

Syllabus

Name of the course: Dispositions and Causes

Semester: 2018, Fall, Thursday 15.30–17.10

Instructor: Ferenc Huoranszki

Number of credits: 2

Area: Metaphysics

Course level: MA, elective course

Teaching format: Seminar

Course description: In many areas of philosophy – in philosophy of action, philosophy of mind, philosophy of language and philosophy of action – reference to causes and dispositions plays an essential role. This course aims at exploring the very concept of dispositions and their relation to causality. Originally, the technical concept of dispositions was not introduced as a causal concept. In philosophy of mind especially, dispositional accounts were meant to replace the more traditional causal-interactionist picture of the mind. Many contemporary accounts of dispositions are, however, causal: either in the sense that dispositions are sought to be explained in terms of causation; or that causation is understood with reference to dispositions (or ‘causal powers’ as they are often called). In this course, we shall discuss several distinct ideas about dispositions as well as causes; and try to uncover the connection between the two.

Goals of the course: Students attending this course are expected to familiarize themselves with the most important issues concerning the problem of dispositions and the connection between dispositions and causation.

Learning outcomes: Students are expected to acquire the ability to reconstruct and analyze philosophical arguments or positions. These involve the understanding of validity and soundness of the arguments, the ability to identify background principles and assumptions as well as the ability to draw out the consequences of certain philosophical commitments. They are also expected to acquire certain oral communication skills such as the ability to formulate arguments concisely and accessibly in words and to give short critical comments. They should also learn how to identify and execute an appropriate writing project. Finally, they should be familiarized with the main contemporary debates about dispositions. Learning outcomes shall be measured by term papers and oral presentations on the relevant topics.

Assessment: Students’ performance shall be evaluated on the following grounds. First, students are required to attend classes regularly and to participate actively in seminar discussions. They should be able to make comments on the texts they have read and respond to the presentations of other student. 30 % of their final grade shall be given on the basis of this in-class activity. Second, students are required to give one or two short presentations of some chosen topic(s) which must include the logical reconstruction of the main arguments of the text and, possibly, interpretative remarks or questions for discussion. They are also expected to prepare and distribute a maximum two page long hand-out that they distribute before their presentation. The choice of topic is optional, but overlap should be avoided. This will make up another 30 % of their final grade. Thirdly, students are required to submit a max. 2 000-word long term-paper. The topic of the paper can be either a careful critical reconstruction of a particular and important argument for some position discussed in the course; or a comparison between competing arguments about alternative solutions to a problem; or a defense of some particular position/argument against some relevant criticism. The chosen topic should be approved by the instructor and presented in the last class of the course. References can, but need

not, go beyond the material included into the compulsory readings. The term paper's contribution to the final assessment of students' performance is 40 %.

Deadline for submitting term-papers: 2019, January 2.

Topics and reading:

1. Introduction: causes and dispositions

I. The classical debate: dispositions and counterfactuals

2. Ryle, G. *The Concept of Mind*, London, Hutchison and Co., 19: 42–45; 116–135.
3. Armstrong, D. *A Materialist Theory of Mind*, London, Routledge: 57–72; 82–88.; Armstrong, D. A. *Belief, Truths, and Knowledge*, CUP, 1973: 7–23.
4. Mackie, J. L. 'Dispositions, Grounds and Causes', *Synthese* 34, 1977: 361–369; C. B. Martin, 'Dispositions and Conditionals', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 44, 1994: 1–8.
5. D. Lewis 'Finkish Dispositions', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 47, 1997: 143–158.
6. Manley, D. & Wasserman, R. 2008. 'On Linking Dispositions and Conditionals', *Mind* 117: 59–84.

II. Dispositions, properties and causes

7. S. Shoemaker 'Causality and Properties', in Kim, J. – E. Sosa, (eds.) *Metaphysics. An Anthology*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1999: 253-268.
8. Ellis, B. & Lierse, C., 'Dispositional Essentialism', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 72: 1994: 27–45.
9. Cartwright, N. 'Causal Laws, Policy Prediction, and the Need for Genuine Powers' in T. Handfield (ed.) *Dispositions and Causes*, OUP, 2009: 127-157.
10. Marmodoro, A. 'Aristotelian Powers at Work', in J.D. Jacobs (ed.) *Causal Powers*, OUP, 2017.
11. Anjum, R. L. - Mumford, S. 'Mutual Manifestation and Martin's Two Triangle', in J.D. Jacobs (ed.) *Causal Powers*, OUP, 2017.
12. Heil, J. 'Real Modalities', in J.D. Jacobs (ed.) *Causal Powers*, OUP, 2017.

Week Dispositions versus
5 causes

Week Dispositions, grounds Armstrong, D. *A Materialist Theory of Mind*, London,
6 and causes Routledge: 57–72; 82–88.;

Week Dispositions, 1977: 361–369; C. B. Martin, 'Dispositions and Conditionals',
7 conditionals and powers *The Philosophical Quarterly* 44, 1994: 1–8; C. B Martin,
Powers

Week 8	<u>Dispositions and counterfactuals</u>	A. Bird, 'Dispositions and Antidotes', <i>The Philosophical Quarterly</i> 48, 1998: 227–234.
Week 9	<u>Causal powers and properties</u>	
Week 10	<u>Dispositions and essences</u>	Ellis, B. & Lierse, C., 'Dispositional Essentialism', <i>Australasian Journal of Philosophy</i> 72: 1994: 27–45. (Mumford, S. 'Kinds, Essences, Powers' <i>Ratio</i> 18, 2005: 420–436.)
Week 11	<u>The fundamentality of dispositions</u>	McKittrick, J., 'Dispositions, Causes, and Reduction', in T. Handfield (ed.), <i>Dispositions and Causes</i> , OUP, 2009: 31–64.
Week 12	<u>From dispositions to causes</u>	

Some suggested further readings:

Goodman, N. *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*, Harvard UP, 1983
 Prior, E. *Dispositions*. Aberdeen University Press, 1985.
 Crane, T. (ed.) *Dispositions: A Debate*. Routledge, 1996.
 Mumford, D. *Dispositions*. OUP, 1998.
 Ellis, B. *Scientific Essentialism*. CUP, 2001.
 Molnar, G. *Powers: A Study in Metaphysics*. OUP, 2003.
 Bird, A. *Nature's Metaphysics*. OUP, 2007.
 Handfield,
 Mumford, S. – Anjum