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JENNIFER MCDONALD

EMPLOYMENT

Lecturer , Philosophy Department	2024 – 2027	Columbia University
Postdoctoral Research Scholar , Philosophy Department	2022 – 2024	Columbia University

EDUCATION

PhD Philosophy 2015 – 2022 The Graduate Center CUNY

Dissertation: *Actual Causation: Apt Causal Models and Causal Relativism*

Committee: David Papineau (supervisor), Stephen Neale, Graham Priest,
Jonathan Schaffer (Rutgers), Michael Strevens (NYU)

Abstract: The philosophy of causation has been recently galvanized by what might be done with *structural equation models* – formal models that effectively link up correlational information with causal information. The success of these models for causal discovery suggests they could serve in an analysis of what causation *is*. But attempts to analyze actual causation in such terms largely bracket the question of what makes a model appropriate or *apt*. My dissertation provides this needed account of aptness, uncovering something surprising in the process: these models represent situations *only* relative to some set of background possibilities. As they stand, accounts of actual causation in the literature existentially quantify over all such sets. But this delivers previously unrecognized counterintuitive causal verdicts. As an alternative, I propose and defend the view that takes this relativity at face value – *Causal Relativism* – whereby actual causation is a three-part relation holding between a cause, an effect, and a set of background possibilities.

MA Philosophy 2015 – 2018 The Graduate Center CUNY

BA Philosophy, *cum laude* 2005 – 2009 New York University

RESEARCH INTERESTS

AOS – Metaphysics, Philosophy of Science

AOC – Philosophy of Language, Philosophy of Mind, Logic

PUBLICATIONS

“Causal Models and Causal Relativism” (*Forthcoming, Synthese*)

“Norms in Actual Causation” (*Forthcoming, Erkenntnis*)

“Essential Structure for Causal Models” (*Forthcoming, Australasian Journal of Philosophy*)

“Causal Models and the Metaphysics of Causation, Part 1: Using Models” (2024, *Phil Compass*)

“Causal Models and the Metaphysics of Causation, Part 2: Interpreting Models” (2024, *Phil Compass*)

PAPERS IN PROGRESS

“What Causal Models Bring to Metaphysics” (*under review*)

“Interventionist Semantics and the Problem of Aptness” (*under review*)

“Deriving Naturalness from Causal Structures”

COLLOQUIA & INVITED TALKS

“Deriving Naturalness from Causal Structure”

Caltech Philosophy of Science Reading Group; November 26, 2024

“Deriving Naturalness from Causal Structure”

Society for the Philosophy of Causation 2nd Annual Conference; July 19 – 21, 2024

“What Causal Models Bring to the Table”

Kyosation: Workshop on the Phil, Psych, and Computer Science of Causation; Jun 24 – 26, 2023

“The Relativity of Actual Causation”

Johns Hopkins University Philosophy Colloquia; June 12, 2021

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS *(blind refereed)*

“Deriving Naturalness from Causal Structure”

American Philosophical Association Eastern Division; January 8 – 11, 2025

“Deriving Naturalness from Causal Structure”

Society for the Metaphysics of Science 9th Annual Conference; August 28 – 30, 2024

“Norms in Actual Causation (or Not)”

Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology Annual Conference; Mar 21 – 23, 2024

“What Causal Models Bring to the Table”

European Philosophy of Science Association 9th Biennial Conference; Sept 20 – 23, 2023

“What Causal Models Bring to the Table”

Society for the Metaphysics of Science 8th Annual Conference; August 10 – 12, 2023

“Apt Causal Models and the Relativity of Actual Causation”

Philosophy of Science Association 28th Biennial Conference; November 10 – 13, 2022

“Essential Structure for Causal Models”

Society for the Metaphysics of Science 7th Annual Conference; September 6 – 8, 2022

“The Relativity of Causal Models”

Society for the Metaphysics of Science 6th Annual Conference; September 1 – 4, 2021

“The Relativity of Causal Models”

42nd Annual Grad Phil Conference, U of Illinois-Urbana Champaign; April 30 – May 1, 2021

“The Importation Problem for Structural Counterfactuals”

Society for the Metaphysics of Science 5th Annual Conference; November 7 – 9, 2019

“The Proportionality of Common Sense Causal Claims”

Philosophy of Science Association 26th Biennial Conference; November 1 – 4, 2018

“Proportionality, Exhaustivity, and Exclusivity: Constraints on Variable Selection”

Society for the Metaphysics of Science 4th Annual Conference; August 22 – 24, 2018

“Patterns and Abstracta: on Dennett’s Mild Realism”

CUNY-Milan Conference on Belief; February 15 – 16, 2018

WORKSHOP & SPEAKER SERIES PRESENTATIONS

“Deriving Naturalness from Causal Structure”

Method, Theory, & Reality 2nd Annual Workshop; April 26 – 28, 2024

“A Distinct Puzzle for Causation”

Method, Theory, & Reality 1st Annual Workshop; May 5 – 6, 2023

“Exploring Causal Relativism”

Method, Theory, & Reality Speaker Series, UMass Amherst; Apr 27, 2022

“The Relativity of Actual Causation”

Logic and Metaphysics Workshop, The Graduate Center CUNY; April 4, 2022

“Probabilistic Causation: De Facto Probability-Raising”

Philosophy of Logic Series w/Prof. Rohit Parikh, The Graduate Center CUNY; Jul 29, 2021

“Causal Models as Relative to Modal Profiles”

Philosophy of Logic Series w/Prof. Rohit Parikh, The Graduate Center CUNY; Feb 25, 2021

“Essential Structure and Apt Causal Models”

Logic and Metaphysics Workshop, The Graduate Center CUNY; Dec 7, 2020

“Structural Counterfactuals and the Importation Problem”

New York Philosophy of Language Workshop; March 9, 2020

“Structural Counterfactuals and the Importation Problem”

Logic and Metaphysics Workshop, The Graduate Center CUNY; April 15, 2019

UNDERGRADUATE TEACHING

Contemporary Western Civilization	Columbia University	2024 – 2025
Senior Seminar: Scientific Theorizing	Columbia University	S2024
Methods and Problems of Phil Thought	Columbia University	F2023
Topics in Cog Sci/Phil: Causation	Barnard College	S2023
Knowledge and Reality	Hunter College, CUNY	F2021/ S2022
Intro to Philosophy	Hunter College, CUNY	F2021
Major Issues in Philosophy	Baruch College, CUNY	S2019
Logic and Moral Reasoning	Baruch College, CUNY	F2017/ F2018
Global Ethics	Baruch College, CUNY	F2016/ S2017/ S2018

FELLOWSHIPS, GRANTS, AWARDS

Graduate Assistant Teaching Fellowship (Hunter College CUNY, 2021 - 22)

Fellowship to support graduate studies, w/ teaching requirement of two courses per semester

Graduate Student Cross-Training Fellowship (Society for Christian Philosophers, 2020 – 21)
Fellowship to train in developmental psychology providing stipend and research budget

Dean Harrison Dissertation Fellowship (The Graduate Center CUNY, 2020 – 21)
Fellowship to support completion of dissertation

McGraw Dissertation Award (The Graduate Center CUNY, 2020 – 21)
Award to support completion of dissertation + tuition relief

Doctoral Students Research Grant (The Graduate Center CUNY, 2020 – 21)
Research grant awarded to support research-related expenses

Doctoral Students Research Grant (The Graduate Center CUNY, 2018 – 19)
Research grant awarded to support research-related expenses

Graduate Center Doctoral Fellowship (The Graduate Center CUNY, 2015 - 2020)
Five-year fellowship providing yearly stipend and tuition relief

DEPARTMENTAL SERVICE @ Graduate Center CUNY, unless otherwise specified

Writing Tutor, Writing Across the Curriculum Fellow, 2019 – 20 (*Hunter College*)

Graduate Student Mentor, 2016 – 20

Committee Member, Placement Committee, 2019 – 20; Philosophy Library Committee, 2016 – 19

Coordinator, Informal Dissertation Seminar, Fall 2019; Qualifying Paper Working Group, Fall 2016; Colloquium Series Reception, Fall 2015

Conference Organizer, 20th Annual Graduate Philosophy Conference, Spring 2017 (*w/Laura Gradowski, Leah Fortgang, & Vincent Peluce*)

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

Secretary, Society for the Metaphysics of Science, August 2023 – August 2026

Co-Coordinator, Method Theory and Reality Speaker Series, Spring 2023 - present (*w/Cruz Davis*)

Conference Organizer, Method, Theory, & Reality Annual Conference, 2023/2024 (*w/Cruz Davis*)

Program Committee Member, British Society for Philosophy of Science Conference, 2021/2022

Budget Coordinator, SWIP-Analytic, New York Division, 2017 – 2019

Graduate Assistant, Residential Summer Program for Diversity in Logic, UMass Dartmouth, 2016

Journal Referee, *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*; *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*; *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science*; *Journal of Philosophy*; *Mind*; *Noûs*; *Philosophia*; *The Philosophical Forum*; *Philosophical Quarterly*; *Philosophy of Science*; *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*; *Synthese*; *Zygon: Journal of Religion and Science*

Book Proposal & Manuscript Referee, Bloomsbury Publishing

ACADEMIC SERVICE

Secretary & Board Member, Susan Elizabeth Stutz-McDonald Scholarship Foundation for Women Engineers, 2013 – present

PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS

American Philosophical Association; European Philosophy of Science Association; Philosophy of Science Association; Society for the Metaphysics of Science; Southern Society for Philosophy and Psychology

REFERENCES

David Papineau (*Dissertation Supervisor*)

Professor of Philosophy
Kings College London
Email: david.papineau@kcl.ac.uk

Graham Priest

Distinguished Professor of Philosophy
The Graduate Center, CUNY
Boyce Gibson Professor Emeritus
University of Melbourne
Email: priest.graham@gmail.com

Michael Strevens

Professor of Philosophy
New York University
Email: strevens@nyu.edu

Stephen Neale

Distinguished Professor of Philosophy & Linguistics
Kornblith Chair in Phil of Science and Value
The Graduate Center, CUNY
Email: sneale@gc.cuny.edu

Jonathan Schaffer

Distinguished Professor of Philosophy
Rutgers University
Email: schaffer0@icloud.com

Thomas Teufel (*Teaching Reference*)

Associate Professor
Baruch College, CUNY
Email: thomas.teufel@baruch.cuny.edu

GRADUATE COURSE WORK (* = audited) @ Graduate Center CUNY, unless otherwise specified

Philosophy

Causation
Leibniz's Metaphysics (NYU)
Linguistic Pragmatism
Intention and Acts of Meaning
Mental Representation
Thought, Speech, and Content
Quine and Sellars
History of Mind
Vagueness
Logic for Philosophers
Adv. Intro to Epistemology (NYU)
Plato: Philosophy and its Rivals
Ancient Chinese Philosophy
Philosophy of Literature
Pragmatism and Neo-Pragmatism
Proseminar
Topics in Philosophy of Science* (NYU)
Intervention, Causation, and Decision*

David Papineau
Anja Jauernig/Marko Malink
Michael Devitt/Stephen Neale
Dan Harris/Stephen Neale
David Papineau
David Rosenthal
David Rosenthal
Peter Godfrey-Smith
Graham Priest
Joel David Hampkins
Richard Foley
Nikolas Pappas
Hagop Sarkissian
Noel Carroll
Peter Godfrey-Smith
Graham Priest/Catherine Wilson
Brad Weslake
David Papineau

Explanation (NYU)*
Naturalism in Phil of Science*
Direction of Time* (Columbia)
Nature of Necessity* (NYU)
Context* (CUNY/NYU)
Naming and Necessity*
Foundations of Metalogic* (Columbia)
Belief and Imagination* (NYU)
Berkeley, Hume, and Shepherd on Causation and
the External World* (NYU)

Laura Franklin-Hall/Michael Strevens
Alberto Cordero
David Albert
Crispin Wright/Paul Horwich
Stephen Neale/Stephen Schiffer
Saul Kripke
Justin Clarke-Doane
Don Garrett/Jessica Moss
Don Garrett

Psychology

Infancy*
Theories of Change in Human Development (Columbia)*
Core Knowledge (Columbia)*
Child Development (NYU)*

Sarah Berger
Dima Amso
Koleen McCrink
Andrew Getzfeld