

Hume's Central Principles

5. Hume on Causal Necessity



Peter Millican
Hertford College, Oxford

5(a)

“Of the Idea of
Necessary
Connexion”

A
T R E A T I S E
O F
Human Nature :
B E I N G
AN ATTEMPT to introduce the ex-
perimental Method of Reasoning
I N T O
M O R A L S U B J E C T S .

*Rara temporum felicitas, ubi sentire, quae velis ; & quae
sentias, dicere licet.* TACIT.

V O L. I.

O F T H E
U N D E R S T A N D I N G .

L O N D O N :

Printed for JOHN NOON, at the *White-Hart*, near
Marcet's-Chapel, in *Cheapside*.

M D C C X X X I X .

1739

Reminder 1: The Idea of Cause

- In *Treatise* I.3.2, Hume identifies the components of the idea of causation as *contiguity*, *priority in time* (of *A* to *B*), and *necessary connexion* (see especially *T* 1.3.2.11).
- At *T* 1.3.6.3, he identifies *constant conjunction* (i.e. *regular* succession) as the basis of our ascription of necessary connexion.
- In the remainder of 1.3.6, he argues that causal reasoning is founded on *custom*.

Reminder 2: The Copy Principle

- According to (what is commonly called) Hume's *Copy Principle* (*T* 1.1.1.7), all our simple ideas are copied from impressions.
- This provides “a new microscope” (*E* 7.4) for investigating the nature of ideas, by finding the corresponding impressions.
- In *Treatise* 1.3.14, he accordingly sets out to identify the impression from which the idea of necessary connexion is copied.
- See 1.3.14.1 for a preview of the argument.

Synonymy and Definition

- Hume begins his quest for the impression:

“I begin with observing that the terms of *efficacy*, *agency*, *power*, *force*, *energy*, *necessity*, *connexion*, and *productive quality*, are all nearly synonymous; and therefore 'tis an absurdity to employ any of them in defining the rest. By this observation we reject at once all the vulgar definitions, which philosophers have given of power and efficacy; and instead of searching for the idea in these definitions, must look for it in the impressions, from which it is originally deriv'd. If it be a compound idea, it must arise from compound impressions. If simple, from simple impressions.” (T 1.3.14.4)

Two Puzzles

- Why does Hume assume that “necessity”, “power”, “force” etc. are virtual synonyms?
- Why does he assume that the idea of “necessary connexion” is *simple*, and hence cannot be explicitly defined?
- Suggested solution: Hume’s interest lies in *a single common element* of the relevant ideas, what we might call the element of *consequentiality*.

A Third Puzzle

- If *necessary connexion* is a key component of our idea of cause, then how can anyone even *believe* that causes could be less than absolutely necessitating?

“The vulgar ... attribute the uncertainty of events to such an uncertainty in the causes as makes the latter often fail of their usual influence ...” (*T* 1.3.12.5, *E* 8.13)

- This too is explained if the key idea is not *necessity*, but rather *consequentiality*: a *force* or *agency* need not be compelling.

“Power”, or “Necessary Connexion”?

- In *Treatise* 1.3.14, Hume refers to the idea of “power” or “efficacy” around three times more often than to the idea of “necessity” or “necessary connexion”!
- My suggestion makes the former more appropriate, so why emphasise the latter in the section’s title, and when summing up?
- Suggested explanation: The key result is to shed light on “liberty and necessity”, the problem of free will (*T* 2.3.1-2, *E* 8).

Refuting Locke and Malebranche

- Locke is wrong to suggest we can get the idea of power from “new productions in matter” (*T* 1.3.14.5).
- Malebranche is right to deny that “the secret force and energy of causes” can be found in bodies (*T* 1.3.14.7).
- But the Copy Principle refutes Malebranche’s claim that we acquire the idea of an “active principle” from our idea of God (*T* 1.3.14.10).

No Idea from Single Instances

- Powers cannot be found among the known or perceived properties of matter (*T* 1.3.14.7-11).
- Nor among the properties of mind (added in the *Appendix* of 1740, *T* 1.3.14.12, SB 632-3).
- We cannot find any *specific* impression of power in these various sources, hence they cannot possibly yield any *general* idea of power either (*T* 1.3.14.13; this draws on the theory of “general or abstract ideas” of *T* 1.1.7, which we have not covered in these lectures).

Repeated Instances

- The actual source of the key impression is revealed when we turn to *repeated* instances of observed conjunctions of “objects”. In these circumstances,

“... we immediately conceive a connexion betwixt them, and ... draw an inference from one to another. This multiplicity of resembling instances, therefore, constitutes the very essence of power or connexion, and is the source, from which the idea of it arises.” (T 1.3.14.16)

An *Internal* Impression

- Repeated instances supply no new impression *from the objects*; to find the elusive impression of power we must look inside ourselves to the habitual transition of the mind (i.e. the operation of custom).
- Recall that *T* 1.3.6.3 anticipated this result:
“Perhaps ’twill appear in the end, that the necessary connexion depends on the inference, instead of the inference’s depending on the necessary connexion.”

Is the Impression a *Feeling*?

“This connexion ... which we *feel* in the mind, this customary transition of the imagination from one object to its usual attendant, is the sentiment or impression, from which we form the idea of power or necessary connexion.” (*E* 7.28).

- Stroud and others take the impression to be a *feeling* of compulsion that accompanies the operation of customary inference.
- But Hume’s own arguments seem to rule out the possibility that mere feelings could be the source of the idea (*T* 1.3.14.12, *E* 7.15 n. 13).

Is “Determination of the Mind” an *Impression*?

- Why does Hume equate *inference* from *A* to *B* – a transition of thought from *A* to *B*, with *another*, third, “perception”?

“This determination is the only effect of the resemblance; and therefore must be the same with power or efficacy, whose idea is deriv’d from the resemblance. ... Necessity, then, is ... nothing but an internal impression of the mind, or a determination to carry our thoughts from one object to another.” (T 1.3.14.20)

- Hume needs an “impression” to satisfy his Copy Principle, but this may be misleading ...

Reflexive Awareness of Inference

- *Consequentiality* may be the key here ...
- *Inference* is genuinely consequential:
 - “that inference of the understanding, which is the only connexion, that we can have any comprehension of” (E 8.25)
- Hume should be taken literally: the source of the idea is the *reflexive awareness of making causal inference*, and not a feeling.
- This awareness is very dubiously an “impression”; here Hume’s theory of the mind is far too crude in limiting our awareness to ideas and impressions.

Necessity in the Mind, not in Objects

“[customary inference] is the essence of necessity. ... necessity is something, that exists in the mind, not in objects; nor is it possible for us ever to form the most distant idea of it, consider'd as a quality in bodies. ... necessity is nothing but that determination of the thought to pass from causes to effects and from effects to causes, according to their experienc'd union.” (*T* 1.3.14.22)

“When we say, therefore, that one object is connected with another, we mean only, that they have acquired a connexion in our thought, and give rise to this inference ...” (*E* 7.28)

Hume's Anti-Realism

- Hume is not saying that there is some kind of full-blooded “thick” necessity that applies only to events in the mind. Rather ...
- We find ourselves inferring from *A* to *B*, and this consequential relation is all that we can understand by “necessity”. *We can't even make sense* of any more “full-blooded” necessity.
- This seems incredible to us because “the mind has a great propensity to spread itself on external objects, and to conjoin with them any internal impressions, which they occasion” (*T* 1.3.14.25).

An Outrageous Conclusion ...

“But tho’ this be the only reasonable account we can give of necessity ... I doubt not that my sentiments will be treated by many as extravagant and ridiculous. What! the efficacy of causes lie in the determination of the mind! As if causes did not operate entirely independent of the mind, and wou’d not continue their operation, even tho’ there was no mind existent to contemplate them ... to remove [power] from all causes, and bestow it on a being, that is no ways related to the cause or effect, but by perceiving them, is a gross absurdity, and contrary to the most certain principles of human reason.” (*T* 1.3.14.26)

... Which Hume Defends!

“I can only reply to all these arguments, that the case is here much the same, as if a blind man shou’d pretend to find a great many absurdities in the supposition, that the colour of scarlet is not the same with the sound of a trumpet, nor light the same with solidity. If we really have no idea of a power or efficacy in any object, or of any real connexion betwixt causes and effects, ’twill be to little purpose to prove, that an efficacy is necessary in all operations. We do not understand our own meaning in talking so, but ignorantly confound ideas, which are entirely distinct from each other.” (*T* 1.3.14.27)

Objective Causes, in a Sense ...

“As to what may be said, that the operations of nature are independent of our thought and reasoning, I allow it; and accordingly have observ’d, that objects bear to each other the relations of contiguity and succession; that like objects may be observ’d in several instances to have like relations; and that all this is independent of, and antecedent to the operations of the understanding.” (T 1.3.14.28)

- There is an objective and a subjective side to our idea of power or necessity; hence two definitions of “cause”.

Two “Definitions of Cause”

- Hume’s main discussions of “the idea of necessary connexion” (*Treatise* 1.3.14 and *Enquiry* 7) both culminate with two “definitions of cause”.
- The first definition is based on *regular succession* of the “cause” *A* followed by “effect” *B* (plus contiguity in the *Treatise*).
- The second definition is based on the mind’s tendency to *infer B* from *A*.

“There may two definitions be given of this relation, which are only different, by their presenting a different view of the same object ... We may define a CAUSE to be ‘An object precedent and contiguous to another, and where all the objects resembling the former are plac’d in like relations of precedency and contiguity to those objects, which resemble the latter.’ If this definition be esteem’d defective, because drawn from objects foreign to the cause, we may substitute this other definition in its place, *viz.* ‘A CAUSE is an object precedent and contiguous to another, and so united with it, that the idea of the one determines the mind to form the idea of the other, and the impression of the one to form a more lively idea of the other.’ Shou’d this definition also be rejected for the same reason, I know no other remedy ...”

(T 1.3.14.31)

The Confused Vulgar Idea of Power

- “as we *feel* a customary connexion ... we transfer that feeling to the objects; as nothing is more usual than to apply to external objects every internal sensation, which they occasion” (*E* 7.29 n. 17)
- At *T* 1.3.14.25 n. 32, referring to 1.4.5.13, this is compared to our propensity to objectify taste impressions: “All this absurdity proceeds from our endeavouring to bestow a place on what is utterly incapable of it”.
- Necessity involves “the same propensity” (*T* 1.3.14.25).
- “the sentiment of *nisus* or endeavour” also “enters very much into” the vulgar idea (*E* 7.15 n. 13, 7.29 n. 17).

The More Precise Humean Idea

- “’tis probable, that these expressions do here lose their true meaning by being *wrong apply’d*, than that they never have any meaning” (*T* 1.3.14.14).
- Hume takes his analysis and definitions to vindicate a more precise idea of power, by revealing that there is a *bona fide* impression from which it is derived.
- He seems to be saying we should apply that idea according to the first definition (constant conjunction), and understand its application as implying willingness to draw inferences accordingly (as in the second definition).
- This is fairly close to a kind of “quasi-realism” (Simon Blackburn’s term), parallel with Hume’s moral theory.

“Corollaries” of the Definitions

- “All causes are of the same kind ... For the same reason we must reject the distinction betwixt *cause* and *occasion* ... If constant conjunction be imply'd in what we call occasion, 'tis a real cause. If not, 'tis no relation at all ...” (*T* 1.3.14.32)
- “there is but one kind of *necessity* ... and ... the common distinction betwixt *moral* and *physical* necessity is without any foundation in nature.” (*T* 1.3.14.33)
- It is now easy to see why the Causal Maxim of *T* 1.3.3 is not intuitively or demonstratively certain. (*T* 1.3.14.35)
- “we can never have reason to believe that any object exists, of which we cannot form an idea.” (*T* 1.3.14.36)

5(b)

The New Hume Debate

A
T R E A T I S E
O F
Human Nature :
B E I N G
AN ATTEMPT to introduce the ex-
perimental Method of Reasoning
I N T O
M O R A L S U B J E C T S .

*Rara temporum felicitas, ubi sentire, quae velis ; & quae
sentias, dicere licet.* TACIT.

V O L . I .

O F T H E
U N D E R S T A N D I N G .

L O N D O N :

Printed for JOHN NOON, at the *White-Hart*, near
Marcet's-Chapel, in *Cheapside*.

M D C C X X X I X .

1739

The “New Hume”

- Hume has generally been read as denying the existence of any causal “power” or “necessity” going beyond his two definitions (i.e. any upper-case Causation or “thick connexions”).
- The “New Hume” is the view of John Wright, Edward Craig, Galen Strawson and others that Hume is instead a “Causal Realist”.
- Their most persuasive argument: *Hume’s texts show him to be taking causation, causal power and causal necessity very seriously ...*

“Sceptical Realism”

- John Wright coined the term “Sceptical Realism” for this point of view:
 - Realism: Causation in things goes beyond (possibly complex functional) relations of regular succession and inference, involving a full-blooded necessity *which, if we knew it, would license a priori inference.*
 - Sceptical: In so far as Causation goes beyond what is captured by Hume’s two definitions, it cannot be known or understood.

Hume's Advocacy of Causal Science

- Hume seems in general to have a very positive attitude towards causal science:
 - a) He says that causation is the basis of all empirical inference;
 - b) He proposes “rules by which to judge of causes and effects”;
 - c) He talks of “secret powers”;
 - d) He advocates a search for hidden causes underlying inconstant phenomena.

(a) The Basis of Empirical Inference

- “The only connexion or relation of objects, which can lead us beyond the immediate impressions of our memory and senses, is that of cause and effect ...” (*T* 1.3.6.7)
- “’Tis evident, that all reasonings concerning *matter of fact* are founded on the relation of cause and effect” (*A* 8)
- “All reasonings concerning matter of fact seem to be founded on the relation of Cause and Effect.” (*E* 4.4, cf. *E* 7.29)

(b) The Rules of *Treatise* 1.3.15

- “Since therefore ’tis possible for all objects to become causes or effects to each other, it may be proper to fix some general rules, by which we may know when they really are so.” (*T* 1.3.15.1)
- “[Phenomena] in nature [are] compounded and modify’d by so many different circumstances, that ... we must carefully separate whatever is superfluous, and enquire by new experiments, if every particular circumstance of the first experiment was essential to it” (*T* 1.3.15.11)

(c) Hume's Talk of "Secret Powers"

- Most prominent in *Enquiry 4-5*:
 - “the ultimate cause of any natural operation ... that power, which produces any ... effect in the universe ... the causes of these general causes ... ultimate springs and principles” (*E 4.12*);
 - “the secret powers [of bodies] ... those powers and principles on which the influence of ... objects entirely depends” (*E 4.16*);
 - “those powers and forces, on which this regular course and succession of objects totally depends” (*E 5.22*);

Necessity as Essential to Causation

- “Power” is a term from the same family – derived from the same impression – as “necessity”, which Hume sees as an essential part of our idea of causation:
 - “According to my definitions, necessity makes an essential part of causation” (*T* 2.3.1.18, cf. also 1.3.2.11, 1.3.6.3).
 - “Necessity may be defined two ways, conformably to the two definitions of *cause*, of which it makes an essential part.” (*E* 8.27, cf. 8.25)

(d) The Search for Hidden Causes

- “philosophers, observing, that, almost in every part of nature, there is contained a vast variety of springs and principles, which are hid, by reason of their minuteness or remoteness, find, that it is at least possible the contrariety of events may ... proceed ... from the secret operation of contrary causes. ... they remark, that, upon an exact scrutiny, a contrariety of effects always betrays a contrariety of causes, and proceeds from their mutual opposition.”
(E 8.13, copied from *T* 1.3.12.5)

Causal Science and Causal Realism

- We have seen that Hume indeed takes causal science very seriously. All science must be causal; causal relations can be established by rules; explanation involves reference to secret powers; and we should search for hidden causes.
- But the presumption that this implies Causal Realism that goes beyond the two definitions can be challenged ...

Hume's Anti-Realism: an Initial Case

1. Berkeley's example proves that a positive attitude to science need not imply Causal Realism.
2. Hume's argument concerning the origin of the idea of necessary connexion, in *Treatise* 1.3.14 and *Enquiry* 7, is naturally read as implying that he is anti-Realist about "thick" powers.
3. Hume's Conceivability Principle seems hard to square with a prioristic necessities in nature.
4. An important footnote connects the power references in *Enquiry* 4-5 with the apparently anti-Realist argument of *Enquiry* 7, in such a way as to undermine their apparent force.

1. Berkeley's Instrumentalism

- ... the difference there is betwixt natural philosophers and other men, with regard to their knowledge of the *phenomena*, ... consists, not in an exacter knowledge of the efficient cause that produces them, for that can be no other than the *will of a spirit*, but only in a greater largeness of comprehension, whereby analogies, harmonies, and agreements are discovered in the works of Nature, and the particular effects explained, that is, reduced to general rules ... which rules grounded on the analogy, and uniformness observed in the production of natural effects (*Principles* i 105)

Science as Simplification

- “the utmost effort of human reason is, to reduce the principles, productive of natural phaenomena, to a greater simplicity, and to resolve the many particular effects into a few general causes, by means of reasonings from analogy, experience, and observation. But as to the causes of these general causes, we should in vain attempt their discovery ... and we may esteem ourselves sufficiently happy, if, by accurate enquiry and reasoning, we can trace up the particular phaenomena to, or near to, ... general principles.” (*E* 4.12, cf. *T* intro 8)

2. An Argument for Anti-Realism

- Hume's entire argument is structured around the Copy Principle quest for an impression.
- The Principle is a tool for deciding questions of *meaning* (*T* 1.1.6.1, *A* 7, *E* 2.9).
- He aims to find causal terms' *meaning* or *significance* (*T* 1.3.14.14 & 27, *A* 26, *E* 7.3, 26 & 28).
- When the *subjective* impression is identified, the apparently anti-Realist implication is stated.
- The discussion culminates with two *definitions* of "cause", incorporating this anti-Realism.

3. The Conceivability Principle

- Hume's principle that "whatever we *conceive* is possible, at least in a metaphysical sense" (A 11) implies a sharp distinction between causal necessity, and "absolute" or "metaphysical" modality.
- He thus repeatedly insists that a priori, we cannot possibly put limits on what causal relations will obtain (e.g. *T* 1.3.15.1, 1.4.5.30; *E* 4.9, 12.29).
- But if he were prepared to countenance a "hidden" objective necessity – of a genuine metaphysical kind – connecting *A* with *B*, then the fact that we can conceive of *A* not being followed by *B* could not imply that this is a genuine metaphysical possibility.

4. Kames and a Footnote

- Kames (1751) quoted Hume's references to powers in the *Enquiry* (at 4.16) against him, as evidence of inconsistency; they knew each other well and swapped manuscripts prior to publication.
- In 1750 Hume added a footnote to *E* 4.16:
 - “* The word, Power, is here used in a loose and popular sense. The more accurate explication of it would give additional evidence to this argument. See Sect. 7.”

Quantitative Forces

- In the *Enquiry*, Hume is clear that mechanics involves *forces*: theoretical entities that can be quantified and enter into equations describing objects' behaviour. (e.g. *E* 4.12-13)
- “Force” is in the same family as “power” etc.
- This, rather than Causal Realism, explains the *Enquiry*'s prominent “power” language.
- *E* 7.25n and *E* 7.29n both suggest an attitude to such forces corresponding exactly to the anti-realist spirit of *Enquiry* 7. Forces are to be treated *instrumentally* (cf. Newton and Berkeley).

Why Two Definitions?

- The argument of T 1.3.14 and E 7 ends, notoriously, with two definitions of cause:
 - The first definition is based on *regular succession* of the “cause” *A* followed by “effect” *B* (plus contiguity in the *Treatise*).
 - The second definition is based on the mind’s tendency to *infer B* from *A*.
- These don’t coincide: constant conjunctions can be unseen, and we can (mistakenly) infer when the conjunctions are inconstant.

- To make sense of the definitions, we should not assume that they are intended to specify necessary and sufficient conditions.
- Hume's conception of *meaning*, associated with his Copy Principle, suggests a different view. The meaning of causal necessity can only be understood through the impression from which its idea is derived: *reflexive awareness of our own inferential behaviour* in response to observed constant conjunctions.
- The second definition, accordingly, specifies a paradigm case in which we experience this impression and thus can acquire the idea.

- Nothing in Hume's theory requires that, *having once acquired the idea*, we must restrict its application to those paradigm cases that characteristically generate it.
- Indeed his advocacy of “rules by which to judge of causes and effects” etc. implies that he must think we can go beyond these cases by *systematising* our application of the idea (cf. his discussion of the “system of realities” at *T* 1.3.9.3-5).
- Accordingly the two definitions can be seen as *complementary* rather than conflicting. The second identifies the relevant idea; the first specifies the criterion for applying it.

- There is a parallel case in Hume's treatment of *virtue or personal merit* in the *Moral Enquiry*. Here again he gives two definitions:
 - “PERSONAL MERIT consists altogether in the possession of mental qualities, *useful or agreeable* to the *person himself* or to *others*. ... The preceding ... definition ...” (M 9.1, 9.12)
 - “[My] hypothesis ... defines virtue to be *whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation; ...*” (M Appendix 1.10)
- Again we have a characteristic idea, whose application is then to be systematised.

- This understanding of the paired definitions tells strongly in an anti-Realist direction. For it suggests that the system of causes, like the system of virtues, is essentially being read *into* the world rather than being read *off* it.
- We thus have a process of systematisation in which our natural judgement, refined and applied more systematically in accordance with the relevant rules, “raises, in a manner, a new creation”, by “gilding or staining natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment” (*M* Appendix 1.21).

5(c)

The Point of
Hume's
Analysis of
Causation

A
T R E A T I S E
O F
Human Nature :
B E I N G
AN ATTEMPT to introduce the ex-
perimental Method of Reasoning
I N T O
M O R A L S U B J E C T S .

*Rara temporum felicitas, ubi sentire, quae velis ; & quae
sentias, dicere licet.* TACIT.

V O L. I.

O F T H E
U N D E R S T A N D I N G .

L O N D O N :

Printed for JOHN NOON, at the *White-Hart*, near
Marcet's-Chapel, in *Cheapside*.

M D C C X X X I X .

1739

Hume's Use of his Two Definitions

- If we search for subsequent paragraphs in the *Treatise* that mention the definition of “cause”, “power” or “necessity”, we find just three, at *T* 1.4.5.31, 2.3.1.18, and 2.3.2.4.
- If we search instead for “constant conjunction” or “constant union”, we find mainly *T* 1.4.5.30-33, 2.3.1.416, and 2.3.2.4 (*T* 1.4.1.2 and 1.4.3.2 also mention “constant union” briefly).
- Similar searches in the *Enquiry* point very clearly to Section 8 (10.5 is the only other).

Causation and the Mind

- Hume is especially keen to establish causality and necessity in respect of the mind:
 - In principle, matter could be the cause of thought (*T* 1.4.5, “*Of the Immateriality of the Soul*”)
 - The “doctrine of necessity” applies as much to the mental world as to the physical world (*T* 2.3.1-2 and *E* 8 “*Of Liberty and Necessity*”)
- Both arguments crucially turn on the claim that there is nothing to causal necessity beyond the two definitions ...

Of the Immateriality of the Soul

- The standard anti-materialist argument insists that material changes cannot cause thought, because the two are so different.
 - “... and yet nothing in the world is more easy than to refute it. We need only to reflect on what has been prov’d at large ... that to consider the matter *a priori*, any thing may produce any thing, and that we shall never discover a reason, why any object may or may not be the cause of any other, however great, or however little the resemblance may be between them ” (T 1.4.5.30)

- Hume then goes further to insist that material motion *is indeed* found to be the cause of thought:
 - “we find ... by experience, that they are constantly united; which being *all the circumstances, that enter into the idea of cause and effect* ... we may *certainly* conclude, that motion may be, and *actually is*, the cause of thought and perception.” (*T* 1.4.5.30, my emphasis)
 - “*as the constant conjunction of objects constitutes the very essence of cause and effect*, matter and motion may often be regarded as the causes of thought, as far as we have any notion of that relation.” (*T* 1.4.5.33, my emphasis)

Of Liberty and Necessity

- Hume's argument that the same necessity is applicable to the moral and physical realms depends on taking our understanding of necessary connexion to be completely exhausted by the two factors of constant conjunction and customary inference.
- These two factors can be shown to apply in the moral realm, and he insists that we can't even *ascribe* any further necessity to matter:

“the ... advocates for [libertarian] free-will must allow this union and inference with regard to human actions. They will only deny, that this makes the whole of necessity. But then they must shew, that we have an idea of something else in the actions of matter; which, according to the foregoing reasoning, is impossible.” (A 34, cf. *T* 2.3.1.3-18, *T* 2.3.2.4, *E* 8.4-22, *E* 8.27)

- Here Hume is arguing against the Causal Realist, who thinks that “we have an idea of something else in the actions of matter”.

“A New Definition of Necessity”

- Even more explicitly than with “Of the Immateriality of the Soul”, Hume portrays his argument here as turning on his new understanding of necessity:
 - “Our author pretends, that this reasoning puts the whole controversy in a new light, by giving a new definition of necessity.” (A 34)
- This requires that his definitions are understood as specifying “the very essence of necessity” (T 2.3.1.10, 2.3.2.2).

Anti-Realism supporting realism

- all objects, which are found to be constantly conjoin'd, are *upon that account only* to be regarded as causes and effects. ... the constant conjunction of objects constitutes *the very essence* of cause and effect ...
(T 1.4.5.32, my emphasis)
- two particulars [are] essential to necessity, *viz.* the constant *union* and the *inference* of the mind ... wherever we discover these we must acknowledge a necessity. (T 2.3.1.4)

Reconstructing Hume's Vision

- The “chief argument” of the *Treatise* (as summarised in the *Abstract* of 1740) is almost entirely devoted to causation etc. – *Treatise* 1.3 is the central part of the work.
- Applying the Copy Principle to the idea of necessary connexion reveals the nature of causal necessity, settling fundamental issues about causation in the moral sphere, and eliminating aprioristic causal metaphysics.

The Cosmological Argument

- Hume told Boswell that he “never had entertained any belief in Religion since he began to read Locke and Clarke”
- Both Locke and Clarke advocated the **Cosmological Argument**, and insisted that **matter cannot give rise to thought**.
- *Treatise* 1.3.3 – which disputes the basis of the Causal Maxim – identifies both Locke and Clarke by name (in footnotes).

The Origin of Ideas

- Locke's empiricism naturally raises the issue of the origin of the idea of causal necessity, central to the Cosmological Argument.
- Locke's "Of Power" (*Essay* II xxi) gives an inadequate account: Hume sees this, and attempts to remedy the omission.
- Locke's chapter focuses also on Free Will. Hume sees his account as supporting Collins against Clarke (a debate very familiar to him through Dudgeon, Baxter, Desmaizeaux).

An Integrated Vision

- Hume's causal anti-Realism refutes:
 - The Cosmological Argument;
 - Anti-materialist arguments;
 - The Free Will Theodicy (cf. Hume's early memoranda, from the late 1730s);
 - Aprioristic causal metaphysics in general.
- At the same time it supports:
 - Empirical, causal science: the *only* way to establish anything about “matters of fact”;
 - Extension of causal science into moral realm.