Causation: A Very Short Introduction

By Stephen Mumford and Rani Lill Anjum

Questions for Thought and Discussion

- How important is causation for all sciences and the humanities? Could some sciences do without causation?
- Philosophers argue over what causation is. Scientists try to develop the best methods for finding causation. Why is causation such a difficult matter?
- To what extent is correlation an indication of causation? Would all the theories of causation suggest that there is a link between the two?
- Do causes have to come before their effects?
- Can we ever have the cause without the effect?
- In developing new technology our causal understanding and knowledge seems essential. How would we go about getting the required causal knowledge?
- Pluralism suggests that causation could be many different things. Could we reconcile all the philosophical theories or do some fit better together than others?
- Do all causes make a difference? Is everything that makes a difference a cause?
- Are all our choices, thoughts and behaviour caused by something physical? Are all causal processes ultimately physical processes?
- Many theories try to understand causation by replacing it with some other notions, such as difference-making, constant conjunction or probability-raising. Can causation really be replaced by another notion?
- How, if at all, are dispositions related to causation?
- Can absences be causes? If so, how would they bring about an effect? How important is it for scientific and other explanations to invoke absences as causes?
- How are our philosophical theories of causation reflected in scientific methods such as experiments, randomised controlled trials (RCTs) and statistics?
- Which scientific method or methods do you take to be the best for finding causation and why?
- Which theory or theories of causation do you find the most plausible and why?

Other books by the authors
Stephen Mumford and Rani Lill Anjum Getting Causes from Powers (Oxford University Press, 2011)

Further reading
Psillos, S., Causation and Explanation (Acumen, 2002)