which of these relationships should feature in an explanation. This question of relevance crops up variously in philosophical debates about levels of explanation, structural explanation, causes vs. background conditions, and more, and it also can shape what scientists target in their research. In this talk, I’ll argue that there is no way to determine which relationships should be included in a given explanation without reference to the cognitive needs of those seeking explanation. The world’s complexity gives rise to a variety of potentially explanatory relationships; determining which of these in fact explains depends on those setting the agenda. This view has two implications with significance for science and philosophy of science. If I am right about the role of the explanation-seekers in shaping explanatory relevance, we should anticipate—and accept—the coexistence of multiple explanations. And this also paves the way for the recognition of the explanatory value of a wider range of structural, large-scale, and stable features of the world.

Angela Potochnik is Professor of Philosophy and Director of the [Center for Public Engagement with Science](#) at the University of Cincinnati. Her research addresses the nature of science and its successes, the relationships between science and the public, and methods in population biology. She is the author of *Idealization and the Aims of Science* (2017) and coauthor of *Recipes for Science* (2018), an introduction to scientific methods and reasoning. She earned her PhD from Stanford University in 2007.

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