Perspectives on Causation

Fall 2022

Karen Bennett and Carolina Sartorio

Tuesdays 3-6

This class will cover causation from a variety of angles. We will discuss the metaphysics of causation, what we want from a theory of causation, the relation between token causation and causal generalizations, the causal relata, causation by omission, the relation between causation and grounding, and connections between causation, free will, and moral responsibility. We hope these different angles will inform each other.

This course will be in person in the department seminar room (534), though Carolina will largely be joining us over zoom. On rare occasions, with a good reason such as illness or conference travel, students can request in advance to join by zoom (available through Canvas). But we do intend this to be a primarily in-person seminar.

**Requirements:** These will differ between undergrads and grad students, as well as between grad students taking the class as a “research seminar” vs. a “non-research seminar” (see https://philosophy.rutgers.edu/phd-requirements). But the basic idea, details below, involves short presentations & papers followed by revision. The semester will be divided into two chunks, each of which will begin with several weeks of instructor-led discussion, and culminate in two weeks of student-led presentations, which will be structured like APA colloquia. The idea here is to help prepare you for a career as a professional philosopher. You need to learn to give talks and incorporate feedback from them., and it’s also useful to practice writing shorter, tightly argued pieces (journals are cracking down on long papers, and APA colloquia have always been quite short.)

Grad students taking for research credit: You will give two 20 minute presentations followed by 30 minutes of Q&A. Each of these presentations will then be polished into a 3000 word paper, taking into account the feedback from the Q&A. At the end of term, you will revise one of the short papers into a 5000 word paper. Each short paper and presentation will be worth 15% of your grade, for a total of 60%. Your longer paper will be worth the remaining 40% of your grade.

Grad students taking for non-research credit: you are expected to do the readings and fully participate in the course, but will only do one of the two presentations & short papers. By the end of term, you will revise the short paper in light of the feedback you receive; this revision can but need not involve expanding it into a longer paper. Your presentation will be worth 25%, the short paper worth 35%, and the revision worth 40%.

Undergraduates: you will do one 20 minute presentation, write two 3000 word papers, and revise the second paper. The default will be that you will do a presentation in the second round rather than the first, but talk to us if you’d rather do one in the first round.

**Due dates**: The first of the two 3,000 word papers is due 10/25. The second 3,000 word paper is due 12/16. The final 5,000 word paper is due January 15. Please be in touch with us if you need adjustments to these deadlines.

Readings will be made available on the Canvas page for the course. If you are interested in purchasing books, here are some suggestions:

Collins, Hall, and Paul, *Causation and Counterfactuals*

Fenton-Glynn, *Causation*

Lewis, *Philosophical Papers Volume 2* (both volumes should be in every grad student’s library)

Sartorio, *Causation and Free Will*

**Unit 1: Causation Boot Camp**

9/6 Regularity theories and counterfactual theories

Hume, §7 part 2 from *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*

Hume, Abstract of *A Treatise of Human Nature*

Lewis, “Causation” (not including postscripts)

Lewis, “Counterfactual Dependence and Time’s Arrow,” start at p. 41 (“analysis 2”) and read through p.48 (finish the section titled “The Future Similarity Objection”)

*Optional extra introductory material: Fenton-Glynn, chapters 1, 2, and 4.1; Collins, Hall, and Paul §§0-3; Beebee & Menzies, “Counterfactual theories of causation” (Stanford Encyclopedia)*

9/13 Counterfactual theories continued; causal modeling

Lewis, “Postscript E”

Lewis, “Causation as Influence”

Hitchcock, “The Intransitivity of Causation Revealed in Equations and Graphs”

Fenton-Glynn, §4.6-4.6.2

*Optional extra introductory material: Collins, Hall, and Paul §4; Fenton-Glynn 4.2-4.5*

*Other optional extra: \*Schaffer, “Trumping preemption”*

**Unit 2: Methodological issues and the relationship between token and type causation**

9/20 Collins, Hall, and Paul, §5, “Methodology”

 Fenton-Glynn, §3.4.1, “Concepts vs. Metaphysics”

 Fenton-Glynn §3.3, “Token vs. Type”

 Gallow, “The Metaphysics of Causation (SEP entry),” §2.1

 Hitchcock, “Mishap at Reichenbach Fall: Singular vs. General Causation”

**Unit 3: The causal relata & causation by omission**

9/27 Gallow, §1.1 of “The Metaphysics of Causation (SEP)”

 Schaffer, “Contrastive Causation”

 Paul, “Aspect Causation”

10/4 Lewis, Postscript D

 Schaffer, “Causation by Disconnection”

 Beebee, “Causation and Nothingness”

 McGrath, “Causation by Omission: A Dilemma”

**Round 1 of presentations**

10/11 **presentations -- seminar will start at 3:30 (K has an unmovable dr appt)**

10/18 **presentations**

**Unit 4: Probabilistic causation**

10/25 Lewis, “Postscript B”

Sartorio, *Causalism*, chapter 6

Bennett, *Making Things Up*, pp. 81-82

Bennett, section 1.2 “Indeterministic Causation” of “Reply to Audi, Bliss, Rosen, Schaffer, and Wang”

**Unit 5: Causation and grounding**

11/1 Bennett, §§4-4.2 of *Making Things Up*

 Bennett, §1 of “Reply to Audi, Bliss, Rosen, Schaffer, and Wang”

**Unit 6: Causation, free will, moral responsibility**

11/8 Sartorio, “Responsibility and Causation,” section 2

 Sartorio, “*Causation and Free Will*, chapter 2

 Sartorio, “Resultant Luck and the Thirsty Traveler”

11/15 Sartorio, “Responsibility and Causation”

 Frankfurt, “Alternative Possibilities and Moral Responsibility”

 Sartorio, *Causation and Free Will*, chapter 4

**11/22** **no class**  (Rutgers runs Thursday classes)

**11/29 no class** (Rutgers-Tel aviv personal identity conference)

**Round 2 of presentations:**

12/6 presentations

12/13 presentations