

Review of: "Teleology, backward causation, and the nature of concepts. A study in non-locality of reason"

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Review of <Teleology, Backward causation, and the nature of concepts: a study in nonlocality of reason—Marcin Poreba>>

To me, the most enjoyable aspect of this work is the author's evocation of the idea of backward causation implied in the philosophical concept of teleology. Indeed, the forward temporal directionality is built in the structure of teleology; whether history as a whole or an individual action or natural events, everything, everyone goes forward, heading toward the future in which the telos lies. In fact, thinking of teleology in connection to just cause and causation primarily, itself, is rare, while telos was in the category of cause in the first place since Aristotle.

So it is a refreshing attempt to try to surface up the idea of cause originally involved in teleology as well as the idea of backward causation having operated underwater. I more or less agree with the author that the discourses of teleology depends on the idea of backward causation and think highly of his/her motivation to problematize it. It seems an eye-catching challenge that the author formulates the problem in quasi-analytic terms and even to 'solve' it with the aid of quantum mechanical interpretation of causality.

Despite all that, I find several points that seem to be mistaken or make wondered about.

First, in understanding teleology, the author refers to the sense of "purpose" or "intention" only, which requires a distinct agent of action and a concrete specific action itself. But the kind of teleology that matters to philosophy is in most cases rather the holistic theory of telos qua 'ultimate end' that stresses its dual sense as both terminus and goal. The absolute dependence on the idea of ultimacy and finality is crucial. The forward directionality is logically drawn as the final moment belongs obviously to the future. In this philosophical picture of teleology, the purpose is the macroscopic universal goal that intrinsically accompanies normativity, e.g., the order itself, humanity itself, etc. etc. In the end, the very teleology itself becomes a purpose; heading towards the final goal, setting forth of the ultimate moment, is itself a normative call, a command from either logos itself or God. The option Kant takes in the third critique is the former one, making teleology itself a decision of reason itself. Reason, being theoretical and moral, is now also teleological; it in a way ought to be, in order to be systematic. Kant makes telos part of rationality; it represents desire of reason, which means that teleology deals with universality and necessity.

In this philosophical background, the problem of backward causation in relation to teleology, rather represents the problem

of normativity of forward causation, namely, the problem of the normative determination of the future to be an ethical juridic-rational- claim. Then the meaning and role of cause here has little to do with any mechanics of thinking that the future states of affairs or of system that has not happened yet affects the present states of affairs either factually or reflectively. Throughout the history of philosophy, the problem of teleological causation is that telos as cause functions axiologically rather than logically; it is not that telos runs through time as a cause whether forward or backward, in order to determine actions and events, but it evaluates time-movement, temporality and history itself, from above, from without, a priori; so the apriori logic of teleological forwardness results in a specific a posteriori valorization of the past; in accordance to the teleological necessity, the past is re-valuated and re-ordered; the new value of the past turns up as an effect: the meaning of time is effectuated. The main teleological object is not an event or a state or a system, but rather meaning, the meaning of being. That is why telos as final cause takes such a privileged and distinguished stance since Aristotle. With and without the final cause, a seed can have a completely different story of its becoming a tree. The whole Western modernity was in a way a re-struggle with, against and for teleology. Thus the problem of backward causation can be posed also on this basis; whether it is justifiable to let the meaning of the future determine the meaning of the past? That was in fact an important point of Derrida's critique of Husserl.

Secondly, precisely because the backward causation functioning in teleological claims should be understood in terms of the meaning causation and evaluation, at least in the philosophical context, the analogous use of the quantum mechanical concept such as nonlocality when applying to the quality of abstract concepts seems out of joint, though interesting as it is. In quantum mechanics, nonlocality indicates instantaneity, no time lapse in the causal influence between the two events locally limited. Here the event specifically refers to the event of measurement, an epistemological action of the measuring subject to know the state of being of an object or a system at some point of time. So not only that the purpose or intention as the measuring subject's or the instrument's is fully identifiable, but the uncommon-sensical peculiarity of the meaning of backwardness is also clear and obvious. The backwardness here does not really indicate a reverse temporal order; it is not that the state or an event at later time t_2 affects (determines) the state or an event at earlier time t_1 . But it is about a different possibility in terms of the manner in which the action of a subject(event) can relate to the state of an object (system), outside of the ordinary traditional principle of causality that necessarily commands definite time delay between cause and effect, based on the presupposition of the essence of temporality as linear forward directionality from past to future. What the EPR thought experiment shows is that in the quantum mechanical world, such principle of causality may not be true anymore, because the communication between a causal act and an effective state of being transcends temporal interval as such. It is not even a claim about the violation of the principle of causality between events. Besides it never attempts to talk about anything like the meaning of the state of being of subatomic micro objects 'living' or 'existing' in the system characterized with nonlocality.

Very differently, as to the abstract meaning power of concepts, traditionally and conventionally philosophers used to understand and express it in terms of universality. The nonlocal function of concepts, if there is such thing, is to be something corresponding to their universal meaning power, simply and precisely in the sense that the validity or truth-value of what it means is not affected by any particular space-temporal condition and context. The kind of spatiotemporal transcendence concerning the function or purpose of concepts in terms of their meaning or validity power is quite

irrelevant from the quantum mechanical transcendence of space-time interval understood among physicists. So the quantum mechanical concept of nonlocality itself really needs elaborating more clearly and accurately in the context of physics. Only based on that, how such quantum mechanical nonlocality even metaphorically or analogously can substitute or supplement the traditional notion of universal meaning power of concepts, should be explicated.

Lastly, the author's gesture of somehow defending the backward causation at the end seems rather to be an adoption of phenomenological conception of time, e.g. Husserl's: Time, neither as an objective reality nor a linear movement, but qua wholeness and absolute point of orientation of all and every meaning, it is self-consciousness as such. In such phenomenological time as time-consciousness, the present never takes up a point or an instant, it is the Presence of all meaning as such, precisely because it always contains the past and future references in the form of retention and pretention. The sudden embrace of the phenomenological time makes us think of the author's purpose of introducing the quantum mechanical nonlocality. The author somehow seems to think that the quantum mechanical concept of nonlocality gives a clue to have a different picture of time and temporality in which the boundaries of past, present, future overlap one another. But for the reasons that I stated above, the connection is so clear.

After all, it seems obvious that the author wants to save the validity of teleological claims on the ground of the phenomenological time as the consciousness of wholeness, absolute containment of all aspects of spatiotemporality as such. I wonder whether such is the whole motive of this work in the first place and then the problem of backward causation would still stay there in and with teleology. Moreover, if concepts as nonlocal provides the key to the possibility of backward causation, the nonlocal reason still faces all those critical issues centering around the normativity and universality.