

Causal Explanation and Historical Meaning: How to Solve the Problem of the Specific Historical Relation between Events

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Abstract

Inspired by Arthur Dantos (often misunderstood) discussion of the specific structure of our history, which is in his opinion no mere chronicle of events, it is often claimed that the property of an event of the past which should be foremost in the focus of a historical explanation, namely its historical meaning, could not be causally explained. The argument for this assertion is the fact that historical events can change their historical meaning in the course of time – simply because of what happened afterwards. I don't want to challenge this fact. But I want to show in my talk that this so called specific historical relation between events can perfectly well be causally explained. The background of my thesis is the conviction that histories have a real structure and that the historical meaning of past events is determined by the causal and temporal structure of these events. The conception of causality, which I am supposing, is a counterfactual analysis of causal relations. It is argued that an expansion or revision of this analysis can meet the mentioned challenge of a changing historical meaning.