

I'm going to start by restating the discussion of Helen's paper in terms I find a bit more congenial than the official presentation, and then ask a couple of questions.

Consider a few cases -- Fill these in with "things are otherwise normal":

In case 1, a dry match is struck and then lights

Case 2 is Helen's cool case of a dry match that lights (somewhat oddly) by remote control after being struck too weakly to light

In case 3, a match remains safely nestled in its box, unstruck and unlit.

I want to describe these cases using a bit of slightly arcane vocabulary that I think we nonetheless can get a handle on, in a way that I intend to be fairly neutral about the underlying ontology of the description.

I want to say that in cases 1 and 2, the match lights **partly thanks to** or **partly in virtue of** the striking and **partly thanks to/ivo** its being dry. They differ in that in case 1, the match lights **partly thanks to** the striking **being** a striking, but this is not so in case 2, where it lights **partly thanks to** the striking being an **arm movement**.

Finally, in case 3, the match doesn't light **partly thanks to** not being struck.

The bearing of these descriptions on the ontology of causation -- the things that stand in the first place of the causal relation -- is not clear to me, at least not without first, some choices about what in these descriptions to reify, and second, a terminological choice.

It seems to me that Helen wants to reify certain "expressions" (what are the things that get reified?) in these descriptions, but to fail to do so in others. At least among the reificanda are (ignoring the matches) the things we good Davidsonians would intuitively class as "events" -- namely the striking and the lightings. I wasn't entirely sure on her attitude toward other things -- the tropes, universals, and facts that some might reify on the basis of these descriptions. More on this later. So a more ample option here is to reify not just the events but also the tropes, universals, and facts. Intermediate options are of course available.

Second, what relations are we to regard as **causal**, properly so-called? A sort of minimal choice is **the semantic value of the English verb 'cause'**. A more ample choice is the **partly thanks to** relation.

As we've seen, the **partly thanks to** relation can take in a lot of ontology, if it's around to be reified. I myself think the semantic value of 'cause' doesn't take in tropes, universals, or facts, but only events. I thought some of Helen's examples intended to show otherwise were a bit dodgy, eg the manoeuvre of transforming a "q because p" claim into a claim like "the fact that p caused the fact that q" is something English doesn't really allow (at least my English). We know what is communicated but it seems

a bit philosophese.

Anyway, if we adopt the minimal choice on the second question (what is the causal relation), the only bits of causal ontology in any of these cases are the striking.

If we adopt the more maximal choice, then the ontology depends on our choice on the first question (what to reify). If only events, the outcome is the same, but if we make the more ample choice we also get the tropes, universals, and facts.

It seems that Helen's main thesis rests on making the more ample choice on both questions. But the first question is one that seems pretty holistic, involving a huge amount of metaphysics, and the second question is terminological in the strongest sense.

Two questions.

1. The argument for not regarding tropes as causes was intriguing -- on a Davidson view, events are awesome because they are "multiply specifiable" and thus "genuinely particular", and hence can form a sort of causal backbone of the world. Tropes however are not multiply specifiable. This seemed cool and I'd like to see a bit of expansion on a bunch of points. First, a couple of quibbles about the notion of multiple specifiability. Surely it can't have to do with our ability to single the entities out determinately, because how could the causal backbone of the world care about *that*, and anyway events seem to be vague, hence on certain views not singleable out determinately. Does it have to do with having a rich set of properties? No, because tropes have a big load of *extrinsic* properties. Does it have to do with having a rich essence? A worry is that events might not have such rich essences: eg Helen's striking that nearly wasn't a striking. Second and more importantly, why is being multiply specifiable a necessary condition for being part of the causal backbone of the world? Third and finally, why does causation need a backbone? Maybe the world is more like a jellyfish. I thought this stuff here was exceedingly cool and intriguing and this is a request for expansion less than any kind of objection.

2. What is the causal status of facts? She criticises a position like Mellor's on the ground that facts can't be causes, being "outside the world", as mirrors of the sub specie aeternitate, like true propositions. Of course there are other conceptions of facts -- eg on a tractarian view, or an armstrongian view facts aren't just true propositions; and on the view of Moore 1899 shared by Russell for a brief period facts are true propositions but the world is made up of true propositions. So the argument seems contestable. But more importantly, they appear on her list of causes as "matters". So I sense a bit of a tension here. If I'm not misreading I wonder how it is resolved.