

Seminar on Metaphysics of Causation and Moral Responsibility

Professor: Sara Bernstein (sara.bernstein@duke.edu)

What is the relationship between causation and moral responsibility? How well do metaphysical theories of causation function as guides to attributions of moral responsibility? Is there a moral difference between causing something by action and causing something by omission? Is moral responsibility exhaustible for a certain outcome? If causation is transitive, is moral responsibility also transitive? How do we distribute causal and moral responsibility across collectives, such as armies and corporations? This seminar will examine these and other questions about causation and moral responsibility, with an eye to the metaphysics of causation.

Required Texts:

Michael S. Moore, *Causation and Responsibility* (C&R)

Numerous others, available on Blackboard

(Optional: H.L.A. Hart and Tony Honoré, *Causation in the Law* (CiL))

Requirements:

weekly well-formed questions due on Tuesdays at 6pm (10%)

one in-class presentation on a course reading (10%)

one 10-15 page term paper (60%)

class participation (20%)

Schedule:

August 31: Introduction to Causation and Moral Responsibility

- Carolina Sartorio, "Causation and Ethics" (Blackboard)
- Michael S. Moore, "Causation and Moral Blameworthiness" (C&R)

September 7: Metaphysics of Causation

- Ned Hall, "Two Concepts of Causation" (pp. 1-8) (Blackboard)
- Jonathan Schaffer, "Causation by Disconnection"
- (Optional: David Lewis, "Causation" (pp. 1-5) (Blackboard))

September 14: What is Moral Responsibility?

- Fischer and Ravizza, "Moral Responsibility: The Concept and Challenges" (pp. 1-16) from *Responsibility and Control* (Blackboard)
- Hart and Honoré, "Causation and Responsibility" (*CiL*) (Blackboard)

September 21: Omissions

- Sarah McGrath, "Causation by Omission: a Dilemma" (Blackboard)
- Helen Beebe, "Causing and Nothingness" (Blackboard)

September 28: Omissions, continued

- Michael S. Moore, "The Role of Counterfactual Dependence" (*C&R*)
- Jonathan Schaffer, "Disconnection and Responsibility" (Blackboard)

October 5: Actions versus Omissions

- Jonathan Bennett, "Morality and Consequences" (pp. 1-30) (Blackboard)
- Carolina Sartorio, "A New Asymmetry Between Actions and Omissions" (Blackboard)

October 12: Redundant Causation and Moral Responsibility

- Hart and Honoré, "Concurrent Causes and Contributory Negligence" (*CiL*) (pp. 235-253) (Blackboard)
- Harry Frankfurt, "Alternate Possibilities and Moral Responsibility" (Blackboard)

October 19: Class rescheduled for morning of Friday, October 21

Friday, October 21, 9-12am, West Duke 08A:

- Michael S. Moore, "Preserving the Possibility of Overdetermining Causes" (*C&R*)
- Sara Bernstein, "Moral Overdetermination" (Blackboard)

October 26: Causes versus Background Conditions

- J.L. Mackie, "Causes and Conditions" (Blackboard)
- Michael S. Moore, "The Superfluity of Accomplice Liability" (*C&R*)

November 2: Transitivity

- Harry Frankfurt, "Coercion and Moral Responsibility" (Blackboard)
- Carolina Sartorio, "On Causing Something to Happen in a Certain Way Without Causing it to Happen" (Blackboard)

November 9: Moral Luck

- Bernard Williams, "Moral Luck" (Blackboard)
- Susan Wolf, "The Moral of Moral Luck" (Blackboard)

November 16: Collective Responsibility

- Sarah Rachel Chant, "The Special Composition Question in Action" (Blackboard)
- Virginia Held, "Can a Random Collection of Individuals be Morally Responsible?" (Blackboard)

November 23: (No class: Thanksgiving Break)

November 30: Collective Responsibility

- Carolina Sartorio, "Failures to Act and Failures of Additivity" (Blackboard)
- David Silver, "Collective Responsibility, Corporate Responsibility, and Moral Taint" (Blackboard)

December 7: Review

Ways to Reach Sara, or her Indistinguishable Robot Clone

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Office Hours: 201G West Duke, Monday 11:30-12:30pm, Wednesday 11:30-12:30pm, or by appointment.