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Can Normic Laws Save Hempel's Model of Historical Explanation? a Critique of Schurz' Approach

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Abstract

I critically discuss Gerhard Schurz' improved version of Hempel's covering law model as the model appropriate for human action explanation in the historical sciences. Schurz takes so-called "normic laws" as the best means to save Hempel's covering law model from the objection that there are no strict laws in historiography. I criticize Schurz approach in two respects: 1) Schurz falsely takes Dray's account of historical explanations to be a normic law account. 2) Human action explanation in terms of goals and means-ends-beliefs are not based on normic laws at all, for the explanandum (the action) in an explanation follows from the volitional and doxastic premises (the explanans) alone. To show this, I argue that there is a conceptual connection between volition and action, rooted in our actual usage of volitional concepts. Ultimately, a difference in principle between the methods of explanation in science and historiography has to be acknowledged.

Keywords

explanation in historiography – covering law model – normic laws – human action explanation – methodological dualism