

The Power of Possible Causation

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Abstract

In this paper I consider possible causation, specifically, would-cause counterfactuals of the form 'had an event of kind A occurred, it would have caused an event of kind B'. I outline some difficulties for the Lewis program for understanding would-cause counterfactuals, and canvass an alternative. I then spell out a view on their significance, in relation to (i) absence causation, where claims such as 'A's not occurring caused B's not occurring' seem to make sense when understood in terms of the would-cause counterfactual 'had an event of kind A occurred, it would have caused an event of kind B'; (ii) contrastive causal explanation, where to explain why E rather than E* occurred we might appeal to the causal history of E and the counterfactual causal history of E*, an approach which appeals directly to would-cause counterfactuals 'had an event of kind C* occurred, it would have caused an event of kind E*'; and (iii) dispositions, where the claim 'the glass is fragile' clearly has some connection or other with would-cause counterfactuals such as 'were the glass to be struck, the striking would cause the glass to break'.

Keywords: absence causation, dispositions, explanation

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