

Elisa Paganini

THE AGENCY THEORY OF CAUSALITY
AND THE PROBLEM OF BACKWARDS CAUSATION

Abstract

The main purpose of the article is to show that the assumption of a power or force which connects cause and effect is an essential characteristic of our concept of cause.

The article is divided into two parts. In the first one I present the criteria of the Agency Theory of Causality which I appreciate as correct. I show why, according to my point of view, this theory assumes the idea of force connecting cause and effect, and I propose that the idea originates in the experience of “being compelled or induced” to undertake an action.

In the second part of my article, I analyse an argument in favour of the opinion of Backwards Causation presented by Michael Dummett. Dummett’s argument demonstrates that just as the fatalist does not have arguments against those who believe in causality, so those who do not believe in backwards causation do not have arguments against those who do believe in it. I assume that it is also the other way round: people who believe in causality cannot convince the fatalist, and people who believe in backwards causation cannot convince people not already convinced. So the two different opinions (the belief in causality and the belief in the absence of causality in its different forms) are both compatible with the empirical experience. The difference is to be looked for in an unverifiable assumption, and my proposal is that the difference lies in the opposite assumptions regarding the force connecting the events in consideration.

At the end, I investigate the apparent implausibility of backwards causation. I believe that the reason it is usually regarded as implausible has to do with the experience that localizes force as the factor that links cause and effect.