

PHIL 4603: Metaphysics  
Prof. Funkhouser  
Tooley, "The Nature of Causation: A Singularist Account"

- What is a singularist account of causation?

... is it possible for two events to be causally related, without that relationship being an instance of some causal law, either basic or derived, and either probabilistic or non-probabilistic? (458)

Such an account would obviously counter a Humean or regularity account of causation.

1.

- Tooley first considers two bad arguments for a singularist account: the immediate knowledge of causal relations and the appeal to intuition. These arguments are quickly dismissed.

- There are four other arguments for a singularist account that Tooley thinks are much stronger.

- These arguments proceed by ruling out alternative theories. Tooley characterizes the dominant position as follows:

The place to begin, clearly, is with the dominant, supervenience view. According to it, events cannot be causally related unless that relation is an instance of some law. Moreover, whether or not two events are causally related is logically determined by the non-causal properties of the two events, and the non-causal relations between them, together with the causal laws that there are in the world. (459)

To simplify matters (greatly), I will ignore his discussions of the intermediate alternative.

- The argument from the possibility of indeterministic laws: Given two indeterministic laws (like those given at the top of p. 460), it could be the case that which property (and law) brought about some effect is not determined

by the non-causal properties plus laws. (In Tooley's example, such a situation occurs when an object instantiates both  $P$  and  $S$ , followed by  $Q$  and  $R$ .) This runs counter to the supervenience argument.

○ The argument from the possibility of uncaused events and probabilistic laws: Imagine a world in which objects sometimes acquire property  $Q$  without any cause whatsoever. Also, imagine that it is a probabilistic law that if an object has property  $P$  there is a 75% chance that it will acquire property  $Q$ . An object with property  $P$  acquires property  $Q$ . Contrary to the supervenience argument, whether or not  $Q$  was caused does not supervene on the local facts and the laws.

○ The argument from the possibility of exact replicas of causal situations:

Suppose that  $P$  causes event  $M$ . There will, in general, be nothing impossible about there also being an event  $M^*$  which has precisely the same properties as  $M$ , both intrinsic and relational, but which is not caused by  $P$ . But is it logically possible for it to be the case that, in addition, either (1) the only relation between  $P$  and  $M$  is that of causation, or else (2) any other relation that holds between  $P$  and  $M$  also holds between  $P$  and  $M^*$ ?

If either of these situations can obtain, we have a counterexample to the supervenience view. (462)

For an example recall the immaterial minds that can be connected by telepathy.

○ The argument from the possibility of inverted universes: An inverted twin of a possible world is indiscernible from it but for the direction of time being reversed, along with all the properties and relations necessary to secure such a reversal. So, let's consider an inverted twin of our world.

... if we let  $A$  and  $B$  be any two complete temporal slices of our world, such that  $A$  is causally and temporally prior to  $B$ , then the other world will contain temporal slices  $A^*$  and  $B^*$  such that, first  $A^*$  and  $B^*$  are indistinguishable from  $A$  and  $B$ , respectively, except with respect to properties that involve the direction of time, and second,  $B^*$  is causally and temporally prior to  $A^*$  ... The question now is this. What makes it the case that, in our world,  $A$  causes  $B$ , whereas in the inverted twin world,  $B^*$  causes  $A^*$ ? (463)

Tooley does not think that the difference in temporal order is a non-causal difference here, because he holds that the direction of time is reducible to

the direction of causation.

2.

• Tooley thinks that most philosophers have accepted Hume's reasoning for the claim that causal relations require causal laws. Tooley extracts two parts from Hume's argument:

The first involves the claim that causal relations are not observable in the relevant technical sense of being immediately given in experience. The second involves the claim that causal relations are not analytically reducible to observable properties and relations *unless* one looks beyond the individual case. (464)

Hume argued that we can never observe, in a single instance, the property in virtue of which a causal relation obtains (e.g., we cannot observe the power or necessary connection). So, he thinks that we must look elsewhere for this property. And the best or only candidate is to look at similar events that are conjoined (constant conjunction).

◦ Tooley argues, contrary to Hume and others, that there can be causation at both a spatial and temporal distance.

◦ Tooley accepts the two parts of Hume's reasoning, but claims that they are compatible with a singularist conception of causation.

For one possibility remains: the possibility, namely, that causation is simply a relation between individual events, but one this is neither observable, nor reducible to observable properties and relations. (466)

And, unless one is a verificationist (or has a better theory on hand), why deny the possibility that causation is an irreducible and unobservable relation?