

The Nature of Causation

Philosophy 680

Fall 2008

Prof. Brandon C. Look

General Information:

Meeting Place: Kastle Hall Room 210

Meeting Time: T 4:30-7:00pm

Office Hours: T 2:00-3:00pm

Office Phone: 257-3071

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Description:

This seminar will focus on contemporary discussions in analytic metaphysics concerning the nature of causation and counterfactual analysis of causation. We will consider a number of questions, including the following:

- What is primary, causal relations or causal laws?
- How are we to understand necessary and sufficient conditions for events?
- What is the nature of an event?
- Do causal relations exist between events or facts or states of affairs?
- Can non-events be causes?
- How are to understand pre-emption of events?
- If we adopt a counterfactual analysis of causation, what are our further metaphysical commitments?
- How are we to understand causation in a probabilistic universe?

We will be working through two anthologies that contain classic and recent treatments of these issues. It is the goal of this seminar to familiarize students with the range of positions regarding the nature of causation and to deepen their appreciation of the philosophical problems attendant to any attempt to understand causation, the cement of the universe.

Expectations, Requirements, and Grading:

Grades will be determined by three components.

I. Participation (5%)

Students are expected to attend all seminar meetings, have read closely the required readings, and be active participants in discussion.

II. Reflection Papers (20%)

Each student will be required to write a short, weekly “reflection paper,” in which he or she addresses two questions:

- (1) What is the most important unanswered question from the previous week's session?
- (2) What is the most important unanswered question in the required reading for the present session?

As part of the assignment, students are to explain *why* these questions are important. These papers are to be no more than 300 words long and are to be completed by 1:00p.m., Tuesday and e-mailed to me at look@uky.edu.

III. Term Paper and Presentation (75%)

In addition, each student is required to make a presentation in the final two meetings of the semester. Students will submit a *first (working) draft* of their term papers to their fellow students and the instructor at least 48 hours prior to their presentation. (The draft should be at least 10 pages in length and give some indication of the main lines of the argument.) Each student will have 15-20 minutes to present his or her paper in class; there will follow a 20-30 minute discussion of the draft and presentation with an eye to improving the final draft.

Final drafts of the term papers should be approximately 18-25 pages in length. They will be due Tuesday, December 16th.

Naturally, students are encouraged to discuss an appropriate topic with the instructor well in advance.

Texts:

Required:

- Sosa, Ernest & Michael Tooley (eds.), *Causation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Collins, John, Ned Hall, & L.A. Paul (eds.), *Causation and Counterfactuals*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004.

Suggestions for Further Reading:

- Lewis, David, *On the Plurality of Worlds*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1986.
- Salmon, Wesley, *Causality and Explanation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.
- Tooley, Michael, *Time, Tense, and Causation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Woodward, James. *Making Things Happen*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Readings:</u>
9/2	Introduction
9/9	Mackie, "Causes and Conditions" (ST 1) Scriven, "Defects of the Necessary Condition Analysis of Causation" (ST 2) Kim, "Causes and Events: Mackie on Causation" (ST 3)
9/16	Davidson, "Causal Relations" (ST 4) Anscombe, "Causality and Determination" (ST 5) Von Wright, "On the Logic and Epistemology of the Causal Relation" (ST 6)
9/23	Ducasse, "On the Nature and the Observability of the Causal Relation" (ST 7) Salmon, "Probabilistic Causality" (ST 8) Salmon, "Causality: Production and Propagation" (ST 9) Tooley, "Causation: Reductionism versus Realism" (ST 10)
9/30	Lewis, "Causation" (ST 11) Kim, "Causation and Counterfactuals" (ST 12)
10/7	Horwich, "Lewis's Programme" (ST 13) Bennett, "Event Causation" (ST 14) Sosa, "Varieties of Causation" (ST 15)
10/14	Lewis, "Causation as Influence" (CHP 3) Yablo, "Advertisement for a Sketch of an Outline of a Prototheory of Causation" (CHP 5)
10/21	Paul, "Aspect Causation" (CHP 8) Hall, "Two Aspects of Causation" (CHP 9)
10/28	Lewis, "Void and Object" (CHP 10) Beebe, "Causing and Nothingness" (CHP 11)
11/4	Election-Day, Academic Holiday
11/11	Mellor, "For Facts as Causes and Effects" (CHP 12) Hitchcock, "Do All and Only Causes Raise the Probabilities of Effects?" (CHP 17)
11/18	Maudlin, "Causation, Counterfactuals, and the Third Factor" (CHP 18) Armstrong, "Going through the Open Door Again" (CHP 19)
12/2	Student Presentations
12/9	Student Presentations