

# 3



## Causation in History



### 3.1 Questions

1. Why is the concept of causation problematic in history and how has it been resolved?
2. “The study of history is the study of courses” E. H. Carr. Discuss causation in the light of this statement.
3. Explain two of the following aspects of causation in history.
  - Determinism
  - Chance
  - Free Will
  - Indeterminism
  - Great Man Theory
4. Giving a historical example, show the problems of historical causation.

### 3.2 Causation

The principle of causality is an integral part of the dynamic interpretation of matter; even random events (accidental) have their causes manifestations for example regularities that govern facts. For historians dealing with causality, true premises in those facts are guided by regularity in them.

### 3.3 Historical Causation

This diagnoses the causes of a happening. Asks questions such as how? Why? When? Whom? Where? Attributes blame or responsibility of the event in

question. Historians act like a judge in trying to discover whose action was the cause of the event before attributing blame. It has underlying, immediate, actual, ultimate causes and consequences. Historians ask the questions why? The study of history is the study of causes. It assigns several causes to the same event.

Historians deal with a multiplicity of causes to the same event e.g. possible reasons that made the Bantu to migrate from their cradle land (civil war, adventure, famine population pressure, famine, drought, fertile land, external attacks, adventure). An occurrence is described as being inevitable, unavoidable, incapable (one aspect leading to it is overwhelmingly strong). The historian distills from the experience of the past which he recognizes as an enable to rational explanation and interpretation and from it draws conclusions which may serve as a guide to actions.

History is a process of selection in terms of historical significance i.e. a selective system not only on cognitive but of causal orientations to reality. Historians select from facts that are significant for his purpose, so from the multiplicity of sequences of cause and effect, he extracts those and only those which are historically significant and the standard of historical significance is his ability to fit them into his pattern of rational explanation and interpretation.

Some causes are a rational and real while others are rational and accidental. Rational causes lead to fruitful generalizations and lessons can be learned from them, they serve the end of broadening and deepening out understanding. Accidental causes cannot be generalized teach no lessons and lead to no conclusions. Causality is bound up with interpretation.

Functions of history is to promote our understanding of the past in the light of the present and of the present in the light of the past. Cause is a compelling effect that produces and effects. According to positivists, causality denotes the

sum of necessary and sufficient conditions for the occurrence of any event, is a necessary antecedent to it.

Historians examine, the underlying, immediate causes, or even actual cause to the event. The actual cause to the historical event is that which completes a sufficient set of conditions. The historical agent is induced, compelled or persuaded so as to act. Causation is concerned with the following:

1. The nature of historical facts.
2. The nature of historical events (sequential way explanation of events).
3. Facts which are random, some based on chance, events (facts).
4. Events with regularity – meaning highly predictable – eating, rising of sun, setting of sun, seasons, drought etc.
5. To give meaning to phenomena, one has to distil and sequence
6. Causation therefore is concerned with change from situation A-B. what causes the change
7. Change implies conditions that exist in a place together in a particular year.
8. Change implies direction – this involves the observation of some historical facts at successive moments.
9. Change implies-mechanisms of transformation in society
10. Causation also is concerned with development (change) mechanisms in which they occur in the sense that the situation improves i.e. qualitative improvement.

11. Causation is also concerned with conditioning the elements of a given developing system, which are linked to events (facts) that are one conditioning the other.

### 3.4 Cause and Effect

This involves different types of conditions such as; condition other changes, serial conditioning, causal conditioning, direct causal conditioning and indirect causal conditioning. Causation must include change, development and conditioning.

### 3.5 Types of Causes

There are several types of causes in history such as, long term causes, short term causes, immediate causes, principal causes, essential causes, sufficient causes, real/actual causes, general causes, secondary causes, advantageous causes, necessary causes and efficient causes.

### 3.6 Concepts of Causation

#### 3.6.1 Determinism

Determinism is a principle which states that all fragments of the universe have their conditioning of cause. Determining is a concept that links the problem of laws. In history determinism is the theses that for every set of human actions, there is the same system which is deterministic with respect to this items i.e. no accidents in history. There are four views about determinism and indeterminism each has two elements; radical indeterminism, moderate indeterminism, moderate determinism and radical determinism.

### 3.6.2 Indeterminism

Radical indeterminism – this is a principle that holds that there are no regular events. All events are chance events. Even thought is evoked by causes whatever happens is accidental. Moderate indeterminism according to this view, there are both regular events which are unambiguously determined and chance events that is non-determined. Radical determinism holds that all events are regular no chance events. Moderate determinism (dialectical determinism) view holds that both regular and chance events occur, but chance events are such that only apparently, being also determined i.e. every event is both regular and chance events. Regular because it is linked with specified regularities. Chance because it may not appear at the surface of the events, they manifest itself in disguised form.

For a historical fact or event to occur there should be both necessary and sufficient conditions that is both the principal causes exist and that advantageous or chance (side cause) which work on behalf of principle cause also exists.

### 3.6.3 What Makes an Event both Sufficient and Necessary?

Karl Marx (moderate determinism) says “world history would have a very mystical character if there were no room in it for chance this chance itself becomes part and parcel of the general trend of development and is compensated by other forms of chance.”

Trotsky argues “the entire historical process is a refraction of historical laws through the accidental. In the language of biology historical laws are revealed through the natural selection of accidents.” Radical determinism is extreme and the closer to truth is moderate indeterminism. Dialectical or moderate

indeterminism is closer to the truth for it allows for both of them (regular/chance). Therefore the history researchers need to penetrate the chance event.

According to H.L.A Hart and A.M. Honore they argue that causes are abnormalities, they argue that causes are deviations from the events. Then a customary norm breaks down, it is due to a form of deviation from the protective customary produces. In this case a cause becomes an omission which coincides with what is reprehensible by established standards of conduct.

William Dray, talks of a gardener who is to take care of flowers, the job is to water flowers if the flowers dry up then investigate the cause what you need is to question the gardener. If he forgot – deviated from the norm – forgetting is an omission and deviation from the norm and thus the cause of drying is because of lack of watering by the gardener.

Voluntary action can be both cause and non-causal in nature for example a thief snatches bag or purse handing over another. Where do historians lay the cause, the lady for being careless or the thief? A problem of cause emerges because there is value judgment in historian in attributing the causes. In this case the historian is required to judge the cause before attributing the blame. Why do people volunteer to assist? Find out what the person volunteering is expected to get. Are there hidden causes to the action? Does charity work have hidden motives? What is the motive behind the assistance?

### **3.7 Historical Causation: Why is it Problematic?**

Historians ought to be able to say what brought things about as well as what in fact occurred and yet there is evidently for more disagreements among them in diagnosing causes than in delineating the precise course of events.

Causes of the First World War; what really caused the war? Was it the personality of with German emperor the fundamental factor, or was it the economic rivalry of the great powers? Was it nationalism in Europe; was it the destruction the balance of power?

The fact that there are no clear and agreed answers to questions of this sort certainly troubles some students of history. Different historians have different answers to the same question. The difficulties in identifying causes in history are due what an historical cause is? What caused the relations between the main European powers to deteriorate sharply in the 19<sup>th</sup> century? Causes cannot operate in isolation cause is only one of a number of necessary conditions to compel, forces, prompt the gear to act. Several or a variety of affairs or factors were in operation to led to necessary and sufficient conditions. For an event to occur it is prompted by all the events which preceded it (antecedent factors).