

I

*Hume's "Two Definitions"
of Cause and the Ontology
of "Double Existence"*

*I am sensible, that of all the paradoxes, which I have had,
or shall hereafter have occasion to advance in the course of
this treatise, the present one is the most violent.*

—HUME, *A Treatise of Human Nature*

*He may well admit this doctrine to be a violent paradox,
because in reality, it contradicts our natural feelings, and
wages war with the common sense of mankind.*

—LORD KAMES, *Essays on Morality and Natural Religion*

THROUGHOUT THIS ESSAY¹ my objective will be to establish and clarify Hume's original intentions in his discussion of causation in Book I of the *Treatise*.² I will show that Hume's views on ontology, presented in Part

1. The text in this essay has been slightly modified to include a few corrections and stylistic changes (including some that were supposed to appear in the original but did not), as well as a couple of longer passages that were added into a later version that appeared in Russell, *Freedom and Moral Sentiment*, Chap. 2. References to Hume's works have also been updated.

2. References to Hume's writings are to *A Treatise of Human Nature* [T], ed. by D. F. Norton and M. J. Norton; *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* [EU], ed. by T. L. Beauchamp. I will also provide references to the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch editions of the *Treatise* and *Enquiries*. Following the convention given in the Nortons' *Treatise* (and Beauchamp's *Enquiry*), I cite Book. Part. Section. Paragraph; followed by page references to the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch editions. Thus T.1.2.3.4/ 34: will indicate *Treatise* Bk.1, Pt.2, Sec.3, Para.4/ Selby-Bigge pg. 34. References to the *Abstract* [TA] are to the two editions of the *Treatise* cited earlier (paragraph/page). References to the editors' annotations to the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* cite page numbers in the relevant text. References to Hume's *A Letter from a Gentleman to his friend in Edinburgh* [LG], are first to the Nortons' edition (Vol 1: 420–31) followed by E. C. Mossner and J. V. Price, eds. (paragraph/page).

IV of that book, shed light on his views on causation as presented in Part III. Further, I will argue that Hume's views on ontology account for the original motivation behind his two definitions of cause.³ This relationship between Hume's ontology and his account of causation explains something which has baffled Hume scholars for some time; namely, why does Hume's discussion of causation in 1.3.14 have such a paradoxical air about it? I will show that Hume's views on causation have a paradoxical air about them because they rest on an ontology of "double existence"—an ontology which Hume describes as "the monstrous offspring of two principles, which are contrary to each other, which are both at once embrac'd by the mind, and which are unable mutually to destroy each other" (T, 1.4.2.52/215).

My interpretation will center on the following two claims:

- (i) When Hume wrote Section 14, *Of the idea of necessary connexion*, he was *primarily* concerned to attack the view that the origin of our idea of necessity was to be discovered in the operations of matter or bodies. Of the suggested sources from which our idea of necessity could be thought to originate, this is the source which, initially, interested Hume the most. It is, therefore, of great importance that we interpret Hume's remarks in light of this fact.
- (ii) Hume offers the first definition of cause as an account of causation as it exists *in the material world independent of our thought and reasoning*.

3. Discussion in the secondary literature concerning this issue has centered on such questions as whether or not Hume was a supporter of the regularity view of causation; whether or not he really intended to offer two *definitions* of our notion of cause; which, if either, of these two definitions is primary; and, lastly, what part the idea of necessity plays in these definitions. In this essay I will not directly discuss the various interpretations that have been put forward in the secondary literature. The explanation for this is twofold. First, the various permutations and combinations of answers to these questions in the secondary literature is quite staggering and I do not believe that I have the space in this paper to profitably discuss these additional complexities. I believe that many commentators have tended to discuss the secondary literature at the expense of the more relevant primary literature (e.g. Locke and Malebranche). Second, and more importantly, my approach to these issues is quite unlike that of most of my predecessors in that it is primarily historical and my discussion would, therefore, tend to lose its coherence if it were to be repeatedly redirected toward the secondary literature. However, I should stress that I have benefited from the secondary literature and that what I have to say is obviously relevant to the secondary literature. Suffice it to mention in this context that two of the most influential interpretations will be found in Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume*, esp. pp. 91–92 and p. 369; and in J. A. Robinson, "Hume's Two Definitions of 'Cause'." For a more recent discussion, see T. L. Beauchamp and A. Rosenburg, *Hume and the Problem of Causation*, Chap. I; this work contains a detailed and illuminating discussion of much of the secondary literature.

He offers the second definition as an account of causation as we find it *in our perceptions*. It will also be argued, in this context, that necessity constitutes "an essential part" of both of Hume's two definitions of cause.

I

In *A Letter from a Gentleman* Hume briefly describes the debate out of which his own views about the origin of our idea of necessity developed:

When men considered the several Effects and Operations of Nature, they were led to examine into the Force or Power by which they were performed . . . all the ancient Philosophers agreed, that there was *a real Force in Matter*. . . . No one, until Des Cartes and Malebranche, ever entertained an Opinion that *Matter had no Force*. . . . These Philosophers last-mentioned substituted the Notion of occasional Causes . . . [but this opinion] never gained great Credit, especially in England, where it was considered as too much contrary to received popular Opinions, and too little supported by Philosophical Arguments, ever to be admitted as any Thing but a mere Hypothesis. (LG, 32 / 27–28, my emphasis)

These remarks are indicative of the fact that Hume believed that there was a close connection between ontological issues and the question concerning the origin of our idea of necessity. In what way did Hume believe that these matters were related?

In Section 14 Hume returns to the question which he raised in Section 2 (T, 1.3.2.12/ 77); from what impression does our idea of necessary connection originate? Hume is faced with the difficulty that, given his theory of meaning, if no such impression can be found then this term must be meaningless. Hume comes to consider three possible sources of our idea of necessity before presenting his own account. These are: (1) *the known qualities of matter* (T, 1.3.14.5–9/ 157–59); (2) *the deity* (T, 1.3.14.10/ 159–60); and (3) *the will* (T, 1.3.14.12/ 632–33 [this being appended to T, 161])

The most obvious differences between the section entitled "Of the idea of necessary connexion" in the *Treatise* and its counterpart in the first *Enquiry* is that the former is mostly concerned with the first suggested source of our idea of necessity, whereas the latter places the most emphasis

on the third source. In the *Treatise*, Hume is primarily concerned to refute the claim that our idea has its source in the “*known qualities of matter*,” while in the *Enquiry*, he is more concerned to refute the claim that its origin is to be found by reflecting on our willings. This change of emphasis is not without significance and is of some importance in coming to an understanding of Hume’s views on causation as he originally put them forward in Book I of the *Treatise*.⁴

It was only *after* Hume wrote and published Books I and II (January 1739) that he came to discuss the third possible source of our idea of necessity. The view that our idea of necessity or power is derived from our reflection on our willings is to be found in Locke’s *Essay*⁵:

. . . Bodies, by our Senses, do not afford us so clear and distinct an Idea of active Power, as we have from reflection on the Operations of our Minds. . . . The Idea of the beginning of motion, we have only from reflection on what passes in our selves, where we find by Experience, that barely by willing it, barely by a thought of the Mind, we can move the parts of our Bodies, which were before at rest. (ECHU, 235 [II,xxi,4])

This suggestion of Locke’s was first expressly considered by Hume in the *Abstract* of the *Treatise* (published in March 1740), where he deals with it tersely:

Now our minds afford us no more notion of energy than matter does. When we consider our will or volition *a priori*, abstracting from experience, we should never be able to infer any effect from it. And when we take the assistance of experience, it only shows us objects contiguous, successive and constantly conjoined.” (TA, 26/656–57)

This argument is somewhat expanded in the Appendix to the *Treatise* (published with Book III in November 1740). Here again he argues “that the

4. Antony Flew has pointed out that the *Enquiry* has often been viewed as merely a “popularized version of Book I” (*Hume’s Philosophy of Belief*, 1.) This is, as Flew notes, a serious mistake as it leads philosophers into missing important differences in Hume’s concerns and arguments.

5. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 235 (II, xxi, 4). [Abbreviated as ECHU.]

will being here consider'd as a cause, has no more discoverable connexion with its effects, than any material cause has with its proper effects" (T, 1.3.14.12/ 632). By the time the first *Enquiry* was published, eight years later (April 1748), Locke's suggestion had come to preoccupy Hume (see EU, 64–69/ 7.9–20). However, even up to the time of writing the Appendix, Hume retained his original view that the most natural and plausible place to look for the origin of our idea of necessity is in external objects or matter:

No internal impression has an apparent energy, more than external objects have. Since, therefore, matter is confess'd by philosophers to operate by an unknown force, we shou'd in vain hope to attain an idea of force by consulting our own minds. (T, 1.3.14.12/ 633, my emphasis)

Further evidence of Hume's primary concern in Book I with matter considered as a source of our idea of necessity can be found in his discussion of liberty and necessity in Book II. In that discussion, Hume regards his opponents as taking the view that, although there can be little doubt that necessity exists in the material world, it does not exist in the realm of our thought and action. Accordingly, Hume begins his discussion by describing necessity as it exists in the operations of bodies. Hume suggests that his opponents may "refuse to call [constant union and inference of the mind] necessity" because they assume that "there is something else *in the operations of matter*" (T, 2.3.2.4/ 410, my emphasis; see also TA, 32/ 661, as cited earlier, which makes much the same point). Hume goes on to point out to his opponents that they should be careful not to take him to be ascribing "to the will that unintelligible necessity, *which is supposed to lie in matter*" (T, 2.3.2.4/ 410, my emphasis). I believe there can be little doubt that it is this "unintelligible necessity which is supposed to lie in matter" which serves as Hume's prime target in Book I.⁶

6. In his discussion *Of the ancient philosophy* (1.4.3) Hume refers to the view that we can attribute power, efficacy, etc. to the operations of matter as a *false philosophy* (T, 1.4.3.9/ 222–23). In this he may well have been influenced by Malebranche's discussion of "the most dangerous error of the philosophy of the ancients" (*The Search After Truth* [Abbreviated as SAT], VI, ii, 3—Hume in fact refers to this section at T, 1.3.14.7/ 158n). Malebranche states:

There are therefore no forces, powers or true causes in the material, sensible world; and it is not necessary to admit the existence of forms, faculties, and real qualities for producing effects that bodies do not produce and for sharing with God the force and power essential to Him. (SAT, 449)

Hume notes in the *Abstract* that he confines most of his remarks “to the relation of cause and effect, as discovered in the motions and operations of matter” (TA, 23/ 655). This reflects the emphasis that we find in Book I. Although he believes that “the same reasoning extends to the operations of mind” and that the causal relation remains the same between both internal and external objects, his attention was, at that time, firmly fixed on the case of matter.⁷

Why was Hume initially preoccupied with the case of matter? Why did he fail to consider Locke’s suggestion in Book I? It has already been pointed out that he was impressed by the fact that most philosophers, including many of his contemporaries, believed there was “a real force in matter.” Obviously, this was a deeply entrenched, traditional supposition which had to be swept away if his own (alternative) account was to be accepted. More important, Hume also thought it was quite plausible to suggest that our experience of the material world is the source of our idea of necessity. Evidence that he took this view is to be found in an objection he raises against his own position:

In his *Elucidations* Malebranche returns to this theme:

Feeling himself a sinner, man hides, flees the light, fears encountering God and prefers to imagine *in bodies surrounding him* a blind nature or power that he can master and without remorse use toward his bizarre and disordered intentions. . . . [T]here are many people who through a principle different from that of the pagan philosophers follow their opinion on nature and secondary causes. (SAT, 657; my emphasis)

Note too Malebranche’s reference to “the false philosophy of the Pagans” in his Sixth Dialogue, Sect. 11. Malebranche’s discussion of “the most dangerous error of the philosophy of the ancients” seems closely related to Hume’s discussion of the *false philosophy* of the ancients. Further, in his *Elucidations* Malebranche, like Hume in Book I, is primarily concerned to refute the view that matter possesses some force or power. However, unlike Hume’s discussion in Book I, Malebranche does consider, in *The Search After Truth*, the *Elucidations*, and the *Dialogues*, the suggestion that we derive our idea of power by reflecting upon our willings. (See, for example, SAT, 448, 449–50, 668–71 and 679.) Given Hume’s obvious familiarity with Malebranche’s writings it seems certain that despite his failure to discuss this suggestion in the context of Book I he must nevertheless, at the time of writing Book I, have been aware of Malebranche’s comments upon it. Not surprisingly Hume’s subsequent discussion of this suggestion in the *Abstract*, Appendix, and the first *Enquiry* follows Malebranche’s general line of criticism.

7. Hume’s examples of billiard balls in the *Treatise* (T, 1.3.14.18/ 164), the only example which he uses in T, 1.3.14, is a paradigm case of causation as it exists in bodies or the operations of matter and as such it is indicative of Hume’s primary interest. The example is even more prominent in the *Abstract* and is used again by Hume in the *Enquiry* (EU, Sects. IV, V, and VII) in those contexts where he is concerned with causation as it exists in external objects. (It should be noted that Keynes and Sraffa incorrectly imply that this example does not appear in the *Treatise*; see their introduction to the *Abstract*, xxix.) Significantly Malebranche repeatedly uses the example of colliding balls (cf. SAT, 448, 451, 659, 660, and the 7th Dial., Sect. XI) and Locke uses the specific example of billiard balls at ECHU, 235 (II, xxi, 4).

What! the efficacy of causes lie in the determination of the mind! As if causes did not operate entirely independent of the mind, and would not continue their operation, even tho' there was no mind existent to contemplate them, or reason concerning them. Thought may very well depend on causes for its operation, but not causes on thought. This is to reverse the order of nature, and to make that secondary, which is really primary. (T, 1.3.14.26/ 167–9, my emphasis)⁸

Hume held that we naturally suppose that there exists an independent, external world of bodies. These bodies are taken to exist quite independently of mind and are also supposed to operate on one another independently of our thoughts about them (cf. T, 1.4.2.20/ 195–97). In this way, it seems quite natural to suppose that the efficacy of causes lies in matter. The two suppositions are connected.⁹

There is also some evidence that Hume misunderstood Locke's position insofar as Hume misrepresents Locke's views about the origin of our idea of necessary connection. That is, it seems that Hume initially took Locke to be as much of a rationalist with regard to the origin of our idea of necessity as he rightly took him to be with regard to the causal maxim (cf. T, 1.3.3.6/ 81 with *Essay*, 620 [IV, x, 3]). Locke suggests that we get the idea of necessity (or power, to use his term) in two ways:

Power also is another of those simple Ideas, which we receive from Sensation and Reflection. For observing in our selves, that we can, at pleasure, move several parts of our Bodies, which were at rest; the effects also, that natural Bodies are able to produce in one another, occurring every moment to our Senses, *we both these ways get the Idea of Power.* (ECHU, 131 [II, vii, 8], my emphasis)

8. Cf. T, 410: "I change therefore. . . ." In this context, Hume makes very clear that he holds unorthodox views about the nature of the material world and changes the "receiv'd systems" in respect of it.

9. Hume's early preoccupation with the question of whether matter possesses any power, force, or activity is perfectly intelligible in its historical context. In this regard, there are two particularly important points to be noted: this issue was of enormous contemporary importance because of the impact of Newton's natural philosophy, and it was *laden* with theological ramifications which Hume would certainly have been very well aware of (the criticisms and replies in LG cited earlier are plainly indicative of this). [For more on this issue see Russell, *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise*: Chap. 12.]

The order in which Locke places these two sources of our idea of power is not without significance. As I have already noted, Locke is committed to the view that the first source is of greater importance, because “bodies, by our senses, do not afford us so clear and distinct an idea of *active* power, as we have from reflection on the operations of our minds.” Despite this, in Book I Hume discusses only the second and less important of Locke’s two suggestions.

I believe the most general and most popular explication of this matter [the origin of our idea of necessity], is to say [here Hume adds the footnote: “See Mr. Locke; chapter of power.”], that there are several new productions *in matter*, such as the motions and variations of *body*, and concluding that there must somewhere be a power capable of producing them, *we arrive at last by this reasoning at the idea of power and efficacy.* (T, 1.3.14.5/ 157, my emphasis)

This passage provides further evidence of Hume’s primary concern in Book I with the suggestion that our idea of necessity originates with our observations of the operations of matter. Against this suggestion of Locke’s, Hume argues that no reasoning can give rise to any original idea (a point which he notes in the *Enquiry* that Locke would accept: EU, 7.8n12/ 64n).

Nowhere in Book I does Hume even mention Locke’s first and more important suggestion. That is to say, of the two proposed solutions to this problem which Locke put forward, Hume, in Book I, attacks the one Locke clearly regards as being of the least importance. Evidently, Hume came to realize, shortly after Books I and II were published, that he had misrepresented Locke’s position and that Locke’s alternative account of the origin of our idea of necessity (i.e., reflection on our willings) raised difficulties for his own views which he would need to address.¹⁰

10. It seems very likely that these difficulties would have been pointed out to Hume by one of those who read the *Treatise* shortly after it was published. By far the most likely candidate for this role is Lord Kames (i.e., Henry Home). Kames—who was an intimate friend and early mentor of Hume’s—read and discussed Hume’s work when Hume returned to Scotland in early 1739 (i.e., shortly after the first two books of the *Treatise* were published). Kames had a deep and long-standing interest in the subject of causation and was, in particular, much impressed by Locke’s views on “power.” (Relevant material regarding these facts can be found in Ernest Mossner, *The Life of David Hume*, 118–19; and Ian Ross, *Lord Kames*, 60–66, 76–77, 174–75.)

In his *Essays on Morality and Natural Religion* (1751), Kames devotes a whole essay to the “Idea of Power.” His discussion includes a sustained attack on Hume’s views on this subject

II

Let us now try to reconstruct Hume's problem in the *Treatise* 1.3.14 as he originally saw it when he wrote that passage. Given that in this section he does not discuss Locke's suggestion, his view of the problem must center on two points. First, Hume accepted the negative conclusion of the "Cartesians" that to all appearances matter "is endowed with no efficacy" and therefore cannot be the source of our idea of necessity. Second, he rejected the "occasionalist" claim of Malebranche that God is "the prime mover of the universe." Against this suggestion, Hume points out that we have "no idea of power or efficacy in any object," because in "neither body nor spirit" are we able to discover a single instance of it. Hume here seems to be in agreement with Locke's remarks:

If we are at this loss in respect to the Powers, and Operations of Bodies, I think it is easy to conclude, *we are much more in the dark in reference to Spirits*; whereof we naturally have no Ideas, but what we draw from that of our own, by reflecting on the Operations of our own Souls within us, as far as they can come within our Observation. (ECHU, 548 [IV, iii, 17]; Locke's emphasis)

In other words, looking to "spirits" (i.e., spirits other than ourselves), such as God, for the origin of our idea of necessary connection is even less likely to be of any help to us.¹¹ Hume's rather disparaging remarks in his subsequent writings concerning the attempts of occasionalists to resolve the

(282–92). Kames interprets Hume as *denying* that there are any powers or forces in the material world or bodies (285–86). This is a view which Kames asserts conflicts with humankind's "natural feelings and sentiments." Against Hume, Kames argues that both our experience of our own will and our observations of the operations of bodies immediately give rise to the feeling that these objects are necessarily connected and that the one (i.e., the cause) produced the other (i.e., the effect). (Cf. Kames, *Essays on Morality and Natural Religion*, 279–80.) Note also that Kames's *Essays* was published *after* Hume's *Enquiry*. Kames points out that Hume's remarks in the *Enquiry* concerning "secret powers" stands in some tension with his views in the *Treatise* (Kames, *Essays*, 290–92). Given the intimate relations which Hume and Kames enjoyed, and their closely overlapping concerns on this subject, Kames's discussion should be given careful consideration by those who are interested in interpreting Hume's views.

11. Clearly, however, Hume differed from Locke in so far as he did not believe that reflecting upon our own case would be any more enlightening. (Note that Hume uses a rather Lockean argument to deal with Malebranche's "hypothesis" of occasionalism and he uses, in his subsequent writings, Malebranche's general line of attack against Locke's suggestion concerning the will.)

problem they generated by robbing matter of its power and efficacy make it clear that he never thought that their “hypothesis” was even a starter.¹²

In this way, the problem which Hume sets himself to resolve is this: having failed to find the origin of our idea of necessity in those sources in which we expected to find it, it *seems* as if this expression is meaningless.

Thus upon the whole we may infer, that when we talk of any being, whether of a superior or inferior nature, as endow'd with a power or force . . . when we speak of a necessary connexion betwixt objects, *and suppose, that this connexion depends upon an efficacy or energy, with which these objects are endow'd; in all those expressions, so apply'd, we have really no distinct meaning, and make use only of common words, without any clear and determinate ideas. But . . . 'tis more probable, that these expressions do here lose their true meaning by being wrong applied, than that they never have any meaning. . . .* (T, 1.3.14.14/ 162, my emphasis)

Hume's point is not that these expressions are in fact meaningless but only that they are meaningless when applied to “objects” (keeping in mind that the “objects” which concern Hume the most are physical objects or bodies). It was Hume's view that these expressions should, properly speaking, be applied only to our perceptions. As we shall see, the fact that these terms are wrongly applied in these ways is, for Hume, connected with the fact that we have sought the origin of our idea of necessity in the wrong place—that is, in the operations of *matter*.

Near the end of T, 1.2 Hume states that his “intention never was to penetrate into the nature of bodies, or explain the secret cause of their operations.” He continues:

For besides that this belongs not to my present purpose, I am afraid, that *such an enterprise is beyond the reach of human understanding*, and that we can never pretend to know body otherwise

12. At the time of publishing the *Treatise* Hume suppressed his views on religion. Clearly, however, Hume thought, philosophically speaking, any appeals to “the deity” were fraught with difficulties. In *A Letter from a Gentleman* Hume describes occasionalism as a doctrine that was considered by most English philosophers (e.g., Locke, Cudworth, Clarke) as “too little supported by philosophical arguments, ever to be admitted as any thing but a mere hypothesis” (LG, 32/ 28). In the *Enquiry* Hume suggests that “we are got into fairy land, long ere we have reached the last steps of [this] . . . theory” (EU, 7.25/ 73).

than by those external properties, which discover themselves to the senses. . . . I content myself with knowing perfectly the manner in which objects affect my senses, and their connections with each other, as far as experience informs me of them. This suffices for the conduct of life; and this also suffices for my philosophy, *which pretends only to explain the nature and causes of our perceptions, or our impressions and ideas.* (T, 1.2.5.26/ 64, my emphasis)¹³

However, despite this disclaimer of any interest in the nature of bodies and their operations, Hume also takes the view that our imagination makes it impossible for us to "reject the notion of an independent and continued existence" (T, 1.4.2.51/ 214). Hume is also aware that this natural belief in the existence of body is bound to conflict with his skeptical principles.

In his discussion of our natural tendency to believe in the existence of body, Hume distinguishes between "objects" and "perceptions"; "perceptions" are those existents that are interrupted, perishing, and dependent on the mind, and "objects" or "bodies" are those existents that are independent, continuing, and external to the mind.¹⁴ "The vulgar," Hume says, "confound perceptions and objects" (T, 1.4.2.14/ 193) and "can never assent to the opinion of a double existence and representation" (T, 1.4.2.31/ 202). They "take their perceptions to be their only objects and suppose, that the very being, which is intimately present to mind, is the real body or material existence" (T, 1.4.2.20/ 206). Philosophers cannot accept this view of things. They have devised the hypothesis of

. . . the double existence of perceptions and objects; which pleases our reason in allowing, that our dependent perceptions are interrupted and different; and at the same time is agreeable to the

13. To this passage Hume appends the following remarks: "As long as we confine our speculations to *the appearances* of objects to our senses, without entering into disquisitions concerning their real nature and operations, we are safe from all difficulties, and can never be embarrass'd by any question. . . . If we carry our enquiry beyond the appearances of objects to the senses, I am afraid, that most of our conclusions will be full of scepticism and uncertainty" (T, 1.2.26/ 638–39).

14. In T, 1.3 Hume uses the term "object" to include mental as well as physical objects (i.e., bodies) and it would seem, therefore, that there is a sudden change in the meaning of this term. However, it should be kept in mind that in T, 1.3 Hume was primarily concerned with physical objects. Once this emphasis is noted then it should be apparent that his usage of the term "object" in T, 1.4 is not as out of keeping with his usage of that term in T, 1.3 as appears at first glance.

imagination, in attributing a continu'd existence to something else, which we all call *objects*" (T, 1.4.2.52/ 215, Hume's emphasis).

In this way, the conflicting principles of the imagination and reason create a double ontology. Hume believes that this hypothesis of double existence is only "a palliative remedy, and that it contains all the difficulties of the vulgar system, with some others, that are peculiar to itself" (T, 1.4.2.46/ 211). However, as neither nature nor reason will "quit the field" (T, 1.4.2.52/ 215), we are left with this "philosophical hypothesis." This is a "malady" which philosophy can never cure. "Carelessness and inattention alone can afford us the remedy" (T, 1.4.2.57/ 218). Although Hume stops short of abandoning the commonsense belief in the existence of the material world, he argues, nevertheless, that (a) we cannot infer the existence of a material world on the basis of our perceptions, and (b) even if we could do so, we "should never have any reason to infer that our objects resemble our perceptions" (T, 1.4.2.54/ 216).

In short, the ontology of double existence permits Hume to embrace a position which is consistent with his "mitigated scepticism." On the one hand, he argues that we never penetrate the nature and operations of the material world of bodies, that we have no reason to believe that there exists such a world, and that we have even less reason to believe that it resembles the world of our perceptions. On the other hand, Hume accepts that it is an inescapable fact about human nature that we suppose that there exists such a world of bodies and that they operate "independent of our thought and reasoning."

How this ontology of double existence sheds light on Hume's discussion of causation and, in particular, how it helps to account for the motivation behind Hume's two definitions of cause can best be appreciated by considering his arguments concerning "the relation of cause and effect, as discovered in the motions and operations of matter" in some detail.

The following three arguments form the core of Hume's position concerning the causal relation as we discover it in physical objects or bodies:

1. There are no intelligible or a priori discoverable connections between bodies themselves.
2. After repeated *experience* of one sort of object (i.e., body) being conjoined with another object, for example, bodies resembling X being constantly conjoined with bodies resembling Y, we find that our *perceptions* of Xs and Ys become connected. That is to say, our experience

of constant conjunction generates connections among our ideas (i.e., generates connexions *in our mind*).

3. This "connexion" is the product of a natural relation. It is an association which holds only between our perceptions, and it cannot, therefore, be attributed to the objects (i.e., bodies) themselves. Nevertheless, insofar as we suppose bodies to be represented by our perceptions, the philosophical relations which exist between these perceptions may be attributed to the bodies themselves.

Hume argues that our idea of necessity does not arise directly from our observation of physical objects or bodies. That is to say, he holds that there is no necessity observed in bodies themselves. Constant conjunction is all that we observe of causation as it is in these objects. Hume holds that it is not the bodies that are the source of our idea of necessity but rather our perceptions of them. We must "change the point of view, from the objects to the perceptions" (T, 1.3.14.29/ 169) if we are to discover the source of this idea. Hume has already stated that his procedure has been "like those, who being in search of anything that lies concealed from them, and not finding it in the place they expected, beat about all the neighbouring fields" (T, 1.3.2.13/ 77–78). The "neighbouring field" where he has found the origin of our idea is that of our perceptions. The traditional reluctance of philosophers to change their perspective from bodies to perceptions has prevented both ancient and modern philosophers from arriving at the true source of our idea of necessity.

[These philosophers] have sufficient force of genius to free them from the vulgar error, that there is a natural and perceivable connexion betwixt the several sensible qualities and actions of matter; but not sufficient to keep them from *ever seeking for this connexion in matter*, or causes. . . . At present they seem to be in a very lamentable condition. . . . For what can be imagined more tormenting, than to seek with eagerness, what for ever flies us; and seek for it *in a place where it is impossible it can ever exist?* (T, 1.4.3.9/ 223, my emphasis)

Accordingly, the change of perspective from bodies to perceptions is, for the Hume of Book I, fundamental to discovering the actual source of our *idea* of necessity. The reason for this is quite straightforward. The connection which we think of as holding between cause and effect turns out to be the same as that which holds between our perceptions whereby one idea

naturally introduces the other. That is, the necessary connection turns out to be an association between our perceptions. Thus, in one move Hume can account for both the failure of philosophers to find the origin of this idea in matter and for our natural tendency to believe that bodies themselves are necessarily connected.

Hume argues that, as “the idea of necessity is a new original idea,” constant conjunction “must either *discover* or *produce* something new, which is the source of that idea” (T, 1.3.14.16/ 163). We feel that a cause produces or determines its effect and is not simply followed by it because of

. . . that propensity, which custom produces, to pass from an object to the idea of its usual attendant. This therefore is the essence of necessity. Upon the whole, *necessity is something, that exists in the mind, not in objects; nor is it possible for us to form the most distant idea of it, considered as a quality in bodies.*” (T,1.3.14.22/ 165–66; my emphasis).

This very important passage offers further evidence of Hume’s primary concern, in Book I, with body or matter considered as a source of our idea of necessity. Apart from the explicit reference to bodies emphasized earlier, it seems clear that Hume is arguing that necessity exists in the *mind* as opposed to *bodies*. Because mental objects (i.e., perceptions) must, obviously, “exist in the mind,” Hume’s remark that “necessity exists in the mind, not in objects” would lose its significance if he were referring to mental objects. He is, rather, drawing a contrast between his view, that necessity exists in the mind, and the view that he is attacking, that necessity exists in matter or bodies. Clearly, the “objects” to which Hume refers must be physical objects or bodies.

Hume completes this passage as follows:

. . . Either we have no idea of necessity, or *necessity is nothing but that determination of the thought* to pass from causes to effects and from effects to causes, according to their experienced union” (T, 1.3.14.22/ 166, my emphasis).

The “determination of the thought” is what we have the internal impression of, and this is the origin of our idea of necessity. This impression would not arise were it not for associations among our perceptions,

associations which constitute the only "connexions" we will discover among things. We are "led astray by a false philosophy," Hume suggests, "when we transfer the determination of the thought to *external objects*, and suppose any real intelligible connexion between them; that being a quality which can *only belong to the mind that considers them*" (T, 1.3.14.27/168, my emphasis—note that Hume mentions this "false philosophy" again at T, 1.4.3.9/ 222–23).

I have already pointed out that Hume held that it was impossible for us to abandon our belief in the independent and continuing existence of bodies—that is, the material world. The question naturally arises as to what relations and connections hold among bodies themselves, as distinct from our perceptions of them. The gist of Hume's answer to this question seems to be that although we may attribute philosophical relations to physical objects, we cannot attribute those connections which are produced by natural relations to them.¹⁵ For example, Hume states explicitly (T, 1.3.14.28/ 168) that physical objects may "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." But, as we have seen, he will not allow that the product of natural relations, that is, those "connexions" which hold between our perceptions of these objects, may also be "transferred" to these bodies (although he notes that we have a natural tendency to do this [cf. T, 1.3.14.25/ 167] because we "confound perceptions and objects"). A natural relation is a "quality, by which two ideas are connected together in the *imagination*, and the one naturally introduces the other after the manner above explained" (T, 1.1.5.1/ 13 —as explained at 1.1.4 in terms of "the connexion or association of ideas"). These effects of natural relations (viz. the generation of "connexions" among our ideas) must, obviously, be confined to our perceptions. However, we find philosophical relations wherever there are qualities "which make *objects* admit of comparison" (T, 1.1.5.2/ 14, my emphasis). There is no reason, therefore, to suppose that such relations do not exist in the material world among bodies (assuming, that is, that we also suppose that our perceptions represent these objects).

15. We have a natural tendency to do this because we have a natural tendency to "confound perceptions and objects" (T, 1.4.2.14/ 193—see also T, 1.4.3.9/ 223: "'Tis natural for men . . .").

III

Let us briefly digress from our primary concern, Hume's discussion of the origin of our idea of necessary connection in Book I, in order to consider whether or not Hume's reasoning concerning "the relation of cause and effect, as discovered in the motions and operations of matter . . . extends to the operations of mind" (TA, 25/ 655). In light of what has already been said in the first part of this essay, it should be clear that the first two of Hume's arguments outlined earlier suffice to refute Locke's suggestion regarding the will (the will being the specific mental object which Hume comes to consider). First, as we have noted, Hume argues that "we learn the influence of our will from experience alone." That is to say, there are no intelligible or a priori discoverable connections between the will and its effects. From the idea of the cause, we cannot by any sort of reasoning demonstrate what its effect will be. Second, experience teaches us "how one event constantly follows another, without instructing us in the secret connexion, which binds them together, and renders them inseparable" (EU, 7.13/ 66). Hume is anxious to establish, as he was when considering the operations of matter, that our experience of the constant conjunction of our willings and their consequent effects does not create any change in our conception of these objects (i.e., does not involve a change in "the parts or composition" of these ideas; cf. T, 1.3.7.2/ 95):

And even after we have experience of these effects [of the will], 'tis custom alone, not reason, which determines us to make it the standard of our future judgments. When the cause is presented, the mind, from habit, immediately passes to the conception and belief of the usual effect. This belief is something different from the conception. It does not, however, join any new idea to it. It only makes it felt differently, and renders it stronger and more lively. (TA, 10/ 655–56)

In short, it is evident that Hume's first two arguments "extend" to the case of the will and can, therefore, be used to refute Locke's suggestion that our idea of necessity originates with our reflecting on our volitions. Further, these arguments apply not only to the case of our will considered as a cause but also to mental objects or perceptions in general. There are no intelligible or a priori discoverable connections among any objects, including perceptions. Nor does our experience of the constant conjunction of

perceptions produce or discover any further metaphysical tie or bond between them. After experiencing the constant union of a given perception with another object, these two objects, like our ideas of physical objects in these circumstances, become connected in our thought. Here again, therefore, the reasoning seems to be on the same footing as we found with material bodies.

Hume's third argument—that is, that “the determination of the thought” cannot be transferred to the “external objects”—is not required for his refutation of Locke's (p. 34) suggestion. Rather, it is designed to undercut the supposition which is fundamental to the “false philosophy,” namely, the supposition that there exist connections among the bodies themselves, “independent of our thought and reasoning”. Because we naturally tend to “confound perceptions and objects,” we are liable to suppose that there exist some intrinsic connections among the external objects which correspond to “the determination of the thought” or “connexions among our ideas.” This tendency in our thinking is seriously in error, and it is a source of considerable support for the “false philosophy.” In this way, it suffices for Hume's purposes that his first two arguments “extend” to the case of the operations of mind, thus refuting Locke's suggestion concerning the will, and that the third holds in the case of the operations of matter, thus refuting the “false philosophy.”

It should be noted, however, that the third argument does *not* in fact “extend” to the case of the operations of mind. Any perception, viewed as a mental object, can be considered as a cause of another perception. Initially, as with physical objects, there is no connection of any sort between the two. That is to say, when we first experience a mental object resembling an x , say x^1 , we may find that it is conjoined with an object resembling a y , say y^1 . This is all that we will find relating them. There is, in other words, no connection whatsoever between x^1 and y^1 . However, after experiencing the constant conjunction of x s and y s, we will eventually find that there exists a felt connection between x^n and y^n . Now, in the case of physical objects or bodies, we noted that this “determination of the thought” or “felt connexion” holds only among our perceptions of these bodies and not among the physical objects themselves. But in the case of mental objects or perceptions, *they are the objects themselves*—there is no representation involved. That is to say, there is no gulf between mental objects and our perceptions of them. Hence, these felt connections can, obviously, be attributed to the mental objects themselves. In this way, it seems clear that Hume's argument that “the determination of the thought” should not be transferred

to “external objects” cannot be “extended” to the case of the operations of the mind.

Does the fact that “felt connexions” can, on Hume’s principles, be attributed to the operations of the mind in any way undermine Hume’s claim that “the same reasoning extends to the operations of the mind”? I think not. Hume’s point is, I suggest, that all the relevant reasoning extends to the operations of mind. Felt connections are clearly not conceived of as “connexions” in the “loose” or “popular” sense.¹⁶ Felt connections do not impinge on Hume’s principle that all objects, including our perceptions, are entirely distinct. Nor do connections of this nature disclose any tie or bond between cause and effect which render them “inseparable.” Most important, felt connections, unlike connections as commonly conceived, do not make this relation “an object of reasoning.” The inference from the cause to the effect rests entirely on custom or habit rather than reason. Thus, in all these important respects (i.e., all relevant respects), it seems clear that Hume is justified in claiming that “the same reasoning extends to the operations of mind.”¹⁷

IV

Let us return to Hume’s concerns in Book I and examine what he has to say about causation as it exists in nature “independent of our thought and reasoning” (i.e., in the material world). Hume says that such objects “bear to each other the relations of contiguity and succession” and “that like objects may be observed in several instances to have like relations” (T, 1.4.14.28/ 168). This passage is almost immediately followed by Hume’s “two definitions” of cause. I believe that it is significant that this account of causation as it exists in bodies or the material world comes very close to giving Hume’s first definition of cause, which I call definition C₁:

[A cause is] an object precedent and contiguous to another, and where all the objects resembling the former are plac’d in like

16. On Hume’s view, “real connexions” (cf. T, 1.3.14. 27/ 168) depend on the *nature* of the objects (i.e., their “parts or composition”) rather than on the *manner* in which they are conceived by the mind.

17. Section III did not appear in the original article as first published in 1984. The text inserted here first appeared in *Freedom and Moral Sentiment* (33–34). [See note 1 earlier].

relations of precedence and contiguity to those objects, that resemble the latter." (T, 1.3.14.40/ 172)

I suggest that Hume is here concerned to define the cause as it exists in nature, independent of our thought and reasoning. Accordingly, because he is considering bodies, he makes no mention of perceptions, that is, impressions and ideas, nor of the effects of natural relations (i.e., those "connexions" which relate only perceptions).

By contrast, his second definition is concerned with cause as it exists in our perceptions (i.e., mind). When we change the point of view from the objects (i.e., material objects) to perceptions, Hume says, "the impression is to be considered as the cause, and the lively idea as the effect; and their necessary connexion is that new determination, which we feel to pass from the idea of one to that of the other" (T, 1.3.14.29/ 169, my emphasis). Thus we have Hume's second definition of cause as it exists in our thought or perceptions, definition C_2 :

[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*." (T, 1.3.14.40/172, my emphasis)

It is by considering causation as we find it in our perceptions that we discover that (internal) impression of the necessary connection which our examination of matter failed to reveal.

Hume's two definitions of cause reflect the fact that he embraces the ontology of double existence of perceptions and bodies. The criticism of his position which he considers prior to offering his two definitions (i.e., "As if causes did not operate entirely independent of mind . . ." [T, 1.3.14.26-8/ 167-69]) makes clear the relevance of his views on ontology, as developed in Part IV, to his discussion of causation. Given that people ordinarily "confound" perceptions and bodies, it is understandable that they arrive at the mistaken conclusion that material bodies are necessarily connected.¹⁸ They attribute those connections which exist in their imagination, that is, those associations which connect their perceptions, to the bodies themselves. However, as Hume points out, even philosophers—who distinguish

18. Here again the passage at T, 1.4.3.9/ 223 already cited ("'Tis natural for men . . .") is relevant.

between bodies and our perceptions of them—continue to assume that the necessary connections hold among bodies and thereby adhere to the “false philosophy” which he seeks to dispose of.

Hume seeks to establish that necessary connections, like secondary qualities (T, 1.4.4.3/ 226–27) and moral qualities (T, 3.1.1.26/ 469), can be said to exist only in the mind that considers these material objects. Thus, what Hume has to say can be assimilated to other central doctrines in the *Treatise*. Necessary connections, like colors, smells, virtue, and vice, exist in the mind and not in objects themselves, and we must check our inclination to attribute these features to the objects.¹⁹

Hume offers two definitions of necessity which are, as with his two definitions of cause, founded on his ontology of double existence:

I define necessity two ways, conformable to the two definitions of cause, *of which it makes an essential part*. I place it either *in the constant union and conjunction of like objects, or in the inference of the mind from the one to the other* (T, 2.3.2.4/ 409, my emphasis, cf. EU, 8.27/ 97).

Let us call “the constant union of like objects” definition N_1 and “the inference of the mind from the one [object] to the other” definition N_2 . N_1 , like C_1 , is a definition offered in terms of philosophical relations and makes no reference to our perceptions. N_2 refers to “the inference of the mind” and is, consequently, dependent on an ontology of perceptions rather than external objects. It is dependent on an ontology of perceptions because the inference of the mind must be an association between *ideas*. On Hume’s account, inferred “objects” must be capable of “enlivening” and of possessing the phenomenological property of vivacity; clearly, these are properties which only ideas (as opposed to bodies) are capable of possessing. Here again, we find the change in point of view which reflects the ontology of double existence.

Given that N_1 and N_2 follow the ontological distinction which we found between C_1 and C_2 , how are C_1 and N_1 and C_2 and N_2 related? Specifically, does necessity make an essential part of both of Hume’s definitions of cause, as his remarks would seem to suggest? When Hume examines

19. Of course, the *sense* in which Hume thinks that virtue and vice “are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind” (T, 3.1.1.26/ 469) requires careful interpretation. However, this is not our present concern.

material bodies, all he can discover are the relations of contiguity, priority, and constant conjunction—he cannot find any relation of necessary connection. Consider the following “part” of definition C_1 : “and where all the objects resembling the former are plac’d in like relations of precedency and contiguity to those objects, that resemble the latter.” This is simply all that we find of the relation of necessary connection if we (mistakenly) look for it in material bodies—that is, constant conjunction. It is, therefore, not surprising that this “part” of C_1 is simply N_1 reworded. N_1 , as we have noted, confines itself to an ontology of objects and philosophical relations. Now consider the following “part” of C_2 : “and so united with it, that the idea of the one determines the mind to form the idea of the other.” This is simply the relation of necessary connection as we find it in our perceptions—that is, the inference of the mind, or N_2 . It is obvious that necessity does, as Hume suggests, form an essential part of *both* definitions of cause.

We are now in a position to clarify in what way N_1 and N_2 form an essential part of C_1 and C_2 , respectively. First, Hume takes the view that a cause is an “object,” and, as such, it may be viewed as either a body or a perception. The alternative perspective reflects the natural alternative we find in the ontology of double existence. Second, this “object” bears certain relations to another “object” (i.e., its effect). These relations include the philosophical relations of contiguity and priority, which both bodies and perceptions share. Third, it is also “essential” that these objects be related by a necessary connection. When we mistakenly seek this relation in bodies, all we discover is the relation of constant conjunction. This is all that exists of necessity independent of our thought and reasoning. However, when we change our point of view and consider these “objects” as perceptions, then the necessary connection turns out to be a determination or inference in our thought.

As we have already noted, Hume states that “either we have no idea of necessity, or *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/ 166). This claim, although it might accord with definition N_2 , makes it difficult to understand why Hume offers definition N_1 at all. Further, in some contexts (e.g., T, 1.3.14.14/ 162), Hume clearly suggests that necessity should not be ascribed to objects and does not exist in objects. Why, then, does he offer us an account of necessity as it exists independent of our thought and reason? He does this, I believe, because he is committed to the view that we naturally believe in an independent,

material world—however much that belief may lack rational foundations. It is understandable, given this view of things, that he offers some account of causation and necessity as they exist in that material world, independent of mind. Just as Hume refuses to join Berkeley in abandoning our belief in matter (cf. EU, 12.16n32/ 155n), so, too, he refuses to abandon the “common sense” view (as expressed at T, 1.3.14.26-8/ 167–69) that causation and necessity also exist independent of our thought and reasoning.

If we try to define cause as it exists independent of mind, then we must also define necessity, which makes an “essential part” of cause, as it exists independent of the mind. From this perspective, the only account of necessity that one can offer is, as we have seen, constant conjunction, or N_1 . It is in this way that the ontology of double existence yields Hume’s definitions C_1 and N_1 as an account of “the operations of nature” as they exist independent of mind. It must be noted, however, that Hume also maintains, somewhat paradoxically, that any such account is quite “beyond the reach of human understanding.” I suggest, therefore, that these definitions, C_1 and N_1 , should be viewed as “palliative remedies” which Hume offers so as to “set [us] at ease as much as possible,” given our inescapable “malady” of believing in a world we can know nothing of. This is entirely in keeping with both the spirit and letter of Hume’s philosophy.

V

Let us briefly note some of the more important and illuminating aspects of the interpretation argued for in this essay.

1. On this interpretation, it is possible to explain why Hume claims that “the mind has a great propensity to spread itself on external objects” (T, 1.3.14.25/ 167; cf. T, 1.4.3.9/ 222–23 and 1.4.7.3/ 266–67). The mind has a tendency to “spread itself on external objects”—and hence to “transfer the determination of the thought to external objects”—because the mind tends to “confound perceptions and objects” (T, 1.4.2.14/ 193).
2. On this interpretation, we can explain why Hume believes that we are inclined to suppose that the source of our idea of necessity is to be discovered in the operations of matter. According to Hume, we naturally suppose there is a world of objects that exist and operate on one another “independent of our thought and reason.” Consequently, we naturally suppose there must be some intrinsic necessity or power in

these objects independent of our thought and reason. (How else could these bodies operate on one another?)

3. On this interpretation, we can also explain why Hume suggests that we are reluctant to accept that there is nothing more to necessity as it exists in the objects themselves than mere constant conjunction. We tend to suppose there must be some *intrinsic* connections among the objects themselves because we have a natural tendency to attribute those connections which we *feel* among our *perceptions* (i.e., in the mind) to the *objects* themselves. (See point [1] just cited.) In other words, because we confound perceptions and objects, we tend to suppose that necessity inheres in the objects themselves.
4. On this interpretation, we can explain why Hume suggests that we must "change the point of view from the objects to the perceptions" (T, 1.3.14.29/ 169). When we consider causation as it exists in objects (i.e., bodies), we cannot discover the source of our idea of necessity. However, when we change our perspective to our perceptions, we discover that the source of our idea of necessity is an association of ideas. These "felt connexions" among our perceptions cannot be attributed to the objects themselves (although we are, as has been noted, naturally inclined to do this).
5. On this interpretation, we can account for the force of Hume's criticism of his own position (at T, 1.3.14.26/ 167: "What! the efficacy of causes lie in the determination of the mind! . . ."). In this passage, Hume acknowledges that his account of the origin and nature of our idea of necessity deeply conflicts with our natural belief that bodies exist and operate on one another independent of the mind. That is to say, as has been noted, Hume recognizes that we naturally suppose that there exists some necessity in the objects themselves.

An appreciation of the significance of these points is essential for a proper understanding of Hume's position. The fact that Hume's views on ontology consistently and strikingly shed light on these aspects of his discussion provides strong support for the interpretation offered in this essay. Previous interpretations have almost entirely failed to note the significance of these points. Any adequate interpretation of Hume's views on causation must cohere with the details of the relevant passages in Book I and must also be able to account for the original starting point and subsequent development of Hume's discussion. In this way, it seems clear that the strengths of this interpretation reveal the weaknesses of its rivals.

In conclusion, if Hume's views on causation have a paradoxical air about them, that is because they rest on an ontology of "double existence," which Hume describes as "the monstrous offspring of two principles, which are contrary to each other, which are both at once embrac'd by the mind, and which are unable mutually to destroy each other" (T, 1.4.2.52/215). In this way, the dualism which we find in Hume's account of causation simply reflects the dualism of the ontology of double existence. On the one hand, in order to set our imagination at ease and to take into consideration our natural belief in the material world, Hume offers an account of causation as it exists in matter independent of mind (as at T, 1.3.14.28/168). Hence, he offers us the first definition of cause. This account of causation indicates his respect for the fact that we cannot abandon or escape from our natural beliefs. On the other hand, in order to set our reason at ease, Hume also points out that we cannot infer that there exists a material world, that we have no reason to believe that our perceptions represent such a world, and that any attempt to "penetrate into the nature of bodies" is beyond the reach of human understanding and liable to produce skepticism and uncertainty. All that we require for "the conduct of life" and for an understanding of Hume's philosophy is knowledge of the nature and operations of our perceptions. Hume, accordingly, is primarily concerned with "the universe of the imagination" and therefore with the nature of causation as we find it there. Thus, he offers us his second definition of cause. By viewing the problem in this light, Hume seeks to establish that "the cement of the universe" (i.e., the universe of the imagination) is the association of our ideas. As his concluding remarks in the *Abstract* make clear, this is what Hume set out to prove in Book I of the *Treatise*.²⁰

Appendix 2020: Was Hume a "Causal Realist"?

About the same time that this chapter was first published (1984), several other contributions appeared that argued that Hume should be interpreted as a "causal realist."²¹ This work includes, most notably, John Wright's *The*

20. I am grateful to Bernard Williams for his very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

21. My remarks in this appendix draw extensively from Russell, *Freedom and Moral Sentiment*, 41–42, 117; Russell, "Review of *The New Hume Debate*"; and Russell, *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise*, 159–160.

Sceptical Realism of David Hume (1983) and Galen Strawson's *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism and David Hume* (1989). Contrary to the traditional view that Hume holds some form of the regularity view of causation, the "realist" account maintains that Hume "did not *question* the *existence* of real forces in nature any more than he questioned the existence of independent external objects themselves."²² Perhaps the clearest and most succinct account of the "causal realist" interpretation is provided by Galen Strawson in his paper "David Hume: Objects and Powers" (2000).²³ According to Strawson, the traditional regularity interpretation presents Hume as making a "positive ontological assertion about the ultimate nature of reality," which is "violently at odds with Hume's [epistemological] scepticism" (Strawson, "David Hume: Objects and Power," 34). Strawson maintains that although Hume "does not make positive claims about what definitely (or knowably) does *not* exist," he also "never really questions the idea that there is Causation [i.e., causal powers in objects], something in virtue of which reality is regular in the way that it is" (Strawson, "David Hume: Objects and Power," 35.) On Strawson's account, therefore, Hume holds that real powers in objects exist (i.e., "Causation"), even though we have no positive, contentful conception of it.²⁴

The account I have defended in this essay (i.e., as based on Hume's ontology of "double existence") rejects the causal realist interpretation. The causal realist interpretation goes astray at a number of points. The most important of these are the following:

22. Wright, *The Sceptical Realism of David Hume*: 147—my emphasis. According to Wright's "sceptical realist" interpretation there are two general components to Hume's philosophy that are especially important. The first is that Hume is a skeptic who denies the possibility of attaining knowledge about the ultimate nature of reality. The second is that he is not a Pyrrhonian, as he endorses certain "natural beliefs"; most notably, that external objects exist, and that (real, metaphysical) causation exists. [I explain my disagreement with the skeptical realist interpretation as it relates to Hume's views on the external world in essay 3 later.]

23. This paper condenses the much longer defence of this interpretation presented in *The Secret Connexion*. Strawson makes clear that his own interpretation follows closely the skeptical realist account defended by Wright (Strawson, "David Hume: Objects and Power," 39). For two important responses to the "causal realist" view see Winkler, "The New Hume"; and Millican, "Hume, Causal Realism, and Causal Science".

24. Strawson's interpretation leans heavily on Hume's discussion in the first *Enquiry*. In contrast with this, the interpretation based on the ontology of double existence, gives the *Treatise* account equal weighting (especially since there is no obvious counterpart to T, 1.4.2 in the *Enquiry*). There is, nevertheless, no significant shift in Hume's views in the later work.

- (1) Hume is clearly committed to the view that we *naturally suppose* that there are “powers” and “forces” in bodies beyond mere regularity (i.e., for the reasons already explained in detail). This natural supposition is shown to be groundless, lacking any specific content, and wholly explicable in terms of the workings of our perceptions.
- (2) It is no part of the interpretation that has been defended here, based on double ontology, to argue that Hume (dogmatically) *denies* the existence of unknown “secret powers” in bodies or external objects. On the contrary, in some contexts Hume allows that there *might* be some (incomprehensible and unknowable) “secret powers” in external objects (for all that we know and understand of such objects). Consistent with his skepticism, he neither denies nor asserts the existence of such “secret powers” (i.e., he is agnostic about this issue).²⁵
- (3) Hume is especially concerned to argue that whether or not such unknowable and incomprehensible “secret powers” in fact exist in the objects, we have every reason to avoid conflating this “unintelligible” account of necessity (T, 2.3.2.4/ 410; and EU, 8.22/ 92–93) with the intelligible and coherent account of necessity which he is particularly concerned to provide us with (i.e., as per his two definitions).²⁶
- (4) Hume’s philosophy is concerned “only to explain the nature and causes of our perceptions,” and this suffices not only for his philosophy but also “for the conduct of life” (T, 1.2.5.26/ 64 and 1.3.14.12/ 632). It is within this framework that Hume sets out to explain why we *mistakenly* suppose that we have some (further) *idea* of necessity beyond that of constant conjunction and inference. The root difficulty is our natural tendency to confuse perceptions and objects and transfer those

25. As has been pointed out, given Hume’s double ontology, in the case of external objects or bodies there is a *representational gap* between our ideas and the objects themselves. While *felt* connections cannot be attributed to *bodies*, there *might* still be some form of concealed powers or connections that our ideas fail to represent (e.g., as per Locke’s hypothesis). The situation is not so clear with regard to mental objects or perceptions. In this case there is no representation, as our perceptions are the objects themselves. Since there is no representational gap or “double existence” involved, we might say that mental objects, unlike bodies, are ontologically *transparent*. As such, although felt connections can be attributed to these (internal) objects, any “secret powers” in these objects cannot be hidden or concealed by way of inadequate representation. It is significant that the hypothesis of “secret powers” faces particular difficulties with respect to *mental* objects. In this case there is no set of objects distinct from our perceptions to *project* felt connections back onto.

26. Note, in particular, that Hume explicitly *rejects* any proposed distinction between “occasions” and “real causes” (T, 1.3.14.32/ 171: “For as our idea of efficacy is deriv’d from constant conjunction . . .”

connections that we feel among our constantly conjoined perceptions back to the objects (i.e., bodies) themselves.

- (5) Historically speaking, the hypothesis of real causal powers in objects is bound up with the view that there are causal powers of one kind in matter or bodies and of another kind in mind or thought (i.e., "active powers"). This was, of course, a view that was widely held among Hume's contemporaries, most of whom were committed to forms of "causal realism." Views of this kind are, as Hume points out, also closely connected with the related distinction between "spiritual and material substance" (EU, 7.9-20; and also T, 1.4.3). Any effort to account for "secret powers" in spiritual and/or material substance has, according to Hume, no basis in reason or experience (T, 1.4.5)—and he dismisses *all* hypotheses rooted in these metaphysical speculations as "unintelligible" and "absurd" (T, 1.4.5.21/243). Related to this point, Hume is equally clear that "the common distinction betwixt *moral* and *physical* necessity is without any foundation in nature" (T, 1.3.14.33/171, Hume's emphasis), just as he is clear that any distinction between power and the exercise of it is "equally without foundation" (T, 1.3.14.34/ 171; and also 2.1.10.5 and 7/ 312 and 313). These claims all run directly against the suggestion that Hume is committed to the existence of real causal powers independent and distinct from constant conjunction.²⁷

The upshot of these considerations is that the "causal realist" interpretation both understates and exaggerates Hume's skeptical commitments on this subject. It understates Hume's skeptical commitments by suggesting that Hume (dogmatically) *affirms* the *existence* of "real causal powers" (i.e., "Causation" in objects)—something that would, indeed, be "violently at odds with Hume's [epistemological] scepticism."²⁸ At the same time, it exaggerates Hume's skepticism by suggesting that on Hume's account we have no "genuine conception" or "descriptively contentful" *idea* of

27. Hume is especially concerned to reject the suggestion that thought is in some way "more active than matter" (T, 1.4.5.31/ 249). Not only is this claim fundamental to Hume's irreligious cosmological views, it is also a key feature of his argument (in T, 3.1.1-2 and EU, 84-19) that human thought and action is subject to causation and necessity *in the same way* as the operations of matter, and that there is no difference between them in this respect. On these aspects of Hume's broader philosophical agenda see Russell, *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise*, esp. Chaps. 12 and 16.

28. This point is made in Winkler, "The New Hume."

causation and necessity. It is precisely this skeptical conclusion that Hume *aims to avoid* by way of identifying the *true* nature and origin of our *idea* of necessity. The fundamental obstacle to getting a clear understanding of this idea is our natural “bias” or “prejudice” whereby we tend to suppose that we have some *further* idea of causation and necessity as they exist in bodies. The irony is, therefore, that the causal realist interpretation manifests the very confusions that Hume is seeking to overcome. From his perspective, the whole hypothesis of “real causal powers” in bodies or external objects is the root *obstacle* to making effective progress on this subject.²⁹

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29. This reveals a further inconsistency in the causal realist interpretation. According to Strawson, Hume's skepticism about our *knowledge* of “Causation” does not prevent him from accepting some hypotheses about its nature and rejecting others, even though there is no experimental basis for this preference. More specifically, on the “causal realist” account, as defended by Strawson and Wright, Hume accepts the (Lockean) view that there exist “real powers” in external objects, but nevertheless rejects as “absurd” the occasionalist hypothesis that these regularities manifest God's immediate activity and (infinite) power. It is not clear, however, given the constraints of Hume's “epistemological scepticism,” how this difference in attitude toward the principal alternative hypotheses that he considers can be accounted for. On the double ontology account that I have defended, Hume rejects *all* such hypotheses as not only unintelligible and groundless, but also irrelevant to his own philosophy and our human practical life.

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