Causation in International Relations

World political processes, such as wars and globalisation, are engendered by complex sets of causes and conditions. Although the idea of causation is fundamental to the field of International Relations, what the concept of cause means or entails has remained an unresolved and contested matter. In recent decades ferocious debates have surrounded the idea of causal analysis, some scholars even questioning the legitimacy of applying the notion of cause in the study of International Relations. This book suggests that underlying the debates on causation in the field of International Relations is a set of problematic assumptions (deterministic, mechanistic and empiricist) and that we should reclaim causal analysis from the dominant discourse of causation. Milja Kurki argues that reinterpreting the meaning, aims and methods of social scientific causal analysis opens up multi-causal and methodologically pluralist avenues for future International Relations scholarship.

Milja Kurki is a lecturer in the Department of International Politics at Aberystwyth University. Her research on the concept of cause in International Relations theory has been awarded prizes by the British International Studies Association and the Political Studies Association.
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This book argues that the concept of cause should be liberated from the deterministic and mechanistic connotations that it has in much of modern philosophy, social theory and International Relations scholarship. It is argued that we should look towards alternative philosophies of science in order to grasp the multiplicity of meanings that the notion of cause can have and for the many non-deterministic senses in which causes work to be appreciated. If the argument here is accepted and causes are seen to refer to all those things that we talk of, not only as ‘pushing and pulling’ causes, but also as ‘becauses’, as ‘influences’, or as ‘constraining and enabling’ conditions, then there are many causes to this work itself. It has by no means been predetermined in its outcome or process, but nevertheless has been shaped by many ‘enabling’ causal conditions. Since causal accounts, it seems, should entail recognition of manifold causal forces, I must begin by expressing my personal gratitude to the many people and institutions that have facilitated, encouraged and influenced this work.

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Milja Kurki
Helsinki