

Editor's Introduction

In the sciences, specialization might be supposed to be a response to theoretical confirmation and new research programs that spring into place in the wake of confirmation. For instance, some hypothesis is tested and confirmed and other competing hypotheses discarded. Following this the theories branching from the confirmed hypothesis are then themselves tested and confirmed, giving way to further branches and new sets of questions and theories to be constructed to coherently explain them. Philosophers today, like scientists, focus their attention both on older problems that haven't gone away—viewed through the lens of contemporary empirical findings—and a significant set of new problems. Every discipline that may be put in place to acquire knowledge regarding some class of phenomena is also subject to philosophical analysis. Accordingly, in the light of the multifarious disciplinary specializations born in the last century, there is at least one plausible reason as to why philosophy has been subject to the same trend of specialization; philosophical analysis is often required in coming to an understanding of the limitations that those developing disciplines face theoretically and practically.

In the face of philosophical specialization, something which I am not claiming is new in and of itself but only increasing as we continue to confirm and discard our hypotheses, there remains a core. This core might be argued to be not one thing, but a collection of related concepts—concepts that have survived over the centuries as phenomena not only to be themselves explained but which, in various hypothetical forms also play invaluable instrumental roles in our theories. This month's issue features four papers, each inquiring into some role or notion of one of these core concepts in particular—that of causation.

The first paper, 'Interlevel Causation and External Causes' by Marco Totolo, explores the apparent circularity in the notion of interlevel causation and how it may be avoided. This circularity may be crudely characterized as an instance within a system, where one of its constituents is a cause of that system and where that system is a cause one or more of its parts; the result being that this kind of system causes itself. After providing a counterexample to a proposed solution to this circularity by Craver and Bechtel (2007), Totolo, in formulating an amendment to the Craver and Bechtel proposal, suggests that if we construe "part-whole systems as mechanisms and if we understand mechanisms as types, we'll have to assign a point in time to each entity/activity pair belonging to the mechanism." Thus, through the application of temporal indexing, the problem of circularity is avoided.

The second paper by philosopher Norman Schultz (Duquesne University), 'Freedom in Hegel – Why the Concept of Self-Consciousness is a Precondition for a Theory of Causality', looks at the relationship between causation and freedom from behind a Hegelian lens. Schultz's focal argument in this essay concludes that "the concepts of causality and freedom have to be preceded by a theory of self-consciousness, and will turn out to be different frameworks [that are used] in order to interpret the original existential problem of self-consciousness" (N. Schulz 2016). "Both ideas freedom and causality can be taken as regulative ideas constituted by self-consciousness. They are universal abstractions of self-consciousness that are useful but do not represent reality" (ibid).

Linus Gabrielsson, in his paper entitled ‘Causality and the Human Condition’, uses a socio-anthropological framework to map out the various ways that our development as social animals and our unending desire to make sense of the world we live in have influenced our notions of causation. Gabrielsson argues that our having evolved as the social creatures we are, our anthropocentric bias heavily influences the way in which we explain many of the events and phenomena that surround us. This is evident, he claims when “we use concepts like intent, volition, agency and will to make sense of phenomena we observe”—something that is apparent when looking at such things from the explanations of natural phenomena presented in various religious views to those explanations offered conspiracy theories. He views such concepts as “useful heuristics” in the case of explanation and prediction of human behavior”. However, he denies that such explanations have any merit when it comes to “non-human systems”. He goes on to conclude that given our natures as social creatures, our projections of such anthropocentric concepts on “complex inanimate, non-volitional processes” still survive as a default explanatory resource—despite the development and success of mechanistic models that pervade modern science.

In the last paper ‘Final Causes and Actions’ the author looks at the notion of Aristotelian final causes and their explanatory role in the analysis of action. He goes on to argue that by assuming that the final causes of any action may be equally described as an agent’s intending to bring about some event, and given that intending is also an action, which itself may be explained in terms of having an additional final cause, an infinite regress of intentions follows as a result. If this is the case then we are faced with a dilemma: either any and all actions require an infinite amount of final causes, something which renders final causes as explanations of action impossible or we are forced to deny that actions cannot be analyzed in terms of having final causes in the first place; such a denial being a rejection of Aristotle’s own explicit position that actions may indeed be explained in terms of final causes. The solution offered by the author is that the explanatory target of a given action determines the level at which an analysis of that action—with respect to its final cause—bottoms-out. Admittedly, even if this solution supplies a means to identify the final cause of any particular action, it does not halt the infinite regress of intentions. Having a plausible means to identify the final causes of actions, it is argued, is all that is required to avoid the dilemma, which itself comes apart from the problem of an infinite regress.

Note to the reader

These papers obviously cannot and do not attempt to represent a complete survey of the various analyses of causation; a complete survey might be the aim of a sizable book on the matter and not a mere journal issue. That being said, there is reason to believe that even such a book if released today, might fall short tomorrow of being complete, given the breadth of causal theories and the continual amendments that such theories undergo in attempting to avoid counterexamples and remain theoretically consistent. The papers, collected here are merely four papers that take on specific issues with respect to the philosophically core concept of causation and in doing so, if they are successful in their analysis of the issues that each targets, then they have done all that could be asked of them.

I would like to wholeheartedly thank each of the contributors of this issue for rolling up their sleeves and getting their hands dirty. It was a pleasure to engage with each of you and learn

from your efforts and investigations. Lastly, I would like to thank Dr. Geoffrey Klempner for once more extending to me the opportunity to take part as editor of Pathways. Dr. Klempner's guidance as a mentor and fellow philosopher is something that I have gained immeasurably from. His gift and passion for the art of thinking continue to be an inspiration and his reason a standard.

Now without further ado, it gives me great pleasure to introduce to you this 203rd issue of Philosophical Pathways.