

**Metaphysics Proseminar**  
**Topic: Causation**  
Office hours: By appointment

Metaphysical issues arise in many contexts, including moral psychology, political science, the philosophy of psychiatry, and the philosophy of mind. And in each case, there are many ways of approaching the relevant metaphysical issues. There is no way that we could even attempt to do justice to the entire field of metaphysics in a single semester. So instead, we will work through *some* approaches to questions about causality. Over the course of this semester, we will explore the possibility that adopting different starting points yields different hypotheses about the nature of causation. And we will also try to cultivate a sense of the different approaches that can be taken to raising and addressing these sorts of metaphysical questions. While we will be focusing on causation, this approach should help you to acquire the skills you will need to think clearly and critically about metaphysical issues wherever they emerge in philosophical contexts.

**Class Structure:** I see myself as a facilitator of this proseminar, and not as someone whose role it is to tell you how to think about metaphysical issues. I will have plenty to say about the things we will read; and I will always do my best to help you *work through* any ideas that you don't understand. But it is important to me that the discussion focuses on the things that matter to you. And it is important to me that the members of this proseminar learn to uncover and interpret metaphysical arguments on their own. Since the members of this proseminar are living and working in different time zones, we need to find ways to sustain a virtual and asynchronous approach to generating fun and interesting conversations. And I propose that we do this in the following way:

1. We will use **Zoom** to record brief 'coffee chats', which focus on the assigned readings; and,
2. We will schedule four 1-hour group discussions on **Zoom**, using When2Meet to find a time that works for all of us.

For this to work, each member of the seminar will need to take responsibility for two 'coffee chats' over the course of the semester. These chats will be recorded and shared on Discord.

When it's your week to lead a 'coffee chat', you will probably want to:

1. **Solicit questions, insights, and worries that other members of the proseminar would like to see discussed.** This shouldn't require very much additional work, beyond checking in with your classmates on Discord. And you should all try to help each other out as much as possible, so that these chats are both as useful and as low-stress as possible.
2. **Prepare the set of questions, insights, or worries that you would like to discuss with me.** There are many ways to do this (e.g., linking ideas from the weekly reading to other things you're working on; offering objections to the arguments in the assigned texts; or extending ideas from the readings to a novel domain). I don't care which parts of the reading you address, so long as you engage with it in a meaningful way. *Critically:* If there are things you don't understand, you should feel comfortable saying "I don't understand why [the author] made [the claim]. Can you explain that in a different way?". Your primary task is simply to make sure that we have a few things to discuss; and my primary task will be to make sure that things get clearer over the course of the discussion.
3. **Set aside 30-45 minutes for a Zoom chat with me** about the things we have read for the week, focusing on the things you've prepared in (1) and (2). These discussions should take place prior to 17:00 Eastern on Wednesday—but I will do my best to work around your schedule.

Finally, each member of the seminar will write one **short paper** (max 3000 words). These papers must take a stand on a metaphysical issue, but they can either address the things that we have read in class, or they can address a metaphysical issue that is more closely related to your own research interests.

**Reading:** We will read two recent books: L.A. Paul & Ned Hall (2013), *Causation: A user's guide* and Carolina Sartorio (2016), *Causation and free will*. The remaining readings are books chapters or journal articles that will be shared in a dropbox folder. For all readings, the number of pages is provided in blue; and the readings that are marked with an \* might take you longer to read if you lack the relevant background.

Preliminaries		
8/26	<b>Christopher Hitchcock</b> , Three concepts of causation (8); <b>L.A. Paul &amp; Ned Hall</b> , Causation: A user's guide (Chapters 1-2; 69); (optional) <b>David Lagnado &amp; Tobias Gerstenberg</b> , Causation in legal and moral reasoning. (32)	BH will lead solo, with a brief orienting lecture
Approaches from Analytic philosophy		
9/2	<b>L.A. Paul &amp; Ned Hall</b> , Causation: A user's guide (Chapter 3; 101)	Sabrina - Coffee Chat
9/9	<b>L.A. Paul &amp; Ned Hall</b> , Causation: A user's guide (Chapters 4-6; 86)	Yo- Coffee Chat
9/16	<b>Sarah McGrath</b> , Causation by omission (23); <b>Jonathan Schaffer</b> , Contrastive causation (31); <b>Paul Henne et al.</b> , Cause by omission and norm: Not watering plants (13)	Chris - Coffee Chat
9/23	<b>Rani Lill Anjum &amp; Stephen Mumford</b> , Dispositionalism: A dynamic theory of causation (13); <b>Eleonore Stump</b> , Emergence, causal powers, and Aristotelianism in metaphysics (17); <b>Nancy Cartwright &amp; John Pemberton</b> , Aristotelean powers (19)	Group discussion: Time TBA
9/30	<b>Carolina Sartorio</b> , <i>Causation and free will</i> (Intro, Chapters 1-3; 107)	Yo- Coffee Chat
10/7	<b>Carolina Sartorio</b> , <i>Causation and free will</i> (Chapters 4-end; 66)	Melanie - Coffee Chat
Science-Centered Approaches		
10/14	<b>Paul Griffiths &amp; Karola Stotz</b> , Developmental Systems Theory as a process theory (19); <b>Anne Sophie Meincke</b> , Persons as biological processes (19); <b>*Spyridon Koutroufinis</b> , Organism, Machine, Process (17)	Penney - Coffee Chat
10/21	<b>Nancy Cartwright</b> , One world, many things (14); <b>Peter Godfrey-Smith</b> , Causal pluralism (10); <b>Tania Lombrozo</b> , Causal-explanatory pluralism (28)	Sabrina - Coffee Chat
10/28	<b>Cei Maslen</b> , Keeping Score for Causal Claims (13); <b>Kenneth Kendler</b> , The dappled nature of causes of psychiatric illness (9); <b>Elly Vintiadis</b> , A process view of mental disorders (28)	Melanie - Coffee Chat
11/4	<b>Holly Anderson</b> , Patterns, information, causation (32); <b>Sharon Crasnow</b> , The role of case study research in political science (11); <b>Roberta Millstein</b> , Types of experiments and Causal Process Tracing (7)	Free week! No coffee Chat!

What is Causation, really?		
11/11	<b>Peter Menzies &amp; Hugh Price</b> , Causation as a secondary Quality (16); <b>Sara Bernstein</b> , Causal Idealism (15) (optional) <b>Sophie Gibb</b> , The causal closure principle (21)	Chris - Coffee Chat
11/18	<b>*Noa Ronkin</b> , Causation as the handmaiden of metaphysics (50); <b>Eleanor Rosch</b> , Is causality circular? (16) (Optional) <b>Alison Gopnik et al.</b> , A theory of causal learning in children: causal maps and Bayes nets (28)	Penney-Coffee Chat
12/2	<b>*J.L. Shaw</b> , Causality: Sāmkhya, Buddha and Nyāya (57); (Optional) <b>Marzenna Jakubczak</b> , The problem of psychophysical agency... (9)	