

What is Causation?

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Abstract

Though philosophers have thought about causation for ages, there is hardly an agreement as to what causation is. But this crisis in the foundations of causation is no reason for despair. We can know a lot about what causes what without knowing what causation is. Causation is simply too precious to be given up. We are interested in causation because we are *thinkers* and *agents*, because we are both theoretical and practical beings.

In this paper, I offer a review of the basic trends in our current thinking about causation, aiming also to highlight their historical origins and development. In particular, I argue that there are a number of platitudes that our ordinary concept of causation satisfies and every philosophical theory of causation should accommodate them. Besides, there are two pre-philosophical views about what causation is—what I call *intuitions* about causation. The *regularity* intuition puts a premium on regular sequences of events, while the *intrinsic-relation* intuition put a premium on the intrinsic and local features of a single sequence of events. The paper will advance the view that there are two concepts of causation, corresponding to the two intuitions. On the *dependence approach* to causation, to say that *c* causes *e* is to say that *e* suitably depends on *c*. On the *production approach*, to say that *c* causes *e* is to say that something in the cause produces (brings about) the effect or that there is something (e.g., a mechanism) that links the cause and the effect. There have been different ways to cash out the relation of dependence: nomological dependence (cause and effect fall under a law); counterfactual dependence (if the cause hadn't happened, the effect wouldn't have happened); probabilistic dependence (the cause raises the probability of the effect). Similarly, there have been different ways to cash out the concept of production, but key thought is that cause and effect are connected by means of a local

mechanism. The paper will then offer a more detailed examination of the prospects and problems of these approaches.