Causal Laws and Effective Strategies

(in: How the Laws of Physics Lie)

p. 22: “There is a pre-utility sense of goodness of strategy” — that is, some strategies are good regardless of whether what one achieves by means of them is good. For a strategy to be good in this sense is to be effective.

p. 22: “causal laws cannot be done away with, for they are needed to ground the distinction between effective strategies and ineffective ones.”

Hunting Causes and Uding Them

Cartwright: "To explain a phenomenological law is to restate it, but in a sufficiently abstract and general way that states a variety of other phenomenological laws as well" (p. 95).

She does not notice that the exact same might be said about causal explanation. The explain A by reference to its cause is to restate what happens in terms of a generic process type of which items of A's type are a typical result. This is also a restatement of the explanans in more general terms.

Causation is related to action: it is what we can text in experiments by manipulating things. Every causal link is also a potential effective strategy. Cartwright p. 98.

Nancy Cartwright, Hunting Causes and Using Them: a causal theory must tell us how to identify causes independently from their effect. we must be able to hunt causes and then use them. a cause cannot be defined as whatever gets us the result. this means that causal processes are processes that possess a certain organic unity such that two aspects, efficient and final, can be distinguished and the process can accordingly be identified in two independent ways: as bringing about the effect (in terms of the final cause) and as something else (in terms of the efficient cause).
There is a sense in which physicists can tell us what causality is. When they know what causal processes are, they can find out how they in general work. But the do not thereby explain what it means to be causal; i.e. they do describe the difference between causal and non-causal processes, but in order to do so, they must have already drawn that distinction. Drawing the distinction before knowing the details is the job of the philosopher. We are not interested in describing causal processes once we see them, but in casting them, so that we see them in the first place.

Compare that to pregnancy: what we want is a test that tells us whether A is pregnant before it is obvious. We want a more detailed description of what pregnancy is, not a definition of it. Physicists are working on more detailed description of causal processes, such that we can identify them before it is obvious which result they will produce.

Causality has a lot to do with regularity. There can only be a typical form of a process when there is something regular. But that does not mean that causality is a regular connection between two separable events. The basic causal processes cannot be understood by establishing connection between isolated items. Still, they are re-identifiable. What we have is a regularity of unified form or Gestalt, not a regularity of connection.