

Comments on 'Causality, Senses and Reference'<sup>1</sup> by U.T. Place, 1999.

<http://www.cognitivequestions.org/utplacecaus.html>

This section of Rockwell's paper raises the important issue of distinguishing between cases where we are dealing with two descriptions differing in sense which refer to one and the same thing and cases where we are dealing with a causal relation between distinct existences. He points out quite rightly that as we move away from paradigm cases of identity such as 'Water is H<sub>2</sub>O' and 'The Morning Star is the same object as the Evening Star' the more difficult this distinction is to draw. What he does not discuss is the direction in which we are moving when we move away from the standard cases he mentions. This is something we pick up only from the examples he discusses beginning with a particular instantaneous event, the death of Socrates.

Now it appears to be the case that if, for the time being, we put aside cases such as 'Water is H<sub>2</sub>O' where we are dealing with a type or kind of thing and focus on cases where we are dealing only with tokens or particulars, we find that if we put cases of particular substances in Aristotle's sense of that term such as the planet Venus at one extreme, there is progression through particular processes and activities, such as the mental process which produced this piece of prose, instantaneous events such as the death of Socrates, to at the other extreme a particular relation such as that between a particular dog and its owner or a particular dispositional state such as my belief that it's not going to rain this afternoon. Along this dimension we find that the number of predicates that are true of the particular diminishes as we move from particular substances to particular dispositional states. Moreover, although types in general have far fewer predicates true of them than do the corresponding tokens/particulars, the same diminution in the number of predicates that are true can be observed as we move from substance types, such as billiard balls in general or water in general, to dispositional property types, such as brittleness in general.

That said, I cannot accept the death of Socrates and Xanthippe's becoming a widow as two descriptions of the same event. These are descriptions of two distinct and causally related events. Becoming a widow is a matter of acquiring a social status with distinctive legal and social rights and obligations, a status which a woman acquires on and by virtue of the death of her husband. The relevant causal counterfactuals which show that this is a causal relation are:

'If Socrates had not died when he did, Xanthippe would not have become a widow when she did'

'If Xanthippe had predeceased (or been divorced from) Socrates, she would not have become a widow on his death'.

What is wrong with

'If Xanthippe had predeceased (or been divorced from) Socrates, Socrates would not have died as and when he did'

is that it inverts the causal relation, and makes an effect into the cause.

If you want an example of a genuine case of another description of the same instantaneous event as the death of Socrates, how about the event whereby Socrates' heart stopped beating, given that no attempt was made to re-start it? Although it's a slightly odd way of putting it, it is still true that if the event whereby Socrates' heart ceased to beat had not occurred when it did, Xanthippe would not have become a widow as and when she did.

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<sup>1</sup> Section from A Defense of Emergent Downward Causation by Teed Rockwell,  
<http://www.cognitivequestions.org/causeweb.html>

You will see from this that I agree with Kim and Goldman in thinking that Socrates' death and Xanthippe's widowhood are discrete events; but reject their view that there are NO cases of different descriptions of the same event. I have some sympathy with Goldman's view that "only two SYNONYMOUS (I would prefer to say 'conceptually Connected') descriptions can refer to the same event." But the reason for this, I believe, is connected to the relatively small number of predicates that apply in the case of instantaneous events, even particular ones. The number of predicates that go with a particular ontological category appears to be a function of the number of spatio-temporal dimensions involved. Thus substances both in the Aristotelian and in the modern sense are located and extended in both the three spatial dimensions and one temporal dimension. Processes and activities are similarly located and extended; but their spatial location and extension is parasitic on the spatial location and extension of the participating substances. Think of a telephone conversation between someone in the US or the UK and someone in Australia. Where is that? Instantaneous events, such as the death in which the process of dying terminates, are located, but not extended in time and located, but hardly extended, in space. Relations are extended and with some qualifications located in time and located, but not extended, in space. Dispositional states are extended in time within certain often undeterminate temporally located limits, but to my intuitions it makes no sense to talk of either spatial location or extension in such cases.

This latter is part of the reason for thinking, as I do, that dispositional states cannot be the same thing as the underlying structures on which their existence depends. But that in no way diminishes my conviction that in the case of substances and processes macro-and micro-descriptions relate to one and the same thing. To raise the question whether mental and neurological PROPERTIES are or are not identical rides roughshod over a distinction on which I have insisted since 1956, but which no one else appears to recognize, the distinction between the story we tell about mental processes/consciousness and the story we tell about mental dispositions, particularly propositional attitudes.

The status of instantaneous events such as the death that ends the process of dying is, of course, a problem for a view such as mine that construes the reductionist issue differently in the case processes and dispositional states. For it would seem that in the biological and mental cases instantaneous events are constituted by the temporal interface between an antecedent process and a subsequent and consequent dispositional state. That means that, on my view which holds that processes are, but dispositional states are not, identical with their structural composition/underpinning, no simple answer can be given to the question 'Are instantaneous biological/mental events identical with the structures that underlie them?'

To take Kim's stabbing and killing case, I would certainly want to agree that in so far as Brutus' stabbing Caesar caused Caesar to die, the stabbing and the killing refer to the same action on the part of Brutus. But whereas the 'stabbing' mentions only what Brutus did, 'killing' mentions the effect of what he did, namely the event whereby Caesar died. There is no contradiction involved in saying that Brutus stabbed Caesar but failed to kill him. This is just another case of a particular of which more than one predicate is contingently true. It is not remotely comparable with the case of a belief and the underlying state of the brain. The analogy here is between the state of being dead and the cessation of the metabolic processes which keep an organism alive. That, according to me, is a causal relation between distinct existences. The same is true of the relation between a belief and the underlying state of the brain. In the case of the stabbing and the killing both are descriptions of an action, an action of Brutus. In the dispositional cases the belief and the state of being dead are states of the person. The cessation of the metabolic processes and the state of synaptic connections that underlie a belief are states of those structures. Identity between events and states for my money requires identity between the substances involved.

Turning to the issue of causality, to suppose that causal relations hold between objects, i.e. substances, is clearly a mistake - though I can't think of a causal relation that doesn't involve some kind of interaction between two or more substances. On the other hand to speak of causation as a relation between events

is to ignore the whole domain of statics where causal relations are between states, not events. Moreover, in the case of an event it also ignores, as the paper implicitly points out, all those multiple contributory causal factors which need to be in place as persistent states before the effect is finally set in motion by the triggering event (e.g., the lighting of the touch paper).

While I very much endorse the emphasis on the invariable multiplicity of causes, I think, it's important in talking of the causes of an event or state of affairs to distinguish between those causal factors that are still operative so long as the state persists or when the event occurs and those that are part of the complete causal story of how the event or state of affairs came to be, but which have ceased to exist or to operate by the time the effect comes to exist. Talking of "the metaphysical cause of an event ... as everything in the universe that was responsible for that event taking place" strikes me as over-inclusive.

I will forbear to comment on the appalling quotation from Kim 1993. Trying to disentangle the conceptual confusions it contains would take an essay as long again as this is already.

That causes have effects that are epiphenomenal in the sense illustrated by Dennett's example of the shadow, must be granted. But it's important to note that such effects are only epiphenomenal RELATIVE to some intention of an agent or some interest on the part of an investigator. In themselves they are just as much effects as those that are intended or in the focus of interest.

There's a lot I could say about causal laws and laws of nature. I would confine myself to three dogmatically stated points:

1. As is stated in the paper, causal laws (i.e. verbal formulae) are invariably subject to a CETERIS PARIBUS (other things being equal) clause.
2. Causal laws cannot be adequately represented by a proposition of the form 'If p then q'. The conditional relation they express is between the existence/occurrence of states and events, not between the truth of propositions.
3. The truthmakers (the events or states of affairs whose existence or non-existence makes the proposition true) for causal law statements are the dispositional states of particular substances. There are no universal substantive laws of nature in general as envisaged e.g., by David Armstrong.

I note finally that I haven't said anything about the concept of a property, and whether or not there are emergent properties. On this I will say only two things. Firstly, I hold that the only genuine properties are dispositional properties. Secondly, I hold that the dispositional properties of the whole are invariably emergent relative to the parts and THEIR dispositional properties on which the properties of the whole depend in a causal sense. But here the direction of causation is upward rather than downward.