CHAPTER IV
VON WRIGHT’S APPROACH
TO
THE PROBLEM OF CAUSAL ASYMMETRY
CHAPTE R - IV

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In order to account for the asymmetry associated with causal relations—manipulability—theory has been gaining grounds over other views with a rapid pace. This obviously demands a closer attention towards a comprehensive theory of action. There is an ever-growing tendency to discard the causal theory of action, viz; that actions are caused by the intention to act. The revival of interest among the analytic philosophers concerning the theory of action opened the possibility of viewing the causal notions in a larger conceptual framework.

Georg Henrik von Wright's analysis of causal asymmetry and that of action open a new direction of philosophical debate. His great contributions in the logic and theory of action obviously play a significant role in his analysis or causality and causal asymmetry. He provided an analysis of causal asymmetry in terms
of manipulability or controlability. Thomas Reid, R.G. Collingwood and Douglas Gasking, to name only a few, had been the predecessors to von Wright in this direction.

According to Collingwood, very roughly speaking, the cause is a voluntary agent which brings about several effects with the help of voluntary actions. He claims that the original and fundamental sense of "cause" occurs in the actions of human beings in relation to other human beings. He also claims that cause form the impression of "compelling" or "causing" some other man to do something when by argument, command, threat or the like, we place him in a situation in which he can only carry out his intentions by doing that thing; and conversely, form the impression of "being compelled" or "caused" to do something. It is this primitive sense of "cause" as directly influencing or even compelling another human agent that is responsible for our tendency to use the language of

"necessary connection" while speaking of causality. He has given three meanings of cause. The first is, which produces a voluntary act, the second is a means through which a man can bring about or prevent something in nature, and the third is a condition or set of conditions in nature which are invariably accompanied by some change, whether these conditions are within man's control or not. Collingwood regards the second of the above sense of causes as "levers", i.e.; means of ends. Similarly, Douglas Gasking has argued in favour of the conception of causes as means to ends. Collingwood refers to causes as levers and Gashing as recipes. His views on the notion of causation is essentially connected with the manipulation technique i.e.; for producing desired results. According to Gasking, 'a statement about the cause of something is very closely connected with "recipes" for producing it or preventing it'. Casking claims that we have a general manipulative technique for making the iron

2. Ibid; part—III.
bar to the usual manipulative technique for making things hot, namely; putting on a fire, which in this special case, makes it glow. He says that we do not speak of making iron hot by making it glow. Because, we have no general manipulative model for making things glow without heating it. In other words, we may say that the high temperature causes the glowing, but not vice-versa. This example shows that causal relation must be asymmetrical in nature. We never claimed, according to Gasking that the effect produces the cause. Accordingly, the nature of causal relation, 'cause always produces the effect' in the sense of manipulation. Gasking, therefore, is very much aware of the need for such an analysis of causal asymmetry.

The concept of manipulative causation is more clearly and logically articulated by prof. von Wright. He has argued for an 'experimentalist' analysis of certain causal locations and explained that the
experimentalist concept of causation is supposed to capture the desired asymmetry.\textsuperscript{4}

Von Wright develops his ideas by reference to a model of the world that satisfies requirements of logical Atomism. There is a set of \( n \) basic states. He says that a state of the world is in conjunction with \( n \) terms such that each of the basic states or its negation appears as a term. According to him, occasions are basic units of time (and space). On any occasion \( 2^n \) different states are logically possible, and over \( m \) occasions \( 2^{mn} \) different histories are logically possible (See Oncological Framework).

Von Wright claims that causal analysis depends on a system. System defines what is physically possible (not everything that is logically possible is physically possible). A System, according to von Wright, is relative to a series of occasions, a

set of basic states, and a starting-point or state. It contains all the physical, possible historical ramifications of the world defined by the n basic states through the m occasions starting with the given starting point or state.

Let us consider a set of two basic states; namely p and q, and also consider two occasions like #1 and #2. Supposing that p & q is our starting-point or state at #1 occasion, there are four logically possible histories by the occasion # 2 :-

But let us suppose only the top one and the bottom one (of the above picture) are physically possible. Then our relevant system (for the two basic states, the two
occasions, and our starting state) would be the following.

It is important to note that, systems are defined in part by reference to a king of physical possibility, according to von Wright.

Let us consider a system with four occasions:
This system has actually passed through four stages, from a to d. Each node is a state of the system with basic states \( p_1 \ldots p_n \). Von Wright defines the top row as the course that nature would take unless (active) interference with the normal course of nature takes place. Thus \( aTb_i \) (i.e. a and next \( b_i \)) would happen an occasion \#1 unless someone acted so that \( aTb_2 \) happens. And if we are giver, that \( b_2 \) obtains at \#2, then \( b_2Tc_2 \) unless someone acted so that \( b_2Tc_3 \) or \( b_2tc_2 \), and so on. Thus we can say that in von Wright's system, an every occasion, nature not only does but \textit{would} behave in a certain way but for the interference of agents.

Von Wright develops a formal (logical) apparatus for characterizing causal relation. He also adopts an internationalist view for the formulation of the causal relation and rejects the extensionalist approach on the familiar ground that the genuine causal statement
permits us to extract the corresponding counter factual conditionals. After the formulations of the counterfactual conditionals, he goes on to elaborate how a counterfactual conditional can be "verified", if they can be verified at all. Von Wright seems to be on the right track when he says that the ground for asserting a causal counterfactual conditional is an inductive generalisation. Thus a "verification" of a causal counterfactual conditionals will also make sure that the generalization is a nomic one. Here he brings in the human "interference with the normal course of nature". For him, the observed regularity does not give us the assurance that it required for the justification of counterfactual conditionals. The assurance rests on the possibility of free human action. We might have observed in the past that a certain state described by 'p' is always followed by the state described by 'q' but this observation, by itself, is not enough to give us the assurance that this relation will continue to hold. What gives us the assurance that
this relation will continue to hold is the fact that by bringing about the state of affairs described by 'p' we can bring about the state of affairs described by 'q' and by preventing the state of affairs described by 'p' we can prevent the state of affairs described by 'q' from occurring. This pair of experiments, analogous to that of Mill's methods of difference, give us the assurance that the pair of the states of affairs will continue to exhibit the same relation in future, and consequently the generalization connecting the two states of affairs in question is a nomic one.

For the analysis of the nomic connection in causal relation, von Wright develops a complex formal logical apparatus with reference to an arbitrarily selected "now", an an arbitrarily selected "total state of the world". The total state of the world immediately succeeding the "now", he calls "tomorrow" and develops a logic of tomorrow. It is similar to
that of a weakened version of his system-M of modal logic. Let us use 'MP' and 'Lp' for symbolizing 'perhaps, the state p will obtain tomorrow' and 'it is of necessity that the state p will obtain tomorrow' respectively. One can write 'NMNP' for 'Lp'. The weakening consists in the fact that the principle p→M fails to hold. From the fact that the state p obtains now it does not follow that perhaps the state p will obtain tomorrow (or on the next occasion).

he then introduces a weakened version of the system—S4 of modal logic as the "logic of future" and symbolizes 'perhaps the state p will obtain on some future occasion', that is, 'the state p is possible at some future stage' in the historical development of the world by 'Vp' and defines 'AP' as 'Vp'. It means that 'it is of necessity that the state p will obtain at some future stage* in the development of the history of the world. The principle, p→vP, fails to hold in the "logic of future" as well, though the principle ._vP (and its dual) holds


6. The principle 'MMP→Mp' fail to hold in any normal system of Modal logic.
good. Von Wright then turns attention towards the past and the total state immediately preceding the "now", he calls "yesterday". The state p obtained yesterday (or; the occasion immediately preceding the "now"), can be symbolized as \( \text{\textit{M}} \). The "logic of yesterday" too is a system of modal logic which has not yet received any standard name. Since, ontologically the past is closed, there is no room for the contingent propositions in the "logic of yesterday". But we can shight shift the "now" in the past, that is, we can shift the reference point to some occasion in the past and then we can talk about the future possibilities fro ' that reference point. We shall see that this will enable us to talk about the "lost possibilities" which is essential for the formulations of the counterfactual conditionals referring to the past, that is counterfactual conditionals of the form; 'had there been the state of affairs p (when in fact it was not there), the state of affairs

7. CD.p.23
6. Von Wright prefers to call this system as the system-R of modal logic, - see in CD.p.25
q would have been'. In the "logic of yesterday* every truth is a necessary and every falsity is an impossibility. To say that the state of affairs p obtained yesterday is equivalent to say that it is not the case that the state of affairs p did not obtain yesterday. In symbol, *"Mp ↔ N:\:Np"*. Finally, the symbol 'Vp' is introduced in the "logic of past", which is structurally similar to the system -S4.3 of modal logic. It means that 'the state, p has come to obtain in the world either "now" or at some stage in the past'. Correspondingly, 'Ap' defined as 'N\:NVNF' to mean that 'the states of p has always obtained in the past including the "now"'. This approach immediately invites the problems, viz; what are the real states of affairs that make these modal statements true ? How can we verify or confirm them ?

In terms of the above vocabularies von Wright thinks that we can talk about a "lost possibility." The state of affairs p is a "lost possibility" means

10. CD,p.26
that 'the state of affairs p is not and never was and never will be but there was a time in the past when the state of affairs p might have been (i.e. might have come to be) at some future stage'. In symbol, we can write:

\[ \neg p \land \neg \neg p \land \neg p \]

Some state of affairs, according to von Wright, are "causally necessary". That means, the state of affairs in question not only has, as a matter of fact, obtained on all occasions in the past but it is certain that the state of affairs will always obtain in all future. Von Wright introduces a new symbol for such expression and writes '⊆'. This symbol stand for 'the state of affairs p is causally necessary'. This can also be defined in terms of the concepts already introduced as fellows:

\[ \neg p \lor p \land \land p \land \land p \]

The state of affairs p is causally necessary' is symbolized as vp. This is equivalent to
$\top \lor \bot = \text{NAND}$. These he differentiates from the formula $\top \lor \top \lor \bot$ and $\top \lor \neg \bot \lor \bot$. The former, von Wright abbreviates as $\top \lor \top \lor \bot$ and the latter as $\bot \lor \bot$. We can easily check that $\bot \lor \bot \lor \bot$ is a valid principle but the converse is not. In fact, $\bot \lor \bot \lor \bot$, for him is the formulation of the "accidental generalization."\(^{11}\)

He seems to forestall the problem regarding the nature of the causally necessary state of affairs and thus says.\(^{12}\)

"...it seems obvious that molecular (compound) states may be necessary - more specifically states which are disjunctions of other states. Consider, for example, the compound state $\sim \top \lor \bot$ or which is the same $\top \lor \bot$. That this state is causally necessary means that, at every stage in the world's history, necessarily either the state $\top$ does not obtain or the state $\bot$ obtains. In other words necessarily, if $\top$ obtains, then $\bot$ obtains too".

11. CD- pp.26-27
To avoid the paradoxes of implication (whether strict or material), he thinks that the state of affairs connected by a nomic tie must themselves be contingent. The symbolic expression for the causal laws would be then something like, $Y(\rho\mu\rhoq) \& A(p\rightarrow q)$. He also anticipates the problem of the temporal relations. Can any two state of affairs be nomically related when they are temporally separated or to put it in another way, can causal actions be possible at a distance? However, von Wright recognizes the issue as a "bit problem in the philosophy of causality", and yet puts the problem aside. He only talks of contiguous causation in some details and we can formalize the statements of the form: 'necessarily if the state of affairs p obtains in any stage of the world's history, then the state of affairs q certainly obtains at the next stage' as $A(\rho\rightarrow LP) \rightarrow A(LP\rightarrow q)$. 

13. CD-p.29
Equipped with these preliminary remarks, von Wright finds himself in a position to talk about the counterfactual conditionals of the form, 'had there been p, q too would have been'. In his classic essay "on conditionals" von Wright discusses the problem of counterfactual conditionals at some length and finds that the ground for asserting a counterfactual conditional may either be deductive or non—deductive. In other words, the components of a counterfactual conditional may be "connected" either logically or not—logically. Such not—logical connection, he calls nomic and concludes:

"The problem of counterfactual conditional assertion is closely allied to the problem of the ground of induction."

Von Wright's main thesis that a counterfactual conditional asserts a "connection" between two propositions seem to be in the right direction but it will be an oversimplification to call all the "non-logical"

15. Ibid., p. 163
connections as "nomical". There may well be other ways of connecting two propositions such that the corresponding counterfactual conditional is quite reasonable. For example, 'if we were to desert our family we would be acting immorally' — is a reasonable counterfactual conditional and yet the connection is not a nomical one. However, for dealing with the problems associated with causal direction, we will require considerations of only these counterfactual conditions whose components are "causally related" or "nomically connected", We shall call such counterfactual conditionals as "causal counterfactual conditionals". That is to say, the assertions of the form would be: 'had the state of affairs p been present, the state of affairs q too would have been present'. It points out to some causal laws by way of which we can say that 'p causes q'. According to von Wright, such causal counterfactual conditionals is a conjunction of four propositions, they "contain four things". The first is 'the state of affairs p is not the case on that occasion' in symbols :~p. The second is that 'it was certain on
that occasion that either the state of affairs $p$ is not going to obtain on that occasion' (or on the occasion immediately succeeding that occasion). In our symbolism: $\mathfrak{M}^* (\neg p \lor q)$ or $fa^* (\neg p \land q)$.

This is depending upon whether the state of affairs $q$ is supposed to materialize simultaneously with the state of affairs $p$ or immediately after. Third statement is that 'it was not certain on that occasion that the state of affairs $p$ was not going to obtain' that is, the state of affairs $p \land q$ as possible on that occasion. In symbolic expression, it would be like $\mathfrak{M}^* p$. Finally, the fourth is that, 'it was not certain that the state of affairs $q$ was going to obtain on that occasion'(or on the occasion immediately succeeding that occasion) . In symbols $\mathfrak{M}^* q$ or $\mathfrak{M}^* \neg q$. This is also depending upon whether the state of affairs $q$ is supposed to materialize simultaneously with the state of affairs $p$ or immediately after. The full expression of a counterfactual conditional is thus: $\neg p \mathfrak{M}^* (\neg p \lor q)$ or $\mathfrak{M}^* (\neg p \land q)$ or, alternatively, or
This form is depending upon whether the state of affairs q is supposed to materialize along with the state of affairs p or immediately after.

Obviously such counterfactual conditional are not entailed by the nomic generalizations. The formula \( \land (p \rightarrow q) \) or \( \land (p \rightarrow \neg q) \), for generalizations do not entail that there have been or will be any occasion when the state of affairs p will or did in fact obtain. The extraction of the counterfactual conditional is only for the hypothetical cases where the state of affairs p fails to obtain and it is for all such occasion. The generalized hypothetical counterfactual conditionals are of the form (when p and q are simultaneous),

\[
\neg p \land \neg (\neg p \lor q) \land \neg (\neg p \lor q) 
\]

And when q is supposed to succeed p immediately, it has the following forms

\[
\neg p \land \neg (\neg p \lor q) \land \neg (\neg p \lor q) 
\]
This formula depending upon whether the state of affairs q is supposed to materialize simultaneously with the state of affairs p or immediately after the obtaining of the state of affairs p.

After making so much ground, von Wright proposes to throw some light on the problem of "verification" of the singular causal counterfactual conditionals which he thinks to be equivalent to the problem of distinguishing the accidental generalisations from the nomic ones. For von Wright, the mere generality is not sufficient to generate the concept of law-likeness, as opposed to Hume. The observation of the regular succession of events may give us a hint of the law likeness but the observation of the regular succession of events or the constant conjunction of phenomena, by itself, is not sufficient to guarantee that such regularity will continue to hold in all future. Here von Wright brings in the concept of human action. He thinks that the concept of law likeness is to be
built on our capacity to act, to "Interfere" with the "normal" course of nature. The "verification" of the causal counterfactual conditionals would require, according to von Wright, considerations of the possible situations of the past, of the "lost possibilities". As he puts it:\footnote{CD,p.37. and also EU,pp. 71-72.}

"... what is required for this discussion is a dive under the surface of actual reality into the depths of actualized possibilities, the "lost possibilities" of an ever growing past."

Therefore, von Wright admits that the "verification" of a causal counterfactual conditional, in straightforward sense, is impossible. It can be "verified", only in an oblique way. In some oblique sense, we can "verify" a causal counterfactual conditional by our active "interference" with the world, with the 'normal course of nature'. The very possibility of the "verification" of the causal counterfactual conditionals and hence the criteria of law likeness, according to von Wright, is based on the
possibility of "free" human action, of interference with the "normal" course of nature. He says:\(^{18}\)

"It is on this possibility, viz: of interfering with the "normal" course of nature, that the possibility of distinguishing the nomic from the accidental ultimately rests".

He further strengthens his view, which he calls the "experimentalist theory of causation" by an illustration. He asks us to assume 'p' and 'q' to be the descriptions of such logically independent states that whenever the state of affairs described by 'q' has also occurred invariably either simultaneously with the occurrence of the state of affairs described by 'p' or immediately after. To make sure that the connection between the two generic states of affairs described by 'p' and 'q' respectively is a nomic one, we must consider a situation when the state of affairs described by 'p' is not there and we "believe" that the state of affair in question will not

\(^{18}\) CD,p 39 and EU,p.72
be there on the next occasion unless we bring it about, unless some one produces the state of affairs in question. Moreover, we "feel confident" that some one can bring about the state of affairs described by 'p' on that occasion. We bring about the state of affairs described by 'p' and the state of affairs described by 'q', which too has been absent on that occasion, "dives up" on that occasion or on the occasion immediately after. This he says "will impress us". To check that the state of affairs described by 'q' would not have come in any other way, we make a supplementary experiment. In a genetically similar situation, where the state of affairs described by 'p' is absent, we "refrain" from "intervening" and the state of affairs described by 'p' remains absent. If the state of affairs described by 'p' also remains absent on that occasion or on the occasion immediately after, this will "justify" us in being "impressed". Von Wright writes: "This will confirm that we were justified in being "impressed" by the result of our

19. CD p.45 and also EU,p.72
20. CD p.45 and also EU,p.72
previous experiment". This he claims to be the nearest logical possibility of "verification" of the singular causal counterfactual conditionals. Similarly the possibility of establishing that the generalization which entail the causal counterfactual conditional is a nomic one. "What he seems to suggest is that there exists an intrinsic connection between the concept 'cause' and 'nomic necessity' on the one hand and the concept of 'action' and 'agency' on the other. He also seems to suggest that the former concept presuppose the latter ones. According to von Wright, the concepts of 'cause' and 'nomic necessity' is based on the concepts of 'action' and 'agency'. For him the concept of 'nomic necessity' or the concept or 'cause' is derivative of our concept of 'action'. Though, he does not give any argument for this derivation but it seems, that his views closely resemble that of Collingwood21. Collingwood distinguishes three different senses of the word "cause" and points out that the anthropogenic conception of 'cause' is the most primitive one-conceptually

and even historically. The Humean Idea of mere 'constant conjuction' though necessary yet is not sufficient for our idea of causation. Mere succession of the state of affairs does not given us the guarantee that this succession will continue to hold in all future; that is to say, mere generality does not give rise to our notion of "necessity" that is associated with our concept of cause. The idea of "causal necessity" is different from the concept of "logical necessity". The concept of 'causal necessity', is grounded on our ability to act intentionally, to interfere, to bring things about. Von Wright wants to say that it is vital that the state of affairs described by 'p' should be capable of being introduced by our action to be causally efficacious. That is why, von Wright concludes that the manipulative concept of causation is secondary to that of action. He says:22

"If a man throughout stood "possive" against nature, i.e; if he did not possess the notion that he can do

22. CD, p.52-53 and also EU, p.82
things, make a difference to the world, then there would be no way of distinguishing the accidental regularity from the causal one. Nor would there be any tray of distinguishing the case when p has the "power" of producing q from the case when some factor r has the "power" of producing the sequence of q upon p. Man would simply not be familiar with the idea of how it would have been, if ... this is the ground for saying that the concept of causal connection rests on the concept of action?

Now we are in a position to analyse von Wright's account of causal asymmetry. His approach to the problem of causal asymmetry is loaded with the concept of action. Von Wright is of the opinion that the notion of 'cause' is dependent, in some sense, on the notion of 'action'. He says that '... p is a cause relative to q, and q an effect relative to p, if and only if, by doing p or prevent it from happening'.

23. EU, p.70
the generic level alone. The universal generalizations, by themselves, cannot suffice as a ground for this asymmetry. If we have two different description, like 'p' and 'q' of two different logically Independent generic state of affairs, the two statements 'p is the cause of q' and 'q is the cause of p' - are quite compatible, because the two statements refer to two different causal situations. For instance, von Wright describes a device consisting of two buttons, so connected that, whenever one button is pressed the other simultaneously sinks, and vice-versa; yet one can established the asymmetrical relation between the going down of the two buttons. He says that for the two button-device, "in the case when by doing p (i.e. the button to the right sinks down) we bring about q (i.e.; the button to the left sinks down), it is p that is the cause and not q, and in the case when by doing q we bring about p, it is q that is the cause and not p. The above analysis clearly shows that the causal relation is not symmetrical but asymmetrical.  

24. EU, p.75
we may suggest, therefore, that human agency is involved in cases of causation.

This suggestion will be more clear when we explain it with the help of von Wright's "two valves" example. According to him, there is a container with two valves, a top one and a bottom one. He also assumes that the valves are so connected that when the top valve closes, the bottom valve opens, and vice-versa. He further assumes that the two changes take place absolutely simultaneously. From the above example, we become curious to know whether they are causally related, and if so, which is the cause and which is the effect here.

It is clear from the above 'two valves' example that there is some kind of "connecting mechanism." between the valves. But it does not settle the question. It must be assumed, therefore, that we (human beings) can operate the two valves ourselves. For example, we
shut the top one by pressing it with our hand and we
can also open the bottom one by putting our hands
on it. We do the first and see the bottom valve
open. We do the second one and see the top valve close.
Under the normal circumstances, we should feel convinced
that the changes are causally connected. Moreover,
we should not think that on the first of the two
occasions, it was the closing of the top valve which
made the bottom one to open, and on the second occasion,
it was the opening of the bottom valve which caused
the top valve to close. Thus, the two changes occur,
for all we can see simultaneously; and yet we confidently
distinguish then as cause and effect. So the causal
order is revealed, according to von Wright, through
intentional human interference. The only suitable way
to distinguish the cause from the effect is by way of
"manipulability". That is, the cause is the one by manip-
ulate the effect. As von Wright puts it:-
"What makes p a cause - factor relative to the effect-
factor q is... , the fact that by manipulating p, i.e. by
producing changes in it "at will" as we say, we could
25. See for detail analysis CD, pp. 63—68
bring about changes in q".\textsuperscript{26} That is to say that x is a cause of y if and only if we could bring about changes in y by producing changes in x.

\textit{Von Wright} is not in favour of the usual positivist view that the causal asymmetry can be fully characterised in terms of temporal asymmetry alone. We find that causal symmetry is different from the temporal asymmetry since he thinks that simultaneous causation or even backward causation is a logical possibility. The causal asymmetry can be established independently, without any consideration of the temporal asymmetry. \textit{\ldots} we can illustrate this by an example. Where two states of affairs, the cause and the effect appears to have occurred simultaneously, and yet a causal order is detectable. For example, consider a bicycle driver on the move. Be is pedalling and the cycle is moving forward. The fact that the driver is \textit{pedalling} and the fact that the cycle is moving forward are \textit{simultaneous}. The simultaneity of the two facts does not forbid us

from differentiating the cause from the effect. The rotation of the rear wheel and the rotation of the pedal are simultaneous and yet we are able to identify the causal order. This is, the rotation of the rear wheel is caused by the rotation of the pedal.

From this observation, it seems that we cannot ignore the possibility of simultaneous causation entirely. If we have two states of affairs occurring simultaneously and they are causally related, we must be able to account for the different between the cause and the effect without any reference to temporal order. This obviously points to the fact that the causal order is quite different from the temporal order. It is admitted that the causes always or nearly always precede their effects in time and we often employ the temporal order to decide which of the two causally connected events is the cause and which one is the effect. But we do not rule out the possibility of an effect occurring simultaneously with its cause. It will be quite justified to recognize a relation which we may call the causal priority as
different from the temporal priority. The relation of causal priority holds in one direction only from the cause to the effect, though it may not be identical with the direction of time. It does not mean that temporal order has no significance in causation. Von Wright admits that he is not trying to deny "that time is an essential ingredient in the logical analysis of causation". He only claims that the asymmetry of the causal relation, that is, the separation of cause factors from effect-factors cannot be accounted for in terms of temporal relationships alone. He says that the root of the asymmetry lies elsewhere (i.e. in deliberate human interference.)

The asymmetry of the causal relations are to be understood in terms of the capacity to interfere, or deliberate human intervention. In other words, it is to be determined by our(human) capacity to interfere by the "normal course of nature". The event over which we have a more direct control is the cause. We can

27. EU, p. 43
control the effect only through a control over the cause. At times, we may come across situations where two events are equally amenable to human control and one causes the other. In such situations, we must stick to the particular situation and the cause will be that which has been under human control more directly in that situation. For an illustration of this point we can go back to our example of the bicycle. In this case, let us suppose that the pedal and the rear wheel of the cycle are moving on reverse direction. It is also supposed that the cycle is an ordinary one. Under this situation, we also know that it is the rotation of the rear wheel that causes the pedal to rotate. By retaining the pedal in the reverse direction we cannot make the rear wheel to rotate in the opposite direction or in the backward direction. It is only by retain, the rear wheel that we can make the pedal move in the reverse direction. This observation clearly suggests that the direction of causality is to be understood in terms of human intervention. The cause factor must be amenable to human control more directly than the effect factor.
Therefore, von Wright concludes that effects are the consequence of actions while the causes are the result of the actions. According to him, 'to regard things as being causally related is the intellectual privilege of agents who think that they are, free to interfere with the world'. This he calls as the experimentalist view of causation. It makes the notion of the agency conceptually prior to that of causation. But von Wright insists that it is not the interfering or manipulating agent who is the cause, but some event which he has brought about. He very clearly says that to speak of actions themselves as causes of their results is a "bad mistake".\textsuperscript{28}

In this context, it is important to make a distinction between doing and bringing about or the result and the consequence of the action. By doing certain things we bring about something else. For example, by raising the arm, the policeman stops the car. The thing done is the result of an action and

\textsuperscript{28} EU,p.68
the thing brought about is the consequence of the action. The connection between an action and its result is logical. That is, if the description of the action is a and a corresponding description of the fact is p which materialises due to the performance of a, then p is known as the result of action a. Here, the relation between 'a' and p is a logical one. In symbols: 'Bp→p' (‘Bp’ is stand for ‘an agent does p’). And if the natural consequence of p is q, then q will be the consequence of that action A. Here the relation between 'p' and q' is not logical' but causal one. Let us give a concrete example, suppose by opening a window we let fresh air into the room (i.e. ventilation). The thing done by an action is the result of the action; but the action does not cause the result, since the result is an essential part of the total action itself. What we bring about are the consequences( i.e. effect) of our action. Thus by the result of the act of opening a certain window we can understand either the fact that the window is opening (i.e. change from closed to open) or the fact that it is open. Here the open window is
a result but also part of the action. So the relation between the act and its result is intrinsic (logical). If, the first transformation effected through action, is called the result of an act, then the second is a consequence of the action. In the above example, a consequence of the act of opening a window may be the temperature in a certain room falls. Here the relation between an act and its consequence is extrinsic (or causal).

Someone may object that the distinction between result and consequence (of action) or, the ground that what he calls a consequence is quite commonly in ordinary language spoken of as the result of an act, and vice-versa. So there is no difference between the two concepts. Von Wright clearly says that the conceptual distinction between such changes among the states as often display intrinsic and sometimes expresses extrinsic relation to a given act in ordinary language. He also says that the 'defect' of ordinary language is
connected with the fact that the distinction between
the result and the consequences of an act, although
logically sharp, is at the same time, in an important
sense, relative.\textsuperscript{29}

Thus, von Wright wants to differentiate the
notion of 'action' and 'agency' on the one hand and
the notion of 'cause' and 'lawlikeness' on the other.
And by extension between the causal counterfactual
conditionals and the counterfactual conditionals
associated in action, the result of an action become
logically dependent on the action. In other words,
a description of an action will include the description
of the result or the action, that is, the counterfactual
conditionals associated with actions and agency are
conceptual or logical. Whereas the cause-effect relation
is to be established through empirical means, that is,
the description of the cause-event by itself does
not entail the description of the effect-event. That
is to say that cause and effect are distinct events. If
event A is the cause of event " B, then A and B

\textsuperscript{29} See for details, von Wright, G.H. Norms And Action,
must be distinct events. Further two distinct events must be logically independent of each other. That is if A is the cause of B, then A should be describable independently of B and so also B should be describable independently of A. Von Wright agrees with Hume that causal relations are empirical, but he is of the opinion that observation of mere sequence, by itself, is not sufficient ground for our belief that such sequence will continue to hold in all future. According to him, this belief, i.e., the observed regularity will continue to hold in all future, is based on our ability to act, to "interfere" with the "normal" course or nature. But this relations hold between the changes among the states of affairs and not between action and changes among the states of affairs. When by performing an act, we bring about the states of affairs described by p, the state of affairs described by q also obtains as a consequence of our action. Here it is the obtaining of the states of affairs described by p that is the cause at obtaining
of state of affairs described by q. This observation shows that our actions are not caused by some event or a group of events. We may conclude, therefore, that the cause is more intimately connected with the action, while the effect is an outcome of the action in an indirect way.

It is important to note that according to von Wright, actions are not events, yet a description of an action entails a description of an events. Thus actions are not causes. But some philosophers, particularly the Davisonian group, are of the opinion that actions are events. Hence, actions are caused. At this point, it must be noted that von Wright has a lot to say about the notion of action. It is not surprising that his notion of action plays a significant role in his analysis of causal asymmetry, we must pause a little and take a closer look at his notion of action briefly.
The logic of action forms an integral part of
deontic logic, which von Wright had developed since
early fifties. The concept of action is basic to this
logic. It is also basic to explain causality, according
to him. His *Korms and Action* and *Practical Reason* are brilliant attempts in this regard. We can decipher
two different tendencies from the philosophical
literature so far as the logical form of the sentences
are concerned, viz; extensional and intentional -
depending on the nature of language that is required for
the characterization of action.

According to Davidson, actions are nothing
but mental events. As actions are events, if they
have parts, then the parts Can be causally related, he
says that the relation between actions and consequences
are causal. The sense of willing, which is a part of
basic action, causes the bodily movement which is the

31. *Practical Reason, Basi;* Blackwell, Oxford, (1983), and there are many published and unpublished
articles scattered here and there.
32. Davidson, D-"Action, Reasons, and Causes", *Journal of philosophy,* 60 (1963), 685-700; reprinted in *white:A.R.
(ed) The philosophy of Action, Oxford University
other part of the action. Davidsonian view of action can be called extensional theory of action.

In accordance with this theory, an action acquires its designation due to its particular position in the causal nexus. An action is preceded by a mental event where there is a proposition - "want and desire". Since an explanation of the performance of an action, in this view, is necessary and sufficient to cite the causal antecedents of the bodily movements associated with the action, namely, the agent's wants, desires, beliefs, etc. An immediate consequence - an action is not identical with the associated bodily behaviour; it is a complex event involving at least bodily motions, neurological events and brain events, and also the wanting, believing, etc. are parts of the action performed. And the logical form of such actions or events can very well be captured in terms of first order predicate logic. This line of discussion is very interesting as well as a controversial issue. We are not going for detailed
analysis of this view.\textsuperscript{33} Von Wright's notion of action can be said to be intentional. We shall wish to give a brief expository survey of the intensional theory of action. The fundamental units or the building blocks for an intensionalistic theory of action would be propositions or proposition like objects and a monadic operator over them. This is the notion that some propositions are \textit{made true} by an agent. The basic syntactical expression, in this language would be an agent A performs an act a such that the proposition p is made true. What corresponds to an event, what is brought about, in this framework, is a state of affairs ana a description of which is made true.

The basic insight or the intensionalistic approach towards the action sentences is that action is to be

construed as a change among the states of affairs. A proposition is made true by bringing about the corresponding state of affairs. However, the point is to be noted here is that an agent can never do p, which is a sentence, he can only do something which makes the sentence true. Thus, according to von Wright, there is a large class of action of types "doing p" where p is a proposition expressing a state of affairs. The proposition made true by bringing about the corresponding states of affairs. An action, therefore, is to be distinguished from bodily movements. An action, according to von Wright, is essentially Intentional; whereas a bodily movement may just occur. An unintentional bodily movement may be due to some conditioned reflexes. An element of intentionality is always associated with action. No one raises his hand for nothing.

34. Since I use the words 'intentional' and 'intensional' frequently in this section, therefore, I take this opportunity to underline the difference between them. Intentional is used where an action is directed to an objective or aim. This is a subclass of the intensional, which contrasted with extensional. In extensionality, if x is identical with y, then everything true of x will be true of y, and any term substituted for another with the same reference will have the same truth-values. In intensionality, expressions contain terms for mental states, ana this mean that substituted expressions with the same reference may not have the same truth—values, (this is a logical ana not a psychological distinction).
The requirements of an intensionalist theory of action are as follows: (1) The agent's behaviour should eventuate in the result of the act, and (ii) By this behaviour, the agent should have intended or aimed at the result in the sense that the actually intended event, the consequence, would causally follow from the result (practical Inference). So the result of an action will be that event which is brought about by the agent where the agent believes that by bringing about the result he will be able to achieve the event he intended. The event so achieved is the consequence. It is to be noted that the first requirement of an intentional action, according to both the theories (i.e., intensional as well as extensional) are the same; but von Wright thinks that an agent is intending a result by his behaviour is not equivalent to that of the behaviour being caused. In his own words:35 "... Intentionality is not anything "behind" or "outside" the behaviour. It is not a mental act or characteristic experience accompanying it." Thus, in normal cases, what we see directly is not mere behaviour but intentional

35. EUp115
action. Von Wright, therefore, rightly says that the theory of action is to be understood "intentionalistically" and it is to be explained "teleologically".

Action is to be explained "teleologically", means, it will be explained in terms of certain purpose or aim. That is to say that an agent achieves a certain result by doing certain thing. For example, 'an agent opens the window'. Here what he achieves thereby is the 'opening of the window'? It also implies that an agent has "freedom" to act. He is not predetermined. It may be pointed out that sartre's notion of freedom also implies an ability to act. According to Sartre, man is free. Only objects are predetermined. He says that for a man action is inescapable. One who does not choose, is, in effect, chooses not to choose and to that extent does something for which he can be held responsible. "Not to cheese", Sartre
Says "is, in fact, to choose not to choose. Thus, von Wright says 'to act is intentionally (at will) to bring about or to prevent a change in the world (in nature)." We may say, therefore, that action has counterfactual elements. Me can express it in the form: 'had there been an action, the possible result would have been.'

One may suspect von Wright's notion of action as circular. For, action may be characterized as an event and therefore, it must have a cause. If that is so, then von Wright's argument is obviously circular. It will be circular in the sense that causal relation presupposes action and action in turn presupposes a causal connection.

We have already said that according to von Wright, action itself is not cause of anything. Further, since causal relation holds between events and action is not an

event but a separate category, it cannot be brought under the causal nexus. Thus, von Wright believes that action is to be explained "teleologically" and not "causally". Teleological explanations are to be distinguished from the causal explanations in the sense that the former is expressed in an 'in order that' vocabulary and there need not be any 'nomic tie' between the explanandum and explanan. On the other hand, in the causal explanation, there exists a nomic tie between the thing explained and the thing in terms of which it is explained. Ana they are usually expressed in a because vocabulary. This distinction will be made more clear with the help of a concrete example. For instance, Ram ran in order to catch the train. This is a case of teleological explanation, since Ram's running is conditioned by reaching the station before the departure of the train to fulfill his aim or purpose, i.e., to catch the train. His belief, however, may be mistaken. That means, it is very much possible that Ram would have missed the train no matter how fast he ran. But the teleological explanation of his running may nevertheless be correct. It is a sort of explanation to the
question 'why p ?' in term of the answer 'so that q' or 'in order that q'. On the other hand, 'lightning causes thunder' - is a case of causal explanation. Here we not only mean that in a particular situation, when there was lightning there was thunder too, but we also claim that on any occasion or situation, even when there was no lightning, 'had there been lightning, there would have been thunder too: However, the distinction may be made more clear with the help of 'practical inference', which forms an essential part for any action situation.

The logic of action is represented by a "practical inference" of the following scheme. 39

1) A Intends to bring about the state p.
11) A consider that he cannot bring about the state p unless he does a.
Therefore,
iii) A sets himself to do a.

here the first premise speaks about A's (agent's) intention to do something which has as its consequence

39. EU,p.96
the fact that p is realised or brought about. In other words, we may say that A Intends to do q such that the result of the action q is the realisation of the state of affairs p. The second premise speaks about A's **means-end-belief** in the broad sense that his doing £ is factually (or conceptually) necessary for this achieving p. The conclusion describes A's begining to do a. The symbol 'A' 'P' and 'a' play, here, the rate of variables. To obtain a specific practical inference, we have to substitute for A a name or definite description of an agent, for 'p', a goal or result and for 'a' an action respectively. This can be seen in Seller's formulation of "practical inference" His concept of "practical inference" may be set out schematically as follows:40

i) I will bring about E

ii) Unless I do A, I can't bring about E.

Therefore,

iii) I will do A.

It is important to note that the conclusion of the "practical inference" is an "intentional action" and

not mere behaviour. Without doing an action, we cannot bring about our desired result.

So von Wright's analysis of the "practical inference" entails a thesis about the nature of explanation of action. If the conclusion of a "practical inference" is a true statement of what the agent's intentional act was its premises also constitute an explanation of his action. This type of explanation von Wright calls, "teleological". Unlike traditional accounts of teleological explanation, however, von Wright restricts the explanandum of this kind of explanation to intentional action, for what subsumes diverse behaviours under an end is simply the agent intending that end and his behaviour is to be understood in terms of it. But to intend an end by one's behaviour is to act intentionally and teleological explanation, therefore, presuppose intentional action. Teleological explanation presupposes that the agents behaviour be understood in terms of a "result" which he intends.  

41 There is a necessary reciprocity between an enquiry into the

41. For a details account of "teleological explanation" see EU,pp.84-131.
"intentionality" of an agent's behaviour and 'explanation' of his action. This reciprocity is the key to von Wright's conception of the "practical inference". The premises of a "practical inference" imply an intentional action without the addition of any causal or lowlike statement and therefore, explain the action in a teleological rather than a causal way.

The premises of a "practical inference" lay down the conditions in terms of which to understand the "intentionality" of the agent's behaviour. The "practical inference" is valla because its premises are constituted by the set of conditions in terms of which the conduct of an agent is to be interpreted or understood. In von Wright's own words:42

"... the formal validity of the practical inference requires that the item of behaviour mentioned in its conclusion is described (understood, interpreted) as action, as doing or trying to do something by the agent under consideration. In order to become teleologically explicable, one could say, behaviour must

42. EU,p.121.
first be intentionalistically understood". The premise of a "practical inference" imply a statement about the act that an agent's behaviour is understood to be, what he intends (aims at) by his behaviour, regardless of what the mere behaviour is whatever it is, and that is how, we must understand it. Whatever behaviour is occurring, he is acting intentionally. Von Wright's mode of analysis here is different from that of the causal theories. His aim is not to decompose the concept of "intentional action" into its mere basic elements. He regards the concept of "intentional action" and that of "intentionality" as, in a critical sense, irreducible. One does not understand the concept of "intentional action" by first understanding a concept like mere "behaviour" and then adding to it other concepts like "causality" and "desire". To understand the concept is not to eliminate it in favour of other concepts but to see it in a larger conceptual structure, in a larger conceptual frame work. To understand a concept, therefore, is not to define it in terms of other concepts but to find its relations with other concepts.
It is a great merit of von Wright that he has put forward the logical peculiarities that are associated with the concepts of 'cause' and 'action' and an analysis of them clearly shows that the two concepts are closely related. Any attempt to understand causal asymmetry and the causal notions without any reference to the concept of human action seems to be untenable. Since the relation of cause and effect is to be established in terms of our action and they are usually characterized as an extension of our notions of action. Without human interference, there may only be a regular succession of events, but that they are causally related could not be established. Our confidence in our ability to act in certain definite ways gives rise to the concept of "cause" which is in turn an act of nature. That is to say, according to von Wright, "to act is to interfere with the course of the world, thereby making true something which would not otherwise (i.e., had it not been for this interference) come to be true at that stage of its history" (see-CD,p 34). That which is made true is a description of the result of the action. An action
description (e.g. 'A opened the window) makes explicit reference to the event which was the result of the action (i.e. the window becoming open) and implicit reference to the state of affairs which would have continued to obtain had the agent not acted on that occasion (i.e. the state of affairs of the window's staying closed). This implicit reference is formulated in terms of a counterfactual conditional. Thus von Wright says that every action contains a counterfactual element within it which is of the form; 'had there been no action, the result of the action would not have obtained'. To say that the result of an action has not obtained is simply to say that the action has not been performed. When one brings about the state of affairs p, he acts. This logically entails that the state of affairs described by p is the case; our ability to act presupposes the persistence of the "normal" state of affairs. Thus, von Wright says:43 "The notion of an action and of ability to act thus presupposes confidence in and familiarity with a certain amount of regularity in the course of events in the world. The confidence

43. CD,p.39, and also in EU,pp.190—91.
we sometimes vest in counterfactual conditional statements to the effect that such and such would have been, had we not interfered with the world".

What seems to be von Wright's suggestion here is that the notions of cause and that of lawlikeness presuppose the concept of action and which in turn presuppose "certain amount of regularity* in nature. He prefers to fall back on the Humean idea of regular succession for the formulation of the causal conditionships. But this does not reduce his merits concerning the clarification of the two concepts. He clearly seem the similarities in the linguistic usages of the two concepts and consequently he finds that the concept of action is needed for the understanding of the notion of 'cause' and to tackle the problem of causal Asymmetry.
Von Wright's analysis of causality and that of causal asymmetry open a new horizon to solve the philosophical problem regarding causation. His theory of action obviously plays an importance role in his analysis of causal asymmetry. It is fair to say that von Wright has given us the most detailed and systematic statement of the manipulability theory of causation.

Kim says:44 whether the concept of bringing about q by doing p itself must be analyzed by the use of the concept of 'cause' and 'causal symmetry'. He claims that the action concept is not something that should be taken as primitive. He further says that no unitary relation corresponds to the expression "bringing about q by doing p." He offers one of the stock example in the current action theory, 'I signal for a turn by extending my left arm.' Kim points out that this example fits von Wright's formula that by doing p(where p is my left arm being extended), I bring about q(where q is the

state of affairs that a signal for a turn is made). From this example, Kim concludes that von Wright's actionist concept of causation is not wholly convincing. That is to say, the arm be extended is not cause of a signal being made. The relation between the former and the latter case is not a causal link but rather the existence of appropriate rules and conventions about signalling.

The gist of Kim's objection is that 'all the cases of bringing about are not causal; they may be conventional'. To get rid of this Kimian objection, we may very well say that von Wright himself has never claimed that causal relation is equal to that of bringing about. However, it is true that all causal relations may be understood in terms of brining about, but converse is not true (that is, all the cases of brining about need not be causally connected). For example, we do say that by killing Mr. X, Y can make Mr. X's wife a widow, but the converse need not be true i.e., 'death of Mr. X' need not be causally related to the fact of 'Mr. X's wife being a widow'. It may be conventional or social.
von Wright clearly says that 'in the case when I being about q by doing p, p is the cause and not q and in case when I bring about p by doing q, q is the cause and not p.' This distinction requires that there is some basic action, i.e., an action which we can do directly and not doing something else. That is to say, if p were a basic action, such as raising my arm, the result of it would be the cause and q the effect even if p and q were simultaneous. This suggests that in order to impose a causal direction in cases of simultaneous causation, human action must in fact be involved. It is clear, therefore, that even in simultaneous causation, where temporal factor fails to establish causal asymmetry, human action comes to our aid.

Further Kim points out that in order to understand causal asymmetry, in the cases of simultaneous causation, von Wright introduced 'human action'. That is to say, human action is needed if there is a genuine case of simultaneous causation. But in response to another objection, Von Wright himself says that he is uncertain.

45. EU, p.70
about the existence of simultaneous causation. Hence it seems, according to him, that there is no significant role of human action to understand causal asymmetry.

We may say that it is true that von Wright himself says: ‘...I am therefore, not certain whether genuine example of simultaneous causation can be found’\textsuperscript{46}. But von Bright's this remark does not rule out the possibility of simultaneous causation. If we agree that at least theoretically, simultaneous causation is possible then nobody can deny the importance of human action to understand causal asymmetry. He states that 'p is a cause relative to q, and q an effect relative to p, if and only if by doing p we could bring about q or by suppressing p we could remove q or prevent it from happening' (EU,p.70). But it may seen that there are obvious counter-instances to such a view. For example, the eruption of vesuvious was the cause of the destruction of Pompeii. however, human beings can not make volcanoes erupt, or prevent then from erupting. His answer may be such that the eruption of a volcano and the destruction of a city

\textsuperscript{46}. EU,p.76
are both very complex events, and that within each of these complex events, we can distinguish a vast number of events between which there hold causal connections of this kind. Let us suppose that the Pompeii is an instance of the causal law that the roof of a house will collapse under a certain load—and such a collapse is southing that we can easily produce or prevent.

Manipulability theory, in roost of its forms, implies that the truth values of causal statements are relative to the capacities of certain agents and thus may vary from person to person and over time, contrary to our intuition that such statements are not relative in this sense. Von Wright's concept of agent is not like an individual agent, viz; x, y, z, etc. His notion of agent represent refers to an ideal agent which need not vary from person to person and over time. Thus in von Wrightian schema, the truth value of causal statements are not relative to persons though it may be relative to a theory.

The Manipulability theory is ultimately circular, since "doing p" is to be analysed in causal terms. In other words, manipulation is a type of action, and it seems quite plausible that action necessarily involves a causal relation between mental events and events brought about by the action. It would seem, therefore, that any account or causal priority or asymmetry that involves the concept of manipulation will suffer from circularity.

The notion of action, according to von Wright, is not an event. Thus it is neither cause nor it can be explained in causal term. According to von Wright, action is analysed only in teleological term. So we may very well say that von Wright's concept of manipulability is free from this circularity.

From the above critical discussions, it seems that most of the criticisms on von Wright's descriptions, are
based on some misunderstanding of his views on cause and action. According to von Wright, the relation of cause and effect is to be established in terms of our action. Without human interference, there may only be a regular succession of events but that they are causally related could not be established. Our confidence in our ability to act in certain definite ways gives rise to the concept of cause which in turn can be thought of as act of nature.