

Why causalist theories of action are wrong

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Abstract:

Causalists of agency think that actions are effects of causes, be it of mental causes of their own sort, be it of causes of a physical, mainly neurological sort. This picture is fuelled from several ideas: 1) that actions are physical events, 2) that actions are physical events accompanied by volitional mental occurrences, 3) that these volitional mental occurrences are entities of some kind and that these are causing actions just like natural phenomena cause each other. In my talk I want to show that these assumptions are deeply mistaken.

In particular, I want to show that actions are not caused by intentions. I will make use of my own renewed version of the “Logical Connection Argument”. According to it, intentions and actions are connected logically. More specifically, the connection is a normative one. Our concept of intention is such that the first person use of the expression “to have an intention to do X” implies that the agent is committed to perform the action when he has the opportunity to do so. This will be spelled out for simple and complex actions. From cases of complex, long-term actions or cases of hindrances the expression “*to have* the intention to...” gets its sense and meaning – by it we do not mean the *possession* of some entity (be it mental or neuronal) – as it is commonly misunderstood by causalists. The function of a practical syllogism then is to show – given the premises – what action *must* or *should* be done by the agent in order to be called “rational”.