
p. 50: Consider the idea of a causal chain. “Causal chains consist of links. They are discrete events, bound to neighbour-events very like themselves.”

p. 51: or, consider, the idea of a causal tree.

p. 52: Because we think of causes as something arranged in chains or trees, the concept has no application in physics. (He does not give a reason why it should not apply in physics.)

p. 52: “Causal chain accounts are just plausible when we deal with fortuitous occurrences, a series of striking accidents.” Why the fuck should this be so? Hanson thinks that whenever A causes B and B causes C, there must be some striking accident involved. Any good reason for thinking so?

p. 54: “There are as many causes of x as there are explanations of x. .... The chain analogy obscures this feature of causation.” Does it? How?

p. 54: “The chain model encourages us to think that only normal vision is required to be able to see the ... causing ...” Does it? Why? Hanson could as well argue that the chain analogy encourages us to be mean to children, and therefore is bad. Whatever. Of course there are no literal chains of events. It is a fucking analogy.

p. 55: consider “the scar on his arm was caused by a wound he received when thrown from his carriage.” (Why do we need to consider all this?)

p. 55-6: Hanson points out: to describe something as a “wound” is to imply that it has certain causes and effects.

p. 56: again, Hanson claims without much justification that something gets lost in the causal chain analogy. For scars and wounds are conceptually related: a wound is something that would cause a scar, and a scar is something caused by a wound. “To hang the wound and the scar on the same causal kind fails to mark how scars are explained by reference to wounds. ‘Scar’ and ‘wound’ are words on different theoretical levels.” But
that an analogy fails to marks something does not at all mean that it is misleading. And what is a theoretical level? If “scar” and “wound” are on different levels, do we not get far too many of them? (Later, on p. 59, Hanson implies that he might refer to a level difference of (a) sense datum language and (b) explanatory language. But if this is the difference, “wound” and “scar” clearly fall on the same side. See the quotation from p. 60 below.)

   p. 57: Hanson thinks that this shows us that there is always a background theory. (Why and how does it show us that? Do we need a background theory in order to talk about wounds? That we need background knowledge is more than obvious. So what is the point?)

   p. 57: “Similarly ‘wound’ explains the man’s scars only against the implicit background of theory brought out here. So too with ‘crater’ and ‘poison’. The diagnostic and prognostic quality of these causal substantives reflects in the verbs with which they combine, verbs which are loaded in the same way: ‘inhale’, ‘perforate’, ‘dissolve’, ‘charge’, ‘expand’, ‘stretch’, etc.”

   Anyway, Hanson seems to think that causal verbs are “theory-loaded” (p. 59).

   p. 59: He says that causes cannot be literally seen and remarks in an endnote that this seriously damages Michotte’s thesis – which presumably has something to do with children seeing causes. Children do not see causes?

   p. 60: “Causal connections are expressible only in languages that are many-levelled in explanatory power. This is why causal language is diagnostic and prognostic, and why the links-in-a-chain view is artificial.” None of this follows from anything.

   p. 60: “This is why within a context the cause-words are not ‘parallel’ to the effect-words, and why causes explain effects but not vice versa. For ‘cause’-words are charged: they carry a conceptual pattern with them. But ‘effect’-words, being, as it were, part of the charge, are less rich in theory, and hence less able to serve in explanations of causes.”

   This is plain bullshit. Why should an effect word, such as “scar,” be any less theory-loaded, if at all, than a cause-word?? Let alone less rich in content. That effects are part of the charge of cause words does not at all mean that they carry less charge. (This
‘charge’-analogy is far worse than the chain-analogy.) My guess would be that we possess more effect terms than cause terms, and that they imply more about their causes than cause words about their effects. This is clearly not how to explain causal asymmetry. (Just imagine: effects do not cause effects because the words we use for them are less rich in content.)

p. 65: “The difference between generalizing the repeated occurrences of contiguous, propinquitous, asymmetric event-pairs and understanding the ‘causal’ structure of a natural phenomenon is like the difference between having the visual impression of a lunaroid patch and observing the moon. It is like the difference between contemplating a concavity on the lunar surface, and appreciating the fact that the moon is craterous” (The crucial point here is that “crater” is a causally committed noun.)

“Coincidental event-pairs are bound by no reputable theory, and we would feel little unsettlement if one occurred without the other. ... For X to be thought of as a cause of Y we must have good reasons for treating ’X’, not as a sensation word like ‘flash’, ‘rumble’, ‘bright’, ‘solaroid’, ‘bitter’, or ‘red’, but rather as a theory-loaded, explanatory term like ‘wound’, ‘crater’, ‘stretch’, ‘pendulum’, ‘discharge’ or ‘elastic impact’.”
- true.

“This is obscured by the links-in-a-chain, ancestry-progeny view of cause and effect.”
- false.

Hanson’s main point is this: constantly conjoined but logically unrelated events are not causally related except by accident. This is what is wrong with the chain analogy. It makes us believe that there are only such accidental relations, but always the same. But causation is a more than accidental relation. This is why there are no causal relations in the sense data. The important point is: in order to “see” causation, one needs experience. Hanson thinks that one needs a background theory, but after all he wants to say the same as Hume: one needs to be familiar with what happens as a consequence of what in a certain context. And when one is able to see this, there is more in the world of appearances than isolated events connected by chains. Seeing the causal links is seeing
the events in a different way.