



Defending Medical Cases as Abduction

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4-6pm, Close-Hipp 202

*Reception will follow in the Philosophy Department:
5th floor of Close-Hipp

Despite having a somewhat dubious reputation as a form of anecdotal evidence, case reports remain exceedingly popular forms of communication and publication in medicine. They are ill-understood even within biomedical research communities, and often are described as not counting as real evidence or even as simply being equivalent to anecdotes. This paper begins by introducing the case report and its typical uses in the context of research in contemporary medicine, and exploring their status as a form of evidence particularly in our current era which is dominated by so-called 'evidence-based medicine' (EBM). I then flip the usual process on its head and instead of outlining how cases fall short of these ideals, instead I investigate what cases are good for how they are used, and what it means to use them 'well,' including what epistemic resources need to be in place, and what they are best viewed as being good for. I contend that instead of viewing medical cases as failed examples of weaker forms of reasoning, particularly induction, the form of logical inference that underlies medical cases is more closely related to abductive reasoning of the type espoused by the American philosopher C.S. Peirce in his later views. These arguments provide important considerations not just for those interested in medical cases or philosophy of medicine, but more generally for those seeking to provide more complex accounts of various fields of science in practice.