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# Metaphysical principles of causality and normativity in historical knowledge

*Abstract:* The article is dedicated to the metaphysical basis of the freedom of will. Metaphysical principles of causality are considered as sources of accomplishment of different deeds. The evolution of the given principles in developing human civilization is examined. A principle of causality, which is regarded as a fundamental ontological characteristic of existence, suggests that man can fulfill his aspiration for freedom only when he subjugates his life to the objective Universal Law. From a causal perspective, any phenomenon is considered a consequence of some reason and simultaneously a cause of some different consequence. The author concludes that the realization of the complexity and diversity of the world and, consequently, the impossibility of finding any unrealistic "master key" method that works equally effectively in both the natural and socio-humanitarian spheres. Most likely, it is worth recognizing that two fundamental metaphysical principles interpret the nature of human actions in different ways. The metaphysics of causality considers them consecutive links of a specific universal series. Freedom is understood here as strictly following this series, any deviation from which is interpreted as an absolute evil. The metaphysics of normativity prefers to consider human actions as independent acts of realization of freedom, for each of which a person bears full responsibility.

*Keywords:* causality, normativity, freedom of will, necessity, objective universal law.

## Introduction

One of the urgent problems of any transitional society is the theoretical understanding of the freedom of human will and its metaphysical foundations. In this regard, the metaphysical principles of causality and normativity act as the fundamental foundations of the organization of our ideas about the world and its cognition.

Since the middle of the 20th century, as the historical and socio-cultural conditionality of the rationalistic ideals of classical philosophy has been revealed, the initial intuition of a certain universal, unified and unique rationality has been losing its former clarity and becoming vaguer and indefinite. In any case, it becomes evident that rationality can be theoretical knowledge and practical human behavior, not mediated by any theory.

## Results

The rationality of actions presupposes, at least, their motivation. Motivation, in turn, is determined, on the one hand, by the reality, the objective circumstances in which a person finds

himself, and on the other hand, by his determination, understanding, and comprehension of these circumstances. Depending on the intended meaning, a person's behavior in the same circumstances can be very different – up to the diametrically opposite. The past determines the reality, all circumstances are conditioned by events that have already taken place and led in their entirety to the present state. The task is not directly present. Instead, it is an urge, an aspiration to realize a specific imperative offered to a person or assumed by him as an ideal or norm. Thus, the present in which a person finds himself is a gap between the given (the past) and the given (the projection of the future). In this gap, a person's real life is realized, constantly connecting the thread of his being with his thoughts and actions.

Determination, as well as reality, is something out of place concerning a person; therefore, the pursuit of it can be considered a constantly renewed attempt to go beyond the boundaries of reality, as a desire for transcendence. One of the forms of realization of this aspiration is science as a way of transcending a given by formulating the laws of nature and methodological principles of thinking. However, science is not the only form of realization of such an aspiration. Prigozhin, e.g., writes that "Europeans live at the intersection of at least two different value systems: on the one hand, scientific rationality, and on the other, the rationality of collective behavior." (*Prigozhin, 1989*) However, rationality, whatever it may be, is always based on a conscious belief or an instinctive belief in the existence of a particular stable order in the world. The very existence of such a belief (or faith) is the most profound basis for the assertion of ontological definitions of being, and the actual content of these definitions largely depends on the content of the fundamental beliefs or beliefs of a particular historical epoch. How and from what do such beliefs arise, how do they affect the content of our ontological representations, how do they change, and what happens as a result of such changes?

In primitive thinking, there might not have been anything at all and, most likely, there really was nothing similar to modern scientific ideas about nature as an ordered sequence of phenomena interconnected by causal (causal) relationships. However, this hardly means that primitive thinking does not have the concept of an orderly world. Instead, we can speak not about the absence, but about the different nature of this order. What appears to modern scientific consciousness as a nature outside of and even opposed to man was, for ancient man, a direct continuation of his life world, instead rigidly bound by a system of moral or legal norms. The social order that regulates human behavior extends to the whole world, the understanding of which is based not on causal (cause – effect), but on normative (guilt – retribution) relations.

Ethnographic research shows that the idea that a person is responsible for everything that happens in the world belongs to the most ancient stereotypes of thinking. Many ethnographers point out that primitive man interpreted natural phenomena not as spontaneous events indifferent to his fate, but in strict accordance with the principle of retribution, considering favorable events as a reward and unfavorable ones as punishment. The dualism of nature as a causal order and society as a normative order was utterly alien to the primitive consciousness, just as it is alien (albeit with the opposite sign) to the scientific consciousness of modern man.

Potentially, the worldview based on normative relations differs significantly from the causal one, although the mythoreligious consciousness may be utterly insensitive to this difference for a long time. After all, for him, the connection of natural phenomena, just like the connection of social phenomena, is the result of a divine institution. The laws of nature, just like social laws,

are nothing more than an expression of the creator's will – norms prescribing specific rules of behavior to natural objects, the violation of which entails inevitable punishment (*Rozhansky, 1989*). Notably, the cause and the fault were designated in Ancient Greece by the same word – atria. Apparently, the idea of the law of cause-and-effect relations arises as a result of a rethinking of the concept of the law-norm linking guilt and retribution. The transition from the normative to the causal order consists in a person's realization that the relations between things, unlike the relations between people, are independent of neither human nor superhuman will, or, what is the same thing, are not determined by norms. However, this transition was neither simple nor instantaneous.

The history of forming a conviction in the existence of an entirely impersonal natural order, a sentence that forms the ontological core of classical rationality, stretches from the first natural philosophers of Ancient Greece right up to the meta-scientific research of Galileo, Descartes and Newton. In Plato's philosophy, the idea of the Cosmos emerges as a hierarchically organized system in which the ideal world is separated from the objective world and opposed to it. This higher world of pure entities is interpreted as an eternal and unchangeable prototype (perfect plan), according to which the order of things and phenomena that make up a person's immediate environment arises and exists. The order of the objective world is revealed to us as a reflection of the order that exists in the ideal world, but the reflection is crude, inaccurate, approximate. Actual being is not given to us in our direct experience. Therefore, comprehending universal laws and the true meaning of existence is achievable only through pure contemplation. Empirical knowledge does not deserve to be called knowledge and is designated by the unique term "opinion." Genuine knowledge results from intellectual contemplation, revealing the preset order and meaning of the world, which means man's true purpose.

Nevertheless, ancient philosophy has no complete separation of causality from normativity. Many ancient authors continue to interpret the law of nature precisely as an established order. The concept of cause is practically indistinguishable from the concept of fate: "Everything happens according to the dictates of fate, as Chrysippus, Posidonius, Zeno, and Boethius say <…> Fate is a continuous [chain] of causes of existence or reason, according to which it is controlled the universe." (Diogenes Laertius (*Losev, 1979, VII, p. 149*)) Even by the 17$^{th}$ century. This separation cannot yet be considered a fait accompli. Thus, in his "Discourse on Method" Descartes writes about the laws "established by God in nature," and in a letter to Mersenne asserts that "God established these laws... just as a sovereign sets the laws in his kingdom." (*Kline, 1984*) Newton takes a decisive step towards completely separating the causal order from the normative one when he gives a law of nature a universal character.

Affirming the unity of celestial and terrestrial mechanics laws, Newton proceeds from the firm conviction that there is a single and unique world order encompassing all phenomena of both the supralunar and sublunar worlds. The ancient concept of the Cosmos as a hierarchically ordered system is being replaced by the idea of the Universe, fundamental to Modern science, the order and laws of which equally relate to the movement of celestial bodies and the movement of terrestrial objects described by the same mathematical formulas. And although Newton's own fundamental beliefs still contain reminiscences of the ancient normative order, his theism is already "just around the corner" not only to Leibnizian deism, but also to Laplace's radical

determinism, which finally pushes the idea of a powerful will (as the basis of normativity) beyond the limits of science (and rationality in general).

In a new perspective, an unusual and previously unknown world opens up before a person, which is governed by a single universal set of causal laws that allow precise mathematical expression. However, the law is only perceived by us as the truth, excluding the possibility of all contradictory provisions, when a higher authority's sanction is sanctified. Science claims both higher knowledge and higher power simultaneously and becomes such an authority in the "new world."

The basis of science's claims to the role of the highest authority is the fundamental belief that the causal order prevailing in the world makes it possible (subject to specific logical and methodological procedures) to accurately and unambiguously correlate every phenomenon with all previous and subsequent ones.

From a causal perspective, the unpredictability of certain events is considered a purely epistemological phenomenon with no ontological prerequisites. Nothing that happens occurs without an appropriate reason. Surprises exist only for us and exist only insofar as we have not yet learned all these reasons. We hope to use the cause-and-effect relationships that we already know and have learned to achieve our goals. However, the constant interference in our activities by a mass of patterns still unknown to us leads to the fact that, against our will, we turn into one of the means of manifesting a particular global necessity.

The principle of causality, considered a fundamental ontological characteristic of being, suggests that a person can realize his desire for freedom only by subjecting his life to a universal objective law. To freely manage their future, a person who thinks about causality must exclude everything accidental from consciousness, retaining only the necessary in it. In other words, to be free, a person must become required not only in means, but above all in motives and goals: he must not desire anything that would not be "provided for" by objective necessity. Strict adherence to the causal principle does not allow us to consider our activities entirely autonomous. After all, if any of our actions is the "result" of a multitude of objective and often unconscious factors, it means that our behavior is determined by something beyond our will. "Science, – writes F. M. in Notes from the Underground. Dostoevsky, – will teach a man that… Everything he does is not done according to his will, but by itself, according to the laws of nature. Therefore, these laws should only be discovered, and a person will not be responsible for his actions."

Causal thinking is formed due to a rather lengthy process of radical change in ideas about how the world is ordered. The world of traditional society is dominated by a normative (social) order, which also extends to the entire reality surrounding a person. The New European world is a world of causal (natural-natural) order, to which society and man are now striving to subordinate. This world is literally being created in the formation of European science. It appears to us as a result of a change in the most fundamental ontological ideas about the prevailing order in the world.

One of the most authoritative creators of the new science, Leibniz, believes that the order prevailing in the world is such that "every complete action represents [its] complete cause," therefore, "from the knowledge of this action, I can always come to the knowledge of its cause." (*Leibniz, 1984*) Suppose the cause is "fully represented" in the effect. In that case, it means that

the logic of our cognition must be as consistent and continuous as the chain of causal relationships in nature. However, we are talking here not so much about the epistemological as about the ontological principle. Leibniz's belief in the causal nature of the fundamental world order presupposes that all events form a continuous series in which causes and effects are dense, without "gaps," adjacent to each other. The world appears to us as a perfect unity, an integral sequence of phenomena that are not broken at any point. But this position is nothing more than a particular ontological principle, which is implicitly present in the foundation of classical science. According to this principle, all nature is unconditionally subject to mathematically expressed laws, the effect of which is manifested in the immutability of cause-effect relationships. There is nowhere for a person to "squeeze in" here with his free will, the manifestation of which is always associated with the appearance of a "gap," a break in gradualness.

As a result, an attitude towards nature as a kind of non-historical education is being formed and is becoming widespread. After all, if the complete cause of any phenomenon is represented in it as a full effect, then this means their equivalence. However, the equivalence of cause and effect, in turn, means nothing more than the reversibility of time (at least logically). And suppose we are physically unable to reverse the global process. In that case, it is logically not only possible to make such a backward movement, but it is the direct responsibility of a man of science. The idea of the non-historical nature of scientific laws, which relate primarily to natural processes, is gradually spreading to human existence.

Over the past three hundred years, this Leibnizian "formula" of the fundamental world order has become dominant not only among scientists and philosophers; even in everyday consciousness, there is a firm belief in the immutability of causal laws that organize everything that happens in the world into continuous causal chains stretching from the endless past to the infinite future. However, by the middle of the 20$^{th}$ century, among professionals – philosophers, scientists, and methodologists of science – the conviction in the comprehensive nature of the causal world order was losing its former firmness. Disillusionment with the ideals of universal determinism is growing. As a result, the fundamental principles of classical New European rationality are in question – the ontological principle of continuity of cause-and-effect relations and the organically related epistemological principle of the unity of the system of rational knowledge. The break with tradition is so acutely realized that Gaston Bachelard characterizes the idea of universal determinism of the Leibniz type as an incredible, monstrous idea (*Bakhtin, 2011*).

And here, as in the case of the formation of the classical ideal, a change in the epistemological perspective and a revision of the ontological foundations are inextricably linked with a change in ideas about the prevailing world order. After all, based on these ideas, our preliminary assumptions about what is truly meaningful in this world are formed. The most fundamental ontological premise of classical science – the existence of nature as the last given, existing "by itself," regardless of our human existence – becomes unacceptable in the new conditions. However, along with the distinction between natural and human existence, the idea of the world as a kind of absolute inseparable unity, subject in all its spheres and manifestations to the same universal causal laws, becomes unacceptable. If, from the point of view of the classical ideal, all relations, both in the sphere of nature and in the sphere of the human life world, were considered as internal relations between the elements of a single and unified system,

now it becomes possible to include external influences in the consideration, the action of which destroys the rigid linearity of classical determinism.

The "image of the world" is changing not only due to the natural causal processes taking place in it. A change in the conceptual structure of thinking can give us a completely different structure of the division of being, open up a new perspective in which not only the meaning and significance of familiar things change, but we find ourselves in a new world with other objects and other facts. The principles of structuring of being are now considered not as initially inherent like the world, but as a result of adopting certain meta-paradigmatic attitudes. Choosing a particular concept of world order is a creative act based not so much on discursive reflection as on a volitional decision, which represents a break in the chain of cause-effect (and logical) relationships. This choice cannot be reduced to any formalized algorithm or deduced from previous history as a consequence of the cause. From the point of view of classical rationality, this is an irrational act. However, we may be talking here not so much about irrationality but rationality of a different, non-classical type – the rationality of "collective behavior." In any case, we are talking about choosing a particular model of community life.

However, unlike the causal order of classical rationality, the normative world order is no longer considered either an absolute and eternal characteristic of being and thinking itself or the result of the action of some powerful transcendental domineering will. This order is understood as established or recognized by people, not by superhuman authority. It therefore has normative force only within the boundaries of a particular cultural community or historical epoch.

The internal difference between causality and normality as principles of the organization of the world order is primarily as follows. In the causal perspective, every phenomenon is considered as a consequence of some cause and at the same time as the cause of some other effect, therefore, the causal chain is represented as a continuous line, not broken anywhere, starting from infinity and going to infinity. The normative perspective, unlike the causal one, presupposes a well-defined beginning – the very creative act of free choice of a meta-paradigm setting, which sets the boundary conditions for the functioning of not only a particular type of thinking, but also the life of the social organism itself as a whole. In this fundamental difference between causality and normativity, the opposition between the prevailing necessity in nature and human freedom is rooted. The fact that a person is free means that he can, by approving certain norms, act as the initial (first) link of a particular causal series. When deciding on this kind, he acts as the cause of the effects, not the consequence of the cause. This understanding of freedom is fundamentally different from the "learned necessity" of the causal tradition.

The causal series unfolds as a smooth transition from one possible world to another. The act of freedom is a break in gradualness, which irreversibly transports us to another world, immediately created by this act itself. Here, we are not talking about the reason, but rather about the fault. We are responsible for this transition, we created this world, and we are responsible for the fact that it now exists. At the same time, guilt is understood not in a moral and evaluative sense, but in an ambivalent (metaphysical) sense, because the birth of good or evil from our act is equally likely. Therefore, responsibility here does not mean punishment, but the consciousness of one's active participation in life and involvement in being.

## Conclusion

*Thus*, after several centuries of persistent attempts not only to create a science of nature based on the idea of a purely causal order, but also to build on its basis a completely value-free "social physics," we conclude that it is impossible to reduce the normative order to the causal ultimately. However, completely immersing the causal order in the normative one seems just as untenable. The main thing here is the awareness of the complexity and diversity of the world and, consequently, the impossibility of finding any unrealistic "master key" method that works equally effectively in both the natural and socio-humanitarian spheres. Most likely, it should be recognized that two fundamental metaphysical principles interpret the nature of human actions in different ways. The metaphysics of causality considers them consecutive links of a particular universal series. Freedom is understood here as strictly following this series, any deviation from which is interpreted as an absolute evil. The metaphysics of normativity prefers to consider human actions as independent acts of realization of freedom, for each of which a person bears full responsibility.

## Conflict of interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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