

## Week 12 Response: *Gelmania*

Natalie Carlson

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I enjoyed both Gelman's papers and the discussion on Wednesday. Both were quite broad and non-technical, but I think what he provides is a useful framework for thinking about how to approach and frame causal questions, particularly for social scientists. Two elements were particularly useful for me: the distinction between forward and reverse causal questions, and the notion of the latter being a form of model checking. The recent faddishness of randomized program evaluations notwithstanding, I think the most interesting questions in social science tend to be reverse causal questions, and they are interesting precisely *because* our current mental model doesn't suffice to explain a particular phenomenon. The process of answering that question then becomes an iterative process of rejecting that inadequate model, creating a new model in the form of a forward causal question, and then testing it.