

Workshop on Causation in Early Modern Philosophy

20 May 2022, 14.00h – 17.30h (CET)

Faculty of Philosophy, University of Groningen

Room: Beta

Zoom link:

<https://zoom.us/j/96427734479?pwd=RVlYbVZQeVZSMo9IZWRoamxWT1N3QT09>

Programme

PART 1—Chair: Doina-Cristina Rusu

14.00h to 14.45h

Jean-Pascal Anfray (Paris)

Causation with or without Transfer?

Descartes and More

14.45h to 15.30h

Laura Georgescu (Groningen)

Cavendish on Principal & Occasional Causes

15.30 to 16.00h

Coffee break

PART 2—Chair: Martin Lenz

16.00h to 16.45h

Christian Henkel (Groningen)

An Exploration into Erhard Weigel's Notion
of God's Continuous Causal Creation

16.45h to 17.30h

Steve Nadler (Wisconsin-Madison)

How Important Was Louis de la Forge?

From 18.00h

Drinks at Martinus Brewery

From 19.30h

Dinner at Chang Thai

ABSTRACTS

Jean-Pascal Anfray (ENS Paris)

Causation with or without Transfer?

Descartes and More

Descartes's account of bodily causation is notoriously elusive and has led commentators to develop opposed interpretations, ranging from occasionalism to mere conservationism. But the difficulties concern not only what counts as a cause, but more generally the nature of causation itself and how it works. On the one hand, Descartes maintains that matter is intrinsically passive, while on the other hand body-body causation requires a kind of impulse which occurs through surface contact. One way of coping with these two constraints is to insist that causation consists in the transfer of some quantity of motion from one body to another, as some passages suggest. In a neglected part of his correspondence with Descartes, Henry More ascribes such a view to Descartes and raises objections against it. In return, he sketches his own view, according to which matter is endowed with its own spontaneous activity and each body is the sole real cause of its own motions. In this paper, I will establish that Henry More misunderstood Descartes. I will then show that in the case of body-body causation, Descartes does not endorse the kind of occasional causation account that he envisaged in the case of body-mind causation. I will then try to elaborate further Descartes's positive account. Finally, I will examine the prospects of More's own account.

Laura Georgescu (Groningen)

Cavendish on Principal & Occasional Causes

Cavendish endorses occasional causation. She does so because, on her account, both occasionalism and 'accidental' transeunt causation are unintelligible. Occasionalism is unintelligible since it relies on an immaterial substance to do the work of an efficient cause, and accidental transeunt causation is unintelligible because accidents and modes are the kinds of beings which cannot be transferred. This much is clear. But Cavendish's views on what kind of causes occasions are, what relationship they have to the effect they help produce, and the implications of occasional causation for her general theory are disputed. O'Neill (2001) defends a view of occasions as 'moral causes' and takes a body's own causal action as the sufficient cause. O'Neill's views have been picked up by Detlefsen as part of her argument for a libertarian reading of Cavendish. In a recent paper, Lascano (2021) challenges O'Neill's account, and by extension Detlefsen's libertarian reading. Lascano claims that the entire cause includes occasions, and that, at least sometimes, occasions are the sufficient causes. Lascano's motivation is to show that Cavendish's views on occasional causation do not commit her to libertarianism, but, on the contrary, put her closer to Hobbesian determinism. This talk is a contribution to this discussion. It argues for a *via media* between O'Neill's account of occasions as moral causes and Lascano's occasions as (necessary) and sufficient causes. I show that Lascano's position is under-motivated, and I discuss an alternative account by focusing on the mechanics of how occasions contribute to the effect.

Christian Henkel (Groningen)

An Exploration into Erhard Weigel's Notion of God's Continuous Causal Creation

Towards the end of the *Theodiciée* (1710), one of his last masterpieces, Leibniz turns to the discussion of the 'dogma' according to which God's conservation of the world is but a continuous creation (CCC). Leibniz maintains that the Cartesians—following their master, Descartes—have endorsed temporal atomism in order to prove CCC. While Leibniz's main target of the ensuing discussion and critique is Pierre Bayle, he briefly mentions the case of his former teacher at the University of Jena, Erhard Weigel (1625-1699). Taking up Leibniz's cue, I will explore how Weigel understands CCC and what role his endorsement of temporal atomism and presentism (the view according to which only the present is real) play in this.

Weigel himself is not only an original thinker, but was influential as a teacher of some of the luminaries of seventeenth German philosophy, inter alia, Leibniz and Johann Christoph Sturm. Weigel's interpretation of CCC features prominently in his proof of God's existence which he presents both in his *Wienerischer Tugend-Spiegel* (1687) and his *Philosophia mathematica* (1693). More importantly, Weigel's reading leads him to the same conclusion as one of his prominent French contemporaries: Nicolas Malebranche. For both, Weigel and Malebranche CCC—in different ways—establishes occasionalism. The case of Weigel's occasionalism is another central piece of the puzzle of the dissemination of occasionalism in early modern Germany.

Steve Nadler (Wisconsin-Madison)

How Important Was Louis de la Forge?

Louis de la Forge is generally recognized as a significant contributor to the Cartesian cause in the seventeenth century, given both his role in the publication of Descartes's *Traité de l'homme* (1664) and his own *Traité de l'esprit de l'homme* (1666), in which he carries on Descartes's project and is arguably the first to present a systematically argued occasionalism. But just how important was La Forge? What kind of influence did he and his work — as commentator on Descartes and especially as occasionalist thinker in his own right — have on other, more prominent early modern thinkers, such as Malebranche and Leibniz?