Lectures for Philosophy 3601G: Metaphysics

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Readings

Many readings are available for download from the course’s webpage:
http://strangebeautiful.com/uwo/phil3601.html
(Some of the works are not individually downloadable but are rather in anthologies or compilations that are themselves downloadable, per the way the work is cited in the References section at the end of this document.) Other works should be on reserve at Weldon Library or available online as cited. Goodman (1983), *Fact, Fiction and Forecast*, and Lewis (1973b), *Counterfactuals*, are on sale at the University of Western Ontario bookstore, as well as being available for download on the course’s webpage.

1 Introduction and Précis; Hume’s Analysis of Causality

So what is this thing called ‘causality’? What are counterfactuals? What do they have to do with each other? Why does everyone talk about what Hume said about causality? And what did Hume say about it anyway, by god?

Required Reading


Suggested Reading

8. Hume (1975, §7), *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding*
10. Mackie (1980, ch. 1), *The Cement of the Universe*
11. Mill (1874, bk. iii, ch. v), *A System of Logic, Ratiocinative and Inductive: Being a Connected View of the Principles of Evidence and the Methods of Scientific Investigation*
12. Strawson (1989), *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume*
2 Meta-Linguistic Accounts of Causation

Mackie proposes an analysis of the causal relation based on the sorts of logical conditions used (so he claims) to judge evidentiary propositions about causal statements. Lewis proposes one based on counterfactuals. Can either work? If so, what sort of causal relations are they working for?

Required Reading
1. Lewis (1973a), “Causation”

Suggested Reading
5. Lewis (1986e), “Postscripts to ‘Causation’”
9. Lewis (1986f), “Postscripts to ‘Counterfactual Dependence and Time’s Arrow’”

3 Physicalist Accounts of Causation—Manipulability

Woodward proposes a (currently popular) analysis of causality based on the idea of the ability to manipulate (at least in principle) some things (“causes”) so as to affect other things (“effects”).

Required Reading

Suggested Reading
2. Lewis (1986b), “Counterfactual Dependence and Time’s Arrow”
3. Lewis (1986f), “Postscripts to ‘Counterfactual Dependence and Time’s Arrow’”
4. Pearl (2000), Causality
6. Wright (1971), Explanation and Understanding
4 Causation According to Science—Positive Accounts

Salmon proposes that any analysis of causality must be based on our best current scientific knowledge. Peirce offers warnings and remonstrance about such an endeavor. Salmon boldly charges ahead and tries actually to produce such an analysis, based on his understanding of conserved quantities (e.g., energy) as treated by physics. Does Salmon run afoul of the gist of Peirce’s remarks? What can it mean, indeed, to offer an account of causality based on scientific knowledge?

Required Reading

1. Peirce (1898, lecture vi, pp. 197–199), *Reasoning and the Logic of Things*

Suggested Reading

3. Dowe (2000), *Physical Causation*
5. Reichenbach (1956), *The Direction of Time*
6. Russell (1927), *The Analysis of Matter*

5 Causation According to Science—Skepticism

Some impressive and eminent thinkers think that causality plays no fundamental role in fundamental science, that, in fact, the idea should be purged from the argot of science. Can they be right? If they are right, where does Salmon go wrong? If something like Salmon’s view is correct, where of they wrong?

Required Reading

3. Russell (1919), “On the Notion of Cause, with Applications to the Problem of Free Will”

Suggested Reading
6 Causation, Determinism and Necessity

Hume spoke of causation as a “necessary connexion” between cause and effect. Is there any sense of “necessary” in which he is right? Does the idea of causality imply any sort of determinism?

Required Reading

1. Peirce (1892), “The Doctrine of Necessity Examined”

Suggested Reading

1. Earman (1986, chs. i–ii,v), A Primer on Determinism
2. Mackie (1980, ch. 8), The Cement of the Universe
3. Wright (1974), Causality and Determinism

7 Counterfactuals, Introduction (Mar 01)

Goodman showed us that counterfactuals are troublesome beasts, perhaps incorrigibly so. What is this trouble they cause? Can they be tamed?

Required Reading

1. Goodman (1983, part i), Fact, Fiction and Forecast

Suggested Reading

1. Adams (1975, passim), The Logic of Conditionals

8 Counterfactuals, the Possible-Worlds Account (Lewis I)  
(Mar 08, 10)

About the same time as Stalnaker, Lewis formulated a closely related theory of counterfactuals. What is it, how does it differ from Stalnaker’s, and do those differences matter?

Required Reading

1. Lewis (1973b, ch. 1), Counterfactuals
Suggested Reading

3. Lewis (1986c, ch. 1), On the Plurality of Worlds
4. Montague (1974, chs. 3-4,6-7), Formal Philosophy
5. Stalnaker (2003, chs. 1-2,10), Ways a World Might Be: Metaphysical and Anti-Metaphysical Essays

9 Counterfactuals, the Possible-Worlds Account (Lewis II) (Mar 15, 17, 22)

Lewis continued.

Required Reading

1. Lewis (1973b, chs. 2,4), Counterfactuals

Suggested Reading

3. Lewis (1986c, ch. 1), On the Plurality of Worlds
4. Montague (1974, chs. 3-4,6-7), Formal Philosophy
5. Stalnaker (2003, chs. 1-2,10), Ways a World Might Be: Metaphysical and Anti-Metaphysical Essays

10 Counterfactuals, the Possible-Worlds Account (Stalnaker) (Mar 24, both lectures)

Stalnaker proposed the use of (so-called) advances in formal semantics (due largely to Carnap, Tarski and Montague) as a foundation for a theory of counterfactuals, viz., the idea of basing semantics on relations among possible worlds. What the hell is a possible world? Can it really help?

Required Reading


Suggested Reading

11 Counterfactuals, Problems with the Possible-Worlds Account (Mar 28)

Required Reading
5. Goodman (1972), “Seven Strictures on Similarity”

Suggested Reading

12 Counterfactuals, the Support Account I (Mar 29, Mar 31)

Goodman proposes to tame counterfactuals by noting their connection with certain causal ideas and analyzing how we judge the correctness of those—how, that is, on his view, we can and do gather support in evidence of the truth of the counterfactual.

Required Reading
1. Goodman (1983, parts i–iii), Fact, Fiction and Forecast

Suggested Reading
1. Adams (1975, passim), The Logic of Conditionals
2. Bennett (2003, ch. 20), A Philosophical Guide to Conditionals
13 Counterfactuals, the Support Account II (Apr 05)

We finish looking at Goodman’s account, and we look at some troubles for Goodman’s account and some possible emendations.

Required Reading

1. Parry (1957), “Re-examination of the Problem of Counterfactual Conditionals”
2. Goodman (1957), “Parry on Counterfactuals”

Suggested Reading

1. Bennett (2003, ch. 21), A Philosophical Guide to Conditionals
2. Jackson (1998, part i, §§2-3), Mind, Method and Conditionals

14 Counterfactuals, the Possible-Worlds and the Support Accounts Compared (Apr 07)

What are the comparative virtues and demerits of the two main approaches to counterfactuals we’ve considered?

Required Reading

2. Lewis (1973b, ch. 3), Counterfactuals

Suggested Reading

2. Lewis (1986b), “Counterfactual Dependence and Time’s Arrow”
3. Lewis (1986f), “Postscripts to ‘Counterfactual Dependence and Time’s Arrow’”
4. Stalnaker (1984, ch. 8), Inquiry
5. Stalnaker (2003, chs. 1-2,10), Ways a World Might Be: Metaphysical and Anti-Metaphysical Essays

15 Exam Week

SECOND LONG PAPER DUE (Monday, 17:00, April 11, Philosophy Department drop-box, Stevenson Hall, first floor)
References


