

## Causation: A Very Short Introduction

By Stephen Mumford and Rani Lill Anjum

### Questions for Thought and Discussion

- How important is causation for all sciences and the humanities? Could some sciences do without causation?
- Philosophers argue over what causation is. Scientists try to develop the best methods for finding causation. Why is causation such a difficult matter?
- To what extent is correlation an indication of causation? Would all the theories of causation suggest that there is a link between the two?
- Do causes have to come before their effects?
- Can we ever have the cause without the effect?
- In developing new technology our causal understanding and knowledge seems essential. How would we go about getting the required causal knowledge?
- Pluralism suggests that causation could be many different things. Could we reconcile all the philosophical theories or do some fit better together than others?
- Do all causes make a difference? Is everything that makes a difference a cause?
- Are all our choices, thoughts and behaviour caused by something physical? Are all causal processes ultimately physical processes?
- Many theories try to understand causation by replacing it with some other notions, such as difference-making, constant conjunction or probability-raising. Can causation really be replaced by another notion?
- How, if at all, are dispositions related to causation?
- Can absences be causes? If so, how would they bring about an effect? How important is it for scientific and other explanations to invoke absences as causes?
- How are our philosophical theories of causation reflected in scientific methods such as experiments, randomised controlled trials (RCTs) and statistics?
- Which scientific method or methods do you take to be the best for finding causation and why?
- Which theory or theories of causation do you find the most plausible and why?

### Other books by the authors

Stephen Mumford and Rani Lill Anjum *Getting Causes from Powers* (Oxford University Press, 2011)

Stephen Mumford *Metaphysics: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2012)

Stephen Mumford *Laws in Nature* (Routledge, 2004)

### Further reading

Beebe, H. Hitchcock, C. and Menzies, P., *The Oxford Handbook of Causation* (Oxford University Press, 2009)

Psillos, S., *Causation and Explanation* (Acumen, 2002)

Mackie, J. L., *The Cement of the Universe: A Study of Causation* (Oxford University Press, 1980)

Cartwright, N., *Hunting Causes and Using Them* (Cambridge University Press, 2007)

Woodward, J., *Making Things Happen: A Theory of Causal Explanation* (Oxford University Press, 2003)