Public Abstract
First Name:Daniel
Middle Name:Christopher
Last Name:Marshall
Adviser's First Name:Paul
Adviser's Last Name:Weirich
Co-Adviser's First Name:
Co-Adviser's Last Name:
Graduation Term:SP 2014
Department:Philosophy
Degree:PhD
Title:SKILL-BASED RELIABILISM

My main goal in this dissertation was to solve the Generality Problem, a problem that has been facing reliabilistic theories of knowledge for roughly 20 years. Reliabilistic theories claim that a true belief counts as knowledge only if it was formed by a reliable process or mechanism. One of the major problems facing reliabilism is the Generality Problem. This problem arises because the process directly responsible for a given belief is a token process – an individual, one-time instance of a process. However, reliability is generally thought to be a property of a type of process – a category or kind of process, which can be instantiated multiple times. To make matters that much more complicated, an individual token of a process belongs to as many different types as it has properties. The Generality Problem is the problem of specifying, in a principled, non-ad hoc way, which of these types is relevant for knowledge attributions. My approach towards to solving this problem relies on a skill-based model of belief formation. This model allows us to specify the kinds of mechanisms that play a role in shaping the mechanism responsible for forming a belief. (And the mechanism plus causal contributions of the environment the mechanism activates in constitutes the process that forms the belief.) Because these adaptive mechanisms constrain the way the mechanism can change and vary at different points in time, and across different counterfactual worlds, they specify types that their target mechanism (the one directly responsible for forming a belief) belong to. I propose that one of these adaptive types (which I call the extended activation type) is the one that is relevant for knowledge attributions.
While the theory I develop in this dissertation is fairly abstract and removed from everyday affairs, it is possible that the basic approach I use in developing this theory could have some spin-off applications. For example, a couple of my colleagues are assisting an economist in using Darwinian evolutionary models to try to explain how the routines used in firms change over time. The skill-based model I develop in this dissertation may provide a useful middle ground between Darwinian evolution on the one hand, and foresightful design on the other.