

REVIEW OF *CAUSATION AND COUNTERFACTUALS*,  
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As you scroll through this review, you move your hand; this causes the mouse to move; in turn this causes, via a series of intermediary events, changes on your screen. A bit more reflection shows that this case is entirely mundane: causal relations are a ubiquitous feature of the physical world. Causal relations are also, according to many philosophers, at the center of phenomena like knowledge, perception, linguistic meaning, mental content, belief, free action, and right action. In fact, one is hard put to think of an important philosophical notion that has not received a causal analysis, especially in recent analytic philosophy. Consider a few from the theory of knowledge. According to the causal theory of knowledge, knowledge is true belief caused by what makes the belief true. Or, according to a competing view, knowledge is true belief caused by a reliable belief forming process, where a reliable process is one that causes a high ratio of true to false beliefs. According to the causal theory of perception, seeing that the cup is on the table consists in being in a perceptual state that is appropriately caused by the cup and the table. Causation, it seems, is absolutely central. We will need to understand causation itself if we are to understand either causal theories in philosophy or the nature of the surrounding world.

Working through the papers in *Causation and Counterfactuals* will help us with this. The volume consists in eighteen cutting edge papers (twelve new, six previously published) by the best people in the field, as well as an editors' introduction. Most are devoted to one leading view of causation – the counterfactual view. Hume articulated the basic idea this way: “we may define a cause to be an object followed by another . . . where, if the first object had not been, the second never had existed.” (*An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section VII) Intuitively, this is the view that causes make a difference, enough of a difference that had they not occurred their effects would not have occurred either. On this view, what makes it true that the ingestion of the poison killed the spy – that is, what makes it true that ingesting the poison *caused* the death of the spy – is the following fact: if the spy had not ingested the poison, then he would not have died. This last statement is what philosophers call a counterfactual conditional: it is conditional because of its distinctive if-then form; it is counterfactual because, roughly, the part following ‘if’ (namely, ‘the spy didn’t ingest the poison’) is counter to fact (i.e. false).

In applying this view to see if it provides us with the right verdict about whether some event, *c*, is the cause of some distinct event, *e*, we must have a consistent way of determining exactly what the world would have been like had *c* not occurred. It is only when we know exactly what the world would have been like minus *c* that we can then go on to determine whether, as the theory alleges, *e* would have been absent as well. To do this, David Lewis, the leading

contemporary proponent of the counterfactual theory, employed the idea of a divergence miracle. If *c* occurred at *t*, then in considering a possible world in which *c* does not occur, we are to consider a world in which the laws of the actual world are violated shortly before *t* in a localized way that is just sufficient enough to permit *c*'s not occurring. Then imagine the remaining events fall into place and look for *e*: if *e* is not present, then *c* made enough of a difference that without it, *e* would not have occurred. This qualifies *c* to be a cause of *e*.

That is the basic idea. In filling in the details of this or any other account of causation, one faces two challenges. Both are formidable. The first consists in an ever-expanding body of difficult puzzle cases (e.g. cases of redundant causation, prevention, double prevention, early and late preemption, delaying and hastening, trumping, causation by absences, various kind of probabilistic causation, and more). The cases are so numerous that the editors decided to include an index to help readers keep track of the 200-plus cases discussed in the various papers in this collection. The other challenge is to deliver a set of illuminating explanations about various features of causation. These divide into controversial features and uncontroversial features. For the controversial features, an illuminating explanation, but no particular verdict, is required. Here we find the possibility and nature of backward and simultaneous causation; the possibility and nature of causation by, and of, absences; whether causation is transitive; and the role of causation in chancy processes. Other features are uncontroversial. Here, both an illuminating explanation and a particular verdict is required. This is where we find

the asymmetry of the causal relation, probabilistic causation, and the difference between causing an outcome and guaranteeing it.

The papers by opponents of the counterfactual view fall into three groups. Two are focused on raising problem cases. Here Jonathan Schaffer raises novel cases of trumping preemption; and John Collins raises various prevention and trumping cases. Another paper relies less on intuitive cases: Ned Hall argues that counterfactual views fail to tell us in a satisfying way whether causation is a transitive relation. A third set of papers is devoted to developing alternative accounts and showing that they are, in some way, superior to the counterfactual view. Here, Tim Maudlin argues for an approach that takes laws of nature as central and primitive; D.M. Armstrong argues for a singularist view that takes causation to be a primitive relation between universals; Ned Hall argues (in a second paper) for thinking that we really have two quite different concepts of causation (one captured by the counterfactual view, the other by something Hall calls 'production'); and Igal Kvatarg argues for the superiority of a probabilistic view. In another paper, Christopher Hitchcock raises some novel challenges to the last view.

Friends of the counterfactual view are primarily concerned with developing the counterfactual view so that it can handle various objections. Sometimes, as with the papers by Stephen Yablo and Peter Menzies, the counterfactual view is taken in directions quite different from the one Lewis took it in. Into this group fall two papers by Lewis (one, "Void and Object," is previously unpublished), the

papers by Yablo and Menzies, as well as papers by David Coady and Murali Ramachandran.

Last, a number of papers are primarily concerned with defending views about the apparent relational nature of causation. Here, L.A. Paul defends the view that the relata are property instances; Lewis defends the view that absences (i.e. the non-occurrence of events) can serve as causes; Helen Beebe argues that Lewis is mistaken about this; Cei Maslen argues that causation is really a three-place relation between a cause, an effect, and a contrast; and D.H. Mellor argues that causation is not a relation at all.

As this rundown indicates, not all the papers are primarily concerned with the counterfactual view. This makes the collection less unified than its title suggests. Still, it embodies the best of analytic philosophy – sharply focused well-conducted constructive debates that go far beyond casual suggestions. Often the interplay of objections and available defenses is played out quite exhaustively. I suspect that along many of these roads, non-experts will be left behind after just a few basis moves and countermoves have been made. But even these aborted trips will be instructive. Further labor, and lots of it, will be needed to reach the level of sophistication displayed in many of these papers.

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