Humean Effective Strategies

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Abstract

In a now-classic paper, Nancy Cartwright argued that the Humean conception of causation as mere regular co-occurrence is too weak to make sense of our everyday and scientific practices. Specifically she claimed that in order to understand our reasoning about, and uses of, effective strategies, we need a metaphysically stronger notion of causation and causal laws than Humeanism allows.

Cartwright's arguments were formulated in the framework of probabilistic causation, and it is precisely in the domain of (objective) probabilities that I am interested in defending a form of Humeanism. In this paper I will unpack some examples of effective strategies and discuss how well they fit the framework of causal laws and criteria such as CC from Cartwright's and others' works on probabilistic causality. As part of this discussion, I will also consider the concept or concepts of objective probability presupposed in these works. I will argue that Cartwright's notion of a nomological machine, or a mechanism as defined by Stuart Glennan, is better suited for making sense of effective strategies, and therefore that a metaphysically primitive notion of causal law (or singular causation, or capacity, as Cartwright argues in (1989)) is not – here, at least – needed. These conclusions, as well as the concept of objective probabilities I defend, are largely in harmony with claims Cartwright defends in The Dappled World. My discussion aims, thus, to bring out into the open how far Cartwright's current views are from a radically anti-Humean, causal-fundamentalist picture.

Keywords:	causal laws, causation, Cartwright, effective strategies, Humeanism, probability, chance
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