

CAUSAL MAP GARDEN

!! Getting philosophical

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CAUSAL MAPPING AND PHILOSOPHY

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📅 30 Dec 2025

Some thoughts...

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COUNTERFACTUALS ARE PART OF THE MEANING OF CAUSATION BUT ARE NOT NECESSARILY PART OF HOW WE KNOW ABOUT IT

Relevant page:

Causal mapping is easier if we are realist about causation



We can **learn** about causal powers via constructing or observing pseudo-counterfactuals, but also via other routes.

Maybe counterfactual arguments logically follow from facts about causal powers. But the meaning of "X caused Y" can't be reduced to a counterfactual statement about co-occurrences.

"X caused Y" maybe implies something about a counterfactual: broadly speaking, that Y would not have happened if X had not happened and everything else had stayed exactly the same. (Philosophers love to argue over the details.)

But the meaning of "X caused Y" can't be *reduced* to a statistical, counterfactual statement about co-occurrences. It says that the co-occurrences are true but they happen *because X has the power to cause Y*, and X happened.



JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING IS COMPLEX

📅 15 Sep 2025

Putting a man on the moon was merely a complicated task, not a complex one?

“Putting a man on the moon” is really often given as an example of a merely complicated but not complex task - Glouberman and Zimmerman (2002), cited in Rogers (2008).

But while that task was certainly very complicated, it was often complex too. There were plenty of conflicting sub-goals, arguments about how to solve a particular problem, interdependencies and conflicts between means, and between ends... You can *see* it as merely complicated, in order to make a point, and maybe that's OK. But if you're an actual space scientist you'd probably disagree.



THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN COMPLEXITY

📅 9 Oct 2025

Irene Ng speaks for many who write about “complex systems” when she says: “What has happened in the last 50 years is that we’ve been trying to use deterministic tools to achieve emergent outcomes, essentially because those are the only tools we have learnt (systems thinkers are still a minority unfortunately). We treat complex systems like complicated systems. We try to design, specify, impose, dictate when we should be designing, enabling, intervening, stabilising.”

Is there any historical truth in this at all? Did, say, a midwife 50 years ago only know how to impose and dictate rather than intervene and stabilise? Was, say, managing the Mongol Empire, or Alexander’s conquests, a merely complicated, not complex task?

An often-used example of a complex task is bringing up a child (and I’d agree, loosely). Well, did we have no children to bring up until our frightfully modern era?

Perhaps Irene Ng is writing about *our writing about* management, not how it is or was actually done. But there are ancient books like “[The Art of War](#)” about how to lead, and manage, and reach goals. Were they all merely guides to snapping together simple solutions? Of course not.