

Kane versus O'Connor

Kane's complaint about agent causation theories:

They don't fit with a naturalistic picture of the world – they ascribe powers to human beings that are not of the sort that science can talk about.

Kane's own view supposedly does not do this.

Free will in Kane's view is based in quantum indeterminacy, not in some special power that the agent has to avoid being constrained by the laws of nature. Self-forming choices (SFA's) just happen; they are not caused by anything.

They are choices made by the agent, but not caused by the agent. Perhaps it would be most accurate to say the choices "made by" the agent *emerge from* the agent. No supernatural powers, no agent causation needed.

O'Connor, as I understand him, agrees in part with Kane:

It is accurate to say that the power of free choice-making that human agents possess is not the sort of power that science describes. It is accurate to say that this power is not governed by the sort of natural laws that science attempts to discover.

BUT, O'Connor does not think that this is a problem for his theory, because...

Causation as science understands it is merely a *special case* of a more fundamental notion of natural causation.

All forms of natural causation are fundamentally an exercise of the powers of individual beings or objects.

Example: Newton's law of gravitational attraction basically attributes certain specific, measurable powers to any two masses – any two material beings or objects. Any two such beings have the power to attract each other by an amount that is described by Newton's law.

When a power of a natural being is *always exercised in some regular fashion*, according to the circumstances that the being is in, then the operation of that power can be described in what we recognize as a law of nature. We are in this case talking about causal powers of a natural being that are like those described by science.

But this does not mean that all powers of material beings are regular in the way described above. Human agents have a power that is not regular in that way – the

power of freely bringing about the formation of an executive intention – that is, the power to make a free choice. Since the exercise of this power does not always result in the same choice in the same circumstances, it does not operate with the kind of regularity that science requires.

This is supposed to convince us that agent causation is not opposed to science, but simply outside of the realm of science. O'Connor is not saying that science is wrong; it is just limited to the investigation of a certain (broad) range of powers of material beings.

It is not that *science* is wrong; rather it is that our *thinking about science* is wrong when we say that the scientific understanding of the world sees causation as relating events, properties, and states, rather than as describing powers of material beings.

I don't believe O'Connor proposes any other examples of "natural" causal powers that are not exercised in completely regular ways. So, maybe it would be more accurate to say that the case of human power of free choice is special and unique.

Does all this mean Kane is right? Or, has O'Connor convinced you that his version of agent causation really doesn't require supernatural agents?