
Mind-dependence, Social Kinds and the Causal Criterion of Reality.

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Résumé

In this paper, I question the view that the "Eleatic principle" used as a criterion of reality, can adequately save the constitutively mind-dependent kinds we wish to protect from accusations of irrealism, such as social kinds understood broadly (i.e. constitutively mind-dependant kinds whose instances are good candidates to partake in causal interactions because they support inductive generalizations that are mentioned in the special science, such as economical kinds, legal kinds, but also artifactual kinds that are the study of anthropology and archeology for instance).

Many (Rosen, 1994), (Thomasson, 2007), (Haslanger, 2016), (Juvshik, 2021), (Raven, 2022), (Burman, 2023) have rejected that entities such as football clubs, cars, and universities should be denied reality because of their constitutive mind dependence. Furthermore, (Baker, 2007), (Khalidi, 2016), and others have argued in favor of the reality of these social kinds understood broadly by endorsing the Eleatic principle and showing that they fit the requirement of the causal criterion of reality. The basic structure of their argument can be rephrased as follows:

P1: Something exists if and only if it has causal relevance

P2: Some constitutively mind-dependent entities (such as social kinds understood broadly) have causal relevance.

Conclusion: Some constitutively mind-dependent entities (such as social kinds understood broadly) exist.

I argue that this reasoning is unsound due to an equivocation of the term "causal relevance." To support P2, "causal relevance" must be clearly defined. I examine three possible and exhaustive interpretations and evaluate whether they plausibly satisfy the causal criterion of reality:

(1) They can be causally efficacious as representations (Frank and Pettit, 1992), meaning that the social or intentional property, an instance of a peculiar kind, will affect one's behavior when represented. However, defining causal relevance as "being effective as representations" will not do. If something is being represented in a certain way and affects someone's conduct, then the causal relevance should be attributed to the mental representation or its underlying physical micro-structure and not to the represented entity.

*Intervenant

(2) Another possibility is to understand causal relevance as having a distinctive and irreducible causal import (List and Spiekerman, 2013) or, as giving rise to a host of other causal properties (Khalidi, 2015), which also entails the capacity to feature in inductive inferences (Khalidi, 2016).

This can at best implies that social kinds understood broadly can be "causes" but not "causers" (Bianchi, 2024). While constitutively mind-dependent entities may make a difference as causal relata, this does not endow them with irreducible causal power in a productive sense (understood as a physical process, for instance, as the manifestation of a power).

(3) This is why I contend that the last way in which the notion of causal relevance can be understood should be in line with a productive account of causation, in which being a causer is to be something that can "push, carry, knock over, scrape, break, move, pull, burn, tear, shatter, hurt, bruise or stab" (Anscombe, 1981). I will argue that this interpretation is the most plausible for establishing the truth of P1.

However, to accept that constitutively mind-dependant entities such as social kinds understood broadly have a causal relevance in a productive sense means embracing the more dubious views of emergentism (Wahlberg, 2020).

Ultimately, the argument hinges on an equivocation: in P1, causal relevance implies participation in a physical process, whereas in P2, it can mean, at best, being an irreducible difference-maker.

Starting from there, friends of constitutively mind-dependent kinds have two options:

- either deny that the causal criterion is necessary for something to be real.
- or submit to the claim that constitutively mind-dependant entities such as broadly understood social kinds are not real.

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