

PHIL 302/502: Seminar in Modern Philosophy—Early Modern Theories of Causation

Friday 1:00-3:30pm, HUM 227

Instructor Contact Information

Instructor: Sebastian Bender

Office: HUM 218

Email: sebastian.bender@rice.edu

Office Hours: TR 3:00-4:00pm and by appointment

Class Description

What is the nature of causation? While this question is of perennial interest in philosophy, it was particularly hotly debated in the early modern period. This is no surprise since early modern philosophers rejected Aristotelian hylomorphism (the view that all things consist of form and matter), in favor of a mechanistic worldview. As a result, the Aristotelian conception of four causes and the explanation of change in terms of the acquisition or loss of forms was given up. Early modern philosophers thus faced the challenge of coming up with alternative accounts of the nature of causation. In this course, we will analyze and evaluate several of these accounts. In particular, we will examine the views of causation held by six early modern philosophers: Francisco Suárez, René Descartes, Nicolas Malebranche, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, John Locke, and David Hume. While we will discuss in their own right the positions held by these thinkers, we will also try to understand how these positions relate to each other. One main aim of the seminar is to consider whether it is possible to tell an overarching narrative about early modern theories of causation.

Texts and Materials

All class materials will be made available on owlspace.

Course Requirements

1. Regular attendance, completion of the weekly readings, and participation
2. Six reading responses (1-2 pp.) to be submitted online before class meetings
3. One short in-class presentation of one of the secondary texts (ca. 10 min.)
4. One short mid-term paper (~7 pp.) (due March 16)

5. One term paper (~12 pp. for undergraduates; ~20 pp. for graduate students) (due May 1)

The grade for this course will be based on the two papers (midterm paper 20%, final paper 60%) and participation, reading responses, and presentation (together 20%).

Rice Honor Code

In this course, all students will be held to the standards of the Rice Honor Code, a code that you pledged to honor when you matriculated at this institution. If you are unfamiliar with the details of this code and how it is administered, you should consult the Honor System Handbook at <http://honor.rice.edu/honor-system-handbook/>. This handbook outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of your academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process.

All written assignments you turn in must be your own and plagiarism will not be tolerated. Make sure that all passages you take from other sources are quoted and cited properly. If you are uncertain about whether or not a certain case constitutes plagiarism, please contact me *before* you submit your assignment. All violations of the Honor Code will be handed over to the Honor Council.

Disability Support Services

If you have a documented disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with Disability Support Services (Allen Center, Room 111/adarice@rice.edu/x5841) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) talk with me to discuss your accommodation needs.

Absence Policies

I expect that students show up for all class meetings. Expected absences should be coordinated with me ahead of time. Two or three unexpected absences are acceptable. Four or more unexpected absences, however, may be grounds for "failing" the attendance requirement, which can result in failing the class.

Syllabus Change Policy

This syllabus might be subject to change with advanced notice

Topics and Readings

January 15: Introduction

January 22: Suárez on Efficient Causation

Francisco Suárez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, 17.1; 18.2.1–4; 18.4.1–3; 19.1.

Stephan Schmid, “Efficient Causality: The Metaphysics of Production”, in: *Suárez on Aristotelian Causality*, ed. by J. L. Fink, Leiden & Boston: Brill (2015), 84-120.

January 29: Suárez on Divine Causation

Francisco Suárez, *Disputationes Metaphysicae*, 21.1; 22.1.; 22.3.1–9.

Alfred J. Freddoso, “God’s General Concurrence with Secondary Causes: Why Conservation is Not Enough”, in: *Philosophical Perspectives* 5 (1991): 553-585.

February 5: Descartes’s Causal Principle(s); Body-Body Causation

René Descartes, *Third Meditation*; *Fifth Replies* (selections); *Sixth Replies* (selections); *Principles* I.39-41; II.4, 23-64; III.56-57.

Michael Della Rocca, “Causation without Intelligibility and Causation without God in Descartes”, in: *A Companion to Descartes*, ed. by J. Broughton & J. Carriero, Oxford: Willey-Blackwell (2011), 235-250.

Daniel Garber, “Mind, Body, and the Laws of Nature in Descartes and Leibniz”, in: *Midwest Studies In Philosophy* 8 (1983): 105–133.

February 12: Descartes on Mind-Body Interaction

René Descartes, *Sixth Meditation*; *Correspondence with Elisabeth*; *Passions of the Soul* I.7-10, 30-37.

Daniel Garber, “Understanding Interaction: What Descartes Should Have Told Elisabeth”, *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 21 (1983): 15-32.

February 19: Malebranche’s Defense of Occasionalism I

Nicolas Malebranche, *Search after Truth*, VI.2.3 (LO: 446-452); *Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion*, VII.

Steven Nadler, “Malebranche on Causation”, in: *The Cambridge Companion to Malebranche*, ed. by S. Nadler, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2000), 112-138.

February 26: Malebranche’s Defense of Occasionalism II; Occasionalism and Freedom

Nicolas Malebranche, *Elucidation* XV (LO: 657-685).

Sukjae Lee, “Necessary Connections and Continuous Creation: Malebranche’s Two Arguments for Occasionalism”, in: *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 46 (2008): 539-566.

Susan Pepper-Bates, *Nicolas Malebranche: Freedom in an Occasionalist World*, London: Continuum (2009), Chapter 5: “Attending to Malebranche’s Agent Causation”, 90-112.

March 4: Spring Break. No class!

March 11: Leibniz on Substance and Activity

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *Discourse on Metaphysics*.

Julia Jorati, “Leibniz On Causation—Part 1”, in: *Philosophy Compass* 10 (2015): 389-397.

March 18: Leibniz against Occasionalism; Forces; Pre-Established Harmony

Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, *New System; On Nature Itself; The Monadology* §§1-61.

Donald Rutherford, “Natures, Laws and Miracles: The Roots of Leibniz’s Critique of Occasionalism”, in: *Causation in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. by Steven Nadler, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press (1993), 135-158.

March 25: Locke’s Conception of Powers

John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, book II, chapters xxi.1-19, xxv, xxvi.

Walter Ott, *Causation and Laws of Nature in Early Modern Philosophy*, Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press (2009), 159-187 (Chapters 19-22).

April 1: Midterm Recess. No Class!

April 8: Hume on Necessary Connection and Constant Conjunction

David Hume, *Treatise of Human Nature* I.3 (selections).

Kenneth Winkler, “The New Hume”, in: *The Philosophical Review* 100 (1991), 541-79.

April 15: Hume’s Theory of Causation

David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, section 7.

Don Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume’s Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press (1997), 96-117 (chapter 5: “Two Definitions of ‘Cause’”).

April 22: Open