

MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE CAUSAL NATURE OF OMISSIONS

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A punches B in the face and B subsequently develops a black eye. There seems to be little doubt that there is a causal relation here between A's punch and B's injury. However, what happens when there is no positive physical connection between A and B such as the punch? Can an omission, which is essentially an absence of positive physical action, ever be considered a cause of some particular effect? There are certain cases in which we intuit a clear causal relation between an omission and an effect, yet there are cases in which, equally clearly, an omission is not causal. In this paper I investigate the notion of omissions acting as causes, in an attempt to ascertain whether causes can be considered genuine causes within a coherent theory of causation.

If a parent strikes their infant child, there seems to be little doubt that they are the cause of any physical injury or harm which that child suffers as a result. Regardless of which method of analysing causation you chose to adopt, this appears to be a paradigm case. There is a direct relation between the physical contact of the parent upon the child and the bruises which later emerge, as a result of blood vessels under the child's skin being broken by the parent's blow. To couch this within the language of two of the dominant theories of causal analysis, the parent's action is a cause because either (i) had they not struck the child, these particular bruises would not have emerged¹; or (ii) these blows are a necessary part of a set of conditions (the child being an infant unable to defend itself, the absence of someone else to protect the child from the parent's blow, the blow being forceful enough to break blood vessels

¹ This is founded upon the counterfactual analysis advanced by David Lewis. See Lewis (1984) & (2004).

etc.) which are sufficient to give rise to the effect of the child being bruised.² For present purposes, it is not necessary to further expound these causal analyses, as there seems to be an obvious causal relation here, one which satisfies metaphysical and legal definitions as well as common sense intuitions.

What happens however, when it is not the parent's positive action which injures their child, but their inaction? Suppose that the parent, for whatever reason, fails to feed their child for a prolonged period, and the child eventually dies from starvation. In this case, we cannot chart the same kind of physical connection between the parent's action and the child's injury, for it is precisely this lack of action, and lack of a physical connection between the two parties, which we are concerned with. Intuitively, it seems that the parent is a cause of their child's death, for their neglect in not feeding the child provides an explanation of how its death came about. However, metaphysics and our present legal doctrines struggle to provide a principled account of causation in this case, particularly one which attributes causal responsibility to the parent whilst denying such casual responsibility for other parties extraneous to the child's starvation. In this sense, omissions cases present a significant difficulty for our present theoretic apparatuses, as it is not so easy to track the chain from cause to effect where the alleged cause is an instance of doing nothing.

Recent developments in both metaphysical debates and legal doctrines have prompted the consideration of causation by omission, and the dilemma it poses for theorists.

On the one hand, there is a clear intuitive causality in many omissions cases, yet equally clearly there are cases of omissions which are not causal. At present,

² This is drawing upon the regularity analysis initially proposed by David Hume, and modern adaptations of it by theorists such as Richard Wright. See Hume (1748) and Wright (1985).

“academic efforts to achieve a coherent theory of...causation have not been met with significant success”³, and these difficulties are only magnified when considering omissions. It seems metaphysical conceptions of causation have not yet caught up with such cases, as although they may be able to account for causation by omission in certain circumstances, they have failed to provide a principled account which identifies precisely which omissions are and are not causal. These issues are also present within the realm of the law, with certain jurists suggesting that “perhaps the nature of the subject matter when combined with the lawyer’s need to couple issues of factual causation with culpability, make the achievement of a coherent theory virtually impossible”⁴.

One of the key factors behind this issue is the existence of both normative and non-normative considerations of causation, and the degree to which they overlap when determining an agent’s causal responsibility. Cases which involve determining whether an agent’s conduct is the cause of a particular effect seem to highlight the tension between these considerations, for labelling this conduct as causal implies a degree of responsibility on the part of the agent. To this extent, accepting omissions as causes appears to involve the subsequent acceptance of a degree of normative consideration within our causal judgments. However, the degree to which these normative factors are present within our conception of causation has the potential to produce disparities between metaphysical, legal and intuitive notions of causality.

Accordingly, it seems clear that acknowledging omissions as causes will present difficulties for our established methods of analysing causation. These methods are

³ *Royall v R* (1991) 100 ALR 669, per McHugh J at 719

⁴ *ibid.*, at 720

largely predicated on a notion of causation in which two positive physical events stand in relation to each other; whereby the first event – the cause – contributes significantly towards the subsequent occurrence of the second event in its particular form – the effect. Omissions present an obvious dilemma for this conception of causation however, for they are not positive physical events, but rather, the absence of such an event. In light of such difficulty this paper will take its primary project to be an investigation of the causal possibility of omissions; asking whether or not they can be considered genuine causes. In doing so, it is first important to review the notion of omissions acting as causes in greater detail. Accordingly, the first section of this paper will consider arguments from two theorists – David Lewis and Jonathan Schaffer – who advocate the causal nature of omissions. These arguments are not without objection though, and the second section will consider counter arguments which may be offered in response to Lewis and Schaffer. This section will also look at methods by which these theorists may defend their assertions, in particular, a new example which may be able to avoid the issues presented to Lewis and Schaffer's contentions. The idea of omissions acting as causes though, will conflict with theories which conceive of causation in terms of a relation between positive physical events. As such, the third section of this paper will consider Helen Beebe's conception of causation and the subsequent assertion that omissions cannot be causal because they are absences rather than physical events. The position reached through this discussion is that omissions ought to be considered as instances of genuine causation, although there may be a need for further work to refine our present theoretical apparatuses so that they can capably discern between causal and non-causal omissions.

I - The Possibility of Omissions as Causes

In considering the issue of causation by omission, and the adjustments it would require for a theory of causal analysis, David Lewis describes omissions as a “special case”⁵ which requires particular attention. This description acknowledges the difficulty of analysing omissions within present theoretical frameworks, owing to the nature of omissions as absences or “non-occurrences”⁶. However, it also asserts the necessity of accepting the causal nature of omissions. Lewis takes it to be fundamental that “it is not to be denied that there is causation by omission”⁷, going so far as to suggest that “simply to state this...[possibility] is to complete the reductio against it.”⁸ In defending this contention Lewis provides a rather pragmatic argument, drawing on the strong common-sense intuition that omissions can act as causes. In so doing, he is alluding to cases such as the parent failing to feed their infant child discussed above. Here, despite the lack of a positive physical action from the parent that we may point to as a cause, we intuit that they have caused the child’s death.

Lewis’ references to such intuitions and what he believes to be the undeniably causal nature of omissions, point to the fact that on some intuitive level it seems to be of little consequence whether a given effect occurs as a result of a positive event or an omission. Here, Lewis provides the example of a frightened passenger on board a train who pulls on the emergency brake chord, knowing that this will deploy the brakes bringing the train to a halt.⁹ Being reasonably mechanical, the passenger knows that by pulling this chord he opens a valve connecting a reservoir to the outside

⁵ Lewis, D ‘Causation’ in *Philosophical Papers: Vol. I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983) p. 189

⁶ id.

⁷ *ibid.*, p. 191

⁸ Lewis, D ‘Void and Object’ in Collins, Hall and Paul *Causation and Counterfactuals* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), p. 281

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 286

air, with the result that the changed pressure in the reservoir will alter the balance of forces on the brake shoes, thereby applying the brakes and stopping the train. What the passenger doesn't know though, is just how this connection between opening the valve and the brakes stopping the train will eventuate. In particular, he is unaware whether the brakes fitted on this train are 'air brakes' – where opening the valve lowers the high pressure inside the reservoir, thereby applying the brakes by removing a force which was previously preventing them from acting – or 'vacuum brakes' – where opening the valve raises the low pressure inside the reservoir, thereby applying a force which engages the brakes. As such, the passenger is unaware whether he has caused the train to stop through a process of direct causation (applying a force with the vacuum brakes) or causation by omission (removing an inhibiting force with the air brakes). However, to the extent that he is able to halt the train, it is of merely academic interest which method he has utilised, for they result in precisely the same consequence of stopping the train.

If, on the present facts, we acknowledge that the passenger is a cause of the train stopping, it seems that we must acknowledge the possibility of omissions as causes. When presented with the seemingly intuitive causal relation between the passenger's pulling of the chord and the train halting, we may either accept this as a case of genuine causation or suspend our causal judgment until we have further evidence as to the particular type of brakes installed on the train. This second response to the passenger case seems implausible for two reasons. Firstly, the evidence which we have available to us – that the passenger pulled the chord, that this opened the valve, that this changed the air pressure in the reservoir, and that this applied the brakes – appears sufficient to warrant a conclusion on the question of causation. Indeed, one

may wonder whether, if we weren't aware of the distinction between the operation of air and vacuum brakes, we would have any reservations about drawing a conclusion as to the passenger's causality. As such, to suspend judgment here pending further evidence seems unnecessary, given the plausibility of a conclusion based upon the present evidence. Furthermore, to suspend judgment, and to deny the possibility of causation by omission in this case, presents a highly implausible theoretical position. Doing so would mean denying that a passenger, driver or any other person could ever cause a train which is fitted with air brakes to halt; for the operation of these brakes will always involve an absence – the removal of the force previously preventing the brakes from operating. It is highly implausible to suggest that trains fitted with air brakes stop themselves, without some agent causing them to; but this is a conclusion which a theorist who responds with the second option will be committed to. In light of this implausibility, the most rational option in responding to this case appears to be accepting the passenger as a genuine cause of the train halting. Yet, doing so will entail accepting the possibility of omissions as genuine causes. As such, Lewis' case provides reason to believe that omissions can function as genuine causes.

In advocating the possibility of omissions as causes, Jonathan Schaffer presents a similarly pragmatic argument. However whilst Lewis asserts that, where causation appears to exist, it is largely immaterial whether the cause was an act or an omission, Schaffer contends that the notion of omissions acting as causes is so prevalent in our everyday lives, that to deny such a possibility would be completely untenable.¹⁰ Consequently, Schaffer complements Lewis' assertions as he presents "some of the

¹⁰ Schaffer, 'Causes Need Not be Physically Connected to their Effects' in Hitchcock, C (ed.) *Contemporary Debates in Philosophy of Science* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004) pp. 197-203

most paradigmatically causal cases”¹¹ that nevertheless involve omissions; and which, therefore, a theory that denies the possibility of causation by omission would have to deem non-causal. According to Schaffer, heart disease – regarded by the Australian Bureau of Statistics as “the leading cause of death for Australians”¹² – causes death by creating an absence of oxygenated blood flow to the brain, thereby resulting in cells starving and failing to keep an individual alive.¹³ Similarly, other diseases such as diabetes – Australia’s seventh largest cause of death¹⁴ – scurvy and rickets, are caused by an absence of insulin, vitamin C and vitamin D, respectively.¹⁵ Moreover, Schaffer asserts that firearms – which are the cause of death in roughly twelve percent of murders in Australia each year¹⁶ – involve a non-occurrence as the pulling of the trigger removes the sear which otherwise prevents a spring from uncoiling, sparking the gunpowder and subsequently firing the bullet from the chamber.¹⁷ As such, denying causation by omission looks to be a highly undesirable theoretical standpoint, as it entails denying, inter alia, the causal nature of various diseases (including Australia’s first and seventh most prodigious killers), as well as the defendant’s causal responsibility in twelve percent of murder cases. This undesirability leads Schaffer to support Lewis’ conclusion that omissions can be causes in certain circumstances.

II – Contracts, Omissions and Cause

¹¹ *ibid.*, p. 199

¹² ‘303.0 – Causes of Death, Australia, 2007’ published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 18th March 2009, accessed online at <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/9982A795F3C13BE2CA25757C001EF4D9?open=document>> 7th August, 2009

¹³ *op. cit.*, Schaffer, p. 199

¹⁴ *op. cit.*, ABS

¹⁵ *op. cit.*, Schaffer, p. 202

¹⁶ ‘4510.0 – Recorded Crime – Victims, Australia, 2008’ published by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 4th June 2009, accessed online at <<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/B2F27B848859B030CA2575CA00142375?opendocument>> 7th August, 2009

¹⁷ *op. cit.*, Schaffer, pp. 199-200

There are two issues or possible objections which may be raised against these arguments from both Lewis and Schaffer however. Firstly, although the examples cited by both theorists feature 'omissions' of sorts, these omissions are not the first items in the relevant causal chains being analysed. As such, working within the causal framework that Lewis establishes and Schaffer endorses¹⁸, there may still be causation despite the presence of an omission, in so far as there is overall causal dependence involved in these examples. In this sense, it is not necessary that every item in a causal chain is causally dependent upon the one that preceded it, so long as there is an overarching counterfactual dependence between the first (the cause) and the last (the effect).¹⁹ For example, in Lewis' train passenger case, although there may be no counterfactual dependence between the passenger pulling the brake chord and the manner in which the brakes were applied – given that we don't know whether the train is fitted with 'air' or 'vacuum' brakes -, the train halting is counterfactually dependent upon the chord being pulled. Here it is true that had the passenger not pulled the brake chord, the train would not have stopped, thereby indicating counterfactual dependence and causation between the two events. The same is also true of Schaffer's firearms example, as despite the uncoiling of the spring being dependant upon the removal of the sear and the force which was otherwise preventing this action, there is overall counterfactual dependence between the pulling of the trigger and the shot being fired. In this case, had it not been for the agent's pulling of the trigger, the shot would not have been fired, meaning that there is a causal relation here. Consequently, although Lewis and Schaffer suggest that a coherent theory of causation must accept the possibility of omissions as causes or else deny causation in

¹⁸ see Lewis, 'Causation' and Schaffer, p. 212

¹⁹ see *ibid.* Lewis and the discussion thereof in Section II below, in particular p. 18

the seemingly paradigm cases they discuss, a theorist who denies this possibility may respond by simply pointing to the overarching causal dependence between positive events which is present in these cases. As such, this approach appears to allow a theory to both accept these cases as causal and to deny the causal possibility of omissions.

Moreover, the second issue with Lewis and Schaffer's arguments is the fact that in each of their examples, the omission in question is not the individual's but some other event in the causal chain removed from their agency. The consequence of this, particularly when attempting to extend this analysis to the realm of legal liability, is an inaccuracy in labelling them as cases of causation by omission. For example in Schaffer's firearms case, although there may be an omission involved in the removal of the sear, it is inaccurate to describe this as an omissions case, for the action of the agent in pulling the trigger is distinctly positive and voluntary conduct. If we are concerned with the causal responsibility of the agent, then the fact that the mechanical processes of the firearm involve the removal of a force otherwise preventing the bullet from firing seem of little consequence, when the relevant conduct of the individual is positive. Equally, if we are concerned with the causal responsibility of the passenger on board the train, it seems irrelevant that the mechanics of the train's brakes involve the removal of an otherwise inhibiting force, for the relevant action of the passenger in pulling the chord was positive. As such, in employing these examples, Lewis and Schaffer's arguments in favour of the possibility of causal omissions have limited impact and credence.

Whilst these objections carry certain force against Lewis and Schaffer's assertions, it is not certain that they negate the arguments themselves, rather than merely the particular examples cited. In this sense, I now propose considering a new example which avoids these two issues and allows Lewis and Schaffer's arguments to follow.

Consider the '*breach of contract case*':

I run a businesses manufacturing machinery used in factories to package consumable goods. A is the owner of a company (C) which sells liquorice, and enters into a contract with me to purchase one of my machines for use in C's factory. I fail to deliver the machine until 2 months after the date specified in the contract, during which time C loses revenue as they are unable to process their liquorice efficiently without a machine to do so.²⁰

With regards to the first issue above, concerning the omission not being the first event in a causal chain, this new breach of contract case avoids the objection as it is my omission in failing to deliver the machine in accordance with the contract that initiated the chain of events which resulted in C's loss of revenue. It may be argued that this sequence of events began earlier, when the contract itself was signed, as it is true that had it not been for the signing of the contract, C would not have suffered these losses of revenue. However such an analysis would greatly expand the set of possible causal candidates to include spurious causes. In this sense, it is relevant that at the point of entering into the contract there is no intention on my part to breach my obligations by failing to deliver the machine, and there is therefore only a tenuous connection between the signing and C's losses. If we consider the possible outcomes which could have occurred at the point of signing, there is no reason to suggest that C suffering loss of revenue through my breach of contract is any more than a remote possibility. As such, given the loose nature of the connection between the signing and

²⁰ Although the example is modified and expounded upon for present purposes, the idea for this 'breach of contract case' was derived from discussion in Hart, H & Honoré, *A Causation in the Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 58-61.

C's loss, and the subsequent counter-intuitiveness of attributing causal responsibility to it, a more plausible analysis appears to be suggesting that there is a new causal chain which commences with my breaching the contract. Here, there seems to be one causal chain which concerns the entering of the contract – in which preliminary discussions and salesmanship stand as causes for the effect of A entering into the contract – and one which concerns C's losses – which commences with my breach of contract and ends with C's loss of revenue. This analysis appears the more plausible theoretical option, for if we accept the signing of the contract as a cause of C's loss simply because there is counterfactual dependence between the two, we also open up the possibility of an extensive array of spurious causes. There are a significant number of events which may be counterfactually responsible for C's losses, each of which is extraneous to these losses in any meaningful sense. As such, it seems we must accept my omission in failing to deliver the machine as the cause of C's loss, for fear of opening up an almost infinite regress in which we must accept, *inter alia*, my being born as causally responsible for C's losses.

Moreover, this new breach of contract case deals with the second issue discussed above, being that the omission in Lewis and Schaffer's examples was not the agent's but simply some other object in the causal chain. In this case, the omission in question is the breach of contract which occurs through the machine not being delivered to C's factory in accordance with the contract. On the facts presented, this omission looks to be one of my own agency, for it is my failure to deliver the machine to C's factory which constitutes the breach. Although it could be possible that this breach was due to some other mitigating factor, such as my supplier failing to provide me with goods, that is not the way things are stated in this particular example. As such, the omission

here is one of my own agency and not simply some subsequent event within the causal chain which is irrelevant in determining my causal responsibility.

III – Causation As A Physical Relation

These arguments in favour of the causal nature of omissions conflict with many theories which conceive of causation in terms of a relation between two positive physical events.²¹ One example of such a thesis can be found in the work of Helen Beebe, who claims that common parlance is “just mistaken when it asserts that an absence or an omission caused some event”²². Beebe advocates the view that “the causal history of any event is...a relational structure”²³, in which events interact within a “network model”²⁴, whereby the instantiation of one event will necessitate the instantiation of another and so on. This ‘network’ of relations is the way in which Beebe conceives of cause and effect, however it is important to note that her account only allows for positive physical events to exist within this network. For Beebe, omissions are the absence of a particular event, property or action; leading her to describe them as “nothingness”²⁵. As such, where there is no positive action an agent has performed, there can be no causation, for there is nothing to stand in relation to the consequence in question, as cause to effect. In conceiving of causality in this manner, Beebe’s account explicitly denies the possibility of omissions ever acting as causes.

²¹ For examples of such theses which assert the necessity of a physical connection between cause and effect see Dowe (2000) and Salmon (1998)

²² Beebe, ‘Causing and Nothingness’ in Collins, Hall and Paul *Causation and Counterfactuals* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004), p. 305

²³ *ibid.*, p. 291

²⁴ *id*

²⁵ *ibid.*, p. 294

This categorical denial of omissions as causes presents a significant discord with common sense intuitions, and their assertion that omissions can be causal in certain circumstances. For example, Beebe's account would deny that the parent who fails to feed their child has caused this child's death; a position which seems at odds with the intuitive causal responsibility of the parent in this case. Beebe acknowledges that her denial of omissions as causes may appear counter-intuitive in some instances²⁶, however she contends that accepting causation by omission creates an equal discord with such intuitions. In this sense, she states that although we may feel the parent has caused the child's death in the above example, it seems implausible to suggest that a next-door neighbour, postman or distant relative from overseas has caused this death. Yet, if it is suggested that the parent is a cause because if it were not for their omission the child would not have died, then these other parties must also be considered causes as it is equally true that if they had not omitted to feed the child, it would not have died.²⁷ Such an ascription of causation seems implausible, and leads Beebe to conclude that "when it comes to doing justice to common sense intuitions about causation by absence, neither view fares very well."²⁸

Presented with these arguments from Beebe, and those theorists who hold a similar conception of causation as a relation between positive physical events, Lewis, Schaffer and other advocates of the causal nature of omissions appear to have two primary avenues of response. Firstly, concerning Beebe's contention that causation simply cannot exist in the absence of a positive physical event as there is nothing to stand in causal relation to an effect, those advocating the causal nature of omissions can point to the strong intuition of causation manifested in many omissions cases. In

²⁶ *ibid.*, p. 293

²⁷ *id.*

²⁸ *id.*

this sense, it may be argued that in certain cases there seems to be a causal connection between an omission and an effect which is, intuitively, as strong as any connection between a positive physical event and a given effect. For example, *ceteris paribus*, the parent's failure to feed their child and their striking the child seem to be causally connected to the child's subsequent harm with equal strength. Moreover, in the breach of contract example, "a failure to deliver to a manufacturer on time a piece of machinery which he has ordered, may, like the destruction of the existing machinery, be held the cause of the loss of profits"²⁹ as the connection between cause and effect in each instance appears equally strong. The issue with these cases, therefore, appears not to be the strength of a connection between the omission and an effect, but rather, distinguishing it from other extraneous omissions, such that it is deemed a cause while the others aren't.³⁰ Consequently, there looks to be little reason to deny the possibility of causation by omission, for it seems there is sufficient evidence to suggest the plausibility of them acting as causes. Given that the biggest issue concerning omissions appears to be discerning between those which are and are not genuine causes, there is reason to further investigate the subject in order to reveal some method of discerning between them on this basis.

Secondly, in responding to Beebe's assertion of the difficulty in discerning between the relative causal nature of omissions, one may consider the precise nature of her argument and the potential theoretical reforms it would imply. By identifying the paradoxical nature of intuitions regarding causation by omissions, whereby they both affirm its existence in particular circumstances and deny it in others, Beebe points to

²⁹ *op. cit.*, Hart and Honoré, pp. 59-60

³⁰ Beebe actually acknowledges that this difficulty of discerning between relevant omissions is the biggest issue for attributing causal responsibility to them. Her discussion of the apparently paradoxical nature of intuitions, and the way they both support and deny causation by omission in particular circumstances, is particular evidence of this. See *ibid.*, pp. 298-300.

the clear difficulty our present theoretical frameworks have in analysing such cases. However, it seems a long bow to draw to infer from this dilemma that omissions cannot ever be causal. Equally, it seems a long bow to draw the inference that omissions are always causal in light of this impasse. Yet the argument from Lewis and Schaffer is not that all omissions are causal, but rather that certain omissions can be.³¹

The conclusion that may be drawn from this dilemma should not be that intuitive judgments have no bearing upon the causal nature of omissions, because they go both ways; but rather, that omissions cannot be lumped together as a metaphysical grouping and labelled either causal or non-causal in their totality. The existence of this dilemma suggests that there are omissions cases which are clearly causal and those which clearly are not. As Beebe acknowledges, our present theoretical frameworks have difficulty with this concept, as they struggle to discern between which cases are and are not causal.³² However, this difficulty would seem to suggest a need to revise our present principles and search for a more sophisticated method of discerning between omissions, rather than simply denying their existence as causes. As such, Beebe's conclusion that omissions cannot act as causes seems unjustified on the basis of her supporting premises, as the dilemma she identifies seems to provide greater support to the argument in favour of further examining omissions as causes. Consequently, it seems that the arguments advanced in favour of a purely

³¹ Whilst Lewis is unequivocal in stating that he believes omissions can be causes, he remarks that it is "the unfinished business" of his theory to draw the line and "distinguish the genuine omissions from other alleged events that we should still reject". See *op. cit.*, 'Causation', p. 191. Schaffer is not attempting to provide a positive account of causation, but to establish the possibility of omissions acting as causes. This is not to say that he believes all omissions will be causal though. Although he provides no positive account of those which will and those which won't, he does acknowledge that there is some difference between causal and non-causal omissions cases, which is for another paper to attempt to define. (see, in particular, *op. cit.*, Schaffer, p. 214)

³² *op. cit.*, Beebe, p. 300

physical conception of causation have failed to denounce omissions as causes, and have only established the need for further examination of the issue.

Conclusion

Present theoretical frameworks for analysing causation are largely founded upon a conception of causation as a relation between two positive physical events.

Within this framework, it is easy to deem a parent the cause of their child's injury, where they have physically struck the child. Difficulty arises however, when the very conduct of the parent that we are concerned with is an instance of doing nothing. Here, in the case of the parent failing to feed their child, our present causal theories struggle to categorise the parent's omission as a cause, whilst denying any causal responsibility on the part of the postman or other parties extraneous to the child's starvation. These examples evince a strong intuition that the parent is a cause of their child's injuries in both cases. In light of this, the fact that our present theories have difficulty in discerning between causal and non-causal omissions appears to stand as greater evidence of the need for further theoretical work on the issue, rather than any reason to deny the causal possibility of omissions. Consequently, although some current methods of causal analysis deny omissions as causes due to the fact that they are not positive physical events, the premises upon which these arguments are founded appear to lend greater support to refining these theoretical frameworks than denying omissions as causes.

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