

Discussion about cause and effect with rozeboosje

This is a short discussion with the interesting Youtuber, rozeboosje, on causation. Rozeboosje is one of many Youtube atheists, albeit one of the most intelligent, who crusade against theism using the arguments of science. I took the opportunity of interacting with him [after his video 'On the beaches'](#) (a humorous recycling of Winston Churchill's speech), because I wished to see whether he could make the leap from atheistic science ('there is no first cause') to wisdom ('all things are causally created and lack intrinsic existence').

Rozeboosje's attitude is one of discomfort and uncertainty about the term 'cause'. This becomes apparent when his reasons for objecting to the word 'cause' lack consistency. At first he wishes to abandon it in philosophy (and science) because 'cause' is a colloquial term, that implies will and agency (i.e. a 'first cause'). Then he offers the view that 'cause' is technically unusable because it implies time, while he rather oddly believes the implication of 'causes' by 'effects' means the future creates the past. Next, he rejects it because, as he claims, no primary scientific theories, meaning laws of nature, ever state the word 'cause'. I was wondering at what point he would start to look for the underlying principle for all his statements, namely, the philosophical one.

Kelly Jones

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ContinuumXT: I had one question about 'reason'. This question is correct right: "What's the reason why the ball falls down? > Gravity. Reason doesn't always suggests a concious being right? I'm aware that in this instance it certainly does. I always had the feeling with 'why' questions, that they lead to nowhere, because for every event, there are multiple reasons. All depends on where you are looking for the answer.

rozeboosje: Yes. If you hear a question asking for reasons, or using the word "why", it isn't necessarily one looking for motivation. The test is to see whether you can rephrase it as a "how" question.

Kelly: You mean, "how? else but causes"?

rozeboosje: No. Say somebody asks you "why do apples fall to the ground". It's a valid question, but they're obviously not looking for a reason, a motivation. You can verify that by rephrasing the question "Oh, you want to know how come apples fall down?" And I would expect asker to confirm that.

Kelly: Are you saying, there are causes, not reasons? So if a person asks, "why do things exist?" you would answer, "Oh, you want to know how causation works?" Out of interest, how would you explain that?

rozeboosje: Er... no. If somebody asks why there is a hole in my pocket, I trust that they want to know what mechanism was involved in producing said hole. I would imagine that "I put a knife in there and its sharp edge eventually worked its way through the fabric" would be a satisfactory response. If somebody asks "why is there something rather than nothing" then I am not sure at all that all they are looking for is a mechanism.

Kelly: Isn't causation the most suitable? tool for that philosophical job?

rozeboosje: Actually, no. Causation, again, involves agents. Only agents "cause" something to happen. When an agent is involved, you have a desire, a will, a plan, an execution, and that is what "causes" something to happen, imposing its will. Laws? of nature, on the other hand, are merely descriptive mechanisms that we use to describe regularities in what we see happen in nature. "Cause" and "Effect" play no role there, although colloquially those terms are often used, adding to confusion.

Kelly: I think that's an unnecessarily restrictive use for causation. People frequently talk about causes for illness, for example. I define a cause as something necessary for the existence of something else. In looking for why something happens, and for an explanatory mechanism like a law of nature, one is seeking causes.

rozeboosje: > causes for illness, for example

True, but that IS the "colloquial" use of the word, and there is nothing wrong with it. I use it very liberally myself, and it makes perfect sense to do so. It just isn't right to hang a philosophical framework on that hook. Laws of nature, for example, do not include anything like "cause". In a temporal context they tend to work equally well if viewed in reverse. For example if you were to watch movie footage of two colliding billiard balls, you would not be able to tell whether you were watching the movie normally, or played backward. Most laws of nature (even QM, at the level of the wave function) are deterministic. That means that at least in theory you can just as readily calculate the past state of a system from its future state as vice versa. In that sense you could as validly claim that the future "causes" the past as the other way around. It just sounds weird to us because we're not used to looking at it that way.

Kelly: rozeboosje, I think you're confusing philosophy with science for one thing. But as you yourself show, 'cause' is quite comfortably used in both. Just one point, to say that a theory made in hindsight, about how an event arises, is part of the event's causes, is wrong. It is like saying my recognition of myself in a mirror has caused the reflection to exist.

rozeboosje: No, that's not what I mean. What I mean is that if you look at how laws of nature are formulated you will see that there typically is no preferred direction in time. They would look identical if flipped "backwards". That strongly indicates that "before" and "after" AND "cause" are just constructs of the mind. Nature is just what it is. Terms like "cause" are how our minds interpret what they see.

Kelly: rozeboosje, a law of nature doesn't even exist before its hypothesis, and proofs, exist. Without those coming first, the law of nature cannot be formulated.

rozeboosje: Yes, but none of the ones that HAVE been formulated incorporate anything like "cause" or "effect".

Kelly: Can you name a law of nature, meaning, a scientific theory that is primary to most other theories, that doesn't imply that certain things are necessary for the existence of other things (which is what cause and effect means)?

Also, cause and effect isn't linear in the way illustrated by the billiard-ball interactions, but more that, for there to be billiard-ball interactions, there needs to be billiard-balls, first.

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