

Abstract

Causation – a synthetic perspective

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The debate about causation is livelier than ever in the history of philosophy. There are several completely different approaches. One train of thought is the Reichenbach-Salmon account, according to which causation fundamentally is a physical process. If a and b are causally related there must be a physical connection between them, for example transfer of momentum from a to b . A modern variant is to say that causation is transfer of a kind of information.

Another approach is the agency theory, which places the concept of cause in the human perspective of beliefs, actions and desires. The fundamental idea is that we identify causes in our surroundings just because we are agents in the world; we want to do things in order to foster or prevent certain states of affairs. We are interested in causal chains since identifying them helps us in planning our actions.

A third popular account is in terms of counterfactuals; 'a causes b' means 'b would have not have occurred, had not a occurred.'

In my view these approaches complement each other and Mackie's analysis of causation in terms of INUS-conditions provides the uniting picture. This, in turn is a development of Hume's view.

This perspective will be elaborated in the lecture.