The paper confronts the interventionist theory of causation with one of its main competitors, namely the Causal Model. A dilemma raised against the former is analysed and some possible answers to this quandary are contemplated. Although the limits of interventionism are acknowledged, it is suggested these are not of a principle character. The strengths and the limits of Causal Model are also uncovered and its professed metaphysical neutrality is called into question. It is argued that this theory can not do its job without the need of the inference to the best explanation. The conclusion suggests the disagreement between the two theories lies in their different framing of the social ontology, respective of the ontology of the natural sciences.

10.1 Introduction

The interventionist theory of causation\(^1\) is based on the principle that causal relationships are relationships which are relevant for manipulation and control. Roughly stated, given a cause \(C\) of an effect \(E\), if I can manipulate \(C\) in an appropriate way then this should be a tool for modifying \(E\) itself. Thus, according to this interpretation, causal statements are analyzable by the means of intervening upon the putative causes and furthermore preserving invariant the relationship between the causal relata. This view has become increasingly popular in the last decades among philosophers and scientists, being used by econometricians, statisticians

and more recently, by computer scientists. Obviously, it must be that the vast application of this idea in so many causal contexts is also facilitated by the very structure of these states of affairs – they are open to interventions. It is tempting however to speculate about the application of this theory in domains where intervention is not an easy task, in social sciences, for instance. If interventionism will prove to be satisfactory enough in accounting for social causes, then it can be fairly considered the best candidate we have for a general theory of causation. If interventionism fails in this attempt, then it is worth seeing what the philosophical reasons for its limits are and what light they can shed upon the concept of causality instantiated in the social and natural sciences.

The aim of this paper is to make such an analysis of the virtues and limits of interventionism when applied to social sciences. I start by laying down a dilemma for the interventionist theory of causation due to Federica Russo’s *On Empirical Generalisations*. I then provide a detailed investigation of the structure and assumptions of this dilemma, which is to my knowledge, one of the strongest arguments against professing the validity of interventionism in the field of social sciences. I also provide three possible answers to the quandary raised by Russo (Sect. 10.3). I further draw on the features of the Causal Model, which is Russo’s preferred theory of causation. Here I highlight the positive points of this interpretation and I submit the concept of invariance championed by this view to a separate analysis (Sect. 10.4). It will turn out from this detached examination that introducing new conceptual dimensions for the causal variables is the true counterpart of intervention in the Causal Model (Sect. 10.5). I however conclude this section with raising a serious objection to the professed metaphysical neutrality of the Causal Model. The final chapter allows me a short review of the investigation and suggests the root of disagreement between the two evoked theories may consist in their different views about ontology.

### 10.2 A Dilemma for Interventionism

Russo proposes two possible readings of interventionism: the conceptual reading, according to which interventionism provides an analysis for the notion of causation, and a methodological reading, which should supply us with a methodology for causal assessment. Under the reasonable assumption that a theory of causation should also tell us how to find out about what causes what, Russo argues that interventionism fails to determine an adequate methodology for evaluating causation. Her strategy is to show first of all that the conceptual reading bears no methodological support (Horn 1 of the dilemma). Then, Russo argues the methodological

---

4 Ibid.
5 Russo (Ibid.) uses ‘manipulationism’ for ‘interventionism’, but I prefer the latter one here.
6 Ibid.