

# Decision Processes Colloquia

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**Monday, November 26, 2012**

**Where:** JMHH 340

**When:** 12:00 noon to 1:20 PM

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## Illusions of Causal Understanding

ABSTRACT: People's preferences and decisions are often guided by the sense that they understand how things work. People support political policies, in part, because they think the policies will be effective, and they purchase products that they believe can plausibly deliver promised benefits. Unfortunately, people's sense of understanding is often dissociated from their true understanding; they suffer from an illusion that they understand more deeply than they do, and hence their preferences and attitudes about causal systems often rest on shaky ground. I will describe some of the consequences of this phenomenon in the domain of political attitudes. I will then discuss a critical moderator of susceptibility to the illusion, one's natural tendency to engage in deliberative thinking, and how this determines the type of explanation that will resonate with an individual. Finally, I will say a few words about the kinds of causal judgments at which people excel. The illusion of understanding does not suggest that we are hopeless at causal reasoning, just that our mechanism knowledge does not go as deep as we think.