

This is a preprint of the article published in *Collingwood and British Idealism Studies*, Vol. 22, No. 1, pp. 453-461, January 2016. Please use the published version [here](#) for citing this article.

Collingwood and Manipulability-based Approaches to Causation: Methodological Issues

Elena Popa

Collingwood's view on causation draws on his considerations on metaphysics and philosophical method. The section on causation in *Essay on Metaphysics*, along with 'On the So-called Concept of Causation' employ Collingwood's method of investigating absolute presuppositions to clarify the concept of causation in its scientific uses. In this paper I investigate how Collingwood's methodologically-oriented analysis of causation relates to contemporary manipulability-based approaches to causation. I claim that both approaches contain two common methodologically-related elements: a) an inquiry into the origin of causal concepts, and b) an analysis of causation where the human perspective plays a central role. I further argue that these two issues are connected through Collingwood's more general idea of approaching metaphysical problems through the means of epistemology.¹ Particularly, the main questions relating to causation concern the acquisition of causal concepts and causal inference through action/intervention. In this regard, my argument is that the epistemic preoccupations of recent manipulability-based theories can be interpreted as an integral part of Collingwood's more general project of investigating presuppositions. Along with Collingwood's initial logical and historical considerations, the recent approaches that I am discussing add a psychological component to causal knowledge. Furthermore, the framework set up by Collingwood can generate a unified view over the separate issues under debate in the current manipulability literature. In what follows, I present Collingwood's stance on the problem of causation in the context of his approach concerning metaphysics and philosophical method, then discuss them in contemporary perspective, namely, compared to the methodology surrounding the intervention-based theories of causation.

1. Collingwood's methodology in relation to the problem of causation

Although Collingwood is often viewed as a precursor to agency, or manipulability theories of causation,² it is important to point out that his approach to causation is part of his more general view on metaphysics. Collingwood's discussion of metaphysics amounts to identifying 'deep background features of scientific thinking in his own time', as opposed to addressing ontological questions (Martin 1998: lv). Consequently, the distinction between three senses of causation should be read as an inquiry into three types of explanation, and thus as an epistemic claim, rather than a claim about the nature of causality.³ This subsection is devoted to Collingwood's general approach to the problem of causation along with a more detailed account of the three senses of causation and their relation.

Collingwood's discussion of causation is based on causal explanation in history, and more generally, the social sciences, and it is related to actions and agents. For example if I decide to cancel my travel plans upon hearing the forecast of a snowstorm, there are two elements relevant to what caused the cancellation of my trip. One amounts to the particular situation (the imminence of the snowstorm), the other to my own intentions (I do not wish to be caught in a snowstorm and I can act in such way as to avoid this outcome). Collingwood aims to establish the main sense of cause as a combination of these two elements – *causa quod* (efficient cause) and *causa ut* (final cause). Collingwood defines them as follows: 'the *causa quod* [...] is a situation or state of things believed by the agent in question to exist' and 'the *causa ut* is a purpose or state of things to be brought about' (EM: 292). In Rex Martin's interpretation, Collingwood's account of causation rests on an inference schema⁴ including *causa quod* and *causa ut* that aims at explaining particular actions. Martin takes it as 'an absolute presupposition of scientific history' (1998: lvii) and further holds that 'one can map the concept of causation (that is of contributory causation in the special case of a singular event or deed) onto the general account of explanation just given' (1998: lviii-lix).

Considering this explanatory framework, Collingwood's three concepts of causation can be clarified. They apply to three different explanations: sense I for an individual's motivation and action, sense II for an individual's action and its effect in the world, and sense III for natural phenomena bringing about other natural phenomena. Collingwood's definitions of the three senses go as follows:

Sense I – 'that which is "caused" is the free and deliberate act of a conscious and responsible agent, and "causing" him to do it means affording him a motive for doing it' (EM: 285);

Sense II – ‘that which is “caused” is an event in nature, and its “cause” is an event or state of things by producing or preventing which we can produce or prevent that whose cause it is said to be’ (EM: 285);

Sense III – ‘that which is “caused” is an event or state of things, and its “cause” is another event or state of things standing to it in a one-one relation of causal priority’ (EM: 285).

Drawing from these considerations there are two substantial questions regarding the problem of causation and Collingwood’s three senses:

(1) As specified by Collingwood (EM: 287, 'On the so-called idea of causation': 108), the most problematic of the three is sense III. What is Collingwood’s approach to sense III? Two further clarifications need to be made concerning this issue: one addresses the anthropocentric character of causal claims in sense III, while the other involves the status of sense III as the concept of cause at use in natural science, and construed through explanatory laws.

(2) Senses I and II clearly involve an agent’s perspective. Furthermore, on various occasions (EM: 292, 323), Collingwood traces the uses of causal concepts to sense I. Given the emphasis that Collingwood places on these senses, should his approach to causation be interpreted as a version of a manipulability theory?

Regarding causation as an anthropocentric concept, Collingwood holds that 'compulsion is an idea derived from our social experience, and applied in what is called a "metaphorical" way not only to our relations with things in nature (sense II of the word cause), but also to relations which these things have among themselves (sense III). *Causal propositions in sense III are descriptions of relations between natural events in anthropomorphic terms*' (EM: 322, my emphasis). Closely connected with this view, Collingwood denies the use of causal terms in physics, for the reason that there is a human element to the concept of cause that should have no place in physics.

As to the use of sense III in natural science, Collingwood relies on a Newtonian view of events following the laws of motion: '(a) those that happen according to law; (b) those that happen as the effect of causes, class (a) has expanded to such an extent as to swallow up (b)': (EM: 327, 'On the so-called idea of causation': 106) Here Collingwood relies on the laws of physics to explain the expansion of causal concepts past the agent's perspective (i.e. from senses I and II to sense III). Furthermore, when discussing sense III in 'On the So-called Idea of Causation', Collingwood specifies that 'when we use it in sense III we should do better to speak of "laws" and their "instances."' (p. 86) Thus, Collingwood explains sense III causes according to the absolute presupposition specified above: all senses of causal explanations refer to agents performing certain actions in order to reach certain goals, and this goes back to

sense I (as the historical sense). This perspective is not satisfactory in the case of causal claims concerning natural science, however. Collingwood proposes, thus, that causation between events in nature be explained by reference to laws. One way of bringing these two considerations together is by taking sense III to develop from the same background presupposition underlying senses I and II; this involves a certain level of abstraction until causes between natural events can be spelled out in terms of laws.⁵ The fact that Collingwood argues against causal claims in physics is a mark of a human-dependent constituent of causation, even taken in sense III. This point is further enforced by the fact that Collingwood considers that sense III ‘logically presupposes’ sense I: ‘sense I does not logically presuppose sense III. On the contrary, (...) both sense II and III logically presuppose sense I’ (EM: 292)

Question (2) above concerns the legitimacy of an interpretation of Collingwood’s views on causation as a kind of manipulability approach. Martin’s interpretation denies that ‘*manipulability* through human action should be singled out as the root of the idea’, on the grounds that ‘it is too narrow a notion to play this role and is [...] but a special case of a more general idea that Collingwood emphasized in discussing contributory causes of particular events or actions or states of affairs’ (Martin 1998: lxiii). Martin further claims that ‘while holding to an interventionist account of causation [Collingwood] did not think that such accounts implied that causal interventions were or were necessarily like performances or manipulable interventions by human, or human-like agents’ and that for Collingwood causes do not require laws (1998: lxiv).

Given that the main aim of this paper is to compare Collingwood’s method of defining causation to contemporary manipulability-based approaches, it is necessary to focus on this point. Taking Martin’s considerations into account along with the previous remarks on sense III, should Collingwood’s view be interpreted as a version of a manipulability theory? This issue, in my interpretation, comes down to the description of sense I and its connection to a human element (acting on certain motivations given a specific situation) as the historical and/or logically prior sense. If manipulability is taken as necessarily related to human action, then I agree with Martin on it being too narrow a concept to cover all of Collingwood’s three uses. However, if manipulability is thought of in the sense of human action as the origin of causal thinking, while the more objective uses, building up to sense III, are simply modelled on this presupposition, then Collingwood’s account on causal explanation can be taken to be a version of a manipulability theory. This interpretation is supported by some of the considerations above: the talk of laws, which, although present at sense III, are not necessary for Collingwood’s other senses (and thus, a law-based concept of causation is not regarded a

rival to the interventionist one, or as a more fundamental one), and, further, as the physics talk shows, there is a human component to sense III. In the context of Collingwood's view on causation, the reliance on laws can answer one of the most serious objections against manipulability approaches to causation: how to explain causal instances not manipulable by human beings? If my earlier considerations are right, though, even in this case, the understanding of causation is modelled on human action.

To conclude, the discussion above reveals the following: if manipulation means actual intervention by human beings, then manipulability is too narrow a concept to account for Collingwood's view of causation. If, however, manipulation involves the idea that causation is a concept built originating in human action, then Collingwood's account could be counted as a manipulability account.

2. A methodological frame for recent approaches to causation as manipulability

In order to compare the methodology underlying Collingwood's distinction of three senses of causation with contemporary manipulability-based approaches their main assumptions should be made clarified. My claim here is that Collingwood's view shares two distinctive features with contemporary approaches to causation as agency/manipulability:

1. The interest in the origin of causal concepts - a consequence of this interest is the starting point of the causation talk which, in both the case of Collingwood, as well as in the contemporary approaches that I discuss, is epistemically, or methodologically oriented.
2. The role of the human perspective, and human action in particular, in defining causal concepts (cf. 'for a mere spectator there are no causes' EM: 307) is crucial in both cases.

The theories that I employ are the agency theory (Menziez & Price 1993) and Woodward's (2003) manipulability theory. As in the case of Collingwood, the distinction between the aim of defining the nature of causation, and the aim of providing an account of causal explanation should be emphasized. In the case of both the agency and manipulability approaches there is an ambiguity between claims about the metaphysics of causation and claims about the concept of causation/a theory about causal explanation.⁶ Since I go with the interpretation that Collingwood's own approach is about three types of causal explanation, rather than causation *per se*, the comparison focuses on the epistemic aspect of both approaches. Notably, Collingwood's view has the advantage of being explicitly concerned

with causation from an epistemic perspective, while both the agency and manipulability views seem to be mixing epistemological and metaphysical claims, and thus require further clarification.

The agency theory, stated in Price 1991 and Menzies and Price 1994 defines causation in terms of the agent's perspective. For instance, Price's definition goes as follows: 'an event A is a cause of a distinct event B if and only if ensuring that A rather than not-A would be an effective means-end strategy for a free agent whose overriding desire is that it should be the case that B (and whose concern is thus to act so as to maximise the probability that B) (Price 1991: 170). This definition takes causation to be inextricably linked to the perspective of the free agent. While there are several issues with this approach that the authors discuss, the most important for my purposes here is the problem of unmanipulable causes (for cases that Collingwood assimilates to sense III causes). Menzies and Price provide a solution in terms of a principle of analogical reasoning:

For we would argue that when an agent can bring about one event as a means to bringing about another, this is true in virtue of certain basic intrinsic features of the situation involved, these features being essentially non-causal though not necessarily physical in character. Accordingly, when we are presented with another situation involving a pair of events which resembles the given situation with respect to its intrinsic features, we infer that the pair of events are causally related even though they may not be manipulable. (Menzies & Price 1993: 197).

Firstly, this principle distinguishes the agency account from Collingwood's view: unlike Collingwood, who resorts to laws in order to make sense of causation in natural science, Menzies and Price introduce intrinsic features common between manipulable (say, a computer simulation of the workings of the solar system) and nonmanipulable (the actual movements of the components of the solar system) causal instances. Secondly, if my earlier interpretation is correct, an important similarity should be pointed out as well: in both cases causation starts from human action, and nonmanipulable causal generalizations are modelled on instances manipulable by humans.

The other important theory for my investigation is Woodward's (2003) manipulability theory. Here, besides the issues about metaphysics mentioned earlier,⁷ there are further complex features of the manipulability theory that I will not go into detail about, among which the multiple concepts of causation. For my current purposes, the definition of direct cause, which is presupposed by all the other concepts of cause that Woodward uses, will suffice:

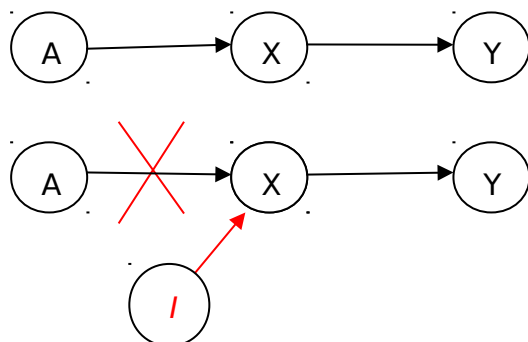
(DC) A necessary and sufficient condition for X to be a direct cause of Y with respect to some variable set V is that there be a

possible intervention on X that will change Y (or the probability distribution of Y) when all other variables in V besides X and Y are held fixed at some value by other independent interventions. (Woodward 2003: 55).

Notably, what Woodward's account of causation has in common with both Collingwood's view and the agency theory is the idea that an essential feature of causal relations is given by the fact that effects can be changed through changing their causes. However, there are a few particular features that set Woodward's account apart from both these theories.

Firstly, the concept of intervention is not focused on human action specifically, but includes hypothetical interventions which can be expressed through counterfactuals. Thus, on a case where X is not manipulable by humans, the truth value of 'X causes Y' is given by a counterfactual of the form 'If there had been an intervention on X, there would have been a change in the value of Y'. While, as presented above, both Collingwood and Menzies and Price deal with the issue of unmanipulable causes, none of them opts for a counterfactual solution. Furthermore, compared to the way in which Collingwood's three concepts of causation relate, Woodward has higher standards with respect to the objectivity of his concept of intervention.

Secondly, Woodward has his own account of what interventions amount to on the basis of a formal model using structural equations. Again, none of the previously presented accounts relies on structural equations or systems of variables. It should be pointed out, however, that my main concern here is the idea of intervention/manipulability common to all the accounts discussed here, and not the technicalities underlying Woodward's view. For simplicity's sake I provide an example rather than going through Woodward's original definition.⁸ In the causal structure illustrated below, *I* counts as an intervention on X if (i) it changes X's value while cutting the causal connection between X and its cause/causes; (ii) it does not directly cause Y, or it is not part of a causal chain leading to Y independently of X; (iii) it does not affect the values of the other variables in the system (for the present case, A).



The third point to emphasize about Woodward's concept of intervention, illustrated above, is that the definition is circular: intervention is used for defining the concept of direct cause, while intervention itself is defined as a causal concept. Woodward argues that this circularity is not vicious and that it leads to interesting insights about causation.⁹ While I am not concerned with the circularity problem here, it is worth pointing out that (1) this counts as another significant difference between Woodward's account and the ones by Collingwood and Menzies and Price whose concepts of action/agency are not explicitly¹⁰ defined as causal; (2) this problem is important for an objection to Woodward's account that I will use for discussing the issue of the origin of causal concepts in the recent causation literature.

Taking the previously described views together, both the agency and manipulability concepts of causation are methodologically focused. In the case of the agency account, while this may not be explicit in Menzies and Price 1994, it is present in Price's further work (2007, forthcoming). Particularly, Price (forthcoming) describes his view on causation as an anthropological (as in non-metaphysical) perspective on causation. Along the same lines stands the treatment of the temporal and causal asymmetry by Price and Weslake, where 'for causation (...) the practical, epistemic perspective is importantly prior to the metaphysical perspective' (Price & Weslake 2009: 437). In the case of Woodward, the focus on methodology is clearly stated in the debate over Strevens' (2007) review: 'the primary focus is methodological: how we think about, learn about, and reason with various causal notions and about their role in causal explanation (...)' (Woodward 2008: 194). A further point is that both concepts of causation are connected to experimentation, in particular controlled experiments.

In order to continue with the discussion of Collingwood's considerations on methodology, two things need further clarification. First, Collingwood's views on causation are part of his more general view on philosophical methodology, i.e. identifying absolute presuppositions underlying metaphysical thinking. Consequently, Collingwood's approach to causation is an investigation over what he takes to be the main presupposition of causal thinking in relation to science. By contrast, while methodologically focused, the contemporary views discussed above have a narrower scope, confined solely to causal notions and causal explanation. Accordingly, their discussion only impacts talk about causation and related notions, without a broader philosophical aim. Nevertheless, there are important methodological similarities between the two as far as the causation is involved, the most important of which concern addressing a traditionally metaphysical question through the

means of epistemology. The particular methods of inquiry will be spelled out in the next two sections.

Secondly, there is another contrast, the one between focusing on causal explanation in history, and focusing on causal explanation in the natural sciences (or at least the part of natural sciences relying on controlled experiments). The most important difference between the two concerns what concept of causation should be taken as the main one. In both kinds of explanation, however, the human agent has an important role: agents acting in order to pursue a certain goal, in case of Collingwood's analysis, and agents acting to bring about certain effects, in the case of controlled experiments. While, as pointed out above, the most objective formulation of the connection between causation and action is the one by Woodward, the agency version is quite close to Collingwood's original account, in the sense that one of the requirements for the relation to count as causal is that the agent in question act freely (and thus, on his/her own motivation and aims – which is what Collingwood's sense I presupposes).

3. The origin of causal concepts in Collingwood and in recent manipulability-based theories

The preoccupation for the origin of causal concepts is a feature that Collingwood's approach shares with recent theories of causation, in both interventionist and agency versions. In the case of the agency theory, while the problem is not directly discussed, the concept of causation is traced back to defining causation through ostension: 'The basic premiss is that from an early age, we all have direct experience of acting as agents. (...) To put it more simply, we all have direct personal experience of doing one thing and thence achieving another' (Menziez & Price 1993: 194). In the case of Woodward's theory, there have been studies (discussed in Woodward 2007, for instance) linking the manipulability theory to causality in psychological context. In particular, the developmental studies¹¹ pointing to a link between causation and action using a model similar to Woodward's definition of intervention are considered relevant for establishing the origin of causal concepts. There are two particular debates reflecting this methodological dimension in both theories of causation which I discuss alongside Collingwood's views. One of them (Gijsbers & de Bruin 2014) brings together the agency concept of causation with the interventionist one in order to deal with Woodward's circularity problem – it connects to Collingwood through tracing a more objective concept of causation to an agent-focused one and through the claim of continuity between the two. The

other (Waskan 2011, Woodward 2011) concerns interventionist and mechanistic models of scientific explanation – here again, the priority of a certain concept of causation is debated (although this goes beyond the manipulability framework) and a traditionally metaphysical problem is dealt with from an epistemic perspective (causation and causal explanation).

Gijsbers and de Bruin (2014) criticize the interventionist theory on the basis of a ‘genesis problem’: ‘although Woodward can hold that his theory captures the meaning of causation, the theory nevertheless makes it highly mysterious how we could ever acquire such a concept and start gathering causal knowledge’ (Gijsbers and de Bruin 2014: 1776). The problem concerns the definition of intervention: while such definition may provide a satisfactory model for causal inference and explanation, it does not explain where the concept of causation which it relies on comes from. The authors’ solution, which involves the claim that the interventionist concept of causation is derived from the agency one (as in Menzies and Price presented above) includes an important psychological component, namely information on the development of causal concepts and empirical evidence in favour of the agency concept.¹² Another important thing for my point is that Gijsbers and de Bruin specify that there is both a methodological and a conceptual continuity between agency and manipulability (p. 1783).

This debate takes a manipulability approach to causation, such as the one by Woodward, to require an explanation of how people come to be in possession of the intervention-based concept of causation. Furthermore, it puts together the two concepts – the agency one, focused on the human agent, develops into the more objective concept of causation, employing interventionist counterfactuals. It is important to emphasize the similarities between these two concepts and Collingwood’s senses I and II, and sense III respectively. Thus, the point made by Gijsbers and de Bruin concerning the continuity between agency and interventionism about causation is analogous to Collingwood’s tracing sense I as the ‘historical’ one, or as the sense that is logically presupposed by the other two senses. This analogy can be spelled out in two important points as far as methodology is concerned: (1) the aim of finding a concept of causation that is in some sense prior to the more objective sense (that is, the one applicable to natural science); (2) there is a kind of continuity between more subjective and objective senses of causality. These points are found in Collingwood – sense I is the historical sense, from which senses II and III are developed (or the background presupposition for causal explanation involving an agent acting in order to achieve a certain goal), and there is a logical continuity between these three senses. Furthermore, the same points are present in the previously mentioned debate where an agent-

independent concept of causation is derived from an agent-focused concept of causation, and there is continuity between the two. There is a very important difference to point out concerning the first point above, though: the senses in which the different concepts of cause are prior differ in the case of Collingwood, on the one hand, and in the case of the Woodward – Gijssbers & de Bruin debate, on the other hand. While Collingwood mentions a historical or logical priority of sense I over the other senses, and his investigation of presuppositions is to an important extent a historical endeavour, in the previously mentioned discussion, the priority is psychological, pertaining to the development of causal concepts. In my view, this point is the source of the main methodological difference between these approaches: a claim about the psychology of causation, in particular about conceptual development can admit of experimental evidence concerning causal learning or reasoning tasks. The interesting issue to raise is whether any connection between the logical, the historical, and the psychological can be drawn. I will discuss this at the end of this section.

As for establishing the priority of a specific concept of causation over another, one thing to mention is that while in the philosophy of causation this has been a metaphysical problem, concerning which concept should be taken to be more fundamental, grounding the higher-level uses, this no longer seems to be the focus in certain recent debates on causation and manipulability. Concerning this particular issue, the debate that I will briefly look into is the one between Waskan (2011) and Woodward (2011) on interventionist versus mechanism models of causal explanation. While I will not go into the complexities of the discussion, there are two main elements relating to my earlier discussion: the idea that one concept of causation/causal explanation may take some kind of priority over a different one, and justifying one's explanatory model based on claims concerning the origin of causal concepts (in this case, evidence from developmental psychology, namely causal perception). Waskan proposes that 'causal perception is triggered by certain forms of temporal contiguity information (...) and the application of our concept of causation as occurs in cases of causal belief is triggered either by causal perception (preferentially so in young children) or by either superficial or deep justificatory information (preferentially so in adults)' (Waskan 2011: 399). One of the points made by Woodward (2011) in his reply is that the adult notion of causation cannot be fully derived from causal perception and information on mechanisms, and that it needs to integrate considerations about difference-making¹³. According to Woodward's critique, Waskan's view, along with his considerations on developmental data, seems to suggest that the full-blown adult concept of causation is based solely on the elements belonging to the geometrical-mechanical notion (essentially, a spatio-temporal relation). Here

the issue concerns the role of action (as a difference-maker), and the need to trace it back to a developmentally earlier stage – in a sense a similar problem to the one discussed above.

An important similarity between the Waskan-Woodward exchange and Collingwood's view is the fact that the discussion moves from the metaphysical to the realm of methodology. Furthermore, while the discussion does take place outside of metaphysics, it does seem to hold a metaphysical aim: establishing a relation concerning a way in which one concept of causation may be more fundamental than another one, in the case of Woodward and Waskan, or identifying a background presupposition for an important metaphysical issue (causation), in the case of Collingwood. As with the previous debate, one can notice a preoccupation for the origin of causal concepts and for the way in which people build their way up from a developmentally basic concept of causation to a more sophisticated one (bootstrapping). Again, unlike in Collingwood's case, an important side of these issues is to be settled on empirical grounds, but there are further questions to be answered as far as philosophical methodology is concerned.

Thus far, I have presented an important way in which Collingwood's views on causation are similar to recent debates in the causation literature. This involves the relation between different concepts of causation and ways in which they could be more fundamental (both Gijbbers and de Bruin 2014, as well as Woodward 2011 and Waskan 2011), the continuity between different manipulability-based concepts of causation (Gijbbers and de Bruin), and the attempt to deal with a traditionally metaphysical issue – causation and causal explanation - through a different methodology of approaching causation (Woodward and Waskan). The most important difference that I have singled out is that the recent debates treat the problem of the origin of causal concepts as a psychological problem, and thus, a problem that can be settled on experimental grounds, whereas for Collingwood, the origin of causal concepts is a matter of history, and/or logic. The question is whether these perspectives can be integrated.

While these viewpoints employ different methods and address slightly different issues, I hold that one way of putting this into a broader context is through the idea of cognitive history of science (Nersessian 1995): 'What makes the method of analysis "cognitive" is that its interpretations create a working synthesis between case studies of historical scientific practices and investigations of human reasoning and representation by the cognitive sciences. Cognitive history (...) presupposes that the cognitive practices scientists have invented and developed over the course of the history of science are sophisticated outgrowths of ordinary thinking' (p. 195). On this view, the fact that in ordinary thinking causation is connected to

action can be used to explain the fact that the more objective and sophisticated concept of causation from the natural sciences can be traced to an earlier concept connected to the agent's perspective (Collingwood's sense I). If sense I is taken to be historically prior, adhering to the cognitive history method enlarges the range of evidence for this claim by including psychological information. Thus, the current debates focusing on causation as manipulability and on the problem of the origin of causal concepts can be viewed as extensions of Collingwood's project, with the addition of data from psychology regarding the role of causation and action in ordinary thinking.

4. Causality and the agent's perspective

On both Collingwood's view and on recent manipulability-based approaches the human perspective plays an important role in defining causal concepts. In particular, Price's more recent considerations on causation as a perspectival concept can be linked to Collingwood's analysis. Price (2007) presents his project as 'an abstract characterisation of what might be called *the causal viewpoint*: a distinctive mix of knowledge, ignorance and practical ability that a creature must apparently exemplify, if it is to be capable of employing causal concepts'. The aim is 'to understand causal notions by investigating the genealogy and preconditions of causal thinking; by asking what general architecture our ancestors must have come to instantiate, in order to view the world in causal terms' (255). This project is described in Price (forthcoming) as a 'philosophical anthropology' project.

Besides the focus on methodology, highlighted in section 2 above, I believe that Price's perspectivalism has another important point to share with Collingwood's view. It is the idea that causal notions can be better understood by looking at the characteristics of those who are able of causal thinking.¹⁴ Concerning this, Price links causal thinking to the situation of deliberation, and its specific characteristics, whereas Collingwood traces causal thinking to a set of conditions that involve acting on certain motivations and goals. This similarity can also be singled out by Price's anthropological project – the idea that an inquiry into the concept of causation can be made through methods engaging the subject capable of causal thinking, rather than through an exclusively metaphysical perspective. Thus, on both theories causal concepts are related to the agent's perspective. While for Price causation is explained through action, which is a result of the deliberation situation,¹⁵ for Collingwood causal notions are based on a presupposition involving an agent acting in order to realize a certain end. A

further issue to explore is the way in which this relates to the previous discussion concerning the origin of causal concepts and Collingwood's sense I.

Given that in both Collingwood's and Price's views causal concepts are traced to the agent's situation the same question about where the concept of causation at use in the sciences originates can be raised. As discussed earlier, while providing an account for sense III causes in terms of laws, Collingwood takes sense I to be logically and historically prior to the other two senses. What would be a perspectivalist's view be on this matter? While the means – end relation discussed in both the agency theory and Price's perspectivalism could be spelled out in terms of both senses I and II, a contrast with my discussion in section 3 must be noted. With Price's (2007, forthcoming) additions to the agency theory the origin of causal concepts is traced through an analysis (or 'architecture') of causal thinking, and is further presented as a philosophical anthropology project. In this sense, it differs from the projects described earlier, which take the issue to be a matter of psychology, for which experimental data plays an important role. My main point here is that through this feature, perspectivalism is closer to Collingwood's view. While it is not entirely clear what Price's project is comprised of, experimental data is not discussed, and it is likely that the project of disclosing what enabled our ancestors' use of causal concepts has an important historical component. This project is consistent with Collingwood's inquiry into causation as part of an investigation into historical presuppositions. The fact that these features may amount to a 'homogenous perspective' (Price 2007: 251) may be further explained by the logical priority of the agent's understanding of the means – end relation: causal thought follows a certain logic which is common across different subjects. Thus, Collingwood's fundamental presupposition about action and causal concepts can be taken to be part of the 'architecture' of causal thinking that Price is setting out. Thus, if the earlier accounts were brought together with Collingwood's view by the broad epistemological framework, Price's perspectivalism is compatible with the background presupposition about causal concepts identified by Collingwood.

The agent's perspective is an important component of Woodward's approach to causation as manipulability as well, but it is necessary to keep in mind that Woodward's main aim is to keep his concept of intervention as objective (and thus agent-independent) as possible. In Woodward's (2014) discussion of Collingwood's 'On the So-called Idea of Causation', the distinction between senses II and III is challenged, on the grounds that the separation between theoretical and practical sciences is not that sharp, and that what is manipulable by humans changes over time. Woodward's own view involves opting for a concept of manipulability that would include both instances of causation (intervention is

defined as a counterfactual concept). Thus, on Woodward's view, intervention defined in a way that incorporates both senses II and III, would take care of the objection concerning the anthropomorphic flavour of an agent-centred concept of causation. While Woodward's realist views, amounting to the priority of the agent-independent concept of causation, cannot be reconciled with Collingwood's views, there are a few observations to make.

The important methodological implication of an agent-independent concept of causation is connected to the objectivity of causal claims, and this is an epistemological aim. As specified earlier, Collingwood's sense III can be accounted for through the use of laws of nature, but it is still traced to the presupposition according to which causal thinking is tied to the agent's perspective. Woodward's version of objectivity involves a counterfactual concept of intervention, and a single concept of causation, incorporating both Collingwood's senses II and III. However, even if sense III is to be understood through counterfactuals, it is doubtful that in uses attributed to Collingwood's senses I and II people necessarily think of their interventions in counterfactual terms. Furthermore, given the perspective on the origin of causal concepts and psychological investigations mentioned above, it is likely that the counterfactual concept of intervention may be developed from a concept closely related to human action (e.g. the agency concept). I claim that the core issue here is the place where one starts: either with a one-fits-all concept of causation (Woodward), or with a presupposition underlying causal thinking that can be developed into a concept sufficiently objective for causal explanation in natural science (Collingwood). If the points I have made in the previous section are right, apart from this shift in focus, there are important methodological issues that these views have in common, relating to the investigation of the origin and development of causal concepts and their relation to action. This point is further strengthened by the fact that, albeit in psychological context, Woodward (2007) discusses three stages of causal thinking from 'egocentric', through 'agent viewpoint', to 'fully causal' that are to be understood in the context of the interventionist apparatus. While this distinction seems to be quite close to Collingwood's three concepts of causation, Woodward's claim is that the agent-independent concept of causation is the main one. In my interpretation, Collingwood's view proves to be more committed to the epistemic goal – identifying the presuppositions in which causal thinking originates and from which it develops, while Woodward looks for a concept of causation fitting all uses – it is difficult to see how such project plays out without an inquiry into ontology.¹⁶

Conclusion

While there are important differences between Collingwood's overall view on causation and contemporary approaches to causation based on manipulability, I have shown that there are significant similarities concerning the methodology underlying these views. The basis for this comparison is the fact that both Collingwood's views on causation and certain contemporary theories of causation as manipulability appear to be methodologically-oriented. Moreover, the various methodological issues falling under the debates discussed above can be integrated through Collingwood's 'metaphysics without ontology' project.

Concerning the origin of causal concepts, I have argued that in contemporary debates around interventionist and agency concepts of causation there is a question regarding the priority of one concept of causation over another in a similar way to Collingwood's considering senses II and III as reliant on sense I. Furthermore, on both the Gijsbers-de Bruin resolution of the manipulability problem and Collingwood's discussion of the three senses there is continuity between the different concepts of causation. Finally, although both Collingwood's views and the Waskan-Woodward debate do not aim at an ontological account of what causation is, their considerations on the relations between different concepts of causation use a broadly epistemic framework to address a metaphysical issue. In both cases, the most important difference that I have singled out is the focus on the psychology of causation and experimental data in the contemporary approaches as opposed to Collingwood's considerations on a historical or logically prior sense of causation.

With regard to the relation between causation and the human perspective, I have explained how Price's perspectivalism and its aim of singling out the characteristics of the causal viewpoint (which he traces to the deliberation situation) connect to Collingwood's inquiry into the main presupposition that underlies causal thinking. Furthermore, both views take the agent's perspective to be central for causal thought. Since Collingwood's considerations on historical and logical priority could fit in with Price's philosophical anthropology project, I have concluded that it is in fact closer to perspectivalism than to psychologically-focused inquiries into the origin of causal concepts. Finally, I have also explained how Collingwood's view fares in comparison with a more objective version of manipulability (Woodward's counterfactual version). While there is a difference in focus, I have pointed out that even if one starts from an agent-independent concept of causation, the commitment to manipulability requires discussion of the agent's perspective, especially in the context of the characteristics and development of the causal viewpoint.

In my view, a unifying perspective on these issues is achieved through Collingwood's more general view on metaphysics, construed as an epistemological project. The theories of

causation discussed above highlight different aspects of causation and this can be interpreted through their adherence to different methods, yielding into different background presuppositions underlying causal talk. Nevertheless, what these perspectives have in common is that they take causal knowledge as a starting point for defining what causation is. The logical, psychological, and historical elements discussed above are integrated under the project of identifying the main assumptions underlying the inquiry into causation. Thus, from a broader perspective placing Collingwood's approach among contemporary accounts of causation as manipulability provides a unifying view over apparently disparate issues regarding causation. Finally, from a narrower perspective, it is worth noting that while all of these inquiries share epistemological aims, Price's causal perspectivalism discussed above can also be integrated under Collingwood's background presupposition connecting causal thinking with the agent's situation and goals.

Acknowledgements I would like to thank the anonymous referee for valuable suggestions on developing this paper, especially concerning Collingwood scholarship. I am also grateful to Natalya Khokholova, James Plumtree, and Maria Temmes (in alphabetical order) for their feedback, which has led to a significant improvement of this piece. I would also like to thank James Connelly and Giuseppina D'Oro for editorial comments.

References

- COLLINGWOOD, ROBIN GEORGE (1938), 'On the So-called Idea of Causation', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* New Series, Vol. 38, pp. 85-112
- COLLINGWOOD, ROBIN GEORGE (1998), *An Essay on Metaphysics*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- D'ORO, GIUSEPPINA (2002), *Collingwood and the Metaphysics of Experience*, Routledge.
- D'ORO, GIUSEPPINA. & CONNELLY, JAMES (2015), 'Robin George Collingwood', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2015 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/collingwood/>>.
- GIJSBERS, VICTOR & DE BRUIN, LEON (2014), 'How agency can solve interventionism's problem of circularity', *Synthese* 191: 1775-1791.
- ILLARI, PHYLLIS & RUSSO, FEDERICA (2014), *Causality: Philosophical theory meets scientific practice*, OUP.
- MARTIN, REX (1998) 'Editor's Introduction', in R.G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, pp. xv-ci.

- MENZIES, PETER & PRICE, HUW (1993), 'Causation as a Secondary Quality', *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, 44, pp. 187–203.
- NERSESSIAN, NANCY (1995), 'Opening the Black Box: Cognitive Science and History of Science', *Osiris* vol. 10, *Constructing Knowledge in the History of Science* (1995), pp. 194–211.
- PRICE, HUW & WESLAKE, BRAD (2009), 'The Time-Asymmetry of Causation', in Beebe, H., Hitchcock, C., Menzies, P. (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Causation*.
- PRICE, HUW (1991), 'Agency and Probabilistic Causality', *British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*, 42, pp. 157–76.
- PRICE, HUW (2007), 'Causal Perspectivalism', in H. Price & R. Corry (eds.), *Causation, Physics, and the Constitution of Reality: Russell's Republic Revisited*, Oxford University Press.
- PRICE, HUW (forthcoming), 'Causation, Intervention and Agency: Woodward on Menzies and Price', [Preprint], forthcoming in H. Beebe, C. Hitchcock, H. Price (eds.), *Making a Difference*, Oxford University Press.
- SCHULZ, LAURA, GOPNIK, ALLISON, GLYMOUR, CLARK (2007), 'Preschool children learn about causal structure from conditional interventions', *Developmental Science* 10: 322–332.
- STREVEN, MICHAEL (2007), Essay review of Woodward, *Making Things Happen*, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 74: 233–249.
- STREVEN, MICHAEL (2008), Comments of Woodward, *Making Things Happen*, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 77: 171–192.
- VERSCHOOR, STEPHAN, WEIDEMA, MAAIKE, BIRO, SZILVIA, & HOMMEL, BERNHARD (2010), 'Where do action goals come from? Evidence for spontaneous action-effect binding in infants', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 1, 201.
- WASKAN, JONATHAN (2011), 'Mechanistic explanation at the limit', *Synthese* 183: 389–408.
- WOODWARD, JAMES (2003), *Making Things Happen*, Oxford University Press.
- WOODWARD, JAMES (2007), 'Interventionist theories of causation in psychological perspective', in Gopnik, A., Schulz, L. (eds), *Causal Learning*, Oxford University Press.
- WOODWARD, JAMES (2008), 'Response to Strevens', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 77:1 (2008): 193–212.
- WOODWARD, JAMES (2011), 'Mechanisms revisited', *Synthese* 183: 409–427.

WOODWARD, JAMES (2014), 'Commentary on R.G. Collingwood, "The so-called idea of causation"', *International Journal of Epidemiology*.

¹ Namely, Collingwood's 'metaphysics without ontology'.

² See, for instance, Illari & Russo 2014: 178-179.

³ See D'Oro: 20 for this interpretation.

⁴ This is Martin's reconstruction of Collingwood's inference schema: '1. the agent did perceive himself or herself to be in a certain situation, in which that agent is motivated to act, where indeed; 2. the agent might be moved to do some deed – a deed that that exemplified an action describable (...) as A – where the agent; 3. has a purpose or end in view; 4. to resolve this particular situation by accomplishing such-and-such a thing and 5. could be taken as seeing or believing that doing such a deed would accomplish or help to accomplish this very end.' (Martin 1998: lvi)

⁵ See also 'when we move from sense I to sense III we effectively remove a teleological framework of explanation.' (D'Oro & Connelly 2015) Here teleology involves the agent's perspective which, in the case of sense III is replaced by laws.

⁶ In the case of Woodward, see the debate with Strevens (Strevens 2007, 2008; Woodward 2008).

⁷ In the case of Woodward's account it is important to specify that the manipulationist concept of causation is used in a theory of causal explanation, and thus, it can be compared with Collingwood's account which has a more or less similar aim.

⁸ See Woodward 2003: 98 for a complete account of intervention.

⁹ Establishing the possibility of causation by omission, for instance.

¹⁰ Though see Woodward 2014 for a worry about prevention used as a causal term in Collingwood's work.

¹¹ Such as Schulz et al. 2007.

¹² See Verschoor et al. 2010.

¹³ Due to space constraints, I will not go on into explaining the concept of causation as difference-making. For my purposes here, it suffices to say that Woodward's definition presented above is a version of a difference-making concept of causation.

¹⁴ Although not crucial for my point here, it is important to point out that for Price this need not be limited to human beings, but to anyone in the deliberation situation that meets a set of conditions.

¹⁵ It should be emphasized that there are differences in which Collingwood and Price discuss the agent's situation. For Price's considerations on deliberation see Price 2007, section 7.

¹⁶ This point is further strengthened by Woodward's commitment to realism, which I will not discuss here (see the debate with Strevens).