

MENTAL CAUSATION
University of Chicago, winter 2015

Course Instructor: Jason Bridges (bridges at uchicago)

DESCRIPTION

How is the concept of causation to be applied in reflection on the activities of thought? In what way or ways should thoughts be understood as causally related to each other, and in what way or ways should they be understood as causally related to elements of the material world? We pursue these questions through the close reading of a range of historical and contemporary writings, including works by Descartes, Mill, Ryle, Winch, Anscombe, Davidson, Dretske and Hornsby. A guiding theme will be a conflict within the tradition between two broad approaches to these questions: one that attempts to derive the role of causation in thought from reflection on what thoughts themselves imply or otherwise commit their thinkers to, and another that seeks to impose causal patterns on thought's activity drawn from models and considerations external to it.

READINGS

Most of the readings will be posted to the Chalk site in advance of discussion. The remaining readings will be drawn from the following books, available for purchase at the Seminary Coop:

Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*, Hackett Publishing, 1989
Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, The University of Chicago Press, 1948/2000
Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science and its Relation to Philosophy*, Routledge, 1958/2008
Davidson, *Essays on Actions and Events*, Oxford University Press, 2nd edition, 2002

COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

There will be a fifteen page paper due on March 18. Send it as a PDF to my email by 5pm. Late papers will not be graded until the spring quarter.

Paper topics must be approved by me; come to my office hours once you have an idea of what you want to write on. The papers should focus on assigned course readings.

SCHEDULE OF TOPICS

Part I. Foundations

	<u>Topic</u>	<u>Reading</u>
1	Mental causation and the philosophy of mind	
2	“The contribution of the soul”	Princess Elizabeth, selections from her <i>Correspondence with Descartes</i> Descartes, <i>The Passions of the Soul</i> , pt.I and pt.II, §§51-90 <u>Further readings</u> : Descartes, med.6 of <i>Meditations on First Philosophy</i> ; Hobbes, <i>The Elements of Law</i> , pt.I, chs.1-4,7-10,12
3	“The science of human nature”	Hume, <i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding</i> , sec.1 Mill, <i>A System of Logic</i> , bk.VI, chs.1-5,12 <u>Further readings</u> : Hume, <i>Enquiry</i> , secs.4-7; Hempel, “Aspects of Scientific Explanation”

Part II. Ryle and midcentury Wittgensteinianism

4	Mind and disposition	Ryle, <i>The Concept of Mind</i> , selections from chs.1-5
5	Meaningful behavior and scientific explanation	Winch <i>The Idea of a Social Science</i> , chs.1-3 <u>Further</u> : <i>The Idea of a Social Science</i> , chs.4-5; Collingwood, “Human Nature and Human History”
6	Cause and reason	Anscombe, <i>Intention</i> , secs.1-16 Kenny, <i>Action, Emotion and Will</i> , chs.3-4 <u>Further</u> : Anscombe, “The Causation of Action”

Part III: The Davidsonian framework

7	Desires, causes and aims	Ducasse, “Explanation, Mechanism and Teleology” Davidson, “Actions, Reasons and Causes”
8	Causes and laws	Davidson, “Mental Events” Davidson, “Laws and Cause” <u>Further</u> : Davidson, “Hempel on Explaining Action”; Davidson, “Thinking Causes”; McLaughlin, “On Davidson’s Response to the Charge of Epiphenomenalism”
9	Cause, mechanism and explanation	Kim, “Mechanism, Purpose and Explanatory Exclusion” Dretske, “Minds, Machines and Money: What Really Explains Behavior” <u>Further</u> : Malcolm, “The Conceivability of Mechanism”

Part IV: Intentional causation

10	Agents as causes	Hornsby, “Actions in their Circumstances” Coope, “Aristotle on Action”
11	Agents as affected	Bridges, “Intentional causation”