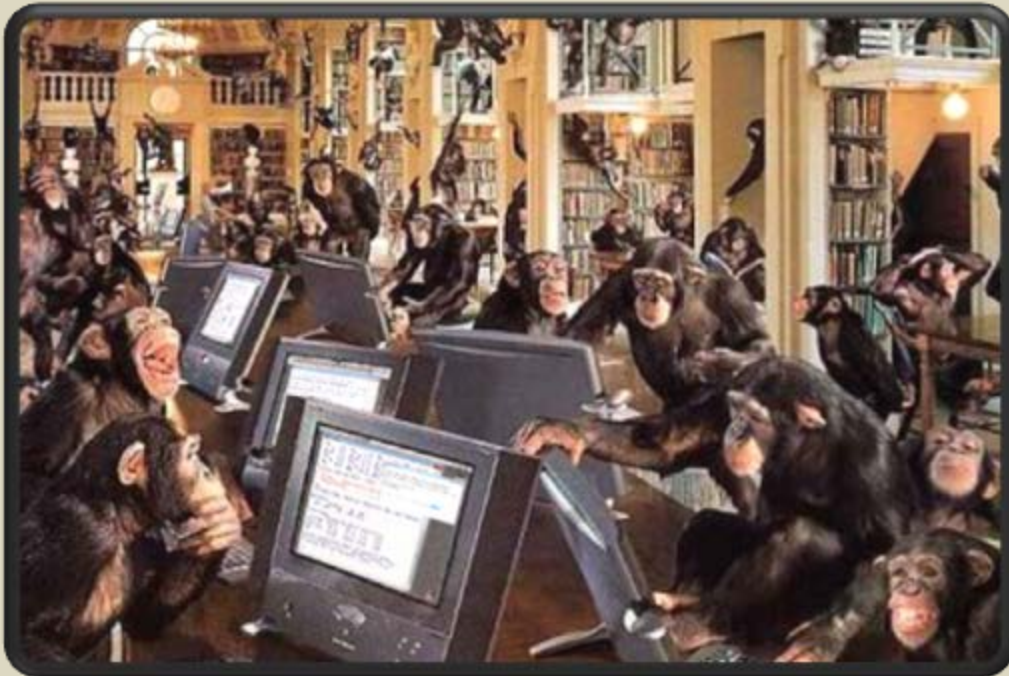


Research Design is Not Enough: The Role of Theory in Causal Inference

2016/17 Annual Theme



Social science seeks to understand the causes of important social phenomena. Understanding requires both theoretical explanation as well as empirical evidence bearing on causal claims. Statistical research on the problem of causal inference beginning in the last quarter of the 20th century has provided a powerful foundation for both experimental research as well as strong observational designs meant to uncover causation. These advances have permeated all of the social sciences in multiple ways. In addition, contemporary developments in computing have permitted scholars to carry out empirical research on a massive scale, opening up possibilities for causal research in contexts, on subjects, and at scales that were impossible until a very short time ago. As exciting and useful as these empirical developments have been, it is important not to overlook the crucial role that social science theories play in the interpretation of results and assessment of policy implications. Our annual theme considers the role of theory development and application in empirical research in the social sciences intended to support causal claims. The theme will be explored through interdisciplinary workshops, conferences, and a variety of lectures.