

EXPLANATION PAPER TOPICS

Some fairly straightforward suggestions to get you thinking:

1. Describe the hexed salt and birth control pill counterexamples to the DN account of event explanation. How might a proponent of the DN account deal with these cases while retaining the spirit of the account? Critically evaluate your proposal.
2. Describe the flagpole/shadow and barometer/storm counterexamples to the DN account of event explanation. Can a unificationist approach to explanation deal with these cases?
3. Describe the flagpole/shadow and barometer/storm counterexamples to the DN account of event explanation. Can van Fraassen's "pragmatic" theory of explanation deal with these cases?
4. Which of Hempel's DN account and Kitcher's unification account has better realized the conception of explanation inherent in empiricist philosophy of science?
5. Critically evaluate Salmon's at-at theory of causal processes/causal influence. Where necessary, suggest fixes.
6. Defend the minimalist causal account of explanation against the accusation that it lets too many irrelevant details into explanations.
7. Contrast Strevens' and de Regt & Dieks' views about the nature of scientific understanding. Do they disagree on any substantive issues? If so, who, if anyone, is right?
8. The probabilistic relevance, counterfactual, and kairetic approaches to difference-making – which is best? Discuss with reference to some particular class of problem cases. (Don't try to discuss every problem case.)