

ABSENCES AS CAUSES: A DEFENSE OF NEGATIVE CAUSATION

Michael Hartsock

Dr. André, Dissertation Supervisor

ABSTRACT

In this dissertation, I confront the issue of negative causation, (i.e., causation by or of absences). I investigate the causal status of absences with regard to particular philosophical concerns and argue that absences are very often causes and effects. On my analysis, it turns out that absences – at least those absences thought to be causally efficacious – are not metaphysical absences. They are perfectly ordinary entities, thus candidates for causal *relata*. Generally, I argue that the notion of an ‘absence’ has been ill-understood and that this has been aggravated by focusing on sentences of the canonical form, ‘the absence of x caused y.’ Such a focus engenders the view that absences are capable of being causally efficacious only if there exists some entity, absence of x. If such a view were correct, then the case for absences as causes is a non-starter; there are no such entities. Instead, I recast the argument for negative causation as a vindication of our intuitive judgments that statements of the canonical and related forms are very often true and express genuine causal relations.