

# Ephemeral Mechanisms in Natural and Human History

**Stuart Glennan (Butler University Indianapolis)**

## **Abstract**

One of the longstanding debates in the philosophy of history concerns whether the explanatory forms appropriate to historical inquiry are distinct from or continuous with the explanatory forms of the natural sciences. In this paper I argue that these forms are continuous by means of an analysis of the nature and role of narrative explanation in both natural and human history. In particular, I suggest that narratives, both in natural and human history, are descriptions of what I call ephemeral mechanisms. Ephemeral mechanisms share important characteristics with the more stable mechanisms typically studied by scientists, and these shared characteristics help explain the connections between scientific and historical explanation.