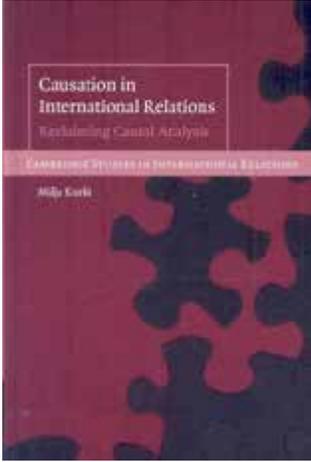


TANITIM VE DEĞERLENDİRME YAZILARI

CAUSATION IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS: RECLAIMING CAUSAL ANALYSIS

Kurki, Milja. Causation in International Relations: Reclaiming Causal Analysis. Cambridge University Press, 2008. ISBN: 9780521882972

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Milja Kurki is one of the prominent theorists in IR tradition who follows Scientific Realist philosophy of science. In this book, causal analysis in Social Sciences, IR in particular was taken into consideration. For this, the book is divided into three main parts that are 'the Humean philosophy of causation and its legacies, Rethinking the concept of cause and Reconfiguring causal analysis of world politics' and eight sub-chapters. *Debates Covered by Kurki*

Debates covering theory and meta-theory (theory of theory) have been dominating the IR Discipline since 1980s. Actually, there were a common belief that Positivist Philosophy of Social Science was the only valid philosophy and it was granted as given. Nobody needed to investigate or question the assumptions of it. Philosophy of theories was not taken into consideration as long as positivism utilized.

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Literally, Positivism rests upon some assumptions read as follow. First and foremost, science must be relied upon 'systematic observations'. As it is seen here that 'observation' occupies a great place in the Positivist Philosophy. In addition, systematic observation necessities that observable regularities should be uncovered whose knowledge could only be observed via human sense. So, there are basic emphasizes on observation, regularities and human sense. Logical outcome is that only observable facts by human sense can be subject of scientific inquiry, and the knowledge of observable facts are given ontological significance. So, there is nothing knowable beyond our senses.

As it is put forward, Positivism mostly highlights the epistemological side of the meta-theory rather than ontology. Hence, Empiricist epistemology is mostly adopted as the valid way of knowledge claims. According to Kurki and Wight, 'the acquisition of knowledge is premised on the belief that the only genuine knowledge we can have of the world is based on those 'facts' that can be experienced by the human senses.'² So, could we get the knowledge of unobservable things? Or, is there a reality outside of human senses? Positivism neglects the fact that there could be ontological realities exist independent of human senses. Back to the scope of the book, Milja Kurki tries to reconceptualise Humean concept of 'casual analysis'; and try to represent it into ontological aspect and keep away from epistemological shallowness. In order to do so, Kurki first deal with the issue of *cause* and *effect* relationship by tracing its roots commencing from Ancient Greek to 20th century. Conceptualizing of antecedents of the concept was examined and respectively *rationalists* and *empiricists* were taken into consideration. Lastly, 20th century philosophers were analysed. All these efforts are based on Humean concept of '*causation*'.

-The History of Philosophy of Causation-

The meaning of 'cause' was considered by Ancient Greek philosophers also. From Plato to Aristotle, many had copped with the issue of *causation* and actually were hot on the term *cause* itself. For instance, Plato's basic concern was that of ideas (forms) which played a crucial role to identify things that observed by humans. So, it is clear here that Plato divided world of affairs into two area namely 'the ideational reality' – world of forms- and 'the sense of

² Milja Kurki and Colin Wight, 'International Relations and Social Science', in Dunne, T., M. Kurki, and S. Smith, (ed.), *International Relations Theories*. OUP Oxford, 2013, p.22.

world'. This distinction is so crucial that ontological concerns play decisive role in explaining *causation*.

However, as Kurki proclaimed, Aristotle was the first philosopher 'who truly developed the notion of cause and gave it central place in Western philosophy.'³ Formally, Aristotle gave epistemological importance to the problem of causation. However, by putting down the subject as such can be misleading; because by explaining the issues referencing to *aitia*(cause, specified by Plato) means that observed knowledge is not adequate enough alone. So, Aristotle gives an ontological ground to inquiry of *causation*. As a result, for Aristotle, 'causes ... referred to really existing (ontological) things or powers in the world.'⁴ Consequently, Aristotle proposes four types of cause; i. Material Cause, ii. Formal Cause, iii. Efficient Cause, and iv. Final Cause.⁵

-The Anti-Aristotelian turn and the 'narrowing down' of the concept of cause-

Scholastic Scholars who were inspired by Aristotle gave great importance to Final Cause, 'which became linked to the idea of God: God came to be seen as the ultimate cause.'⁶ God is real and its ontological reality is outside our sense, thus Aristotle and his successors adopted ontological cause idea rather purely epistemological. However, one of the first shift away from this divine cause (final cause) idea was represented by Galileo, Gilbert, Kepler and Newton. This shift was famous with its emphasises on 'observable facts'. Yet, this shift away did not mean total ignorance of Aristotle's 'reasoned fact' which pays attention to real ontological causes.

Descartes' rejection of Scholastic Thinking stems from his rejection of 'metaphysic cause' understanding. So, by adopting such world view Descartes 'first narrowed down the final cause to efficient cause (push and pull and moving forces). Descartes' objection to Aristotle can be listed as followings; i. According to Descartes notion of '*final cause*' doesn't deserve such attention as scholastic thinkers did, rather notion of '*efficient cause*' is worth to be chosen; ii. Also Descartes was against the notion of 'forms-ideas', which attributes a kind of 'soul' to things; iii. Consequently, 'efficient cause' plays central role in Descartes' philosophy.

³ M. Kurki, *Causation in International Relations: Reclaiming Causal Analysis*, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 26.

⁴ **Ibid.**

⁵ Aristotle gives sculpture example to concretely understand four different but interconnected causes.

⁶ **Ibid.**, p.30.

As a 'rationalist philosopher' Descartes, the idea of cause remained fundamentally important in his inquiry. Because, knowledge is innate and *a priori* in rationalism. However, David Hume introduces an *empiricist scepticism* on causation. Humean conception of causality deeply and inherently affected even today's philosophies. According to Hume, the problem on knowledge, more specifically 'how can we know anything for certain?', is the problem of epistemology. 'The basis of knowledge – and the limits of our knowledge- are defined by what our perceptions transmit to us.'⁷ As it was explained, *rationalist philosophers* upheld the claim that knowledge is *innate*; however, according to Hume any knowledge claim should rely upon concrete experiments. Ideas are shaped or are given meaning by our experiences without which all knowledge claims become meaningless.

Importantly, link between 'cause' and 'effect' is something related to regularities or patterns. According to Hume, if we are talking about cause and effect, it means that we are talking about observable regularities, namely things follow each other regularly. So, link between cause and effect actually is reduced to push and pull forces or moving forces of *flat ontology*. Because ideas are shaped by our experiences that are based on regularities reflect in our mind, one should be aware of the fact that *cause* always comes first. Thus, from this logic some Humean assumption can be derived from.

First and foremost, 'Hume's definition of cause entails that all that can be said about causes must be derived from analysis of regular successions of perception...'⁸ which means that the idea of cause is created via our senses which recognizes regular patterns. Secondly, 'all we can know is what we observe'⁹ according to Hume. This means that casual relation is a kind of relation which occurs between *observables*. In accordance with this logic, Hume rejects the concept of '*natural necessity*' which brings the idea of ontologically link *cause and effect relations*. Indeed, 'Hume tried to reduce the problem of causation to an epistemological issue, thus avoiding all ontological aspects of the problem of causation'.¹⁰ Rejecting the notion of '*naturally necessitating*', Hume also rejects ontologically defined '*cause and effect*' relations. By so, Humean philosophy represents a great breaking point with Scholastic thinking. Moreover, Humean philosophy deeply inspired by

⁷ *Ibid.*, p.34.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.36.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.37.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

twentieth century thinkers and these thinkers had adopted the way how Hume conceptualized 'cause and effect' issue.

-The Legacy of Humeanism in twentieth-century philosophy of science-

It should be noted here that Humean philosophy became dominant in twentieth century philosophy in so much that Humean philosophy regarded as given and did not become subject of criticism. Humean conception of cause and effect regarded as the only valid way for scientific inquiry.

For instance, according to Ernst Mach, 'what is knowable must be perceivable.'¹¹ This logic is representing a sharp turn to 'radical Empiricism' in twentieth century. So, there is nothing real without our senses percept, because only knowable thing is that of observable one via senses. So, unseen or unobservable facts are rejected by Mach ontologically. Moreover, according to radical empiricist philosophers, casual relations/causality took new form. Casual relations are components of general laws and the basic duty is to find out these general laws. *Observance, regularity and casual relationship* are key factors of this new thinking; yet basic task, now, is to find out general laws. Logically, if there are general laws derived from regularities, it is possible to propose future predictions as well.

These philosophers were challenged by Karl Popper who was critical about the excessive emphasize on fully inductive inference. Scientific knowledge is derived from inductive methodology, rather scientific reality is based on deductive testing. According to Pooper, rejecting inductive view of science in the sake of deductive testing and falsifiability-based model of science, makes scientific inquiry can be justified more adequately. So, casual relationship also takes a new form to be investigate. As Popper puts –what is called Deductive-Nomological model of expression- there are two separate criteria for scientific inquiry: namely general laws and initial conditions. As a result, casual relations should be examined via three basic steps; 'i. the universal laws that have been observed ...; ii. The initial conditions referring to a particular time and place ...; iii. deduce the 'event' to be explained.'¹²

It is apparent here that Popper's understanding of casual relationship is one way of rejecting metaphysical one that proposes everything has an *ontological cause*. Thus, Popper accepts causal analysis as a valid way of science if only

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.44.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.48-49.

it serves under empiricism. So, 'casual explanation ... is based squarely on the analysis of regularities.'¹³ Without defining or determining regularities, any explanations will lack coherence and will be uncompleted. This proposed statement is named as '*explanatory sketch*'. Consequently, finding general laws or regularities are the key assumption of casual relationship, hence any claim cannot be justified via experiences -that are inherently needed to be verified via human sense- cannot be the subject of scientific inquiry rather it would constitute a speculation. As it is explicit in DN (deductive nomology), matter is mostly related to *epistemology* and *methodology* rather than *ontology*.

There are different causality explanations also; namely *probability theories* and *counterfactual accounts*. Probability explanations are ... 'assertions to the effect that if certain specified conditions are realised, then an occurrence of such and such kind will come about with such and such statistical probability.'¹⁴ Logically, probability explanation is benefiting inductive methodology; however, this fact rejects certainty. *Counterfactual accounts* also take causality problem into account yet in a different manner. According to this approach, 'causation is defined as a dependency relation between observed events.'¹⁵ All these approaches have Humean roots and share common assumption that are *observation*, *patterns between observables*, *generalisation*, and *regularity-deterministic logic*.

Re-conceptualizing 'Causal Analysis'

Drawing on scientific realism (ontological realism), Bhaskar asserts that we should prioritise ontology over epistemology contrary to mainstream philosophies do. It is important to ask ontological questions rather than epistemological ones. In contrast with positivism, reality is over there whether we can observe its knowledge via our senses or not. So, unobservable things are also taken into account. So, mind-independent reality has deep and stratified ontology. Following this logic, according to Bhaskar, 'much of modern philosophy, having prioritised epistemology, has conflated the question 'what is?' (ontology) with the question 'how do we know?' (epistemology). As a consequence, the idealist tradition has reduced reality to 'what we think', while the empiricists have reduced reality to 'what is

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.49.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.51.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p.54.

perceived'. Bhaskar claims that both traditions portray the nature of reality in misleading ways and, as a consequence, fail to understand the nature of scientific inquiry.¹⁶

As Bhaskar provides, 'we must recognise three distinct level of reality: the level of the 'empirical', consisting of our experiences; the level of 'actual', consisting of events and actual states of affairs; and the level of the 'real', consisting of the unobservable real structures and mechanisms that, in interaction with other real structures and mechanisms, bring about states of affairs and make empirical observation possible. Scientific theories... far from merely stacking up empirical regularities, aim to grasp and theorise this deeper unobservable level of reality.'¹⁷ Actually, it can be alleged that there cannot be 'independent variable' that empiricists assert because of the holistic and complex nature of underlying structures.

As a result, social sciences should study underlying social relations and structures that have real causal power that shape social life. Society has ontologically real nature which is complex and has inner mechanisms. This way of thinking rejects regularity determining causal analysis. Moreover, according to SC, causes are real because they have powers to bring about change; and causes are generative. Thus, social world is an open system to investigate, there are many causal mechanisms and structures operating in. These mechanism or structures should not necessarily be observable. SR accepts the causal power of unobservables, moreover accepts unobservables as causes. Causes are also real and can be unobservable. By saying so, ideas, norms, discourses have causal roles that are traditionally accepted as non-causal. Causes are real and underlying social structures and mechanisms have causal powers. Now, here it is a must to say that there is a possibility for conceptualization of causal relations beyond positivism. Moreover, by emphasizing the unobservables' causal powers, causal/constitutive dichotomy that post-structuralists put forward can be tackled. Lastly, it is apparent that terms are inherently depicted as non-causal, have causal powers; such as discourses, norms and ideas. So, it is possible to deepen the meaning of causal relations in social sciences by applying Scientific Realist assumptions.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p.162.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p.164.

Comments

Kurki has conducted a meta-theoretical research relating to the concept of casual relationship. As it is seen here, *positivist* and *empiricist* account of casual relationship is lack of *ontological depth*. The bulk of the study is mainly about epistemological and methodological aspect of the issue. Apparently, Kurki tries to take the issue from the demise of epistemology to ontology. In order to do so, Kurki first defines the dominant philosophy in the subject area. According to Kurki, ‘the Humean conception of causation, and of science, has become widely accepted as ‘self-evident’ in much of the philosophy of science and has formed the implicit and unquestioned backdrop for most debates in the philosophy of science in past decades.’¹⁸

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.58.