



Chapter I

Introduction

The Significance of the Problem

Causation is one of the major problems in philosophy. Philosophers have attempted to define 'cause' in different ways; for instance Hume defines 'causality' as constant conjunction, whereas Mill defines 'cause' as sufficient condition, etc. This leads to the metaphysical question of causality – what is the real nature of cause?

As long as this problem is not resolved, causal explanation, status of causal knowledge and Ethics are inevitably affected.

Anyway this thesis is not an attempt to give a complete answer to the question. Though this topic is indeed important, it is too big. And in any case it does not properly come under my title 'The Problems of Causation in Contemporary Western Philosophy.'

I shall restrict my thesis to analytic clarification of the more important notions of cause advanced by various philosophers. In addition, the thesis attempts to provide some historical background to the twentieth century concepts of causality so that the

readers are able to see how the concept of causation has developed.

Brief Historical Background

The problem of causation has been a central one in philosophy since the Pre-Socratic Period. The main thrust in that period was the question 'What is the cause of what?' For instance, Thales maintains that water is the first cause of our universe, whereas Anaximenes believes that air is.

In the Classic Period, this problem was treated more systematically than before. Aristotle clarifies the notion of cause into four categories of cause, namely, (1) The Material Cause, (2) The Formal Cause, (3) The Efficient Cause, and (4) The Final Cause. With (3), it can be seen that the problem of causality has shifted to the question 'What is the relationship between what is called a cause and what is called its effect?'

In the Modern Period, Locke regards causality as power, but Hume argues against him that causality is nothing more than a constant conjunction. Mill throws new light on this problem. According to him, cause is sufficient condition.

In the Contemporary Period, Russell says causality defined by traditional views is nothing but 'a relic of a bygone age.' According to Russell, the law of causality renders only probability, not necessity.

This is brief historical background of causation. A more extensive treatment is provided in Chapter II.

Objectives

1. To provide historical background for twentieth century concepts of causality.
2. To clarify and analyse contemporary problems of causality.

Methodology

The thesis comprises four chapters; viz. (1) Introduction, (2) Historical Background to Twentieth Century Concepts of Causality, (3) The Problems of Causation in Contemporary Western Philosophy, and (4) Conclusion.

The present chapter is the Introduction stating the significance of the problem of causality, providing brief historical background, specifying objectives of the thesis and methodology, lastly mentioning relevant theories and expected benefits.

Chapter two provides readers with historical background for twentieth century concepts of causality. Thus, the notions of causation from the Pre-Socratic Period up to John Stuart Mill's time are presented in this chapter.

Chapter three is the major chapter of the thesis. There, I clarify and analyse contemporary problems of causality. The following topics - Causality and Temporal Succession, Cause as Necessary Connection, Cause as Regularity, Cause as Sufficient Condition, Cause as Power, Cause as Recipe, Cause as INUS Condition, Cause as Probability, and Causality as Unanalysable Primitive Category, will be explored in this chapter. Both supporting and objecting views of contemporary philosophers to each view will be presented in this chapter too.

Chapter four is the conclusion. Although no absolutely final analysis of the notion of cause is offered, a tentative view is put forward. It is hoped that the thesis contributes to a clearer understanding of the problem.

Relevant View and Theories

The thesis will study the following topics and theories:

1. Causality and Temporal Precedence.
2. Cause as Necessary Connection.
3. Cause as Constant Conjunction.
4. Cause as Sufficient Condition.
5. Cause as INUS Condition.

6. Cause as Power.
7. Cause as Recipe.
8. Cause as Probability.
9. Causality as Unanalysable Primitive Category.

Expected Benefits

It is expected that benefits to be gained from this thesis will be threefold:

1. To advance the clarification and analysis of the concept of causation.
2. To improve understanding of contemporary work on the notion of causality in Western philosophy.
3. To be a general source of information about the history of the concept of causality.

ศูนย์วิจัยทรัพยากร
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย

หอสมุดกลาง สถาบันวิทยบริการ
จุฬาลงกรณ์มหาวิทยาลัย