



THE *Engraved by Brooman*
NEW HUME DEBATE

EDITED BY
RUPERT READ AND KENNETH A. RICHMAN

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The New Hume Debate

For decades scholars thought they knew Hume's position on the existence of causes and objects—he was a sceptic. However, this received view has been thrown into question by the 'new' readings of Hume as a sceptical *realist*.

For philosophers, students of philosophy and others interested in theories of causation and their history, *The New Hume Debate* is the first book to fully document the most influential contemporary readings of Hume's work. The editors provide a clear introduction and conclusion, placing the main players in the New Hume debate in context, and setting the stage for the contributors to state and defend their positions. Throughout, the volume brings the debate beyond textual issues in Hume to contemporary philosophical issues concerning causation and knowledge of the external world and issues in the history of philosophy, offering the reader a model for scholarly debate.

The New Hume Debate is essential reading for anyone interested in Hume, the history of ideas, the history of science, and eighteenth-century philosophy.

Rupert Read is Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of East Anglia, Norwich.
Kenneth A. Richman is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at Kalamazoo College.

Contributors: Barry Stroud, Galen Strawson, Kenneth P. Winkler, John P. Wright, Simon Blackburn, Edward Craig, Martin Bell, Daniel Flage and Anne Jaap Jacobson.

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Preface

On the day, several years ago now (while both of us were still graduate students), deep in the bowels of the Rutgers University Philosophy Department, when we idly but excitedly dreamed up the idea of this collection, we couldn't have known just how very much time and effort it would take to bring it to fruition. But neither could we have known just how close to our initial vision this final product would turn out to be, nor how very rewarding and illuminating much of its production would be, and *has* been.

It is our firm belief that 'the New Hume debate' offers insights not only into the most difficult issues of the interpretation of some of Western philosophy's most vital texts, but also into an absolutely central example of the relevance of the philosophical history of philosophy to *contemporary* philosophy, in microcosmic and thereby accessible form. Anyone hoping to advance philosophical understanding of issues of conceivability, of the status of metaphysics, of scepticism, or of the relation of language and thought to philosophy can do no better, we would hazard, than to look to what has already been achieved in this debate—and in turn to bring their own understanding of these matters to bear on the debate. It is our hope that this collection will advance this process, make it easier, and render it accessible to a wider audience.

Rupert Read and Kenneth A. Richman
January 2000

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Barry Stroud: 'Gilding and Staining the World with Sentiments', *Hume Studies* (November 1993), 253–72.

Kenneth Winkler: 'The New Hume', *Philosophical Review* 100 (1991).

Simon Blackburn: 'Hume and Thick Connexions', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 50, Supplement (1990), 237–50.

Reference notes

All references to David Hume's major philosophical works within the text take the form of *T* or *E* followed by a page number, for example *E*164.

T=*A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739–40), edited by L.A.Selby-Bigge; 2nd edition, revised and edited by P.H.Nidditch, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978.

E=*Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning The Principles of Morals* (1748/51), edited in one volume by L.A.Selby-Bigge; 3rd edition, revised and edited by P.H.Nidditch, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.

All other references in the text are to works in the bibliography at the end of the book, and take the form (Author Year: Page).

1 Introduction

Kenneth A. Richman

Does Hume believe that there are causes in the world that have the power to bring about their effects? Does he believe that these causes are objects in the world? Does he believe that there are any objects in the world at all? What does Hume think about the fact that some people (but not all of us) feel compelled to ask questions about causes and objects? These questions have been discussed for some time, but over the last few years, with the introduction of new readings of Hume as a sceptical realist about causal powers and external objects, the discussion has moved to new levels of sophistication, subtlety and care in the interpretation of Hume's texts and their historical context. The sceptical realist interpretations claim that Hume believed we can know that causal powers and objects exist in the world, although we may not be able to know any more about them than that they exist. The purpose of this anthology is to document some of the early moves in this new stage of the discussion, to further the discussion even more, and to suggest some ways in which it might fruitfully be continued in the future. In this introduction, I will sketch how I see the issues raised in the debate over sceptical realist readings of Hume fitting into various facets of Hume's overall account of belief. I will also offer some introductory remarks on the essays that make up the rest of this volume.

Proponents of the 'New' interpretations of Hume's philosophical writings share the view that Hume was a realist of some sort about causal powers and external objects. That is, defenders of the New Hume hold that Hume's analysis of our everyday beliefs has as one of its conclusions that the beliefs in the existence of external, independent objects and causes objectively so-called meet at least minimal epistemic standards for assent. The New Hume debate is between those who read Hume as a strict epistemic sceptic on these matters and those who support the New Hume interpretation.

The 'New Humeans', as I shall call them, include, among others, Janet Broughton, Galen Strawson and John Wright. New Humeans generally attribute to Hume what they call a 'sceptical realist' view of causes (and certain other entities, such as external objects). A sceptical realist about some entity is realist about the entity's existence, but agnostic about the nature or character of that thing because it is epistemically inaccessible to us in some non-trivial way. Janet Broughton offers a clear example of the New Hume position in 'Hume's Ideas about Necessary Connection'. She argues that Hume held the following theses:

...we can form the bare thought just of there being some feature of objects that underlies the constant conjunctions of their observable qualities.

and

We cannot know anything more about the causal powers of objects than what we know in having the bare thought described [above] and observing constant conjunctions.

(Broughton 1987:235)

Broughton's interpretation is much like Galen Strawson's in *The Secret Connexion*, where he writes that Hume 'takes it for granted...that Causation does exist in reality, although we are entirely ignorant of its ultimate nature' (Strawson 1989:219). John Wright argues for a similar position in *The Sceptical Realism of David Hume* when he writes:

It seems to me undeniable that one misses the central aim of Hume's sceptical philosophy unless one recognises that he consistently maintained the point of view that there are real powers and forces in nature which are not directly accessible to our senses.

(Wright 1983:129)

The more traditional readings vary in the varieties of scepticism they attribute to Hume. So, for instance, Richard Popkin claims that Hume takes a kind of Pyrrhonian scepticism, one which recognizes that we must acquiesce to the beliefs that our nature compels us to hold, but also recognizes that these beliefs are without epistemological foundation. According to Popkin, Hume considers a self-conscious reliance on the beliefs of nature to be the most practicable way to exhibit true scepticism (Popkin 1980:130). Don Garrett offers an account of Hume's scepticism which recognizes that Hume's scepticism about reason must also be applied to itself. 'That is', writes Garrett, 'if human reason judges itself to be imperfect, then reason itself tells us that we must discount to some extent the very skepticism to which it leads us' (Garrett 1997:236). The 'old' Hume readings also vary in how they describe the contents of the beliefs whose status is under consideration in the debate, and in their ways of understanding how the beliefs in causal powers and external objects are related.

As the chapters that follow show, the New Hume interpretations also have a certain degree of diversity. However, Kenneth Winkler has observed that the New Hume interpretations all differ from more traditional interpretations of Hume in their shared view of the role that Hume's theory of ideas plays in his overall system. By the theory of ideas he means (primarily) Hume's claims that we can have no idea that is not derived from a previous impression and that our beliefs are limited by the range of our impressions and ideas:

The scope of the theory *seems* to be universal, and its force unforgiving: it seems to say that any alleged thought or conception lacking an appropriate pedigree is unintelligible or meaningless. But defenders of the New Hume dispute this reading...

(Winkler, p. 59 below)

According to Winkler, defenders of the New Hume interpretation either understand Hume's theory of ideas to be limited in scope (that is, to apply to less than the entire range of our beliefs, ideas and terms) or to be limited in force (that

is, to say of ideas or terms that are not derived from previous impressions something less strong than that they are meaningless and hence useless), or both.

There are other ways to describe the disagreement inherent in the debate. In fact, the debate sits squarely in the midst of a nest of issues central to Hume's system. In what follows, I want to sketch the relationship between the New Hume debate and the following topics: (1) Hume's empiricism and his account of relative ideas, (2) the relationship between philosophy and 'common life' in Hume's work, (3) the character of Hume's naturalism, (4) the notion of proof and the status of Hume's 'mitigated' scepticism, and (5) Hume's response to occasionalism and other voluntarist accounts of natural laws. The New Hume debate can help us to unravel some of these issues; for others, the debate helps us to understand how significant and complex the issues really are. Understanding how the New Hume debate is tied into all of these will, I hope, help us to see the importance of the debate to Hume scholarship as a whole.

1 Hume's empiricism and his account of relative ideas

A puzzle in the interpretation of Hume, perhaps the main puzzle, is the fact that Hume appears to do the following: (a) endorse beliefs in objects and causes, (b) hold that we should not endorse beliefs that do not have appropriate grounding in our impressions (as described in the theory of ideas), and (c) hold that the beliefs in objects and causes do not have appropriate grounding in our impressions. Defenders of the old reading of Hume reject or qualify (a), arguing either that Hume does not endorse these beliefs, or that he endorses them in a way that does not commit him to the truth of the beliefs. As we have seen, Popkin defends an interpretation of the latter sort. According to Popkin, Hume endorses an entirely sceptical allegiance to our beliefs.

New Humeans accept (a), and either reject or modify (b) or (c). For example, in his book *The Mind of God and the Works of Man*, Edward Craig defends the New Hume interpretation by rejecting (b), arguing instead that Hume entertains the theory of ideas only in order to reject it. He takes it as a 'general truth that he [Hume] has in fact little real interest in the theory of ideas and impressions' (Craig 1987:120). Wright and Strawson, on the other hand, argue that although the beliefs in causes and objects do not meet the standards of the theory of ideas under its most strict interpretation, there is a broader understanding of the theory of ideas according to which these beliefs are acceptable to Hume. They can, therefore, be understood as accepting (a) and (b) and rejecting (c).

Hume's early statement of the theory of ideas states: That all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent' (T4). Disagreements concerning the import of this passage arise in light of Hume's later statements in which he suggests that there may be a distinction between what we can suppose and what we can conceive. For instance, at the end of *Treatise* Book I, Part II, Hume writes: '...we may well suppose in general, but 'tis impossible for us distinctly to conceive, objects to be in their nature any thing but exactly the same with perceptions' (T218; see also T68). Under the strict reading of the theory of ideas, an idea only has meaning if it is derived from an impression previously *conceived* by the mind. So, according to this strict reading, the supposition of an object different in nature from our ideas cannot be the basis for a belief in such objects because this supposition is either empty, non-existent, or is in fact a

confused conception with some content other than what we initially take it to have.

The New Humeans generally take Hume's distinction between conceiving and supposing as a distinction between two ways in which ideas can satisfy the requirements of Hume's theory of ideas. Those ideas that we can conceive will have more robust meaning than those that are merely suppositions. However, according to this reading, ideas that we suppose but do not conceive can also be meaningful to us. The suppositions of interest to the New Hume debate often come in the form of *relative ideas*, ideas of things that stand in certain relations to the objects of our experience but that we cannot experience directly. (Daniel Flage offers an in-depth discussion of relative ideas in Chapter 9 of this volume.)

Hume sometimes suggests that a true causal power must be *intelligible*. Most take this to mean that if we know a causal power, we know its essence fully. Because causal powers are often referred to by Hume as necessary connections, knowing a causal power, on this model, means knowing what it is with which the cause is necessarily connected. Hume claims (for instance in Section IV of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*) that we cannot obtain evidence simply by examining a cause by itself for any claims about what its effect would be. Some defenders of the New Hume interpretation argue that the complete understanding suggested by Hume's use of terms like 'intelligible' is treated by Hume as an ideal for knowledge of a thing, but not as necessary for knowledge of a thing's existence. This New Hume treatment of intelligibility is thus parallel to the New Hume treatment of conceivability as an ideal for acquaintance with an idea.

2 The relationship between philosophy and 'common life' in Hume's work

The beliefs under investigation here are beliefs central to our 'common life' ways of thinking. By common life (a term used not only by Hume, but also occasionally by others, including Locke and Berkeley), Hume means our everyday experiences not subverted or made self-conscious by philosophy. Thus common life is (at least) closely allied with the life of the 'vulgar'. The beliefs of common life are the beliefs that common (vulgar) people share, and that philosophers share with the vulgar when they are not concerned with philosophy. These beliefs include the belief that the objects we experience continue to exist when not perceived. As the philosophical examination of these beliefs can have the effect of undermining them, we can understand the New Hume debate as involving a disagreement about the relationship between philosophy and common life in Hume's account of belief.

Defenders of the New Hume argue that sceptical realism was Hume's philosophical position. Strawson puts this point quite simply on page 1 of *The Secret Connexion*:

I hope to show that Hume takes the existence of something like natural necessity or causal power for granted not only in common life but also as a philosopher. If we are to accept the beliefs in objects and causes, this must mean either that common life in some way trumps philosophy, or that philosophy and common life somehow work together, with philosophy not completely subverting but rather correcting or merely weakening the common life beliefs.

(Strawson 1989:1)¹

We might articulate this view of the New Hume debate as a disagreement on how best to interpret Hume's famous imperative from Section I of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*: 'Be a philosopher; but, amidst all your philosophy, be still a man' (E9). Hume sometimes tells us that what he believes as a philosopher is different from his position as an agent in 'common life'. For instance, he writes about his own inference from cause to effect that, 'As an agent, I am quite satisfied in the point; but as a philosopher...I want to learn the foundation of this inference' (E38). Where Hume the man may be willing to believe, Hume the philosopher remains sceptical. The New Hume debate can be thus described as a disagreement concerning the outcome of the internal struggle between Hume's two tendencies. The New Humeans claim that Hume the man is able to stake out some ground in the philosopher's territory, indeed, that the conflict is not as complete and devastating as the old Humeans think.

3 The character of Hume's naturalism

We might also characterize the New Hume debate in terms of the relationship between Hume's critical project of analysing our beliefs and his project of describing how it is that we come to have the beliefs we do. The first critical project is what we might call his 'empiricist' or 'philosophical' project. In this project, Hume seeks to test our beliefs for philosophical rigour and justification of a philosophical (or epistemic) sort by searching among our previous impressions for the origin of the ideas involved in each belief. This project is intertwined in the texts with what we might call Hume's 'naturalist' project, in which he explores how it is that we come to form various beliefs even apart from the issue of whether they meet his strictest standards of philosophical rigour. One might defend the New Hume position by invoking the conclusions of Hume's naturalism. After all, Hume seems to be recommending the beliefs in question when he makes statements such as 'If I must be a fool...my follies shall at least be natural and agreeable' (T270), and when he calls scepticism a 'malady' (T218).²

If we come to the conclusion that Hume's attitude towards these beliefs is determined by his naturalism, we must yet determine what attitudes are supported by this aspect of Hume's work. If the conclusions of Hume's naturalist project are found to have normative import, according to which the beliefs to which we are naturally inclined are better in some way than other beliefs, then Hume can be said to endorse the beliefs in objects and causes. However, even if Hume can be said to endorse these beliefs, we might still ask whether the sort of endorsement offered is *epistemic* (that is, whether Hume sees himself as suggesting that these beliefs might be true, or might either be knowledge or lead us to knowledge), the type of endorsement that would support the New Humeans' claims. However, if the type of normative endorsement involved in Hume's naturalism is not epistemic but based rather on healthy functioning, survival value or social convention, then Hume's naturalist conclusions cannot be used to support any claims about what Hume believed was actually *true*. Thus the type of normativity at work in Hume's naturalist project, and the role that this normativity plays, bear greatly on the New Hume debate.

Hume describes the *Treatise* as 'An ATTEMPT to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into MORAL SUBJECTS' (T title page). This description is often cited to support the common understanding of Hume as attempting 'to be the Newton of the moral sciences' (Passmore 1952:43). On this understanding,

Hume's naturalist project is meant to describe and explain the workings of our minds in the same way that Newton described and explained the workings of the physical world. In 'Hume's Defense of Causal Inference', John Lenz writes: 'Such explanation was possible, Hume thought, because the actions of the mind are as fully determined as the motions of material bodies...' (Lenz 1968:170). If the subject of Hume's naturalist investigation is fully determined in this way, then certain types of normativity (those that allow blame for straying from the norm) are not available for defending the New Hume position or any other.

Like Lenz, Gary Hatfield also interprets Hume's naturalism as non-normative. He sees this as closely tied to Hume's Newtonian aspirations, as well as to the fact that Hume 'posited belief-producing processes that were neutral with respect to whether the beliefs produced are true or false' (Hatfield 1990:26). If Hatfield is correct, Hume's naturalism does not invoke any norms that can be called epistemic. Thus even those who argue that Hume's attitude towards our everyday beliefs is determined more by his naturalist project than by his empiricist one are often led to thoroughly un-New Humean views. On interpretations such as Hatfield's, Hume's naturalism tells us that the natural status of many of our everyday beliefs may mean something other than that these beliefs are true.

However, if you think that there is a place for epistemic normativity in a naturalist project, this helps clear the way to the view that despite the clearly negative evaluations of these beliefs offered by Hume in his critical account, his naturalist account of these beliefs contains a positive evaluation of them. That is, a New Hume interpretation could be supported by arguing that Hume's naturalist account of these beliefs is not just descriptive but also normative (in the right way).

A key conclusion of Hume's naturalist project is that there are some beliefs that are regularly produced by the normal workings of the mind despite the fact that they do not meet the standards of Hume's empiricist analysis strictly interpreted. Some of these beliefs are portrayed by Hume as being so common and unavoidable, indeed so central to our cognitive lives as humans, that they have come to be called 'natural beliefs'. Because those of our everyday beliefs that we take to be beliefs in objects and causes are among these, Hume's theory of natural belief is particularly relevant to the New Hume debate. Some of the features that Hume identifies as common to these beliefs can be understood as reasons to embrace them, that is, as offering a positive valuation of them. Indeed, on the first page of Galen Strawson's book-length defence of the New Hume position, he writes that 'the force of Hume's doctrine of natural belief is often underestimated, and this point is an important one' (Strawson 1989:1).³

Wright claims that Hume's doctrine of natural belief is in the main the same as Malebranche's account of natural judgement. The significance of this reading for our project is that Wright reads Hume as believing that natural beliefs provide some kernel of truth:

Both Hume and Malebranche assume that through reason we may discover the partial falsity of our natural or instinctive judgement...However, like Descartes, Malebranche and Hume hold that in what nature teaches us there is some truth contained. While human nature deceives us about the exact nature of external objects it does teach us the general truth that there are things which exist outside our own minds...

(Wright 1983:225)

Wright sees in Hume's approval of our natural beliefs (and his apparent appropriation of Malebranche's account of them) evidence for the claim that Hume understood natural beliefs as leading us to a truth about the world.

If Wright is correct, then one way to understand the New Hume debate is as a disagreement about what the special status of natural beliefs amounts to. In this section, I would like to examine the status of natural beliefs in Hume's system in order to give us a stronger understanding of our current topic, the New Hume debate.

Norman Kemp Smith contends in *The Naturalism of Hume* that natural beliefs are best described as instincts 'of a biological character'. He also writes that Hume's theory of natural belief 'leads to a genuinely fresh conception of the nature and conditions of experience...' (Kemp Smith 1905:156). This second feature is explained in slightly different terms in *The Philosophy of David Hume* (Kemp Smith 1941). There he writes that natural beliefs 'condition and make possible de facto experience' (1941:458). Furthermore, a natural belief, according to Kemp Smith, 'does not allow of being questioned' (1941:455). Kemp Smith claims that there are only two natural beliefs in Hume's system: the belief in external objects and the belief in 'causal dependence' (1941:455).⁴ Not surprisingly, these are exactly the beliefs that are discussed in the New Hume debate.

Louis E. Loeb argues in 'Hume on Stability, Justification and Unphilosophical Probability' (1995) and 'Stability, Justification, and Hume's Propensity to Ascribe Identity to Related Objects' (1991) that Hume valued stability in beliefs: 'a doxastic state is [epistemically] justified just in case it results from mechanisms that tend to produce sets of doxastic states that are in equilibrium' (Loeb 1995:102). A set of doxastic states (beliefs, generally) is in equilibrium if 'consideration of the content of the doxastic states themselves' does not leave us 'inclined to revise the set...' (1995:102). Beliefs in equilibrium are said to be 'stable': 'On my interpretation, Hume holds that there could be a positive reason for holding some beliefs, relative to stability as a cognitive objective' (1995:131). Because the stable beliefs are the natural ones (for 'Nature is obstinate, and will not quit the field, however strongly attack'd by reason...' (T215)), Loeb's suggestion can be used to support the view that Hume held natural beliefs to be epistemically justified.

There is a particularly pregnant passage in the *Treatise* pertaining to the issue of natural belief that is worth quoting at length:

There is a great difference betwixt such opinions as we form after a calm and profound reflection, and such as we embrace by a kind of instinct or natural impulse, on account of their suitableness and conformity to the mind. If these opinions become contrary, 'tis not difficult to foresee which of them will have the advantage. As long as our attention is bent upon the subject, the philosophical and study'd principle may prevail; but the moment we relax our thoughts, nature will display herself, and draw us back to our former opinion. Nay she has sometimes such an influence, that she can stop our progress, even in the midst of our most profound reflections, and keep us from running on with all the consequences of any philosophical opinion.

(T214)

The sheer power of nature accounts for many of the features of natural beliefs. This power is the power of instinct over reason. It is precisely the fact that natural

beliefs are instinctive and non-rational that makes them stable. However, stable beliefs may not be true beliefs. Thus stability (which Loeb quite rightly identifies as something that Hume values in belief) might confer or be a sign of some sort of justification that has nothing to do with knowledge.

One reason to think that the natural beliefs *are* true is that they are so terribly useful in helping us to find our way safely about the world. This role of natural beliefs as necessary guides to action is hinted at in several spots in the *Treatise*:

Did impressions alone influence the will, we should every moment of our lives be subject to the greatest calamities; because, tho' we foresaw their approach, we should not be provided by nature with any principle of action, which might impel us to avoid them.

(T119)

Sometimes we require for our survival that our *ideas* be as potent an influence as our immediate sense experience (which comes in the form of what Hume calls *impressions*). It is for this reason, Hume claims in the passage quoted, that we have natural mechanisms by which we form beliefs. The resulting beliefs guide us to avoid 'calamities' and are in this way necessary guides of action. The usefulness of our natural beliefs certainly gives them a sort of pragmatic justification, if not also justification of an epistemic sort.⁵

4 Proof and 'mitigated' scepticism

Under its strongest interpretation, Hume's theory of ideas supports deeply sceptical conclusions. But if the belief in causal powers cannot escape Hume's strong scepticism, perhaps it can escape the mitigated scepticism Hume discusses in Section XII of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, involving, one might think, a weaker version of Hume's main sceptical tool, the theory of ideas.

The mitigated sceptic is 'sensible of the strange infirmities of human understanding, even in its most perfect state...' (E161). She is therefore inspired to proceed in her deliberations with caution. 'In general', Hume writes, 'there is a degree of doubt, and caution, and modesty, which, in all kinds of scrutiny and decision, ought for ever to accompany a just reasoner' (E161–2). This type of mitigated scepticism calls for a general reduction in our levels of certainty for all of our beliefs. Hume also identifies what he calls 'another species of *mitigated* scepticism' (E162). This species calls for 'the limitation of our enquiries to such subjects as are best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding' (E162). The subjects within the narrow capacity of human understanding fall into two categories: relations of ideas and matters of fact. Hume claims that relations of ideas are 'the only proper objects of knowledge and demonstration' (E163).

In the *Enquiry*, Hume reminds us that matters of fact are known only from experience: 'The existence, therefore, of any being can only be proved by arguments from its cause or its effect; and these arguments are founded entirely on experience' (E164). Thus our knowledge of causes or other existences can only be as sure as experience can allow. In the *Treatise* Hume is careful to distinguish between belief established by 'proofs' based on experience and knowledge proper. He advises that we 'distinguish human reason into three kinds, viz. *that from knowledge, from proofs, and from probabilities*' (T124). Proofs are defined as arguments from cause and effect 'which are entirely free from doubt and

uncertainty' (T124).⁶ At one point Hume claims that the difference between proofs and probabilities is that proof is based on a constant conjunction and probability on a variable one (E112). Demonstration (deduction) can only be used to confirm relations of ideas, not matters of fact. Beliefs established by proof are thus the most certain of those we come to believe through experience (other than beliefs about experiences themselves).

The notion of proof plays an important role in Hume's discussion of miracles and laws of nature:

A miracle is a violation of the laws of nature; and as a firm and unalterable experience has established these laws, the proof against a miracle, from the very nature of the fact, is as entire as any argument from experience can possibly be imagined.

(E114)

Proofs are defined in the first *Enquiry* as 'arguments from experience as leave no room for doubt or opposition' (E56n). So, Hume is here saying that the laws of nature are established by experience in such a way that we cannot doubt them. The freedom from doubt here does not represent a logical necessity, as no argument from experience will have that. It must, then, be an argument that leaves no room for doubt because of our psychological make-up. The unalterable experience supporting the laws of nature is somehow satisfying to us, leaving no room for us to doubt. These laws, then, do not satisfy the philosopher intent on believing only what can be demonstrated or deduced from experience, but will count as justified in the same way that natural beliefs are (whatever way that may be) (cf. Ferreira 1985:45–57).

We would thus expect Hume to deny any belief in a matter of fact the status of knowledge. Nonetheless, he writes:

It is only experience, which teaches us the nature and bounds of cause and effect, and enables us to infer the existence of one object from that of another. Such is the foundation of moral reasoning, which forms the greater part of human knowledge, and is the source of all human action and behaviour.

(E164)

This passage is unexpected, given his distinction between knowledge and proof. However, we may take this unexpected statement as a clue to the sense in which this approach to knowledge is properly called mitigated scepticism. It is a form of scepticism since it is careful and diffident about belief and human faculties. It is mitigated since it does not take these worries as seriously as, for example, Hume himself does in his *Treatise* discussion, 'Of scepticism with regard to reason', and is willing to accept as knowledge at least some inferences from experience.

What we have seen Hume say about mitigated scepticism suggests that he is willing in the *Enquiries* to include proof as a means to knowledge while in the *Treatise* he was not. This is so because in the *Enquiry* he tells us that we have knowledge of cause and effect, and that proofs will offer the most certain evidence for claims about such matters.

So, as mitigated sceptics we are allowed to believe that some causal statement, understood as a statement about the constant conjunction of perceptions, is probably true where the probability assigned corresponds to the number and

frequency of the conjunction in our experience. Where the experienced conjunction has been constant, this constitutes proof and the belief may be called knowledge. Hume's discussions of miracles, freedom and necessity are consistent with this modified sceptical attitude. But the belief in things distinct from perceptions (powers and objects) is not something that the mitigated sceptic can allow as knowledge *any more than the unmitigated sceptic can*. Even the mitigated sceptic has no right to make mitigated claims about it.

Thus mitigated scepticism will not help with knowledge of existences (powers, objects and so on) understood as independent of our perceiving them. For these, we have at best suppositions and relative ideas for which we have experienced only one of the relata. So while the New Hume reading may be supported by a weaker reading of Hume's theory of ideas, it cannot be supported by invoking the *Enquiry's* mitigated scepticism.⁷

5 Hume's response to occasionalism and other voluntarist accounts of natural laws

Hume's discussions of causation and of our knowledge of causal powers come, of course, in the context of the early modern debates on these issues. In his paper, 'Natures and Laws from Descartes to Hume', Michael Ayers discusses the philosophical traditions that informed these debates. He identifies two main traditions. According to one of these traditions, objects have natures (essences, or powers) which by themselves account for the regularities that are true of the objects. This (somewhat Aristotelian) position can be called naturalism, but as naturalism means many things to many Hume scholars, I will here use the term *essentialism*. The other tradition is *voluntarism*, the view that the laws of nature are imposed by God on objects that might have been subject to different laws while remaining in themselves the same types of objects that they are.

The fact that these two ways of understanding causation seem to have been the only viable traditions in Hume's time suggests that he may have felt compelled to choose between them. Hume is clearly not going to embrace theocentric voluntarism. The other option is a realism about causal powers in objects. Ayers writes that: 'the interpretation of Hume as a sceptical realist for whom unknown natures underlie regularities gains some, perhaps considerable, support from his direct consideration of voluntarism in the *First Enquiry*' (Ayers 1996:105). Ayers argues that Hume's treatment of voluntarism in Part I of Section VII ('Of the idea of a necessary connexion') of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* suggests that he accepted a form of essentialism. If this is correct, it offers evidence in favour of the New Hume interpretation because the essentialist's picture of the world is of a world of objects with inherent causal powers.

Ayers has three factors in his favour here. First, as Ayers points out, in his arguments against claims to know causal powers Hume employs an essentialist model of what it would be like to have such knowledge. That is, he writes as though having a complete idea of the cause would allow us to conclude that it must be followed by its effect. Second, when Hume claims that we do not know particular causes, he often uses an essentialist characterization of that thing he claims we do not know. That is, he writes as though, in looking for causes, we are looking for qualities in objects that link them to other objects. Third, there is an asymmetry between Hume's rejection of voluntarism and his rejection of claims to know causes understood as powers inhering in the objects themselves. That is,

while Hume claims that we do not know causes understood as the essentialist understood them, he argues that occasionalism, a form of voluntarism, will not work even as an account of what causes *might* be like.

The first of these factors involves *intelligibility*, a recurrent central topic in the New Hume debate. Intelligibility is the strongest form of understanding or being acquainted with an idea. The model of what it would be like to have knowledge of causes that Ayers sees in Hume involves intelligibility. When something is intelligible, we can know its nature completely. Those who believe that causes are intelligible believe that it is possible to conclude from the complete idea of the cause what will follow it as an effect.⁸

We can see, therefore, that Hume's manner of arguing against the voluntarist theories of causation is directly relevant to the New Hume debate. If Hume meant to argue against theories such as occasionalism by defending a form of essentialism, then he must have believed that objects have causal powers. Hume clearly believes in the existence of causes in the sense of:

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.

(T170)

The New Hume debate concerns how to understand Hume's attitude towards beliefs about causes where causes are understood in a more robust sense, a sense not entirely dependent on the perceiving mind.

Survey of the contents

The contents of this volume have been arranged so that readers new to this aspect of Hume scholarship can start from the beginning and understand the main issues and complexities of the New Hume debate in a back and forth exchange through the papers by Stroud, Strawson, Winkler, Wright and Blackburn. The remaining papers offer alternate ways of challenging the sceptical readings of Hume (Bell), more detailed examinations of some aspect of the debate (Flage), or challenges to the other authors' assumptions about Hume's project (Jacobson). Rupert Read's concluding chapter connects the New Hume debate with issues in twentieth-century philosophy. Those already more familiar with the debate may want to begin with the new papers by Wright and Strawson, proceeding thence to the postscript to Winkler's paper, which appears here for the first time, and Edward Craig's new paper in which he modifies his previously published position. Alternatively, if one wanted to read the papers in chronological order from oldest to youngest, one might start with Simon Blackburn's 'Hume and thick connexions'.

Barry Stroud's paper leads the contents of this volume because it offers a clear statement of a traditional, old Hume interpretation. Stroud begins by drawing parallels between Hume's treatment of causal judgements, ethical judgements and aesthetic judgements. According to Stroud, Hume understands all three types of judgement as instances of 'the mind...spread[ing] itself on external objects' (T167). That is, Stroud reads Hume as saying that when we make moral and aesthetic judgements, as when we make judgements about necessary connections, we ascribe to objects qualities that exist not in the objects but in our own minds.

The position Stroud attributes to Hume can be called 'projectivism'. The attribution of a merely projectivist view of causation to Hume is a main target of the New Humeans. Stroud also criticizes Hume's theory of the mind as inadequate for the projectivism he attempts to defend.

In his contribution to this volume, Galen Strawson presents the New Hume interpretation of Hume as a sceptical realist about objects and causal powers. He argues that the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* should be treated as the text of record for Hume's positions. With this in mind, Strawson recasts some of the arguments he presented in his book *The Secret Connexion*. In particular, he argues against what he calls the 'standard' reading of Hume (which attributes to Hume a regularity view of causation, according to which causation is nothing but constant conjunction) on the grounds that it attributes to Hume two unlikely things: (1) an argument from a claim about what we can know to a claim about what there is, and (2) a claim to have knowledge of matters of fact of which we have no direct experience.

Strawson moves on to a discussion of the issue of intelligibility, arguing that a misunderstanding of Hume's use of this term has led commentators astray. Hume's distinction between conceiving and supposing is brought in to aid in the task of determining the meaning of Hume's use of the terms 'intelligible' and 'unintelligible'. Strawson argues that Hume used the term 'intelligible' in a much weaker sense than is usually thought, so that external objects (considered as distinct from mere perceptions) turn out to be 'intelligible' for Hume. Strawson concludes his paper by examining a number of quotations that support his view, arguing, along the way, that 'there is no special link between inductive scepticism and the regularity theory of causation' (p. 44 below).

Kenneth P. Winkler's paper 'The New Hume' is the paper that named the sceptical realist interpretation 'the New Hume'. Winkler points out that the defenders of the New Hume interpretation have in common that they all read Hume's theory of ideas as in some way weaker than suggested by more established interpretations. Winkler goes on to argue against these weaker readings of the theory of ideas, and thus against the reasons given for accepting the New Hume view.

In the postscript to 'The New Hume', 'Intelligibility and the theory of ideas', Winkler revisits the issues, most particularly the role of Hume's thoughts on intelligibility as a model for understanding causes. He also discusses Hume's apparent distinction between supposing and conceiving in connection with our belief in body. In his comments on Michael Ayers's essay 'Natures and laws from Descartes to Hume', he considers the possibilities that Hume rejects the requirement of intelligibility on lots of issues but not on the issue of causation, or that he does not really reject it at all. Winkler also considers that one problem with the New Hume interpretation might be that it makes it difficult to understand the disagreements that are supposed to have existed between Hume and his critic Thomas Reid.

John Wright begins his contribution to this volume by directly addressing the objections put forward in Winkler's original paper, 'The New Hume'. His discussion gets right to the issue of Hume's empiricism and the distinction between conceiving and supposing. Wright argues that Hume's theory of ideas must be weaker than Winkler claims it is, if Hume allows that we could even seem to believe in causal powers although we cannot conceive of them. Wright wraps up his paper by presenting some reasons to think that the 'New Hume' is not new at

all, but merely a new emergence of an interpretation of Hume's position that was prominent in Hume's time, when it was, perhaps, easier to determine what Hume's intended meaning was.

Simon Blackburn offers a sustained attack on the sceptical realist interpretation of Hume on causation in 'Hume and thick connexions'. He defines a 'thick' connection as one that 'involves something beyond the concept of regular succession' (p. 100 below). He goes on to distinguish between a 'causal nexus', that fact which makes it the case that the effect follows the cause in individual instances, and a 'straitjacket', that fact which makes it the case that the causal connection remains the same through time. Blackburn argues that Hume is no sort of realist about causal straitjackets, but is a 'quasi-realist' about causal nexuses. He argues that in Hume's system our use of the term 'causal connexion' (in the sense of causal nexus) is meaningful, but not in the sense that it represents something in the world. It has, he argues, *functional* meaning. On this reading, the New Hume interpretation is incorrect because it misunderstands the kind of meaning that Hume attributes to our thoughts and talk of causal powers.

In his new postscript to this paper, Blackburn reasserts his claim that much of the recent debate concerning how to read Hume's position on causation results from scholars taking too narrow a view of the interpretive options. He sketches some alternative ways of being a realist that are not often recognized, and explains his interpretation of Hume in terms of them.

Edward Craig's contribution to this volume presents what we might call a compatibilist reading of the New Hume debate. Craig argues that the old Hume interpretation of Hume as a (mere) projectivist about causal powers and the New Hume interpretation of Hume as a sceptical realist about causal powers could both be correct interpretations of Hume. In fact, Craig suggests that they might both be correct theories about causation. These theories are compatible, Craig argues, because they are theories about different things. The projectivism is a theory about our everyday practices and beliefs; the sceptical realism is a theory about what the world is really like.

Craig has argued elsewhere that Hume was mostly concerned with rejecting previous models of human understanding, so that any apparent conflicts between his claims about the origins of our beliefs and the existence of things in the world need not be taken seriously. Here, however, Craig suggests that Hume's own theories concerning the origins of belief are at odds with any realism about causes and objects. On this picture, Hume's epistemology cannot be made consistent with sceptical realism, so that while projectivism and realism may be compatible in themselves, they cannot both be combined in a consistent interpretation of Hume. The New Hume debate, then, concerns a genuine puzzle indeed.

In his contribution to this volume, Martin Bell argues that Hume defended a realist position on the existence of causes, but not the sort of realist position defended by the New Humeans Strawson and Wright. Bell sees Hume as arguing against previous theories of causation not by saying that we can have no knowledge of causes, but rather by rejecting the idea that we can know the causal power in an object before we have experience of the effects of the object. That is, Bell sees Hume as responding to his predecessors by challenging their accounts of the role played by causal powers in causation and our knowledge of it. The concept of causal power as necessary connection (the concept used by Malebranche and others to whom Hume was responding) with its implications as a logical concept, places causal power in the realm of the intellectual, the realm of

the intelligible. Bell argues that Hume's account takes our causal knowledge out of the intellectual realm and into the empirical. Hume's theory was a challenge to specific earlier accounts of causal knowledge as knowledge of 'intelligible connections' rather than a challenge to any and all concepts of causal knowledge. On this picture, Hume's talk of secret powers refers to causes not yet experienced by us rather than entities that are essentially unknowable by us, or of causes that are known by us but not in the full sense required by Malebranche.

In 'Relative ideas re-viewed', Daniel Flage explores the relevance of his interpretation of Hume's account of 'relative ideas'⁹ to the New Hume debate. In recasting his interpretation of relative ideas as akin to definite descriptions, Flage adds a substantial amount of historical context to his account. He then argues against Strawson's use of Hume's statements about relative ideas to defend the New Hume interpretation. Flage claims that Hume's theory of relative ideas cannot do the job that Strawson wants it to do because it is not, as it would need to be, a theory of linguistic reference.

In 'From cognitive science to a post-Cartesian text: what did Hume really say?', Anne Jaap Jacobson posits that the search for Hume's actual position on causes and objects is a futile one. This is not, she argues, because there is such a position that is out of our reach. Instead, Jacobson recommends that we understand Hume as examining the issue of causation from three positions: that of the vulgar, that of the philosopher, and that of the 'cautious investigator'. On Jacobson's reading, the persistence of the New Hume debate results from a failure to see that none of these 'personas' is *the* voice of Hume.

In his 'conclusion' to this book, 'The new antagonists of "the New Hume": on the relevance of Goodman and Wittgenstein to the New Hume debate', Rupert Read traces some aspects of Hume's influence on twentieth-century philosophy. He offers readings of Hume's influence on Nelson Goodman and of the early Wittgenstein's similarities to Hume, readings that are informed by the New Hume debate. He argues that the picture of Hume that Goodman paints in his characterization of 'Hume's Problem' is provocative, but misleading in ways that can be better understood when we examine them in the context of the interpretations defended in this volume.

Read's discussion of the connections between Hume's ideas and those of Wittgenstein focuses on talk about the unknowable, and about nonsense. This is important to the New Hume debate in that we find Hume claiming of certain ideas that we cannot have them. Read suggests that we can see in Wittgenstein both a continuation of Hume's struggle with the difficulty of making such claims and insight into the nature of Hume's struggle with this difficulty. Read understands Hume's theory of ideas to be an exploration of the limits of human understanding very much akin to the limits of meaning explored by Wittgenstein. The volume thus concludes with a look at the way that the issues raised by the New Hume debate resonate with broader philosophical issues and texts that are more of our own time.¹⁰

Notes

- 1 Baier writes of the 'new philosophical enterprise' that Hume embarks on beginning with the Conclusion to Book I of the *Treatise*. 'To be satisfactory', Baier writes, this new philosophical enterprise 'will have to 'suit with common practice and experience' and so it will need to have a share of 'this gross earthy mixture' of the general public to whom the *Treatise* is not addressed'

- (Baier 1991:24). She suggests, therefore, that common life can inform and correct philosophy, which cannot be done well without it. However, according to Baier, Hume could not have brought us to the point in which we can proceed with the new and improved philosophical project except by means of the sceptical journey of *Treatise* Book I.
- 2 One might think that this characterization of the debate is no different from the previous one. However, it is important to realize that common life is *what we live*, while naturalist projects like Hume's involve the *study* of common life.
 - 3 Norman Kemp Smith's 1905 essay was the first to name and discuss natural beliefs as such in Hume's system. There he argues that natural beliefs as Hume describes them 'can only be practically justified' (Kemp Smith 1905:161). He offers a somewhat more focused account in Chapter XXI of his *The Philosophy of David Hume* (Kemp Smith 1941:449–58). Ronald J. Butler argues (Butler 1960:71–100) that Hume took the belief in God to be a natural belief. J. C. A. Gaskin rejects this claim of Butler's in (Gaskin 1974:281–94), arguing instead that Hume took the belief in God to be merely irrational. Gaskin also argues that Hume allowed that some of our various natural beliefs contradict one another. Dorothy Coleman argues for a distinction in Hume's system between natural beliefs and natural illusions (Coleman 1988:461–8). Using this distinction, she argues against the claim that Hume is a Pyrrhonist by arguing that our natural beliefs do not contradict each other, although they may contradict some natural illusions. Miriam McCormick (1993:103–16) argues that while the belief in God is the result of a natural disposition, it is not itself a natural belief. My own essay (Richman 1995:425–41) discusses natural beliefs in the context of the New Hume debate. Each of these works includes some discussion of the identifying features of natural beliefs in Hume's system.
 - 4 The belief in causal powers is not often enough distinguished from the natural belief that experienced uniformities will continue into the future. Kenneth Winkler has suggested that Hume might not have considered the belief in objective causal powers a natural belief. Simon Blackburn's discussion of causal straitjackets and causal nexuses also reflects Hume's different treatment of these two beliefs. (See Blackburn in this volume, pp. 100–12.)
 - 5 In the first *Enquiry*, Hume writes: 'But a Pyrrhonian cannot expect, that his philosophy will have any constant influence on the mind: or if it had, that its influence would be beneficial to society. On the contrary, he must acknowledge, if he will acknowledge anything, that all human life must perish, were his principles universally and steadily to prevail. All discourse, all action would immediately cease; and men remain in a total lethargy, till the necessities of nature, unsatisfied, put an end to their miserable existence' (E160). Wayne Waxman reads Hume's naturalist account of belief as in no way opposed to scepticism. Indeed, he argues that: 'Hume's naturalism, far from being incompatible with radical skepticism, actually dovetails into it, so that the proposition that human reason is false possesses the same irresistible authority of natural belief as does its contrary' (Waxman 1994:6). Waxman portrays Hume's account of natural belief as not offering any special recommendation that is not negated by the same sort of process as the one that produced it.
 - 6 In the *Enquiry* this passage is rephrased in terms of types of arguments. Hume writes that 'we ought to divide arguments into *demonstrations, proofs, and probabilities*' (E56).
 - 7 In §5 of his contribution to this volume, John Wright offers a different reading of Hume's mitigated scepticism, and suggests that it may offer a 'theoretical' solution to the New Hume debate, in favour of the sceptical realist interpretation. However, Wright also offers other ways of defending his position.
 - 8 It is interesting that, while Ayers defends the New Hume interpretation by arguing that Hume maintains an intelligibility model of understanding causes, Edward Craig (1987) argues in something of an opposite way. Craig defends a New Hume position by arguing that Hume rejects such a strong model of what it is to understand objects. Craig calls this model the 'Insight Ideal', which involves the claim that humans are capable of the same sort of certain, direct knowledge as God, if of a more limited set of truths. For some interesting remarks on just what the Insight Ideal involves, see Craig (1987:89).
 - 9 Flage's interpretation of Hume's use of relative ideas is discussed in Flage (1981, 1990).
 - 10 In developing this Introduction, I benefitted greatly from the insight and encouragement of Rupert Read, Ken Winkler and John Yolton.

2 ‘Gilding or staining’ the world with ‘sentiments’ and ‘phantasms’

Barry Stroud

Hume’s ‘science of human nature’ is meant to explain, in theory, how human beings come to have all the ideas, thoughts, and beliefs that we know they have. All such mental items are to find their source, one way or another, in experience. But given Hume’s conception of perception and feeling, and his understanding of the relation between perception or feeling and the rest of our mental life, there is an important class of thoughts which present a special problem for him.

The question is whether Hume’s theory can really explain how we get those thoughts and whether, if the kind of explanation he offers does not succeed as it stands, it could ever be improved on while remaining faithful to the general structure of his conception of the mind and its relation to the world. Many who philosophize today in the spirit of Hume while rejecting what they see as unacceptable but dispensable details of his way of thinking would appear to hold that it can. I think no satisfactory explanation along the right lines has yet been given, or even suggested.

The thoughts I am concerned with are primarily thoughts of something or other’s being so. I do not mean only beliefs or judgements that something or other is so; there is also the contemplation or entertaining of something as being so, whether it is actually believed or judged to be so or not. For example, looking at the billiard table, I come to believe that the white ball’s hitting the red ball will cause the red ball to move in a certain direction. I also think that *if* the white ball causes the red ball to move in that direction, the red ball will go into the corner pocket. In this second, conditional, thought, I think *of* the white ball’s causing the red ball to move, but I do not then express the belief *that* it will, which I have in the first thought.

This is one example of the kind of thought I have in mind. It involves what is for Hume the problematic idea of one thing’s causing another. Another example, from a seemingly very different area, is the thought of an action’s being evil, or vicious, or blameworthy. I might observe someone doing something and immediately come to think that it is bad or vicious. Or I might think, purely hypothetically, that if any person were to commit a sufficiently vicious or evil act, he should be executed; or perhaps, more humanely, that he should not, even if what he did is vicious or blameworthy. These thoughts involve what is for Hume the problematic idea of vice, or moral evil, or blameworthiness.

A third example involves the idea of beauty. I can find a particular object beautiful when looking at it, or, with no particular object in mind, I might seek something beautiful. And I might think that *if* I had something beautiful, I would be fortunate or happy.

There seems to me no doubt that we all have thoughts like this. What binds these apparently different examples together is that the ideas involved in each case

are special or problematic for Hume in the same way. 'Take any action allow'd to be vicious', he says, 'Wilful murder, for instance':

Examine it in all lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or real existence, which you call *vice*. In which-ever way you take it, you find only certain passions, motives, volitions and thoughts. There is no other matter of fact in the case. The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object.

(T468)

The idea of vice or viciousness does not denote anything in the 'object' to which it is applied. What you think to be true of the 'object' simply is not there.

The 'object' is also said to be the wrong place to look in the case of beauty:

EUCLID has fully explained every quality of the circle, but has not, in any proposition, said a word of its beauty. The reason is evident. Beauty is not a quality of the circle. It lies not in any part of the line whose parts are all equally distant from a common center...In vain would you look for it in the circle, or seek it, either by your senses, or by mathematical reasonings, in all the properties of that figure.

(Hume 1985:165)

There is nothing in any object which can properly be called its beauty. For Hume this is not a matter of controversy:

If we can depend upon any principle, which we learn from philosophy, this, I think, may be considered as certain and undoubted, that there is nothing, in itself, valuable or despicable, desirable or hateful, beautiful or deformed.

(1985:162)

Considering only the objects in question in themselves, there is no vice or evil or beauty or ugliness to be found.

Something parallel is true of causation. However closely we scrutinize a single instance of one billiard ball's causing another to move:

we find only that the one body approaches the other; and that the motion of it precedes that of the other, but without any sensible interval. 'tis in vain to rack ourselves with *farther* thought and reflexion upon this subject. We can go no *farther* in considering this particular instance.

(T77)

But we cannot say that contiguity and succession alone give us a 'compleat idea of causation': 'There is a NECESSARY CONNEXION to be taken into consideration.' But, Hume says:

Here again I turn the object on all sides, in order to discover the nature of this necessary connexion, and find the impression, or impressions, from which its idea may be deriv'd. When I cast my eye on the *known qualities* of objects, I immediately discover that the relation of cause and effect depends not in the least on *them*. When I consider their *relations*, I can find none but those of

contiguity and succession; which I have already regarded as imperfect and unsatisfactory.

(T77)

There simply is no such connection to be perceived in any particular case. After we have observed a series of several resembling instances of contiguity and succession, we do in fact come to think of two sorts of things as causally connected. But the repetition alone does not reveal something in the current instance that was not to be found in any of the earlier and exactly resembling instances; nor does it *produce* something new in the later resembling instances, each of which is independent of all the rest. Hume concludes:

There is, then, nothing new either discover'd or produc'd in any objects by their constant conjunction, and by the uninterrupted resemblance of their relations of succession and contiguity. But 'tis from this resemblance, that the ideas of necessity, of power, and of efficacy, are deriv'd. These ideas, therefore, represent not any thing, that does or can belong to the objects, which are constantly conjoin'd.

(T164)

This is perhaps the best description of what is special or problematic about the ideas centrally involved in each of the kinds of thoughts I want to consider. The idea in question does not represent anything 'that does or can belong to the objects' which we think of by means of that idea. We think of those objects as being a certain way, but they are not and cannot be that way. There is nothing in, or perceivable in, an act of wilful murder that is its vice or its being vicious; beauty is not a quality of any object; there is nothing in, or discernible in, any two objects or the relations between them that is the necessary or causal connection between them. But it appears that we can and do think of some actions as being vicious, of some objects as being beautiful, and of one thing's causing another. We appear to have thoughts in which we predicate those very qualities of certain objects or relations.

The problem then is to explain how we come to have such thoughts. It is not just a matter of identifying the occasions on which thoughts like that first come into our minds. It is also a question of what happens to us on those occasions, and of exactly how whatever happens brings it about that the thought we eventually get is the thought of an act as being *vicious* or of an object as being *beautiful* or of one event as being the *cause* of another.

What Hume thinks happens to produce a thought of an action's being vicious or of an object's being beautiful is that in each case we feel a certain 'sentiment'. If you are looking for the vice or viciousness of a certain action:

You never can find it, till you turn your reflexion into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action. Here is a matter of fact; but 'tis the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself, not in the object.

(T468–9)

Similarly, the beauty of a circle is not a quality of the circle: 'It is only the effect, which that figure produces upon a mind, whose particular fabric or structure

renders it susceptible of such sentiments' (Hume 1985:165). If we never got such 'sentiments' we would never 'pronounce' anything to be 'valuable or despicable, desirable or hateful, beautiful or deformed': 'these attributes arise from the particular constitution and fabric of human sentiment and affection' (1985:162). That is not to say that our getting the relevant 'sentiments' is always completely independent of all reason or judgement or thought. Discernment of beauty can be improved; with practice and learning, 'the organ acquires greater perfection in its operations' (1985:237). And not just any 'sentiment' of pleasure or pain derived from a person's action or character makes us praise or condemn it: 'Tis only when a character is consider'd in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil' (T472).

Experience and informed reflection might well be necessary to arrive at such '*steady and general* points of view' (T581–2). But even when thought or reflection is needed, some actual 'sentiments' or feelings are needed as well. Without them, we would never 'pronounce' on the moral qualities of actions or characters, or on the beauty or ugliness of objects around us.

The 'sentiment' that always arises in such cases is something new, something beyond or at least different from any thought or belief produced by reason or the understanding:

All the circumstances of the case are supposed to be laid before us, ere we can fix any sentence of blame or approbation...But after every circumstance, every relation is known, the understanding has no further room to operate, nor any object on which it could employ itself. The approbation or blame which then ensues, cannot be the work of the judgement, but of the heart; and is not a speculative proposition or affirmation, but an active feeling or sentiment.

(E290)

The distinction Hume draws here marks the difference in general between the distinct faculties which he calls 'reason' and 'taste':

The former conveys the knowledge of truth and falsehood: the latter gives the sentiment of beauty and deformity, vice and virtue. The one discovers objects as they really stand in nature, without addition or diminution: the other has a productive faculty...From circumstances and relations, known or supposed, the former leads us to the discovery of the concealed and unknown: after all circumstances and relations are laid before us, the latter makes us feel from the whole a new sentiment of blame or approbation.

(E294)

Something 'new' is also produced in the case of causation, and never by reason or the understanding. There is nothing in a series of resembling pairs of objects which answers to the idea of a necessary connection between their members:

yet the *observation* of this resemblance produces a new impression *in the mind*, which is its real model. For after we have observ'd the resemblance in a sufficient number of instances, we immediately feel a determination of the mind to pass from one object to its usual attendant, and to conceive it in a stronger light upon account of that relation. 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.

(T165)

The 'new' or 'added' ingredient is something in the mind. The independent but resembling instances of contiguity and succession therefore 'have no union but in the mind, which observes them', as Hume puts it (T165). I take this to mean that there is no necessary connection between the objects; we only think that there is. That is also the way to take his famous (and otherwise disastrous) pronouncement that, 'Upon the whole, necessity is something, that exists in the mind, not in objects' (T165): we think things are necessarily connected, but they really are not. That would make the remark about necessity parallel to the even more famous (and almost equally disastrous) adage that, 'Beauty is in the eye of the beholder'. This is not to be taken to mean that beholders have beautiful eyes.

What is important for Hume is that it is what he calls 'the imagination', not reason or the understanding, that is the source of the 'new' or 'additional' item which must make its appearance in the mind if we are to be led to 'pronounce' any 'sentence of blame or approbation', or of beauty or deformity, or of causal or necessary connection. In all these cases the new item is an impression—a 'sentiment' or feeling or an impression of reflection.¹ How does the appearance of one of those things in the mind have the effect of giving us thoughts (or 'ideas') of vice, of beauty, of causation, or of any other qualities or relations we ascribe to objects, when according to Hume those qualities and relations do not and cannot actually belong to 'objects as they really stand in nature' (E294)?

He is aware that the idea that objects do not really stand in causal relations or necessary connections to one another in nature will be greeted as an astonishing and violent 'paradox'. He thinks there is a deep 'bias of the mind' against it (T166–7). But he thinks that the source of that very 'bias' also provides the explanation he is looking for. In the case of causation, for example, we know that a certain 'internal impression' arises in the mind after the observation of a constant conjunction between objects of two kinds. And:

'Tis a common observation, that the mind has a great propensity to spread itself on external objects, and to conjoin with them any internal impressions, which they occasion, and which always make *their* appearance at the same time that these objects discover themselves to the senses. Thus as certain sounds and smells are always found to attend certain visible objects, we naturally imagine a conjunction, even in place, betwixt the objects and the qualities, tho' the qualities be of such a nature as to admit of no such conjunction, and really exist no where...the same propensity is the reason, why we suppose necessity and power to lie in the objects we consider, not in our mind, that considers them.

(T167)

In the first *Enquiry* he describes that same 'spreading' or 'conjoining' operation this way: 'as we feel a customary connexion between the ideas, we transfer that feeling to the objects; as nothing is more usual than to apply to external bodies every internal sensation, which they occasion' (E78n).

We 'feel a determination of the mind' to 'pass from one object to the idea of its usual attendant' (T165), and it is that impression, or what it is an impression of, that we somehow 'spread' on or 'transfer' to or 'conjoin' with the objects now

before us, and so come to 'imagine' or 'suppose' that they are causally or necessarily connected.

In the case of morals, the understanding first discovers and judges the relevant matters of fact in the case, and then 'the mind, from the contemplation of the whole, feels some new impression of affection or disgust, esteem or contempt, approbation or blame' (E290). There is again a certain 'propensity' at work which starts from that impression or sentiment and somehow takes us beyond the deliverances of observation and the understanding alone. It is the imagination which in all these cases exhibits: 'a productive faculty, and gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment, raises in a manner a new creation' (E294).

The 'new creation' is eventually a conception of a world containing good and evil actions, admirable and contemptible characters, and beautiful and ugly objects. It is only because we naturally get certain feelings or impressions, and, even more importantly, only because of the mind's 'productive faculty' in 'gilding or staining' the world with what those feelings give us, that we ever come to think in those ways at all. Our moral and aesthetic judgements do not report the presence in objects of qualities which really belong to those objects to which we appear to ascribe them.

Hume draws the same parallel to explain the formation of moral and aesthetic judgements as he drew earlier with thoughts of necessary connection. There he compared necessity to sounds and smells; here he adds colours and heat and cold, and invokes the 'modern philosophy's' doctrine of 'secondary' qualities. The mind operates in moral thinking just as that view says it does with respect to colours, sounds, heat and cold: 'Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compar'd to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind...' (T469). In each case, the mind 'transfers' features of its internal workings or contents to an external world which does not really contain them.

The question is how this 'gilding or staining' is supposed to work. What is involved in the mind's 'spreading' itself on to external objects and 'conjoining' with them, or 'transferring' to them, something 'borrowed' from internal impressions or sentiments? In making the transition, Hume says, the mind 'raises in a manner a new creation'. I take him to mean that in our thoughts we somehow come to endow objects with something 'new', with certain qualities or relations which they do not possess 'as they really stand in nature, without addition or diminution' by us. This mental operation I have called 'projection',² no doubt more in the dictionary than in the psychoanalytic sense. We put on to objects in our thoughts about them certain features that they do not really possess. We take something mental and see it as external. That is how I take Hume's metaphors of 'gilding or staining', or 'spreading' something onto, a neutral and unsuspecting world. How does it work?

There is a real problem here for Hume. To put it another way, there is a real problem here for anyone who would interpret Hume as holding that we do really think of objects as causally or necessarily connected, or as evil or vicious, or as beautiful. I do want to interpret Hume that way. I think human beings do have such thoughts, so it would be a good thing if Hume's science of human nature could acknowledge that we have them. That theory is meant to explain every thought and feeling human beings have. But the problem for Hume is that if we do have thoughts of causation, or of the vice or beauty of things, they are thoughts which

do not represent ‘any thing, that does or can belong’ to external objects ‘as they really stand in nature’. He has a view of the world or of ‘nature’ according to which no such qualities or relations could belong to or hold between the objects that make up that world. That is one of the things that make it so hard for him to explain how such thoughts or beliefs are possible. What the thoughts are about is never to be found in the world. It seems then that we could arrive at them only by ‘adding’ something to our conception of the world, by ‘gilding or staining’ it with something that does not really belong to it. The source of that extra ‘stain’ or ‘gilding’ could only be the mind itself, or its contents, so it is from there that we must ‘borrow’ whatever materials are used in the ‘spreading’ or ‘transferring’ operation. Anyone who thinks that we do have such thoughts, and who shares Hume’s restricted conception of what the world or ‘nature’ can contain—as many philosophers apparently still do—would seem forced into an account along some such lines.

The questions any such account must answer are: what do we ‘borrow’ from our internal impressions, and what do we ascribe to the external objects we ‘gild or stain’? We presumably do not ‘borrow’ the internal impression itself and ascribe it in thought to an external object. We do not think that the sequence of events on the billiards table—the one ball’s striking the other and the second ball’s moving—*itself* has a feeling or impression like the feeling Hume says we humans get when we observe it. Nor do we think that, when the second ball is struck, it moves off with a feeling like that.³ We do not think that an act of wilful murder itself has a feeling of disgust or disapprobation, any more than we think that a painting on a wall has a sentiment of pleasure or awe. That is nonsense in each case. It is not the internal impression itself that we ascribe to the external object. Rather, it seems that it should be what the impression is an impression *of* that we so predicate.

But Hume’s view of impressions—or at least of those impressions he seems to have principally in mind in his ‘gilding or staining’ metaphor—makes it difficult for him to appeal in the right way to what impressions are impressions of. He thinks primarily of colours, sounds, smells, heat and cold, and all of them he says are ‘nothing but impressions in the mind’ (T226). The point is not that impressions of colours and sounds are impressions in the mind, but that colours and sounds are impressions in the mind. That is the view he attributes to ‘modern philosophy’ (T469). It is because such impressions always ‘attend’ the perception of certain external objects that: ‘we naturally imagine a conjunction, even in place, betwixt the objects and qualities, tho’ the qualities be of such a nature to admit of no such conjunction, and really exist no where’ (T167).

This suggests that Hume endorses ‘modern philosophy’s’ view that the redness we see is nothing more than a feature of our impressions. In his essay ‘Of the Standard of Taste’, he says he wants to explain how one colour can be ‘denominated’ the ‘true and real’ colour of an object, ‘even while colour is allowed to be merely a phantasm of the senses’ (Hume 1985:234). If that were what colour is, it would not be something that could ever be in the same ‘place’ with an apple. In that respect it would be like pain; the pain we feel is not something that could intelligibly be located in, or belong to, or be predicated of, an external object that causes it. It does not exist in, or belong to, the world of external objects at all. In that sense, the felt quality of a painful sensation could be said to exist ‘no where’, that is, in no place. But presumably in that case, no one thinks that it does. There is no ‘spreading’ or ‘gilding’ the objects of the world with pain when we have sensations of pain. What is perceived or felt when a painful

impression is present is not something that coherently admits of attribution to an inanimate external object.

The same would be true of the disgust or displeasure we might experience when observing an act of wilful murder, or the pleasure we might get from seeing a great painting, if they too are on Hume's view just impressions or feelings of certain distinctive kinds. To try to predicate them of the objects that cause them would be to ascribe a feeling or impression to an act of murder or to a painting. And that is absurd. The impression or feeling that Hume says comes into the mind when we see objects of one kind constantly followed by objects of another kind would also on that view be yet another distinctive impression. Like a pain, it would be simply an impression or feeling of a certain kind which differs in directly perceivable ways from impressions of other kinds. What distinguishes them in each case would be perceivable or felt qualities of the impressions themselves. Those same qualities which serve to distinguish one kind of impression or feeling from another therefore could not also be thought to be qualities of external objects, any more than the pain we feel or the painfulness of a painful sensation is something that could be a quality of an external object. If impressions of something are understood in that way—as we speak of a 'sensation of pain'—then what they are impressions of is not something that could also be thought to be a quality of an object.

To understand the operation of 'gilding or staining' the world with something 'borrowed from internal sentiment' in that way, then, would mean that that operation could never really succeed in producing an intelligible thought which attributes certain 'added' features to external objects or to the relations between them. At best it would produce a kind of confusion or nonsense on our part, perhaps with an accompanying illusion of having coherent thoughts of that kind when we really do not. There certainly are suggestions that Hume sometimes thinks of it that way, especially in what he says about the idea of necessary connection. Necessity, he says, 'is nothing but an internal impression of the mind, or a determination to carry our thoughts from one object to another' (T165). If that is what necessity is, then it would seem that any thoughts about necessity would be thoughts either about an impression or about a determination or transition of the mind. But then we could not intelligibly think that necessity, so understood, is a feature of the relation between two external objects or events; that the two are necessarily connected. We could not think that one thing must or had to happen, given that something else had happened earlier.

Hume appears to endorse that conclusion in his gloss on the formula that '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, consider'd as a quality in bodies. 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.

(T165–6)

This seems to say that we can think intelligibly about the passage of our thought from one thing to another, and we can think intelligibly about the impression or feeling of determination which accompanies that transition, but that is really all there is to think about in connection with necessity. We cannot intelligibly think that something has to happen, or happens of necessity, or that one thing is necessarily connected with another.

When Hume says that we nevertheless do:

suppose necessity and power to lie in the objects we consider, not in our mind, that considers them; notwithstanding it is not possible for us to form the most distant idea of that quality, when it is not taken for the determination of the mind...

(T167)

he implies that we are at best confused in our attempts to think of things as causally or necessarily connected. What he says we 'suppose' ('Necessity lies in the objects we consider') is not really something we could ever have 'the most distant idea of. On this reading, the only idea we could have of the necessity involved in causation is apparently not an idea of any quality which we could intelligibly think belongs to, or could be predicated of, the relation between two objects. It could only be an idea of something (an impression or feeling) which always accompanies the observation of certain pairs of objects, and that is something in the mind, not a quality of the objects or of the relations between them.

There is no question that we can think clearly and without confusion about the passage of our thought from one thing to another, or about impressions which appear in our minds on certain occasions. But such thoughts do not involve 'gilding or staining' anything in the world with qualities it does not really possess. If Hume is right, we do in fact feel or experience something when the mind passes from one idea to its usual attendant, and in announcing the presence of such an impression we would be stating no more than a straightforward autobiographical fact. Or, in the moral case, I might say, as Hume suggests, 'I feel a sentiment of disgust or disapprobation when I consider that act of wilful murder' (T469); and if I do, what I say will be no more than the ungilded truth. I would not be 'adding' or 'spreading' any extra quality on to that act or on to anything else.

We can think, equally clearly and truly, not only about ourselves and the goings on in our own minds, but also about external objects. If we think of objects of a certain kind, that observation of them is always accompanied by an impression of a certain kind—a feeling of pleasure, or disgust, or perhaps a 'feeling of determination'—then again, in having such thoughts we are not 'spreading' a 'new creation' on to those objects, or 'adding' something to them which does not belong to them 'as they really stand' in the world. We merely think, without projection or confusion, about a relation which actually holds in nature between certain objects and certain human feelings. So although we can and do have perfectly intelligible thoughts of these two kinds, they involve no 'gilding or staining'. Nor do they involve ascribing beauty or viciousness or a causal connection to any objects either. But those are the kinds of thoughts which need to be explained. If we have them, Hume must acknowledge that we have them, and his theory of the mind must eventually account for them.

To have only thoughts about our impressions, or dispositional thoughts about the natural tendency of external objects to produce such impressions in human minds, we perhaps do not need to think of the impressions involved as anything other than impressions or feelings with their own distinctive and directly perceivable characteristics, on the model of sensations of pain. But that is what we found stands in the way of the apparently most straightforward understanding of the operation of 'spreading' or projection. We could not then take the quality which distinguishes impressions of one kind (for example, disgust) from

impressions of another kind (for example, pain) and somehow predicate that very quality of any external object. The feature of the impression which in that sense makes it the kind of impression it is cannot also intelligibly be thought to be a quality of an external object. But although Hume does often appear to think of impressions of colours, sounds, smells, and heat and cold in this way, and perhaps also feelings of various kinds of pleasure and displeasure as well—along with sensations of pain—it is clear that that view of impressions cannot be accepted in general. Not all impressions 'of F' can be understood on the model of sensations 'of pain'. There must be another way of distinguishing impressions from one another, another way of understanding what it is for an impression to be an impression of such-and-such, if we are ever able to think of perceived qualities as belonging to objects in the world.

If, as Hume holds, every case of perceiving something is a matter of our having an impression of something, then if every impression were just an impression with a certain distinctive felt or perceived character, we could never come to think of external objects as having any of those very qualities that we can perceive. An impression of a round ball, for example, or of the roundness of the ball, would then also be just an impression with a certain distinctive character perceivably different from other impressions like pain or disgust or pleasure. The quality that we are aware of in having such an impression could not coherently be thought also to be a quality of an external object. And if that were true of all impressions, and so of all perceivable qualities, then either impressions or feelings or things in the mind would be the only things that we could think of as having any qualities at all—as Berkeley held—or none of the qualities that we could think of an external object as having could be qualities which we could also perceive anything to have. Thought of objects which are not in the mind, if it were possible at all, would be in that way completely cut off from perception or feeling. The objects of thought and the objects of perception would never be the same. What we can perceive and what we can think would not even overlap.

To avoid that unacceptable dilemma, at least some impressions must be understood 'intentionally', as being 'of something that could be so, or of something that could be thought to be true of external objects. Hume apparently finds no difficulty in thinking in this way about an impression of a round ball, for example, or of the roundness of a ball, or an impression of one round ball's striking another. It seems that we can and do have such impressions, and when we think of one ball striking another, our thought has the very same content; the very qualities and relations that we sometimes perceive—roundness and striking—we also think are qualities or relations of the balls we think about. What we can find in perception is in that case reproduced in thought. We attribute some of the very qualities and relations we perceive to the objects we think about.

It must be said that it is difficult to understand how we could ever have an impression of one round ball's striking another if the thought of two such objects standing in that relation to each other made no sense to us, or was something that we did not think could be so. Our being capable of a perception with just that content would seem to require our finding intelligible the thought of one ball's striking another. For Hume, it is the other way around. Our getting an impression of something is what makes it possible for us to have an idea of that same something.⁴ So he needs an independent specification of what we can and cannot, strictly speaking, get impressions of. But the special problem which arises for the problematic thoughts we are interested in is that the impressions which are said to

produce them cannot in that sense be impressions of ‘anything, that does or can belong’ to external objects. They are not ‘of anything that can be so, or that we can perceive to be so, in the world.

This is sometimes obscured by the way Hume occasionally describes those impressions or feelings. In the case of causation, for example, he speaks of ‘this connexion...which we *feel* in the mind’ (E75). He says that after having observed two kinds of events in constant conjunction, the observer ‘now feels these events to be connected in his imagination’ (E75–6). But of course on Hume’s view of the world there can be no such thing as a necessary connection between two events, and no such state of affairs as two things’ being connected in the mind. Nothing in the world is actually connected with anything else, anywhere. So we can never perceive a connection which holds between two things, and if we can nevertheless be said to ‘feel’ them to be connected, it must be because the idea of two things’ being causally connected already makes sense to us. If we really did have such a feeling, there would presumably be no difficulty in ‘transferring’ the content of that feeling to objects in the world and thinking that it is true of the relation between them. We could reproduce in thought exactly what we had found in feeling or perception. But if we must possess the idea of necessary connection in order to ‘feel’ that two things are connected, even in the mind, then it would seem that we could have such a ‘feeling’ only if we had already performed the operation of ‘gilding or staining’. Hume thinks that that operation is the only way we come to think of two things as causally connected in the first place.

Hume is more careful in describing the experience of exercising the will. He easily resists the suggestion that we get the idea of cause or power from the way in which parts of our bodies and many of our thoughts can be seen to obey the will. He does not deny that we observe the motion of the body to follow upon a ‘volition’ to move it, but we are never able, he says, ‘to observe or conceive the tie which binds together the motion and volition, or the energy by which the mind produces this effect’ (E74): ‘the will being here consider’d as a cause, has no more a discoverable connexion with its effects, than any material cause has with its proper effect’ (T632). There is no impression of the will’s efficacy or power; all we are aware of in action is at first a felt ‘volition’, and then an impression of what happens next.

It would be no better to appeal not to the power of the will but to its powerlessness.⁵ If we have experienced a correlation between things of two kinds in the past, and an idea of a thing of the first kind appears in the mind, then whatever we happen to will or not to will at that time, an idea of a thing of the second kind will inevitably present itself. That is one of Hume’s fundamental ‘principles of the imagination’. If in those circumstances we were to get an impression of the inevitability with which that idea appears in the mind, or of our powerlessness to resist its appearing there, we could presumably then ascribe that very feature that we get an impression of—inevitability or powerlessness—to the happenings on the billiards table and elsewhere in the world of objects. We could reproduce in thought exactly what we can find in perception or feeling. But again it is Hume’s view that we could get no such impression or feeling. We could feel a certain desire or ‘volition’—for example, we will the appearance of an idea other than the idea of the second ball’s moving, or perhaps we decide to will nothing at all—and then we immediately find that the idea of the second ball’s moving nevertheless appears. Repeated experiments show that that same idea always appears in the appropriate circumstances, whatever ‘volitions’ are present in those

circumstances. But that discovery of the goings on in our minds involves no impression of the inefficacy or powerlessness of the will. It involves only the awareness of many very different 'volitions', which according to Hume are themselves just different impressions,⁶ followed always by the appearance in the mind of one and the same kind of idea. There is and can be no impression of the inevitability with which things happen, even in the mind; there are impressions only of what happens, or of its happening. If we did have an impression or feeling of the inevitability of something's happening, or of our powerlessness to prevent it, it could only be because we had already acquired the idea of power and were able to recognize its absence. But such an idea is for Hume the product of the operation of 'gilding or staining'; if it were required for the very impression from which that operation is supposed to start (as it, in fact, seems to be), it could not also be the product of that very operation.

In explaining his view of morals Hume is careful to point out that: 'We do not infer a character to be virtuous, because it pleases: But in feeling that it pleases after such a particular manner, we in effect feel that it is virtuous' (T471). But again, that a given character is virtuous is on Hume's view not something that is or could be so as things 'really stand in nature'. If we could have a feeling that a certain character is virtuous, it would have to be because we are already capable of intelligibly predicating virtuousness of some of the actions or characters we observe or think about. Simply feeling or thinking that an action pleases us in a certain way does not involve projecting or 'spreading' anything on to the action. But feeling or thinking that the action is virtuous does. The 'gilding or staining' operation which is supposed to lead to such thoughts could not therefore start from just such a feeling or impression. It must start from a feeling or impression which is 'of something, or has an object, in the 'intentional' sense; but it cannot be 'of any object or quality or relation which could be part of the way things 'really stand in nature'. If it were, no 'gilding or staining' would be necessary.

We can of course have many false thoughts about the world, and even impressions of things that do not really exist. Hume's view is that in the normal case that is because there are combined in our thoughts or impressions ingredients which we can and do find in our experience; it is only the complex combination which happens to find no counterpart in the world. If I believe that there are unicorns I am wrong about the way things are, and if I open my eyes and get an impression of a unicorn I am not perceiving anything that actually exists. But in each case the 'intentional' object of my thought or perception is something which in the widest sense could be so in the world; it just happens not to be. I can perceive and think what I do in that case because I have perceived both horses and horns in the past, and the thought of a creature with a horse's body and a horn between its eyes is perfectly intelligible to me, even if that idea applies to no actual thing. What is especially problematic for Hume is not this ordinary kind of contingent falsehood or delusion. The world as he conceives of it does not just happen to lack causal connections, virtuous characters and beautiful objects. He does not just think that if things had been different in certain intelligible ways, those qualities and relations would have been there. There is no coherent place for them in any world which he conceives of. What is problematic is therefore to explain how we can have intelligible thoughts or perceptions which do not represent 'any thing, that does or can belong' to the way things 'really stand in nature', if we take the ways things could 'really stand in nature' to exhaust the range of what could be so.

That is the problem I find at the centre of Hume's philosophy. It is not unique to Hume. There is admittedly a completely general problem of intentionality which he faces because of his own special conception of the mind and its contents. Strictly speaking, I believe he is not really in a position to explain how we could ever have any thoughts at all of something's being so. That is largely because of that 'theory of ideas' he inherited from Locke and Berkeley—a way of thinking about the mind which he seems to have imbibed without question just as he unhesitatingly took in the air he breathed. On that conception, the 'objects' of the different senses—the only things sensed—are in each case strictly speaking only qualities. For Berkeley, for example, the only or proper objects of sight are colours and shapes, of touch, certain textures and degrees of hardness, and so on. The theory really leaves no room for the intelligible predication of those or any other perceived qualities to an enduring object, despite those philosophers' understandable tendency to continue to speak as if it did.

In the face of this difficulty, Berkeley held that an object is really nothing more than a collection or combination of sensible qualities, or what he equivalently called 'ideas'. But he never explained what a 'combination of sensible qualities' amounts to. He was right to find no help in what he thought was Locke's idea of a 'substratum'—a *je ne sais quoi* which somehow 'supports' the qualities—but he was in no better position than Locke to explain how we can think, of an apple, that it is red, and round, and on the table. What looks like predication of such qualities to an object can be for him nothing more than a thought of a number of qualities somehow being 'present' together. I think Hume makes no advance on Berkeley or Locke on this crucial matter.

I believe the difficulty is connected with something deeper: the absence from this theory of any adequate notion of judgement, or assertion, or putting something forward as true. With no account of judgement, it would be hard to find a place for predication; predication yields a thought that is capable of truth or falsity. That is why I think Hume ultimately cannot even explain the possibility of our thinking of a particular ball as round, or as striking another. Thinking for him is too much like being presented with pictures. But even to see something as a picture of a round ball, or of one ball's striking another, one must be able to think of a ball as round, or as striking another, and that involves the ability to predicate a quality of an object, and to think of one object as related to another. Without an explanation of how we can make sense of such thoughts, there can be no account of how we could even have such a thing as an impression of one round ball's striking another. Thought of an object, and of its having qualities and relations, must be possible for us in order to have such experiences, and that requires in turn the possibility of judgement or assertion. This is obviously the kind of objection which Kant, for one, would be eager to press against Hume.

There is, then, a completely general problem of intentionality for Hume which should not be overlooked or minimized. But even if we drop the restrictions imposed by the theory of ideas, as most philosophers nowadays would claim to have done, the most troubling aspect of the problem I have been drawing attention to seems to me to remain. It has to do with that notion of 'the world' or of the way things 'really stand in nature' which is supposed to exclude beauty and causal connections and the virtuousness or viciousness of actions and characters. A ball's being round, or its striking another ball, is allowed to be part of that 'world', and so unproblematically available as an object of an impression. It might even be said that such things happening in the world is what explains why we get impressions

of a ball's being round, or of one round ball's striking another; what fixes the content of the perceptions we get on certain occasions is precisely what is so or what is going on in plain view on the occasion in question. If we followed Hume in supposing that thought is ultimately derived from perception, we might then be able to explain how it is possible to think of one round ball's striking another. We reproduce in thought what we have found in perception. But even on that view of thought, we could not be said to have found the source of any thoughts we might have of the causal connection between the movements of those balls, or of the beauty of any objects, or of the virtuousness or viciousness of any actions or characters. On the view of 'the world' shared by Hume and his many followers, there can be no such things in the world for us ever to get impressions of. That is precisely why the mental operation of 'gilding or staining' the world is needed; it alone is supposed to produce the thought of something that is not really there.

Of course, one could simply deny that we ever do get any thoughts which in their content go beyond the way the world could really be: we think only either about happenings in our own minds or about the dispositions of objects to produce effects in minds that observe them. There is no doubt that we can and do think of the world in those ways, but I have been considering the view that we also believe more; that we predicate moral and aesthetic qualities of objects and attribute necessity to some of the relations between them. But if we do eventually come to think coherently of beautiful objects, of virtuous and vicious actions and characters, or of causal connections between things—however we manage to do it—how can we then hold that the world does not and cannot include such things? How can we make sense of the idea that we do indeed think things are that way, if we also think that they really are not? And if things in the world are not really that way, how can we explain the fact that we nevertheless think that they are? The Humean suggestion I have been considering is that our thoughts are generated by a creative or productive process which 'takes' something or other from our impressions or feelings and leads us somehow to 'spread' what it takes on to objects which we unproblematically believe to populate the world. But that is only a prejudice or a hope or a fairy story without a convincing account of exactly what we 'take', and exactly how it is turned into something which it becomes intelligible to predicate of objects or the relations between them.

The feelings or impressions from which the 'gilding' story is supposed to start cannot be described from the outset as impressions of something in which the very feature that we are said to 'spread' appears already in intelligible predicative position, applied to an object. No 'new creation' would then be needed to give us the corresponding ideas or thoughts about objects in the world. The thoughts we eventually get are said to predicate something 'new' or 'added' to objects 'as they really stand in nature'. So, something must happen between the original impression or feeling and the subsequent idea to generate what to us will be a newly intelligible predicative thought.

I think we do have intelligible thoughts about beautiful objects, the virtuousness and viciousness of actions and characters, and causal connections between things that happen. But if we do, how can we avoid regarding such thoughts as representing the way things are, or the way things are in the world? What is the notion of 'nature' or 'the world' employed by Hume and all those philosophers who hold that only some, but not all, of the things we seriously and unavoidably believe represent things 'as they really stand in nature' or in 'the world'? For them it is apparently not true that the world is everything that is the

case, or that the world we believe in is everything we believe to be the case. They draw an invidious distinction within all the things we believe; the ‘world’ they think we believe in amounts to something less than the truth of everything we believe. But on that view, the very possibility of our having and making sense of those ‘extra’ thoughts has still to be accounted for.⁷

Notes

- 1 There are other thoughts which are problematic for Hume in this same way but which do not arise from particular impressions or sentiments at all. We think of objects as continuing to exist unperceived, although we never encounter such things in our experience, and ‘the fiction of a continu’d existence...as well as the identity, is really false’ (T209). We think of minds as existing through time, although ‘the identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one’ (T259); ‘there is properly no simplicity in it at one time, nor identity in different; whatever natural propension we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity’ (T253). In these cases, because of certain general ‘principles of the imagination’, the mind is equally naturally led in conflicting directions, and we are said to ‘feign’ or ‘imagine’ certain things as a way of resolving the conflict. The resolution in each case appears to be strictly cognitive, or intellectual. We introduce a new thought or way of thinking into our repertoire; no feeling or ‘sentiment’ works on us in addition to the ideas we possess. I will not enter further into Hume’s explanations of ‘fictions’ or ‘illusions’ which arise in this way without a feeling or sentiment. I concentrate here on the relation between feeling or perception and thought, and how the one is supposed to lead to the other in these problematic cases.
- 2 See Stroud (1977), for example on pages 86–7, 185–6. I find now that the term was used to refer to this operation in Hume by Paul Grice in the early 1970s; see Grice ‘Method in Philosophical Psychology: From the Banal to the Bizarre’, Presidential Address to the Pacific Division of the American Philosophical Association, March 1975, in Grice (1992:146).
- 3 It must be admitted that Hume sometimes suggests that we do suppose something like that:

No animal can put external bodies in motion without the sentiment of a *nisus* or endeavour; and every animal has a sentiment or feeling from the stroke or blow of an external object, that is in motion. These sensations, which are merely animal, and from which we can a *priori* draw no inference, we are apt to transfer to inanimate objects, and to suppose, that they have some such feelings, whenever they transfer or receive motion.

(E78n)

- 4 Here I ignore for the moment the distinction between simple and complex impressions and ideas. The sweeping generalization strictly holds only for simple perceptions.
- 5 This has been suggested by David Pears (1990:110–15).
- 6 ‘I desire it may be observ’d, that by the *will*, I mean nothing but *the internal impression we feel and are conscious of, when we knowingly give rise to any new motion of our body, or new perception of our mind*’ (T399).
- 7 I am grateful to Janet Broughton and Hannah Ginsborg for very helpful critical comments on earlier versions of this paper.

3 David Hume: Objects and Power

Galen Strawson

1

Many people think that Hume holds a straightforward ‘regularity’ theory of causation, according to which causation is nothing more than regular succession or constant conjunction. ‘If Hume is right’, Saul Kripke says, then ‘even if God were to look at [two causally related] events, he would discern nothing relating them other than that one succeeds the other’.¹ ‘Hume’s conclusion’, according to Roger Woolhouse, is ‘that so far as the external objects which are causes and effects are concerned there is only constant conjunction’; so far as the ‘operations of natural bodies’ are concerned, ‘regularity and constant conjunction are all that exist’.² I will call this the standard view. I will argue that it is wrong, and that Hume believes in causal power, or ‘natural necessity’, or ‘Causation’, as I will sometimes call it.³

2

If you want to know what Hume thought about causation, you have to give priority to his first *Enquiry*, which begins as follows:

Most of the principles, and reasonings, contained in this volume, were published in a work in three volumes, called *A Treatise of Human Nature*: a work which the author projected before he left college, and which he wrote and published not long after. But not finding it successful, he was sensible of his error in going to the press too early, and he cast the whole anew in the following pieces, where some negligences in his former reasoning and more in the expression, are, he hopes, corrected. Yet several writers, who have honoured the author’s philosophy with answers, have taken care to direct all their batteries against the juvenile work, which the author never acknowledged, and have affected to triumph in any advantages, which, they imagined, they had obtained over it: *a practice very contrary to all rules of candour and fair-dealing, and a strong instance of those polemical artifices, which a bigotted zeal thinks itself authorized to employ.* Henceforth, the author desires, that the following pieces *may alone be regarded as containing his philosophical sentiments and principles.*

(E2; my emphases)

These are strong words for Hume, and they express hurt. Responding anonymously in 1745 to an early attack on the *Treatise*, he described the

quotations from the *Treatise* given by his ‘accuser’—which read like a summary of what many in the twentieth century regard as Hume’s essential views—as ‘maimed excerpts’ (Hume 1745:3) selected with ‘a degree of unfairness which appears to me altogether astonishing’ (1745:20). The accuser (probably William Wishart) used Hume’s words, but ‘pervert[ed] them and misrepresent[ed] them in the grossest way in the world’ (Hume 1978:15).

Hume’s public response was to write the *Enquiry* (1748). He wrote it to counteract the misinterpretation of the *Treatise*, and to correct certain mistakes: ‘The philosophical principles are the same in both: but I was carried away by the heat of youth and invention to publish too precipitately... I have repented my haste a hundred, and a hundred times’ (Hume 1932: I, 158). ‘I...acknowledge...a very great mistake in conduct, viz my publishing at all the Treatise of Human Nature... Above all, the positive air, which prevails in that book, and which may be imputed to the ardor of youth, so much displeases me, that I have not patience to review it’ (1932:I, 187).⁴ He expected a much better reception for the *Enquiry*, in which ‘the same doctrines [are] better illustrated and expressed’: a striking remark when one is trying to establish Hume’s views about causation, given that all the main support for the view that Hume was an outright regularity theorist derives from the *Treatise*, and vanishes in the *Enquiry*.

‘[A]llow me to tell you, that I never asserted so absurd a proposition, as *that anything might arise without a cause*: I only maintained, that our certainty of the falsehood of that proposition proceeded neither from intuition nor demonstration; but from another source’ (1932:I, 187). Hume was irritated by the suggestion that he thought otherwise, that he was ‘denying the truth of [a] proposition, which indeed *a man must have lost all common sense to doubt of*’ (1745:22). He would have been equally irritated by the allegation that he asserted that regular succession is all there is to causation. The most direct proof of this is given on pp. 46–7 below.

In asking that the *Enquiry* alone should ‘be regarded as containing his philosophical sentiments and principles’, Hume lays a clear obligation on us. We can read the *Enquiry* back into the *Treatise*, when trying to understand his considered view; we cannot go the other way. Everything in the *Treatise* that is or appears incompatible with the *Enquiry* must be discarded. Nothing in the *Treatise* can legitimately be used to throw light on any passage in the *Enquiry* unless two conditions are fulfilled: the passage in the *Enquiry* must be unclear (this is not often the case), and the passage from the *Treatise* must not be incompatible with anything in the *Enquiry* that is not in dispute. Even when a passage from the *Treatise* is called in evidence, its claim to make a contribution to interpretation must be weak when compared with competing claims from passages in the *Enquiry* other than the passage under consideration.

If we also respect Hume’s insistence that ‘the philosophical principles are the same in both’ the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*, we have a further obligation. In order to understand the *Treatise*—in order, in particular, to avoid being misled by the dramatic and polemical exaggerations of the ‘ardor of youth’—we must read the *Enquiry* back into the *Treatise* wherever possible, and give it priority. For it was written to correct the misunderstanding of the *Treatise*.

Nearly all present-day commentators ignore this obligation, and many have their exegetical principles exactly the wrong way round.⁵ Hume deserves sympathy, for it is bad to be attacked for views one never held, and worse to be praised and famous for holding them.⁶ I know of no greater abuse of an author in the history of philosophy.⁷ Many love the *Treatise* because they love argument, and this is

understandable; many excellent philosophers are condemned to the lower divisions in philosophy because, consciously or not, they are more attached to cleverness and argument than truth. Hume is not among them, however, and no one can avoid the obligations described in the preceding paragraph. It cannot be plausibly argued that there is early Hume and late Hume, that they are importantly different, and that each deserves study in his own right. Hume was at work on the *Treatise*-clarifying *Enquiry* within five years of the publication of the *Treatise* and probably earlier, and (once again) was most insistent that the philosophical principles are the same in both. We have no reason to judge him to be self-deceived on this matter.⁸

3

When Hume talks of ‘objects’ he usually means genuinely external objects, in a sense to be explained further below. Sometimes, however, he only means to refer to mental occurrences, or what he calls ‘perceptions’, and it may be suggested that this is always so: that he only means to refer to the ‘immediate’, mental objects of experience, in talking of objects. This suggestion is worth mentioning, because if it were correct it would be easy to understand why Hume might wish to adopt a regularity theory about causation in the ‘objects’.⁹ But it is not correct: Hume did not mean to refer only to mental occurrences or perceptions, and when I use the word ‘object’ I will mean what he usually meant in the contexts with which I will be concerned: objects that are genuinely non-mental things, things that exist independently of our minds.¹⁰

I will argue for this soon. For the moment I will take it for granted, because it allows me to state the main objection to the standard view of Hume. It is that the standard view fails to distinguish clearly between two fundamentally different notions, one ontological, the other epistemological. It fails to distinguish sufficiently between the ontological notion of causation as it *is* ‘in the objects’, and the epistemological notion of causation so far as we *know* about it in the objects.¹¹ But this distinction is crucial. In the end Hume’s regularity theory of causation is only a theory about causation so far as as we can know about it in the objects, not about causation as it is in the objects. As far as causation as it is in the objects is concerned, Hume believes in Causation.

In other words: the ‘standard’ view confuses Hume’s epistemological claim

(E) All we can ever know of causation is regular succession

with the positive ontological claim

(O) All that causation actually is, in the objects, is regular succession.

It moves, catastrophically, from the former to the latter. The former is arguably true. The latter is fantastically implausible. It is ‘absurd’, as Hume would have put it.¹²

Although (E) and (O) are clearly distinct, Hume sometimes abbreviates his main claims, in the *Treatise*, in such a way that he seems to slide from (E) to (O), propelled by his theory of ideas or meaning. In these cases, the passage from the merely epistemological claim (E) to the ontological claim (O) appears to be made via the semantic claim

(S) All we can legitimately *manage to mean* by expressions like ‘causation in the objects’ is regular succession.

The transition is made as follows. (1) (E) is true. (2) If (E) is true, (S) is true (that's strict empiricism for you). (3) If (S) is true, (O) is true. Hence (4) (O) is true. Why does (O) follow from (S)? Because, given (S), when the phrase 'causation in the objects' comes out of our mouths or pens, or occurs in our thought, it inevitably just means regular succession. So (O) causation in the objects—here is the phrase, meaning 'regular succession'—just is regular succession. After all, regular succession is regular succession.¹³

I am going to reject this view of the consequences of Hume's theory of ideas (or theory of meaningfulness). Let me raise an initial doubt. Suppose there were good grounds for thinking that Hume's theory of ideas did license the (very strange) move from (E) to (O) via (S), and hence licensed the claim that all we can suppose a thing to be is what we can detect or experience or know of it, simply because we cannot manage to mean anything more than what we can detect or experience or know of it, when we think or talk about it. Even if this were so, the following decisive objection to attributing (O) to Hume would remain: (O), the claim that causation is definitely nothing but regular succession, and that there is definitely no such thing as Causation, makes a positive ontological assertion about the ultimate nature of reality. It is therefore violently at odds with Hume's scepticism—his scepticism with respect to knowledge claims about what we can know to exist, *or know not to exist*, in reality. As a strict sceptic with respect to knowledge claims about the nature of reality Hume does not make positive claims about what definitely does exist (apart from mental occurrences or 'perceptions', whose existence he rightly takes as certain). But, equally clearly, he does not make positive claims about what definitely (or knowably) does not exist. For such claims are equally unwarranted, from the sceptical point of view. Ignorance, as he says, is never a 'good reason for rejecting any thing' (E73, quoted on p. 44 below). This point about Hume's scepticism is enough to refute any attribution of (O) to him.

4

The following objection may be put. As a strict sceptic with respect to knowledge claims, Hume will not claim that we can know that there is definitely nothing like Causation in reality. Equally, though, he will not claim that there definitely is something like Causation in reality.

This is true. It requires us to take note of the distinction between knowledge and belief. Those who think that Hume is a straightforward regularity theorist with respect to causation standardly suppose that he makes a *knowledge* claim on the question, claiming that causation is definitely just regular succession, and that therefore there is definitely nothing like Causation. Such a knowledge claim is ruled out by his scepticism. The *belief* that there is some such thing as Causation is not ruled out, however. Scepticism can acknowledge the naturalness of this belief, and grant that it may well be something like the truth; it will merely insist that although we believe it, we cannot prove it to be true.

Some think that Hume cannot even admit to *believing* in the existence of anything like Causation, given his scepticism. I will discuss the motivation for this view in §§5 and 6. For the moment it suffices to say that Hume is not a Pyrrhonist.¹⁴ This objection fails to take account of his doctrine of 'natural belief', according to which we have certain natural beliefs (for example in the existence of external objects) which we find it practically impossible to give up. Scepticism of the Humean kind does not say that these beliefs are definitely not true, or

unintelligible, or utterly contentless (see §6). Genuine *belief* in the existence of X is fully compatible with strict scepticism with regard to *knowledge* claims about the existence of X.¹⁵

In fact Hume never really questions the idea that there is Causation, something in virtue of which reality is regular in the way that it is. Following Newton, he repeatedly insists on the epistemological claim that we know nothing of the ultimate nature of Causation. The power or force, which actuates the whole machine...of the universe...is entirely concealed from us' (E63), and 'experience only teaches us, how one event constantly follows another; without instructing us in the secret connexion, which binds them together, and renders them inseparable' (E66). We cannot know the nature of Causation. But to say that is not to doubt that Causation exists.

5

These quotations seem very clear. But it may now be objected that Hume cannot mean what he says. He cannot mean what he says because he holds that the idea of causation as something more than regular succession—the idea of Causation—is completely *unintelligible*. What's more, he says the same about the notion of 'external objects'.

The fact that he said the same about the notion of external objects may, however, be part of the solution, not part of the problem. I will now approach the general issue of Hume's attitude to questions of meaning and intelligibility by defending the view that he was committed to the intelligibility of the realist conception of objects. This commitment is obvious in the *Enquiry*, and also in the *Treatise*, but some doubt it, believing that Hume is some sort of idealist about objects, and is forced to be so by a theory of meaning which entails that talk of external objects is unintelligible.

The central point is simple. When present-day philosophers say that something is unintelligible they mean that it is incoherent and cannot exist. But Hume—with Locke, Berkeley, and many others—uses the word 'unintelligible' in the literal sense, which survives in the standard non-philosophical use of the word—as when we say that a message is unintelligible, meaning simply that we cannot understand it, although it exists ('Ni chredai Hume nad yw achosiaeth yn ddim ond cyddigwyd-diad rheolaidd'). When Hume says that something is unintelligible, then, he means that we cannot understand it. In particular, he means that we cannot form an idea of it or term for it that has any positive descriptive content on the terms of the theory of ideas. To say this, however, is not to say that we cannot refer to it, or that the notion of it is incoherent.

Hume's position on this matter is like Locke's position with respect to the 'real essence' of gold. Locke takes it that the real essence of gold is completely unknown to us. This leads him to say that in so far as the word 'gold' carries a 'tacit reference to the real essence' of gold, as it does in common use, it has '*no signification at all*, being put for somewhat, whereof we have no idea at all'.¹⁶ In other words, the word 'gold' is *completely meaningless*—it lacks any positive descriptive content on the terms of the theory of ideas—in so far as it is taken to refer to the unknown real essence of gold. And yet it does so refer, as Locke concedes. We can perfectly well talk about the real essence of gold and take it to exist.

Berkeley makes a similar move when he proposes that the term 'notion' be used as a 'term for things that cannot be understood'. It is, he says, 'absurd for any man to

argue against the existence of [a] thing, from his having no direct and positive notion of it'. It is only where 'we have not even a relative notion of it' that we 'employ words to no manner of purpose, without any design or signification whatever'. 'Many things, for anything I know, may exist, whereof neither I nor any other man has or can have any idea or notion whatsoever.'¹⁷ This is Berkeley speaking.

Kant makes a similar move. On the one hand, he says that the categories, which include the concept of cause, 'have only an empirical use, and have *no meaning whatever* when not applied to objects of possible experience'. On the other hand, he says that 'in *thinking*', and *a fortiori* in intelligible—hence contentful, hence meaningful—thinking, 'the categories are not limited by the conditions of our sensible intuition, but have an unlimited field. It is only *knowledge* of what we think...that requires intuition'.¹⁸

The point is routine in Hume's time. He continually stresses the fact that there may be aspects of reality of which we can form no positively descriptive conception on the terms of the theory of ideas, and in which are in that sense wholly unintelligible by us. This is an integral part of his scepticism. It is, in fact, an integral part of any sound philosophy.

The claim about Hume may still be doubted. So I will consider what happens in the *Treatise* when Hume explicitly considers the thought that talk of realist external objects is 'unintelligible', given his theory of ideas.¹⁹

6

Speaking of the notion of external objects, Hume says that it is 'impossible for us so much as to conceive or form an idea of any thing *specifically different* from ideas and impressions' (T167). By 'specifically different' he means 'of a different species or kind'; so his claim is that we cannot form any idea of anything which is of an entirely different species or kind from ideas and (sensory) impressions. Why not? Because the content of our ideas is entirely derived or copied from our impressions, and such impression-copy content can never amount to a genuine representation of something entirely different from impressions. But this means it can never amount to a genuine representation of an external object. For an external object is by hypothesis an essentially non-mental thing, and is *obviously* of an entirely different species from an essentially mental thing like an impression and an idea.²⁰

Hume, then, seems to be saying that we can never conceive of or form any idea of such a thing as an external object. But he goes straight on to grant that we can after all form some sort of conception of external objects:

The farthest we can go towards a conception of external objects, when [they are] suppos'd specifically different from our perceptions, is to form a *relative* idea of them, without pretending to *comprehend* the related objects.

(T68)

This is the farthest we can go; external objects are 'incomprehensible'; we have only a 'relative' idea of them. But a relative idea of X is not no idea at all. An everyday example of a case in which one has a referentially efficacious but in a sense contentless and hence merely 'relative' idea of something X is the idea one has of something when one can refer to it only as, say, 'whatever it was that caused this appalling mess'. In this case, one may have no positive conception of the nature of X.²¹

In the case of Causation, our merely relative idea of it is ‘that in reality in virtue of which reality is regular in the way that it is’; or, in Hume’s terms, it is ‘the power or force, which actuates the whole machine...of the universe’ (E63) and on which the ‘regular course and succession of objects totally depends’ (E55). It is ‘that circumstance in the cause, which gives it a connexion with its effect’ (E77), ‘that very circumstance in the cause, by which it is enabled to produce the effect’ (E67–8). Or—to quote the *Treatise* rather than the *Enquiry*—it is that which is in fact the ‘reason of the conjunction’ of any two objects (T93). This description suffices to pick Causation out in such a way that we can go on to refer to it while having no descriptively contentful conception of its nature on the terms of the theory of ideas.

Many quotations from Hume’s *Dialogues* can also be called in support. The dialogue form raises certain problems of interpretation, but there is no doubt that Philo represents Hume’s views.²² Many still proceed as if the *Dialogues*—Hume’s most carefully composed work of philosophy, and arguably his ‘greatest work of metaphysics’²³—simply does not count when it comes to understanding Hume’s views. They are viscerally incapable of admitting that quotation from the *Dialogues* has the same weight as quotation from the *Enquiry* and the *Treatise*, and have in consequence no hope of getting Hume right. They cannot hear Hume speaking as Philo when he says:

‘Tis observed by arithmeticians, that the products of 9 compose always 9 or some lesser product of 9, if you add together all the characters, of which any of the former products are composed. Thus, of 18, 27, 36, which are products of 9, you make 9 by adding 1 to 8, 2 to 7, 3 to 6. Thus, 369 is a product also of nine; and if you add 3, 6, and 9, you make 18, a lesser product of 9. To a superficial observer, so wonderful a regularity may be admir’d as the effect either of chance, or design; but a skilful algebraist immediately concludes it to be the work of necessity, and demonstrates, that it must for ever result from the nature of these numbers. Is it not probable, I ask, that the whole economy of the universe is conducted by a like necessity, though no human algebra can furnish a key which solves the difficulty? And instead of admiring the order of natural beings, may it not happen that, could we penetrate into the intimate nature of bodies, we should clearly see why it was absolutely impossible, they could ever admit of any other disposition?

(1779:191)

Let me return to the discussion of objects in the *Treatise*. Hume writes that ‘we may *suppose*, but never can *conceive* a specific difference betwixt an object and an impression’ (T241). This contrast is important. It occurs at several other points in the *Treatise* (for example, T68, already quoted), and the idea behind it, expressed in one way or another, is routine in Hume’s time. Anything that is to count as a genuine *conception* of something must be descriptively contentful on the terms of the theory of ideas: it must have directly impression-based, impression-copy content. By contrast, a supposition that something exists or is the case can be a genuine *supposition*, genuinely about something, and hence intelligible in our present-day sense, without being contentful (or meaningful or intelligible) on the terms of the theory of ideas. So the natural supposition that there are external objects ‘specifically different from perceptions’ is an intelligible one in our sense, and may well be true. All that follows from the theory of ideas is that we cannot form any well-founded descriptively contentful conception of external objects.²⁴

Here as elsewhere Hume respects the principles of his scepticism, which prohibit the claim that we can know that there *isn't* anything to which the merely 'relative' idea of objects realistically conceived might relate or refer. Hume grants that there may be such external objects, firmly believes that there are, and merely insists that there will always remain a sense in which their nature is 'perfectly inexplicable' by us (T84).²⁵ The conclusion of the famous discussion of objects in I.iv.2 of the *Treatise* is not that there are no external objects, or that the notion of such things is incoherent: unintelligible in our strong, modern sense. On the contrary. In the penultimate paragraph Hume remarks that he began his discussion of objects by 'premissing, that we ought to have an implicit faith' in our natural, sense-and-imagination based belief in external objects (T217). He concludes that this is indeed what we ought to do, announcing in the final paragraph that he will proceed upon the 'supposition...[that] there is both an external and an internal world' (T218).

His conclusion, then, is certainly not that there are no external objects. Nor is it that the idea of external objects is incoherent (unintelligible in our strong modern sense). He has two main points, of which the first is that we can supply no decent rational foundation or justification for the belief that there are external objects: 'By what argument can it be proved, that the perceptions of the mind must be caused by external objects, entirely different from them, though resembling them...?' (E152–3). It cannot be proved, he says. For 'it is a question of fact, whether the perceptions of the senses be produced by [such] external objects, resembling them', and if we ask 'how shall this question be determined?', the answer is 'By experience surely; as all other questions of a like nature. But here experience is, and must be entirely silent' (E153).

In other words: it is either true or false that there are external objects, but we cannot know which. *A fortiori*, the supposition—and natural belief—that there are external objects is intelligible, and hence meaningful. Hume himself takes it that it is true, for the belief that it is true is part of natural belief.

His second point is that there is none the less something profoundly problematic, incomplete, misleading—defective, relative, inadequate, inaccurate, imprecise, imperfect, vulgar, loose, uncertain, confused, indistinct, 'fiction'-involving (see T267, T218, T160, T639, E67n, E76, E77n)—about any conception of external objects (or Causation) that purports to be anything more than a merely 'relative' notion of external objects. This view is a consequence of his theory of ideas, and the question he faces is then this: 'What exactly is the content of natural beliefs featuring defective conceptions of this sort?' He does not answer this question in any detail, however. It is a question which has tormented many in the twentieth century, but it was not one about which Hume felt he needed to say any more. The point he insists on is that we are deluded if we think we have any sort of complete, adequate, accurate, precise, perfect, philosophical, tight, certain, distinct, legitimately sense-based conception of external objects (or Causation).

Suppose for a moment that the standard view is right to claim that Hume thinks that the idea of external objects has no content at all, and indeed can have no content. The argument about causation that was given in §3 can be rerun for objects as follows: (1) All we can ever know or observe of external objects are perceptions. (2) So (given standard meaning-empiricist principles) all we can legitimately manage to mean by expressions like 'external object' (or 'table', or 'chair') are perceptions. (3) So the statement that external objects are nothing but perceptions must be true, because when the phrase 'external objects' is used, it inevitably just means perceptions. Hence (4) phenomenalism is true: outright

ontological phenomenalism, the view that external, physical objects are definitely—yea, provably—nothing more than perceptions. Do not suppose that the conclusion can be tamely stated as ‘Even if something other than perceptions exists, we can’t manage to mean this “something”’. On the present view, the quoted sentence is already a kind of nonsense, because the phrase ‘something other than perceptions’ cannot really manage to refer to something other than perceptions in the way it purports to do.

Fortunately, this is not Hume’s view. It is, he says, a straightforward ‘*question of fact*, whether the perceptions of the senses be produced by *external objects...entirely different from them*’ (E153; my emphases). This is *very* clear. Or consider the *Treatise* again: ‘we may well suppose in general’ that physical objects are different from perceptions; there is no problem with this. The problem is that it is ‘impossible for us *distinctly* to conceive’ this (T218; my emphasis).

Certainly Hume says things that admit the interpretation I am rejecting. He wrote the *Treatise* in the ‘ardor of youth’. He was tempted into provocative expressions he regretted (Hume 1932: I, 187, E2). Even in the *Treatise*, however, he followed Locke and Berkeley (and many others) and anticipated Kant (and many others) in making the essential move, distinguishing between what we can suppose and what we can conceive in such a way as to allow that language can intelligibly be supposed to refer to something of which we have (and can have) no impression-copy-contentful idea.

Simon Blackburn has argued that little weight can be placed on the fact that Hume makes a distinction between what we can suppose and what we can conceive, because Hume himself does not make much of it (pp. 100–12 below). But we could grant, for purposes of argument, that Hume does not make much of the distinction—although he relies on it constantly. We could grant that Hume, in the *Treatise*, in the iconoclastic ardor of youth, sees the necessity of making the distinction between what we can suppose and what we can conceive as somewhat *annoying*. The fact remains that it is something that he finds himself obliged to record, in the course of his sceptical progress. He duly does so, clearly and unambiguously.²⁶ It is, as remarked, a routine distinction, utterly indispensable in any serious empiricist enterprise. It immediately blocks the disastrous argument from (1) to (4) set out on the previous page, and Hume takes it for granted in the *Enquiry*, which omits nearly all the technicalities of the *Treatise*. He takes it, in particular, and to repeat, that it is a straightforward although undecidable ‘question of fact, whether the perceptions of the senses be produced by external objects...entirely different from them, though resembling them (if that be possible)’.²⁷

It is a very simple point. Hume has to grant that thought and language can reach beyond perceptions in such a way that the thought that something other than perceptions exists can be allowed to be intelligible and possibly true. For if he does not do this, then, once again, he is condemned to dogmatic metaphysics; to outright ontological idealism; to the view that the statement ‘All that exist are perceptions’ is *provably true*. He is landed with a form of metaphysical certainty that he cannot possibly tolerate, as a sceptic who denies the possibility of attaining knowledge about the ultimate nature of reality (other than perceptions). This is the first, crucial component of what John Wright calls his ‘sceptical realism’. The second is simply his endorsement of certain ‘natural beliefs’. He really does believe that external objects exist, and that Causation exists (see §§7–11 below).

Blackburn claims that it is an ‘error of taste to make sceptical realism a fundamental factor in the interpretation of Hume’ (op. cit. p. 100), but this is back

to front. It is a grave error of taste and judgement to think that a philosopher of Hume's sceptical profundity could have failed to adopt a sceptical realist attitude. Blackburn's claim (pp. 101–2) that Hume dismisses the 'supposes' versus 'conceives' distinction out of hand is not supported by the text he quotes from the *Treatise*, and is controverted both by Hume's announcement (on the same page) that he will proceed on the supposition that 'there is both an external and an internal world' (T218), and by his earlier declaration that the existence of body is something 'which we must take for granted' (T187), and by his practice throughout the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*.

Blackburn is also wrong to claim that he quotes 'the two major passages' in which the suppose/conceive distinction features, 'with enough surrounding context to matter' (p. 102 below). For he omits Hume's most striking employment of the distinction:

Since we may suppose, but never can conceive a specific difference betwixt an object and impression; any conclusion we form concerning the connexion and repugnance of impressions, will not be known certainly to be applicable to objects.

(T241)

Here Hume is stating that the relations we discover on the basis of our impressions cannot be known to apply to real objects. His closing use of the word 'objects' is straightforwardly realist, and the clause 'will not be known certainly' adds the scepticism to the realism. He goes on to say that although we cannot have certainty, we can 'by an irregular kind of reasoning from experience, discover a connexion betwixt objects, which extends not to impressions' (T242). No one who acknowledges no distinction between objects and perceptions can say this.²⁸

Blackburn's claim (p. 102 below) that Hume 'affirms idealism' when he says that 'we never really advance a step beyond ourselves' in our conceptions (T67) is also false. It turns Hume into a metaphysician of exactly the sort that he was not. At this point Hume is making a routine empiricist epistemological claim about the limits of knowledge and understanding. He is directly echoing Locke when he wrote 'It seems probable to me, that the simple Ideas we receive from Sensation and Reflection, are the Boundaries of our Thoughts; beyond which, the Mind, whatever efforts it may make, is not able to advance one jot' (*Essay*, II.xxiii.20). And Locke—that great and paradigmatic realist—was not affirming idealism.

All in all, Hume handles this issue in just the right way. He travels to the frontier of the absurd thesis about meaning (the thesis that leads to mad metaphysical phenomenalism) in accordance with his empiricist theory of ideas. Then he stops, acknowledging, correctly, that it is intelligible to suppose that things other than perceptions exist, and expressing with great force the point that we can have no (certain) knowledge of their nature:

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...If [however] 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 [my emphasis in bold].²⁹

These are the sentiments of a sceptical realist (and follower of Newton) who relies on the distinction between 'supposing' and 'conceiving' and is far from affirming idealism.

One useful thought for those who doubt that Hume generally writes as a sceptical realist is as follows: he repeatedly distinguishes between the ‘sensible qualities’ of objects, on the one hand, and the objects themselves and their ‘secret’ or unknown nature or internal structure, on the other hand. Whenever he does so, he is *ipso facto* thinking of objects in a realist fashion as something more than perceptions (as something more than idealist or phenomenalist objects). For he holds that there is nothing hidden or unknown in perceptions: unlike genuine external bodies, perceptions have no unobservable ontic backsides or innards: ‘The perceptions of the mind’, he says, ‘are perfectly known’ (T366), whereas ‘the essence and composition of external bodies are...obscure’ (T366). It follows that bodies cannot be perceptions, on Hume’s view. For nothing can be both perfectly known and obscure.

I will now begin on the direct argument—it is little more than an argument by quotation—that Hume believes in Causation, after first briefly stating his view about the nature of our idea of Causation, and describing an apparent tension in his thought.

7

The result of applying Hume’s theory of ideas to the idea of Causation is clear: we have no idea of it at all, conceived of as something in the world of physical objects. Why not? Because we can form no positively descriptively contentful conception of it. Why not? Because we can form a descriptively contentful conception of something only out of impression-copy content, and there is no impression of Causation to be found in or derived from objects. Why not? Because all we ever actually observe is regular succession, one thing following another.

It follows that no term like ‘power’ or ‘force’ can ever really *manage to mean* anything in the world, on the terms of the theory of ideas. It cannot pick up descriptively on anything in the world. It can only manage to pick up descriptively on something in the mind: the feeling of determination in the mind which we come to experience on being confronted with regular succession in the world. For this, according to Hume, is the impression-source from which our actual idea of power or Causation is derived.³⁰

It has been widely believed that Hume went on from the epistemological claim that we have no idea of Causation to the outright ontological claim that there is nothing like Causation, and that causation is nothing but regular succession. And it is true that Hume’s empiricist theory of ideas, strictly and literally interpreted, creates some pressure on him to put things in this way (see §3). But this pressure is comfortably offset by his scepticism and realism—which one might equally well call his deep philosophical common sense—as I will shortly show by quotation. The strict and literal interpretation of Hume’s theory of meaning is not Hume’s interpretation,³¹ and in fact he takes it for granted that there is Causation.

There is certainly a tension in Hume’s expression of his thought: he uses terms like ‘power’ and ‘force’ in a way that is arguably ruled out by his theory of ideas. If we call such terms ‘Causation’ terms—terms that purport to refer to Causation, that is, to causation conceived of as something essentially more than regular succession—we can state the tension as follows: Hume holds that no Causation term can manage to ‘positively-contentfully’ mean anything like Causation. And yet he allows in practice that they can manage to mean something like Causation, at least in the sense of genuinely *referring* to it.

Well, this is at most a tension; it is not an inconsistency. The appearance of tension arises because our understanding of words like ‘meaning’ and ‘unintelligible’ is not the same as Hume’s. There is obviously no difficulty in the idea that we may successfully use a term to refer to something which has some manifestation in our experience, even though we have no positive conception of its nature, over and above the thought that it is something and has the manifestation that it has (see §5). The idea that we can do such a thing is correct and indispensable. (It is even more obvious that we can refer to something when we only have an ‘inadequate’ or ‘imperfect’ idea of it.)

8

I have claimed that Hume grants that Causation terms may reach out referentially to refer to Causation in the world, just as terms purporting to refer to external objects may reach out to external objects, and I will now try to show that he consistently uses Causation terms like ‘power’ and ‘force’ in a straightforwardly referring way. He assumes that Causation exists: it is that on which the ‘regular...succession of objects *totally depends*’ (E55); it is ‘the *reason* of the conjunction’ that we observe between two (types) of objects (T93; my emphases). He takes it for granted that there must be something about the world in virtue of which the world is regular. The idea that there might be nothing—the ‘Humean’ view—is not a candidate for consideration. The point he cherishes and wants to drive home, spectacularly contrary to the orthodoxy of his time, is simply that we have no positive descriptive conception of the nature of causal power.³²

On page 30 of the *Enquiry*, Hume writes that:

no philosopher, who is rational and modest, has ever pretended to assign *the ultimate cause* of any natural operation, or to show distinctly the action of *that power, which produces* any single effect in the universe [my emphases].

Following Newton, here as elsewhere, he goes on to say that we can greatly simplify our account of the laws of nature, reducing it to a ‘few general causes’:

but as to *the causes of these general causes*, we should in vain attempt their discovery...These *ultimate springs and principles* are totally shut up from human curiosity and enquiry [my emphases].

But they certainly exist.

This natural reading is doubted by those who think that all Hume’s apparently referring uses of Causation terms are really ironic, but they ignore his admiration for Newton. There is, furthermore, a serious difficulty in the idea that a book written in order to clarify misunderstanding should be loaded with irony in such a way as to be deeply misleading.

On page 33, Hume writes that ‘It is allowed on all hands that there is no known connexion between the sensible qualities and *the secret powers* [of bodies]’, for nature ‘conceals from us those *powers and principles on which the influence of...objects entirely depends*’ And on pages 63–4 he writes that:

The scenes of the universe are continually shifting, and one object follows another in an uninterrupted succession; but *the power or force, which actuates*

the whole machine, is entirely concealed from us, and never discovers itself in any of the sensible qualities of body [my emphases].

Speaking as Philo, he says:

Chance has no place, on any hypothesis, sceptical or religious. Everything is surely governed by steady, inviolable laws. And were the inmost essence of things laid open to us, we should then discover a scene, of which, at present, we can have no idea. Instead of admiring the order of natural beings, we should clearly see, that it was absolutely impossible for them, in the smallest article, ever to admit of any other disposition (Hume 1779:174).

Some have suggested that when Hume talks of secret or concealed powers or forces, all he really means are constant conjunctions, or objects, that are too small to be detected.³³ But even if this interpretation were thought to have some plausibility for the plural uses of terms like ‘power’ and ‘force’, it would have none for the more common singular uses. When someone speaks of the ‘power or force, which actuates the whole machine...of the universe’, and says that it is ‘entirely concealed’ from us, it is very implausible to suppose that all he really means are all those hundreds of constant conjunctions that are too small to be seen.³⁴

On pages 37–8 of the *Enquiry*, after speaking of ‘our natural state of ignorance with regard to the power and influence of all objects’, Hume goes on to give an argument against the appeal to past experience in justifying induction that makes essential use of the idea that causal power exists. Although particular experiences of objects at particular times may indeed show us ‘that those particular objects, at that particular time, were endowed with...powers *and forces*’, still, he says, we can never be sure that the objects in question will continue to have just those same powers in the future. The reason why induction cannot be justified by appeal to past experience, therefore, is precisely that ‘*the secret nature* [of bodies], and consequently all their effects and influence, may change’, between now and the next time we observe them. So the reason why induction is not rationally justifiable by appeal to past experience is certainly not that there is not really any power governing bodies. It is not that bodies do not really have any secret nature or powers governing their effects and influence, so that anything might happen. On the contrary. Bodies do have a secret nature which determines their effects and influence. The trouble with appeals to past experience is simply that past experience can never provide a guarantee that the secret nature of bodies will not change in the future, bringing change in their effects and influence.³⁵

This clarifies something that is obvious on reflection but often misunderstood: there is *no special link between inductive scepticism and the regularity theory of causation*. The argument for inductive scepticism just quoted appeals essentially to Causation.

9

When things go normally, Hume says, ordinary people suppose that they perceive ‘*the very force or energy* of the cause, by which it is connected with its effect’ (E69; my emphasis). They only feel the need to invoke some invisible unperceived power or principle when something happens which they think of as extraordinary.

But philosophers do better, for they can see that ‘even in the most familiar events, *the energy of the cause* is...unintelligible’ (E70; my emphasis).

They realize, that is, that we have no positive conception of its ultimate nature in any case at all—although it certainly exists. Going on to talk of the Occasionalists, Hume sets out their view ‘that the true and direct principle of every effect is not any power or force in nature, but a volition of the Supreme Being’ (E70). He strongly implies that he finds their view absurd, and ill-motivated even on religious grounds. More important for present purposes, however, is the methodological argument he presents against them. First, he observes that it is precisely their acknowledgement of our ignorance of power or energy in objects that leads them to ‘rob nature, of every power’, and attribute all power to God. Next, he observes that it is awareness of ‘the same ignorance’ that then leads them to rob the human mind too of power, and to ‘assert that the Deity is [also] the immediate cause of the union between soul and body’, for example, when we act.

He then grants that they are right about our ignorance in these departments: we are indeed ‘totally ignorant of the power on which depends the mutual operation of bodies’ (E70), (although there must of course be some such thing); and we are ‘no less ignorant of that power on which depends the operation of mind on body, or of body on mind’ (E70), (although of course there must be some such thing). But if it is acknowledgement of our ignorance that leads the Occasionalists to attribute all power to God, then they should realize that our ignorance of any power that might be attributed to God is equally complete:

We are ignorant, it is true, of *the manner in which bodies operate on each other*: Their *force or energy* is entirely incomprehensible: But are we not equally ignorant of the manner or force by which...even the supreme mind operates either on itself or on body?

(E72; my emphases)

Yes, he answers, and goes on to make a remark that again appears to suffice to refute the standard view of Hume:

Were our ignorance, therefore, a good reason for rejecting any thing, we should be led [to deny]...all energy in the Supreme Being as much as in the grossest matter. We...comprehend as little the operations of the one as of the other.

(E72–3; my emphasis)

Here things are very clear. Our ignorance is not a good reason for rejecting the possible existence of anything. This quotation refutes the view that he can be supposed to be positively denying the existence of Causation, in going on at such length about how we are ignorant of it.

Hume continues with a distinction between what we *mean* and what there *is* which clearly illustrates that the tension described on p. 42 is unproblematic for him: ‘when we talk of gravity,’ he says, ‘we *mean* certain effects, without ever comprehending *that active power* [that is, gravity itself]’ (E73n), which none the less exists. And Newton famously agrees: ‘the cause of Gravity...I do not pretend to know’ (1959–77:III, 240). In a general comment on his account of forces in Definition VIII of his *Principia*, he says that he intends ‘only to give a mathematical notion of those forces, without considering *their physical causes*

and seats', and that he considers certain 'forces not physically, but mathematically: wherefore the reader is not to imagine that by those words [attraction, impulse, or propensity towards a centre] I anywhere take upon me to define the kind, or the manner of any action, *the causes or the physical reason thereof*, or that I attribute *forces, in a true and physical sense*, to certain centres'. Newton is quite clear that we have a merely relative idea of such forces: we can have no knowledge of their nature beyond the knowledge we have of their observable manifestations.

10

On page 74 of the *Enquiry* a famous passage occurs which may at first seem to support the standard view. Hume claims that when we step back from our ordinary belief that we can observe power or necessary connexion in the objects, we realize that the belief is not correct, and that the truth of our epistemic situation, critically assessed, is as follows:

All events seem entirely loose and separate. One event follows another; but we never can observe any tie between them. They seem *conjoined*, but never *connected*. And as we can have no idea of any thing which never appeared to our outward sense or inward sentiment, the necessary conclusion *seems* to be that we have no idea of connexion or power at all, and that these words are absolutely without any meaning...

It follows, according to him, that

when we say...that one object is connected with another, we *mean only* that they have acquired a connexion in our thought...: A conclusion which is somewhat extraordinary, but which seems founded on sufficient evidence.
(E76; my emphasis)

In other words, we try to talk about the real force or energy in the world, but these words, in our use, only manage to (positively-contentfully) mean their impression-source: that is, a feeling of determination in the mind, derived from experience of regular succession or constant conjunction.

But Hume does not say that regular succession is all that causation is. Once again, his point is that this is all we can know or comprehend of causation. He admits that it seems 'somewhat extraordinary' that when we talk of causal connexion between two objects we do not really manage to mean the real causal connexion between them (which of course exists), but mean only that they have acquired a connexion in our thought on account of having been observed to be constantly conjoined. But he does not take this as grounds for any sort of ontological assertion that this is all that causation (really) is, but rather as an occasion for an epistemological remark about the *profound limitations on the human capacity to grasp the nature of reality*:

what stronger instance can be produced of the surprising ignorance and weakness of the understanding than the present [one]?
(E76)

That is, in our unreflective moments (or excessively exalted philosophical

moments) we are pretty sure we know about causal power in the objects if we know about anything. But in fact human understanding is so restricted that it cannot even ‘comprehend’ the nature of causal power, in so far as it involves something more than observable regular succession. The ‘somewhat extraordinary’ conclusion, then, is not that there is really no such thing as Causation. That would certainly be an extraordinary conclusion, but I do not think that it ever crossed Hume’s mind.³⁶ His point is this: it is truly extraordinary that despite the fact that causal power is all pervasive, governing our thoughts and actions and our world in all respects, still human understanding is utterly incapable of grasping its true nature in any way. That is how limited we are:

Our thoughts and enquiries are...every moment employed about this relation. Yet so imperfect are the ideas which we form concerning it, that it is impossible to give any just definition of cause, except what is drawn from something extraneous and foreign to it.

(E76)

It concerns us at every moment, and yet we cannot grasp its true nature at all. This purely epistemological point is what the philosophers Hume was arguing against could not believe.³⁷

11

The view that Hume’s point is epistemological is further confirmed by what he goes on to say about his two ‘definitions’ of cause. When he says that ‘the ideas which we form concerning’ cause are ‘so imperfect... that it is impossible to give any just definition of cause, except what is drawn from something extraneous and foreign to it’ (E76), he is referring to the two definitions that immediately follow, which specify the content that the idea of cause has given its impression sources: they tell us what we can legitimately manage to mean, on the terms of the theory of ideas, when we talk about causes. The first defines causation as constant conjunction or regular succession and the second defines it in terms of a feeling of determination in the mind (E76–7, T170, 172), but both are held to be imperfect because they cannot representationally encompass causation or power ‘as it is in itself’ (E77n). They can define it only by reference to something other than itself.

An enormous amount has been written about the content of the two definitions, but here I am concerned only with Hume’s view of what they achieve: his view that it is actually impossible for us to give anything other than an ‘imperfect’ definition of cause. Some deny that Hume thinks his definitions are imperfect, pointing out that in the *Treatise* he says that they are ‘exact’ and ‘precise’ (T169). But we can allow this (though both these words disappear from the corresponding passage in the *Enquiry*). We can allow that he thinks his definitions are ‘just’, or as just as any definitions of cause can be (E76, T170). For the present point is then this: Hume says that the definitions are imperfect *in spite of the fact* that he thinks they are entirely exact, precise, and just. So what can he mean by ‘imperfect’?

He is very clear about it. He means that the definitions do not really capture the true nature of causation at all. The trouble is that ‘we cannot remedy this inconvenience, or attain any more perfect definition, which may point out *that circumstance in the cause, which gives it a connexion with its effect*’ (E77; my emphasis). The trouble, in other words, is that although there is something about

the cause-event in virtue of which it is connected with its effect, in any particular case, we cannot form any genuine descriptively contentful conception of it, on the terms of the theory of ideas.

Note that this quotation suffices by itself to refute the view that Hume held a regularity theory of causation. For if causation in the objects were just regular succession or constant conjunction, there would be *no inconvenience or imperfection in the first definition at all*. And in giving the first definition, we could hardly be said to be in the position of finding it ‘impossible to give any just definition of cause, except what is drawn from something extraneous and foreign to it’.³⁸

Some may say that all that Hume means, when he says that one has to refer to circumstances foreign to the cause, is that one has to go beyond the individual cause-event considered on its own: one has to mention the effect-event, and other events of the same type as the cause-event and effect-event, and even the human mind. But let us suppose that this is at least part of what he meant (see Wright pp. 88ff. below). The present point retains its full force. For Hume says that the definitions are imperfect specifically because they cannot ‘point out that circumstance in the cause, which [actually] gives it a connexion with its effect’ (*E77*; also *E67–8*). There is something about the cause itself which the definitions cannot capture or represent: they leave out the essential thing. The imperfection in question is the imperfection that definitions have when they do not fully capture the nature of the thing that they are meant to be definitions of. We cannot give a perfect definition of cause because of our ignorance of its nature. All we can encompass in our definition are its observable manifestations—its regular-succession manifestations (first definition), and the feelings of necessity or determination or habits of inference in the mind to which these give rise (second definition).

There has been a lot of speculation about the differences between Hume’s use of the word ‘definition’ and our present-day use,³⁹ and in this context Edmund Burke’s remarks about definition are illuminating, for they were made in 1757, nine years after the publication of the first edition of the first *Enquiry*, in a work which Hume read.⁴⁰ ‘When we define’, Burke writes,

we seem in danger of circumscribing nature within the bounds of our own notions, which we often...form out of a limited and partial consideration of the object before us, instead of extending our ideas to take in all that nature comprehends, according to her manner of combining...A definition may be very exact, and yet go but a very little way towards informing us of the nature of the thing defined.

(Burke 1757:12)

Here, I propose, Burke uses ‘definition’ in exactly the same way as Hume. A definition of a natural phenomenon, as opposed to a definition of a geometrical figure, records human understanding’s best take on that phenomenon. As such, it may be very ‘exact’ and ‘precise’ (*T169*) while also being very ‘imperfect’, ‘limited and partial’ in its representation of the nature of the phenomenon defined.⁴¹

Hume restates his position as follows:

If we examine the operations of body, and the productions of effects from their causes, we shall find that all our faculties can never carry us farther in our knowledge of [the] relation [of cause and effect] than *barely* to observe that

particular objects are *constantly conjoin'd* together [see the first definition], and that the mind is carried, by a *customary transition*, from the appearance of one to the belief of the other [see the second definition].

(E92; my emphasis in bold)

That is, all we can get to know of causation is the content of the two imperfect definitions. That is, we can't get very far. We can 'barely' (merely) observe this much. So these two definitions do not say what causation actually is; they just express all we know of it. And:

this conclusion concerning human ignorance [is] the result of the strictest scrutiny of this subject...we know nothing farther of causation...than *merely* the *constant conjunction* of objects, and the consequent *inference* of the mind from one to another, [my emphasis in bold]

The conclusion, then, is a conclusion about human ignorance. There is more to causation, but we are ignorant of it.⁴²

12

Hume's principal targets are those philosophers (mechanists or mentalists) who think that they mean or know more than it is possible to mean or know; those who think that the intrinsic nature of causation is 'intelligible' (whether partly or wholly), and that they have some sort of genuine understanding of it. Hume thinks that it is dangerous to use words like 'power', 'force', and 'energy' without continual stress on our ignorance, for the use of these terms is likely to delude us into thinking that we do after all have some positively contentful or 'perfect' grasp of the nature of causation—a grasp that goes beyond what is given in experience of regular succession and the feeling of determination to which regular succession gives rise in human minds. This, just this, is, he insists, a mistake. Our best grasp of causation is very imperfect. We are ignorant of its nature. This ignorance is what has to be shown and argued for from all sides.

That is what Hume believed. At no point in the *Enquiry*, which must 'alone be regarded as containing his philosophical sentiments and principles', does he even hint at the thesis for which he is so unjustly famous: the thesis that all there is to causation in the world is regular succession; the thesis that there is (provably) nothing at all in the nature of things in virtue of which reality is regular in the way that it is, so that the regularity of the world is, from moment to moment, and knowably, an 'outrageous run of luck'.⁴³

One might summarize the dispute about Hume as follows. Two things in Hume are incompatible: (1) the theory of ideas, strictly and literally interpreted, and (2) the view that a straightforwardly realist view of objects and causation is at least coherent and intelligible ('it is a question of fact...' (E153)). Most people this century have argued that his adherence to (1) proves his rejection of (2). This is the wrong way round. Hume's adherence to (2) proves his rejection of (1). And he not only thinks that a straightforwardly realist view of objects and causation is coherent and intelligible; he standardly takes it for granted that such a view is true.⁴⁴

Notes

- 1 Kripke (1982:67). According to the regularity theory of causation (and ignoring certain complications), a particular event of type A (say A1) is the cause of a particular event of type B (say B1) if and only if A1 is prior to and spatio-temporally contiguous with B1, and all events of type A are prior to and spatio-temporally contiguous with events of type B. Causation is just regular succession: 'in nature one thing just happens after another' (Ayer 1973:183).
- 2 Woolhouse (1988:149–50). According to Stroud (2000:11), Hume's view is that 'all that ever happens in the world independently of minds is that one thing succeeds another and resembles other instances that followed similar antecedents'.
- 3 Two recent critics of the 'standard' view are Wright (1983 and forthcoming), and Craig (1987: ch. 2). See also Kemp Smith (1941:396–402).
- 4 This remark about the 'positive air' is particularly poignant when one considers those who persist in thinking that Hume held an outright ontological 'bundle theory of the self. The principal 'negligences in...expression' that Hume finds in his *Treatise* and regrets in his Advertisement to the *Enquiry* are doubtless his phrasings of epistemological points in a dramatically ontological idiom (see Craig 1987: ch. 2 §5).
- 5 Year after year, the Oxford University Examination Decrees for the History of Philosophy from Descartes to Kant specify that Hume is to be studied in connection with the *Treatise*; no mention is made of the *Enquiry*. A proposal to include the *Enquiry* was rejected by the Oxford Sub-Faculty of Philosophy in 1999.
- 6 It is bad to be praised for holding views one never held even when they are right, but worse when they are absurd.
- 7 Perhaps the near-exclusive focus on the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, in the discussion of Kant's moral philosophy, is a comparable case.
- 8 See Buckle (1999a, 1999b) for some excellent recent work on this issue.
- 9 This point is discussed in Strawson (1989:45–6) and Appendix A, 'Cartoon-film Causation'. On this view, Hume agrees with Berkeley about what causation is, considered as a phenomenon in the physical world, but puts things differently.
- 10 Hume sometimes means events when he talks of objects. When this is so, the present claim is that he means events that involve genuinely external, mind-independent objects, not merely mental events. In *The Secret Connexion* (ch. 22.2) I point out that Hume's belief in causal power does not depend on belief in external objects, although they go naturally together. On the general question of Hume's use of the word 'object', see Grene (1994).
- 11 See Mackie (1974: ch. 1) and Craig (1987: ch. 2 §§4 and 5).
- 12 In fact nothing in the present account of Hume hangs on the claim that the regularity theory is absurd (see for example Armstrong (1983), Foster (1982), Strawson (1987, 1989 chaps 5, 8, 22), but I take it to be obvious that there is more to causation than regularity (it is equally obvious that this cannot be conclusively proved). The regularity view is very like dogmatic phenomenalism: to suppose that regularity is all there is to causation is like supposing that objects consist merely of perceptions (actual or possible). It is a delicate matter to find the best way of saying what causation involves, over and above regularity; but there is a fundamental respect in which one has already said enough when one has granted that matter has a certain nature.
- 13 The same type of invalid argument can be made if one replaces 'causation' and 'regular succession' with 'external objects' and 'perceptions' respectively, or with 'the self and 'a series of perceptions' respectively.
- 14 'I am not such a sceptic as you may, perhaps, imagine' (Hume 1932:I, 186).
- 15 See Kemp Smith (1941:62–8, and ch. 21).
- 16 Locke, 1690:III.x.19. See Mackie (1976:93–100).
- 17 1721, §23; 1713:177, 184.
- 18 Kant 1787, B724 (see also B298–9); B166n (see also B309). Kant gives a clear indication of what he means by the word 'meaning' in the phrase 'no meaning whatever' on B300: when the categories are not applied to what is given in sensible intuition, he says, 'all meaning, *that is, all reference to the object*, falls away'.
- 19 At this point the argument becomes a bit more complicated. The direct argument that Hume believes in Causation starts in §7, and does not depend on the details of the next section.
- 20 Here I put aside an important complication. It has to do with Hume's attitude to Locke's 'resemblance' theory. Briefly, if the Lockean account of the resemblance between primary qualities of objects and ideas of primary qualities is at all defensible, then it is arguable that objects are *not* entirely (qualitatively) different from perceptions, even though they are indeed of an entirely different *species* or kind. On this view, ideas of primary qualities really can give us

- some genuine idea of what external objects are like; they render them at least partly 'intelligible'. Hume's final position on Locke's claim is one of agnosticism (*E153*). See Wright (1983: ch. 2).
- 21 Except, perhaps, the thought that it is a physical phenomenon. But who knows? Maybe it isn't even a physical phenomenon.
 - 22 See Strawson (2000: §8).
 - 23 Wright (1995:350). Some think that Hume attacked all metaphysics. In fact he considers his own work in the first part of the *Treatise* and in the first *Enquiry* to be metaphysics (as Kant observes (1783:6)), and remarks, in his essay 'Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences', that metaphysics is one of the four principal 'branches of science. Mathematics and natural science...are not half so valuable' (1741–2:126).
 - 24 More precisely: we cannot do this unless Locke's resemblance claim is defensible in some form; and this too we cannot know. See note 20. For a recent development of the point, see Craig (1987 ch. 2). See also Wright (pp. 88–99).
 - 25 Either partly or wholly inexplicable, depending on the defensibility of Locke's resemblance claim. See, once again, note 20.
 - 26 Note his equally clear statement, when arguing that we can have no idea of Causation, that he is 'indeed, ready to allow, that there may be several qualities both in material and in immaterial objects, with which we are utterly unacquainted' (*T168*): the realm of existence does not necessarily cease where the realm of words or positively contentful conceptions ceases.
 - 27 In the last seven words of this quotation Hume adverts to the point discussed in note 20.
 - 28 Craig (1987:124–5) and Wright (pp. 88–99) have good discussions of this passage.
 - 29 *T64n* (*T638–9*). This is a note Hume added in order to try to correct misunderstanding of the text. Note the restraint of 'most' and the mildness of 'scepticism and uncertainty'.
 - 30 See *E75* (and *T165*). On *E67n.*, Hume remarks that the experience of effort we have in pushing and pulling things (for example) also enters into the 'vulgar...idea of power'. See also *E78n*.
 - 31 See Craig (1987: ch. 2).
 - 32 The worst reason for attributing the 'Humean' view to Hume is probably the one considered in note 36 below. Note that the word 'depends', in the quotation from *E55*, cannot be supposed to indicate any sort of causal dependence. The way in which regular succession depends on powers and forces may be supposed to be something like the way the properties of a substance like mercury are held to depend on its property of having a certain atomic structure. The crucial idea is simply that there is something in the nature of things in virtue of which things are regular in the way they are, something which is therefore not just the fact of the regularity itself. One could put the point by saying that regular succession is a manifestation or aspect of Causation, and depends on it in that sense.
 - 33 See for example Broackes (1993:100–1), Winkler (1991: §1).
 - 34 See Strawson (1989: ch. 18). At this point the following objection may be made: 'Hume talks as if Causation exists for ease of exposition. He grants its existence to his opponents for the sake of argument, so that he can then shoot home his epistemological point that even if it does exist we can know nothing about its nature. But he doesn't really believe in it at all.' This view is not strictly refutable, because it denies outright the relevance and force of all the direct evidence against it; but there is no reason to believe it. There is no reason to claim that a sceptic and follower of Newton like Hume holds that there is definitely nothing about reality in virtue of which it is regular in the way that it is, so that its regularity is an objective fluke from moment to moment. There is not even any reason to claim that he believes that there *may* be nothing about reality in virtue of which it is regular in the way that it is, so that the regularity *may* be an objective fluke from moment to moment. Hume certainly insists that we cannot know whether the 'original, inherent principle of order [lies] in thought or in matter', but he is clear on the point that there is some such principle of order, and that 'chance has no place, on any hypothesis' (Hume 1779:174; 1993:76–7).
 - 35 Blackburn thinks that I invoke fundamental physical forces 'to soothe away inductive vertigo' (op. cit. p. 105), but I have no wish to do this. Nothing could do it, as Hume's argument shows (see Strawson 1989:113). Blackburn is equally wrong to think that I want a 'straitjacket' (op. cit. pp. 105), something that can give certainty about the future (see Strawson 1991).
 - 36 It is an elementary error to suppose that Hume's frequent remarks to the effect that 'any thing may produce any thing' (for example, *T173*, *E164*) provide any support for the claim that he considered the idea that there might be no such thing as Causation. The view he is endorsing, in making such remarks, is simply this: that so far as *reason* (or a priori thought) is concerned, there is no *logical* contradiction in the idea that any one thing may produce any other thing, however disparate the two things may seem to us. This view is correct, and is entirely compatible with the view (which he also holds) that given the way things actually are in reality (considered

- independently of anything that reason has to say about it), nothing can possibly happen any differently from the way it does happen. Consider the quotation from the *Dialogues* on p. 43.
- 37 'When a man speaks as do others, that does not always signify that he is of their opinion. But when he positively says the opposite of what is commonly said, though he might say it only once, we have reason to judge that it is his view' (Malebranche 1674–5:672–3). Broackes (1993) cites this passage as support for the standard view of Hume, and is right to think that Hume is saying the opposite of what is commonly said: for Hume is saying that we have no (legitimate) positive conception of the nature of causation. He is not, however, saying what the standard view has him say; *that* idea hasn't occurred to him, and the claim that the Malebranche quotation supports the standard view is scuppered by the points made in §2 above. It must also be offset by two true remarks of Kant's: 'many historians of philosophy, with all their intended praise, ... attribute mere nonsense...to past philosophers. They are incapable of recognizing, beyond what the philosophers actually said, what they really meant to say' (1790:160). 'If we take single passages, torn from their context, and compare them with one another, contradictions are not likely to be lacking, especially in a work that is written with any freedom of expression...; but they are easily resolved by those who have mastered the idea of the whole' (1787, Bxliv).
- 38 Many still reject the present interpretation of Hume, but none of them has made any sort of reply to this point. (I discuss the strongest *prima facie* evidence for the opposing view of Hume in Strawson 1989: ch. 5, 14 and 15.)
- 39 Craig has a good discussion of differences between Hume's use of 'definition' and ours (1987: ch. 2 §4).
- 40 He called it 'a very pretty treatise' (Hume 1978:51).
- 41 The practice is not restricted to the eighteenth century. Russell uses 'define' in exactly the Hume/Burke sense when discussing the nature of matter: 'all that we ought to assume is series of groups of events, connected by discoverable laws. These series we may *define* as 'matter'. Whether there *is* matter in any other sense, no one can tell' (1992:93). Russell makes it very clear that to give a definition is not to make an ontological declaration.
- 42 Here again Hume follows Newton, who was criticized by Leibniz and Huygens—and even by Berkeley—for disrupting the existing mechanist world-picture by reintroducing 'inexplicable qualities' into nature. Blackburn calls some of these inexplicable qualities 'straitjacketing facts', and claims that Hume's attitude to them is 'contemptuous', but this is a mistake. Hume's contempt is for people who attempt to elaborate positive *theories* about the nature of these facts (see Blackburn *op. cit.* p. 106). He has no contempt for the facts themselves, any more than Newton does.
- 43 Reid loves criticizing Hume for adopting views contrary to common sense, and attacks him at length for denying that we can know a priori that 'every thing that begins to exist, must have a cause of its existence', but never criticizes him for holding a view apocalyptically contrary to common sense—the ontological regularity theory of causation. Why not? Because he reads Hume correctly, attributing to him the same view as Priestley: 'a cause cannot be defined to be any thing, but *such previous circumstances as are constantly followed by a certain effect*, the constancy of the result making us conclude, that there must be a *sufficient reason, in the nature of things*, why it should be produced in those circumstances...This is Mr. Hume's definition [nb. definition] of a cause' (Reid 1788:282, quoting Priestley). See also T212 and the commentary on it in Strawson (1989:166–7).
- 44 This paper abridges, supplements and adjusts arguments in *The Secret Connexion* (1989). I wrote it in 1992–3, and have made minor adjustments to it since then. Up to 1995 I tried to answer any objection that I came across and that seemed to me to need a reply; but publication has been long delayed and I have not been able to keep up (Winkler's enjoyable and influential 1991 paper raised no new objections, as far as I can see). I would like to thank John Wright and Peter Millican for their comments, and audiences at Birmingham, Bristol, Cambridge, Oxford and University College London.

4 The New Hume¹

Kenneth P. Winkler

One reason the history of philosophy is so often rewritten is that later developments sometimes broaden our view of what earlier philosophers could have meant by what they said. A second reason is that later developments sometimes narrow our view of what earlier philosophers *should* have said. Something like this has happened, I think, in the case of Hume. According to an influential wave of recent scholarship, Hume is a causal realist—a more or less firm believer in objective necessary connections. In this paper I do what I can to restore (with some important modifications) an earlier portrayal. I do not think that the new portrayal of Hume can be decisively refuted. But I do think it can be shown that the evidence for it is, on the whole, far from compelling, and that defenders of the New Hume have underestimated the power and interest of the more traditional interpretation.

How do we determine whether Hume is a causal realist? As historians of philosophy we are, for the most part, unwilling to say that a philosopher believes *p* unless he or she takes *p* to be justified. But this scruple may fail us when we turn to Hume, who holds (or so it has been argued) that some unavoidable beliefs cannot be justified. One response is to search Hume's texts for a theory of human nature, or a more local account of our natural history, according to which we all believe that *p*. Another response is to comb the texts for avowals of *p*. Recent scholarship (notably Galen Strawson's book *The Secret Connexion* (1989)) has sometimes concentrated on the latter. At the same time, writers such as Donald W. Livingston (1984) and John P. Wright (1983) have followed Norman Kemp Smith (1941) in asserting that Hume regards causal realism as an inevitable natural belief, but they have (to my mind at least) provided too little support for this, perhaps because they are, like Strawson, so impressed with the apparent avowals. I think it can be shown that these avowals have been read too hastily.

Sections 1 through 7 of my paper review the leading arguments for the New Hume. In the first section I offer alternative readings of some of Hume's alleged avowals of realism, and in §2 I argue that commentators who make too much of these avowals make too little of Hume's commitment to the theory of ideas. In §3 I try to show that even if causal realism is a 'natural' belief—a belief human beings often have, and one whose presence and influence Hume thinks he can explain—there is no evidence that he takes it to be inescapable, or necessary for life. In §4 I sketch an interpretation of Hume's scepticism, and in §5 I examine his two definitions of 'cause'. Section 6 shows why it is unfair to blame the standard view of Hume on positivism. Strawson and Livingston are wrong to insinuate that the 'standard' portrayal seems to fit Hume only when he is seen through the distorting lenses of positivism. The standard view prevailed even in Hume's own century, among intimates and acquaintances whose grasp of the relevant 'context'

(and freedom from positivist prejudice) far exceeded our own. In §7, I briefly examine Hume's response to occasionalism. In the eighth and final section I comment on the value of reinstating the Old Hume.

I should begin by explaining what causal realism is. According to Galen Strawson, to be a causal realist is to affirm the existence of causal power 'conceived of in some essentially non-Regularity-theory way' (Strawson 1989:vii). (I will follow Strawson in speaking of such causal power as 'Causation'—causation with a capital 'C'.) The regularity theory has it that 'one particular object or object-involving event of Type A—call it A1—is truly said to be the cause of another particular object or object-involving event of type B—call it B1—just in case A1 is prior to and spatio-temporally contiguous to B1, and all objects or object-involving events of type A are prior to and spatio-temporally contiguous to objects or object-involving events of type B' (Strawson 1989:8–9). Michael J. Costa makes a useful distinction between *causal objectivism*, according to which 'causes are objective in the sense that causal relations would continue to hold among events in the world even if there were no minds to perceive them', and *power realism*, according to which 'objects stand in causal relations because of the respective causal powers in the objects' (Costa 1989:174). To be a causal realist, he suggests, is to be both a causal objectivist and a power realist. Mere causal objectivism falls short of causal realism because cause-and-effect relations can be objective—their *esse* can be more than their *percipi*—even if they are nothing more than regularities. I think Costa understands power realism so that it entails causal objectivism: objects can stand in causal relations *because* of causal powers inherent in them only if their causal relations do *not* depend on their being perceived. To be a causal realist, then, is to be a power realist, to believe (borrowing once again from Strawson) that there is something—something extra-mental—in virtue of which the world is regular in the way it is (Strawson 1989:84). Costa's account makes the further demand that this 'something' be in things themselves, but for now I want to put this to one side. I thereby leave room for two possibilities: that an occasionalist might qualify as a causal realist, and that the primitive polytheists of Hume's *Natural History of Religion* might also qualify. An occasionalist believes there is something—the will of God—in virtue of which the world is regular in the way it is, even though that something is not in things themselves. And a polytheist believes there is something—an indwelling or animating spirit—in virtue of which a physical object's behaviour is regular, even though the spirit may not be 'in' the object in quite the way Costa intends. Defenders of the New Hume seem to agree that causal powers are (according to Hume) in objects themselves. I will briefly consider this contention later on; it bears importantly on the question of whether Hume takes causal realism to be a humanly inevitable belief.

I will argue that Hume *refrains from affirming* that there is something in virtue of which the world is regular in the way it is. This is not to *deny* that there is such a thing, but merely not to believe in it.² Defenders of the New Hume sometimes ease their task by supposing that according to the standard view, Hume positively denies the existence of secret powers or connections. They argue (rightly, in my view) that a positive denial runs counter to Hume's scepticism. But a refusal to affirm such powers or connections suits Hume's scepticism perfectly, as I will try to show.

1 Avowals of realism

Defenders of the New Hume are struck above all by Hume's apparent avowals of

realism. I cannot discuss all of the alleged avowals here. I will concentrate instead on just a few, hoping that if the more dramatic ‘endorsements’ can be undercut, the reader will be able to see that *every* such avowal is more ambiguous than defenders of the New Hume suppose.

Strawson quotes many texts—any number of which he regards as near-decisive evidence of causal realism—in which Hume refers to real powers or secret connections. The *Enquiry* is especially rich in such pronouncements; Livingston, Wright, Costa and Janet Broughton quote or cite many of the same texts.³ Most of the passages occur *before* Hume provides his two definitions of ‘cause’ near the end of *Enquiry* §7. It is reasonable to suppose that Hume wants these passages *retrospectively reinterpreted* in light of §7.1 will discuss Hume’s definitions in some detail later on. For now, it is enough to know that according to the first definition, a cause is ‘*an object, followed by another, and where all the objects similar to the first are followed by objects similar to the second*’, and that according to the second, a cause is ‘*an object followed by another, and whose appearance always conveys the thought to that other*’ (E76, 77). Retrospective reinterpretation is exactly what Hume expects of us *after* these definitions have been given. ‘It is universally allowed that matter, in all its operations, is actuated by a necessary force’, he writes in §8, ‘and that every natural effect is so precisely determined by the energy of its cause that no other effect, in such particular circumstances, could possibly have resulted from it’ (E82). But he immediately explains—now that §7 is behind us—how he wants all this to be understood:

Our idea...of necessity and causation arises entirely from the uniformity observable in the operations of nature, where similar objects are constantly conjoined together, and the mind is determined by custom to infer the one from the appearance of the other. These two circumstances form the whole of that necessity, which we ascribe to matter. Beyond the constant *conjunction* of similar objects, and the consequent *inference* from one to the other, we have no notion of any necessity or connexion.

(E82)

Here Hume uses *ascribe to* and *notion of*. They are a good deal less demanding than *conceive of or idea of*, and Hume uses them, I think, in order to say that we have *no notion whatsoever* (in *our* sense of ‘notion’) of Causation. Strawson, for example, is sensitive to Hume’s use of *notion*, but he responds to it by suggesting that even notions are more contentful than the etiolated ‘conception’ which (on Strawson’s view) picks out Causation (Strawson 1989:212).

I said a moment ago that it is reasonable to suppose that Hume wants passages suggestive of belief in Causation to be retrospectively reinterpreted. In fact there is clear evidence that he intends this—evidence Strawson, for example, passes over in a curious way. On p. 33 of the *Enquiry*, in the third paragraph of §4, part ii, Hume writes that

notwithstanding this ignorance of natural powers and principles, we always presume, when we see like sensible qualities, that they have like secret powers, and expect that effects, similar to those which we have experienced, will follow from them.

In the 1750 edition Hume attached the following footnote to the first occurrence of

the word ‘powers’: ‘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’ (E33). Strawson (1989) acknowledges this footnote on p. 179, where he dismisses those who ‘take all the apparently referring uses of Causation terms as provisional or tongue-in-cheek or uses “in a loose and popular sense” (E33n) that is later renounced’. Strawson never explains why Hume’s footnote does not license exactly that reaction. It could hardly be Hume’s view that ‘power’ is used in a loose and popular sense *only* in the sentence to which the note is attached. The sentence is like every other sentence in which Strawson finds what he calls apparently referring uses of Causation terms—for example, the following passage (quoted in part by Strawson on p. 178) leading up to the footnoted sentence:

[Nature] conceals from us those powers and principles on which the influence of these objects entirely depends. Our senses inform us of the colour, weight, and consistence of bread; but neither sense nor reason can ever inform us of those qualities which fit it for the nourishment and support of a human body. Sight or feeling conveys an idea of the actual motion of bodies; but as to that wonderful force or power, which would carry on a moving body for ever in a continued change of place, and which bodies never lose but by communicating it to others; of this we cannot form the most distant conception.

(E33)

The footnote flags *all* uses of ‘power’ and related words that (appear to) conflict with the more accurate explication of §7.⁴ But should the loose and inaccurate sense of these words compromise Hume’s avowals? Perhaps Hume’s causal language remains fully ‘referential’—reaching out to causes whose power cannot be reduced to regularity—even after reinterpretation. I propose that we read the more accurate explication back into one or two of Hume’s more striking ‘avowals’, in order to see what results. This reading back should meet two conditions. First, the more accurate explication should preserve the truth of whatever Hume is saying, particularly in *Enquiry* §4. Second, it should (as the footnote stipulates) make the overall argument of §4 more ‘evident’.

Because Strawson is particularly impressed by the following pair of passages, it will be best to work with them. The first ‘seems decisive’ (Strawson 1989:185); the second ‘appears to suffice on its own to establish the present view’ (1989:188):

As nature has taught us the use of our limbs, without giving us the knowledge of the muscles and nerves, by which they are actuated; so has she implanted in us an instinct, which carries forward the thought in a correspondent course to that which she has established among external objects; though we are ignorant of those powers and forces, on which this regular course and succession of objects totally depends.

(E55)

The scenes of the universe are continually shifting, and one object follows another in an uninterrupted succession; but the power or force, which actuates the whole machine, is entirely concealed from us, and never discovers itself in any of the sensible qualities of body. We know, that, in fact, heat is a constant attendant of flame; but what is the connexion between them, we have no room

so much as to conjecture or imagine. It is impossible, therefore, that the idea of power can be derived from the contemplation of bodies, in single instances of their operation; because no bodies ever discover any power, which can be the original of this idea.

(E63–4)

Now Hume's definitions of *cause* also provide definitions of *power*, as Hume at several points makes clear.⁵ To say that one object has the *power* to produce another is to say (according to the first definition) that objects like the first are followed by objects like the second. We can now reformulate the passages E55 and E63–4. The first passage can be read as saying that we are ignorant of certain *objects* whose behaviour is constantly conjoined with the behaviour of the objects we observe. The objects we observe are 'actuated' by these unobserved objects, just as our limbs (according to the passage itself) are 'actuated' by muscles and nerves beneath the skin. These unobserved objects are probably the parts and particles of eighteenth-century natural philosophy. Hume himself suggests as much in the *Natural History of Religion*, where he writes that:

could men anatomize nature, according to the most probable, at least the most intelligible philosophy, they would find, that these causes are nothing but the particular fabric and structure of the minute parts of their own bodies and of external objects; and that, by a regular and constant machinery, all the events are produced, about which they are so much concerned. But this philosophy exceeds the comprehension of the ignorant multitude, who can only conceive the *unknown causes* in a general and confused manner.

(Hume 1757:29)

Hume is not a dogmatic corpuscularian, but his willingness to speak of objects or textures as causes is evidence that the unknown powers and forces of E55 may be nothing more than unknown objects, as his definitions of 'cause' themselves suggest.

In the passage on pp. 63–4, Hume speaks of 'the power or force, which *actuates* the whole machine'. The word 'actuates' also appears in the first passage, where it is applied, significantly, to muscles and nerves (objects rather than Causes). But the second passage differs from the first in one striking respect: the power or force to which it refers is *singular*. It is (or seems to be) a power or force all causes have in common, and one that will therefore resist the analysis I applied to the plural powers and forces of the first passage.

But the analysis can still be applied. Three paragraphs before the quoted passage, Hume begins his search for the impression of necessary connection:

To be fully acquainted...with the idea of power or necessary connexion, let us examine its impression; and in order to find the impression with greater certainty, let us search for it in all the sources, from which it may possibly be derived.

(E63)

The first source he consults is 'external objects'—or, more specifically, single instances of cause and effect in the external world. He argues, in the lines leading up to the quoted passage, that

there is no part of matter, that does ever, by its sensible qualities, discover any power or energy, or give us ground to imagine, that it could produce any thing, or be followed by any object, which we could denominate its effect. Solidity, extension, motion; these qualities are all complete in themselves, and never point out any other event which may result from them.

(E63)

He then writes that ‘the power or force, which actuates the whole machine’—the power or force contained in any part of matter large enough to be perceived—is ‘concealed from us, and never discovers itself in any of the sensible qualities of body’ (E63–4). And this is entirely true, even if ‘power’ and ‘force’ are reinterpreted along the lines of *Enquiry* §7: unlike solidity, extension, and motion, causal power cannot be observed in single cases, because causal power reveals itself only in regularities, as Hume makes explicit on E74–75. Causal power—the property all causes have in common—is not ‘complete in itself (that is, wholly manifest in single episodes of experience). It is not a ‘sensible quality’.

It might be objected that by ‘the power or force, which actuates the whole machine’, Hume has in mind something deeper—a power or force so deep that it drives not only observable pieces of matter, but their unobservable parts. But the passage (whose point, after all, is that we cannot derive the general idea of power from single instances of *observed* interaction among bodies) does not even address the topic of unobservable parts. (The ‘whole machine’ is the world *insofar as we observe it*, the shifting scenes we *sense*. And the ‘part[s] of matter’ Hume refers to on E63 are *sensible* parts, parts with ‘sensible qualities’.) In *Enquiry* §7, Hume turns to unobservable parts and particles only to suggest (as in the passage quoted above from the *Natural History of Religion*) that the hidden powers of observable things rest not on unobservable (and unanalysable) real powers, but on unobservable mechanisms or structures. For example, on p. 68 of §7, after extending his search for the impression of power to the operations of the mind, Hume observes that we are ‘more master of our thoughts in the morning than in the evening: Fasting, than after a full meal’. ‘Can we give any reason for these variations’, he asks, ‘except experience?’ He continues:

Where then is the power, of which we pretend to be conscious? Is there not here, *either in a spiritual or material substance, or both, some secret mechanism or structure of parts*, upon which the effect depends, and which, being entirely unknown to us, renders the power or energy of the will equally unknown and incomprehensible?

(E68–9; my emphasis)

The first condition on our reinterpretation of Hume’s avowals is that they remain true. That condition has, I think, been met. The second condition is that the reinterpreted avowals make the argument of *Enquiry* §4 more ‘evident’. They do so because they suggest that our ignorance of natural powers is nothing more than an ignorance of *objects* and their characteristic patterns of behaviour. Not even the natural philosopher who breaks through the surface of things has insight into a ‘power’ or ‘energy’ that would license an indubitable inference from past to future.

Most of the *Enquiry*’s ‘avowals’ of realism are undercut by the 1750 footnote. Other alleged avowals are undercut in other ways. Nearly every defender of the

New Hume quotes the following passage from the *Treatise*,⁶ whose context I will turn to in a moment:

I am, indeed, ready to allow, that there may be several qualities both in material and immaterial objects, with which we are utterly unacquainted; and if we please to call these *power* or *efficacy*, 'twill be of little consequence to the world. But when, instead of meaning these unknown qualities, we make the terms of power and efficacy signify something, of which we have a clear idea, and which is incompatible with those objects, to which we apply it, obscurity and error begin then to take place, and we are led astray by a false philosophy. This is the case, when we transfer the determination of the thought to external objects, and suppose any real intelligible connexion betwixt them; that being a quality, which can only belong to the mind that considers them.

(T168)

In thinking about this passage it is important to distinguish among the following five views:

- (i) It is *possible* that there are unknown qualities in bodies.
- (ii) There *are* unknown qualities in bodies.
- (iii) It is possible to *call* an unknown quality a power.
- (iv) It is possible for an unknown quality to *be* a power (in more than name).
- (v) There are unknown powers (in more than name) in bodies.

Defenders of the New Hume believe that he embraces (v), but as the passage opens, Hume accepts no more than the conjunction of (i) and (iii). Elsewhere he seems to accept (ii), but this still leaves us far short of (iv), which is itself a good deal weaker than (v). And when it is read in context—a context brimming with passages supporting the traditional portrayal—the focal passage does not even *leave room* for (iv) and (v), as I will now try to show.

In the *Treatise*, Hume writes that:

upon the whole, 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. 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.

(T165–6)

'I am sensible', he explains two paragraphs later, '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, and that 'tis merely by dint of solid proof and reasoning I can ever hope it will have admission, and overcome the inveterate prejudices of mankind' (T166). 'What!', he imagines his readers saying, 'the efficacy of causes lie in the determination of the mind! As if causes did not operate entirely independent of the mind' (T167). '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', the imagined reader continues, 'is a gross absurdity, and contrary to the most certain principles of human reason' (T168).

The only reply, Hume says, is 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’ (T168). The focal passage then follows. In the paragraph following the passage, Hume admits that contiguity and succession are independent of the mind, but argues that ‘if we go any farther, and ascribe a power or necessary connexion to these objects; that is what we can never observe in them, but must draw the idea of it from what we feel internally in contemplating them’ (T168–9).

The focal passage does not open any space between (i), (ii), and (iii) and the propensity to spread an internal impression of determination onto things themselves. It is clearly Hume’s view that it is impossible for the impression (or anything like the impression) to exist there: as he says at the end of the focal passage, the determination of thought ‘can only belong to the mind that considers them’. The passage says nothing to indicate that we have (or could have) some *other* conception of a body’s power—a conception that goes beyond (i), (ii), and (iii), but without distortion or projection.

2 The scope (or force) of the theory of ideas

The theory of ideas takes certain items as input; how varied the items (*all ideas, all non-relative ideas*) is a matter of the theory’s *scope*. These items are then tested—we ask, to put it roughly, whether they can be traced to resembling impressions—and the theory then issues in a verdict as output. How severe the verdict (*completely meaningless, not positively meaningful, not empirically meaningful*) is a matter of the theory’s *force*. Defenders of the New Hume all agree that the theory of ideas is either narrower in scope or more circumscribed in force than Hume’s readers typically suppose.

When he states the theory of ideas in the first *Enquiry*, Hume proclaims that ‘when we entertain...any suspicion that a philosophical term is employed without any meaning or idea (as is but too frequent), we need but enquire, *from what impression is that supposed idea derived*’ (E22)? The scope of the theory *seems* to be universal, and its force unforgiving: it seems to say that any alleged thought or conception lacking an appropriate pedigree is unintelligible or meaningless. But defenders of the New Hume dispute this reading. Some narrow the scope of the theory by suggesting there are thoughts or conceptions to which the theory does not apply. The theory of ideas was not meant to account for *all* thought, Edward Craig argues, but covers ‘only that area of thought which is susceptible of reasoning, experiment, clarity, [and] knowledge of truth and falsehood’ (Craig 1987:126), Broughton suggests that we can achieve ‘the *bare thought*...of there being some feature of objects that underlies... constant conjunctions’, even if our minds are too feeble to form the corresponding idea (Broughton 1987:235). And Strawson claims that the theory applies not to every conception but only to ‘positively contentful’ ones (Strawson 1989:122). Others dampen the theory’s force by suggesting that what is unintelligible, meaningless, or absurd in Hume’s sense is not therefore unintelligible, meaningless or absurd in our sense.⁷ Hume is not saying that talk of ultimate causes is meaningless, Livingston argues, only that it is empirically vacuous (1984:165). Hume’s use of the word ‘meaning’ is ‘special’, suggests Wright (1983:129). ‘Careful attention to Hume’s text’, he explains, reveals that ‘meaningless’ terms can nonetheless ‘refer to something real’ (1983:125). Costa likewise suggests that Hume uses ‘meaning’ and

‘significance’ in ‘a special, technical sense’. ‘What he means to assert’, Costa writes, is that

the only *sensible* (image-like, qualitative) idea that can be found for the term ‘power’ is the internal sensation of determination. That is the only ‘meaning’ that can be found for the term. But this does not mean that the term cannot be used to make reference to some unknown (in fact, unknowable) quality of objects.

(Costa 1989:180)

I now want to examine Strawson’s extended argument for a more modest reading of the theory of ideas. Strawson holds that if an alleged conception has no theory-of-ideas-approved content, it does not follow that we cannot refer to (or ‘pick out’) its object. Nor does it follow that we cannot suppose certain things are true of it. The mind’s reach (though not its grasp) extends beyond our ‘ideas’. Although what Strawson calls ‘Causation’ with a capital ‘C’—‘causal power conceived of in some essentially non-Regularity-theory way’ (Strawson 1989:vii)—is unintelligible in Hume’s sense, it is not, Strawson thinks, unintelligible (inconsistent or absurd) in our sense. Nor is it meaningless in our sense merely because it lacks meaning in Hume’s.

What is Strawson’s evidence for so displacing the theory of ideas? There is, to begin with, the following passage from the *Treatise*:

The farthest we can go towards a conception of external objects, when suppos’d *specifically* different from our perceptions, is to form a relative idea of them, without pretending to comprehend the related objects. Generally speaking we do not suppose them specifically different; but only attribute to them different relations, connexions, and durations.

(T68)⁸

Second, there are passages later in the *Treatise* that draw a distinction between *supposing and conceiving*; a distinction implicit in the passage quoted just a moment ago:⁹

For we may well suppose in general, but ’tis impossible for us distinctly to conceive, objects to be in their nature any thing but exactly the same with perceptions. What then can we look for from this confusion of groundless and extraordinary opinions but error and falshood? And how can we justify to ourselves any belief we repose in them? (T218, cited by Strawson 1989:50)

Let us remember, that as every idea is deriv’d from a preceding perception, ’tis impossible our idea of a perception, and that of an object or external existence can ever represent what are specifically different from each other. Whatever difference we may suppose betwixt them, ’tis still incomprehensible to us; and we are oblig’d either to conceive an external object merely as a relation without a relative, or to make it the very same with a perception or impression.

(T241, quoted in part in Strawson 1989:54)

This is all of the textual evidence Strawson marshals on pp. 49–54. When he returns to the subject on pp. 122–3, he presents no new texts. ‘We can successfully refer and genuinely talk about something, as Hume acknowledges in his use of the notion of a “relative” idea’, he writes, ‘even though there is a sense in which we don’t know what we are talking about, or what we are saying’. He then admits in a footnote that he ‘would not wish to claim that all this is explicit in Hume’s use of the notion of a relative idea’ (Strawson 1989:123). In fact, very little is explicit in the passages Strawson quotes. Hume admits there are relative ideas, and that is about all.¹⁰

Let us turn now to the *Enquiry*, because the notion of a relative idea also plays a role there—though Strawson takes no notice of it.¹¹ In fact the act of *supposing* plays a role there too, and in each case Hume gives every indication that the notions in question fall within the scope of the theory of ideas. In §7 of the *Enquiry*, Hume uses the theory of ideas to clarify the notion of cause, power, force, energy, or connection. There is no room for doubt about the section’s dependence on the theory: Hume introduces the section with a summary of the theory of ideas (E62), referring us back to §2, and in the second part of §7, when he seems to reach a crisis point, it is the theory of ideas that rescues him:

All events seem entirely loose and separate. One event follows another; but we never can observe any tie between them. They seem *conjoined*, but never *connected*. And as we can have no idea of any thing which never appeared to our outward sense or inward sentiment, the necessary conclusion *seems* to be that we have no idea of connexion or power at all, and that these words are absolutely without any meaning, when employed either in philosophical reasonings or common life.

(E74)

Here (even on Strawson’s view) Hume is working well within the borders of the theory of ideas. In the following paragraph, Hume assures us that we can avoid the threatened conclusion: there is, he writes, ‘one source [of meaning] which we have not yet examined’ (E74). When one species of event has always been conjoined with another, Hume explains, we ‘then call the one object, *Cause*; the other, *Effect*’ (E75). ‘We *suppose* that there is some connexion between them; some power in the one, by which it infallibly produces the other, and operates with the greatest certainty and strongest necessity’ (E75; my emphasis). Here Hume is using the theory of ideas to account for the content of what we suppose. He writes in the very next sentence that ‘this idea of a necessary connexion among events arises from a number of similar instances which occur of the constant conjunction of these events’. So supposing, like conceiving, involves ideas (theory-of-ideas-approved ideas), and thereby falls within the scope of the theory. If any doubt should remain, in a footnote on E77 Hume describes the ideas of cause and power as *relative*. They are relative because the definition of each is ‘drawn from circumstances foreign’ to the thing defined (E77). Yet ‘we cannot remedy this inconvenience, or attain any more perfect definition, which may point out that circumstance in the cause, which gives it a connexion with its effect. We have no idea of this connexion, nor even any distinct notion what it is we desire to know, when we endeavour at a conception of it’ (E77). So an interest in *acts of supposing* or *relative ideas* is no sign that we have moved into territory where the theory of ideas does not hold sway; in the *Enquiry*, relative conceptions and acts of supposing are well within its scope.

There is every reason to think that acts of supposing and relative conceptions *should* fall within the scope of the theory of ideas, given the generality Hume claims for the theory when he introduces it. Section 2 of the *Enquiry*, as Hume repeatedly indicates, treats all of the perceptions of the mind. Our thought, Hume writes, is ‘confined within very narrow limits, and all this creative power of the mind amounts to no more than the faculty of compounding, transposing, augmenting, or diminishing the materials afforded us by the senses and experience’ (E19). ‘When we analyze our thoughts or ideas, however compounded or sublime, we always find that they resolve themselves into such simple ideas as were copied from a precedent feeling or sentiment. Even those ideas, which, at first view, seem the most wide of this origin, are found, upon a nearer scrutiny, to be derived from it’ (E19). ‘When we entertain, therefore, any suspicion that a philosophical term is employed without any meaning or idea (as is but too frequent), we need but enquire, *from what impression is that supposed idea derived*’ (E22)? (Hume says the same sort of thing in the *Treatise*, where he lays greater emphasis on the role of the theory of ideas in his projected science of human nature (for example, on p. 7 in I.i.l). It would be a sorry science that said nothing about acts of supposing and relative ideas.) Strawson wants to say that Hume recognizes conceptions that lie beyond the scope of the theory of ideas. But *everything* Hume says in the *Enquiry* indicates just the opposite. The same holds for the *Treatise*, as Hume’s own ‘Abstract’ indicates. ‘Wherever any idea is ambiguous’, Hume there explains, the author of the *Treatise*

has always recourse to the impression, which must render it clear and precise. And when he suspects that any philosophical term has no idea annexed to it (as is too common) he always asks *from what impression that pretended idea is derived?* And if no impression can be produced, he concludes that the term is altogether insignificant.

(T648–9)

Note that if we narrow the scope of the theory of ideas we also narrow the scope of Hume’s theory of belief. But it seems that an account of ‘the whole nature of belief’ (E48) should cover what Strawson calls supposings.

It is important to recognize the intended scope of the theory of ideas because the theory, as Hume understands it, cannot easily explain how a *relative* idea of Causation could arise. If the theory is universal in scope, a relative idea must involve a relation (such as constant conjunction) of which we have an idea. In forming a relative idea we take an idea of an object and an idea of a relation¹² and we then form an indirect conception of *another* object as that which stands in the given relation to the given object.¹³ This is the process as it was understood by Locke and Berkeley, although Berkeley insists that we have *notions of relations* rather than ideas of them.

Now according to Strawson’s Hume, we have a relative idea of ‘that in reality in virtue of which reality is regular in the way that it is’ (Strawson 1989:122). Strawson writes in a footnote that ‘it may be objected’ that expressions such as ‘in virtue of are ‘causal-relation-implying’ (1989:122). This is an excellent objection: if the theory of ideas is going to account for our idea of Causation (as Strawson understands it), we *first* need an idea or conception of the ‘in virtue of relation. If we cannot form this idea unless we *already* have an idea of Causation, we will never be in a position to form the latter idea. Strawson says that the ‘in virtue of’ locution ‘could still function to indicate what we were talking about in talking of Causation, compatibly with the

idea that we have no positive conception of its nature, in so far as it is more than regular succession' (1989:122), but this is only because he thinks that the 'in virtue of locution need not be validated by the theory of ideas in order to play such a role. When he returns to this point, Strawson writes that the word 'depends' (as in the phrase, 'those powers and forces, on which [the] regular course and succession of objects totally depends') is 'presumably not meant [by Hume] to indicate any sort of causal dependence' (1989:185). 'Perhaps', he continues, 'the way in which regular succession depends on powers and forces may be supposed to be something like the way the properties of a substance like mercury are held to "depend" on its "essential" property of having a certain atomic structure' (1922:185–6). 'One could express this by saying that regular succession is a *manifestation* or even an *aspect* of Causation, and "depends" on it in that sense' (1922:186). Now I find all this pretty dark. (I tend to favor interpretations of Locke, for example, that explicate the relationship between manifest qualities and substance in terms of a decidedly *causal* notion of dependence.) But why does Strawson think Hume 'presumably' has something other than a causal relation in mind? The fact is that Hume says nothing whatsoever about this, and in the *Treatise*, where he lists 'seven general heads, which may be considered as the sources of all *philosophical* relation' (T14)—the seven sources of *all* of our comparisons—cause and effect is the only item listed that would be of any use at all in making sense of 'manifestation' or 'aspecthood'. This does not worry Strawson because in his view Hume makes no attempt to account for our ability to refer to Causation.¹⁴ My own view is that the difficulty of providing a non-circular genealogy for the idea (or notion, or conception) of Causation is the source of Hume's scepticism regarding cause and effect. In §8 of the *Enquiry*, Hume argues that anyone who seeks an alternative to his two definitions of cause 'will be obliged either to employ unintelligible terms or such as are synonymous to the term which he endeavours to define' (E96). He gives the details in a footnote:

Thus, if a cause be defined, *that which produces any thing*; it is easy to observe, that *producing* is synonymous to *causing*. In like manner, if a cause be defined, *that by which any thing exists*; this is liable to the same objection. For what is meant by these words, *by which*? Had it been said, that a cause is *that* after which *any thing constantly exists*; we should have understood the terms. For this is, indeed, all we know of the matter. And this constancy forms the very essence of necessity, nor have we any other idea of it.

(E96n)

The 'by which' locution is equivalent to Strawson's 'in virtue of'; Hume's point in the footnote is that all these locutions belong to the same family. (The 'by which' locution is prominent in the *Enquiry*. It appears once on p. 42, once on each page from 65 through 69, and again on pp. 72–3.) To clarify any one of these locutions, we have to break outside the circle, in order to find our way to such notions as *constancy* (the crucial term in Hume's first definition) and *expectation* (the crucial term in his second). Unless we do so we will not (as Hume says) understand.

As Strawson expounds the standard view, Hume claims to *know* that causation (in objects) is nothing more than constant conjunction. This runs counter, Strawson plausibly argues, to Hume's strictly noncommittal scepticism. (I return to the content of Hume's scepticism in §4 below.) But this leaves us free to suppose that Hume's scepticism consists in a *refusal to affirm* the existence of Causation, a refusal rooted in the belief that there is no notion of Causation to be affirmed (or denied, or even entertained as a possibility). The alleged notion of

Causation is (to borrow from *Enquiry* §12) a notion so imperfect ‘that no sceptic will think it worth while to contend against it’ (E155).

I have suggested that *every* conception or supposition must satisfy the theory of ideas. Every thought or perception must be derived from impressions, and although Hume is vague about the constraints on derivation—the creative power of the mind amounts, as we saw, ‘to no more than the faculty of compounding, transposing, augmenting, or diminishing the materials afforded us by the senses and experience’ (E19)—a ‘thought’ or ‘perception’ whose derivation fails to satisfy those constraints is not a thought or perception at all.

I want to close this section with an observation about a late eighteenth-century use of the word ‘suppose’, one deliberately marked off from superficially similar uses of words such as ‘conceive’. According to Richard Price (whose discussion of the matter was triggered by a passage in Thomas Reid), we can *suppose* absolutely anything—even contradictions, as mathematicians do when they embark on *reductios*. But when it comes to *conceiving*, Price claims, we do not have the same latitude:

Supposing and *conceiving* are not the same. There is no absurdity which I may not be directed to *suppose*; but it does not follow from hence, that there is no absurdity which I may not *conceive*. A believer in transubstantiation may *suppose* that Christ held his body in his hand and gave it to his disciples; but if he was to say that he had a clear and distinct conception of it, he would make himself as ridiculous as if he was to say he *saw* it.

(Price 1758:279, Note A)¹⁵

Strawson never considers the possibility that when he discusses power, Hume uses the word ‘suppose’ in the sense identified by Price, according to which even a contradiction is supposable. Hume certainly uses it in this way at times. At *Treatise* I.iv.5, for example, he argues that there is ‘something altogether unintelligible and contradictory’ in any notion we form of the spatial union between a body and its taste:

For shou’d we ask ourselves one obvious question, *viz.* if the taste, which we conceive to be contain’d in the circumference of the body, is in every part of it or in one only, we must quickly find ourselves at a loss, and perceive the impossibility of ever giving a satisfactory answer. We cannot reply, that ‘tis only in one part: For experience convinces us, that every part has the same relish. We can as little reply, that it exists in every part: For then we must *suppose* it figur’d and extended; which is absurd and incomprehensible.

(T238; my emphasis)

Reason, he concludes, ‘shows us the impossibility of such an union’. This passage is important because Hume explicitly refers to it when discussing necessary connection at *Treatise* I.iii.14 (T167). The mind’s propensity to spread an impression of necessity on external objects is there *identified* with the propensity to couple the idea of a body with ideas of qualities such as taste. This propensity, he explains, ‘is the reason, why we *suppose* necessity and power to lie in the objects we consider, not in our mind, that considers them’ (T167).¹⁶

3 The inevitability of belief

According to most defenders of the New Hume, causal realism is an inevitable natural belief.¹⁷ If they are right, we have powerful evidence of Hume’s causal

realism: if he believes that everyone is by nature a causal realist, Hume is presumably one himself. It is possible to hold this view even if one supposes, as Costa does, that Hume takes belief in causal realism to be entirely unjustified.¹⁸ But there is simply no evidence that Hume takes causal realism to be an inescapable belief.

There are two ways in which a belief might be inescapable: it might be absolutely irresistible, or it might be necessary for life, and therefore capable of suspension only in special or isolated circumstances. Livingston (advocating the first way) writes that 'it is the propensity of the imagination to project into nature the felt determination of the mind set up by experience of constant conjunctions that Hume takes to be the origin of our unshakable belief that there are unobservable powers in nature' (1984:153). But there is no evidence that Hume thinks this propensity is unshakable. Livingston writes that 'to be sure, the belief is not certified by sense or reason, but, then, neither is our belief in external objects' (1984:153). But what is there in the text to license the assumption that the belief in objective necessary connections is on a par with the belief in external objects? Hume writes in the *Treatise* that the sceptic 'must assent to the principle concerning the existence of body, tho' he cannot pretend by any arguments of philosophy to maintain its veracity' (T187). 'We may well ask, *What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body?* but 'tis in vain to ask, *Whether there be body or not?* That is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasonings'. He makes no corresponding point about objective necessary connections. The same is true in the *Enquiry*, where he argues that we can no more throw off our expectation that the future will resemble the past than we can escape our belief in the existence of body. The belief that 'we have no other idea of this relation [of cause and effect] than that of two objects, which have been frequently *conjoined* together', does appear as a premise in a piece of reasoning with an impossibly Pyrrhonian conclusion (E159), but the fact that we cannot maintain belief in the conclusion does not show that we cannot maintain belief in one of its premises. The language Hume uses in describing our projective propensity does not have the air of inevitability. On p. 78 of the *Enquiry* he writes that '*nothing is more usual* than to apply to external bodies every internal sensation, which they occasion' (my emphasis). We are '*apt to transfer to inanimate objects, and to suppose, that they have some such feelings, whenever they transfer or receive motion*' (my emphasis). The second definition of cause (E77) says that a cause always conveys the mind to the thought of its effect. It does not say that it always projects its expectation onto either. The mind, Hume explains in I.iii.14 of the *Treatise* (T167), has a '*great propensity to spread itself on external objects, and to conjoin with them any internal impressions, which they occasion*' (my emphasis). The casual language is apparently deliberate; it stands in marked contrast to the stronger language Hume reserves for our belief in bodies, and for our propensity to project past regularities into the future.¹⁹

In a passage cited by Wright (1983:154), Hume differentiates principles of imagination that are 'permanent, irresistible, and universal' from those that are 'changeable, weak, and irregular' (T225). As examples of the former, Hume cites the customary transition from causes to effects; he does not cite the projection of expectation onto causes.²⁰ Examples of the latter include those he has just been discussing in I.iv.3, the last of them being the 'very remarkable inclination in human nature, to bestow on external objects the same emotions, which it observes in itself; and to find every where those ideas, which are most present to it' (T224).

This is awfully close to the principle at work in the section on necessary connection. It is an inclination ‘suppres’d by a little reflection, and only takes place in children, poets, and the antient philosophers’ (T224). The tendency to project an internal impression of determination has, it seems, a somewhat firmer foothold. But Hume never says that the projective propensity is irresistible. It is, moreover, hard to see why our welfare should depend on the propensity. Our inductive expectations, which are necessary for life, are (so far as we know) entirely independent of it. What fate would befall us if projection ceased?

Elsewhere in the *Treatise*, Hume explains how reflection can modify the influence of association (T148). In Liv.7 (T267), where he asks how far we ought to yield to the illusions of imagination, he leaves open the possibility that a number of deeply rooted principles can in fact be resisted. On T266, he argues that the principle that makes us reason from causes to effects is, like the principle that convinces us of the continued existence of bodies, both natural and necessary. But once again he stops short of saying that the principle of projection is necessary. And if our projective propensities can (as his stopping short suggests) be suspended or modified, Hume’s observation that words such as *force* often have loose and inaccurate meanings is the appropriate first step in a program of reform.

Livingston and Wright think that Hume’s remarks on the mind’s projective tendencies *are* his account of the formation of an inevitable belief. Strawson is more elusive, because he thinks the inevitable belief has nothing to do with the projective tendency. The *belief* may be inevitable, Strawson in effect proposes, even though our projective propensities can be suspended. This suggestion is difficult to refute, but it is easy to see that there can be no positive evidence for it in the details of Hume’s psychology, because on Strawson’s view it never occurs to Hume to apply his psychology to his unexamined belief in real powers.

In a 1751 letter to Gilbert Elliot of Minto, Hume makes the following remarks:

You ask me, If the idea of Cause & Effect is nothing but Vicinity, (you should have said constant Vicinity, or regular Conjunction), I would gladly know *whence is that farther Idea of Causation against which you argue?* This Question is pertinent; but I hope I have answer’d it. We feel, after the constant Conjunction, an easy Transition from one Idea to the other, or a Connexion in the Imagination. And as it is usual for us to transfer our own Feelings to the Objects on which they are dependent, we attach the internal Sentiment to the external Objects. If no single Instances of Cause & Effect appear to have any Connexion, but only repeated similar ones, you will find yourself oblig’d to have Recourse to this Theory.

(Hume 1932:I, 155–6)

This certainly is not decisive, but it is noteworthy that Hume is not ruffled by Elliot’s suggestion that he ‘argues against’ a farther idea of causation. He is fussy enough to correct Elliot’s substitution of ‘vicinity’ for ‘constant vicinity’, yet he placidly accepts Elliot’s indication that he argues against the farther idea. This may be some indication that he thinks we can live with nothing more than what he calls ‘*the idea*’—constant conjunction or vicinity.²¹

A brief comment on the way in which human nature guards against excessive doubt may lend support to what I have said about the inevitability of belief. There is some reason to believe that according to Hume, it does so only by prohibiting the stable acceptance of certain conclusions. If so, it may do nothing to block belief in the premises of those conclusions. It may allow us to believe each of the premises

taken separately, or to believe all of the premises taken jointly, or even (though this would of course be temporary) to believe all of the premises at the same time we believe that the argument containing them is valid. This would explain why Hume seems to think that we can ‘hold’ sceptical views (or suffer sceptical amazement) at least momentarily. Sceptical views or attitudes may not be stable—they may not survive outside the study—but they may nonetheless be the upshot of intellectual insights which (up to a point) human nature does nothing to resist. Human nature does not anticipate the *arguments* that reason might devise, and it would not work very well (in protecting us from sceptical misfortune) if it did. If, as these comments suggest, human nature cuts us off only at conclusions, the tension between the passion for truth and our animal nature will be especially exquisite. Hume expresses the tension not only in the concluding section of Book I of the *Treatise*, but also in the *Enquiry*, where he speaks of the importance of being ‘once thoroughly convinced of the force of the Pyrrhonian doubt’ (E162), and writes that scepticism mortifies every passion but the love of truth (E41).

4 The nature of Hume’s scepticism

Wright, Craig and Strawson all contend that the Hume of the standard portrayal is implausibly dogmatic: he dogmatically denies the existence of real powers, or dogmatically affirms that causation is nothing but constant conjunction. A sceptic, they suggest, should allow that there *may* be real powers, even if we cannot be sure. And if causation *as we know it* is nothing but constant conjunction, a properly cautious sceptic should not jump to a conclusion about causation as it is in itself. ‘Strictly sceptical claims’, writes Strawson, ‘have the form “We do not (and cannot) know that *p* (or that not *p*)”’. They never have the form “It is definitely (knowably) not the case that *p* (or that not *p*)”’. Hume’s scepticism is of this strictly noncommittal kind’ (Strawson 1989:12). As such it ‘provides an extremely powerful argument against the claim that Hume could have wished to assert that causation in the objects was definitely (knowably) nothing but regular succession’, and the argument becomes ‘decisive’ once we understand the special character of Hume’s notion of meaningfulness (1989:12; see also 118–9, 132, 141, 221). Strawson also argues that the standard view has no way of making sense of Hume’s belief (E76) that his definitions of *cause* display our ignorance and weakness.

It never occurs to Strawson that Hume’s scepticism may consist in a *refusal to affirm* the existence of real powers.²² This enables the standard view to make very good sense of Hume’s observation that his definitions display our weakness. His point is that we cannot manage to think that events are connected in anything more than thought. We try, but fail, to conceive of a real connection. A certain *conception* is unavailable to us—a conception we in some sense endeavour to have (E77). This conclusion is sceptical in the sense identified in Hume’s own ‘Abstract’ of the *Treatise*: it ‘tends to give us a notion of the imperfections and narrow limits of human understanding’ (T657). Strawson and the others assume that the limits of which Hume speaks are the limits of what we know. But they are, at the deepest level, the limits of what we can conceive, suppose, or understand—limits that can be drawn from *within* our thought. ‘We wou’d not willingly stop’, Hume writes as he concludes Book I of the *Treatise*, ‘before we are acquainted with that energy in the cause, by which it operates on its effect; that tie, which connects them together; and that efficacious quality, on which the tie depends’ (T266). ‘This is our aim’, he continues,

in all our studies and reflections: And how must we be disappointed, when we learn, that this connexion, tie, or energy lies merely in ourselves, and is nothing but that determination of the mind, which is acquired by custom, and causes us to make a transition from an object to its usual attendant, and from the impression of one to the lively idea of the other? Such a discovery not only cuts off all hope of ever attaining satisfaction, but *even prevents our very wishes*; since it appears, that when we say we desire to know the ultimate and operating principle, as something, which resides in the external object, we either contradict ourselves, or talk without a meaning.

(T266–7; my emphasis)

If defenders of the New Hume were correct, our wishes could never be prevented. We could always *hope* for a filling out of our idea even if we knew the hope could never be realized. As it is we not only have ‘no idea of this connexion’, but lack ‘even any distinct notion what it is we desire to know, when we endeavour at a conception of it’ (E77).

5 Hume’s two definitions of ‘cause’

Strawson argues that the New Hume is effectively established by Hume’s claim that his two definitions of *cause* are imperfect. ‘Our thoughts and enquiries’, Hume writes, ‘are...every moment, employed about’ cause and effect, ‘yet so imperfect are the ideas which we form concerning it, that it is impossible to give any just definition of cause, except what is drawn from something extraneous and foreign to it’ (E76). But the imperfection of Hume’s definitions is quite compatible with the standard view.

According to the first definition, a cause is ‘*an object, followed by another, and where all the objects similar to the first are followed by objects similar to the second*’ (E76). According to the second, a cause is ‘*an object followed by another, and whose appearance always conveys the thought to that other*’ (E77). Both definitions are ‘drawn from circumstances foreign to the cause’ because the first defines the cause in relation to its effect (and to objects of the same type as the cause and the effect), and the second defines the cause in relation to the mind’s response to it. A ‘more perfect definition’ would dispense with all reference to extraneous items (to items, that is, other than the cause itself). It would identify ‘that circumstance in the cause, which gives it a connexion with its effect’ (ibid.). But it does not follow that the underlying circumstance will not be just another regularity. (That is, there may be brute regularity *all the way down*.) Hume goes on to say that ‘we have no idea of this connexion, nor even any distinct notion what it is we desire to know, when we endeavour at a conception of it’. The imperfection need not lie, as Strawson assumes, in the fact that ‘there is something about the cause itself which it cannot capture or represent’ (Strawson 1989:209). The problem is that the definition, however ‘exact’ (and on p. 169 of the *Treatise*, Hume claims that his definitions are exact), does not meet the standard set, for example, by the definitions of geometers.

I am not maintaining that Hume’s two definitions of ‘cause’ *show* that he is not a causal realist. Here it may be helpful to place Hume’s definitions of ‘cause’ in the context of other eighteenth-century understandings of ‘cause’ and related notions, particularly those devised under the influence of Newton. Eighteenth-century Newtonians tended to be causal realists, but they were willing to speak of

behavioural patterns as causes or forces. In his *Mathematical Elements of Natural Philosophy*, W.J. 'sGravesande writes that by gravitational 'attraction' 'we mean the...Effect... and nothing but the Effect' ('sGravesande 1747:320). 'We look upon this Effect as a Law of Nature; because it is constant, and its Cause is unknown to us, and cannot be deduced from Laws that are known, as we shall shew by and by. Now that there is such a Gravity, is to be proved from Phenomena' (1747:320). J.T.Desaguliers ('sGravesande's English translator, and demonstrator and curator of the Royal Society) takes the same view in his *Course of Experimental Philosophy*, but he is willing (as Newton was) to describe this observable effect as a force:

N.B. *When we use the Words Gravity, Gravitation, or Attraction; we have a Regard not to the Cause, but to the Effect; namely to that Force, which Bodies have when they are carried towards each other; which (at equal distance) is always proportionable to their Quantity of Matter; whether it be occasioned by the Impulsion of any subtile Fluid, or by any unknown and unmechanical Power concomitant to all Matter.*

(Desaguliers 1763:6–7)

Gravity, attractions, and repulsions, he says later, 'are not occult Qualities or supposed Virtues, but do really exist, and are by Experiments and Observations made the Objects of our Senses. These Properties produce Effects, according to settled Laws, always acting in the same Manner under the same Circumstances: And, tho' the Causes of those Causes are not known;'—note that here Desaguliers describes the observable effects as causes—'since we do not reason about these hidden Causes, it is plain that we reject occult Qualities, instead of admitting them in our Philosophy, as the *Cartesians* always object to us' (1763:21). According to 'sGravesande and Desaguliers, the words 'force' and 'cause' can be applied to observable behavioural patterns. Hume's definitions of 'cause' are, I think, deliberately *latitudinarian*. 'sGravesande and Desaguliers are probably causal realists, but they can acknowledge the existence of gravitational force without thereby *expressing* their realism. Hume provides definitions of 'cause' and related words that fit their cautious usage. The definitions call for no more than constant conjunction, or the expectation to which such conjunction gives rise.

6 The influence of positivism

Livingston describes the standard view of Hume as 'the positivist interpretation' (1984:150). Strawson explicitly traces the prevailing view to the influence of positivism (for example, 1989:179), and he insinuates that an unfamiliarity with eighteenth-century meanings is partly responsible for its grip on us. 'No doubt', Strawson writes, Hume 'has always had readers who have understood what he is saying' (1989:215). But it is hard to find such a reader in the pre-positivist atmosphere of the early and middle eighteenth century. Thomas Reid, for example, asks (of Hume) how the bulk of mankind can believe in a necessary connection between physical causes and their effects 'without an idea of necessary connection' (Reid 1872:I, 83).²³ In the *Essays on the Active Powers* (1872:II, 604), Reid takes Hume to be denying that we have *any notion at all* of a cause beyond that of constant conjunction. Later in the *Active Powers* he writes that he knows 'of no author before Mr. Hume, who maintained that we have no

other notion of a cause but that it is something prior to the effect, which has been found by experience to be constantly followed by the effect' (1872:II, 627). 0

Henry Home, Lord Kames, also took Hume to be denying that we have an idea of necessary connection.²⁴ Kames himself is, like Reid, a causal realist who believes that causal power is directly perceived or intuited. 'That all men have this very idea [of a productive cause]', Kames writes, 'is a fact not to be controverted. The only doubt is, whence it is derived; from what source it springs' (Kames 1758:218). It cannot be reason, he argues, because there is no contradiction in a thing's beginning without a cause (1758:220). Nor can it be experience, from which we learn only 'that two objects may have been constantly conjoined in time past' (1758:221). 'We are obviously so constituted', he then proposes,

as not only to perceive the one body acting, and exerting its power; but also to perceive, that the change in the other body is produced by *means* of that action or exertion of power. This change we perceive to be an *effect*; and we perceive a necessary connection betwixt the action and the effect, so as that the one must unavoidably follow the other.

(1758:223)

Hume, Kames explains, 'places the essence of necessary connection or power upon that propensity which custom produces, to pass from an object to the idea of its usual attendant' (1758:226). This is a 'violent paradox', he objects, because 'it contradicts our natural perceptions' (1758:226). 'A constant connection...doth by no means come up to our idea of power' (1758:228; see also 229). Hence Hume 'attempts rather too bold an enterprise, when he undertakes to argue mankind out of their senses' and he gives 'evidence...against himself (1758:230) in the passages seized on by Strawson. 'Here is the author's own acknowledgment', Kames writes, 'that he hath an idea of a power in one object to produce another; for he certainly will not say, that he is here making use of words without having any ideas annexed to them' (1758:231–2). (Note that Kames takes the scope of the theory of ideas to be universal.) The case of Hume shows how 'difficult it is, to stifle or to disguise natural perceptions and sentiments' (1758:232).

John Leland embraces *every* component of the standard view. He says it is Hume's opinion that 'we have no idea of that connection which unites the effect to the cause' (Leland 1757:261). This opinion is inconsistent, he thinks, with the doctrine of necessity as it is developed in *Enquiry* §8. 'If he argued consistently', Leland writes, 'he must deny that there is any such thing in nature as *Necessity*, or *Necessary Connection*; or that there is either physical or moral cause at all' (1757:262). The 'whole design of his reasoning' is to show that 'there be no relation or connection betwixt cause and effect' (1757:262). Leland objects that we can be sure there is a connection, even though we cannot 'conceive or explain precisely wherein it consists, or how it operates' (1757:263). (He later quotes Bolingbroke making this very point.) He recommends Chevalier Ramsay's view that although 'we have no adequate idea of power; we see evidently that there must be such a thing in nature'.²⁵ Like Kames, Leland cites some of the passages in which Wright and Strawson find a recognition of Causation, but these are 'in contradiction to [Hume's] own scheme' (1758:269). In Hume's view there is 'only a mere conjunction of events, but no causal influence' (1758:269). 'All events are loose, separate, and unconnected, and only follow one another, without connection' (1758:269). Richard Price also takes Hume to be denying that we

have an idea of necessary connection—in Price’s very broad sense of the word ‘idea’ (Price 1758:29).

James Oswald describes Kames as ‘alarmed’ at Hume’s ‘denying the connection between cause and effect’, and credits Kames with having said ‘all that is necessary in confutation of his opinion’ (Oswald 1768:112). ‘Mr. Hume’, Oswald writes, ‘at bottom believes in the powers of nature; the power of fire, for instance, to scorch, and of water to suffocate living creatures, so far at least as not to venture too near these dangerous elements’ (1758:97). Unlike Kames and Leland, Oswald presents no textual evidence for this. He points instead to Hume’s humanity. Had Hume appealed to himself as a ‘man of sense’, Oswald writes, he would have affirmed ‘that fire has undoubtedly this power’ to consume combustibles (1768:128–9). But Oswald, like Kames and Leland, thinks that as a philosopher, even if not as a man, Hume comes to a different conclusion.

All this shows that elements of what Strawson calls ‘the standard view’ were widespread even among Hume’s contemporaries. There is no need to pin the standard view on the influence of positivism, or to identify Ernst Mach and H.H.Price as people who (as Strawson puts it) may have ‘a lot to answer for’ (1989:9). I do not want to say that Kames and Leland, for example, are entirely correct in their reading. Both miss the fact that Hume *admits* we have an idea of necessary connection, and that it comes to more than constant conjunction (even if it arises out of our experience of such conjunction). Neither pays any attention to Hume’s official definitions of ‘cause’. And *this* leads them to see an inconsistency where there is none. But they are right to think that Hume’s theory of ideas is relevant to all of our conceptions. And it is a consequence of the theory (joined to his emphasis on our projective tendencies) that we have no conception at all of causation as it is in objects. And we in no way *refer* to causation as it exists in objects (though we do refer to the objects) when we spread our internal impression of determination onto them.

7 Hume’s response to occasionalism

Hume castigates Malebranche for robbing second causes of all force and energy. He praises Newton for his unwavering belief in their efficacy, and he condemns Newton’s British followers for succumbing to occasionalism (*E73*). Is this, as Wright and Strawson both insist, evidence of Hume’s causal realism?

Hume can, I think, oppose occasionalism without embracing causal realism. According to Hume, the occasionalists are wrong to say that natural causes are not genuine. This is not because natural causes are real powers in Strawson’s sense; it is because there is no reason for denying a thing is a cause that is not also a reason for denying God is one. This is the same criticism Chevalier Ramsay makes of occasionalism in his *Philosophical Principles of Natural Religion*, parts of which are, in other respects, strikingly similar to §7 of Hume’s *Enquiry*. Both Hume and Ramsay accuse the occasionalists of the error identified by Wright (1983:142–7): they suppose their ideas are the measure of things. Because they cannot understand how second causes operate, the occasionalists conclude that second causes are not causes at all. But this does not prove that Hume accepts the occasionalists’ standard of causation. He may be bothered (as Ramsay was) by the discrepancy between their view of second causes and their view of the first cause. This is the view he seems to adopt in the *Treatise*:

For as our idea of efficiency is deriv'd from the constant conjunction of two objects, wherever this is observ'd, the cause is efficient; and where it is not, there can never be a cause of any kind. For the same reason we must reject the distinction betwixt *cause* and *occasion*, when suppos'd to signify any thing essentially different from each other. If constant conjunction be imply'd in what we call occasion, 'tis a real cause. If not, 'tis no relation at all, and cannot give rise to any argument or reasoning.

(T171)

If occasionalism is a possible belief, it is presumably 'natural' (naturally possible), so the *simple* account of our projective propensities (as presented, for example, by Livingston and Wright) cannot possibly be correct. According to that account, the internal impression of determination is always spread onto objects. But if occasionalism is a humanly possible belief, it must be possible to *detach* force or energy from the particular objects to which we may, at first (or before philosophy), attach it. According to the early sections of Hume's *Natural History of Religion*, there is a natural tendency to attribute powers to invisible intelligent agents who are *distinct* from the bodies they inhabit. But a co-existing tendency to rest our attention on visible objects causes our conception of the animating agent to coalesce with our conception of the animated thing. Hume tells us that in the system of the 'vulgar polytheist',

fountains are inhabited by nymphs, and trees by hamadryads: Even monkeys, dogs, cats, and other animals often become sacred in his eyes, and strike him with a religious veneration. And thus, however strong men's propensity to believe invisible, intelligent power in nature, their propensity is equally strong to rest their attention on sensible, visible objects; and in order to reconcile these opposite inclinations, they are led to unite the invisible power with some visible object.

(Hume 1757: §5, 38)

Strawson (1989) treats Hume's attack on occasionalism as an affirmation that causal power exists not just 'in the universe' but in objects (for example, 1989:201). But this is incompatible with Strawson's judgment that Hume, as a sceptic, leaves room for the Berkeleyan possibility that all causation is mental (Strawson 1989:99). Berkeley (who is not mentioned in Strawson's chapter on occasionalism) is certainly among the 'modern metaphysicians' (condemned on p. 73 of the *Enquiry*) who rob natural causes of all power, and if causal powers exist *in things*, Berkeley must be mistaken.

8 The Old Hume

Does it really matter whether Hume is a causal realist? Even if he believes in real powers, he argues that we know virtually nothing about them. So the practice of science, for example, is left untouched. The debate over the New Hume may be an indication that the issue of causal realism was unimportant to Hume—a peripheral issue he had no real need to clarify.

This may be true. But the question of Hume's causal realism has large implications for the overall shape of his philosophy. On the view I have defended in this paper, the theory of ideas is not (as Craig for example contends) a holdover

from Locke, uncritically incorporated into a project basically hostile to it (Craig 1987:102, 123–4). The importance of the theory is confirmed, in my view, even by the *Enquiry*, where Hume explains that if there were no regularities, we would never even say that one event was produced by another (E82). In the absence of the regularities that trigger expectation, the relation of cause and effect would be, he argues, ‘utterly unknown’ (E82). Uniformity and inference ‘form the whole of that necessity, which we ascribe to matter’. Beyond them ‘we have no notion of any necessity or connexion’ (E82). ‘Had not objects a regular conjunction with each other’, he writes on E96, ‘we should never have entertained any notion of cause and effect’. The point of such passages is that the theory of ideas is taken with utmost seriousness: the theory is used to account for our very acquaintance with the notion of cause and effect.

Recent work has shown how decisively Hume was influenced by Berkeley (see Ayers 1984; Raynor 1990). In my view, the force of Berkeley’s example is difficult to overestimate. Berkeley provides, as Hume says in the *Enquiry*, ‘the best lessons of scepticism, which are to be found either among the ancient or modern philosophers, Bayle not excepted’ (E155). One lesson of Berkeley is that the most profound sceptical arguments rest on the criteria that govern conceptions or suppositions—the criteria supplied by the theory of ideas. Berkeley argues that the modern conception of matter ‘in a manner annihilate[s] it’ (E155). We are left with nothing but ‘a certain unknown, inexplicable *something*, as the cause of our perceptions; a notion so imperfect, that no sceptic will think it worth while to contend against it’. According to Hume this argument ‘admit[s] of no answer’. Of course Hume also believes that it ‘produce[s] no conviction’, but it is an open question whether a given piece of sceptical argumentation arrives, like Berkeley’s, at a conclusion we cannot (or cannot for long) believe. I have suggested that Hume’s sceptical argument regarding objective connection does not arrive at an unbelievable (or even unsustainable) conclusion. Because it is an argument modeled on Berkeley, it issues in a scepticism or doubt that can be described as *decisive* even though it is not *dogmatic*. Hume need not say that there is no such thing as objective connection; it is enough for him to say that we cannot *in any way* conceive of it, and that as a result we cannot believe in it. According to Hume, our only causal conceptions (of any sort) are captured either by his own definitions, or by the loose and inaccurate idea against which he argues. And we can avoid the latter conception, even when we step outside the study. Necessity *as we understand it* lies entirely in the mind. We cannot even *think* or *wonder* about it as it exists in objects. This cuts off belief in objective necessary connection (that is why it is ‘decisive’) without positively denying its existence (that is why it is not ‘dogmatic’). It is salutary, Hume writes in the *Enquiry*, ‘to be once thoroughly convinced of the force of the Pyrrhonian doubt, and of the impossibility, that anything, but the strong power of natural instinct, could free us from it’ (E162). Where natural instinct cannot free us from it, the doubt can be sustained. Hume’s two definitions of ‘cause’ are fashioned for that very purpose.

I will close by recalling two of the many passages that support the Old Hume. At *Treatise* II.iii.2. Hume writes that he defines necessity in two ways, conformable to the two definitions of cause. ‘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’ (T409). There are only two ways, he explains, in which any one can ‘differ’ from him. He may refuse to call this necessity (to which Hume replies that if the meaning is understood the word can do no harm), or he may maintain ‘there is

something else in the operations of matter' (T410). *So to believe that there is something else in the operations of matter is to disagree with him.* 'I change', he continues, 'nothing in the receiv'd systems, with regard to the will, but only with regard to material objects'. But if he holds the view Strawson and the others ascribe to him, why does he have to quarrel with received systems at all?²⁶

In §8 of the *Enquiry*, Hume writes that

however we may imagine we feel a liberty within ourselves, a spectator can commonly infer our actions from our motives and character; and even where he cannot, he concludes in general, that he might, were he perfectly acquainted with every circumstance of our situation and temper, and the most secret springs of our complexion and disposition. Now this is the very essence of necessity, according to the foregoing doctrine.

(E94n)

Here, Hume says that the mind's tendency to infer effects from causes is 'the very essence of necessity'. This passage combines this claim about the essence of necessity with a speculation about an observer who is acquainted with 'the most secret springs' of our nature. Let us suppose that these secret springs are not objective powers or connections but objects. (I have already shown that there is textual support for such a reading.) In that case, Hume is saying that the power we attribute to secret springs is nothing over and above our tendency (a hypothetical tendency in this case) to infer certain effects from objects yet unknown. To say that there are secret powers is to say that *were we acquainted with these unknown objects and their patterns of behaviour*, we could predict the future with greater reliability. Hence Hume's definitions govern our understanding of *all* causes, even ultimate causes. To ascribe power to an experienced cause is to say something about the expectations we actually have. To ascribe power to a secret cause is to say something about the expectations we would have were we to experience unseen parts or mechanisms. And to ascribe power to an ultimate cause is to say something about the expectations we would have were we to experience the smallest objects (or fundamental parts). As Hume says in the 'Abstract', 'either we have no idea at all of force and energy, and these words are *altogether insignificant*, or they can mean nothing but that determination of thought, acquir'd by habit, to pass from the cause to its usual effect' (T657; my emphasis).

Postscript: intelligibility and the theory of ideas²⁷

I suspect I am not the only interpreter of Hume haunted by the kind of question asked by Duncan Forbes as he began his book on *Hume's Philosophical Politics*. One can, he said, display great ingenuity in connecting one thing in Hume to another, but 'who', he asked, 'is displaying the ingenuity'—Hume, or the interpreter (Forbes 1975: x)? When I find something admirable in Hume, am I finding it in the text, or am I imputing it to the text because it is somehow pleasing to me? The recent debate over 'the New Hume' gives us another chance to face this kind of question. Close students of familiar texts disagree deeply and persistently about their meaning. Am I, a party to the disagreement, responding objectively to the texts, or am I favouring one view over others for reasons that are illegitimately subjective or personal? I admit that I have no satisfying way of

spelling out the difference between ‘objective’ and ‘illegitimately personal’ responses, but that does not make the question less disturbing, at least to me.

I want to begin this brief postscript by stepping back for a moment from my disagreement with Galen Strawson, John P. Wright and others, and to ask why we have said what we have said about Hume’s causal realism. I want to suggest that whoever is right, the parties to the debate over the New Hume are responding to deep tendencies in Hume that are not easy to join together. One is the repudiation of a certain kind of intelligibility as a scientific ideal. The other is a tendency to think that a conception is genuine only if it is intelligibly related—in precisely the repudiated sense—to our experience. The second tendency is better known as the theory of ideas.

The demand for intelligibility is not an easy one to articulate, and I will not attempt to give a general account of it here. But I will supply an example: John Locke’s appeal to intelligibility in his defense of corpuscularianism. Locke writes at *Essay* II.viii.8. that impulse is ‘the only way which we can conceive Bodies operate in’, and at IV.iii.16. he defends ‘the corpuscularian hypothesis’ as the theory ‘which is [rightly] thought to go farthest in an intelligible Explication’ of the causal powers of bodies. To say that a causal relation is intelligible is to say that its truth is *comprehensible* or *transparent to the mind*. This (according to Locke and the other early modern philosophers who made the appeal) gives us an *a priori* reason for preferring one causal explanation to another. Affirmations of intelligibility are fairly common not only among so-called rationalists such as Descartes, Malebranche, and Leibniz, but among so-called empiricists such as Boyle, Locke, and Berkeley. (This is a point made forcefully by John Wright: ‘The Newtonians’, he writes, ‘no less than the Cartesians, assumed that they had some *a priori* conception of what sorts of things require a non-material cause’ (1983:163)). Locke accepts corpuscularian mechanism (and the distinction between primary and secondary qualities so intimately linked with it) at least partly because he finds it more intelligible than its rivals. That Hume is suspicious of such arguments is suggested by some remarks he makes at the end of the final volume of his *History*. He writes there that Boyle

was a great partisan of the mechanical philosophy; a theory which, by discovering some of the secrets of nature, and allowing us to imagine the rest, is so agreeable to the natural vanity and curiosity of men.

(Hume 1848:6, 328)

Newton, on the other hand, while he seemed

to draw off the veil from some of the mysteries of nature...showed at the same time the imperfections of the mechanical philosophy; and thereby restored her ultimate secrets to that obscurity in which they ever did and ever will remain.

(Hume 1848:6, 329)

Newton tried but failed to account for gravitational attraction by mechanical means. The proper response to Newton’s failure (and the similar failures of others) is not, Hume thinks, to insist that some such account must succeed, but to recognize that gravity, like elasticity, cohesion of parts and communication of motion by impulse, may be a brute fact—one we can accept, but never comprehend. ‘The most perfect philosophy of the natural kind only staves off our ignorance a little longer’ (*E31*). Repudiation of the ideal of intelligibility is a main

theme of both the *Treatise* and the first *Enquiry*. It is a theme recognized by defenders of both the Old Hume and the New.

To this account of Hume's repudiation of a widely prevailing scientific ideal, I want to propose a simple but striking addition: Hume's theory of ideas makes the very appeal to intelligibility he elsewhere renounces. I cannot point to a text where Hume admits this, and as we will see in a moment, there is one passage in the *Treatise* that might be taken to deny it. I offer my addition as an hypothesis—as a way of explaining why, when it comes to the causation of conceptions or ideas, Hume demands more than constant conjunction. He demands a *resemblance* between the effect and its cause.

Hume calls for resemblance because the theory of ideas plays a legitimating—or, more accurately, a de-legitimizing—role. In order to prove that we lack a conception that others suppose we have, Hume argues that there is no impression from which the conception could be derived. In order to qualify as the effect of an impression (in order, that is, to qualify as legitimate or genuine), it is not enough for the conception to be conjoined with an impression. The conception must *resemble* an impression. My hypothesis is that Hume imposes this further requirement because he remains attached to the ideal of intelligibility, at least in this special case. He wants the impression to render the conception intelligible—to make it comprehensible that we possess a conception of the sort in question. He thinks resemblance is able to impart the intelligibility he calls for, and he sees nothing else that could.

I recognize that there are other, perhaps more parsimonious, ways of explaining why Hume demands that conceptions resemble their causes.²⁸ But I think my hypothesis is at least worth considering. It is, perhaps, undercut by the passage in the *Treatise* to which I alluded a moment ago, where Hume, considering an impression 'as the cause' and a lively idea as its 'effect', writes, as his repudiation of intelligibility suggests he should, that 'the uniting principle among our internal perceptions is as unintelligible as that among external objects' (T169). But the relation under discussion is not the causal relation between an impression of *x* and the idea of *x*, but the relation between an impression of *x* and the idea of a distinct object that is 'usually found to attend' *x*. It could be argued that Hume's observation is meant to apply to *all* relations among perceptions, including the relation between an impression of *x* and the idea of *x*. I find this unlikely, but as I have already granted, Hume's attitude towards the causation of conceptions may not be wholly in accord with his repudiation of intelligibility. The main point of the passage on p. 169 of the *Treatise*, as Hume goes on to indicate, is that we have no 'insight into the internal structure or operating principle of objects', whether they are internal or external. If this means only that we cannot explain how impressions are able to give rise to ideas, it is consistent with the belief that ideas sometimes have a special kind of cause, one that gives us insight into an idea's having the content that it does.

Defenders of the New Hume can accept my hypothesis, at least up to a point. Strawson, for example, distinguishes between the 'supposable' and the 'conceivable': only the conceivable conceptions comply with the theory of ideas. He can agree that possession of a conceivable conception is more intelligible than possession of a supposable one, precisely because the conceivable conception can be 'seen' in the experience that is its basis. It is intelligibly related to its cause. But I lay greater emphasis on Hume's 'return' to intelligibility, because I take Hume to believe that all conceptions, however thin or etiolated, must comply with the theory of ideas. Defenders of the New Hume may be able to tie Hume up into a

tighter package: he renounces intelligibility in his cognitive psychology no less than in his discussions of earlier metaphysics and contemporary science. But I continue to think that the Old Hume accords better with the texts, because Hume's commitment to intelligibility in his cognitive psychology, though it may be at odds with his official renunciation, runs deep.

A comparison between Hume and Thomas Reid may be helpful here. Reid differs from Hume, I think, in two connected ways. First, Reid makes no attempt to show how conceptions arise from experience; he simply claims that they do. For Reid, conceptions are constantly conjoined with experience, but they are not, in any way he is prepared to specify, derived from it. Reid therefore prefers the language of suggestion to the language of derivation; our idea of extension, for example, is *suggested* by our sensations, instead of being derived from them.²⁹ (Reid borrows the language of suggestion from Berkeley, who had used it to describe the relations between the ideas of sight and touch—ideas as heterogeneous, on Berkeley's view, as conceptions and sensations are on Reid's.) Second, Reid is entirely uncritical about conceptions such as extension and hardness. That we have such 'clear and distinct conceptions' is 'a fact of which we may be as certain as that we have sensations' (Reid 1872:I, 132). By his own admission, Reid takes our instinctive belief in external existence, which involves such conceptions, on 'trust, and without suspicion' (Reid 1872:I, 183).

With Reid available as a point of comparison, I can put my doubts about the New Hume very bluntly: I am doubtful about the New Hume because it makes Hume too much like Reid. Hume loses the critical edge or curiosity that I find so appealing, the same curiosity that (according to the *Prolegomena*) stimulated Kant (see Kant 1783:5–7). I hope defenders of the New Hume can sympathize with me in this, even if they cannot agree in the end with my reading. I sympathize with what I believe impresses them in Hume: a willingness to practice science without intelligible connections, a willingness that begs to be extended (and, in their view, *is* extended) to the coming-to-be of conceptions themselves.³⁰

I hope that my confession does not disqualify me as an 'objective' reader of texts. I would like, in any case, to turn now to some of the many texts I was not able to examine in 'The New Hume'. I hope to confirm and strengthen the claims that I made there.

Many defenders of the New Hume contend that Hume's account of our belief in external existence lends support to their interpretation. A full discussion of Hume's account of the belief is beyond the scope of this postscript, but I would like to discuss it briefly, paying particular attention to his purported distinction between *supposing* and *conceiving* (a distinction which, at least on Wright's view, plays a crucial role in Hume's account of the belief).

It is worth noticing at the outset that in the midst of his account, Hume reminds us that beliefs are always based on ideas. 'It has been prov'd already', he writes, 'that belief in general consists in nothing, but the vivacity of an idea' (T208). On the next page he says that ordinary people '*believe* the continu'd existence of matter' (Hume's emphasis), and that he proposes to 'account for the origin of the *belief* (my emphasis).

Hume does speak of 'the fiction of a continu'd existence' (T209). But fictions, according to Hume, are no less idea-involving than beliefs. 'The sentiment of belief, as Hume explains in the *Enquiry*, 'is *nothing* but a conception more intense and steady than what attends the mere fictions of the imagination' (E50; my emphasis). A belief, for Hume, is a kind of idea. And a fiction, for Hume, is also a

kind of idea. As he explains in the *Treatise*, the ‘narrow compass’ of our perceptions is ‘the universe of the imagination’ (T68).

There are, to my mind, five reasons for thinking that too much has been made of the small number of passages in the *Treatise*, nowhere echoed in the *Enquiry*, that suggest a distinction between *supposing* and *conceiving*.

First, *the distinction between supposing and conceiving plays absolutely no role in Hume’s official account of our belief in the continued and distinct existence of body.*

Hume’s account of our belief in body—*Treatise* I.iv.2, ‘Of scepticism with regard to the senses’ (T187–218)—is carefully framed by opening and closing references to objects supposed specifically different from perceptions. The opening reference, on T188, dismisses such objects (or, more precisely, the supposition of such objects) from consideration. There Hume asks ‘whether it be the *senses*, *reason*, or the *imagination*, that produces the opinion of a *continu’d* or of a *distinct* existence’ of body. He then writes: ‘These are the only questions, that are intelligible on the present subject. For as to the notion of external existence, when taken for something specifically different from our perceptions, we have already shewn its absurdity’ (T188).

In case there should be any doubt that Hume is dismissing objects supposed specifically different, a footnote to the words ‘specifically different from our perceptions’ refers us back to I.ii.6. (‘Of the idea of existence, and of external existence’). There, immediately after a paragraph announcing that ‘tis impossible for us so much as to conceive or form an idea of any thing specifically different from ideas and impressions’, Hume writes that

The farthest we can go towards a conception of external objects, when suppos’d *specifically* different from our perceptions, is to form a relative idea of them, without pretending to comprehend the related objects. Generally speaking we do not suppose them specifically different; but only attribute to them different relations, connexions and durations. But of this more fully hereafter.

(T68)

A footnote to the final sentence in this passage refers us forward to I.iv.2.; the point, clearly, is that in I.iv.2., where he attempts to explain what we do believe ‘generally speaking’, Hume intends to ignore what we do not generally suppose.

Throughout the thirty pages that follow T188, Hume consistently honours his dismissal of objects specifically different, concentrating, as *Treatise* I.ii.6. anticipates, on the different relations, connections, and durations that we ascribe to perceptions. The notion of objects specifically different is entirely set aside. Hume does consider a ‘double existence’ view of the philosophers, according to which our internal perceptions have external objects distinct from them, but the objects in the second set are themselves, as he repeatedly insists, perceptions.³¹ This is why, on the final page of *Treatise* I.iv.2., in the closing passage framing his official account of body, he speaks of philosophers as those who have ‘invent[ed] a new set of perceptions’ (T218). He adds: ‘I say, a new set of perceptions: For we may well suppose in general, but ’tis impossible for us distinctly to conceive, objects to be in their nature any thing but exactly the same with perceptions.’

This is an indisputable indication that throughout I.iv.2., where he gives his official account of belief in body, *Hume makes no use of the notion of objects specifically different.* This notion is irrelevant to what Hume has to say in I.iv.2., because his goal there is to *explain* our belief in continued and distinct existence.

To explain it, he needs to rely on the theory of ideas and his theory of belief (as he repeatedly indicates). The notion of objects as specifically different is irrelevant because we can have no idea of objects specifically different from perceptions, and therefore no belief in them.

My second point follows from the first: according to Hume, *our natural belief in body does not rest on our alleged ability to suppose objects specifically different from our perceptions*. As Hume observes in I.ii.6., ‘generally speaking’ we do not suppose that there are objects specifically different from perceptions. This indicates that the natural belief in body does not depend essentially on the supposition. The vulgar, for example, who do not so much as approach the supposition, believe wholeheartedly in body. Philosophers who accept the double existence view and do so clear-headedly—recognizing that the objects they invent are nothing but perceptions—are no less free of the supposition, but they too believe in body. But what, defenders of the New Hume will ask, about philosophers who *do* suppose that there are objects specifically different? My answer is that they may ‘take’ (my word) the external objects they invent to be specifically different from perceptions, but Hume gives every indication that they must nonetheless *conceive* of these objects as perceptions, and that they owe their belief in body to this conception, rather than to their supposition. *Treatise* I.iv.2. contains not a shred of evidence that the supposition of objects specifically different plays any role in anyone’s belief in, or commitment to, body. The texts give us no reason to think that the supposition has *anything* to do with the belief in the continued and distinct existence of body, and every reason to expect the opposite—every reason to expect, that is, that even in a philosopher who makes the supposition, the *belief* in the continued and distinct existence of body rests, as it does for others, on the mechanisms described in I.iv.2. When it comes to explaining belief in body, in other words, the supposition seems to be idle. Even philosophers who suppose that there are objects specifically different from perceptions owe their commitment to body to the new set of perceptions of which they, like the rest of us, conceive, despite (or alongside of) their supposition.

Third, *the supposition of objects specifically different is not a form of realism, as realism is usually understood*. I take it that if the *x* that is specifically different from our perceptions is, as Hume insists (and as Strawson and Wright seem to admit), inconceivable, then we have no way of conceiving (and therefore no way of knowing) that *x* is a physical object as opposed to a spirit. (Descartes’s evil genius is as much an ‘object specifically different’ as a physical object, and Berkeley’s God is as much an ‘object specifically different’ as a physical object.) It follows that the supposition of an object specifically different is no less compatible with immaterialism than it is with realism, and from this it seems to follow that it is not a form of realism at all. As Hume asks in §12 of the *Enquiry*,

By what argument can it be proved, that the perceptions of the mind must be caused by external objects, entirely different from them, though resembling them (if that be possible) and could not arise either from the energy of the mind itself, or from the suggestion of some invisible and unknown spirit, or from some other cause still more unknown to us?

(E152–3)

Fourth, *Hume may well think the notion of an object specifically different is completely empty*, and that ‘supposing’ objects specifically different from perceptions is nothing more than being disposed to utter the words, ‘objects are

specifically different from perceptions'. Hume does, after all, dismiss the notion as absurd. And the notion looks very much like the one we are left with at the close of the first part of *Enquiry* §12, where defenders of the modern philosophy, in bereaving matter of primary and secondary qualities, 'in a manner annihilate it, and leave only a certain unknown, inexplicable *something*, as the cause of our perceptions; a notion so imperfect, that no sceptic will think it worth while to contend against it' (E155). On T241, Hume says that 'we are oblig'd either to conceive an external object merely as a relation without a relative, or to make it the very same with a perception or impression'. The notion of a 'relation without a relative' may well be an empty one, on Hume's view. According to his official account of relations (T14), any relation involves resemblance. This may be an indication that anyone who claims to have a notion of an object specifically different is trying to have things both ways (as the passage from *Enquiry* §12, cited above, itself suggests): the object is supposed to be specifically different, but if it is taken to stand in *any* relation to perception (if it is taken to be a cause, for example), it must be supposed to resemble perceptions.

Finally, *Hume never applies the distinction to the notion of necessary connection*. Nor does he ever suggest that the belief in objective necessary connection involves an object specifically different from perceptions.

I turn now to some texts having to do directly with causation. In *The Sceptical Realism of David Hume* (1983), Wright discusses some interesting passages from the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, in which Philo (in part vi, and again in ix) and Cleanthes (in part ix) consider the possibility that order or existence may be inherent in the very nature of a being.

Although he is elsewhere more tentative,³² Wright says at one point that 'in Part VI of the *Dialogues* Philo states his own preference for a system "which ascribes an eternal, inherent principle of order to the world",' and that he 'clearly states [in part vi] his conviction concerning the existence of an inherent necessary principle in nature of which "we can have no idea"' (Wright 1983:149). Wright quotes the following speech:

And were the inmost essence of things laid open to us, we should then discover a scene, of which, at present, we can have no idea. Instead of admiring the order of natural beings, we should clearly see, that it was absolutely impossible for them, in the smallest article, ever to admit of any other disposition.

(Hume 1993:76–7)

Standing alone, this would be a ringing endorsement, but there are important qualifications surrounding it. A few lines above Philo had proclaimed that 'were I obliged to defend any particular system of this nature (which I never willingly should do), I esteem none more plausible than that which ascribes an eternal, inherent principle of order to the world' (1779:174). Were he obliged, which he is not, he would, but not willingly, assert that no particular system is more plausible than the one he mentions (which does not mean that they are not all tied for last). In part viii, where the parties are still discussing the kind of systems or hypotheses at issue in part vi, Philo says that 'a *total* suspense of judgment is *here* our only reasonable resource' (1779:186–7).³³ Philo then commends the sceptic, who has 'no fixed station or abiding city, which he is ever, on any occasion, obliged to defend' (1779:187). Note the reappearance of the words 'obliged to defend': they recall the passage quoted by Wright from part vi. This suggests that in the earlier

passage, Philo is not defending anything, or stating a preference or conviction. He is causing trouble for Cleanthes, and he is doing it with enthusiasm—enthusiasm that might, were it not for the context, be a sign of commitment.³⁴

I will return to Philo in just a moment, after looking at Wright's reading of the following speech from part ix, where Cleanthes considers an objection to his argument that there is no being whose existence is demonstrable.

It is pretended that the Deity is a necessarily existent Being: and this necessity of his existence is attempted to be explained by asserting, that, if we knew his whole essence or nature, we should perceive it to be as impossible for him not to exist as for twice two not to be four. But it is evident, that this can never happen, while our faculties remain the same as at present. It will still be possible for us, at any time, to conceive the non-existence of what we formerly conceived to exist; nor can the mind ever lie under a necessity of supposing any object to remain always in being; in the same manner as we lie under a necessity of always conceiving twice two to be four. The words, therefore, *necessary existence*, have no meaning; or, which is the same thing, none that is consistent.

(1779:189–90)

In quoting this passage Wright emphasizes the claim that *while our faculties remain the same*, we can always conceive God to be non-existent. 'It is', he writes, 'important to note that this latter claim of Cleanthes—that we lack knowledge of necessary existence (in this case, of God)—is grounded in a claim about the limitations of our human faculties' (Wright 1983:148). When Cleanthes goes on to ask why the material world may not be 'the necessarily existent being, according to this pretended explication of necessity' (Hume 1779:190), Wright suggests that he is introducing—even if he does not embrace—a 'notion of the unknown necessity which is inherent in nature' akin to the one Wright takes to be endorsed by Philo in part vi (Wright 1983:149).

I think all this is very doubtful. Cleanthes's point in the quoted passage is not that we would know the truth of what is being proposed if our faculties were enhanced, but that we cannot understand what is being proposed because our faculties are what they are. To say, as Cleanthes does, that we cannot perceive the impossibility of God's existence while our faculties remain the same, is precisely *not* to say that we would perceive it were they to change. Cleanthes says it is *pretended* that the Deity is a necessarily existent being, and that others *attempt* to explain how this could be so. He concludes that the words *necessary existence* are without meaning, or without a meaning that is consistent.

What Cleanthes needs to do in the passage at issue is to protect his argument that there is no being whose existence is demonstrable. According to the objection, we would be able to demonstrate God's existence if our faculties were enhanced. Cleanthes's reply is that this is irrelevant: 'it will *still* be possible *for us*, at any time', he says, 'to conceive the non-existence of what we formerly conceived to exist; nor can the mind [by which I take it he means *our* mind] ever lie under a necessity of supposing any object to remain always in being; in the same manner as we lie under a necessity of always conceiving twice two to be four'. In effect, the objection proposes that '*x* is necessarily *F*' means only that to some mind or other, 'it is not the case that *x* is *F*' is a contradiction. But Cleanthes seems to think that '*x* is necessarily *F*' means that 'it is not the case that *x* is *F*' is not a contradiction *for us*. Since 'it is not the case that *x* is *F*' can never be a

contradiction for us so long as *F* is *existence* (as Cleanthes's argument purports to show), the proposal either fails to provide *necessarily existent* with a meaning, or provides it with a meaning that is different from the one it has.

Cleanthes does go on to say that the material universe may be the necessarily existent being, but this seems to me to be *ad hominem* (against Demea), as Philo's similar remarks in part vi were *ad hominem* against Cleanthes himself. Philo's subsequent elaboration of Cleanthes's suggestion—his analogy between the economy of the universe and the relations disclosed by the skilful algebraist—strikes me as more of the same. Philo concludes, after all, by observing how 'dangerous is it to introduce this idea of necessity into the present question', and how naturally the idea affords 'an inference directly opposite to the religious hypothesis' (Hume 1779:191).

I turn now to a final bit of textual evidence recently brought to bear on the debate by Michael Ayers. Ayers suggests that Hume's argument against voluntarism—the thesis that 'regularities should be ascribed directly to the will of God'—supports the causal realist reading of Hume.³⁵ Hume's argument, he claims, 'presupposes an explicit formal notion of what it would be like to understand a causal sequence' (Ayers 1993:63; 1996:106). Ayers quotes from *Treatise* I.iii.14. For a causal sequence to be intelligible, Hume explains, we:

must distinctly and particularly conceive the connexion betwixt the cause and effect, and be able to pronounce, from a simple view of the one, that it must be follow'd or preceded by the other. This is the true manner of conceiving a particular power in a particular body...

(T161)

Ayers writes there is 'no obvious sign that Hume's account of this notion is ironical or hostile'. Hume then argues that 'the human mind cannot form such an idea of two objects' (T161), and that volition is (as Ayers puts it) no exception to the rule:

if by consciousness we perceived any power or energy in the will, we must know this power; we must know its connexion with the effect; we must know the secret union of soul and body, and the nature of both these substances.

(E65)

Ayers claims that 'it is difficult to see how this argument could have had force for Hume, if he in fact rejected the ideal of intelligibility which is stated as its premiss' (Ayers 1993:64; 1996:107).

I find Ayers's claim very puzzling, because Hume's argument here is surely *ad hominem*. He is concerned with an occasionalist line of reasoning that runs as follows:

- (i) An effect is rendered intelligible if and only if we are shown a cause, a simple view of which entitles us to pronounce that the effect must follow. (This is what Ayers calls 'the ideal of intelligibility'.)
- (ii) No physical cause can satisfy this condition.
- (iii) Hence, no effect can be rendered intelligible by a physical cause.

Hume's point is that it would be a mistake to infer from (iii) that

(iv) every effect must have a cause in the will,

the reason being that causes in the will *also* fail to satisfy the condition laid down in (i). Another way of putting Hume's point is to say that occasionalists illegitimately assume the truth of:

(v) every effect can be rendered intelligible.

(iv) follows from (v) when (v) is joined to (iii) (assuming that every cause is either physical or volitional). Hume is certainly 'hostile' to (v)—there is, he thinks, no effect of which (v) is true—but I do not see why hostility to (v)—or a conviction that intelligibility is an ideal without application—deprives the argument of force.

Perhaps Ayers thinks otherwise because he is impressed by the word 'true' as it appears in the passage he quotes from the *Treatise*. But Hume is not using the word 'true' to say that the powers at issue are really there in objects. He is using it to say that the conception of power at work in the argument has been adjusted to conform to his account of abstract thinking. The paragraph containing the passage begins with the observation that 'general or abstract ideas are nothing but individual ones taken in a certain light' (T161). It follows, Hume suggests, that if we have any idea of power in general, it must be the idea of a 'particular species' of power, lodged in a 'particular being' with a 'particular effect'. He then goes on to speak of 'the true manner of conceiving a *particular* power in a *particular* body' (my emphasis). It is 'true' simply because it is faithful to Hume's Berkeleyan account of general thinking, and to the priority of the particular to the general that it embodies.

If I were more sympathetic with the New Hume, I would try to show that *some* conception of objective necessary connection—some vague sense of such a connection—is compatible with the theory of ideas. This is in accord with Ayers's suggestion that Hume is not hostile to (or ironic about) the notion of an intelligible connection at work in his refutation of voluntarism. Ayers's point, perhaps, is that we can generate *some* notion of an objective necessary connection between *x* and *y* simply by supposing that if we knew (or knew more about) the natures of *x* and *y*, we would know with certainty that *x* is to be followed by *y*, or (more informatively perhaps) see that *y*'s failing to follow is a contradiction. This is, roughly, the same way of generating the notion that Wright attributes to Philo and Cleanthes. It cannot be defeated by the arguments I used against Strawson's cruder relative idea of Causation (on pp. 61–3 above). But I want to make three cautionary observations about the Wright/Ayers proposal. First, I remain unconvinced that there is a textual basis for their view that Hume accepts the notion as in some way meaningful. Second, even if he does accept it as in some way meaningful, the New Hume is not thereby established (it is not thereby established that in Hume's view the notion actually refers, much less that a commitment to its referent is an inescapable feature of human life), even though one objection to the New Hume—an important objection, admittedly—will have been removed. Third, the claim that the notion is in some way meaningful raises questions—potential challenges to the conception—that Hume or any Humean would have to take very seriously. Any Humean would have to be particularly concerned about the presence of modal vocabulary in the passages cited by Wright and Ayers. Philo (in the passage brought forward by Wright) speaks of a change in the order of nature as 'absolutely impossible'; Hume (in the passage discussed by

Ayers) speaks of a hypothetical ability to pronounce that one event ‘*must* be follow’d or preceded’ by another (my emphasis). Are these invitations to apply Hume’s account of the idea of necessary connection? If so, it is doubtful that the suppositions in question can (on Hume’s view) supply a notion of necessary connection as it exists in things themselves.

I would like to close with a conciliatory observation. In the end, I think, being right about interpretive questions in the history of philosophy is not all that important. The really important thing is the quality of the ‘state of discussion’, something in which we all collaborate. No one can deny that the state of discussion in Hume studies is far better than it was, say, thirty years ago. It is, to list just a few of its improvements, more sensitive to Hume’s intellectual context, more respectful of textual detail, and more richly occupied with interpretive possibilities, which tend to be more fully defended by argument, and more appropriately concerned to show how Hume’s views hang together (though what it means for them to hang together is understood in many different ways).

That, in any case, is the view I have when I am outside my study, dining, perhaps, with fellow interpreters of Hume. But when I am back in my study, being right can begin to seem pretty important. What others write can seem cold, strained and ridiculous (as I am sure what I write seems to them), no matter how heartily I approve, when I am outside my study, of the ‘state of discussion’ to which their writings contribute. Happily, there is a kind of pre-established harmony between our desire to get Hume right (or to prove others wrong) and the creation of something whose worth does not in the end depend, I really do believe, on any one of us being right at all.

Notes

- 1 This paper originally appeared in 1991 in *The Philosophical Review* 100 (October): 541–79. Its title is a bit misleading, because the New Hume is many-sided, and the present paper is confined to recent arguments that Hume is a causal realist. I assess recent arguments that Hume is not an inductive sceptic in ‘Hume’s Inductive Skepticism’ (1999); I comment on an argument that he is a moral realist in ‘Hutcheson’s Alleged Realism’ (1985). A shorter version of the present paper was delivered to the Department of Philosophy at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst in September 1990. I am grateful to John Carriero, Paul Hoffman, and my colleagues at Wellesley, particularly Alison McIntyre, for their comments on an earlier draft.
- 2 This distinction was, of course, quite familiar to Hume and his contemporaries. Shaftesbury’s Theocles, for example, speaks of two kinds of atheist: one ‘who *absolutely denies*’ the true religion, and another ‘who *only doubts*’ it (The Moralists’, in Shaftesbury 1711:260).
- 3 For Broughton’s defense of the New Hume, see Broughton (1987).
- 4 Now it is open for Strawson to respond that when that more accurate explication is finally provided, it turns out to involve Causation. But Strawson does not say this. He admits that it does not involve Causation, but that is because it takes place, he thinks, wholly within the theory of ideas. It is an account of ‘all that we can *positively-contentfully* mean when we talk about causation in the objects’ (1989:206). It tells us nothing about what we can ‘really refer to when we talk about causation’ (1989:206). But in order to believe *this*, we need to believe that Hume does not expect the theory of ideas to account for what Strawson calls reference. And defenders of the New Hume give no evidence for this.
- 5 The evidence for this is ample. At the beginning of *Enquiry* §7, Hume declares that his aim is to ‘fix, if possible, the precise meaning’ of terms such as *power*, *force*, *energy* and *necessary connexion* (E62). In a footnote on E77, he writes that ‘according to these explications and definitions’, which are *explicitly* applied only in the case of ‘cause’, ‘the idea of *power* is relative as much as that of *cause*’. *Cause* and *power* are not exactly synonyms, however. ‘When we know a power’, Hume writes, ‘we know that very circumstance in the cause, by which it is enabled to produce the effect’. ‘These are supposed’, he adds, ‘to be synonymous’ (E67–8). A power, then, is *that circumstance in a cause, by which it is able to produce an effect*. (Unpacking the ‘by which’

- locution will take us back to Hume's two definitions of *cause*, as I explain in the following section.) The same definition of *power* is put forward in a footnote to part ii of *Enquiry* §7: the power of a cause or object, Hume there explains, is 'the *unknown* circumstance of an object, by which the degree or quantity of its effect is fixed and determined' (E77n). According to this definition, a power may simply be (as I argue below) an unseen part or mechanism.
- 6 For example, Kemp Smith 1941:398; Wright 1983:132; Costa 1989:180; Broughton 1987:227, 236; Craig 1987:103.
 - 7 It is not always clear whether a given commentator is recommending that we narrow the theory's scope or blunt its force. As it stands, the theory can *assure* us that terms are unintelligible only if it applies to *every* term that purports to convey an intelligible conception. If it is not universal—if some terms fall outside its scope—it would be rash to conclude that a term is meaningless merely because it fails to satisfy the theory. The suspect term may, after all, be one of those outside the theory's scope. If defenders of the New Hume believe that the theory of ideas applies only to some subset of conceptions, they are free to regard it as a criterion of intelligibility *for such conceptions*. But they must then have a way (independent of the deliverances of the theory) to determine whether a given conception belongs in the chosen subset.
 - 8 T68, quoted by Strawson (1989:50). A footnote to the passage directs us to 'Part IV. sect. 2'. There Hume says that 'we have already shewn [the] absurdity' of a notion of external existence taken for something specifically different from our perceptions (T188, referring back to I.ii.6), but according to Strawson 1989:52, 'absurdity' is another word that does not mean for Hume what it means for us.
 - 9 Costa draws the same distinction between supposing and conceiving (1989:181).
 - 10 Craig (1987:123–6) cites several other passages from the same vicinity, but they make no appreciable change. The passages he quotes from an earlier point in Book I—the discussion 'Of the antient philosophy' in section iii—do not in fact support the Craig-Strawson reading of the theory of ideas. On T222, Hume dismisses occult qualities as 'incomprehensible' fictions. On T223, he explains how philosophers differ from ordinary people who 'imagine they perceive a connexion betwixt such objects as they have constantly found united together'. The philosophers rightly conclude 'that there is no known connexion among objects'. But 'instead of drawing a just inference from this observation, and concluding, that we have no idea of power or agency, separate from the mind, and belonging to causes; I say, instead of drawing this conclusion, they frequently search for the qualities, in which this agency consists'. Hume wants this search to be broken off. Craig and Strawson suggest that Hume calls an end to the search because the qualities in question are *unknowable*, but not therefore unintelligible (in our sense). But it is noteworthy that Hume takes the inquisitiveness of the philosophers to be *inconsistent* with what he calls the just conclusion. He goes on to compare the philosophers to Sisyphus and Tantalus, who 'seek with eagerness, what for ever flies us; and seek for it in a place, where *'tis impossible it can ever exist'* (T233; my emphasis). Earlier on the same page, Hume describes that place as matter 'separate from mind'.
 - 11 The passages I examine here are also neglected by Simon Blackburn, whose assessment of the textual evidence for the New Hume is otherwise very close to my own. See Blackburn (1990) and Chapter 6 in this volume.
 - 12 See T13, where Hume classifies relations as complex ideas.
 - 13 This is the interpretation defended by Daniel Flage (1981). Livingston concurs with Flage's interpretation; see Livingston (1984:81, 347). Strawson, however, makes no reference to it.
 - 14 Strawson (1989) says repeatedly (on pp. 2–3, for example) that it never occurs to Hume to question the existence of Causation. But he must also say that it never occurs to Hume to explain our ability to refer to Causation. This is a curious confinement of Hume's scientific ambitions.
 - 15 Note A first appeared in the third edition, published in 1787. As Raphael explains in his 'Editor's Introduction' (p. xi), the note was occasioned by Thomas Reid's 1785 *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, to which the note in fact refers. In chapter iii of Essay IV, Reid argues against the principle that whatever is conceivable is possible. (It is noteworthy that according to Reid, no one makes more use of this false principle than Hume does.) 'Here we are to examine', Reid writes, 'the meaning of the phrases of *supposing* and *conceiving* a proposition to be true. I can certainly suppose it to be true [that *any two sides of a triangle are together equal to the third*], because I can draw consequences from it which I find to be impossible, as well as the proposition itself (Reid 1872:I, 378).
 - 16 My emphasis. Hume also invokes this relaxed sense of the word 'suppose' in his remarks on mathematics; see for example T29.
 - 17 Kemp Smith 1941:397; Wright 1983:150–5; Livingston 1984:155, 161; Costa (at least by implication) 1989:181–2.

- 18 Costa (1989:175). ‘There is little controversy’, Costa writes on the same page, ‘about whether Hume thinks that we can rationally justify attributing causal powers to objects—he clearly thinks we cannot’. But some defenders of the New Hume may disagree. Livingston writes that the belief in unobservable powers is ‘not certified by sense or reason’ (1984:153), but he may believe there can be certification of another kind. Such certification might, as Wright suggests, ‘justify’ a belief by tracing it to the more established principles of the imagination (1983:176; see also 154).
- 19 For a similar view see Baier (1991:98), who distinguishes between ‘an irresistible human tendency’ to infer a known effect from its cause, and ‘a (resistible) tendency’ to spread the idea of causal determination onto objects.
- 20 On p. 267 of the *Treatise* Hume seems to identify the permanent, irresistible and universal principles with the understanding, and he goes on to suggest that even these core principles are too little to support life (T268). This suggests that a principle can be necessary even if it cannot be classified as permanent, irresistible and universal, but it provides no evidence that any *particular* principle is necessary for life.
- 21 Some defenders of the New Hume can say that they allow for this: Hume rules out any further *idea* of causation, but he does not rule out a further non-idea. But what is it about the further idea that makes it objectionable? It cannot be its application to the object, because the non-idea is applied to the object as well. Nor can it be its suggestion that there are objective necessities, because this suggestion (according to Strawson and Craig) is conveyed by the non-idea as well. If there is nothing more to the idea than this, Hume should (on Strawson’s view) be quite happy with it. ‘We have an idea of necessary connection as it exists in objects’, Hume should say. ‘But it is exceedingly uncertain and confused.’ Strawson does not want Hume to say this; he does not want Hume to say that we have an idea—no matter how uncertain or confused—of causation as it exists in objects. Hume’s view seems to be that we have an idea that *purports* to be of causation as it exists in objects, though it is not. And since his theory of ideas has the scope I claim for it above, to say that the idea is not what it purports to be is to say that we have no conception of causation as it exists in objects—no conception at all—even though we may ‘suppose’ (in *Price*’s sense) that we do.
- 22 Strawson (1989:224) recognizes this possibility (though not in connection with Hume), where he considers the ‘agnostic position’ that ‘when one is faced with (universe-sized) regularity...it is in no way intrinsically more reasonable to suppose that there is a reason in the nature of things for the regularity than it is to suppose that there is no reason’ for it. He thinks there is no conclusive argument against this, but he argues that if one *has* to choose, ‘it would surely be reasonable’ to opt for the former. But the agnostic’s point, as Strawson recognizes, is that we need not choose. His only reply to this is that ‘we are talking about reality, no less, and...either there is, in fact, or there isn’t, in fact, something about the nature of reality in virtue of which it is (cannot but be) regular’. But from the fact that the world itself must be one way or the other it does not follow that we have to decide either way. (Compare: Either there is in fact a God or there is not.)
- 23 Reid goes on to ask ‘how could a man who denies that we have any idea of necessary connection, defy any one to define a cause without comprehending necessary connection?’
- 24 Wright takes note of this (1983:2–3), and he also points out that Kames quotes passages in which Hume—inconsistently, in Kames’s view—seems to admit there are necessary connections.
- 25 The passage, quoted by Leland on p. 264, appears in Andrew Michael Ramsay (1748:109). Ramsay repeats the point on p. 266.
- 26 Strawson (1989) does admit that the *Treatise* provides less compelling evidence of causal realism than the *Enquiry*; see, for example, p. 153.
- 27 I am grateful to Justin Broackes, Ken Richman, David Owen, Gideon Yaffe and Alison McIntyre for their comments on earlier drafts of this postscript.
- 28 For example, Justin Broackes has suggested in correspondence that the resemblance between ideas and impressions is, for Hume, a straightforward empirical finding.
- 29 See for example *An Inquiry into the Human Mind*, chapter V, section v, (Reid 1872:I, 123). Reid’s relationship to empiricism is a large and complicated issue. It may be most accurate to say that for Reid, conceptions such as extension and hardness are merely *triggered* by experience, since they are, at least according to the *Inquiry*, ‘original’ rather than ‘acquired’ (Reid 1872:I, 184).
- 30 I suspect that the conflict I attribute to Hume is endemic to classical empiricism. From the viewpoint of someone like Reid, empiricists who follow Locke, Berkeley, and Hume make the mistake of thinking that there must be ‘discoverable connexions’ between our conceptions and our sensations. They believe that if we cannot see how experience gives rise to a conception, we cannot be sure (no matter how it may seem from the inside) that we actually have it. We are then faced with a conflict that is familiar elsewhere in philosophy: a conflict between ‘rationalist’ philosophers who tell us that we have a certain conception, and ‘empiricist’ philosophers who tell

us we do not, because according to their favoured theory of conception-acquisition, we cannot. I am suggesting that in such a conflict, the demand for intelligibility (and a claim to the effect that something satisfies it) may be made by the second or empiricist side, no matter how 'rationalist' the demand may seem on the surface.

- 31 See for example T216, where Hume writes that 'we suppose external objects to resemble internal impressions'. Because, on Hume's view, anything resembling a perception *is* a perception, this entails that the external objects spoken of must *be* perceptions, as opposed to objects specifically different. As Hume reminds us of later on the same page, 'we never can conceive any thing but perceptions, and therefore must make every thing resemble them'. So great is our commitment to the resemblance of internal and external objects, in fact, that we 'take it for granted, that every particular object resembles that perception, which it causes.'
- 32 See for example Wright (1983:147).
- 33 I emphasize the words 'total' and 'here' to make it clear that the suspense of judgment recommended here—a *total* suspense of judgment on a topic that goes beyond common life—is consistent with the mitigated skepticism of *Enquiry* §12.
- 34 I think my remarks about part vi of the *Dialogues* are enough to dispose of Wright's interpretation, but in fact they concede far too much. The paragraph from which Wright quotes is, in large part, an attempt to show that revolutions or convulsions are compatible with order. When Philo says that the system he describes is no less plausible than any other, he seems to be saying not that it is no less plausible than any other, *period*, but that it is no less plausible than any other *of the same kind*—the kind being those systems that take order to be 'inseparable from matter'. As he says, 'were I obliged to defend any particular system *of this nature* (which I never willingly should do), I esteem none more plausible than that which ascribes an eternal, inherent principle of order to the world; *though attended with great and continual revolutions and alterations*' (my emphasis; an earlier state of the manuscript has 'in matter' where the final version has 'to the world'). Even if Philo intends his remark as the absolute endorsement Wright takes it to be, it is an endorsement he cancels almost as soon as he voices it. 'How could things have been as they are', he goes on to ask, 'were there not an original, inherent principle of order *somewhere*, in thought *or* in matter' (my emphasis again)? In the next breath he explains that 'it is very indifferent to which of these we give the preference'—a clear refusal to stand behind the materialist causal realism Wright ascribes to him. Finally, putting all my other reservations to one side, it seems reckless to take a *Philonian* endorsement of something *sounding* like causal realism to be a *Humean* endorsement of a *genuine* causal realism—one intended, by Hume, to resist reduction along the lines suggested in both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*.
- 35 Ayers (1993:41–65; 1996:83–108). The quoted statement of voluntarism appears on 1993:41 (1996:83). Although he takes himself to be supporting Wright and Strawson, Ayers's view as he sometimes states it seems to me to be consistent with the Old Hume. He writes for example that according to Hume, the 'naturally inescapable world of the imagination is sufficiently related to the unknowable things as they are in themselves for all our practical purposes' (1993:62/1996:105). This claim may presuppose externally existing objects, but it does not presuppose objective necessary connections.

5 Hume's causal realism

Recovering a traditional interpretation

John P. Wright

There is an odd irony in Ken Winkler's attack on the defenders of Hume's causal realism in his article 'The New Hume'.¹ Winkler begins by accusing those who treat Hume as a causal realist of doing the opposite of what should be done by historians of philosophy, namely 'narrowing our view of what he *should* have said' rather than broadening our view of what he 'could have meant by what [he] said' (p. 52 above). In the middle of the article, after noting that Galen Strawson points out that a non-committal sceptic like Hume would not dogmatically reduce objective causation to constant conjunction, he chastises Strawson for failing to recognize that Hume also would not dogmatically affirm the existence of real powers in objects.² So far, it appears that Winkler himself is claiming that Hume allowed both ontological possibilities. However, at the end of the article Winkler asserts that according to Hume, no one can believe in objective necessity because 'we cannot *in any way* conceive it' (p. 73 above). Winkler writes that 'we can't even *think* or *wonder* about it as it exists in objects'. Thus, Winkler himself ends up claiming that Hume closes off the possibility of any kind of belief or even speculation about objective causal powers.

This is, it seems to me, no small matter. On the surface, it is clear not only that Hume thinks that people can believe that there are causal powers in objects but generally do believe it. Writing in the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* of 'the more common and familiar operations of nature—such as the descent of heavy bodies, the growth of plants, the generation of animals, or the nourishment of bodies by food', Hume says that 'the generality of mankind...suppose that, in all these cases, they perceive the very force or energy of the cause, by which it is connected with its effect, and is for ever infallible in its operation' (E69). The supposition referred to here shows that before philosophy enters the picture we are all direct realists about causal power. Moreover, it appears that we cannot help ascribing power to objects. Hume notes that whenever we experience a regular succession of resembling objects 'we suppose that there is some connexion between them; some power in the one, by which it infallibly produces the other, and operates with the greatest certainty and strongest necessity' (E75). Finally, he argues that the difference between ordinary persons and scientists is that the former are willing to ascribe chance or 'an uncertainty in the causes' when they experience irregularity, whereas the latter hold that 'the connexion between all causes and effects is equally necessary, and that its seeming uncertainty in some instances proceeds from the secret opposition of contrary causes' (E86–7; T132–3). They ascribe a 'necessity' to nature even in those cases in which it appears entirely irregular. Thus they conclude that there are 'many secret powers...which are altogether beyond our comprehension'.

There is, therefore, good textual evidence to show not only that the ordinary person ascribes causal power or (what for Hume is the same thing) necessary connection to those objects which they have experienced as constantly conjoined, but that, scientists postulate such necessity even when they discover that there is an exception to the uniformity which they have previously observed. Hume treats this scientific belief in universal causal necessity as the source not only of new discoveries in nature, but also of the belief that there are powers in nature to which we shall never have any access.

1 Supposing v. conceiving

According to Winkler, Hume's own sceptical arguments undermine all belief in objective causal power because they show it is impossible to conceive of it. He takes issue with the views of a number of defenders of causal realism who have argued that Hume distinguishes what we can *suppose* from what we can *conceive* (pp. 59–64 above). Winkler and his opponents both acknowledge that we cannot form an *idea* of objective necessary connection; but they claim that Hume allows suppositions which are not based on ideas. This latter view is wrong, according to Winkler, for in attempting to explain our supposition that there is necessary connection in objects Hume appeals to the theory of ideas: he finds the impression from which our idea of necessary connection is formed. Since this is only a subjective impression which arises from our observation of constant conjunction, we cannot really form any supposition of objective power. Indeed, writes Winkler, 'every conception or supposition (for Hume) must satisfy the theory of ideas' (p. 64 above).

It seems to me that Winkler seriously underestimates the importance in Hume's philosophy of the claim that our fundamental beliefs are based on inconceivable suppositions formed by the imagination. For example, Winkler accepts the view of most Hume scholars that Hume thinks we inevitably believe in the existence of external objects (p. 64–5 above). But Winkler seems not to have considered the implications of this view for his claim that Hume thinks that the theory of ideas is universal in scope. Hume begins his discussion of our belief in external existence by noting that we 'suppose' that the objects of our senses 'have an existence DISTINCT from the mind and perception' (T188). Yet he is quite clear that we have no idea of their independent existence. If our senses were to 'suggest any idea of distinct existences', writes Hume, it would do so 'by a kind of fallacy and illusion' (T189). There is no impression, either external or internal, from which the idea of the distinct existence of the objects of our senses can be derived. Indeed, Hume attributes the belief in the unperceived and independent existence of the objects of our senses not to an impression, but to a 'fiction' of the imagination (T209). Hume uses the term 'fiction' to label a process by which the imagination employs an idea to represent an object or impression other than that 'from which [it is] derived' (T37). According to Hume, the imagination superimposes the idea derived from observing an unchanging object continuously over time and applies it to the resembling impressions we have when we observe the same object discontinuously (T199–210). The imagination fills in the gap, and we suppose that the immediate objects of our senses continue to exist during the interval when they are unperceived. This is Hume's central explanation for the fact that we believe that objects exist independently of the mind, and he stresses that even the corrected representative view of philosophers is dependent on it (T211–

2). He is very clear that the belief in external existence cannot be merely derived from an impression-derived idea.

It is important to realize that there is an ambiguity in Winkler's claim that every conception we have must be in accord with the theory of ideas. In a trivial sense this is true, for even Hume's fictions of the imagination are composed of ideas which are derived from impressions. However, the theory of ideas, going back to Descartes, requires that our beliefs about what really exists be based on the analysis of our clear and distinct ideas, and this is exactly what is questioned in Hume's philosophy. Hume gives a rule for identifying our clear and distinct ideas, namely that they must be derived from our impressions; but this rule is employed in a sceptical way in his philosophy. It serves to show that we cannot base our substantial beliefs on comparison of such ideas. In ascribing ontological beliefs such as the belief in the external world to a fiction and causal necessity to 'an illusion of the imagination' (T267), Hume must be seen as breaking with the theory of ideas as traditionally understood. Herein lies the strength of his scepticism and it gives meaning to comments such as those at the end of his discussion in the *Treatise* of the causes of our belief in an external world that 'carelessness and in-attention alone can afford us any remedy' from philosophical doubt (T218).

Hume's clearest statement of the contrast between what we can suppose and what we can conceive is not cited by Winkler. In the section of the *Treatise* entitled 'Of the immateriality of the soul' Hume writes the following:

Since we may suppose, but never can conceive a specific difference betwixt an object and impression; any conclusion we form concerning the connexion and repugnance of impressions, will not be known certainly to be applicable to objects...

(T241)

In this remarkable statement, Hume is allowing that the relations we discover on the basis of our actual impressions and the ideas derived from them may not apply to the world.³ Thus what is connected in ideas may not represent a connection in objects and what is 'repugnant' in the realm of ideas may not be repugnant in the realm of objects. Hume goes on to note that by 'an irregular kind of reasoning from experience' we can 'discover a connexion or repugnance betwixt objects, which extends not to impressions' (T242). He refers us to his discussion of the judgement of the continued unperceived existence of objects based on their coherence. Here, he had explained how the imagination projects unperceived objects in order to resolve 'contradictions' in what we actually experience (T196–7).

It is clear then that at least in his discussion of external existence, Hume argues that we are not limited in our beliefs about objects to what is based on our legitimate impression-derived ideas. The same theme is to be found in his discussion of space and time in Part 2, Book 1 of the *Treatise*.⁴ Why then should there be an exception in the case of Hume's discussion of causality?

2 Hume's imperfect definitions of causality or power

A major part of Winkler's answer seems to be based on the fact that Hume supplied two definitions of causality at the end of his discussion 'Of the idea of necessary connexion' in §7 of his *Enquiry*, both of which are founded entirely on ideas (E76–7; cf. T169–70). One of these defines causality in terms of the regularity we observe in nature and the other in terms of the response of the mind to the observation of this

regularity—the inner impression we have when we naturally draw the inference from cause to effect. Winkler points out that since the terms ‘cause’ and ‘power’ are roughly equivalent for Hume, these also serve for him as definitions of the term ‘power’. Winkler appeals to a footnote which Hume added to §4 of the 1750 edition of the *Enquiry* to reinterpret all Hume’s earlier references to the term ‘power’ in terms of the first of these definitions (Winkler p. 55 above). Thus, according to Winkler, even Hume’s references to the unknown powers underlying the regularities we perceive in nature are really references to hidden regularities of unobserved objects; probably the minute ‘parts and particles of eighteenth-century natural philosophy’ (p. 56 above). Winkler suggests that, according to Hume, ‘there may be brute regularity *all the way down*’ (p. 68 above).

In response to Winkler, it must be stressed that Hume’s definitions of causality are clearly presented as definitions which are wholly inadequate to what they purport to define (cf. Strawson 1989:205–15). Hume prefaces his definitions in the *Enquiry* with the claim that our ideas of the relation of cause and effect are ‘so imperfect’ that we must define causality ‘from something extraneous and foreign to it’ (T170). Winkler suggests that Hume believes his first definition is faulty because it ‘defines the cause in relation to its effect’ (p. 68 above); but this is the very opposite of what Hume believes. His reason for considering the first definition of causality to be problematic is that it defines the cause, not in terms of its relation to the effect, but rather in terms of its relation to other similar objects—what Winkler correctly (though only in parentheses) identifies as ‘objects of the same type as the cause and effect’. The inadequacy of the second definition lies in the fact that causality is defined in terms of the reaction of the mind to the observation of the constant conjunction of similar objects. This too is clearly extraneous and foreign to the causal relation itself.

According to Hume, a proper definition of cause and effect would define the one in relation to the other. After giving his imperfect definitions of causality in §7 of the *Enquiry* Hume notes that a ‘more perfect definition’ would ‘point out that circumstance in the cause, which gives it a connexion with its effect’ (E77). Winkler writes that ‘it doesn’t follow that the underlying circumstance won’t be another regularity’. But this is exactly what does follow. Winkler is confusing what Hume says about his first imperfect definition of cause with what he says here about a more perfect definition. The ‘connexion’ which Hume is writing about in discussing the latter is an intelligible connection between the cause and effect. Earlier in §7, Hume clearly stated just what would be involved in knowledge of the power of the cause or, what is the same thing for him, the circumstance in the cause which connects it with the effect:

It must be allowed, that, when we know a power, we know that very circumstance in the cause, by which it is enabled to produce the effect: For these are supposed to be synonymous. We must, therefore, know both the cause and effect, and the relation between them.

(E67–8)

Such knowledge would dispense with the need for any observation of regularity:

were the power or energy of any cause discoverable by the mind, we could foresee the effect, even without experience; and might, at first, pronounce with certainty concerning it, by the mere dint of thought and reasoning.

(E63)

Thus, a genuine apprehension of causal power would involve an understanding of the necessary or conceptual connection of cause and effect.

It is Hume's insistence that causality or power ought to be defined in terms of the relation between cause and effect—not, as Winkler thinks, in terms of regular succession of similar objects—which is reflected in the 1750 footnote. In the passage to which the note refers, Hume is arguing for our 'ignorance of natural powers' (E33). In particular, he claims that 'we cannot form the most distant conception' of 'that wonderful force or power, which would carry on a moving body for ever in a continued change of place, and which bodies never lose but by communicating it to others'. It should be noted that in this discussion of inertia Hume is writing of *power* as if it were something absolute that a body can have in itself and which can be transferred from one bit of matter to another. The note he added in 1750 read as follows: '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' (E33).

The reference to §7 is almost certainly to a note which Hume added in the same edition, in which he insists that 'the idea of *power* is relative as much as that of *cause*' (E77n). On this 'more accurate explication', power is no longer thought of loosely, as something which can be transferred from one part of matter to another. Rather, it can only be thought of in terms of the relation between the cause and the effect. Hume defines power as 'the *unknown* circumstance of an object, by which the degree or quantity of its effect is fixed and determined'. In other words, it is the unknown circumstance in the cause which necessarily connects it with the effect. It is true that Hume stresses that this circumstance can only be identified through the effect; that is, as that which is constantly conjoined with it. We have no independent identification of it. Thus we have 'additional evidence', as Hume claims in his first 1750 note, to show that we are totally ignorant of any power, such as the *vis inertiae*. But if, as Winkler thinks, the power were *nothing more* than regular succession, 'these explications and definitions' would afford no such evidence. Hume's aim is to show that the power is unknown to us.

3 Hume's reasons for asserting that power is entirely unknown

Winkler's suggestion that by unknown powers Hume is referring to unknown regularities fails to take into account Hume's *reasons* for asserting that the powers and forces of nature are hidden from us. For example, in §4 of the *Enquiry* Hume explains 'the reason why no philosopher, who is rational and modest, has ever pretended...to show distinctly the action of that power, which produces any single effect in the universe' (E30). The reason is that 'every effect is a distinct event from its cause...(and) could not, therefore, be discovered in the cause'. By pointing out the distinctness of the objects we identify as cause and effect, Hume is showing that we cannot find the conceptual connection which he requires for knowledge of power. In §7, he makes it clear why he believes that no account in terms of our ideas of mechanical qualities will ever reveal 'the power or force, which actuates the whole machine...Solidity, extension, motion...are all complete in themselves, and never point out any other event which may result from them' (E63). Thus Winkler is wrong to suggest that the unknown powers which Hume refers to may be no more than regularities in the mechanical properties of the minute corpuscles which underlie the behaviour of the objects we observe. Such 'brute regularities', as Winkler calls them, cannot reveal the necessary or conceptual connection between cause and effect.

Our ignorance of unknown powers is not characterized by Hume as an ignorance of further regularities or constant conjunctions of objects; it is characterized as a certain lack of understanding—that is, of the intelligible connection of cause and effect. Winkler says that Hume draws the limits of what ‘we can conceive, suppose, or understand...from *within* our thought’ (p. 67 above). But if Winkler means by this that they are drawn simply through our actual ideas then he is wrong. Hume draws limits to our knowledge and understanding of objective causal power through a clear criterion of what would constitute such knowledge. It is true that Hume says that we have ‘no idea of this connexion’ (E77) because we never find any instance of it but, as we saw in the last section, he clearly knows exactly what it is for there to be such an objective connection.

Hume consistently explains our lack of knowledge of power or necessary connection through the imperfection (E76), deficiency (T267) or inadequacy of our ideas. It is this last term which is particularly revealing of Hume’s intentions. In the *Treatise*, after criticizing the views of the occasionalists, Hume writes that we have ‘no adequate idea of power or efficacy in any object’ (T160). Earlier, he had identified the adequacy of ideas as a condition of knowledge:

Wherever ideas are adequate representations of objects, the relations, contradictions, and agreements of the ideas are all applicable to the objects; and this we may in general observe to be the foundation of all human knowledge. (T29)

It follows that if the ‘relations, contradictions, and agreements’ of ideas do not apply to objects then our ideas are not adequate. Now this is exactly what Hume believes is the case in terms of causation. Our ideas of cause and effect are distinct and therefore do not reveal the necessary or conceptual connection of objects. This is why Hume concludes that our ideas are inadequate.

While critics of the interpretation of Hume as a causal realist may be willing to grant that he refers to causal power through the ideal of knowledge or reason which I have explained, they may argue that such an ideal for him is, or at least should be, entirely empty. To see that it is not, it is important to carefully consider both Hume’s account of our instinctive or natural supposition of power or necessary connection and also the nature of the scepticism which he himself adopts. It seems to me that Winkler misunderstands both of these.

While he allows that Hume gives credence to natural beliefs which are irresistible and necessary for human life such as the belief in external existence of body, Winkler denies that the belief in objective power is of this kind (p. 65 above). He is willing to allow that we have an irresistible and indispensable tendency to infer an effect from a cause, but he holds that this does not go so far as a belief in objective necessary connection.⁵

4 The natural supposition of causal power

Winkler stresses the triviality of a projective mechanism which Hume postulates in his *Treatise* to account for the fact that ‘we suppose necessity and power to lie in the objects we consider, not in our mind, that considers them’ (T167). According to the explanation which Hume gives in the section ‘Of the idea of necessary connection’, our observation of objects which are constantly conjoined ‘produces a new impression *in the mind*’ corresponding to the determination we feel to pass from the

impression of the one to the idea of the other. This impression arises simply from that principle of human nature which Hume calls custom or habit. Hume stresses that it is simply an ‘internal impression of the mind’ (T165). However, he postulates a quite separate externalizing principle in order to explain how we come to project this impression onto objects. Thus, he writes of another ‘propensity’ of the mind ‘to spread itself on external objects’ (T167). Winkler argues that this mechanism is similar to others which, on Hume’s own account, cause us to distort reality. He mentions in particular Hume’s discussion of our childish tendency to project our emotions onto external objects; a tendency which may be ‘suppress’d by a little reflection’ (Winkler p. 65 above; cf. T224). Winkler concludes by noting that while our projection of the impression of necessity has ‘a somewhat firmer foothold’ it is difficult ‘to see why our welfare should depend’ on it.

Now it is important to stress that Hume holds that the belief in the objectivity of power is, if anything, more firmly implanted in human nature than the natural belief in external existence. After giving his explanation of the latter belief in the section of the *Treatise* entitled ‘Of scepticism with regard to the senses’, Hume writes that he cannot see ‘how such trivial qualities of the fancy, conducted by such false suppositions, can ever lead to any solid and rational system’ (T217). But Hume does not give any such criticism of his account of the protective tendency of the mind in the case of causal inference. Indeed, he thinks that this tendency is so strong that it will prevent readers from accepting his own psychological explanation of it: he is concerned that ‘the bias of the mind will prevail, and give them a prejudice against the present doctrine’ (T167). The belief in the objectivity of our idea of power is, he writes, ‘riveted in the mind’ through the principles which he has identified. Moreover, there is good reason to think that Hume holds that if we were to give up our belief in the objectivity of necessary connection ‘human nature must immediately perish and go to ruin’ (T225). The belief is required for human survival.

To appreciate this, it is helpful to recognize that Hume also has a more subtle account of the belief in objective necessity than the projection account of §14 of Part 3 of Book 1 of the *Treatise*. This account appears in §4 of Part 4 entitled ‘Of the antient philosophy’; it is also implied in the explanation of our supposition of causal necessity which he gives in §7 of his *Enquiry*. In these accounts he dispenses with the need to postulate any separate projecting mechanism: he does not consider ‘necessity’ as if it were a distinct inner impression separable from the perceptions of cause and effect themselves. Rather, it is nothing but the felt connection between them which is produced by custom and habit. In the *Treatise* he writes:

’Tis natural for men, in their common and careless way of thinking, to imagine they perceive a connexion betwixt such objects as they have constantly found united together; and because custom has render’d it difficult to separate the ideas, they are apt to fancy such a separation to be in itself impossible and absurd.

(T223)

Hume suggests that people ordinarily think they perceive a genuine connection (what he calls ‘a natural and perceivable connexion’ between cause and effect) because they cannot think the one without the other. The objective connection which they ascribe to the familiar operations of nature on the basis of the associational processes of imagination is nothing but the connection which they

would perceive if they had a genuine knowledge of causal connection. It is only philosophers who 'abstract from the affects of custom, and compare the ideas of objects' who are able to recognize the vulgar error and affirm that 'there is no known connexion among objects'. They recognize that in ordinary life we are quite mistaken in thinking we directly perceive the necessary connection of the objects of the senses. The vulgar mistake an associational connection for a genuinely perceived rational connection.

According to this explanation, the supposition of causal necessity is no less 'irresistable' than what Hume calls 'the customary transition from causes to effects, and from effects to causes' (T225). In fact, both are the results of exactly the same mechanism (custom), and are in themselves not essentially different. In his *Enquiry*, Hume writes that the result of the experience of repeated event-sequences is that one simply 'feels these events to be connected in his imagination, and can readily foretell the existence of one from the appearance of the other' (E75–6). For Hume, the belief in power or objective necessary connection is inextricably bound up with the inference of the mind (cf. E37).

5 The nature of Hume's scepticism

What then is the sceptical philosopher's conclusion? Does he or she, as Winkler suggests at certain points in his article, remain satisfied with the judgment based on the comparison of ideas, and refuse 'to affirm the existence of real powers' (p. 67 above)? Does she limit herself to the reflection that our idea of necessary connection is merely subjective and cannot be ascribed to objects? In the conclusion of the *Treatise*, Hume notes that in 'common life' this 'deficiency in our ideas is not...perceiv'd' (T267), and that we ascribe objective powers to the objects which we have experienced as constantly conjoined. He raises the question 'how far' we, as philosophers, 'ought to yield' to the 'illusion of the imagination' which makes us believe that we directly perceive causal power in the objects of our senses, but he arrives at no definitive answer. However, earlier, he had written that the true philosopher needs to return 'to the situation of the vulgar' and regard 'all these disquisitions with indolence and indifference' (T223). In the final analysis, his solution seems to be the same as that which he affirms at the end of his discussion of external existence; namely, that only carelessness and inattention can provide a remedy. As he writes in the *Abstract*, 'philosophy'—that is, attention to the content of our ideas—'wou'd render us entirely *Pyrrhonian*, were not nature too strong for it' (T657).

However, the 'more *mitigated* scepticism or *academical* philosophy' which Hume adopts at the end of his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* provides a more theoretical solution. Hume stresses that in order to reach this solution we need to become absolutely convinced of 'the force of the *Pyrrhonian* doubt' as well as the fact that nothing 'but the strong power of natural instinct, could free us from it' (E162). In other words, the negative results of our attention to the contents of our ideas need to be balanced against the natural suppositions of daily life to which they are opposed. But here Hume affirms that our 'philosophical decisions' must be based on 'the reflections of common life', though these must be 'methodized and corrected'. This implies that the academic philosopher should succumb to judgements of 'common life' such as the judgement that there are objective causal powers in the objects which we experience as constantly conjoined, but he or she needs to correct the false

supposition that these powers can be perceived by us. Hume suggests that by yielding to the natural instinct which makes us believe in the causal power in the objects of our senses, while acknowledging that we have no understanding of this power, we will learn ‘to limit our enquiries to such subjects as are best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding’. Since we can never ‘give a satisfactory reason, why we believe, after a thousand experiments, that a stone will fall, or fire burn’, we will recognize that we can never determine in a satisfactory way ‘the origin of worlds, or the situation of nature, from, and to eternity’.

6 Hume’s speculations about objective power, and ‘scepticism’ reconsidered

Yet Hume did speculate on the ultimate power of nature and on the first principles of the universe. In opposition to many of his contemporaries who claimed that the only active force in the universe was that which could be found in minds, Hume speculated on principles of nature which might cause spontaneous motion and order to exist in the universe.

Hume’s most unequivocal speculation on the unknown powers in nature is to be found in the work we now know as his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, first published under the title *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding* in 1748. In a note at the end of Part 1 of §7, Hume denied that Newton intended to ‘rob Matter of all force or Energy’ and commended him for putting forward the hypothesis of ‘an ethereal active Matter’ to explain universal attraction. In opposition to many followers of Newton who believed that new motion can only enter the universe through the action of a voluntary agent, Hume expressed support for the idea that such motion can arise from matter itself. After criticism from John Stewart, Professor of Natural Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, in 1754, Hume withdrew his claim that the Newtonian aether was a kind of matter. But he still commended Newton for hypothesizing that gravitation is due to an ‘ethereal active fluid’ and denied that Newton sought to ‘rob second causes of all force and energy’.⁶ Hume clearly continued to endorse the speculation that there are active, motion producing powers in nature itself.

This alone should convince us that Hume did not close off all ‘speculation about objective causal powers’, as Winkler claims (p. 73 above), and that such speculation is possible even though we cannot, strictly speaking, conceive of that which we are supposing. On Hume’s account, we have no genuine idea of power, whether active or passive; yet in approving of what he took to be Newton’s hypothesis of an ‘ethereal active Matter’, Hume was postulating a non-mental cause of an increase of motion. He is reacting to a number of thinkers who insisted that such an effect could only arise from the volition of an intelligent being. In the text of the *Philosophical Essays*, where he speculated on the existence of an active matter, Hume asked rhetorically whether ‘it is more difficult to conceive that motion may arise from impulse than that it may arise from volition’ (E73)? Given the context in which these words were written, it is clear that he was allowing for the existence of a mechanical cause of the introduction of new motion in the universe. Having rejected any *a priori* understanding of the nature of our idea of matter, Hume argued that experience gives evidence that matter may have an active power.

The Newtonian hypothesis of which Hume approved in his *Philosophical Essays*, reflected a strong interest among scientists in the 1740s in what were

called imponderable fluids.⁷ In Part VIII of the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, in response to Demea's claim that matter cannot 'acquire motion, without any voluntary agent or first mover', Hume's spokesman, Philo, argues that experience shows us that 'motion, in many instances, from gravity, from elasticity, from electricity, begins in matter, without any known voluntary agent' (Hume 1779:182). Having rejected any *a priori* conclusion based on the nature of our idea of matter, Hume argued that experience gives evidence that matter may have an *active power*.

Speculations about an unknown material source of the order we discover in the totality of the universe are made at various points in the *Dialogues*. In Part VI, in opposition to Christian theology which ascribes the origin of the universe to an independent Divine mind, Philo favours a view which 'ascribes an internal, inherent principle of order to the world' itself. He speculates that, 'were the inmost essence of things laid open to us...we should clearly see, that it was absolutely impossible for them, in the smallest article, ever to admit of any other disposition' (Hume 1779:174-5).⁸ The hypothesis that matter contains the cause of its own existence is put forward by Cleanthes in Part IX of the *Dialogues*. He suggests that

We dare not affirm that we know all the qualities of matter; and for aught we can determine, it may contain some qualities, which, were they known, would make its non-existence appear as great a contradiction as that twice two is five.
(Hume 1779:190)

This suggestion of an inner necessity in matter is taken up by Philo who argues that, if we could 'penetrate into the intimate nature of bodies, we should clearly see why it was absolutely impossible' that the universe should have any structure than that which it now possesses. Rather than admiring the regularities we observe, and attributing them to either chance or design, we should be able to show how these effects arise necessarily from the nature of matter, just as a skilled algebraist can show why of necessity the sum of the digits of any product of 9 is equal to 9 or some 'lesser product of 9' (1779:191; see Wright 1983: §14, especially 147-50).

In the light of this discussion, it is of some importance to understand exactly how the kind of *scepticism* espoused by Hume was considered a threat by contemporary defenders of natural religion. At the end of the note to the *Philosophical Essays* in which Hume expressed approval of the hypothesis of an active matter, he asked why the occasionalist theory which 'robs Matter of all force or Energy' has 'become so prevalent among our modern metaphysicians' (E73n). One of the philosophers who may well have been in his mind when he wrote this passage in the mid-1740s was fellow Scotsman Andrew Baxter.⁹ In 1745, Baxter published a third edition of his *An Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul; wherein the Immateriality of the Soul is evinced from Principles of Reason and Philosophy*.¹⁰ The central argument was that the principle of inertia implies the complete passivity of matter and that any activity in nature requires soul or mind. At one point in his book, Baxter writes against what he calls 'the sceptical account of mechanism'; according to this account 'motion is not diminished, but may be multiplied by the action of particles among themselves...' (Baxter 1745:133). Baxter identifies a sceptical philosopher as one who denies knowledge of the essence of matter as purely passive, and is willing to allow that matter itself has 'several inherent, eternal properties' which cause increase of motion. In particular, he was concerned with the 'ignorance, or

disingenuity of sceptical people’, who contend that mechanism is ‘the cause of spontaneous motion’ in a human body and believe that they can dispense with a separate soul as this cause (1745:127). In his *Philosophical Essays*, when Hume wrote that it is no ‘more difficult to conceive that motion may arise from impulse than that it may arise from volition’, and then went on to speculate about the existence of active matter (*E73*), he clearly instantiated the threat of scepticism as conceived by Baxter.

7 The eighteenth-century interpretation of Hume on causality

Finally, let me comment on Winkler’s claim that the reading of Hume as a causal realist is new, and particularly that Hume was not read in this way in his own day (pp. 69–71 above). I believe that the way I have read Hume corresponds to the way he was read by his most important contemporary critic, namely Immanuel Kant. Winkler cites a number of Hume’s British contemporaries who, he claims,¹¹ believed that Hume reduced objective causality to constant conjunction (pp. 69–71 above). But Kant writes of these contemporaries that they were ‘taking for granted what he was doubting, and proving...with violence and often with great unseemliness...what it had never entered his mind to doubt’ (1783:7). What Kant thinks Hume never doubted was that the relation of cause and effect ‘implies necessity’ and that it is ‘correct, useful, and in respect of all knowledge of nature indispensable.’ Indeed, he writes of the process of imagination by which Hume thinks we mistake ‘a subjective necessity’ arising from habit for ‘an objective necessity from insight’. Kant understands this objective necessity in the way I have explained above—as a relation which would have to be thought ‘a priori and out of concepts’ (1783:6). Later, Kant identifies this as Hume’s error, for he believes that Hume should have recognized that there is a priori knowledge which does not have this kind of analytic necessity, particularly in mathematics (1783:21–2). But the point that needs to be made is that Kant quite clearly interpreted Hume as believing that we ascribe such an objective causal necessity on the basis of repeated experience, though we do so through the associational processes of the imagination rather than the legitimate processes of reason. For Kant, the great threat of Hume’s philosophy lay in the reduction of all causes to necessary causes, and the exclusion of the possibility of freedom and human responsibility.¹²

Thus, I would argue that what Winkler calls ‘the New Hume’, far from being new, recovers one of the oldest and most influential traditional interpretations of his philosophy. In discovering the textual and contextual basis for this interpretation we are performing the task which Winkler himself sets out for historians of philosophy at the beginning of Chapter 4, namely broadening our view of what an earlier philosopher like Hume ‘could have meant by what [he] said’ (p. 52 above). I would only add that there is very strong evidence supporting the view that this is exactly what Hume did mean.

Notes

- 1 *The Philosophical Review* 100:541–79, reprinted in this volume, pp. 52–87.
- 2 The reference is to Strawson (1989:12). Winkler’s charge against Strawson is quite unjustified, however. The latter anticipates Winkler’s point about dogmatism concerning causal necessity on the following page of his book. See Strawson (1989:13–14).
- 3 This passage is cited by Simon Blackburn in ‘Hume and Thick Connexions’, p. 100–12 below, but

- he does not discuss it, focussing instead on much weaker statements of the distinction between conceiving and supposing. Blackburn notes that Hume does not explicitly invoke the distinction between supposing and conceiving in discussing causation and that it is not appealed to in the first *Enquiry* or *Dialogues*. However, as I have noted in the first section of this paper, in the *Enquiry* Hume clearly claims that both ordinary persons and scientists suppose unknown powers. Together with his denial that we have any idea of such powers, this implies the distinction of the *Treatise*. It should be noted that the references to unknown powers are far more explicit in the *Enquiry* than in the *Treatise*. It is surely significant that in the *Treatise*, his seminal work, Hume explicitly allows for a qualitative distinction between objects and impressions—a distinction which can be applied to any ontological claim. More importantly, his many appeals to the limits of our ideas in accounting for our lack of knowledge logically presuppose the distinction which he makes explicit in Part 4 of Book 1 of the *Treatise*. See §§3–4 below. For a discussion of the actual context in which Hume introduces the distinction in the *Treatise* see Wright (1996:180ff), also, Wright (1986:407–35, especially 421–6).
- 4 See Wright (1983:100–7). In this case, Hume allows for the existence of what he thinks is repugnant according to our actual ideas; namely, absolute space and time.
 - 5 His claim is that Hume employs ‘stronger language...for our belief in bodies and our propensity to project past regularities into the future’ (p. 65 in this volume). I can see no evidence for this. I can think of no stronger description of a natural propensity than that which Hume gives of our natural supposition of necessity at *E75*, quoted above.
 - 6 See *E73n*. The change in Hume’s text appeared in the 1756 edition of the *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding*. As secretary of the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh, the predecessor of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, Hume co-edited the volume of scientific papers in which Stewart’s essay appeared. For further discussion of the documents and the issues involved in this dispute, see Wright (1983:145–6, 162–4).
 - 7 See Schofield (1970:101ff). Important in the development of materialist ideas of the aether was the publication of a letter from Newton to Robert Boyle discussing the subject in Thomas Birch’s *History of the Royal Society* (1744).
 - 8 Hume has Philo qualify his approval by saying in parentheses that he would ‘never willingly’ defend ‘any particular system’. But his claim that this is the most ‘plausible’ system is clearly contrasted to his attitude toward its secular alternative, namely the Epicurean hypothesis. Philo, clearly speaking for Hume, rejects chance as a possibility (174; cf. *E57*) and, after putting forward his modification of the Epicurean cosmology in Part VIII, readily admits Cleanthes’s objection that it does not account for the structures of parts of animals which have a function beyond that of bare survival (185–6).
 - 9 John Yolton (1983) suggested Baxter, as well as Berkeley, Isaac Watts and Malebranche, as the ‘modern metaphysicians’ whom Hume had in mind. In Wright (1983), I identified Berkeley, whose *Sirius* was published in 1745, as being foremost in Hume’s mind. I certainly now agree with Yolton that Hume had a number of targets in mind, including Baxter. Hume’s first published reference to Newton’s aether hypothesis was in his *A Letter to a Gentleman from his Friend in Edinburgh*, where he defended himself from the charge of atheism (see Wright 1983:184, n51). Paul Russell has recently argued that Hume’s remarks in the footnote to the *Philosophical Essays* were only directed against Baxter, and that Hume was answering Baxter in *A Letter to a Gentleman...* (Russell 1997). It is beyond the scope of this paper to evaluate either of these theses. I will only mention that it is puzzling that a philosopher of Baxter’s abilities who had no personal interest in the Edinburgh Chair of Moral Philosophy would have so totally distorted Hume’s meaning, as does the author of the ‘Sum of the Charge’ which Hume was answering in *A Letter to a Gentleman...*: Hume is accused of denying the Deity as a first cause in a passage in which he is clearly discussing the occasionalist theory that there are no second causes in nature. See Hume (1745:18) and Hume’s response on 29.
 - 10 Baxter (1745). Baxter’s book was published by Andrew Millar, who became Hume’s chief London publisher. Millar had already published Hume’s *Essays Moral and Political* in 1742.
 - 11 At least, I think that is what he is claiming. The passages he cites from Reid, Kames and Leland stress Hume’s claim that we have no *idea* of necessity and the difficulty of reconciling this with other claims which he makes. See the Introduction to Wright (1983:2–3).
 - 12 For a recent discussion see Kuehn (1994:246–8).

6 Hume and thick connexions¹

Simon Blackburn

1 Two approaches

Recently, there has been a pronounced shift in the interpretation of Hume on causation. The previous weight of opinion took him to be a Positivist, but the new view is that he is a Sceptical Realist.² I hold no brief for the Positivist view; but I believe it needs replacing by something slightly different, and that at best it shows an error of taste to make Sceptical Realism a fundamental factor in the interpretation of Hume.

Let us call any concept of one event producing another, or being necessarily a cause or consequence of another, but which involves something beyond the concept of regular succession a 'thick' notion of the dependence of one event on another. Then on the Positivist account, Hume believes that no thick notion is intelligible. On the Positivist view, there is very little that we can ever understand and mean by a causal connexion between events. All we can understand and properly mean by talk of causation is that events fall into certain regular patterns, and the Positivist interpretation is that Hume offered this as a reductive definition of causation. This is the famous regularity theory, summed up in the 'philosophical' definition of 'an object, followed by another, and where all the objects similar to the first are followed by objects similar to the second' (E76). The sceptical realist view denies that Hume offered any such reduction or analysis of the notion of causation. It takes seriously the many passages in which Hume appears to allow that we are talking of some thick notion of dependence of one event on another, going beyond regular succession. It takes it that Hume acknowledges that there is some such thick relation, even if it will be one about whose nature and extent we are doomed to ignorance: hence, in John Wright's phrase, Sceptical Realism.

At first sight, the difference between Positivism and Sceptical Realism is reasonably clear, and it is clear too that if these are the two options Hume is better seen as tending towards the second. But, as proponents of the Sceptical Realist interpretation realize, there is one big problem. This arises from Hume's theory of meaning. Sceptical realism seems to demand that we know what it would be for one event to depend thickly upon another, even if we are ignorant of the nature of this relation; Hume seems to demand that we have no impression, and hence no idea of any such dependence.

The problem here is a problem for anybody, and can be focussed on a contradiction, to which Hume seems to be committed:

1 We have no ideas except those that are preceded by suitably related impressions.

- 2 There are no impressions that are suitably related to the idea of a thick necessary connexion between distinct events.
- 3 We have an idea of a thick necessary connexion between distinct events.

The 'suitable relation' spoken of includes direct copying, in the case of simple ideas, and whatever is covered by 'compounding' in the case of complex ideas that are compounded out of simple ones.

The Positivist interpretation takes Hume to be claiming that when we talk of causation we only mean something that strips out the thick element of necessity, and substitutes regular contiguous succession. So (3) is false. The difficulty is that Hume denies this:

Shall we then rest contented with these two relations of contiguity and succession, as affording a compleat idea of causation? By no means. An object may be contiguous and prior to another, without being consider'd as its cause. There is a NECESSARY CONNEXION to be taken into consideration; and that relation is of much greater importance, than any of the other two above-mentioned.

(T77)

The central problem in interpreting Hume is coping with the contradiction. The Sceptical Realist strategy is to downplay the importance of the theory of understanding, so that even if Hume officially said (2), it played a negligible part in his view of causation.

2 A doubtful distinction

How then does the Sceptical Realist deal with the problem of meaning? Edward Craig and Galen Strawson draw attention to a distinction that occurs in Hume's writings (Craig 1987:124; Strawson 1987: ch. 12). When the theory of ideas threatens our idea of external existence or 'body', it is said that Hume invokes a distinction between what we can 'suppose' and what we can 'conceive', the idea being that we can coherently suppose that there are things of some sort (external objects) even when strictly we have no idea of what it is that we are supposing. Another way of putting it is that we can have a 'relative' idea of things whose 'specific' difference from other things we cannot comprehend. We could say that we have no representative idea of what we talk about, but a relative or relational idea, locating it by its role. We would talk of a 'something-we-know-not-what' that does something or bears some relation to an aspect of the world of which we do have an idea. This distinction solves the contradiction by distinguishing between the terminology of (2) and (3). Hume thinks we have no representative idea of causation: we have no impression of it, and in some important sense it remains incomprehensible, and we cannot represent to ourselves what it *is*. What we do have however is a relational idea of it: it is whatever it is that *issues* in regular successions of events, or upon which such patterns *depend*, or whatever *forces* such regularities. The negative side is given in (2), but the positive side in (3).

The texts give no direct support to this interpretation of Hume. While he uses both a 'relative' versus 'specific' distinction and the possibility of 'supposing' what we cannot 'conceive', he uses them very sparingly indeed. In fact he never

uses either, nor mentions either in connexion with causation. He never uses or mentions either in the *Enquiry* or in the *Dialogues* in any context at all. This alone makes them unlikely candidates for a central role in understanding his mature philosophy.³ But worse, there are warning signs to be noticed when they occur in the *Treatise*. There are four occurrences: on pages 67–8, 188 referring back to it, 218 and 241. In none of these cases is Hume actually contrasting a specific *versus* a relative idea of any one property or relation, enjoining us that we can know a property or object by its relations even if we cannot know it by some stricter standard derived from the theory of ideas. On the contrary, in each context it is the impossibility of conceiving a ‘specific difference’ between external objects and perceptions that is the focus of attention. ‘Specific’ qualifies the properties supposedly differentiating external objects from ideas, and of these specific qualities we know and understand nothing by any standard at all. Here are the two major passages with enough surrounding context to matter:

Now since nothing is ever present to the mind but perceptions, and since all ideas are deriv’d from something antecedently present to the mind; it follows, that ’tis impossible for us so much as to conceive or form an idea of any thing specifically different from ideas and impressions. Let us fix our attention out of ourselves as much as possible: Let us chace our imagination to the heavens, or to the utmost limits of the universe; we never really advance a step beyond ourselves, nor can conceive any kind of existence, but those perceptions, which have appear’d in that narrow compass. This is the universe of the imagination, nor have we any idea but what is there produc’d. The farthest we can go towards a conception of external objects, when suppos’d *specifically* different from our perceptions, is to form a relative idea of them, without pretending to comprehend the related objects. Generally speaking we do not suppose them specifically different; but only attribute to them different relations, connexions and durations. But of this more fully hereafter.

(T67–8)

Philosophers deny our resembling perceptions to be identically the same, and uninterrupted; and yet have so great a propensity to believe them such, that they arbitrarily invent a new set of perceptions, to which they attribute these qualities. I say, a new set of perceptions: For we may well suppose in general, but ’tis impossible for us distinctly to conceive, objects to be in their nature any thing but exactly the same with perceptions. What then can we look for from this confusion of groundless and extraordinary opinions but error and falsehood? And how can we justify to ourselves any belief we repose in them?

(T218)

It requires some daring to take these passages as a model for sceptical realism. Hume is far—about as far as can be—from saying that we actually *possess* a going idea of the external world, which allows us to understand, by some weak standard, what the externality is that we do not know about. Each of the two passages gives the strongest contrary impression. The first affirms idealism (‘we never really advance a step beyond ourselves’). The second introduces the ‘supposes versus conceives’ distinction only while he simultaneously dismisses its effect out of hand. Its dismissal justifies Hume in describing his philosophers (the culture whose spokesman is Locke) as actually inventing new perceptions, rather than

inventing new things different from perceptions. This is the very opposite of the view a Sceptical Realist Hume should take. He should take seriously the view that a Lockean succeeds in introducing a (relative) notion of an external object as something that has various relations to our perceptions, and go on to worry how much we know about them. Hume does not: he simply dismisses the idea that we have a set of determinate, intelligible, propositions about which, unfortunately, we shall never know the truth. We are in the Humean domain of a 'confusion of groundless and extraordinary opinion' where our only hope is to abandon reason altogether. But we shall shortly find that the theory of ideas makes this inevitable in any case.

3 Another distinction

Before proceeding, it is necessary to have in mind two things that might be asked of 'thick' causation. When we think of a causally connected pair of events, such as the impact of the first billiard ball causing the motion of the second, we want there to be a further fact than (mere) regular succession. We want there to be a dependency or connection, a fact making it so that when the first happens the second *must* happen. Call this the desire for a causal nexus. But now suppose we shift our gaze to the whole ongoing course of nature. Again, we may want there to be a further fact than mere regular succession. We feel that the ongoing pattern would be too much of a coincidence unless there is something *in virtue of which* the world has had and is going to go on having the order that it does. We want there to be some secret spring or principle, some ultimate cause, 'on which the regular course and succession of objects totally depends' (E55). This is whatever it is that ensures the continuation of the natural order, that dispels the inductive vertigo that arises when we think how natural it might be, how probable even, that the constrained and delicate pattern of events might fall apart. Call the desire for this further fact the desire for a straitjacket on the possible course of nature: something whose existence at one time guarantees constancies at any later time.⁴

A fact alleviating this vertigo has to be a very peculiar fact, for the following reason. It has to be something whose *own* continued efficacy through time is subject to no possibility of change or chance of failure. For otherwise, the fact that it keeps on as it does would itself be a case of coincidence or fluke, another contingency crying out for explanation and engendering inductive vertigo. Some think they can point us towards a fact with this potency. Some draw comfort from God's sustaining will, as if anything understood on the analogy of our own mental states could be timeproof! Armstrong believes that a kind of necessary, timeless, gridlock of universals will do (1983:88ff). Galen Strawson takes comfort in fundamental forces constitutive of the nature of matter (1987:91, 254–5).

It is easy to confuse the desire for a nexus, case by case, with the desire for the straitjacket. But Hume (sometimes; but see below) is clear that they are different. They are different because whatever the nexus between two events is at one time, it is the kind of thing that can in principle change, so that at a different time events of the same kind may bear a different connexion. Thus suppose we grant ourselves the right to think in terms of a thick connection between one event and another: a power or force whereby an event of the first kind brings about events of the second. Nevertheless, there is no contradiction in supposing that the powers and forces with which events are endowed at one time cease at another, nor in supposing that any secret nature of bodies upon which those powers and forces

depend itself changes, bringing their change in its wake. Hume emphasizes this point in both the *Enquiry* and the *Treatise* (E37; T90–1). It is his reason for denying that the problem of induction can be solved by appeal to the powers and forces of bodies. But it is equally a reason for separating the question of a nexus from that of the straitjacket. Nexuses by themselves do not provide a straitjacket. The ongoing regularity and constancy even of thick nexus between one kind of event and another is just as much a brute contingent regularity as the bare regular concatenation of events.⁵ In each case, we have something that can engender the inductive vertigo, or whose continuation through time might be thought to demand some kind of ‘ground’ or ultimate cause or straitjacket.

The difference between a nexus, holding on some particular occasions, and a straitjacket guaranteeing the continuation of a pattern of connexions is easy to confuse. This is because of a lurking epistemological difficulty. Suppose one thinks that a particular nexus can be known for what it is, for instance by some observation whose content is more than the mere succession of events. One might report that by claiming to have seen that the one event *had to* happen, given the other. But if you see a ‘must’ in one pair of events, would you not thereby see that it will hold for every pair of some kind that the original pair enables you to identify? How could you see it without seeing something with general implications, and ones that are immune to temporal change? In other words, you will take yourself to have seen a *timeproof* connexion: one that straitjackets how things could ever fall out. To put it the other way round, if things were not to fall out as expected, the original claim to have seen that the one event had to follow the other is refuted. This in turn makes it hard to see how a particular nexus could be an object of observation. Observation extends only to limited periods of space and time: how could we have within our view something that *essentially* casts its net over the whole of space and time?

This problem probably explains one puzzling feature of Hume’s procedure. He repeatedly affirms that someone who has a full apprehension of a causal connexion would be in a position to make an *a priori* claim about the way events will fall out: what kind of event will be caused by another. It is because we cannot have this timeproof knowledge that we do not apprehend the causal connexion, for instance in the exercise of our own will (E §7 *passim*). The argument seems initially to be, as Craig describes it, a muddle, since there is no evident reason why someone apprehending a nexus on one occasion should thereby know that the same nexus will obtain on another; the very point Hume himself emphasizes when arguing that powers and forces will not solve the problem of induction (T91; Craig 1987:97). I suspect that Hume sees that nothing would really count as apprehension of a particular ‘must’ unless it carried with it implications of uniformity for the general case. It is to be (*per impossibile*) a particular apprehension, but one with the consequences of apprehending a straitjacket. Someone apprehending a straitjacket for what it is will as a consequence know its immunity to time and chance: he will know the timeless *must* that it guarantees. He will be apprehending the impossibility that events should ever transpire otherwise. He has therefore a piece of knowledge that, although it took an empirical starting point in the apprehension of an individual thick necessary connexion, can be seen *a priori* to have implications for all other places and times. And it is this that Hume treats as his target, even when the issue ought to be the apparently lesser one of the particular nexus.

There may be some room for manoeuvre over the lesser claim to have apprehended a particular, but not necessarily timeproof, thick connexion. One

might try allowing the particular apprehension not to carry any implications for what might be present on other occasions (Anscombe 1981). The difficulty will be that an apprehension of a mutable thick connexion does not give us quite what we want from knowledge of causation. That knowledge has to have a *consequence*: the subject possessing it must be prepared to foretell the one event on the appearance of the other. It is not at all clear how apprehension of a particular fact at a particular time could automatically carry any such consequence: one might, as it were, say that this is how events are connected today, and form no expectation and not know what to expect to happen tomorrow.

Sceptical realism might characterize Hume's position on either the nexus or the straitjacket. But unless we understand the extraordinary demands on a straitjacket, we shall fail to see that realism concerning it is hardly important compared to the scepticism. Thus, when Strawson opposes the Regularity Theory, with its ongoing flukes, by citing 'fundamental forces' essentially constitutive of 'the nature of matter', and invokes these to soothe away inductive vertigo, he is surely forgetting Hume's point (Strawson 1987:91). Even if forces are taken 'to latch on to real, mind independent, observable-regularity-transcendent facts about reality' (1987:91), they need something further in order to serve as a straitjacket. They need *necessary* immunity to change; they need to be things for which the inductive vertigo does not arise. Equally if the 'nature of matter' is to help, it must also be so that the continuation of matter is not just one more contingency, whose falling out the same way instant after instant, time after time, is not a cosmic fluke. The force that through the green fuse drives the flower might falter, and so might the fuse and the flower, but a straitjacket must not. Its immunity to change must be necessary, for if it is contingent then either it is a fluke that of any changes that might occur, none ever does, or else this regularity is itself not brute but demands some further straitjacket in the background, of which we have even less inkling. The point is that we will not locate it by ordinary talk of 'force' and its cognates. For even if Hume can countenance understanding of a thick nexus, the theoretical demands on a straitjacket are a great deal more demanding.⁶

Hume's main interest in causation is to destroy the idea that we could have such knowledge, and hence ever apprehend a straitjacketing fact: we have no conception of it, nor any conception of what it would be to have such a conception nor any conception of how we might approach such a conception. In particular, we must not think of the advance of science as targeted on finding such a thing. The lesson drawn from Newton is that just as *Principia* gives us the operation of gravitational force, but does not 'tell us what it is', so any conceivable advance in science can only do more of the same. It can put events into wider and more interesting and exception free patterns, and that is all. 'The most perfect philosophy of the natural kind only staves off our ignorance a little longer' (E31).⁷

Would it be easy for Hume to allow us a 'relative' idea of a straitjacketing fact, a 'something we know not what that governs/brings about/explains the continuing order of nature'? We understand this only insofar as we understand the relation involved of governing or bringing about. But can we understand the relation? Can Hume say the relation part of the relational idea is intelligible? The question is whether we know what governing or bringing about would be when we have no example, and indeed no conception of the kind of fact alleged to be doing it. Hume, given his endorsement of Berkeley's theory of ideas, must say that we cannot take relational ideas (governing, forcing, grounding, issuing in, bringing about) out of the context within which they have intelligible application, and apply

them without blush in contexts in which they do not.⁸ We can only generate the *general* idea if we have *particular* examples. Otherwise, comprehension fails.

Nevertheless, it will be said, even if this shows that we have no idea at all, of what would count either as a straitjacket, or as knowledge that some kind of fact provides one, it seems plain that Hume allows that there *is* one, while of course insisting on scepticism about its nature. Sceptical Realists might be right that he allows us a ‘relative’ idea of such a fact, silently betraying the Berkeleyian background. Even if this were technically correct—and we have seen how far it stretches the texts—it would still misplace the stress; this is why I originally described it as an error of taste rather than an outright mistake. The point is that Hume is utterly contemptuous of any kind of theorizing conducted in terms of such a thing. We are at the point where anything we say ‘will be of little consequence to the world’, or in the world of ‘notion(s) so imperfect that no sceptic will think it worthwhile to contend against (them)’ (T168; E155).⁹ His attitude must be the same as that he holds to an equally noumenal substratum, supporting the qualities of matter:

But these philosophers carry their fictions still farther in their sentiments concerning *occult qualities*, and both suppose a substance supporting, which they do not understand, and an accident supported, of which they have as imperfect an idea. The whole system, therefore, is entirely incomprehensible...
(T222)

Hume is here directly echoing Berkeley:

Lastly, where there is not so much as the most inadequate or faint idea pretended to: I will not indeed thence conclude against the reality of any notion or existence of any thing; but my inference shall be, that you mean nothing at all: that you imply words to no manner of purpose, without any design or signification whatsoever. And I leave it to you to consider how mere jargon should be treated.

(Berkeley 1713: para. 121)

Craig, in particular, makes the case that there is importance in the positive claim that something-we-know-not-what exists, and the importance is sceptical: it enables Hume to destroy any pretension to finding what we might antecedently have hoped to understand about nature. I agree entirely that this critical aim is essential to Hume, and at least as important as the theory of understanding in itself. But Hume enjoys this realignment without himself making any positive claim about the existence of any mysterious straitjacketing fact or facts. The realignment of our self-image, our philosophy of what real discovery and understanding might be, is independent of any such assertion. We do not ourselves have to think the other side of the line to learn how tightly the line defining the limit of all possible empirical enquiry is drawn. The point is that our real engagement with the world, in our understanding and our science, and our self-image or philosophical understanding of the notions we actually use must sail on in complete indifference to any facts transcending our ideas. ‘Relative’ ideas of them play no role any more than relative ideas of many things: Cartesian Egos (simple, indivisible entities whose permanence ensures the identity of the self); the substratum in which properties inhere; objective goods commanding the will of all those who apprehend them; and so on. Since the actual business of making

judgements about the identity of the self, the possession of properties by things, about what is good or bad, goes on in complete indifference to these things, they play no role in our real understanding.¹⁰ They have no use at all: nothing will do as well as something about which nothing can be said.

4 The nexus

Perhaps the same is not true of thick connections with a small ‘t’: the particular causal nexus between events at a time. Do we not give every employment to such a notion? And if Sceptical Realists are right that Hume is not giving us a positivist reduction, do they remain in possession of the field here at least? I do not think so, for there is a third option: a truer description of Hume on ordinary empirical causation would be neither that he is a Positivist nor a Sceptical Realist, but rather a not-so-sceptical anti-realist.¹¹

The outline of Hume’s positive theory of causation is well known. The mind’s perceptions, which form the material with which it must work, come to us only as a regular succession of events. However, upon acquaintance with a regular succession the mind changes, but *not* by forming an impression or idea of anything not given in one instance alone. It changes *functionally*: it becomes organized so that the impression of the antecedent event gives rise to the idea of the subsequent event. No new aspect of the world is revealed by this change: it is strictly *nonrepresentative*, just like the onset of a passion, with which Hume frequently compares it.¹² But once it takes place, we think of the events as thickly connected; we become confident of the association, we talk of causation, and of course we act and plan in the light of that confidence. There are two separate components in this story: the contribution of the world to our apprehension, and the functional change in the mind itself.¹³ These are the two aspects separated in the famous two ‘definitions’ of cause:

An object, followed by another, and where all the objects similar to the first are followed by objects similar to the second.

An object followed by another, and whose appearance always conveys the thought to the other.

(E76–7)

The first ‘philosophical definition’ describes the contribution of the world, insofar as we can apprehend it, and the second describes the non-representative, functional difference in the mind that apprehends the regularity. The parallel with Hume’s philosophy of ethics is so far complete: again, there is a neutral starting point in the mind’s apprehension of some non-ethical facts, and then the onset of nonrepresentative passions ready to be voiced in our moralizing.

It is only after this point that complexities start, but unfortunately Hume is less help with them than one would wish. The theory so far tells us of a nonrepresentative change, a change in the structure of our expectations, that gets expression when we deem two events to be causally connected. But it has not yet conjured up a full theory of the content of propositions about cause. It does not tell us, for example, what we are bothered about when we wonder if A caused B, what we are saying if we say that every event has a cause, whether we can sensibly talk of unknown causes, and so on. Hume shows virtually no interest in such questions, and indeed, against the background of the theory of ideas, can only point in misleading directions. He says, for example, that by a necessary connexion we ‘mean’ a

connexion in the mind, leaving himself open to interpretation as a kind of Berkeleyan, taking the idea of necessity to be a representation of something we are aware of in our own minds. He then has to spend Part I of §7 of the *Enquiry* averting this misunderstanding.¹⁴ What he lacks is a link between the real functional difference, and the thick content we contrive to give causal judgements.¹⁵

Notice, however, how many cards he holds in his hands. The basic theory is flexible enough to accommodate many points that are usually raised against him. Our reactions to nature are subtle: not all regularities betoken cause, and sometimes we attribute cause after miniscule experience of regularity. Well and good: the basic theory need put no limits on the *input* to our causalizing, any more than the input to our moralizing. On the output side, the change in the structure of our thought after we have deemed a sequence causal may also be complex. Its heart is that we ‘make no longer any scruple of foretelling’ one event upon the appearance of another, but it may include a willingness, for example, to hold the sequence constant as we conduct counterfactual and conditional deliberations. Well and good: the basic theory puts no limits on the consequences either. The theory happily predicts the ‘intuitions’ that lead people to detest the regularity theory of the content of our causal sayings. Someone talking of cause is voicing a distinct mental set: he is by no means in the same state as someone merely describing regular sequences, any more than someone who appreciates some natural feature as good is in the same state of mind as someone who merely appreciates the feature. Finally, the contradiction I identified in §1 is sidestepped by distinguishing a representative idea of a connexion, which we do not have, from a capacity to make legitimate use of a term whose function is given nonrepresentatively, which we can have.

There are, I believe, only two points at which this theory could be opposed. One is to deny that a Humean could forge the missing link, between the functional difference we are expressing, and the surface content of our causal judgements, and the work we need to make them do. The other is to deny that we have here a distinctive position, by assailing the limits on ‘representation’ under which Hume operates. The first attack presses the point that Hume needs to tell us what happens not just when we think that A causes B, but also when we think that there exist unknown causal connections, that regardless of whether we had ever existed there would still have been causal connexions and so on. We think in terms of causation as an element of the external world, and there will be a real question of how much of this thought Hume can explain, and how much he has to regret. His prospects for deflecting this first criticism must be quite bright, however. For as we have seen, Hume is working with exactly the same ingredients in the case of ethics. Here too, there is the task of explaining the apparently objective content of moral judgements given their source in the passions, but here it is much harder to believe that the problem is insoluble, and Hume certainly did not believe it to be so.

The second attack need not deny Hume his ingredients. It simply claims that we can cook with them in a different way, awarding ourselves the right to a genuinely *representative* concept of causation. When should we say that we have a representative idea of a property or relation? One answer would be, when we can picture it holding, or exhibit to ourselves in imagination a scene in which the property or relation is visibly instanced. This is a natural empiricist answer, and the one that leaves Hume poised to argue that we have no representative idea of thick causal connections. For a view (or succession of other experiences: sounds, felt pressures and so on) in which there is given a certain succession of events, and

in which one event causes another need be no different from a view in which it does not, but in which the same succession happens anyhow. This is why we have to *interpret* sequences as causal, and however automatic this act is, it is still one that needs to be performed. But empiricism now sounds like prejudice: why should we not have a *theoretical* concept of a thick causal connexion, allowing both that there is a step from the raw appearance of a scene to the belief that it instances such and such connexions, but also insisting that we know what it is for such connexions to exist? We have a *theoretical* idea of them, and the idea represents the way the world is when they are present.

The real problem with this is that it only works if we antecedently understand the relation between the thick connexions and the ongoing pattern of events. Thick connexions *make* events happen; they *issue* in patterns of events, and so on. But these are terms of dependency or causation, so we understand the theory only if we antecedently understand them. And this understanding in turn is queried by the particular versus general problem described in Section 3: any theory needs to tell us how the 'musts' known on one occasion throw their writ over others.

The net result is that any such realist theory looks extravagant. It asks from us more than we need. To see this, imagine a character we might call the Bare Humean. The Bare Humean misses out this capacity for apprehension or theory, so does indeed lack the representative idea of thick connexions that these are supposed to give us. But she goes through the functional change which Hume describes, and conducts her expectations and actions accordingly. She can be an enthusiastic natural scientist, finding concealed features and concealed patterns in nature to aid prediction. She can understand that finding ever more simplicity and ever more general patterns may be 'set us as a task', so that there will always be more to know about nature. She will need a vocabulary to express her confidences and her doubts, and to communicate them to others; she will be a virtuoso at the salient features that are usable day by day to control her world. What else does she need? Are we sure she is missing anything at all? Is she not a bit like you and me?

Postscript

I write this postscript in a mood of benign paternity. Revisiting my essay has caused me to admire it once more rather than wish to unsay any of it. But I think I can offer one or two comments that may, perhaps, cast a little light on the debate. These comments were inspired by hearing Galen Strawson and John Wright presenting their views at a Conference on Hume and pragmatism that Huw Price and Steve Buckle organized in Sydney in August, 1997. Although I was not myself talking about just these issues, they forced me to reflect once more upon them.

These days, in any debate about 'realism', we must be sure that we all know what we mean. In the old days this was easier. There were realists, and there were reductionists. And if these are the interpretive options, since Hume is now agreed by all serious interpreters not to be a reductionist about causation, out he comes as a realist. But there are currently many more options in front of us, and unfortunately many more ways of distributing the title 'realist'. I think that to begin to understand Hume, we need at least to know just how many interpretative options we have. Of course, I have a fairly large stake in this. Since one of the options is my own pet creation, I become quite despondent when it is ignored. But without indulging this lament, let me sketch at least the two major families of options that seem to me to lie in front of us. Consider this distinction:

- 1 Face-value or default realism (lower-case realism). Take any area of discourse whose participants say *p*. Suppose we agree with them that *p*. Then if we cannot reduce the content of *p* we must be realists about the entities and properties and relations ostensibly referred to. Our only anti-realist options are either to find other terms, or to stop saying *p* (reductionism or eliminativism).
- 2 Theoretical or ontological Realism (upper-case Realism). Take any area of discourse whose participants say *p*. Suppose we agree with them that *p*. Suppose we cannot understand what is going on except in terms of our responding to a world whose entities and properties and relations are the ones ostensibly referred to. In that case we have to be realists about those entities and properties and relations. But anti-Realist options would include explaining what is going in other ways than in terms of such a response.

There are many areas that illustrate the difference here. Consider colours. Many philosophers would want to hold what is, in these terms, the combination of small-case realism, and upper-case anti-Realism. They would say that propositions ascribing colours do not permit of reduction. You cannot say what they say in interestingly different terms. But you can understand perfectly well what is going on without supposing that we respond to a world in which things are coloured. Such philosophers think, rightly or wrongly, that colour science shows that we should not think this. Some might hold the same combination of views about mathematics and set theory. Some (myself included) would hold the same combination of views about ethics. Others (myself included) would hold the same about propositions apparently mentioning different possible worlds. These people would be face-value, lower-case realists, but anti-Realists.

Obviously, if we ourselves can only see the issues in small case terms, so that anti-Realism is invisible to us, we will lose a lot of interpretative options. Philosophers who want to be lower-case realists but upper-case anti-Realists will in fact seem to contradict themselves. Someone like Hume, a paradigm realist and anti-Realist in the case of causation as in the case of ethics, becomes an exegetical nightmare. But the problem would lie with the impoverished options we are offering him.

If we only see lower-case realism, it will be easy to cite the many passages rightly and repeatedly quoted by the 'causal realist' school of interpretation, to allow them to claim Hume. But if we look at the entire context, in which Hume's explanatory interests become visible, everything changes. It is easiest to see this, of course, in the case of ethics. Hume is a moderately strict moralist. He makes many assertions about what counts as virtue, what counts as human flourishing, and what counts as vice or misery. He shows no temptation to reductionism, as if we could moralize in other terms than those that are designed for the purpose. So he is a lower-case realist, and indeed says as much on the first page of the second Enquiry. But the work of the anatomist shows us what is going on, and it shows us this without making any appeal to a 'response' or a receptivity to an order of nature that includes virtues, vices, duties, rights and the rest. That is the point of the sentimentalist tradition that he absorbed from Hutcheson. And it is this that he applied to causation. Causalizing—seeing regularities in terms of necessities—is exactly analogous to moralizing, seeing human affairs in terms of good and bad, right and wrong.

Once the issue is seen in this way it is simply no good citing one more time the places where Hume shows sympathy with unknown causes, hidden springs and principles, the propriety of thinking of matter as containing within itself the power

to initiate motion, and so on. Hume was regrettably uninterested in the natural sciences of the Edinburgh of his day, but it is not as if he was some kind of armchair opponent of physics or chemistry (as I have actually heard said). This is like staring at passages where he says, for instance, that ingratitude is horrid, and claiming him for moral realism, or alternatively staring at the passages where he talks about vice being in the breast, and supposing that he cannot really mean that ingratitude is horrid. But the real Hume endorses the first-order sayings. He has no quarrel with the mental habits that lead us to them. In fact, in the case of causation, he characteristically celebrates the fact that nature has implanted our fixed propensities to causalizing in us. But these, in his view, are active mental responses to perceived regularities, rather than passive mental representations of an order of properties and relations that cannot be perceived, and so ones of which we can have no idea. Hence, realism together with anti-Realism.

It is important in the current climate, when 'minimalism' is very much the vogue, to be careful to separate two issues. A minimalist may strike at the way in which upper-case Realism is staged. He may say that it depends, ultimately, on an untenable view of what is possible to philosophy, or metatheory. He may 'minimalize' all the terms in which debate about explanation can be conducted. He might insist on giving the blandest reading to 'responds' or 'represents', so that it becomes merely a part of first-order, everyday discourse to say, for example, that colour vision represents the colours of things, or that we respond to those colours when we talk of them. Equally, on this tack, we respond to numbers when we talk of them, or possibilities and possible worlds when we talk of them. We might even say that in moralizing we represent the moral aspects of things, and respond to them. But (according to the minimalist) we should not find these sayings shocking or uncomfortable. They just go with the first-order turf. In other words, minimalism tries to close off the space for explanatory philosophical theory. It does this by kidnapping, for the first-order discourse, all the terms we might have used in order to try to get a philosophical take on it.

One issue is whether minimalism succeeds. The other is whether, if it does, this closes off the space for understanding Hume. It could do so amongst some philosophers. Not making space for an enterprise themselves, they become unable to understand those who thought they were pursuing it. But it should not make understanding impossible. We know, because he tells us, that Hume thought of himself as the anatomist, delving into the structures of mind and of world that end up with our thoughts and sayings being the way they are. We may be less sanguine about his enterprise than he was, without failing to understand that it was after all his enterprise. And in fact, in the case of ethics if not in the case of causation, most philosophers do understand this. They see that his expressivism and the sentimentalist tradition in general provide a distinctive explanation of human moralizing, and then they rail ineffectually against it.

Obviously, what I have called 'realism' and 'Realism' can subdivide. We are dealing with families of positions, depending on how we construe understanding what is going on, what strikes us as a good or bad explanation, what content we think we have managed to give to first-order *p*, and so on. I do not claim at all that my simple distinction remains simple. What I do claim is that until it is entrenched in our minds, any attempt to discuss whether Hume was a realist about this or that is hopeless.

Notes

- 1 This paper first appeared in 1990 in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 1 Supplement (Fall): 237–50.
- 2 I have in mind Craig (1987), Strawson (1987) and Wright (1983).
- 3 It is particularly odd that Strawson relies upon them, since he conceives of the *Enquiry* as embodying Hume's official theory of causation.
- 4 At least. It may be that its existence at one time should entail its existence at any previous time as well. But one way of gesturing at what is wanted is to imagine God creating it by some kind of fiat or act of lawgiving, whose writ would run into the future.
- 5 One might seek to avoid this by the verbal manoeuvre of identifying kinds of events by their causal powers, in which case it will follow that events of the same kind will bear the same causal connexions. But as Hume in effect points out, inductive vertigo then transfers itself to the contingent question of whether future events with the same sensory appearance will turn out to be of the same kind.
- 6 Strawson is probably betrayed into this conflation by using the one term 'Causation' (with a capital 'C') equally for a thick nexus and a Thick Straitjacket.
- 7 This is famously the point where Newton said '*hypotheses non fingo*', and the point that left contemporary scientists such as Huygens and Leibniz feeling badly let down. Newton was quite within his rights to want more scientific understanding of gravitational attraction. But if he and his contemporaries wanted a different thing—an understanding of the impossibility of events ever falling out otherwise—then Hume stands in his way. Hume does not magnify the difference between himself and Newton, but if Newton was aiming at this superlative piece of understanding, and thought that the methods of natural science might give it, then Hume is clearly opposed. He was the first to see that what Newton did was the only *kind* of thing that could ever be done.
- 8 Berkeley's rigour on this is apparent in his constant polemic against 'abstraction', and in such matters as his embargo on taking causal relations away from the domain of the will, given that it is that which is the basis of our understanding of them. More directly relevant is his insistence that if you try to introduce a 'relative notion' of matter as whatever-it-is-which supports various properties, you mean nothing. As well as the passage quoted in the text, see *Principles of Human Knowledge* pt. 1, §80.
- 9 T168: 'I am indeed, ready to allow, that there may be several qualities both in material and immaterial objects, with which we are utterly unacquainted; and if we please to call these *power* or *efficacy*, 'twill be of little consequence to the world'.
- 10 Strawson is at pains to show that not all Hume's reference to straitjacketing facts are ironic, but I do not think he shows that they are not contemptuous.
- 11 Or, for those familiar with the label, quasi-realist.
- 12 Kemp Smith (1941: chaps I–II). These present convincing evidence that this comparison was the prime mover of Hume's theory of causation. It opened up the 'New Scene of Thought' of which he speaks in the 1734 letter to (probably) George Cheyne.
- 13 As clear a statement as any is Hume's recapitulation, *E78–9*.
- 14 An interesting scholarly question, to which I do not know the answer, is why he took such elaborate care in the *Enquiry* §7 to distinguish his theory from Berkeley's, when the *Treatise* contains no corresponding passages. It is one of the very few cases where the *Enquiry* is fuller than the *Treatise*. Did some review or correspondence make the need evident to him?
- 15 Hume is quite prepared to allow that our common notion of cause contains defective elements; see the footnote on p. 77 of the *Enquiry*.

7 Hume on causality

Projectivist *and* realist?

Edward Craig

Much has been heard during the last two decades about Hume's view of causality. Off the agenda now is the idea that he taught a strict regularity theory: that there is nothing in reality but regular sequence, and that that is accordingly all that causality amounts to, either in our concept of it or in things and events themselves. True, the tendency to speak of regularity theories as 'Humean' persists, but unless it is meant (rather misleadingly, is the least one would have to say) as nothing more than a label without historical connotations, this usage just betokens a limited acquaintance with the work of Hume. Ironically enough, the regularity theory did in a very clear sense have its support, notably in the occasionalism of Malebranche, which banned from the natural world everything but regular sequence and handed over all true causality to God. Hume's reaction to all that, nowhere more clearly expressed than in the closing paragraph of Part I of Section VII of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, was thoroughly agnostic and sceptical.

There is, however, plenty left to disagree about. And the most prominent disagreement of recent years is that between those who represent Hume as some kind of projectivist about causality and those who take him to be a realist. Simon Blackburn (1990, reprinted with postscript in this volume (see Chapter 6)) is a leading exponent of the projectivist view; John Wright (1983) and Galen Strawson (1989) are the first to come to mind in connection with the realist interpretation. According to realism, causal power is some feature or property of the world, one which does not in any way owe its existence to human existence, let alone to human responses of any particular kind. Projectivism is not bothered with any such deep and concealed onto-logical matters. It sees a more fruitful approach in the identification of what it regards as specifically human responses and those readily accessible aspects of experience which set them off. The relation between the regular conjunctive experience of A and B and the belief that they are necessarily connected, or between that experience and the disposition to infer to B from the belief that A is happening, are familiar examples drawn straight from our present subject.

Having mentioned the names of particular persons, I should say that I am using them—as one should not really use the names of colleagues, least of all colleagues who are personal friends—very much as a convenience. The exact details of their views about Hume on causality, or about causality itself, are not for the moment of much importance to me, since the first suggestion I want to make is of a rather general nature: that a possibility we ought to be considering, but which is not to my knowledge considered anywhere in the existing literature, is that both of these

views might be right. Blackburnian projectivism and Strawsonian realism might be right simultaneously; they might be right both as contributions to contemporary debate about causality itself, and historically, as interpretations of what Hume thought about it. And—of course—they may also be wrong, either or both of them, but if they are it is a matter for each separately, not because of any incoherence in their conjunction. And they may be incompatible with something else which Hume held, but they are not incompatible with each other.

I shall in fact argue for something rather stronger than the mere compatibility of realism and projectivism. I believe that it is not just possible that both should be true, but that it is actually quite plausible that both are true. And that goes for both the topic and the history: it is quite plausible that Hume held both of them as well. Whether the plausibility, either of the philosophical or the historical claim, can survive close examination is a further question, but in neither case should there be any assumption that either the projectivism or the realism must fail, since they are (supposedly) incompatible.

The compatibility of the two positions arises from the fact that they can easily and naturally be seen as concerned with two different and largely independent questions, recommended by two different and largely independent lines of thought. And a prominent feature of Hume's philosophy is such as to suggest that he might very well have seen them in much this way, which increases the initial plausibility of the view that he may have held both of them.

Causal beliefs are very widespread, and we may ask why this should be so. One way to answer the question would be to describe the process by which the human mind, given a certain type of experiential input, responds by forming beliefs to the effect that events of certain types are caused by events of certain other types, or that of certain pairs of individual events, one was the cause and the other its effect.

According to some, it may not be ideal to speak of beliefs here. Perhaps we should rather think in terms of participation in a complex practice involving a number of elements, some of them best described as attitudes: speaking of 'causal connections', confidently drawing certain inferences, acting on certain assumptions about what will follow what, and so on. But whether we prefer the 'belief version or the 'practice' version is not for the moment important; the point is that there is something that we all go in for all the time. Just what is it that we do, and why do we do it? These questions put us straight into the area occupied by Hume's account of the origin of the idea of necessary connection and causal beliefs, and more recently by projectivist accounts of the whole causal practice.

Whatever the subsequent detail of his theory, a philosopher might present this everyday business as a human response to the fact of regularity in our experience, the fact that input of some one type is regularly followed by input of a certain other type. The output, what I have called the 'everyday business', is not just the belief in this regularity, which is what gives the investigation its spice: our reaction is more than just registration of the input, so how do we bridge the gap, and why is it worth our while to bridge it and end up where we do?

But now another question comes into view. The philosopher begins to think about the regularities which he has just conjectured to be the trigger for the everyday business of 'causalizing'. This regularity is wondrously pervasive, and wondrously regular. While he was thinking about our tendency to talk the language of causality, he did not need to worry about whether this language had any real correspondent in the world, since the whole purpose of his theory was to account for our addiction to it starting from just our experience of the regularities.

But these regularities themselves he regards as real, and their existence raises the possibility that we need to postulate something or other, just as real as they are themselves, to be whatever it is that keeps them regular. That is at least a *prima facie* option. And we are not now explaining a human practice or mindset; we are trying to get into the real ontology of nature and the real basis of its uniformity.

So we have, on the one hand, an explanatory account of a standard and universal practice; and on the other, an argument about the metaphysics of the regularities which that explanatory account treats as the input from which the standard practice is generated. That these are separate projects is clear, for the projectivist story concerns only what happens—happens to and in us—from the regularities onwards, whereas the metaphysical inquiry comes to an end with the regularities themselves, and is not the slightest bit interested in whatever activities of ours the regularities may then set off.

Nor need the projectivist in our imaginary philosopher be worried that his metaphysical realism is going to damage his projectivism. What would conflict with his projectivism would be the view that it is a perception of the strength of the arguments for metaphysical realism that brings us all to adopt the practice of causal talk and causal attitudes; for his projectivism said that what gives rise to the practice was not that sort of thing at all. But, to repeat, he need not worry. For he can say, and with some confidence, that these arguments are only ever rehearsed by a tiny fragment of humanity (not all of which finds them convincing anyway), so that it would be ridiculous to hold them responsible for an activity in which virtually all human beings participate. The way is clear for his projectivist explanation.

The greater threat, if there is one, seems to run in the opposite direction, from the projectivism to the metaphysical realism. Will not the projectivism swamp the realism, saying that the supposed argument for real causal power is just another case of projective causal practice, and the idea that it leads to genuine ontological information a philosophers' illusion?

It may, but that is not to say that it must. For it is surely an option to reserve projectivism for an explanation of the common practice, and hold that one's response to the observation that there is too much regularity around for us not to be realists is something else altogether: the acceptance of the conclusion of a powerful argument. At the second stage of the debate there will of course be voices saying that it is not a powerful argument at all, some of them perhaps holding that we have no conception of the sort of fact which could underlie the regularities, except one which was itself just a further regularity; so there can be no such thing as a *belief* in realism. Anyone who reaches that point, and already favours projectivism as an answer to the first of our questions, will now be very likely to say that the would-be proponent of metaphysical causal realism is in fact just doing some more projecting, the only alternative being that he is merely burbling. But first reach that point; and not everyone will find it obligatory to do so.

Whether it is obligatory or not is another chapter. But however that chapter turns out, we can at least say this: that if causal realism is an untenable position, and the idea that there might be a weighty argument for it mere illusion, then that is a point about causal realism, taken by itself, not a point about the conjunction of it with projectivism about the common practice. The latter does not contradict causal realism, although once causal realism is taken to be down and out it may well be brought in as an account of what the wrong-headed would-be causal realist was, contrary to what he himself thought, really doing.

Another, reversed, view of the debate has it that the projectivist is secretly committed to realism, and maybe not even all that secretly. For does he not set out to tell us how we pass from the experiential input to the output beliefs or practices, and is not the story he tells a causal one, about the effects of the input on our minds and behaviour? It may be possible to avoid causal terms, speaking instead of the advantages to be had from reacting as we do to regularities of perceptual input, and so explaining our practice in pragmatic style. Whether that option really does enable him to steer clear of causal commitments is of course a further question. But for now we can happily leave it as a question, since even if the projectivist does go in for completely uninhibited talk of causes and effects, it is far from clear that this evinces any tendency towards realism. To propose theories about the causal interrelations of things and events of various kinds is, so he believes, a standard part of the common practice; in proposing that that practice is engendered by certain causal relations between the human organism and regular perceptual experience, he is just going in for some more of the practice itself. We already hold plenty of causal theories, and this is another. Projectivism adds one more little entry to the encyclopedia of causalizing behaviour, but nothing new in principle; it is all just the same familiar old business.

It seems perfectly reasonable, therefore, to think of ourselves as faced with two issues. One asks whether causal realism is a possible doctrine, and may go on to ask whether the argument from regularity establishes it. The other asks how we come to engage in the causal practice, or to hold causal beliefs, and wonders whether Hume's account, or some brand of contemporary projectivism, might be good answers. We should be prepared for the possibility that there may not be a single topic—called 'causality'—with which both inquiries are ultimately concerned. It cannot just be assumed that the beliefs which occur as a part of the common practice are the same beliefs that the metaphysical realist holds as a result of some argument about the grounds of regularity—that will depend on what the (neo) Humean says about the content of everyday causal beliefs. And if we are thinking of a Humean who has become so neo as not to think of the everyday practice as involving *belief* at all, but who prefers to talk of attitudes and practices, it is quite unclear what the thread linking the objects of the two investigations could possibly be. For the metaphysical realist certainly thinks of *his* object as being the object of a belief—once *he* starts thinking of what he is doing in terms of attitudes, practices and the like, his realism has evaporated and the projectivist has taken him over.

* * *

So could it have been that Hume held the double view, projectivism about the everyday belief and realism about the underpinnings of the regularity? After all, he does sometimes explicitly adopt a 'two-view' strategy. There is what he thinks in the philosopher's study, and there is what he thinks over dinner and backgammon. Admittedly, the parallel with what I am mooting is not as close as it might be. For one thing, I am talking about his *explanation* of what we think over dinner and backgammon, when he is certainly in philosophical mode. And for another, it is highly questionable to what extent he wishes to *assert* the products of his reflections in the philosopher's study, whereas I am considering the possibility that perhaps he really was, for philosophical reasons rather than because of everyday psycho-mechanics, a realist about causal connections. So this point cannot of itself do much to render it likely that he would combine projectivism and

realism; but it does indicate that he was no stranger to the idea that beliefs can arise in us all from natural sources, and in the philosophically minded amongst us from philosophical sources, and that the two cases need different treatment.

The possibility of the double view, everyday projectivism plus metaphysical realism, must be worth consideration. We do not, I have been arguing, have to see them as competitors. Given that I am not being very fussy about exactly what projectivism is, but am just using the term in the very broad way I have alluded to, I see no room at all to doubt that Hume was a projectivist about the everyday belief. And I find it hard to believe, after the debate of the last two decades, that there is just nothing to the view that he was a realist about causality. For that, Galen Strawson was able to amass too long a list of quotations in which, on the face of it, Hume makes reference to causal powers.¹ I am impressed by Simon Blackburn's writings about 'quasi-realism', which certainly ought to give pause to anyone in the habit of shouting 'Realism!' whenever they come across a realistic-looking sentence. But before I would be happy to understand such sentences in Hume as quasi-realistic, I would want to see positive evidence that that was how he thought of them, on the assumption that if that *was* what he intended it would have been fairly important to him. (Important, that is, that his readers did not take them as expressing a full-blown ontological realism.)

Now I cannot lay before you any passage in which Hume argues *exactly* as I suggested earlier, namely: 'the regularities are real so there must be something equally real that keeps them regular' (whether or not we can get any grasp of its nature). But the final words of §V of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* come pretty close: 'though we are ignorant of those powers and forces, on which this regular course and succession of objects totally depends' (E55); and if he does not put that in the form of an argument, it might well be (as I think Galen Strawson holds) because he would find the conclusion too obvious to be bothered explicitly to argue for it. Since the powers and forces are here presented as what the regularities *depend* on it would take great sophistication in quasi-realism to put that kind of reading on the sentence. That is not meant as a sly way of saying that such sophistication just cannot be achieved; perhaps it can, but it would be beyond anything that I can see any reason to ascribe to Hume.

It may be said—and has been—that these apparently realist references are ironical, or that they might be contemptuous.² As we shall see in a moment, it would be wrong to claim that there is simply nothing to support either of these suggestions, especially the second. But it is very difficult to see either of them as the whole truth, or as anything approaching it. If a substantial proportion of the relevant passages showed independent evidence for such readings (as does, arguably, the quotation next below); if, for instance, sentences like the one cited just above frequently contained expressions such as 'on which *as some hold* this regular course...' or 'on which *it is often said that* this regular course...' or 'on which *our philosophers tell us that* this regular course...', then things would be different. But the great majority do not; they read as if we were hearing Hume's own voice, speaking naturally and sincerely.

So should we just say that Hume held the double view, and draw a line under the debate? I would like to be able to, but still I have the uncomfortable feeling that certain issues will not lie down. One is that saying that he held both views and then drawing a line leaves an important aspect of his thought about causal realism unmentioned; this is the less worrying issue, since all we need to do is mention it, which can be done in a few words: we should not lose sight of Hume's opinion

about the depth of our ignorance about the natures of those powers and forces, with its implication that causal realism is a doctrine to which we can give only the thinnest of content. Do not, to put it another way, forget the sentence from the *Treatise*, especially the part following the semi-colon (which is the sort of remark from which the ‘contempt’ theory can draw some sustenance):

I am, indeed, ready to allow, that there may be several qualities both in material and immaterial objects, with which we are utterly unacquainted; and if we please to call these *power* or *efficacy*, twill be of little consequence to the world.
(T168)

The second issue worries me more, and is this: that even when we have duly modified and diluted Hume’s position about causal realism, it still seems to conflict with an indispensable feature of his epistemology, and I cannot at present see how the conflict is to be resolved.

* * *

I would like to approach this via my central thought about Hume, but being very brief about it here having been very expansive elsewhere (in Craig 1987: chaps 1–2). The idea that we are ‘made in the image of God’ was a lynch-pin of epistemology and metaphysics in the hundred years or so preceding Hume’s maturity. To play that role it had to be made more specific—in what respects are we like God?—and a favoured answer, though not the only one, was that we are like God in respect of our cognitive faculties, which are course weaker than God’s but in principle the same kind of thing.

What sort of thing is that? Orthodoxy would reply that God knows everything, knows it effortlessly, and knows it infallibly and with perfect certainty. The first two of those did not seem to offer philosophers much purchase, but for infallibility and certainty they did think they saw two points of contact in human knowledge: on the one hand the mathematical and logical, the deductive and demonstrative, on the other the immediate deliverances of the senses. And they constructed their accounts of human knowledge (at its best) and divine knowledge to accord with one or both of these models, in each other’s image. Galileo, Leibniz, Newton and Berkeley offer readily available illustrations of this point (see Craig 1987: ch. 1).

Hume, as I like to see him, was first and foremost an opponent of the Image of God doctrine. Human beings are natural objects with no supernatural component, and to be understood, so far as we are capable of understanding ourselves, through the application of the methods of the natural sciences. His intention was to refute and replace the epistemology which the Image of God doctrine implied; hence a major part of his project was to show that our beliefs and attitudes cannot be derived from the sources favoured by his recent predecessors, these being what he called Reason and the Senses, the first understood in terms of ‘demonstration’ and derived from our experience of mathematics and logic, the second in terms of immediate, non-inferential sensory experience. (His choice of these two concepts is thoroughly understandable in the light of the philosophico-theological background which for him defined his principal target.) The other, positive stage of the project was to give an account of their true origin through his psychological theory of association and enlivenment of ideas, the workings of what he calls the human Imagination. In particular cases he may, for local reasons, bypass part of

this procedure: he does not bother to consider whether our confidence in the conclusions of inductive arguments might derive from the Senses, for instance, since that is a trivial consequence of the way he understands the problem. But never does he consider any *fourth* possibility; if he can dismiss the candidature of Reason and of the Senses, then it must be the Imagination, and his 1730s-style cognitive science swings into action.

My worry is that this does not leave Hume with enough epistemological room to affirm causal realism, even a causal realism of the very diluted kind that is the most we can attribute to him. We have grown familiar with the thought, closely allied to the understanding of Hume as an embryonic logical positivist, that he does not allow himself enough *semantic* room, since he allows *no thought of any kind* that cannot be represented in terms of possible sensory experiences; or in his vocabulary: which does not consist of Ideas. This hard-line verificationist reading of him is not convincing, so I believe the semantic problem to be one of our own making, or rather our own invention. But the epistemic one arises quite directly out of Hume's own most obvious procedures, procedures which time and time again dictate the basic structure of his discussion of topic after topic. Is this belief (or whatever) produced by Reason? No. Is it produced by the Senses? No. So it must be produced by the Imagination, and here is how.

When speaking just now of an indispensable feature of Hume's epistemology, it was this one that I had in mind. We may permit ourselves, in seeking an overall interpretation of a philosopher's position, occasionally to dismiss certain remarks as aberrations of thought or expression. And where, as in Hume's case, his main work consists of three books, the shortest of them as long as many a Ph.D. dissertation, all three a good deal denser and very much more original than any Ph.D. most of us have ever read, and the whole of this substantially finished before his twenty-seventh birthday by someone writing in largely isolated circumstances, we can assume with confidence that some such aberrations must exist. But the treatment of Reason, the Senses and the Imagination as the three sources of belief cannot be thought of as one of them. For one thing, it emerges altogether too smoothly from the historical background to Hume's project. For another, any attempt to do without it would repeatedly leave a gaping hole in the structure of his argument with no indication as to how the sympathetic interpreter might begin to fill it in. It is simply too integral to be jettisoned; any reading of Hume's philosophy will surely have to take it as a fixed point.

Now I was considering the possibility that Hume, as well as being a projectivist concerning everyday causal beliefs, is also a causal realist. That must mean that he has a belief, however diluted he takes its content to be, in the existence of those 'powers and forces', and presumably wishes to recommend it to his readers. All of which being so there surely ought to be a place for that belief in his epistemology, and a sufficiently honorific place for him to regard it as worthy of acceptance. But is there? Has he left himself enough epistemological room?

I doubt it. Suppose we were to ask Hume, 'Do you believe that there really is causal power? We appreciate your view that human beings are bound to believe in causal connections, given just regularity of conceptual input; but we note that provided that there is such regularity (as indeed there is) they will hold that belief whether there is anything apart from regularity or not. So do you believe that there *really is* causal power?' I do not see how he could avoid answering us in terms leading to complete agnosticism, perhaps somewhat as follows:

As you imply, your question can be taken in two ways. If you were just asking me whether I believe in causal powers, then of course I do, just like all normally constituted humans, and what I have written about the workings of the Imagination tells you how I think the belief comes about. But you were careful to make it clear that that wasn't what you were asking. What you wanted to know was whether, quite independently of how human beings happen to work, there are causal connections in nature. You wanted me as it were to switch my Imagination off and then answer the question. That's a very difficult thing for a human being to do. But I think I can manage after a fashion, because I can at least ask myself how I *would* decide if I were relying solely on *other sources* of belief. Put like that, in fact, the question is quite easy. I recognise two other sources, namely Reason and the Senses. The Senses don't produce the belief, since (as I've clearly said) we don't perceive the power. And Reason doesn't produce it, since a brute-fact regularity is perfectly conceivable—which as you know is one of my favourite arguments for showing that a belief isn't produced by Reason. And while we are on the topic, I might add that my response would have been the same had you asked me about the belief that there *aren't* causal powers. The Senses don't tell us that there aren't; and Reason doesn't tell us that there aren't, because (as I keep saying) we don't have anything like a clear enough grasp of what they would be like for Reason to get a grip on questions about them at all. So that's my position about causal powers, when I (figuratively speaking) switch my Imagination off: I get no belief about them whatever.

So what are the options? We might decide that Hume was not a causal realist, even a diluted one—could not have been, because his epistemology does not allow it—and scramble to interpret all the things he says which sound so much like causal realism. We might decide that he was a (diluted) causal realist, and simply had not spotted that holding this view was in conflict with his own epistemology. (This might well be the easiest line to take, but do we really want to take it?) A third route might be that there are more resources available to him than I allowed for in the little speech I have just made on his behalf. Then we will have to say what those further resources are, and why they make no appearance in his standard procedure, in other words, why we do not have to consider whether the target belief is produced by Reason, by the Senses, and then by some further X before we proceed to the Imagination. That does not sound easy, especially when we remember that the mystery X must not turn out to be another aspect of the Imagination, or just another way in which human beings form beliefs in response to their incoming impressions. For then it would not be something Hume could appeal to in connection with our question about causal realism.

I have argued before now, and once at a meeting of this very Society³, that Hume's concentration on the refutation of the Image of God Doctrine tended to move ontological issues out of the focus of his attention. The fatal weakness of that doctrine, as he saw it, lay in its false implications about our epistemic potential. So he was primarily concerned with where (to stick with our present example) causal beliefs cannot come from, and where they can and do come from; whether they are true or not was very much a secondary issue, and one that he thought about at a much lower level of intensity. So, I went on, we should not be too surprised if he provided material for both the anti-realist and the realist interpreters, but never bothered to decide firmly and unequivocally where he

himself stood; we can just shrug that one off. But, to use his own words, I find myself now of a quite contrary sentiment. The burden of much of this chapter has been that there was no need for him to decide, since the two views are not in collision; he can perfectly well hold both of them, and there is plenty of *prima facie* textual evidence that he did, and that he expressed them openly and clearly. Now the argument I have just related comes boomeranging back at me: given the intensity of his focus on matters epistemological, this is precisely a question that we *cannot* shrug off. How are we to understand the apparent clash, not between his realist utterances and his projectivist utterances—which need not be seen as a clash—nor between his realist utterances and his theory of meaning—which is a post-positivist mirage—but between his realist utterances and his epistemology? I finish, as my title indicated, on an interrogative note.

Notes

- 1 The extent of the phenomenon may be seen in §§14–20 of his 1989.
- 2 The latter suggestion was made by Simon Blackburn; see footnote 10 to his ‘Hume and Thick Connexions’ in this volume (Chapter 6).
- 3 This chapter is a revised version of a talk given to the Hume Society at its conference in Stirling, Scotland in July 1998. The reference is to a talk given in December 1994 in Boston.

8 Sceptical doubts concerning Hume's causal realism

Martin Bell

Introduction

Since interpretations of Hume as some kind of causal realist were put forward by Galen Strawson (1989) and by John Wright (1983) there has been much discussion about how to interpret passages in Hume's writings especially in the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748) in which he refers to causal powers in objects. The accounts of Hume's alleged realism given by Strawson and Wright differ. I argue here that neither version fits Hume's thought. In §1 I summarize the features of Strawson's version that I need for my argument, and in §2 I argue that there is conflict between this kind of causal realism and Hume's inductive scepticism. To ascribe to Hume causal realism as Strawson understands it is to blunt the power of Hume's argument for inductive scepticism.

In §3 I try to show that the causal realism which Wright ascribes to Hume, being as Wright emphasizes derived from Cartesian philosophy, is in fact a major target of Hume's critique. I concentrate in this section on Wright's response in this volume to Kenneth Winkler's 'The New Hume'.

In §4 I consider the fact that Hume says that causes *are* necessarily connected to their effects, that nature *has* causal powers, and that the world *is* governed by laws of nature. I argue that he considers all this to be compatible with the analysis of causality which he proposes as a replacement for the Cartesian one he rejects, an analysis which is throughout a posteriori and fallibilist. I try to show that Hume says that causal powers are 'unknown' or 'secret' for two main reasons. First, causal powers are unknown in distinction to Malebranche's *a priori* conception of knowledge of causal power. Second, in the terms of Hume's positive *a posteriori* account, they are unknown because nature is a complicated machine of which we know little. Hume connects this latter theme to Newton's epistemological caution about such (real) natural forces as gravity, *vis inertia* and *vis viva*. The forces and powers of physical theory¹ are always known from their effects not their causes. However, there remains a tension in Hume's thought which surfaces in his remarks about the inadequacy of his definitions of cause. Wright and, to an extent, Strawson see this as further evidence for their sharp distinction between Hume's sceptical epistemology and his realist ontology. I suggest that this tension is due rather to the fact that Hume wants to see causal necessity as something which is, so to speak, fully present in each instance of a causal relation, while at the same time he is working towards a recognition that necessity involves essential reference to generalizations, that is, to laws of nature.

1

In his book (1989), Strawson aims to do two things: to argue that Hume did not accept a regularity theory² of causation, and to argue independently against any such theory. So far as the interpretation of Hume goes, Strawson says that the most one can say of the extent to which Hume did accept a regularity theory is two things. First, one could say that he held a regularity theory about causal relations between objects only where ‘objects’ is understood to mean objects in some way constituted by perceptions or their contents, that is, understood in a non-realist way. Second, and better for Strawson’s purpose, one could say that Hume held that regularities of succession are all that the mind can *know* about causal relations between objects in the real world.³ This way of putting things is better for Strawson, because he argues that the view that Hume did accept a regularity theory rests on failing to distinguish epistemological matters from ontological matters in Hume’s philosophy. For Strawson, Hume was in ontology a realist about causal powers and forces, but in epistemology he was sceptical about the mind’s capacity to know them: all the mind can know of causation in nature is regularities of succession. This scepticism about knowledge of causal powers, according to Strawson, has obscured the fact that Hume always ‘takes...for granted’ (Strawson 1989:2) that causation as it really is involves causal powers. His evidence is of two main forms. First, he argues that passages in Hume’s texts which have been taken to be acceptance of a regularity theory should properly be interpreted as making only the sceptical epistemological point. Second, he claims that in many passages, particularly but not exclusively in the first *Enquiry*, the ‘natural interpretation’ is that Hume was ‘referring’ to causal powers in nature (Strawson 1989:145ff).

On this reading, when Hume said that the mind had no idea of causal powers, he did not think that this precluded him from referring to causal powers, because, argues Strawson, he could regard the mind as having ‘relative ideas’ of them. Strawson explains this by means of the passage where, discussing ideas of external bodies, Hume said:

The farthest we can go towards a conception of external objects, when suppos’d *specifically* different from our perceptions, is to form a relative idea of them, without pretending to comprehend the related objects.

(T68)

Similarly, then, Hume could deny that the mind had ideas that comprehend causal powers, but take himself to be able to refer to them by the use of relative ideas. However, someone can think that he successfully refers to an otherwise unknown something by means of its standing in a relation to something else which is known only if he already believes that there exists such a thing, as Strawson makes clear:

the merely relative idea of true causal power or force in nature is: ‘whatever it is in reality which is that in virtue of which reality is regular in the way that it is’; or, in more Humean terms, it is ‘those powers and forces [unknown and ‘unintelligible’ as they are], on which [the] regular...succession of objects *totally depends*’(E55).⁴...This description suffices to pick causal power out, if it exists (*and Hume assumes that it does* [my emphasis]), in such a way that we

can go on to *refer* to it while having absolutely no sort of positive conception of its nature on the terms of the theory of ideas.

(Strawson 1989:52)

The question, then, of whether Hume thought that consistently with his theory about the origins of ideas he could refer to causal powers in objects by means of relative ideas is posterior to the question of what it was that Hume was assuming (if he did so assume) when he assumed the existence of causal powers in nature.

Strawson is emphatic that Hume held that the mind cannot know anything about the nature of causal powers. But this, he argues, is quite compatible with believing that they exist. In fact, he claims, Hume always (at least so far as he was talking about objects realistically understood) ‘takes the existence of something like natural necessity or causal power for granted not only in common life but also as a philosopher’ (1989:1). Strawson’s expression ‘takes for granted’ needs some comment if we are to be clear what his reading of Hume is. At its weakest, the phrase might mean only that Hume did not present any argument for belief in the existence of causal powers while nevertheless using that belief in argument. But since Hume argues that some beliefs we have (so-called ‘natural beliefs’) cannot be supported by argument anyway, a second possibility would be that when Strawson says Hume took causal powers for granted he means that Hume regarded belief in their existence as a natural belief which it would be extravagant scepticism to reject. But Strawson seems to mean something more:

the truth of the claim that Hume believes in causal power is deducible from the details of his discussion of causation considered independently of his doctrine of natural belief; the most direct evidence is simply that he standardly takes its existence for granted...in contexts that contain...no explicit appeal to the notion of natural belief.

(1989:2)

In fact, it is not entirely clear what status Strawson does want to say this ‘taken for granted’ belief has for Hume, in terms of Hume’s classification of types of belief. Strawson does sometimes talk of ‘our natural belief that causation in the objects involves something more than just regularity’ (causal power) (1989:22) but here he is speaking *in propria persona* and it may be that what Strawson means by calling a belief ‘natural’ is not what commentators have meant by Hume’s ‘natural beliefs’. For Strawson also emphasizes that, on his reading, the belief in the existence of causal powers that (he claims) Hume held was not, or perhaps not just, a ‘Humean natural belief’:

The present suggestion, then, is that one can go further than saying that Hume believes in causal power because such a belief is part of natural belief. He believes in causal power even when suspending natural belief as far as possible for philosophical purposes. In fact (I suggest) it never really occurs to him to question the existence of causal power—i.e. to question the idea that there must be and is something about reality given which it is ordered and regular in the way that it is—even in his most extravagantly sceptical (or Pyrrhonian) mode.

(1989:2)

This certainly makes a strong claim. It seems to mean that his belief in the real existence of causal power was, so to speak, *so* taken for granted by Hume *that he never proposed to account for it at all*.

We thus seem to be in a difficulty. First, according to Strawson, Hume denies that we can know anything about the *nature* of causal powers, so we cannot expect to find in Hume an account of what causal powers are. Second, according to Strawson—or so it seems—we cannot expect to find in Hume any account at all of how the belief is acquired. And this makes it hard to get a hold on what it was that Hume believed in when believing in the existence of real causal powers, if indeed he did. Fortunately, Strawson undertakes to explain what this belief is in his own way.

In essence, according to Strawson, to believe in causal power (what Strawson calls ‘Causation’⁵) is to believe ‘that there must be and is something about reality given which it is ordered and regular in the way that it is’ (1989:2), or to believe ‘in there being something about reality in virtue of which it is regular in the way that it is’ (1989:4). Later he attacks those who do not believe in Causation, but hold that nevertheless there is ‘an *objective* regularity, really occurring in the world’, saying that this is to believe in:

an objective fluke, in the simple sense that there is, objectively or in the nature of things, absolutely no reason at all why regularity rather than chaos occurs from moment to moment. Or alternatively—if we call the particular regularity exemplified by our world ‘R-regularity’—there is no reason why R-regularity rather than S-regularity or T-regularity occurs from moment to moment.

(1989:21)

This makes clear that believing in Causation is believing in something in virtue of which the regularity of nature that has been manifested up to time *t* (call this R-regularity) persists after time *t* (‘from moment to moment’) and does not get replaced by chaos or some other pattern (say S-regularity). Strawson also explains that ‘I have adopted “Causation” as a name for that about reality in virtue of which it is regular, and which is therefore not just the fact of its regularity’ (1989:90). In this way, Strawson characterizes Causation and explains that, on his reading, Hume’s causal realism consists in his belief in Causation, and is evidenced by the way in which he constantly uses terms which refer to Causation.

2

In giving this account of Hume’s causal realism, Strawson draws attention to some features of Hume’s philosophy which could be seen to be incompatible with his reading. In particular, he discusses apparent tensions between his reading and the theory of ideas as copies of impressions; Hume’s assertion that the mind has no idea of causal power in objects; and Hume’s scepticism about our ability to know the essence or nature of things, whether mind or matter. To each of these tensions he offers a solution. I will now argue that there is a further source of tension, which arises from Hume’s argument for scepticism about induction. I will concentrate exclusively upon this argument as it is given in Section IV of the *Enquiry*. Strawson makes frequent reference to passages in this section in order to present evidence that Hume speaks about causation in objects in a way that shows that he thinks such causation is Causation. But he does not present a reading of this

argument as a whole. At the beginning of his book (1989:6) Strawson says that he will ‘say little’ about this ‘famous discussion’. What he does say is that in it Hume ‘argues that reason cannot justify reliance on inductive argument’, but that this is in no way incompatible with the fact that here, as throughout his philosophy, Hume is a believer in Causation:

Conviction that the world is governed by causal powers or natural necessity is entirely compatible with the correct view that *reason* cannot prove this fact, or guarantee the trustworthiness of inductive argument. To think that Hume’s discussion of induction supports the view that he held a Regularity theory of causation is an elementary error...

(1989:6)

Now Strawson claims that Hume took for granted a belief in Causation even at his most sceptical. If so, this must be true for the famous argument for inductive scepticism. But there is apparently a tension here. I can bring this out by referring to Simon Blackburn’s way of understanding Strawson, in his paper ‘Hume and thick connexions’:

When we think of a causally connected pair of events, such as the impact of the first billiard ball causing the motion of the second, we want there to be a further fact than (mere) regular succession. We want there to be a dependency or connexion, a fact making it so that when the first happens the second *must* happen. Call this the desire for a casual nexus. But now suppose we shift our gaze to the whole ongoing course of nature. Again, we may want there to be a further fact than mere regular succession. We feel that the ongoing pattern would be too much of a coincidence unless there is something *in virtue of which* the world has had and is going to go on having the order that it does... This is whatever it is that ensures the continuation of the natural order, that dispels the inductive vertigo that arises when we think how natural it might be, how probable even, that the constrained and delicate pattern of events might fall apart. Call the desire for this further fact the desire for a straitjacket on the possible course of nature: something whose existence at one time guarantees constancies at any later time.

(Blackburn, p. 103 above).

It does seem that Strawson’s conception of Causation is of both nexus and straitjacket. On his account of what Causation is, not only are there in nature causal powers which produce effects so that the causes that possess those powers are necessarily connected to their effects, but also there is something, other than the regularity of nature, which is that in virtue of which that regularity is the way it is, which Strawson calls ‘the nature of matter’ (1989:90). And it does seem that the latter fact, the something other than the regular course of nature in virtue of which the regularity obtains, is thought of, in Blackburn’s words, as ‘alleviating this [inductive] vertigo’ (p. 103 above) which arises when we think of the regularity as simply all there is.⁶ But if Strawson is correct that the conception of Causation he constructs is that which Hume took for granted (and his doing so is what for Strawson makes him a causal realist), how are we to understand Hume’s explicit endorsement of the argument for inductive scepticism?

Students of Hume may be prone to reply that it is no surprise that Hume should both endorse a belief and argue that there is no way of establishing that belief by reason. But in this case the issue needs discussion, because according to Strawson Hume took for granted belief in Causation throughout his argument for the sceptical conclusion about induction, in such a way that the argument actually rests on this belief.⁷

Hume's argument for inductive scepticism in the *Enquiry*⁸ begins from the question of what the nature of the evidence is that we have for beliefs about matters of fact, other than where we have the evidence of sense and memory. His conclusion (his 'negative answer') in §IV is that 'our conclusions from...experience are *not* founded on reasoning, or any process of the understanding' (E32). He means, I believe, that we have no reason at all, no reason of any kind whatever, for our beliefs about matters of fact that go beyond the evidence of our senses and memory. Neither the starting point nor the conclusion make explicit reference to causation. But causation enters the argument first because Hume claims that we can only reasonably believe in the existence of a matter of fact beyond sense and memory if we have evidence for it, and that evidence has to be some other matter of fact which is causally related to it. However, we can never establish that one matter of fact is causally related to another by a priori means. We need experience to do this. The experience we have tells us what causal relations held between matters of fact of which we had experience, but can tell us that a causal relation now holds between the fact we take as evidence and the other we infer from it only if we assume that similar causes will have similar effects. Scepticism about induction arises when we ask whether we have any evidence at all for that assumption; for Hume argues that we do not. The proposition that similar causes always have similar effects is not intuitively known, nor can it be demonstratively proved, since its negation is possible. Neither can it be demonstrated from some other matter of fact established already by experience (that is, deduced from such a matter of fact) for there seems no matter of fact that could be both established by experience and sufficiently powerful to entail that similar causes always have similar effects. Finally, it cannot be inferred by an inductive argument from experience, since all such arguments would be circular. This is a rough sketch, but sufficient for my purpose of considering Strawson's claim that the argument 'appeals essentially to Causation' (1989:90).

As we noted, Strawson says little about this argument. The only discussion of any length is two pages (1989:182–3), but it is clear from this that Strawson in fact locates the heart of it in a passage (E37–8) where Hume considers a possible response to what he has said to that point. He has already argued that we do not discover that one object is the cause of another from observation of its sensible qualities. So what it is about the object which connects it to its effects in a causal relation (which Hume calls its 'power') is not itself observable; hence the term 'secret powers'. Suppose, however, that we are observing an object of a type of which we have had experience, so that we know, from observation, what effects other objects of that type had. Can we not then say that although the sensible qualities do not themselves reveal the secret powers, nevertheless on the basis of 'a number of uniform experiments, we *infer* a connexion between the sensible qualities and the secret powers' (E36)? The idea is that if we have inferred, from past experience, that there is a connexion between such sensible qualities and such secret powers, then when we observe an object of the same type (in terms of the

sensible qualities) we *reason* (via the ‘inferred’ connexion) to the presence of the secret powers, and thence again *reason* (via the necessary link between a power and what the power effects) to the existence of the effects of those powers. Hume’s response is to apply his general argument already given. The move from the connexion between sensible qualities and secret powers in the past to the same connexion between similar sensible qualities and secret powers on a new occasion is itself an inference which we can make only on the assumption that ‘the future will resemble the past, and that similar powers will be conjoined with similar sensible qualities’ (E37). However he then adds:

In vain do you pretend to have learned the nature of bodies from your past experience. Their secret nature, and consequently all their effects and influence, may change, without any change in their sensible qualities.

(E38)

Now Strawson implies that *this* is the heart of Hume’s inductive scepticism. He says that

The reason why induction cannot be justified by appeal to past experience, therefore, is precisely that ‘*the secret nature* [of bodies], and consequently all their effects and influence, may change’...Hume appeals to the Causation notion of the power-and-force-grounding-or-involving secret nature of bodies, and to the idea that *this* could conceivably change from one moment to the next ...it is for this reason that induction cannot be justified by appeals to past experience.

(Strawson 1989:182–3)

This reading of Hume’s argument takes us back to Blackburn’s idea of a straitjacket. The believer in Causation does believe that all the powers and forces of bodies depend upon their nature. It is the nature of matter which explains why reality is regular in the way that it is. But *what* is ‘the way that reality is regular’? It is regular in that *so long as the nature of matter does not change* then similar causes must have similar effects. In this way the existence of an unchanging nature of matter straitjackets (constrains to be regular) the operations of bodies. Hence a believer in Causation believes that what all inductive inferences presuppose, namely that similar causes will have similar effects, is guaranteed on the assumption that the nature of matter does not change. Thus, the believer in Causation can argue as follows: take for granted that the nature of matter does not change; then we can infer from that that similar causes will have similar effects; so we can infer from past experience to future cases. Hence if we take for granted that the nature of matter does not change, we can take for granted that the past is a rule for the future, and so *conditionally* justify induction.

Now Strawson claims not only that Hume took for granted that there is Causation, but actually would have held (if he had ever considered not taking it for granted) that it is *reasonable* to believe in its existence, because there is a general argument in favour of this belief (1989:221–4). This is an argument ‘which I [Strawson] believe Hume would have accepted as obvious’. For the moment let us not examine this argument. What is interesting is what Strawson must now be claiming about Hume’s argument for inductive scepticism. This is that not only does Hume, as a believer in Causation, have a conditional justification for

induction, but also he would have held (had he thought of considering the matter) that it is reasonable to believe in Causation, and so reasonable to believe that induction is justified; reasonable to believe that the past is a rule for the future. In which case, what would he have meant by his conclusion ‘that it is not reasoning which engages us to suppose the past resembling the future, and to expect similar effects from causes which are, to appearance, similar’ (E39)? The answer that, I believe, Strawson must make is that when Hume says that we have no reason at all for relying on induction, this is because he accepts that reason cannot *prove* that there is Causation (even though it is reasonable to believe that there is). And this suggests that *proof* is a good deal stronger than just having good reason. This suggestion seems to have evidence in the few other remarks that Strawson makes about Hume’s inductive scepticism. For example, Strawson discusses why Hume holds that we have no idea (in the sense of sanctioned by his theory of ideas) of the causal powers of objects. He argues that it is because Hume considered that if we had such an idea, then we would be able to infer *a priori* from causes to effects. But Hume would have held that ‘it is just not possible to ‘penetrate into the nature of bodies’ in such a way that one could see, on first encountering C, that E just has to happen...’ (Strawson 1989:113). Strawson queries whether just such penetration might not after all be possible with advances in scientific theory. However, he continues:

the certainty of all such predictions will always and for ever be conditional on the assumption that the fundamental nature of matter is not going to change. And Hume’s unassailable central point is that no sort of penetration into the nature of matter could ever guarantee certain knowledge of the truth of *this* assumption; hence it could never really yield unconditional, a priori certain knowledge that E has to happen given C...

(1989:13)

And he goes on to link the thought that there cannot be ‘*a priori certain knowledge*; that things will continue to behave in the same way in the future’ (1989:13; my emphasis) with Hume’s argument for inductive scepticism: ‘This line of thought is very clear in the argument against the rationality of induction...’.

There is evidence therefore that Strawson reads Hume’s argument for inductive scepticism as showing that we have *no reason* to expect future cases to resemble past cases only in a highly restrictive sense of ‘reason’. This interpretation of the argument is, therefore, forced by the assumption that when Hume spoke about causes and causal powers, about secret powers and unknown ultimate principles of nature, and so forth, in the course of §IV he was expressing a belief in Causation. That is, if in this section of the *Enquiry* Hume was indeed taking for granted that there is Causation, then his argument must be seen as having only the restricted force that Strawson *appears*⁹ to ascribe to it. But if, as I do, one holds that Hume’s argument for inductive scepticism is far wider in its force, and genuinely does argue that we have no reason whatever for our beliefs in matters of fact beyond the evidence of sense and memory, then one must interpret Hume’s discourse in some other way. And that would be to conclude that even if that discourse shows Hume to have accepted some kind of causal realism, it does not provide evidence that this causal realism consisted in acceptance of Strawson’s theory of Causation.

3

In his contribution to this volume Wright (Chapter 5) responds to the criticisms of Kenneth Winkler (1991, reprinted in this volume; see Chapter 4) and in doing so makes admirably clear exactly what his understanding is of the causal realism which he ascribes to Hume. He argues that Hume considered that causes and effects appear to the mind as distinct events, and so the ideas which the mind forms of these events are different and separable. No conceptual connection between causes and effects appears to the mind. But the idea of causal power is the idea of a relation or connection between cause and effect, and Wright explains that Hume understood this relation or connection as ‘an intelligible connection’.¹⁰ By this, Wright means a connection or relation such that, were there an idea of it available to the mind, then the effect could be inferred a priori from the cause: ‘Thus, a genuine apprehension of causal power would involve an understanding of the necessary or conceptual connection of cause and effect’ (p. 92 above). Hume is thus read as holding that causal power consists in a conceptual connection between cause and effect; that the mind has no idea of such connections; and therefore that the idea of cause and effect that the mind does possess is inadequate to its object. Wright argues further that the notion of the inadequacy of ideas to reality is at the root of Hume’s mitigated scepticism, and also explains why he regards the definitions he gives of cause and effect (for example, *E76–7*) as defective. Both the constancy of the conjunctions of cause and effect (first definition) and the customary transition of the mind from the idea of the one to the idea of the other (second definition) are, says Wright, ‘clearly extraneous and foreign to the causal relation itself (p. 91 above).

Now if Wright is correct about what Hume’s causal realism consisted in, then evidently Hume was using an understanding of what causal power actually is, in nature, which is not validated by his theory of what ideas the mind possesses, precisely to point to the difference between ideas in the mind and the reality to which they are inadequate. This is another important area of disagreement between Winkler and Wright, and Wright emphasizes it:

Our ignorance of unknown powers is not characterized by Hume as an ignorance of further regularities or constant conjunctions of objects; it is characterized as a certain lack of understanding—that is of the intelligible connection of cause and effect. Winkler says that Hume draws the limits of what ‘we can conceive, suppose, or understand...from *within* our thought’ (p. 67 above). But if Winkler means by this that they are drawn simply through our actual ideas then he is wrong. Hume draws limits to our knowledge and understanding of objective causal power through a clear criterion of what would constitute such knowledge. It is true that Hume says that we have ‘no idea of this connexion’ (*E77*) because we never find any instance of it, but he clearly knows exactly what it is for there to be such an objective connection.
(p. 93 above)

The conception of causal power as a conceptual connection between cause and effect is the conception found in Cartesian writers like Malebranche. As Wright (1983:139) puts it, ‘Hume systematically accepted the Cartesian conceptual criterion for knowledge of true causation and real power’. So real power is something such that if we knew it we would have *a priori* knowledge of what

effects result from what causes, and, for Wright, Hume's causal realism consists in the acceptance that, although we have no knowledge of them, there are such real powers in nature. In terms of the distinction made by Blackburn which we noted earlier, Strawson's version of Hume's alleged causal realism is mainly a theory about nature's 'straitjacket', whereas Wright's version is a theory of the causal nexus, of what it is for there to be a necessary connection between particular causes and their effects.

For Malebranche, an object's power (where this means its active power, not its passive power to be affected) is that by which it produces its effect. Malebranche requires that such powers be conceivable. That is why he makes the capacity of the mind to perceive a necessary connection between a putative cause and its effect the criterion for that cause being an active power. The mind can perceive necessary connection only between ideas which it distinctly and clearly conceives. Malebranche says that

A true cause as I understand it is one such that the mind perceives a necessary connection between it and its effect. Now the mind perceives a necessary connection only between the will of an infinitely perfect being and its effects.

(Malebranche 1674–5:450)

And he explains that to perceive a necessary connection between A and B is to perceive that it is impossible to conceive that A occurs but B does not occur (1674–5: 448). It follows from this that for Malebranche the connection between true causes and their effects must be intelligible, in just the way that the connection between the axioms and the theorems of geometry is intelligible.¹¹

Now Wright asserts that it is *this* account of the connection between causes and effects which Hume accepts as a proper account of what it is for there to be causal powers, active powers, true causes. What distinguishes Hume from Malebranche, according to Wright, is not that they have differing conceptions of what it is for there to be a necessary connection between causes and effects, but that they differ over whether the mind ever does perceive such a connection. As Wright sees it, Malebranche and Hume are in complete agreement that in the case of natural (secondary) causes, the mind never perceives a necessary connection in this sense. But Malebranche asserts that in the case of the divine will, the mind does perceive a necessary connection, while Hume denies that this is a genuine case. For Hume, therefore, there is never a case of perception of necessary connection, and so never a case of perception of causal power. That is what he expresses by saying that we have no idea of causal power in objects. Yet, according to Wright, Hume thinks that we can still suppose there to be such connections in nature, and that this is what we naturally do when we have experienced constant conjunctions.

I believe that this misrepresents Hume's relation to Malebranche.¹² Malebranche frequently chastizes other metaphysicians for making use of ideas that are obscure and confused:

Not only do philosophers say what they do not conceive when they explain natural effects through certain beings of which they have not one single particular idea, they even furnish a principle from which one can directly infer very false and dangerous conclusions. For if we assume, in accordance with their opinion, that bodies have certain entities distinct from matter in them,

then, having no distinct idea of these entities, we can easily imagine that they are the true or major causes of the effects we see.

(1674–5:446)

Ironically, Hume turns just this kind of critique against Malebranche himself. He argues that in fact, Malebranche has no idea of a necessary connection between causes and effects in the sense he intends, namely, that one perceives it impossible to conceive of the cause obtaining without its effect. For Hume argues that since causes and effects are distinct, the non-existence of one object can never be contrary to the existence of a distinct object. Therefore, there cannot be a conceptual connection of the kind Malebranche imagines using as the criterion for the discovery of true causes (T173). Therefore he has no idea of what he means by ‘perceiving a necessary connection between a cause and its effect’: he cannot give any instance in which the mind does this.¹³

For Hume, therefore, there never could be perception of necessary connection in Malebranche’s sense, not because the necessary connection somehow exists but escapes our grasp, but because, for Malebranche, necessary connection has to be perceivable, and ‘nothing is more evident, than that the human mind cannot form such an idea of two objects, as to conceive any connexion betwixt them...’ (T161). This is a rejection of Malebranche’s criterion for the existence of causal power, because Malebranche requires that the connection be conceivable. Even if Wright is correct that Hume does allow that there are real connections in nature between causes and effects, which constitute the causal nexus but of which we are ignorant, these connections cannot be what Malebranche meant by a necessary connection, since a necessary connection in his sense precisely is conceivable. Wright appeals to numerous passages to support the view that Hume allowed that there are causal powers in nature. For example, he refers (p. 88 above) to the passage where Hume says that after experience of constant conjunction of objects ‘we suppose that there is some connexion between them; some power in the one, by which it infallibly produces the other, and operates with the greatest certainty and strongest necessity’ (E75). But I am questioning what grounds Wright finds in such passages for the further claim that the connection, infallibility, certainty and necessity here is to be understood (by us) in terms of the Cartesian conception of an ‘intelligible connection between cause and effect’ or ‘conceptual connection of cause and effect’ (pp. 91–2 above).

4

In both the *Treatise* and the first *Enquiry* Hume warns that ideas about causality are commonly obscure and confused, not only in everyday life but also in philosophy. He begins §VII of the first *Enquiry* with a discussion of this, remarking that ‘the chief obstacle, therefore, to our improvement in the moral or metaphysical sciences is the obscurity of the ideas, and the ambiguity of the terms’ (E61). The same theme, of obscurity in ideas and looseness in use of language about causality, is prominent in the corresponding section of the *Treatise*, as in the famous passage:

when we talk of any being, whether of a superior or inferior nature, as endow’d with a power or force, proportion’d to any effect; 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 these expressions, *so apply'd*, we have really no distinct meaning, and make use only of common words, without any clear and determinate ideas. But as 'tis more probable, that these expressions do here lose their true meaning by being *wrong apply'd*, than that they never have any meaning; 'twill be proper to bestow another consideration on this subject, to see if possibly we can discover the nature and origin of those ideas, we annex to them.

(T162)

I believe Hume is saying that the obscurity and confusion in ideas which affects the common use of causal language arises from the fact that 'when we speak of a necessary connexion betwixt objects', we always suppose that the necessity 'depends upon' a peculiar property of the objects, which philosophers call, variously, 'efficacy, agency, power, force, energy...productive quality' (T157). We are thus inclined to the belief that an object which is a cause of another possesses this quality, that it is 'endow'd' with a 'productive quality'. Then we try to identify it, to search for 'the power and efficacy of causes' (T156). This is where the 'wrong application' comes in. Hume by no means intends to say that causes are *not* necessarily connected to their effects, or that causes do *not* have powers, or that they do *not* produce their effects. After all, it is Malebranche who says all of these things about secondary causes. He does so because he thinks, first, that a cause must possess an attribute which is its power or agency, and second, that necessary connection is a conceptual relation between the idea of that power and the idea of the effect it produces. But Hume argues that it is never the case that the mind perceives a conceptual connection between the idea of some quality or attribute of a cause (which it takes to be its power) and the idea of its effect. Indeed, he argues against Malebranche that, because the occasionalists' appeal to the idea of divine power is vitiated by the absence of any idea of omnipotence, it follows that the occasionalists must deny that there are any cases of causality at all.¹⁴

Our ideas about causality become confused when we suppose necessary connection to arise from or depend on the possession by causes of the peculiar property of causal power or agency, considered as something which each individual cause possesses. To avoid the confusion is to recognize that we ascribe causal powers to objects (which is the same thing as regarding them as causes) because we perceive necessary connection between them and their known effects; it is not because we have ideas of causal power that we perceive necessary connections, as Malebranche thinks. Hume is like Malebranche in keeping a link between necessary connection and causal power, but he replaces necessary connection as a conceptual connection derived from the content of ideas with necessary connection as an association of ideas brought about by a principle of human nature. Because this principle of human nature operates in circumstances in which we experience regularities in the behaviour of objects, our supposition that an object is a cause, or has a causal power, is always *a posteriori*: we ascribe causal powers on the basis of known effects, rather than infer effects on the basis of ideas of causal powers.

It follows from Hume's new analysis of causality that there are many unknown or secret powers in nature. Because, if we wish to avoid confused ideas, we can only ascribe causal powers to objects on the basis of experience of their regular effects,¹⁵ we have to recognize that advances in science may reveal that there are causal powers previously unknown, and indeed that we can have been mistaken

about what causal powers there are. For example, Hume closely follows Malebranche on the matter of our power to move our bodies. Since we learn from anatomy that there is a complex mechanism involved here, we should understand not only that we have no idea of a power to move our limbs (that is, no idea of a causal power or agency or efficacy 'in' our wills), but that we do not in reality have such a power at all:

if the effect be not known, the power cannot be known or felt. How indeed can we be conscious of a power to move our limbs, when we have no such power; but only that to move certain animal spirits, which, though they produce at last the motion of our limbs, yet operate in such a manner as is wholly beyond our comprehension?

(E66–7)

Here Hume is explicitly talking about what causal powers do and do not exist. He denies that we have (and not merely that we have an idea of) a power to move our limbs because the immediate effect of volition is not that but the motion of animal spirits, and then he says that we do have the latter power, even though we may not have realized it. This shows one of the senses in which, for Hume, causal powers in nature can be unknown. There is also, however, another sense in which, for Hume, causal powers are unknown, which becomes clearer if we compare the above passage with Malebranche's discussion:

And we see that men who do not know that they have spirits, nerves, and muscles move their arms, and even move them with more skill and ease than those who know anatomy best. Therefore, men will to move their arms, and only God is able and knows how to move them. If a man cannot turn a tower upside down, at least he knows what must be done to do so; but there is no man who knows what must be done to move one of his fingers by means of animal spirits. How, then, could men move their arms? These things seem obvious to me...

(Malebranche 1674–5:450)

Here Malebranche connects causal power with knowledge; if we know causal powers, we know *how and why* effects result from them. In Malebranche's thought, knowledge of causal powers is understanding. Hume rejects this, in every case. Where we believe that certain objects have the causal power to produce others (and even if we are correct), because our beliefs arise wholly *a posteriori* from our experience of effects, we have no insight into *how and why* just those effects result from just those causes. Thus even if the best science of our day ascribes particular causal powers to certain objects, it still does not provide the kind of insight which Malebranche requires. In the absence of this kind of insight into the connection between secondary causes and effects Malebranche denies that these are true causes at all. Hume, in contrast, is careful to stress that on his understanding of causality, the absence of this kind of understanding is no reason to deny the existence of causal powers, of true causes, because that absence arises as a logical consequence of the way in which we come to believe in the existence of those powers. This he claims was also Newton's position (E73 n1).

I have been trying to show that Hume not only can but clearly does talk about the existence of unknown causal powers in objects, and that this follows from the very nature of his *a posteriori*, fallibilist analysis of causality. The language of

secret powers, therefore, need not be interpreted, as Wright does, as indicating a commitment to an ontological belief in the existence of real powers understood in Malebranche's way, as consisting in a conceptual connection.¹⁶ I will conclude with some brief remarks about Hume's definitions of 'cause', and the disagreement between Wright and Winkler about these.

As against Malebranche's analysis of what is meant by 'cause', Hume's lays down no *a priori* constraints whatever about what can cause what. The fact that we do not 'see' how an effect results from a cause is no reason whatever to deny that it does, and that therefore the cause-object has a power to produce that effect. By dropping the Cartesian requirement that causal power be conceivable, we are enabled to allow, for example, that matter has the power to produce thought:

we find...by experience, that [thought and motion] are constantly united; which being all the circumstances, that enter into the idea of cause and effect, when apply'd to the operations of matter, we may certainly conclude that motion may be, and actually is, the cause of thought and perception.

(T248)

Whatever necessity there is in the causal relation, therefore, this necessity for Hume is not based on *a priori* truths. It is not even true *a priori* that the same cause will always have the same effect; or rather, that the same object which on one occasion is a cause of a given effect will, on another, again be the cause of a like effect:

There is no foundation for any conclusion *a priori*, either concerning the operations or duration of any object, of which 'tis possible for the human mind to form a conception. Any object may be imagin'd to become entirely inactive, or to be annihilated in a moment; and 'tis an evident principle, *that whatever we can imagine, is possible.*

(T250)

This, however, leads to a certain tension in Hume's analysis of the idea of causality. It is a tension between the fact that any notion of necessity will involve some kind of generality,¹⁷ and the fact that Hume, as in the above quotation, wants to say that the causal relation, which must involve necessity,¹⁸ could in principle obtain between two distinct objects on a single occasion without also obtaining on another. In fact, Hume stresses repeatedly that there is no idea of either causality or necessity which arises from and therefore applies to a single instance of the conjunction of distinct objects. His account is one which appeals essentially to repetition; yet at the same time he wants to regard repetition as strictly irrelevant to what it is in reality for an object A to cause an object B.

Winkler observes that, for Hume, 'causal power cannot be observed in single cases, because causal power reveals itself only in regularities' (p. 57 above). When he later considers Hume's two definitions and Hume's own judgment that these definitions are 'imperfect' because they refer to items 'extraneous and foreign' to a cause (E76), he suggests that this does not support the view that Hume wanted to define 'cause' in some way other than in terms of regularities, because although Hume speaks of a 'more perfect definition, which may point out that circumstance in the cause, which gives it a connexion with its effect' (E77), still, says Winkler, 'it does not follow that the underlying circumstance won't be just another

regularity' (p. 68 above). Wright protests that 'this is exactly what does follow. The 'connexion' which Hume is writing about here is an intelligible connection between cause and effect' (p. 91 above). I think that Wright is correct to complain that at this point Hume must mean by 'that circumstance in the cause, which gives it a connexion with its effect' something other than another regularity. As I have argued above, however, this could not be an 'intelligible connection' in the sense Wright means (which is Malebranche's). I think that the problem is precisely what Winkler identified earlier: that causal power reveals itself only in regularities. This is a problem for Hume because of the competing intuition he has, that

the several instances we have of the conjunction of resembling causes and effects are in themselves entirely independent, and that the communication of motion, which I see result at present from the shock of two billiard-balls, is totally distinct from that which I saw result from such an impulse a twelve-month ago. These impulses have no influence on each other. They are entirely divided by time and place; and the one might have existed and communicated motion, tho' the other never had been in being.

(T164)

Hume is therefore trying to square the circle. He asserts that necessity is essential to causality, and recognizes that necessity involves generality. He also wants to think of causation as a relation between two objects which obtains, when it does, quite independently of how things are in the world outside the two objects and their relation. These two elements in his thinking pull against each other, opening a space which I believe Hume himself did not see a way across. One can see both Strawson and Wright as offering to Hume ways of navigating the open space; but I do not think that Hume himself actually took either of these paths.

Notes

- 1 It is worth noting that even Malebranche talks quite happily about forces and powers when doing physics.
- 2 Strawson explains 'regularity theory' as follows (1989:8–9):

I take it that the standard 'Humean' view of causation is roughly as follows. Causation, considered as something existing in 'the objects', or 'in nature', or in 'the world', is nothing but regularity of succession. That is, one particular object or object-involving event of type A—call it A1—is truly said to be the cause of another particular object or object-involving event of type B—call it B1—just in case A1 is prior to and spatio-temporally contiguous to B1, and all objects or object-involving events of type A are prior to and spatio-temporally contiguous to objects or object-involving events of type B. I will call this the 'Regularity theory of causation', taking it in the apparently straightforwardly ontological way just set out.

- 3 That is, 'objects' understood in some realist way. Strawson provides a lengthy discussion of varieties of realism and idealism about objects in chapter 6 (1989). For my purposes I need only assume that Hume, in his discussion of causation and induction in the *Enquiry*, speaks of knowledge of objects understood as things which exist independently of the mind but of which we acquire some knowledge through sensation and reasoning.
- 4 Strawson's emphasis in this quotation.
- 5 Strawson comments on this: 'The typographical distinction between "causation" and "Causation" is necessary only because some have held the Regularity theory of causation, so that (in philosophy at least) the word "causation" can no longer be freely used in the natural way to mean Causation (i.e. to mean what it means)' (1989:87). This seems to me polemical rather than clarificatory. After all, Strawson makes clear that he thinks that belief in Causation is belief in a

- metaphysical claim: 'It is a metaphysical fact that it is *in the nature of things* to be regular. (This is as good an expression as any of the belief in Causation)' (1989:92).
- 6 That Strawson would accept this characterization of what belief in Causation is supposed to do seems implied by his complaint that on a (mere) regularity account 'the regularity of the world is objectively a complete fluke from moment to moment' (1989:90).
 - 7 Strawson says (1989:183) that Hume's 'argument for inductive scepticism appeals essentially to Causation—to an essentially non-Regularity-theory notion of causation'.
 - 8 The starting point and also the way the argument is developed is different in the *Treatise*.
 - 9 Appears' because he does not give a reading of the argument as such.
 - 10 Wright, p. 91 above.
 - 11 See T.M.Lennon's 'Philosophical Commentary' (Malebranche 1674–5:816).
 - 12 I argue this in more detail in Bell (1997).
 - 13 At T248–9, Hume shows that it is probable that Malebranche thinks that the mind perceives a necessary connection, in his sense, between the will of God and its effects because he has confused this with the tautology 'that a being, whose volition is connected with every effect, is connected with every effect'. This, incidentally, supports the view that Hume did not think that propositions expressing relations of ideas are analytic in our modern sense, but that they are synthetic *a priori*; see Deleuze (1991:99).
 - 14 Strawson claims that Hume never considered the possibility that in nature there is nothing but constant conjunction (1989:207, 222). Although this is correct, it is so because Hume forges such a close relation between the idea of constant conjunction and the idea of causal necessity that there cannot be the one without the other. But when he discusses occasionalism, he clearly does envisage a theory in which there is, so to speak, only what Malebranche allows in secondary causes (the invariable regularity of occasional causes) without there being in addition the causal power of the divine will. But because of the close relation Hume makes between constancy and necessity, he describes this universe as one in which not merely is there no causal power but there is no causality at all (T248).
 - 15 And this we can do only because we are so constituted by the principles of human nature: 'the mind, by revolving over a thousand times all its ideas of sensation...[can never]...extract from them any new original idea, unless nature has so fram'd its faculties, that it feels some new original impression arise from such a contemplation' (T37).
 - 16 In fact, I believe, with Winkler, that in a good deal of the first *Enquiry* discussion Hume speaks of 'secret powers' in yet another sense. This is the sense which arises—according to Hume's narrative of the stages of philosophical confusion and enlightenment given more fully in the *Treatise*—when we are still thinking in the confused, common way of causal power as a quality or attribute of objects, considered in themselves without reference to our experience of the regularities in which they take part, but we have got to the stage of acknowledging that we never experience any such qualities or attributes. Then we call this property—namely agency, energy, etc.—*secret* simply for that reason. In the *Treatise* Hume comments that the failure to identify this peculiar property 'has at last oblig'd philosophers to conclude, that the ultimate force and efficacy of nature is perfectly unknown to us' (T159). Here Hume is talking about the general opinion among philosophers (the vulgar commonly do not get this far, but imagine that they *do* perceive efficacy, etc.); but as elsewhere the philosophical view rests still upon the vulgar one. The *Enquiry* is written in a style which stays closer to the common ways of thinking and speaking for longer than in the *Treatise*, as Hume explains in the opening section. So whatever may be thought about the specific issue debated between Winkler and Wright to do with the footnote at E33, I think that there is reason to hold that when at E32 Hume says 'it must certainly be allowed, that nature has kept us at a great distance from all her secrets...', and when at E63 he writes that 'the power or force, which actuates the whole machine, is entirely concealed from us...', he is picking up the same thought as he had expressed at T159.
 - 17 I have in mind here the fact that we explain senses of necessity in terms of quantification over all entities of a certain type, such as, in contemporary philosophy, all valuations, all possible worlds, all possible future states of the world, all times, and so on.
 - 18 'Necessity may be defined two ways, conformably to the two definitions of *cause*, of which it makes an essential part' (E97).

9 Relative ideas re-viewed

Daniel Flage

In ‘Hume’s Relative Ideas’,¹ I argued that Hume, like most of his contemporaries, acknowledged a distinction between positive and relative ideas or conceptions. While positive ideas are nothing more than copies of impressions or compilations of simple ideas copied from impressions, relative ideas allow one to single out ideational and nonideational objects on the basis of their putative relations to positive impressions or ideas. I argued that the distinction between a positive idea and a relative idea is analogous to Bertrand Russell’s distinction between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description:² a relative idea is the cognitive analogue of a definite description, and it is reasonable to suggest that the criteria for the adequacy of a definite description apply, *mutatis mutandis*, to relative ideas. I call this the describing model of relative ideas.

While the role I assign to relative ideas is rather modest—they provide a modicum of cognitive content to entities or possible entities beyond the immediately given—more recent scholars have ascribed a more provocative role to them. For example, assuming that Hume accepted a markedly non-Humean theory of causality—Causation with a capital ‘c’—Galen Strawson has argued that relative ideas single out material objects as things specifically different from perceptions (Strawson 1989). Indeed, Strawson contends that relative ideas commit Hume to virtually all the entities in the traditional metaphysical firmament. I believe that such a position is implausible. To show this, I begin by reviewing my original account of relative ideas, review some of the objections that have been raised regarding my account,³ and ask what role relative ideas should be understood to play in Hume’s philosophy. I argue that, while it is not unreasonable to contend that all ideas that are construed as representative may be construed as relative ideas, it is not clear that they always should be so construed. I conclude by arguing that any attempt to assign a philosophically robust role to Humean relative ideas is warranted neither by the historical milieu nor by the Humean texts.

1 Relative ideas: the historical context

In his philosophical writings, there are but three passages which suggest that Hume adhered to a doctrine of relative ideas. He uses the expression ‘relative idea’ only once. The passage is as follows:

The farthest we can go towards a conception of external objects, when suppos’d *specifically* different from our perceptions, is to form a relative idea

of them, without pretending to comprehend the related objects. Generally speaking, we do not suppose them specifically different; but only attribute to them different relations, connexions, and durations. But of this more fully hereafter.

(T68)

In setting up the case for his charge that all theists are implicit Spinozists, and therefore atheists, he alludes to relative ideas. He wrote:

To make this evident, let us remember, that as every idea is deriv'd from a preceding perception, 'tis impossible our idea of a perception, and that of an object or external existence can ever represent what are specifically different from each other. Whatever difference we may suppose betwixt them, 'tis still incomprehensible to us; and we are oblig'd either to conceive an external object merely as a relation without a relative, or to make it the very same with a perception or impression.

(T241)

Given his allusion to specific difference and his allusion to 'a relation without a relative' within the context of a discussion of substance,⁴ it is not unreasonable to suggest that Hume is alluding to a relative idea. Finally, in a footnote to his definitions of 'cause' in the first *Enquiry*, Hume suggests that one has a relative idea of power. In his words:

According to these explications and definitions, the idea of *power* is relative as much as that of *cause*; and both have a reference to an effect, or some other event constantly conjoined with the former. When we consider the *unknown* circumstance of an object, by which the degree or quantity of its effect is fixed and determined, we call that its power: And accordingly, it is allowed by all philosophers, that the effect is the measure of the power. But if they had any idea of power, as it is in itself, why could not they measure it in itself? The dispute whether the force of a body in motion be as its velocity, or the square of its velocity; this dispute, I say, need not be decided by comparing its effects in equal or unequal times; but by a direct mensuration and comparison.

(E77n)

Here Hume seems to suggest that one can form a relative idea of power that singles out the unknown aspect of an object that is constantly conjoined with a known effect.⁵

None of these passages sheds much light on what Hume meant by 'relative idea'. While the last *suggests* a describing model of relative ideas, neither of the first two provides any clues regarding the meaning of that term. Nonetheless, if we examine the intellectual milieu in which Hume wrote, an understanding of the meaning of 'relative idea' emerges.

Any empiricist faces a *prima facie* problem when he or she posits an entity which is in principle imperceptible. Part of Hume's legacy is the recognition that this problem is exacerbated by the way of ideas, since one is never in a position to conclusively establish that a relation obtains between a perception and a non-perceptual object, that is, an object that is not perceived.⁶ In spite of this *prima facie* problem, Locke, Berkeley and Reid championed a substratum theory of

substance. Each contended that one can have a limited conception of substance itself on the basis of a relative idea, or relative notion, or relative conception.⁷ By briefly examining some of their remarks, we shall see that it is plausible to contend that a relative idea or notion or conception⁸ functions in the way of ideas in a manner analogous to the function of a definite description in the linguistic realm. My discussion begins with Reid, since he provides the most detailed discussion supporting a describing model of relative conception.

In his *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind*, Thomas Reid distinguishes between direct and relative conception. He writes:

Of some things, we know what they are in themselves; our conception of such things I call *direct*. Of other things, we know not what they are in themselves, but only that they have certain properties or attributes, or certain relations to other things; of these our conception is only *relative*.

(Reid 1788:7)

What Reid calls a direct conception of an object is, in his conceptual scheme, what Locke called a 'positive idea'. A positive idea is a simple or complex idea immediately given in experience, or a complex idea compounded from such ideas (see Locke 1690:2.7.10, 132). Locke's complex ideas of substance are examples of positive ideas. A positive idea (Locke) or direct conception (Reid) is an idea of the constitutive properties of a thing or a thing of a kind.

Reid contrasts positive conception with a relative conception, a conception that provides a limited understanding of the object conceived, since it is only conceiving of the thing as having 'certain properties or attributes, or certain relations to other things'. To see what this entails, consider Reid's examples:

To illustrate this by some examples: in the university library, I call for the book, press L, shelf 10, No. 10; the library keeper must have such a conception of the book I want, as to be able to distinguish it from ten thousand that are under his care. But what conception does he form of it from my words? They inform him neither of the author, nor the subject, nor the language, nor the size, nor the binding, but only of its mark and place. His conception of it is merely relative to these circumstances; yet this relative notion enables him to distinguish it from every other book in the library.

(1788:7)

Similarly, body, as such, is known relative to its qualities (1788:8). Mind, as such, is known relative to its operations (1788:8). One conceives of power relative to its effects (1788:6, and see Reid 1785:252–6, 273, 277, 381, 473). And of those things that can be conceived both directly and relatively, such as ten thousand men, one's relative conception might be more distinct than one's direct conception; indeed, 'From these instances it appears, that our relative conceptions of things are not always less distinct, nor less fit materials for accurate reasoning, than those that are direct; and that the contrary may happen in a remarkable degree' (1788:9).

Reid seems to hold that every case of conceptual representation, construed as representation, is based on a relative conception. His library example is particularly poignant, since it shows that one can single out exactly one thing on the basis of accidental properties, namely, the object's location. Indeed, the library

example *requires* that one's conception single out exactly one (unique) thing. Reid's account reminds one of Bertrand Russell's account of knowledge by description, since, like Russell, Reid seems to hold that one must ground one's description on a direct or positive conception, while it allows one to single out an object that is inconceivable given our present contingent epistemic situation (Russell 1912:46–59). So, if Reid's position mirrors the accepted position on relative conception in eighteenth-century British philosophy, it is not unreasonable to suggest that a relative conception is a complex mental state in which one singles out some object *O* on the basis of a presumptive relation between *O* and an object conceived directly: *O* is the thing that stands in relation *R* to directly conceived object *D*.

But Reid's *Essays on the Active Powers of the Human Mind* were published late in the eighteenth century. While Reid's remarks *suggest* a model that Hume might have recognized, they can do no more. Unless it can be shown that earlier philosophers used expressions such as 'relative idea' in contexts similar to those in which Reid uses the expression 'relative conception' or 'relative notion' and that it is historically plausible to understand that as entailing a uniqueness claim, there is no reason to suggest that there is a parallel between Reid's notion of a 'relative conception' and Hume's notion of a 'relative idea'. To show that there was such a tradition, we turn first to the discussions of substance in Locke and Berkeley and to discussions of real definitions that were common during the period.

In his discussions of substance, Locke focuses on complex, positive ideas of kinds of substance. As to the idea of substance in general, he famously says, that one 'has no other *Idea* of it at all, but only a Supposition of he knows not what support of such Qualities, which are capable of producing simple *Ideas* in us' (Locke 1690:2.23.2, 295). He describes such an idea as 'An obscure and relative *Idea* of Substance in general' (1690:2.23.3, 296), adding that 'we have no clear, or distinct *Idea* of that *thing* we suppose a Support' (1690:2.23.4, 297; also 2.23.5, 297–8).

This very limited attention to the idea of substance in general drew the charge from Edward Stillingfleet that Locke was 'almost discarding substance out of the reasonable part of the world' (Locke 1823: IV, 5). In his reply, Locke details his use of the expression 'relative idea'. After reiterating his contention that all ideas of sensible qualities are derived from sense experience and all ideas of the powers of the mind are derived from reflection, Locke remarks, 'the ideas of these qualities and actions, or powers, are perceived by the mind to be by themselves inconsistent with existence...i.e. that they cannot exist or subsist of themselves' (1823:IV, 21). Locke continues:

Hence the mind perceives their necessary connexion with inherence or being supported; which being a *relative idea* superadded to the red colour in a cherry, or to thinking in a man, the mind frames the correlative idea of a support. For I never denied, that the mind could frame to itself ideas of relation, but have showed the quite contrary in my chapters about relation. But because a relation cannot be founded in nothing, or be the relation of nothing, and the thing here related as a supporter or support is not represented to the mind by any clear and distinct idea; therefore the obscure, indistinct, vague idea of thing or something, is all that is left to be the positive idea, which has the relation of a support or substratum to modes or accidents; and that general indetermined idea of something, is, by the abstraction of the mind, derived also from the

simple ideas of sensation and reflection: and thus the mind, from the positive, simple ideas got by sensation or reflection, comes to the general *relative idea* of substance; which, without the positive simple ideas, it would never have.
(1823:IV, 21–2; emphasis added)

Locke's discussion makes several points clear. First, substance *as such* is known solely on the basis of a relation, the relation of inhesion or support, which obtains between a positive idea conceived as a quality of a thing and the thing of which it is a quality. Second, this relation of support is central to one's relative idea of substance in general. Finally, this relative idea provides one with no understanding of the intrinsic properties of a substratum (Locke 1690:2.13.19, 175).

But this tells one very little. Indeed, Locke seems to equivocate on the meaning of 'relative idea' within the paragraph. When he uses the expression 'relative idea' early in the paragraph, he seems to mean nothing other than the idea of a relation, namely, the relation of support. Let us call such an idea of a relation a 'relational idea'. But his use of 'relative idea' late in the discussion seems to be consistent with Reid's use of 'relative conception': since there is an idea of the relation of support, and since 'a relation cannot be founded in nothing, or be the relation of nothing', one seems to single out the thing standing in that relation.⁹ This provides some evidence that Locke recognized a describing model of relative ideas and, therefore, Hume might have used the term 'relative idea' in the same way.

Berkeley also uses the expressions 'relative idea' and 'relative notion'. In *Principles of Human Knowledge* Part I, §16, Berkeley argues against the presumption that one has a relative idea of matter. His argument appears to be a direct attack on the Lockean account in the first letter to Stillingfleet. Notice what Berkeley says:

But let us examine a little the received opinion. It is said extension is a mode or accident of matter, and that matter is the *substratum* that supports it. Now I desire that you would explain what is meant by matter's *supporting* extension: say you, I have no idea of matter, and therefore cannot explain it. I answer though you have no positive, yet if you have any meaning at all, you must at least have a relative idea of matter; though you know not what it is, yet you must be supposed to know what relation it bears to accident, and what is meant by it supporting them. It is evident *support* cannot here be taken in its usual or literal sense, as when we say that pillars support a building: in what sense therefore must it be taken?

(Berkeley 1949:II, 47–8; see also *Three Dialogues*, 1949:II, 197, 199)

Several points should be noticed here. First, Berkeley is concerned with the meaning of the term 'matter' or 'material substratum'. Second, he seems to allow, in principle, that if one could distinguish matter from other things by picking it out on the basis of its relationship to some object immediately known, he would allow that the term 'matter' is significant. This is consistent both with his extensional theory of meaning (see Flage 1987:94–132) as well as his explicit statement in the Second Dialogue, 'That from a cause, effect, operation, sign, or other circumstance, there may reasonably be inferred the existence of a thing not immediately perceived, and that it were absurd for any man to argue against the existence of that thing, from his having no direct and positive notion of it, I freely own' (1949:2, 223). Indeed, in all editions of the *Principles* he claimed that spirits are known only relative to their effects: 'Such is the nature of *spirit* or that which

acts, that it cannot be of it self perceived, but only by the effects which it produceth' (1949:2, 252).¹⁰ Finally, he claimed that the problem with the presumptive relative idea of matter lay in the relation of 'support': the meaning of the term 'support' is indeterminate, and consequently one does not know *that* a relation obtains, and if one does obtain, what the nature of that relation is.

Do Berkeley's remarks shed any light on the eighteenth-century understanding of the term 'relative idea'? Perhaps. Like Locke, Berkeley allows that one can infer the existence of a thing on the basis of its relation to an object perceived immediately (a direct or positive idea). Like Locke (1690:3.3.1, 409), Berkeley held that all existents are particulars, though he went further than Locke and claims that all ideas are determinate; that is, there are no abstract ideas. So, while Locke allows that one has an idea of substance in general on the basis of a general relation of support between a general idea of a quality and a certain kind of thing, Berkeley does the same by means of a relation between a particular entity known directly and a particular unperceived determinate entity.¹¹ As the passage from *Principles* §16 indicates, however, Berkeley insists that one have a clear notion of the operative relation. Nonetheless, Berkeley's use of 'relative idea' or 'relative notion' seems consistent with my describing model of relative ideas, and provides additional evidence that Hume understood the term in the same way.

But here an objection is almost certain to be raised. The model I am using is from Russell. Although Locke, Berkeley and Reid occasionally used such expressions as 'relative idea' in ways that suggest the Russellian analysis of definite descriptions, the model itself is anachronistic. The Russellian analysis entails that denoting phrases are to be understood as propositional functions and that all proper names are reducible to such propositional functions. These were Russell's insights, if insights they were.¹² There is no reason to believe that any eighteenth-century philosopher had such insights. Therefore my model must be rejected. Such is the objection.

In reply, two points that should be noted. First, my model, like most models, is imperfect: it would be anachronistic to claim that any eighteenth-century philosopher anticipated all the details of the Russellian analysis of denoting phrases. In particular, it would be anachronistic to contend that the eighteenth-century British philosophers anticipated the notion of a propositional function. All I can hope to show is that there are certain parallels between the criteria Russell employed in judging the truth of a statement containing a denoting phrase, and, more importantly, the intelligibility of a denoting phrase, on the one hand, and the grounds the eighteenth-century British philosophers used for judging the intelligibility of terms used to denote imperceptible objects, on the other. To put it differently, even though it is unreasonable to suggest that the eighteenth-century British philosophers anticipated Russell's *analysis* of denoting phrases, it is not unreasonable to suggest that they, like Russell, distinguished between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description and that they accepted some of the same criteria for claiming knowledge by description that Russell accepted.

Second, while the Russellian analysis entails that all proper names can be reduced to definite descriptions, there is no reason to believe that Hume and his contemporaries claimed the same. Nonetheless, the logicians of the time did discuss what we now call 'definite descriptions', claiming that they constitute proper names. By examining those discussions and discussions of real definitions, we shall see that by the early eighteenth-century philosophers were aware of complex linguistic means of singling out an object (or kind) and that the criteria for the adequacy of a real definition might reasonably be applied to relative ideas.

2 The logical tradition

One of the most popular logic books in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was Antoine Arnauld's *L'Art de penser*, the Port-Royal Logic. Given the popularity of the work, it is reasonable to suggest that both Locke and Berkeley were familiar with it. (That Hume was familiar with the work is beyond question, since it is one of the few works he graced with a footnote) (T43n, 1779:137n). In this section I first show that Arnauld acknowledged a linguistic form that functions in much the same way as we now say a definite description functions. This provides *prima facie* evidence that early eighteenth-century philosophers were aware of complex linguistic expressions that single out objects and, insofar as these philosophers based linguistic meaning on ideas, that there was a kind of idea that was correlative with such linguistic expressions. Next I turn to Arnauld's account of real definitions to show (1) that he held that there is a type of real definition which is like a definite description and (2) that his criteria for the adequacy of a real definition are comparable to Russell's criteria for the adequacy of a definite description. Given the role Locke, Berkeley, and Hume assigned to ideas *vis-à-vis* the meaning of linguistic terms, it is not unreasonable to take relative ideas to function in the ideational realm in much the same way that a definition functions in the linguistic realm.

In his discussion of linguistic expressions, Arnauld introduces the notion of a determination: 'A complex expression is a *determination* if the extension of the idea expressed by the complex term is less than the extension of the idea expressed by the principal word' (Arnauld 1662:60). Examples of determinations are expressions such as 'transparent body' and 'wise men' (1662:60). But he goes on to indicate that some determinations function as proper names. He writes:

Some determinations are proper names: A general word may be joined with other words in such a way that the idea expressed has in its extension but a single individual. When, for example, I form the complex expression 'the present Pope,' I have determined the general word 'pope' in such a way that the complex expression applies to no other person than to Alexander VII.

(1662:60)¹³

This shows that there was some understanding of the use of a denoting phrase by the latter part of the seventeenth century. Like a definite description, what Arnauld calls a determination must single out exactly one thing. Like philosophers prior to Russell, Arnauld took a denoting phrase to be a proper name. Insofar as a determination is deemed a name or a term, it is not unreasonable to relate determinations to considerations of definitions.

What Arnauld calls a 'real definition', 'identifies the nature of a thing by identifying the essential characteristics of the thing' (1662:165). He distinguishes between two kinds of real definitions. The preferred sort proceeds by genus and difference. A less precise real definition, what Arnauld calls a 'description', 'gives some information about the nature of a thing by expressing the proper accidents of any referent of the defined word' (1662:165). This corresponds to what Locke called a nominal essence (1690:3.6.28, 455–6), and Hume's account of one's idea of a (kind of) substance (T16). But Arnauld goes further and indicates that sometimes a description rests upon a relation. He writes:

Sometimes we define a word by identifying the cause, or the matter, or the

form, or the purpose of any referent of the defined word. For example, we define ‘clock’ as ‘an iron machine composed of various wheels whose regulated movements are used to tell time.’

(Arnauld 1662:165)

Arnauld’s wording suggests that a description is what we now would call an *indefinite* description. Nonetheless, if one takes the term ‘clock’ to refer to a *kind* of thing, then it is ‘the *kind* of thing consisting of an iron machine composed of various wheels whose regulated movements are used to tell time’. So it seems reasonable to construe Arnauld’s description as a definite description picking out a kind of thing, which is consistent with Locke’s discussion of the relative idea of substance in general. Further, since there was an emphasis on the clarification of the meaning of words throughout the modern period, and particularly among the British Empiricists,¹⁴ it seems reasonable to suggest that insofar as a relative idea can provide the meaning of a term, the criteria for the acceptability of a real definition also should function as criteria for the adequacy of a relative idea.

Arnauld states three criteria for the adequacy of a real definition. He writes:

- 1 A definition must be exhaustive, that is, the defined words must refer to all those things to which the defining words refer...
- 2 A definition must be proper, that is, the defining words must refer to only those things to which the defined word can refer...
- 3 A definition must be informative—that is, the defining words must express a clearer, more distinct idea than does the defined word...

(1662:165–6; see also Watts 1806:85–8)

Since the first two criteria require that the *definiens* refer to all and only those things in the extension of the *definiendum*, they comply with the criteria for the adequacy of a definite description. Just as the criteria for the adequacy of a definite description require that the description pick out at least and at most one thing (Russell 1971:249; 1975:53), in an analogous way if one employs a relative idea to provide the basis in the way of ideas for the meaning of the term ‘material object’, it must single out exactly one kind of thing. The third criterion is also instructive, for its application to relative ideas requires that one’s idea of the known *relatum* and of the relation in which it stands to the unknown *relatum* be clear. This corresponds to Russell’s principle for judging the adequacy of a proposition containing a definite description, ‘*Every proposition which we can understand must be composed wholly of constituents with which we are acquainted*’ (Russell 1912:58). As we saw above, this is the basis for Berkeley’s attack on Locke’s putative relative idea of material substance: since there is no clear notion of ‘support’, Locke’s relative idea fails to single-out an object, that is, the expression ‘material substance’ has no determinate meaning and there is no ideational basis for claiming that material substance exists (Berkeley 1949: *Principles* §16).

3 Hume

If my arguments to this point are sound, they show that the eighteenth-century British philosophers acknowledged a distinction between positive (direct) ideas (notions, conceptions) and relative ideas. A relative idea singles out an object as

that which stands in a determinate relation to an object conceived directly (a positive idea). To be adequate, one must have a clear and distinct positive idea of both the *relation* that provides the basis for the relative idea and of the relation that obtains between that idea and the unknown *relatum*. In Hume's parlance, both the idea that provides the basis for the relative idea and the idea of the relation must be copies of impressions (T72–3). Given the pervasiveness of doctrines of relative conception in the eighteenth century, and given that there seems to have been a common set of criteria for judging the adequacy of such ideas, it is reasonable to suggest that Hume used the expression 'relative idea' in much the same way that it was used by his contemporaries: one has a relative idea of some individual *X* if and only if it is possible to conceive of *X* as standing in a determinate relation to some positive idea. But since in many cases the presumed relation obtains between a positive idea and a non-ideational entity, the question *whether* the relation in question obtains may remain open, a point Hume stressed (T211–18).

As we noted above, the relative idea of power to which Hume alludes in a footnote to the first *Enquiry* seems to comply with these criteria, that is, one's relative idea of power picks out an unknown object or property of an object that is constantly conjoined with a given effect. Further, one can understand what Hume means when he says, 'The farthest we can go towards a conception of external objects, when suppos'd *specifically* different from our perceptions, is to form a relative idea of them, without pretending to comprehend the related objects' (T68). Since Hume divides the world into kinds or species on the basis of resemblance (T16, 22; see also T258), to claim that an external object is *specifically different* from a perception is to deny resemblance. So the relative idea to which he alludes might correspond to the following definite description: 'the thing that causes but does not resemble *p*', where *p* is a perception.¹⁵ In the case of a relative idea of substance—'a relation without a relative' (T241)—Hume's discussion works under a theoretical constraint: any candidate for the relation of inhesion, must be one of his seven philosophical relations (T13–15). The only plausible candidate for inhesion is the relation of identity, which results in absurd (inconsistent) consequences (T243–4). Thus, substance is inconceivable; there is no ground for claiming the existence of substance.¹⁶ Thus, Hume's explicit allusions to relative ideas fit with my account.

One of the virtues of recognizing a theory of relative ideas in Hume's philosophy is that it explains how he can claim to conceive of entities or possible entities that otherwise would be banished from his way of ideas. In 'Hume's Relative Ideas', I argued that the theory of relative ideas could explain how Hume could be very nonchalant in raising the case of the missing shade of blue and how he could claim to have an idea of the thousandth or ten-thousandth part of a grain of sand, even though one's mental image differs in no way from that of the grain of sand itself (Flage 1981:68–9). One of the vices of recognizing a theory of relative ideas in Hume is the temptation to see relative ideas cropping up throughout Hume's discussions.

In what remains, I look briefly at the possible roles of relative ideas in the missing shade of blue passage and in Hume's discussion of memory. I argue that the theory of relative ideas cannot solve the problem of the missing shade of blue, but that any solution to that putative problem that is based on distinctions of reason cannot reasonably proceed without a theory of relative ideas.¹⁷ Next, I argue that it is not unreasonable to suggest that relative ideas play a role in Hume's account of memory, but attributing a central role to them is misleading. Finally, I argue that one should resist the temptation to multiply relative ideas beyond necessity and that yielding to that temptation can yield a distorted picture of Hume.

The problem of the missing shade of blue is familiar to all readers of Hume. Assume that shades of a colour are distinct and that a person of thirty has seen all shades of blue save one. If the shades of blue the person has seen were placed before him or her in order from deepest to lightest, the person would notice a blank where the shade would be found:

Now I ask, whether 'tis possible for him, from his own imagination, to supply this deficiency, and raise up to himself the idea of that particular shade, tho' it had never been conveyed to him by his senses? I believe there are few but will be of opinion that he can; and this may serve as a proof, that the simple ideas are not always derived from the correspondent impressions; tho' the instance is so particular and singular, that 'tis scarce worth our observing, and does not merit that for it alone we should alter our general maxim.

(T6)

If one allows that the problem can be solved by a relative idea, it is the relative idea that singles out the missing shade. It is the relative idea corresponding to the definite description, 'the shade of blue that is lighter than x and darker than y ', where x and y are the shades of blue flanking the missing shade. Relative ideas are inherently complex, so it is reasonable for Hume to suggest that it could be constructed by the imagination. But Hume seems to claim that the idea formed is *simple*, so unless he blurred the distinction between a simple idea and an idea of a simple, it would seem that a relative idea of the missing shade of blue cannot solve the problem.¹⁸

There is something inherently odd in Hume's closing remarks on the missing shade of blue. If we assume the imagination to which he alludes is the *Humean* imagination, then it assumes the copy theory of ideas, and all ideas of the imagination are complex. Of course, the notion of simplicity is one of the more obscure notions in modern philosophy. The notion of simplicity to which he alludes might not be qualitative simplicity, and, even if it is qualitative simplicity, he allows that there are degrees of resemblance among simple ideas: '*Blue* and *green* are different simple ideas, but are more resembling than *blue* and *scarlet*; tho' their perfect simplicity excludes all possibility of separation or distinction' (T637). If simple ideas of two distinct kinds can resemble one another, this suggests that there are (simpler?) aspects of these ideas in virtue of which they resemble and differ. This suggests, as several people have argued, that Hume might be able to *construct* an idea of the missing shade of blue on the basis of distinctions of reason (Williams 1992; Durland 1996). How would this work? One attends to the aspect in which shades x and y , the shades flanking the missing shade, resemble and the aspect in which they differ. One then constructs a positive idea containing the aspect in which x and y resemble (hue) combined with the aspects in which x and y differ (saturation or brightness, what Durland calls 'lightness'; Durland (1996:113)).

Does this solve the problem? Perhaps. It is certainly consistent with Hume's claim in 'Of Abstract Ideas' that although the colour and the shape of the globe of white marble are neither distinguishable nor separable, they are subject to a distinction of reason. And, of course, though you might not be able to separate the whiteness from the shape—in the sense of imaginatively setting them side by side—you can imaginatively 'transfer' the whiteness to an object of some other shape; for example, you can imagine a white tetrahedron. But allowing that distinctions of reason could solve the problem of the missing shade of blue does *not* imply that

relative ideas play *no* role in the process. One must selectively attend to *the* aspect in which *x* and *y* resemble and to *the* aspect in which they differ. These acts of selective attention do not take the form of distinct mental images; rather, they are singlings out of something on the basis of a relation. They take the form of relative ideas, and the formation of these relative ideas is a necessary condition for the ‘transfer’ of hue and lightness from *x* and *y* to the intermediate idea one constructs.

This exercise shows that if one contends that Hume accepted a theory of relative ideas, it is easy to see them cropping up all over. Any case of ideational representation can be construed as a relative idea. But although all cases of Humean ideational representation *can* be construed in terms of relative ideas, the more important question is whether they *should* be so construed. I am inclined to believe they should not. To understand why, let us look briefly at Hume’s discussion of memory.

At several places I have argued that Humean ideas of memory should be construed as relative ideas (Flage 1985a, 1985b, 1990:49–51, 1993). Put briefly, the argument goes like this. Hume distinguishes between ideas of imagination and ideas of memory on two grounds. The first difference is phenomenal: ideas of the memory have a greater degree of force and vivacity than ideas of the imagination; ideas of the memory are belief-engendering, while those of the imagination are not (19, 85). The second difference is formal: ‘the imagination is not restrain’d to the same order and form with the original impressions; while the memory is in a manner ty’d down in that respect, without any power of variation’; ‘the memory preserves the original form in which its objects were presented’; ‘The chief exercise of the memory is not to preserve the simple ideas, but their order and position’ (T9; see also T85). It is with respect to the latter that I argued that ideas of memory are relative ideas. Hume recognized a theory of relative ideas. If an idea of memory is construed as a relative idea, then the relevant idea of memory singles-out the impression that was its original cause and (exactly?) resembles the positive idea that provides the basis for the relative idea. If the idea is construed as a relative idea, then one knows the conditions sufficient for the truth of one’s mnemonic claim (T448, 458), although, consistent with everything we ordinarily say about memory, memory alone is never a sufficient condition to establish that one’s mnemonic claim is true.

Is this sufficient to show that Hume’s ideas of memory are relative ideas? No. At best, it shows that they might be relative ideas, and, perhaps, since the model is applicable to *any* case of representation, it is not unreasonable to construe them as relative ideas. Of course, there is a significant problem: Hume never described his ideas of memory as relative ideas. As Lesley Friedman puts this:

there is no suggestion in any of his remarks on memory that memory-ideas are relative ideas...It is odd to suggest that Hume espoused such an elaborate theory of memory-ideas when he makes *no mention of it*.

(Friedman 1993a:182)

She is right: Hume does not explicitly state that ideas of memory are relative ideas. The *sole* reason for claiming that they are is that it fits the representative features that any idea of memory must have. Does this suggest that memory-ideas *should not* be construed as relative ideas? Perhaps.

The term ‘idea’ is a theoretical term: it has a meaning only within the framework of a philosophical theory. But insofar as Hume is attempting to provide some account of the nature and workings of the mind, whatever cognitive content

one ascribes to words such as ‘impression’ and ‘idea’ must be consistent with experience. Hence, to claim that an impression or positive idea is somewhat like a picture—though *not* a picture one knows to be a picture—is not unreasonable. When this is applied to memory, we, in our non-philosophical moments, probably claim to remember the event itself: in a non-philosophical moment, I would *not* claim to be immediately aware of an idea which stands in a relation of resemblance to an impression and is acceptable only to the extent that there is an exact resemblance between the positive elements of the idea and those of one of the impressions of which I was aware on that day, although, as a philosopher, I might find myself pushed in the direction of such a description.¹⁹

Part of the problem with Hume’s discussions of memory is that one is not certain how sophisticated an account one should take it to be. Indeed, it is arguable that he is doing nothing more than describing phenomenal differences between ideas of memory and ideas of the imagination (degrees of force and vivacity), and stating our ordinary beliefs about memories: ‘memory preserves the original form’ (T9) ‘it be a peculiar property of the memory to preserve the original order and position of its ideas’ (T85, see also T9). What is perspicuously missing from both his discussions is an explicit concern with truth-conditions for mnemonic beliefs, a discussion one might expect to find were Hume concerned with relative ideas.²⁰ So if Hume is doing no more than describing our ordinary beliefs about memory—loosely interpreted in terms of his version of the way of ideas—then there is little reason to suggest that the operative ideas are relative or positive or ideas of any particular kind. Indeed, to claim that memory is ‘The faculty, by which we repeat our impressions’ with ‘a considerable degree of [their] first vivacity’ (T8), might do quite well, so long as one adds the requisite, ‘we really should call them ideas’. But the same passages might be read as providing two criteria for distinguishing between ideas of the memory and imagination, a phenomenal criterion and an epistemic criterion (see Noxon 1976), and once such an issue is raised, it is only a short step to the question, ‘What kind of idea in Hume’s philosophical arsenal will best fulfill the representative function of an idea of memory?’ Assuming it is more charitable to err on the side of philosophical sophistication than philosophical naivete, it seems reasonable to suggest that an idea of memory is a relative idea.

But there is a problem: there is no evidence that a relative idea, as such, can support a belief. Recall that Hume’s sole explicit use of the term ‘relative idea’ in the *Treatise* pertains to a version of representative realism (T68). But when Hume discusses the beliefs in the external world, he indicates that the belief of the vulgar—that physical objects are identical with our perceptions—is the sole source of doxastic force behind the representationalist. He writes:

There are no principles either of the understanding or fancy, which lead us directly to embrace this opinion of the double existence of perceptions and objects, nor can we arrive at it but by passing thro’ the common hypothesis of the identity and continuance of our interrupted perceptions. Were we not first persuaded, that our perceptions are our only objects, and continue to exist even when they no longer make their appearance to the senses, we shou’d never be led to think, that our perceptions and objects are different, and that our objects alone preserve a continu’d existence. ‘The latter hypothesis has no primary recommendation either to reason or imagination, but acquires all its influence on the imagination from the former.’

(T211)

What this seems to mean is that if one accepts the representationalist's position and contends that one's idea of an external object is a relative idea corresponding to the definite description, 'the thing that causes (and resembles?) *p*', where *p* is a positive impression or idea, the doxastic force of the relative idea attaches solely to the positive perception that provides its basis. Furthermore, each of the problematic cases Hume discusses—the belief in power or necessary connection (T165), the belief in material substance (T220–1), the belief in the perfect identity of the mind (T253–61)—rests upon confusions of positive ideas. It is to the positive idea—even if misidentified—that doxastic force (force and vivacity) attaches.

If this is correct and one applies this to Hume's account of memory, then with respect to mnemonic beliefs, the possibility that there are relative ideas involved in memory is irrelevant. Extrapolating from his discussion of the beliefs in the external world, Hume would seem to claim that the vulgar draw no hard distinction between the idea of memory and the impression remembered: as we would naively say, we remember the event itself. The mnemonic idea and the original impression are similar to the feeling: the positive idea of memory is nearly as forceful and vivacious as the original impression. It is only the philosopher who draws a distinction between present states of the mind and past states; it is only the philosopher who conceives of a current positive idea as a representation of a past impression. But insofar as the philosopher conceives of the positive mnemonic idea as representative, it seems not unreasonable to construe it as a relative idea, even though its doxastic force rests solely on the positive idea providing its basis.

4 What should we do with relative ideas?

Up to this point I have shown that a distinction commonly was drawn between positive (direct) and relative conception in the eighteenth century. I have shown that Hume was aware of the distinction, and I have argued that it is reasonable to suggest that some cases of Humean ideational representation might be construed as relative ideas. In particular, relative ideas can be used to attend to one of two inseparable aspects of an object, and I have argued that cases of conceiving of a positive idea as an entity representing a thing of another kind—whether an impression or an external object—might reasonably be construed as a relative idea. Relative ideas, however, are strictly philosophical creations. As such, they do not engender belief. It is only the positive idea that provides the basis for the relative idea that is forceful and vivacious.

But a question remains: what is the importance of relative ideas in Hume's philosophy? While it is a conceptual model to which he occasionally alludes, does the model tacitly pervade Hume's philosophy? Or is it little more than a novelty he occasionally considers only as a basis for criticizing his predecessors? Or should it be assigned some middle position?

If the position I have defended above is correct, relative ideas are something more than a novelty. They provide a modicum of cognitive content. Insofar as Hume champions an extentional theory of language, relative ideas can ground the meanings of sortal terms by singling out a thing of a particular sort. They provide Hume with a conceptual hook into a topic, and thereby provide the basis for further enquiry.²¹ And they might shed light on various aspects of Hume's philosophy, such as the claim that vice and virtue are analogous to secondary

qualities.²² But if my argument that only positive ideas engender belief is sound, Humean relative ideas will not support doxastic claims that are not tied to experience on the basis of an intelligible relation.

5 Relative ideas and Strawson's Hume

In *The Secret Connexion* (1989), Galen Strawson recognizes that Hume accepted a theory of relative ideas and uses that as the basis for arguing that there are far more things in Hume's world than are ever dreamt of by most Hume scholars. In what remains, I briefly examine Strawson's position. I argue that Strawson blurs the distinction between relative ideas and questions of linguistic reference, that his position is plausible only if one conflates that distinction, and that there is no reason to believe Hume championed a full-blown theory of linguistic reference.

Strawson suggests that relative ideas play a major role in Hume's philosophy. His focus is on the relative idea of an external object as specifically different from a perception and on the notion of Causation, that is, power understood in the Lockean sense: a property of an object that is the efficient cause, in a strongly non-Humean sense, of an observable effect. His description of a relative idea is given in the context of discussing an idea of an object as something specifically different from a perception (T68). He writes:

Nevertheless (Hume seems to be saying), even if we cannot form any idea of external objects that counts as positively contentful on the terms of the theory of ideas, we can still form a 'relative' idea of such objects. It is merely a relative idea because we cannot in any way conceive of or descriptively represent the nature of an external object as it is in itself (when supposed specifically different from perceptions); we can conceive it only indirectly. We may for example conceive it as something that stands in a certain relation (the relation of cause) to our perceptions (T84). We can conceive it only as something that stands in certain relations, or holds a place in a system of relations (for some this may be reminiscent of our relation to the referent of a variable in a theory expressing a 'Ramsey sentence'), while having no positive conception of its nature considered on its own. But a merely relative idea of (or term for) something X is not no idea of (or term for) X at all. Coupling Hume's notion with a more modern idiom, we may note that a merely 'relative' idea of X is, precisely, merely 'relationally of X. Nevertheless—to use a different form of the Latin word from which 'relative' and 'relational' derive—it does *refer* to X, in this case.

(Strawson 1989:51)

A lot goes on in this paragraph. The early remark to the effect that by means of a relative idea we conceive of the object indirectly and that our conception will not allow us to descriptively represent the object itself is, as we have seen, consistent with the historical tradition in which Humean relative ideas are found. But what insight does such a relative idea provide? Does it single out an external—presumably material—object? No. The relative idea of an object that is specifically different from a determinate perception presumably corresponds to the definite description, 'the thing that is the cause of perception *p* but does not resemble *p*' or 'the thing that is the cause of perception *p*, does not resemble *p*, and is not itself a perception'. The first of these does *not* guarantee that the cause of *p* is not a perception. The second does not guarantee that it is a material object: it could be God

(as it is for Berkeley), or Martians, or anything that is not a perception. More significantly, given Hume's scepticism, there is no more guarantee that the relative idea singles out *anything* than there is that the definite description 'the person who lit a cigar at the corner of North Main and Vine Streets in Harrisonburg, Virginia at the stroke of midnight on September 13, 1997' singles out anything. And here the difference between Humean causation and Strawsonian Causation makes no difference. Even if Strawson were justified in ascribing the philosophical belief in Causation to Hume,²³ for the relative idea to single out a material object, it would be necessary to show that Hume placed constraints on Causal relations such that only a material object can stand in a Causal relation to a perception. And even if this could be done, Strawson would need to show that, in perceiving something as red, the relative idea singles out the object that begins a physiological process rather than a brain state, since Hume occasionally writes as if the immediate physiological state conjoined with (if not connected to) a perception is a brain state (see T247–8; also T65, 68–9). This is an issue Strawson does not broach. But apart from a more general discussion of Hume's account of mind and body, there is no basis for claiming that a relative idea of an object as specifically different from a perception singles out a material object that begins a physiological process. At best, we are left with a something-I-know-not-what that is causally related to a perception, and there is no guarantee that *anything* is singled out.

Toward the end of the paragraph there is a shift from ideas to terms—'relative idea of (or term for)'—followed by a terminological shift to reference. This suggests that Strawson conflates concerns in the way of ideas and concerns with linguistic reference, and this seems to be borne out by his flagging of referring expressions throughout his discussion of the *Enquiry* (Strawson 1989:178–215). If one allows this conflation, and, if one holds that every time Hume uses a referring expression there corresponds an *acceptable* relative idea, then one must grant Strawson that Hume accepts everything from non-Humean causation to a nonbundle theory of mind to real essences of (imperceptible) material objects. But this seems implausible.

Strawson's account of relative ideas is ahistorical. It does not recognize that there is a definable tradition in the eighteenth century according to which it is possible in principle to single out imperceptible objects. More importantly, he does not recognize that a fundamental element of that tradition is the recognition that a necessary condition for the acceptability of a relative idea is a clear understanding of the putative relation that obtains between the positive idea which provides its basis and the imperceptible related object. As we have seen, Locke assured Stillingfleet that he had ideas of relations and therefore could use relations to reach beyond the immediately given. Berkeley argued that the putative relation of support that provides the basis for a Lockean relative idea of material substance is unknown, and, therefore, the Lockean idea is unacceptable. Hume argued that the alleged relation of inhesion that obtains between a substance and its accidents, if knowable at all, must be construed as the relation of identity, which yields absurdities. Hence substance, so construed, cannot exist. The doctrine of relative ideas is not a blank check that allows one to claim to conceive of anything one might wish. Strawson fails to acknowledge that the philosophers of the period recognized criteria by which to judge whether a putative relative idea is cogent. Such a recognition yields a much tamer, more familiar Hume.

If Strawson's thesis has any plausibility, one must assume that Hume had a sophisticated theory of linguistic reference. But he did not have a full-blown

theory of linguistic reference. The closest Hume comes to such is a theory of the meaning of sortal terms. Here relative ideas can play a role: they can ‘point’ to objects that might exist. So, it is perfectly cogent to pick out material objects, and thereby provide significance to the term ‘material object’, on the basis of a relative idea corresponding to the definite description ‘the things that cause impressions’, assuming only that the word ‘cause’ is clearly understood and recognizing that the things so singled out might be the objects of theoretical physics, or an activity of the human mind, or God, or something totally unknown (T84).

Let us grant Strawson that, as a consistent sceptic, Hume could not *deny* the existence of anything that can be consistently described. Let us grant further that it might seem ironic for Hume to use referential expressions if he held that there was nothing to which they referred. But it would have been more ironic still had he not used those expressions: it was part of the standard nomenclature of the time and reflected many of the assumptions Hume called into doubt. And given his commitment to linguistic clarity and significance—a commitment shared by Locke and Berkeley—it would be the height of irony to claim that all the referring expressions Hume uses in some sense refer, for that would seem to imply that ‘When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles’, the first *Enquiry* should be the first book committed to the flames (E165).

6 Conclusions

In this chapter, I have argued that Hume accepted a doctrine of relative ideas. A relative idea is the cognitive analogue of a definite description. To claim that it is possible for such an idea to single out an object, it must be grounded in a positive idea, and one must have a clear understanding of the putative relation that obtains between that positive idea and the thing singled out. I have shown that this is part of a common tradition in the eighteenth century, and I have argued that it is reasonable to suggest that Hume implicitly appealed to relative ideas as a means to initially grasp a concept and in cases of conscious ideational representation. I concluded by arguing that the theory of relative ideas is *not* a theory of linguistic reference, and therefore it cannot license the conclusions Galen Strawson reaches in *The Secret Connexion*.

Notes

- 1 Flage (1981); see also Flage (1990:42–51).
- 2 Russell (1912:46–59); see also Russell, ‘On Denoting’ and The Philosophy of Logical Atomism’, in Russell (1971:39–56, 175–281, 241–54).
- 3 Thomas (1982); Traiger (1985); Friedman (1993a, 1993b).
- 4 As we shall see below, the doctrine of relative ideas came to the fore in eighteenth-century discussions of the doctrine of substance.
- 5 While I consider these the only three clear cases of allusions to relative ideas, some might point to some of Hume’s remarks in his moral and aesthetic writings as additional cases. At T577 he writes, ‘Handsome and beautiful, on most occasions, is not an absolute but a relative quality, and pleases us by nothing but its tendency to produce an end that is agreeable.’ In a note to several editions of the first *Enquiry*, we find this: ‘But a late Philosopher has taught us, by the most convincing Arguments, that Morality is nothing in the abstract Nature of Things, but is entirely relative to the Sentiment or mental Taste of each particular Being; in the same Manner as the Distinctions of sweet and bitter, hot and cold, arise from the particular feeling of each Sense or Organ’ (Hume 1822:4, 10n). In *The Sceptic*, one finds this: ‘If you be wise, each of you will allow, that the other may be in the right; and having many other instances of this diversity of taste,

you will both confess, that beauty and worth are merely of a relative nature, and consist in an agreeable sentiment, produced by an object in a particular mind, according to the peculiar structure and constitution of that mind' (*Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, in 1822:3, 217, and this: 'Good and ill, both natural and moral, are entirely relative to human sentiment and affection' (1822:3, 221). In the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, one finds this: 'But as all perfection is entirely relative, we ought never to imagine that we comprehend the attributes of this divine Being, or to suppose that his perfections have any analogy or likeness to the perfections of a human creature' (Hume 1779:142). Hume's point in each of these passages seems to be that moral and aesthetic notions are meaningful only insofar as they are related to our sentiments. Hence, one *could* talk about the cause of the sentiment—one could form a relative idea of the cause of the sentiment—as something distinct from the sentiment itself. This is a possibility on which I shall touch briefly below.

- 6 This is not to say that Hume could *say* nothing about non-perceptual objects, far from it. It simply places conceptual constraints on any theory of non-perceptual objects one constructs, that is, all concepts used in the description must be drawn from experience (T241–2; also T29). See Flage (1990:6–18, 101–29).
- 7 This is not to say that relative ideas were strictly an eighteenth-century phenomenon. I believe the case can be made that in his attempt to delimit problems in various ways, Descartes implicitly appealed to what were later called relative ideas (*Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, Rule 13, in Descartes (1985:1, 53ff), and I have argued elsewhere that Spinoza accepted a theory of relative ideas (Flage 1989:147–8), but to examine these issues is beyond the scope of the present paper.
- 8 These nominal differences rest on the differences between Locke's way of ideas and Berkeley's, on the one hand, and any version of the way of ideas and Reid's conceptual scheme, on the other. While I believe this model will shed considerable light on Berkeley's notorious 'doctrine of notions', developing that case is beyond the scope of the present paper. See Flage (1987).
- 9 We should notice that Locke seems to be concerned with a general idea of substance in general. Hence, the positive idea that provides the basis for the general idea of substance is itself an abstract general idea.
- 10 But see *Dialogue 3* (vol. 2, 231) where Philonous is made to say, 'Farther, I know what I mean by the terms *I* and *myself*; and I know this immediately or intuitively, though I do not perceive it as I perceive a triangle, a colour, or a sound'. On this apparent inconsistency with the passage cited above, see Flage (1992 247–9).
- 11 Two points should be noted: (1) Berkeley's account of ideas requires that this would *not be* a relative idea, rather, it would be a relative notion; and (2) Berkeley, like Locke, occasionally uses the expression 'relative idea' or 'relative notion' to allude to an idea of a relation. See *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge (PHK)* °17 (in 1949:2, 47–8).
- 12 It is beyond the scope of this paper even to raise questions regarding the adequacy of the Russellian analysis of denoting phrases.
- 13 Nor was Arnauld alone in recognizing this. Isaac Watts made the same point in his *Logic* of 1721: 'Note in the *third* place, That any *common* name whatsoever is name *proper* by terms of particularity added to it, as the common words *pope, king, horse, garden, book, knife, &c.* are designed to signify a particular idea, when we say, the *present pope; the king of Great Britain; the horse that won the last plate at Newmarket; the royal garden at Kensington; this book, that knife, &c.*' (Watts 1806:50).
- 14 See Locke (1690: Book III); Berkeley *PHK*, Introduction, especially °22–25; Hume, T15–25, E21–2.
- 15 The passage might also be understood as placing an emphasis on the word 'perception', that is, one is conceiving of a cause that is not a perception. Since Hume seems to grant that it is in principle possible that external objects—if there are such things—bear a relation of at least partial resemblance to perceptions (they might have properties that resemble in virtue of which each is an extended thing, or a table, for example), one might need to reformulate the description as, 'the thing that causes *p* but is not a perception'. The difference here is of little consequence.
- 16 For a more complete discussion of Hume's attack on the doctrine of substance see Flage (1981:63–67); Flage and Glass (1984:497–508); Flage (1990:61–82). This is not to claim that *all* relative ideas of substance are unintelligible. The idea of substance as that which is simple and perfectly identical through time seems to be intelligible, but there is no evidence that there are such things.
- 17 I no longer read the missing shade of blue passage as a counter-example to the copy theory of ideas. In 'Hume's Missing Shade of Blue' (1997), I argue that all Hume shows—and all Hume *claims* to show—is that 'tis not absolutely impossible for ideas to go before their correspondent impressions' (T5), that is, that the copy theory of ideas is neither a logically nor a conceptually

- necessary truth, and that this might be seen as an initial attack on the thesis that there is a necessary connection between cause and effect.
- 18 I acknowledged this in Flage (1982:158). While it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the precise meaning Hume ascribes to the expression 'simple idea', the remarks in the missing shade of blue paragraph suggest that a positive idea of a determinate shade of blue would be a simple idea.
 - 19 Some might find problematic my suggestion that there is an *exact resemblance* between the positive idea that grounds a relative idea of memory and the previous perception singled out. What are the criteria? How 'exact' does the resemblance need to be? These are questions which one cannot answer with respect to Hume. Given his correspondence theory of truth (T448), that there needs to be a resemblance seems unquestionable. Given that one is never in a position to compare the 'form and order' of the idea with the earlier perception, one is never in a position to determine whether there is any correspondence between the perceptions. Thus, while a concern with resemblance seems required, it is of little epistemic value.
 - 20 It is worthy of notice, however, that the second discussion is prefaced with remarks on the impossibility of knowing the causes of impressions of sensation, a discussion that concludes: 'We may draw inferences from the coherence of our perceptions, whether they be true or false; whether they represent nature justly, or be mere illusions of the senses' (T84).
 - 21 The point of my argument above was that even if the problem of the missing shade of blue can be solved by considerations of distinctions of reason, this does not entail that relative ideas are not operative in the construction of the idea. Similarly, in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, it is a relative idea of God that provides the conceptual hook that is the basis on which Philo examines the extent to which one can have knowledge of God's nature on the basis of the argument from design. Philo is made to say, 'Nothing exists without a cause; and the original cause of this universe (whatever it be) we call God' (Hume 1779:142). It is also the way I believe Descartes avoids the Meno paradox. See note 7 above.
 - 22 T469; see Flage (1994:44n9); Norton (1982:111–16).
 - 23 This issue is beyond the scope of the present paper.

10 From cognitive science to a post-Cartesian text

What did Hume really say?

Anne Jaap Jacobson

In this chapter, I present a new reading of important passages in Hume's first *Enquiry*. The reading provides support for the general thesis that the first *Enquiry* enacts a transition from cognitive science to post-Cartesianism. By this, I mean that Hume's science of human nature leads him to give up the Cartesian goal of finding the one true theory to answer the questions he is asking *and* that this rejection of Cartesian standards has had a significant effect on the structure of the text itself.

Recent and similarly transitional work, such as that by Stephen Stich, has claimed, as Hume does, that our philosophically favoured descriptions of ourselves and our accomplishments employ radically defective models.¹ This recent work, however, attempts to conform to the conceptions it rejects. Thus, Stich gives us carefully prepared arguments for the thesis that careful arguments do not bestow any epistemic advantage. What I shall argue is that the first *Enquiry* as a text should not overall be read as conforming to such standards, and in particular should not be read even as attempting to provide a single and consistent philosophical position on the all issues addressed.

The interpretation I offer also provides a fresh view on the recent controversy over the supposed Humean realism regarding natural necessity. My reading problematizes the reading of Hume as a metaphysical realist about necessary connexions. In addition, I argue in §III below that one textual argument that he is such a realist is based on fallacious inferences.

In what follows, I shall argue that there are three different ways to understand phrases like the 'always conjoined' associated with Hume's first definition of causality, and three different ways to understand the projected necessity associated with his second definition of causality. This gives us potentially nine different ways to read any one causal statement in Hume's work. Employing informal notions of *persona*, *perspective* and *practice*,² we can narrow the perhaps unwelcome diversity in the text to three different constructions of causality. Further, we can often say which is the most appropriate.

A final preliminary comment about the following reading: were I to present the following as *contrary* to professed intentions to provide a unified answer to the questions raised, then this paper would be a deconstruction of the text, arguing that the text subverts any such intention. It is, then, worth emphasizing that my reading sees the text as in fact *not* attempting to provide such an answer.

I The first definition

If anything is true about Hume on causality, it is true that causality is seen by him as having *something* to do definitionally with constant conjunction, or being always conjoined. In this section, we will begin by looking at some of the restrictions on ‘always conjoined’ and related locutions in the texts. We will then enquire about unrestricted, and differently restricted passages.

The restrictions

One restriction on ‘always conjoined’ occurs in Hume’s discussion of his first definition of causality.³ This definition draws on what is going on in the world with regard to which we correctly say that one thing caused another. For Hume, causality according to the first definition is constituted by generality, similarity and succession. Accordingly, ‘we may define a cause to be *an object, followed by another, and where all the objects similar to the first are followed by objects similar to the second*’ (E76). Hume makes two important statements about this definition. First, he says that, ‘*where, if the first object had not been, the second never had existed*’, is merely ‘other words’ for this first definition (E76). Second, he says the following gives us an application of the definition:

We say, for instance, that the vibration of this string is the cause of this particular sound. But what do we mean by that affirmation? We either mean *that this vibration is followed by this sound, and that all similar vibrations **have been followed by similar sounds...***

(E77; my emphasis in bold)

In this last passage, we have an application of the first definition which is temporally restricted; constant conjunction is constant conjunction so far. The fact that Hume gives us this restricted statement strongly suggests that we should understand the first definition itself as implicitly so restricted.⁴

If we do this, we can understand the ‘other words’ as providing us with a conditional that is merely tensed. Suppose, for example, I know that A and B were always conjoined. As an example, suppose Jane and John had always danced together in competitions. I may not know whether Jane had ever danced the tango in a competition, but want nonetheless to insist that if she had not, neither had he. There is nothing counterfactual about this conditional, and so neither need there be with Hume’s.

The past-tense reading of the ‘other words’ does not make the conditional equivalent to the first definition. The first definition correlates As with Bs; the conditional correlates not-As with not-Bs. If the two conditionals are conjoined, then As and Bs are said to be necessary and sufficient conditions of one another. Such an addition is much more modest than one we would understand as implicitly invoking the modalities of counterfactual conditionals.⁵

Hume’s usage

Given this temporal restriction on ‘always conjoined’ in the first definition, how are we to read Hume’s other causal statements? For example, are the principles

mentioned in §1 that are to describe the operations of the human mind themselves to be understood as temporally restricted? The obvious answer here is in the negative. Hume has compared these principles with the laws of planetary motion, which certainly are not restricted with regard to time on any standard interpretation. (If the entailments on Hume's understanding of these laws are only past and present tense, we should have been told of it.) Further, in the final sentence of §III Hume invites us to consider new examples, to show that what he is saying is correct (E24). If what he was saying was temporally restricted, new examples would be beside the point. So clearly, he takes what he is saying as unqualified as to time, or at least much more unqualified than 'so far' would make it. The temporal restriction of the first definition has yet to appear.

Similarly, the philosophers described in the section following the two definitions passage (§VIII) believe if that As cause Bs, then As and Bs are constantly conjoined without temporal qualification. Accordingly, such philosophers also believe there is some difference which accounts for any occurrence of an A without a B, and so an apparent breakdown merely informs us that we need to refine our notions of A and B. Apparent breakdowns simply tell us we have not correctly described the relevant As and Bs.⁶

philosophers form a maxim that the connexion between all causes and effects is equally necessary, and that its seeming uncertainty in some instances proceeds from the secret opposition of contrary causes.

(E87)

The vulgar usage

There appears to be a third account of the generality implied by 'cause' which is discussed in the first *Enquiry*. This is the reading of the vulgar which Hume reports and discusses in §VIII. Hume tells us that unlike philosophers, the vulgar just allow that sometimes things do not work. For the vulgar, 'As cause Bs' says something about what is beyond the experiences we have had, but it does not say that inexplicable breakdowns never occur:

The vulgar, who take things according to their first appearance, attribute the uncertainty of events to such an uncertainty in the causes as makes the latter often fail of their usual influence; though they meet with no impediment in their operation.

(E86)

There seem, then, to be three understandings of 'always conjoined:' (i) The unqualified constant conjunction probably used by Hume at times in his construction of a science of the mind (for example, §III) and employed by philosophers (for example, as reported in §VIII); (ii) Hume in §VII with the first definition; and (iii) the vulgar's usage.

How, then, do we reconcile three different readings of the constant conjunction statements implied by our causal statements? How can they be simply about the past sometimes and not others? There are many hypotheses which could be given to explain what Hume is doing. Perhaps, for example, he *is just* inconsistent. Or perhaps he is sloppy.

I propose a different response. I take the difference in tense to be an example of a more general difference in the voices present in Hume's texts. Voices, or perspectives, are sometimes represented in the third person (as in Hume's extensive discussions of the vulgar and philosophers) and sometimes are simply spoken (as in the cases of which Hume tells us that he is using a word in the vulgar sense).⁷ I am going to illustrate and defend this interpretive hypothesis by considering the second definition.

II The second definition

The critical strategy

To understand Hume's discussion of causality and his second definition in §VII, we need to notice the importance of his critical strategy:

When we entertain, therefore, any suspicion that a philosophical term is employed without any meaning or idea (as is but too frequent), we need but enquire, *from what impression is that supposed idea derived?* And if it be impossible to assign any, this will serve to confirm our suspicion.

(E22)

Hume argues for the need of such a strategy in §I; he announces it as the conclusion of his work in §11. This critical strategy is put to one central use in the first *Enquiry*, and I think that that use must be taken very seriously, despite the controversial nature of doing so.⁸ The use is the one which occurs in §VII in Hume's search for the impression origin for our idea of necessary connexion. Hume there provides an account of the meaning of 'causality' which is an outcome of his critical strategy.

According to Hume, our idea of necessary connection does not have an origin in impressions derived from the relations we call 'causal'. Rather, Hume argues, our idea of necessary connexion arises from our inferences. Hume's startling conclusion is that our notion of a necessary connection is really a notion of a kind of mentalistic or semantical connection.

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, by which they become proofs of each other's existence...

(E76)

Necessary connections are inferential or semantical connexions. Or are they?

Finding the impression source

There is a complex problem with understanding the arguments leading up to Hume's positive account of causality.⁹ The problem concerns Hume's application of the critical principle and Hume's account of what our idea of necessary connection really amounts to. There appears to be a quite wide gap between what the critical principle reveals and the new account Hume is giving.

The problem arises from the fact that Hume's critical principle applies only to simple ideas. When Hume says, 'we can have no idea of any thing which never

appeared to our outward sense or inward sentiment' (E74), he is not being strictly accurate. Hume does allow that we can get ideas of God or a golden mountain without any sensory experience of either. Only simple ideas, not complex ones, require an impression source. But the claim that the notion of a necessary connexion is a simple idea has considerable problems. For Hume, all our ideas of relations are complex ideas. The idea of a necessary connexion certainly seems to be the idea of a relation. Hence, it seems that the idea of a necessary connexion is a complex idea.

One possible route to interpreting Hume would be to say that we, his readers, are wrong to think the idea of necessary connexion is an idea of a relation. Given this interpretation, the impression source of our idea of necessary connection might be just some simple feeling which happens to accompany our inferences. An impression of a connection would then be like, say, a pain.

Hume does sometimes talk this way, and he is sometimes interpreted as holding this thesis. Indeed, I think this is the now standard interpretation.¹⁰ However, he also appears to reject a very similar thesis (E67n). This is the thesis that our notion of cause is infected with an idea (and so impression) of physical force or *effort* which we get in our experiences of trying to change our environment.¹¹ Hume says that this notion plays a large role in the vulgar conception of power, but §VII is to give us a more accurate notion than the vulgar one. (Remember the footnote on E33.) It would be odd if the more accurate explication just picked out a slightly different impression.¹²

The disadvantage to the interpretation that draws on a simple, felt impression, is that it makes a mystery of what else Hume says about necessary connexions. First of all, the impression source is characterized by Hume as *being* the transition or inference or connexion among ideas, not as *accompanying* it.¹³ We feel the connection or transition (E75, 78); we do not simply have a feeling when the inference occurs. Second, it is very important for Hume that our beliefs about connexions are beliefs about relations. Otherwise, the notion of a connection could not have the roles Hume thinks the notion has. The most important roles are three: (1) we think our inferences are not precarious because we think there are connexions which bind things together (E27); (2) one shows that we do not observe connexions by arguing that nothing we observe in a single case observation informs us of the further existent, the object's cause or effect (E27–32, 42); and (3) we do or can believe that the regular course and succession of objects totally depends on the powers and forces which give rise to connexions (E55). A simple impression like pain does not fill the explanatory role well; a simple idea cannot be the semantic origins for the relational beliefs Hume says result from the idea. We cannot just say that the simple impression or idea causes us to have these further beliefs, because it has to supply *the content* for these beliefs.

An alternative account

I think there is another account of the impression source of our idea of necessary connexion, which is in the texts at least as much as the simple-impression account is.¹⁴ That is, there is another way to collect together relevant remarks of Hume's. The second, alternative account puts together and takes very literally two observations of Hume's. The first is that our idea of necessity is an idea of a connexion felt in the mind, the felt transition which is the inference. The second

observation of Hume's is that when we project the feeling or idea onto the world, we take events in the world to be connected up in a way which is modelled on relations of ideas.

If our belief in external connexions is really the result of the projection of logical or semantical connexions, then we can understand why the supposed connexions are assigned an ontological role which they cannot fill. We, and Hume at some points (for example, *E54–5*), assign connexions the role of holding the universe together. But they do so really on the model derived from relations of ideas. When P has happened, Q must happen because Q is somehow contained in P. That Q will occur is part of the meaning or content of P. Hence, one strand of Hume's argument in support of the claim that we have no knowledge of connexions depends simply on saying that we have no *a priori* knowledge of causal relations.

Different uses

The second definition also allows three different readings of causal statements. The first reading is a direct use of the second definition. When, in §VIII, Hume describes us as believing that actions are caused by character, motives and circumstances, he supports this by noting that we make the inferences. He also tells us that the only *notion* we have of cause consists in customary conjunction and inferences. Here Hume is applying the second definition in an account of a section of discourse in order to argue that linguistic practices show people have a particular belief; that is, they make the inferences so they believe in causal relations. Here the second definition is used to interpret a group of cognizers; I shall call it an 'external use' of the second definition.

There are other uses of causal locutions which better manifest what I will call 'an internal use' of the second definition. The internal use is the use in which the semantical connexions are projected onto the world. There are two particularly interesting cases of this sort of use. Thus Hume writes:

It is universally allowed that matter, in all its operations, is actuated by a necessary force, and that every natural effect is so precisely determined by the energy of its cause that no other effect, in such particular circumstances, could possibly have resulted from it. The degree and direction of every motion is, by the laws of nature, prescribed with such exactness...

(*E82*)

and

so has she [Nature] implanted in us an instinct, which carries forward the thought in a correspondent course to that which she has established among external objects; though we are ignorant of those powers and forces, on which this regular course and succession of objects totally depends.

(*E55*)

(Notice that the 'universally allowed' in the first quote does distance the author somewhat. Similarly, in the second passage the author is distanced somewhat by the 'we are ignorant' and by the number of non-serious references the passage makes. See my discussion below of *E54–5*.)

There is a third use which Hume explicitly says is in his text. This is the vulgar usage. Hume tells us that he is using the related word 'power' in the vulgar sense

in the footnote to p. 33 of the first *Enquiry*, and, as we have seen, he contrasts this with the more accurate use to be given in §VII. The vulgar, Hume also tells us, think of connexions as like our impression of an effort (*E67n*) and this is quite distinct from the philosophers' usage, which I have called 'an internal use' of the second definition.

What we have been looking at in the text presents us with an exegetical problem. Given there are three different ways in which the 'always conjoined' of the first definition can be understood, and three different ways the 'connexion' aspect of causality can be understood, there are potentially nine different readings of any one causal locution. The text seems to shatter into pieces.

Before we consider how to avoid this unwelcome consequence, we need to consider another interpretation that is in effect a rival interpretation of many of the causal locutions in the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. The interpretation is a causal realist interpretation, and it maintains that there are a large number of causal locutions in which Hume is referring to strongly necessitating causes or connections in nature.¹⁵ I understand the interpretation I am developing to have useful and negative observations regarding the causal realist readings.

III The Bishop Sheen fallacy

In this section I will focus on causal realist readings of the first five sections of the *Enquiry*; these sections contain the most important occurrences of the disputed words before the two definitions in §VII. I will argue that a recent and detailed version of the causal realist reading is based on an unnoticed fallacy. In the section following this one, I will develop the apparatus my reading needs to avoid positing the unattractive diversity offered by the possibility of nine different readings. Then I will return to the causal realist reading and argue that there are further problems facing it.

The specific version of the reading I have in mind is that offered by Galen Strawson (1989). Strawson singles out thirteen passages in his discussion of phrases supposedly referring to necessary connections in 'Sections I through V' in the *Enquiry* (1989:177ff). Quoting these passages, he finds twelve cases of terms which supposedly are intended to be referring to powers, and so on. From these passages, Strawson infers that Hume believes that there are strongly necessitating powers and connexions. Here are examples:

no philosopher, who is rational and modest, has ever pretended to assign *the ultimate cause* of any natural operation, or to show distinctly the action of *that power, which produces* any single effect in the universe.

(*E30* my emphasis)

and

But as to *the causes of these general causes*, we should in vain attempt their discovery...These *ultimate springs and principles* are totally shut up from human curiosity and Enquiry.

(*E30*; my emphasis)

(Both passages quoted by Strawson (1989:178). Italicized words indicate what Strawson takes to be referring expressions.)

To take such passages as showing that the author believes in such ultimate

springs and principles is to commit a fallacy. The fallacy is the Bishop Sheen Fallacy (BSF for short), which I am naming in honour of that cleric's arguments from the assertions of atheists to their belief in the existence of God.¹⁶ The conclusion of an instance of the BSF asserts that some author(s) believe(s) that some feature or individual (or group of features or individuals) is instantiated or exists. What makes the conclusion part of the fallacy is a non-redundant premise to the effect that the author(s) maintains that they are wholly ignorant of this feature or individual or group. Thus, an example of the fallacy is: atheists maintain that we have no knowledge of God; therefore, atheists believe that God exists.

It is fallacious to infer from such negative epistemological statements that the speaker believes there really are ultimate causes, or powers and forces, or a deity. For example, many philosophers are prepared to say that we are ignorant of many of the features of the possible worlds farthest from us. In doing so they do not reveal themselves as realists about possible worlds. An assertion of the form, 'We are ignorant of the X', tells us *at most* that the context of discourse is one in which some people are prepared to use the term referentially. To draw the realist implication is to commit the BSF.

Ten of the twelve supposedly referential cases are clearly cases regarding which Strawson commits the BSF. That is, they are cases in which it is being said that no philosopher knows the ultimate causes, that we are ignorant of powers and forces, or that nature conceals the powers and forces from us, etc. One quote given us by Strawson is dealt a double blow. As Strawson quotes Hume: 'We are ignorant of *those powers and forces*, on which the regular course and succession of objects *totally depends*' (E55). Not only is this a passage in which we have the negative epistemological assessment, but further, the passage is one in which Hume is using a number of terms non-seriously. For example, the discussion of supposed correlation between ideas and unknown powers and forces starts with 'Here, then, is a kind of pre-established harmony...' (E54). The text goes on to mention the 'wisdom of nature' and 'what nature has taught us' (E55). Hume even recommends the investigation to those who want to find final causes. There is no reason to think that these uses are serious ones, and, at the same time, there is no reason to pick out 'powers and forces' as giving us the one serious metaphysical commitment in this passage.

There is one quote which does not bear the marks of a negative epistemological assessment overtly. However, the words quoted occur in a context in which Hume is concerned with what we do not know. Strawson quotes it thus: 'that those particular objects, at that particular time, were endowed *with...powers and forces*' (E37). The passage begins, however, with:

Here, then, is our natural state of ignorance with regard to the powers and influence of all objects. How is this remedied by experience? It only shows us a number of uniform effects, resulting from certain objects, and teaches us *that...*
(E37)

In addition, the quote is part of the discussion in which Hume says he is using such words in a popular sense and one which awaits the clarification given by his two definitions (E33n).

Let us notice finally that in the passages Strawson draws to our attention, the principal investigator is interestingly *restricted* in the use of terms which might be thought to *commit* one to the existence of powers and forces. This investigator clearly talks about our ignorance of strongly necessitating connexions, and

positively refrains from simply talking about such connexions. He appears then truly to regard the explication of Tower' as awaiting §VII.

IV *Persona, perspective and practice*

We now return to the question of whether any one causal locution can be read in nine different ways. Some, but not all, of the potential diversity is in the text. We can see Hume as presenting and discussing *personas*, *perspectives* and *practices*, though I will leave these terms at the level of metaphor.¹⁷ We do talk happily about perspectives: the perspective of the house buyer, the voter, the average woman, the man in the street, the news media, and so on. Here we have in mind embodied clusters of beliefs, attitudes and tendencies for acquiring beliefs in certain ways, and propensities for action. A *persona* has a perspective; a *persona's* perspective is doxastically open, and the way an embodiment of it acquires beliefs we can call 'practices'. Hume, it cannot be said too emphatically, is very interested in *personas*, *perspectives* and *practices*.

If we employ a robust notion of *persona* or *perspective*, we narrow the options for each causal locution from nine to three: the *vulgar* (whose 'always conjoined' is 'more or less always' and whose conception of connexion is full of a sense of effort); the *philosopher* (whose constant conjunctions are utterly unqualified and who thinks of the world as tied together by quasi-semantic relations) and the *cautious investigator* of §§VII–VIII (whose 'always conjoined' is limited to experience and whose connexions are inferential connexions in the head only).

Taking this schema back to the causal realist readings, we should note we have no good reason for thinking the expressions 'power', 'force' and 'necessary connexion', as they are used in the negative existential statements in §§I–V, are to be understood according to just one sense of necessity. For example, in Part One of §IV such terms are treated as having the implication that our inferences to the unobserved are *a priori*, and this makes it look as though, *if they were referring uses*, the references would be to be understood in terms of the internal sense of the second definition. However, in one footnote in Part Two, we are told that the word 'Power' is being used in a loose and popular sense and awaits the more accurate explication to come in §VII (E33n). If the loose and popular sense is that of the *vulgar*, then it is different from the internal sense of the second definition. Finally, it may be that the distance between Hume as he develops the science of the mind and the philosophers of §VIII on the topic of necessary connexions explains the composure with which Hume greets the case of the missing shade of blue. Perhaps, that is, he sees the science of the mind as uncommitted in merely possible cases.¹⁸

One consequence of the reading proposed in this paper should be emphasized: no simple quoting of the texts can determine 'what Hume really thought' about causality and connections. Rather, far from being able to argue from particular passages to a general interpretation, we need an interpretation of the context of the quote before we can understand what is being said by it.

There is a further implication of the reading(s) of the second definition which we have investigated. Once we put the traditional reading of the second definition in question, then we are in a position to offer a diagnosis of the attractions some philosophers have found in the causal realist readings. There does often enough seem to be more to Hume's causal language than *just* constant conjunction and the simple feeling which is posited in the traditional reading of the second definition. The claim,

It is universally allowed that matter, in all its operations, is actuated by a necessary force, and that every natural effect is so precisely determined by the energy of its cause that no other effect, in such particular circumstances, could possibly have resulted from it.

(E82)

hardly seems explained by that. Hence, it can seem implausible to take Hume seriously when he says that his two definitions will give us a more accurate sense of the terms he employs. However, such claims about necessary force are fully explained by an internal use of the second definition; they are precisely what one would expect. Hence, my reading satisfies some at least of the motivation toward a realist reading.

V A concluding methodological postscript

If we ask, with reference to the picture of Hume which is developed here, whether he is a sceptic about our inferences to the unobserved, the arguments I have given provide an interesting answer. My view of the text warns us against the assumption that Hume's works are standardly modernist, that they contain a single perspective from which Hume hopes to develop the one right answer to the questions he is considering. Our investigation of Hume's two definitions seriously challenges this assumption.

The answer to questions of Humean inductive scepticism should rest on what is in the text, and not on a seeming reconstruction of the features of some one position which Hume is supposedly attempting to defend. In §XII, Part Two, Hume tells us that the sceptic will always win if we concentrate on arguments such as those of §§IV and VII.¹⁹ But we are also told in §XII that it is psychologically impossible to maintain such scepticism, that it would be ruinous if we could, and that these facts give us the strongest objection to scepticism. And that is all there is. On the approach I am adopting, the fact that Hume does not say more means we should put aside the quest for some further fact about whether Hume does or does not take the sceptics to have truth on their side. In doing this, we can start to discern the significance of what Hume does not say. The shapes of the silences in the text become important.²⁰

Notes

- 1 See Stich (1990). I have reviewed Stich's book in Jacobson (1991). In connecting Stich's work to my present concerns, I am very indebted to conversations with Rupert Read.
- 2 To be explained below.
- 3 I have discussed this issue in Jacobson (1984, 1986, 1989).
- 4 It is even more obvious that the corresponding 'constant conjunction' often occurs in the *Treatise* as implicitly or explicitly restricted to the past. I have argued this point in my 1984 and 1989 articles referred to above. Robison (1977) notes that the restriction occurs on T87–8, and at least twice elsewhere.
- 5 Hume's conditional has been taken to be a problematic counterfactual by several commentators, including Antony Flew (1961). I have argued for the alternative, merely tensed reading in Jacobson (1986).
- 6 There is one passage which might be taken to suggest that, despite his seeming generalizing, Hume's usage in the beginning of the *Enquiry* does not coincide with that of the philosophers. The passage is the one concerned with the missing shade of blue, in which Hume appears to regard it as a minor matter that it may be possible to construct a counter-example to a major thesis of his.

- (A more radical suggestion is that Hume's whole usage in the *Enquiry* is best considered as subverted by his discussion in §VII, Part Two. I am not going to pursue this suggestion, since it seems clear that Hume regards himself as committed in his statements to truths beyond ones about the past. If Hume's usage in constructing his science of the mind is to be taken as limited, the limits seem to be less than those of the first definition in §VII and less than those of the vulgar, which we are about to investigate.)
- 7 E33n. Others writing about Hume have seen different voices in the texts; see especially Baier (1991). What distinguishes my reading is my claim that Hume speaks with different and sometimes conflicting voices.
 - 8 Several commentators have recently claimed that for Hume the unavailability of impressions need have little impact on the content of meaningful discourse. See Wright (1983) and Strawson (1989).
 - 9 Some of the discussion in this and the following sections is drawn from Jacobson (1989), referred to above.
 - 10 Following upon Stroud (1977:IV).
 - 11 Notice that we have grammatically both relational and non-relational uses for 'effort'; I can make an effort to push a car, while I might be said to make the same *effort* whether I am pushing a car or pulling a horse. One is an effort-to, the other not. The *Oxford English Dictionary* indicates that the non-relational form is primary, which is interesting in the context of whether Hume is talking about a genuinely simple idea.
 - 12 It is true that at the end of the footnote starting on E77, Hume *appears* to invite us to understand his account in terms of the vulgar sense, which is based on force and effort. However, a careful reading reveals that the explicit comparison extends only to allowing that 'feeling a connexion among ideas' is an internal sensation. Nothing in the footnotes says that feeling a connection is having an extra, simple impression accompanying an inference.
 - 13 This consideration by itself may not be decisive. Enc (1985) argues that a simple feeling gets the label 'feeling of necessity' because it occurs when we make the inferences. Enc's account, however, is vulnerable to the rest of my objections. Further, Enc's account, which is meant to fit the *Treatise* account, appears to be rejected in Hume's discussion of *force-effort* (see above) in the *Enquiry*.
 - 14 I have very considerable reservations about filling out a philosophical position and then calling it Hume's because it provides 'the best explanation' of why Hume says what he says. My doubt is about the determinateness of the supposedly merely unexpressed views. The view that there are background beliefs which are fully determinate depends on a theory of the mind that Hume is (I believe) questioning, perhaps quite correctly. And the phrasing of my claim that the second view is 'in the texts at least as much' is intended to signal that we are not doing a kind of descriptive archaeology of the texts.
 - 15 See Wright (1983) and Strawson (1989); also see Craig (1987).
 - 16 My knowledge of this argument derives from remarks by William Newcomb (of Newcomb's problem) which were made many years ago.
 - 17 Let me anticipate worries that my critical apparatus is here anachronistic by noting that the *OED* records usages of these terms, in senses at least closely connected to mine, which predate Hume's texts.
 - 18 See also my discussion in note 6.
 - 19 I have explored the sceptical implications of these sections in other, recent publications, including Jacobson (1987, 1996).
 - 20 I am indebted to several members of the Hume Society for their comments on some of the ideas in this chapter, most especially Terence Penelhum and Peter Jones. My thanks are also due to Cynthia Freeland and Rupert Read, for our discussions on related issues. Margaret Wilson provided very useful comments on the penultimate draft. I am also grateful to my colleagues for their comments at a department colloquium.

11 In closing: the new antagonists of ‘the New Hume’

On the relevance of Goodman and Wittgenstein to the New Hume debate

Rupert Read

Introductory

The aim of this paper is to situate the New Hume debate in twentieth-century philosophy, primarily ‘Anglo-American’ philosophy. In contrast to the other papers in this collection, it is not primarily a ‘scholarly’ essay focussing on the exegesis of Hume’s texts (though it does look closely at a couple of the key portions of both the *Enquiry* and the *Treatise*). Rather, it aims above all to place the New Hume debate in the broader context of major philosophical thinking on causation this century, through:

- (1) suggesting some *analogues* among major twentieth-century philosophers to Hume’s problem(s) concerning causation (as understood by the various parties to the New Hume debate), analogues which may at the least help in our understanding of what exactly is at stake in the problem(s).
- (2) asking further whether these philosophers can perhaps profitably suggest to us *other ways* of taking Hume’s views in this area than that of the [old and] ‘New Humeans’.
- (3) preliminarily assessing some of the *consequences* that would arguably follow for philosophy now if certain of the various exegeses proposed in this volume (and in this paper) were/are correct.

A natural place to look for consequences of Hume’s ideas on causation and scepticism would be to Russell, who wrestled with Hume’s legacy for empiricism more than most; and especially to the Logical Empiricists, who have been widely and reasonably adjudged as among Hume’s foremost twentieth-century descendants. I take it, in fact, that relatively speaking, it is at least *somewhat* clear how Hume’s influence (whether ‘rightly’ or not) has figured with these figures, particularly the Logical Empiricists (as it is, albeit in a rather different fashion, with that great antagonist and fellow of the Logical Positivists, Karl Popper). For reasons of space and in the cause of novelty, then, I shall refer only very briefly to these, and look instead chiefly to two figures with regard to whom matters might well seem rather less clear: Russell’s great successor (and refuter), Ludwig Wittgenstein; and one of the key inheritors (and refuters) of the Vienna Circle and Logical Empiricism, Nelson Goodman. I think that *these* two figures offer us the deepest and perhaps most surprising means of advancing the debate about how a right reading of Hume can figure in our philosophical understandings now, especially so far as the legacy of the arguments over the ‘New Hume’ interpretation is concerned.

More specifically, then, what I shall do in this chapter is as follows. First, I shall read Goodman on Hume on induction and causation, and attempt to ‘triangulate’ among Goodman, the New Humeans and anti-New-Hume interpreters of Hume, so as to establish how exactly, if at all, Goodman’s unusual version of Hume can help us in establishing certain options for how we could read Hume’s works and his philosophical legacy.

Second, I shall read the early Wittgenstein on induction and causation, so as to buttress and considerably extend the claims made in the first part of the paper concerning a possible way of reading Hume’s critique of ‘natural necessity’, at the least as it can figure in philosophy of language at the end of the twentieth century. This possibility emphasizes the difficulties in *making sense* of the notion of ‘natural necessity’.

Finally, I shall bring the two main components of the paper together, such as to follow up on the claims I will make shortly concerning the key interpretive possibility which the New Humeans miss, and to sketch how this possibility, a ‘deflationary naturalist’ take on Hume, can among other things reconceive how we might (or should) understand ‘scepticism’.

The terms of the debate

If the ‘New Humeans’ are dead right—if they are simply *correct* in their interpretation, and their interpretation ought to replace what has gone before it—then, as will be quite clear to anyone who has read much of this collection, our image of Hume on central aspects of his philosophy has been pretty badly wrong for almost the entire past 250 years. This must in turn have *some* effects upon our understanding of those whose views have been purportedly Humean, and/or have been ‘influenced’ by Hume, or show ‘elective affinities’ with ideas that have been taken to be Humean.

But this will of course only even potentially follow if those who would resist the ‘Realist’ reading(s) of Hume have no clear option open to them other than to accept at least the New Humeans’ *terms* for the debate. Those are, roughly: either (sceptical) realism or outright dogmatic scepticism.

Now, there are a few interesting gestures towards common ground between the parties to the debate *in this volume*, hints that this either/or approach is increasingly becoming thought to be too crude. For instance, Craig’s paper explicitly questions the ‘either/or’ approach which has predominated in the New Hume debate, while Jacobson’s paper in particular offers a very different possible context for the New Hume and its rival interpretations, as different voices in Hume himself, in his (as she sees it) dialogical and multi-perspectival text(s).

Part of what I wish to do in the present paper is to heighten one’s possible sense that the way some of the terms of the debate have been set out by those who began the debate—Strawson, Wright and friends—has been more deeply prejudicial. Specifically, I shall build on thoughts of Winkler and others, to suggest that a way(s) of reading Hume not considered by the New Humeans may in fact be a live and useful option.

A concrete example: Winkler versus Lightner on Hume

Let us begin with a concrete and salient example. When Ken Winkler writes, in his paper ‘The New Hume’ (reprinted in this volume; see Chapter 4) that, for Hume,

we cannot ‘*in any way*’ conceive of ‘objective connexion’, it might seem as though he is making something of a concession to the New Humeans. For he is not saying that Hume *denies* that there are necessary connections. And, to a traditional philosophic ear, that probably means that there still might be, perhaps, albeit perhaps beyond our powers of conception, ‘objective connexions’, natural necessary connections.

But that would be to fail to recognize another possibility—the possibility that a declaration of it being impossible in any way to conceive of something is actually worth calling a ‘stronger’ claim, and perhaps a more interesting one, than the flat-out denial of something’s existence. The possibility, specifically, that something’s being inconceivable ought to be taken, in philosophy, to mean that one cannot even get as far as asserting or denying its existence, because nothing has been conceived that could be found or even claimed to exist (or otherwise).¹

I am suggesting—and I hope that this paper will bear out the suggestion—that this possibility is a real possibility, and ought very much to be borne in mind as we look for a plausible interpretation of difficult passages in Hume’s (difficult, sometimes even mysterious) writings on the ‘non-existence’ of—or our decisive lack of knowledge of—‘necessary connections’ (and ‘objects’).

Why? Because it potentially offers a way of making sense of these passages which would eliminate many of the difficulties with them; and supplementarily, because it would put Hume in closer touch with some of the major twentieth-century philosophers who have claimed to be in certain respects followers of his, or who have been observed to have ‘views’ bearing important similarities to his. In my own opinion, it would give us a hope which we have a decent right to. The hope, that is, of being able to see Hume as not having been *either* in certain very important respects merely egregiously wrong *or* a philosophical ‘chicken’, a backslider without—at the end of the day—a clear view. A hope which most other available readings, including, I will claim, the New Hume reading, do not deliver on. (This is a point that, while hardly overwhelming in the course of interpretation, is not entirely to be neglected. At least if we think, as I do, that it is always wise to be charitable for as long as possible in interpreting the texts of truly major thinkers who have thoroughly survived into the philosophical canon.)

The view which I am arguing we ought at least to allow for is certainly (by implication at least) not very popular in the current Hume literature. Here, to take an almost random example, is Tyckerium Lightner, making what he takes to be an important point concerning the non-sceptical ‘metaphysics’ supposedly underlying Hume’s ‘epistemic scepticism’, in his recent pro-New-Hume-ish paper, ‘Hume on Conceivability and Inconceivability’:

Hume [makes the following] statement about the epistemic status of inconceivable objects. He states ‘we can never have reason to believe that any object exists, of which we cannot form an idea’ (T172). This is significantly weaker than saying that inconceivable objects are impossible. If Hume did think that inconceivable objects were impossible, then it is odd that he would bother making this weaker statement about them.

(Lightner 1997:124)

The passage in question is, of course, from the vital segment of the *Treatise* wherein Hume is endeavouring to establish the precise nature of our being unable to conceive of necessary connection. So it is first worth pointing out that Lightner

pre-judges the issue somewhat by remarking that this is only a question of the *epistemic* status of inconceivable objects.

More strongly, however, let us ask the following: Why assume (as Lightner does) that the ‘stronger’ thing to say (than what Hume actually says) would be that ‘inconceivable objects are impossible’? For to say the latter would already *allow* that we can get as far as thinking clearly and distinctly—intelligibly—of inconceivable objects (such as ‘necessary connections’), and *then* judge that they are impossible. To allow that, to say that, is like saying that the correct way to think of nonsense is to picture clearly a nonsensical situation, and then conclude that it is nonsensical. To say this is, I think, deeply and desperately incoherent; indeed, nonsensical. (I shall buttress this claim in my discussion of Wittgenstein later.) It would be a shame, to say the least, if in order to say something strong hereabouts, one had to say something nonsensical.

I think therefore that we should at least consider taking Hume at his word in the nested quote above: we can simply never have reason to believe that any thing exists, of which no idea can be formed. There is an end of the matter. It is not that we can (or should want to) attempt to proclaim, as a philosophical thesis, that inconceivable objects are impossible. It’s rather that any would-be object which we cannot successfully conceive of in any way never gets so far as to be something which can genuinely be an object of our thoughts and judgements.² To assert *or deny* the existence of such an object, as a matter of philosophy, would be unnecessary and indeed incoherent speculation. As I shall try to argue in more detail later, this perhaps signals a way to read Hume’s texts without doing violence to them, and yet which gives at least some sense to the ferocious and (on almost any reading that we are used to) ‘unfortunate’ methodology centred around his so-called ‘theory of ideas’.

In any case, I think this example just goes to show that some philosophers are indeed, unfortunately, not alive enough to the kind of possibility that I am suggesting. That seems to me to be the message of a careful reading of the quote from Lightner given above, and, more generally, of Lightner’s paper: that, for whatever reason, the strength of the reading of Hume I have begun intimating here has just not occurred to him.

So my aim in what follows can be re-stated again (as follows): briefly to examine whether—with reference especially to the different cases of Goodman and Wittgenstein—we might indeed profitably read the remark from Ken Winkler mentioned above in the strong sense which I have just indicated. Whether, that is, Hume might be argued to have ‘anticipated’, at least somewhat more than has often been recognized, some of the central insights of these philosophers, about what our practices are and what it makes sense to say about them; and, perhaps more important, whether the ideas of these philosophers offer reasons for thinking that the views of ‘the New Hume’ are incoherent, and at least need not be thought to have been Hume’s views (if his views are to be judged as potentially coherent).

Two important *canards*, standing in the way of my aims, need to be disposed of immediately, though unsympathetic readers may find them recurring as they work their way further into the paper. The first of these is that a reading of Winkler’s remark such as I am proposing would yield a Verificationist position. Of course, this notion is by no means *insane*; it is quite clear, as already remarked, that there are important and deep affinities between Hume’s philosophy and modern Verificationism, and even between the philosophies of Goodman and (especially the early and middle) Wittgenstein on the one hand and Verificationism on the

other. But the point should not be overplayed.³ The ‘position’ I am intimating here is precisely not a Verificationist one in that it does not put epistemology, strictly considered as the study of knowledge and means of gaining it, at centre stage. Rather, it is about *what can be thought of, or conceived of*; or, more directly, in more contemporary parlance, *what makes sense to say*.

This can be seen in fact in Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, in his famous and crucial remarks about limits, including the limits of one’s language being the limits of one’s world; of, in an important sense, one’s self. Once one understands that the word ‘limit’ is not being used in the *Tractatus* in the normal sense of a boundary outside of which there is something, one is within striking distance of understanding Wittgenstein’s thought about what it makes sense to say, and one sees clearly that it is not a Verificationist constraint that is in play here, but something quite different, a ‘constraint’ of a more fundamental nature even, one might say; but *not* one actually restricting one from doing or saying anything that one would or could genuinely want to say. (These remarks will be more fully contextualized by the discussions of Wittgenstein (and Hume) below.)

The other *canard* is that I am simply resurrecting outmoded 1950s-ish Oxfordish readings of Hume as if he had in fact made the linguistic turn. Admittedly, I am going to be suggesting that we can to a degree usefully try seeing Hume as, roughly, ‘reaching’ for the kinds of formulations of what there is to say about these vexed philosophical problems, of the idea of natural necessity, and the foundedness or otherwise of ‘induction’ that we find in Wittgenstein, and in Nelson Goodman. But I am going to claim only that these connections are *suggestive*, that they offer us (a) perhaps helpful alternatives to (for example) the New Hume approach, an alternative often quite unrecognized. And insofar as I look at Hume’s texts, I certainly do not intend to read them anachronistically. (Indeed, I will be at pains to point out particularly the respects in which Goodman’s actual reading of Hume is evidently as drastically off target in some respects as it is thought-provoking and ahead of its time in others.)

Introducing Goodman on Hume

I turn then to focus in some detail first upon the reading of Hume we find in the work of Nelson Goodman, because his work embodies an intriguing example in fairly stark relief of not only *how* exactly Hume on causation has played a key role in some of the key works of some of the century’s key philosophers, and thus how the New Hume debate can serve as an illuminating analogy and quasi-historical precedent for substantive philosophical issues which are hotly debated today, but also how there may be argued to be key insights in these works which arguably give the lie at least to the *philosophical* arguments—the would-be coherent and plausible position—of the New Hume. If these insights can furthermore be argued in some instances to be themselves Humean, then we also have here an important tool for use within the New Hume debate, for questioning the New Humeans’ interpretation of Hume.

Take the chapters in this volume (Chapters 4 and 10) and elsewhere by Ken Winkler and Anne Jacobson.⁴ Jacobson has argued cogently for there being an integral connection between Hume’s ‘inductive’ and ‘causal’ scepticisms, by means of illustrating how the argument (concerning ‘powers’) of §VII of the *Enquiry* undercuts any necessitarian rejoinder to the sceptical doubts of earlier Sections.⁵ Winkler has laid out most persuasively what is arguably problematic in the account

of Hume which has recently gained prominence through its stress on the non-sceptical side of Humean philosophy, that is, on the supposedly metaphysical Realist underpinnings of any scepticism in Hume. In particular, Winkler has of course challenged the reading of Strawson and others of passages in Hume's corpus which purportedly show him to have been a 'Causal Realist' willingly admitting the existence of 'secret powers' and 'necessary connections' after all. Winkler does a painstaking job of undercutting this 'New Hume', and claims, 'that Hume *refrains from affirming* that there is something in virtue of which the world is regular in the way it is. That is not to deny that there is such a thing, but merely not to believe it' (p. 53 above). He claims further that this issues in:

a scepticism or doubt that can be described as *decisive*, though it is not *dogmatic*. Hume need not say that there is no such thing as objective connexion; it is enough for him to say that we cannot *in any way* conceive of it, and that as a result we cannot believe in it.

(p. 73 above; italics in original)⁶

As already indicated, I think a right interpretation of remarks such as these offers us a way of reading Hume strongly distinct from that offered by the New Humeans, in part because it refuses to enter fully into conventional philosophical categories. It refuses to be dogmatic. Indeed, it refuses to enter into debate for and/or against the existence of 'objective connexions'. (For this reason, I think that Winkler's use of the word 'merely' and of the phrase 'it is enough' in the above quotation might be misleading. There is nothing 'mere' about it, there need be no 'weakness' to Hume's 'position', once one understands that it may be a 'position' refusing the terms of traditional philosophical debate over epistemology and metaphysics, and arguably instead having at its centre throughout what can be coherently thought/conceived; or again, as we would say today, what it makes sense to say.)

But it seems that Nelson Goodman would not be able to accept these views of Winkler's. For Goodman's version of Hume, to which we are about to turn, is akin to the 'new', Causally Realistic Hume, in *apparently* not being a sceptic, not 'even' a 'decisive' (as opposed to 'dogmatic') one.

What exactly is the nature of Goodman's Hume, which was strangely novel for its time when it first emerged in print, nearly half a century ago now? Is his Hume a powerful anticipation of the New Hume?

Goodman's interest in Hume is focussed on the philosophical 'problem of induction'. In what is the best-known chapter of his contemporary classic, *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*, 'The new riddle of induction', Goodman begins by conceptually differentiating problems of justification from problems of description. He thereby interrogates what has traditionally been known as 'Hume's Problem', for he holds that we are or at least should be interested in questions of justification only insofar as these are expressible as problems of description. Whereas 'Hume's Problem' has been thought of usually as the question of how to satisfy a demand for the justification of our purported belief that the future will resemble the past, or at least for concrete grounds undergirding central inductive principle or beliefs, while Hume's 'sceptical *solution*' has been adjudged no solution at all in the face of the scepticism he proposed for our consideration. Goodman by contrast holds (as we shall see shortly) that Hume's 'sceptical solution' is very much a gesture in the right direction, and is only insufficiently specific, and best not regarded as being *actively* involved with

scepticism at all. That presupposes that Goodman holds, as he does, that a demand for the justification of inductive/projective⁷ principles which goes beyond our best possible description of those principles can quite fairly be dismissed as hyperbolic.⁸ The description of our inductive reasoning which eventuates must then be integrated in a 'virtuous circle' with inferential practices which we are unwilling to give up.⁹

Goodman denigrates the 'smug insistence upon a hard-and-fast line between justifying induction and describing ordinary inductive practice' (1954:64). This is how he thinks the old problem of induction—namely, the 'justificationistic' nexus prompting the question, 'Why one prediction rather than another?' (1954:60)—is to be dissolved. The first twist to this tale liable to give pause to some Hume scholars, especially advocates of 'the Old Hume' interpretation, is the above-mentioned enlistment of none other than Hume himself as an ally in the struggle to displace and dissolve this problem of the Justification of Induction. Goodman suggests that Hume's response to it is that habits based upon observed regularities are the only non-errant criteria to go on. He continues:

How satisfactory is this answer? The heaviest criticism has taken the righteous position that Hume's account at best pertains only to the source of predictions, not their legitimacy; that he sets forth the circumstances under which we make given predictions—and in this sense explains why we make them—but leaves untouched the question of our license for making them. To trace origins, runs the old complaint, is not to establish validity: the real question is not why a prediction is in fact made but how it can be justified. Since this seems to point to the awkward conclusion that the greatest of modern philosophers completely missed the point of his own problem, the idea has developed that he did not really take his solution very seriously, but regarded the main problem as unsolved and perhaps as insoluble. Thus we come to speak of 'Hume's problem' as though he propounded it as a question without answer.

All this seems to me quite wrong. I think Hume grasped the central question and considered his answer to be passably effective. And I think his answer is reasonable and relevant, even if it is not entirely satisfactory...I...want to record a protest against the prevalent notion that the problem of justifying induction, when it is so sharply dissociated from the problem of describing how induction takes place, can fairly be called Hume's problem.

(1954:60–1)¹⁰

This is a fascinating passage, and surely is as atypical a view of Hume's philosophical success as it claims to be, for it closes by suggesting that the famous and hyperbolic 'Problem of Induction' was not Hume's problem after all, but was, one presumes, read into him by 'Humean' successors (and, perhaps more important, 'anti-Humean' successors and would-be refuters; Reid of course springs to mind). While Hume himself, Goodman suggests, was aware that the only question worth answering was how it is possible for us to continue in our ('inductive') practices given the inconceivability of providing foundations for them.

How could this be, after two centuries of diligent Hume scholarship? Is this not a palpable misreading of this 'greatest of modern philosophers'? It appears so; but let us not be too certain too soon. Let us note, to begin, that Goodman is careful thus far not to state that Hume's response to 'Hume's problem' was adequate, or was 'a "straight" answer'¹¹ to the question; he 'only' insists that Hume thought it

was an appropriate answer, and as adequate an answer as possible, and that he was not without reason for thus thinking.

So far, this philosophical argumentation and interpretation from ‘The new riddle of induction’ is probably familiar enough, if not universally understood, let alone accepted as sound in its methodology, or in its upshot. We have briefly recapitulated Goodman’s take on Hume’s ‘sceptical solution’; that it is a decent enough try at a solution, *simpliciter*, insofar as this problem is at all soluble. With regard to Hume interpretation, it is worth noting that Goodman has performed a service by helping to undercut the sometime prevalent picture of Hume as simply a bizarre sceptic with no answer whatsoever to the powerful and novel sceptical problem he raised.¹² And that he did so almost half a century ago, for those who were ready to read him. Goodman’s Hume is a philosopher with a relatively viable and almost moderate view. He is not engaged in pointing out the arguably obvious fact that natural necessity never has the certainty of logical necessity, and drawing drastic conclusions from that, but rather in showing that any project of finding ‘a logic of natural necessity’¹³ should begin from and end with (or ‘take as its data’) *what we do*.

Thus it seems that there is little or no sense, in this Hume, of an abyssal scepticism escaping the efforts of philosophical tinkers.

Goodman and ‘the New Hume’

This is how we might find ourselves with the appearance that Goodman must, if anything, be quite remarkably anticipating the New Hume, and be against not just the very plainest of the traditional scepticistic readings of Hume, but also even the present day subtler opponents of the New Hume, such as Winkler. But such appearances are, in fact, in this case deceptive, for Goodman’s reading of Hume and of the old Problem of Induction is most definitely not Realistic as to the existence and power of causes (conceived of as metaphysically effective). To quote Goodman: Although Hume’s dictum that there are no necessary connections of matters of fact has been challenged at times, it has withstood all attacks’ (1954:59)!¹⁴

Thus Goodman’s reading of Hume *is*, some initial appearances notwithstanding, deeply opposed to that of Strawson and Wright, of ‘the New Humeans’. For Goodman takes something like an ‘Old’ view of causes, of ‘necessary connection’. Being among other things an empiricist (though this should not blind us to elements of Goodman’s thought which are Pragmatist, and even Wittgensteinian; we have no space to explore this point here), it is perhaps not surprising that Goodman applauds Hume as he reads him on causation. And yet, as discussed in the section above, and as anyone will already know who has carefully read Chapter 3 of *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*, Goodman was way ahead of his time in apparently positing Hume as also naturalistic, and indeed not a sceptic as to induction.

How are these tensions to be resolved?¹⁵ Well, in part as follows: by understanding how, as well as offering us a fruitful and surprising constellation of ideas to how to read Hume on induction and causation, of what to be prepared to find him saying, contrary to the received wisdom, Goodman also—and this is pretty crucial for our interests in this volume—makes various moves that are tantamount to what is, in *certain* respects, as problematic an interpretation of what it was that Hume was saying on the topic of (in particular) inductive inference as

any that we find in the contemporary Hume ‘literature’. ‘Goodman’s Hume’ may have a viable view, but as we shall soon see, it cannot be considered Hume’s view *simpliciter*, at least not *qua* philosopher-in-the-study.

Goodman’s Hume is not Hume

Goodman has maintained that nobody seems to have noticed that the ‘old’ problem of induction was not so much bequeathed us by Hume as evacuated of content by him, and invented and continually re-invented by his successors. Goodman gives us a reading of Hume he takes to correct these mistakes in the philosophical history of philosophy. On this reading, Hume (partly) ‘anticipated’ Goodman’s notion of ‘justification as nothing more than right description’.¹⁶ This becomes clear a few pages further into Goodman’s discussion than the long passage quoted above, after he has fully expounded his novel—virtuously circular—approach to the description of inductive inference:

[We] owe belated apologies to Hume. For in dealing with the question how normally accepted inductive judgments are made, he was in fact dealing with the question of inductive validity. The validity of a prediction *consisted* for him in its arising from habit, and thus in its exemplifying some past regularity.

(1954:64–5; my emphasis)

Goodman expands on this immediately in a footnote, where he stresses that:

Hume’s account is a description...For it is an attempt to set forth the circumstances under which those inductive judgments are made that are normally accepted as valid; and *to do that is to state necessary and sufficient conditions for, and thus to define, valid induction.*

(1954: n2; my emphasis)

Now there may well be good grounds for the quasi-Wittgensteinian insistence on the method of describing practices as they are. There might, on the other hand, be general difficulties with Goodman’s ‘artful’ apparent equivocation between the describing of and the defining of induction: can/should the ‘virtuous circle’ conquer, or work with, this equivocation? These issues are currently being examined elsewhere.¹⁷

But the immediate issue is Goodman’s version of Hume, the strangeness of which is highlighted with italics in the two quotations immediately above. Ian Hacking puts the matter concisely:

I cannot read Hume as saying that...validity ‘consists in’ its arising from habit; at most, those inductions that we call valid are the habitual inferences, Hume invoked something *external* to the content of the prediction or the method of inference. Not sample size but human habit.

(1993:275)

If we are to establish this point securely, the question is this: Is there good textual evidence for the claim that Hume regarded *habitual* inferences as *thereby* validated, if the term ‘validated’ here is being used to mean anything like what it is used to mean elsewhere? Can one read Hume as not in any way, shape, or form entertaining doubts as to the validity of our inductive inferences? In short: is *Goodman’s notion of ‘inductive validity’ anywhere to be found in Hume?*

To answer this question, rather than looking at the work of scholars such as Arnold, Broughton, Rosenberg or Baier, which would take too long in the present context, I shall restrict my attention to a fairly brief look at the first paper ever published which most closely does 'follow' something like the Goodmanian line in explicating Hume on Reason and Induction (while omitting to cite Goodman). Ahead of the more recent curve in attempting to find a non-sceptical aspect to Hume on these matters was 'Is Hume really a sceptic about induction?', by Tom Beauchamp and Thomas Mappes.¹⁸

Beauchamp and Mappes ingeniously inter-connect passages from the *Treatise of Human Nature* which might perhaps lend some plausibility to a non-Sceptical reading of Hume on induction. In the course of their effort to see Hume at most an anti-Rationalist philosopher, and nothing more (that is, not necessarily a sceptic, and not opposed to Realism), the following is probably their strongest reference:

[Hume] refers to inductive inference as 'a true species of reasoning' (T97n) and uses the term 'reason' in a looser sense [than that of Rationalists,] approximating our ordinary usage today. He stipulatively confines the scope of reason to the discernment of ideas and their relations...only when danger of misuse is present.

(Beauchamp and Mappes 1975:121–2)¹⁹

When we turn to T97n, we do indeed find Hume saying that 'We infer a cause immediately from its effect; and this inference is not only a true species of reasoning, but the strongest of all others...' But a few sentences further in the very same footnote, Hume generalizes about the acts of the understanding involved in such so-called 'true reasonings' as these, and others, in a manner which undercuts the reading which Beauchamp and Mappes wish to convince us of:

What we may in general affirm concerning these...acts of the understanding is, that taking them in a proper light, they all resolve themselves into [conception], and are nothing but particular ways of conceiving our objects. Whether we consider a single object or several...the act of mind exceeds not a simple conception; and the only remarkable difference, which occurs on this occasion, is, when we join belief to the conception, and are perswaded of the truth of what we conceive. This act of mind has never yet been explain'd by any philosopher; and therefore I am at liberty to propose my hypothesis concerning it; which is, that 'tis only a strong and steady conception of any idea, and such as approaches in some measure to an immediate impression.

Hume is claiming here that ideas are simple, not structured (in the kind of way that language is structured); that we think wrongly of judgement and reasoning if we think they are truly complex and structured. I think from this we ought to conclude that Hume is just not in the business of asserting the actual validity of causative or inductive reasoning in the passage Beauchamp and Mappes cite, that his purposes and interests here are quite different. (And after all, as we know from the rest of Hume's text and corpus, our conceiving of causation as something we literally have externally based impressions of is, Hume holds, our key naive mistake in this area.²⁰) At a minimum, for any apparent impression of necessary connection to have belief annexed to it simply does not guarantee its reliability. This latter point

is crucial, and is sufficient for my purposes here, for it makes the various ‘reasonings’ which in fact are ‘acts of mind’ be exposed to the possibility that there is no basis whatsoever for their involving any reliable beliefs as to what actually occurred or will occur. To sum up: Hume does indeed talk of ‘inferences’ worth calling ‘true species of reasoning’, but that does not prove that there is any validity to them beyond mere psychological ‘validity’.

One might object to my response here on the grounds that I am question-beggingly supposing that validity here ought to be logical (deductive) validity, as opposed to (mere) psychological validity, whereas it is actually ‘*inductive* validity’. In other words, one might claim that, in the passage above, ‘persuaded of the truth’ just means, for Hume, inductively valid; and that it is this equation which Goodman builds on in his reading. This highlights the potential philosophical identity between Goodman and Hume over the irrelevancy of justificatory projects which are supposedly above and beyond descriptive projects (i.e. projects centred upon stating what is the best we can say/do). As we shall see below, I could perhaps even accept this point, and its reconception of ‘validity’, were it not for the following: can one predicate ‘validity’ of a process or schema which does not involve *any* kind of (what we would think of as) genuine reasoning? For the ‘persuasion’ Hume wrote of arguably turns out not to be any kind of reasoning: Hume’s point, *qua* philosopher, is that, *contra* the philosophers, induction is not a ratiocinative process, but rather is an instinctive one (see T179). While Goodman’s Hume, like Goodman (!), refuses to characterize reasoning as a purely instinctive process, but finds it to be natural, and yet to involve a process of mutual adjustment (between reasonings and results). This is a perhaps subtle but still important difference between the two.

We may provisionally conclude that the Beauchamp and Mappes interpretation is at best an extremely partial account of Hume’s texts.²¹ And nowhere in §V of the *Enquiry*, where one might have hoped for it, is there much joy for the seeker after confirmation of the Goodmanian reading of Hume in the specific respect with which we are concerned at present. What we find rather is an extended discourse on the efficacy of habits, of practices, without distinction, and almost entirely without ratiocination. The ‘answer’ to inductive doubts we find in this section of the *Enquiry* (as elsewhere) surely is an ‘external’ one, in the fairly familiar sense that it does not address the doubts internally—that is, on their own terms—and does not aspire to being viewed as rendering our everyday practices (involving what philosophers are pleased to call ‘inductive assumptions’) *valid*, or otherwise. Goodman is right to state that, for Hume, a descriptive account is in an important sense all we can get and even all we need; but this hardly amounts to ‘*dealing with the question of inductive validity*’ (Goodman 1954:65; my emphasis).

If there is still hope for locating a Goodmanian Hume, it is most probably in the Humean notion of a ‘proof, which is posed intriguingly in a footnote to the title of §VI (‘Of probability’) of the *Enquiry*:

Mr. Locke divides all arguments into demonstrative and probable. In this view, we must say, that it is only probable that all men must die, or that the sun will rise tomorrow. But to conform our language more to common use, we ought to divide arguments into *demonstrations*, *proofs*, and *probabilities*; by proofs, meaning such arguments from experience as leave no room for doubt or opposition.

(E56n)

Is ‘proof the notion we are looking for? Does it perhaps illustrate that Hume did after all entertain that reasonings from our experience might have standards of validity and invalidity—of proof or otherwise—to which they should conform? Beauchamp and Mappes are among the New Hume-ish readers who would appear to think so, for one of their moves in attempting to render plausible their ‘Goodmanian’ reading of Hume is to suggest that ‘proofs’ are, throughout Hume’s corpus, genuinely considered quite as valid as their appellation might suggest to present day readers.²²

But any excitement over this possibility is short-lived, for while Hume is at this point in his inquiries prepared to use the word ‘proof in this sense, it is seen in its proper light only a little later, at the close of §VII, by which point the dialectic of his argument has proceeded to make clear that terms such as ‘power’, ‘necessary connection’, and even ‘cause’ and ‘effect’ have to be understood (!) to be unintelligible or incomprehensible, if they are intended to operate in reality as the premises and conclusion of an argument operate in a demonstration. The word ‘proof, like the word ‘power’, is up until this point being used only ‘in a loose and popular sense...’ (E33n).²³ This turns out to be another case of the most general difficulty with accounts of Hume as non-sceptical: they wrongly infer from the valid point that portions of Hume’s work are not written from a sceptical perspective to the false conclusion that Hume has to be read as nowhere endorsing a scepticism, and as being everywhere simply scientific (or perhaps commonsensical, almost Reidian) in stand-point.²⁴

Why Goodman’s Hume is not Hume

I suggest that we have ‘proof enough by this point that there is a non-trivial difficulty with countenancing Goodman’s reading of Hume on ‘induction’.²⁵ Namely, that it can only work ultimately if one over-stretches the meaning of words like ‘valid’. (And while Goodman’s innovation, in response to his own ‘new riddle’, is precisely to have shown the ethnographic centrality of acceptance, entrenchment, and hence projectibility to concepts of validity and the like, still, to say this is *not* to say, for reasons we have seen (at least in brief), that there is no reasoning—no *validity*—to ‘validity’. Goodman, like Wittgenstein, does not think that accepting the contingency and (in a sense) ‘arbitrariness’ of our practices undermines them in *any* respect.)

Moreover, we have seen that there is a subtle but nevertheless positive reason for believing that Hume is not quite being interpreted accurately if one finds in him, as Goodman does, a non-sceptical or post-sceptical consideration of our inductive reasonings and practices, and an interest simply in describing them aright. For Goodman, questions concerning our inductive reasonings are in an important sense on a par with questions about causes—neither are clarifiable or answerable by reference to causal powers or other such supra-linguistic entities. Whereas for Hume—a pre-‘linguistic turn’ philosopher—questions concerning (what we term) ‘inductive reasonings’ are integrally and obviously connected with the consideration of ‘powers’ and ‘forces’. We might say that his mode of presentation of essentially the same questions is necessarily rather different. Thus we have for instance his (ironic) invocation of the:

pre-established harmony between the course of nature and the succession of our ideas...though the powers and forces, by which the former is governed, be

wholly unknown to us; yet our thoughts and conceptions have still, we find, gone on in the same train with the other works of nature.

(E54–5)

It is ultimately hard to make sense of the central sections of the *Enquiry* without reading Hume's problematization of *the very idea of 'power'*, in Section VII, as providing the conclusive constitutive element of the sceptical doubts concerning 'inductive' processes which most of us simply cannot avoid finding as one important element in his text.²⁶ That is to say that ultimately Hume does entertain inductive scepticism just and precisely to the extent that he makes a demand on powers/on necessary connections that they turn out to fail to satisfy; that they should function analogously to premises in a deductive inference, and thus be proofs in the *proper* (rather than the merely popular) sense of that word.²⁷ (He thinks that this demand is one that most of us make already, only without realizing it.) That there can then be said to be no objective connections in this sense²⁸ is not best described as a matter of how our practices (even our practices of reasoning(s), certain of our linguistic practices) are constituted. It might, however, be happily described as a matter of, if you like, philosophical logic. (We will return to this point shortly, and explicate what it might mean, and to just what extent as a result we have to distinguish the kind of project Hume was engaged in from the kind of project we find in Goodman and Wittgenstein.)

It may be that an 'ambiguity' in the term 'necessary connection' has tended to make it harder than it might have been to appreciate the kind of point being made in the above paragraph. Causal Realist readings of Hume tend to reify 'necessary connection' to connote something like an actually existing object, an entity or entities which are out there somewhere—'Causal Relations' which have, it is said, to be (pre-) supposed in order for our knowledge of them even to be put in doubt. This may or may not be so; I have suggested that Winkler gives us good grounds for thinking that such a would-be understanding of necessary connection did not impress Hume, and did not, in any case, particularly interest him. Again, what impressed and interested him was the connotation by 'necessary connection' of the idea that actually existing entities acted as if they were truly necessarily connected; that is, as if they were not phenomena of the physical/metaphysical universe but parts of a chain of deductive reasoning, or relations of ideas (as we imagine these to be prior to any general scepticism as to Reason). After Jacobson, I hold that it is this second version of 'necessary connection' which is Hume's primary target, and what makes his attack worth calling sceptical is chiefly his view that, without such (*inconceivable*) necessary connection between events, what we call our inductive reasonings are perilously unfounded. Goodman embraces the unfoundedness (1954:99), but denies that to do so is perilous/sceptical.

Why Goodman's reading of Hume is of value

In sum, to prove a negative existential hypothesis is notoriously difficult, to say the least. But I would suggest that, unsurprisingly, we have good grounds at least to believe that the textual evidence just does not support the claim that 'Goodman's Hume' is tenably regarded simply as Hume. How then to take Goodman's nevertheless instructive defence of Hume against the claims of his less subtle detractors over the last two centuries, Goodman's useful identification of an

important strand in what Hume was doing which is perhaps surprisingly close to the ‘linguistic practice’-based philosophies of some of the greatest philosophers of this century?

Goodman re-contextualizes and re-reads Hume, albeit, as is usually the case with major philosophers (as opposed to specialist scholars), with too little attention to the man’s texts and their complexity; indeed, with so little attention that in this instance there is a sense in which even to use the term ‘re-reading’ is perhaps overgenerous. But this re-reading is Goodman’s first step on the road to significantly altering our perception of the issues which have come down to us under the misleading rubric of ‘Hume’s problem’ (and thus this ‘step’ may look surer once we have journeyed further down the road). Goodman’s re-reading may thus be quite instructive to us, in gauging and questioning our assumptions in approaching Hume’s approach to the territory of ‘Hume’s problem’.

Goodman held that Hume did not put forward a Scepticism as to the justification of our beliefs about the unsampled and unexperienced, but only recommended we focus on describing our habits and practices of (inductive) behaviour. To reiterate, for Goodman, ‘Hume’s problem’ is a misnomer, because the project of justifying induction was only one he set for us if ‘justification’ is understood in the quite unconventional ‘descriptivistic’ fashion which Goodman famously outlined in ‘the new riddle of induction’.

Thus while the New Humean Causal Realists argue that Hume was no sceptic because he believed in the reality of necessary connections, Goodman held that Hume was no *sceptic just because he was content not to ask for ‘justifying reasons’ for our beliefs either in causal powers or in the uniformity of nature*²⁹ (that is, in the sense of ‘Justification’ known to ‘dogmatic philosophers’), but rather proceeded simply to detail the structure of the beliefs we have and the inferences we make. Where a sceptic would look for foundations for the practice and bewail their absence, Goodman’s Hume makes no such search, no such demands and no such wailing noises.

At this point, rather than further questioning whether this constitutes either Hume or a genuinely a-sceptical position (or both), let us note that Goodman concluded his treatment of the problematic issues surrounding projection/induction by returning to Hume. Having set up his ‘new riddle of induction’, via the “‘grue” paradox’, Goodman wrote:

The real inadequacy of Hume’s account lay not in his descriptive approach but in the imprecision of his description...Hume overlooks the fact that some regularities do and some do not establish...habits; that predictions based on some regularities are valid while predictions based on other regularities are not...To say that valid predictions are based on past regularities, without being able to say *which* regularities, is thus quite pointless. Regularities are where you find them, and you can find them anywhere...Hume’s failure to...deal with this problem has been shared even by his most recent successors.

(Goodman 1954:82; see also Goodman and Elgin 1988:160–1)

With the exception, of course, of Goodman himself—for ‘Goodman’s Paradox’ constitutes precisely such recognition. On Goodman’s account, it is he and no one else who has recognized how right Hume (almost) was; Hume just failed to describe closely enough the predicates and hypotheses which can be rightly employed in making (habitual) inferences.³⁰

That, then, is the strange and perhaps telling tale of Nelson Goodman's remarkable partial anticipation of and partial refutation of the New Hume. What, though, of the point made above, that Hume's central point concerning necessary connection is a negative point of 'logic', understood in relation to human assumptions and practices? Can this claim be explicated satisfactorily, and buttressed further? How does it relate to understandings of logic in some of the other great philosophers of the twentieth century?

A brief look at the early Wittgenstein

To respond to the above questions, to facilitate our understanding of the possible relevance at least of one great philosopher—Wittgenstein—to Hume studies here, and specifically to our questions concerning what attitude to take to the New Hume, a short 'detour' is required into the exegesis of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Let us take as an exploratory and explanatory example the remarkable passages on the self and solipsism (the close of the 5s in the *Tractatus*), which appear highly Humean (such that the absence of any significant amount of attention to them to date, in assessments of Hume and of the legacy of Hume, might reasonably be considered surprising), at least insofar as they resolutely reject any notion of a substantial self or subject.

I wish to claim that a right understanding of Wittgenstein on solipsism has at its centre Wittgenstein's use of the term 'nonsense' as a term of criticism. That is, Wittgenstein is anxious to ensure that, besides (*and* as a means of) figuring out the phenomenology of philosophical illusion and mythology, and besides persuading those subject to such illusion of the better things to say than the things their theoretical inclinations encourage them to say, one must be sure that one is fomenting a 'therapeutic' and not a 'theoretical' diagnosis (Michael Williams's terms, from his *Unnatural Doubts* (1991)) of the illusionary system one is dealing with. That is, one must not concede that it gets as far as being a system. No philosophic system is statable. Or, better: one must persuade others that they have only a *desire* for a system, a desire that they can be persuaded to give up.

The clearest extant exemplification of these points is perhaps the Conant/Diamond reading of the early Wittgenstein. This might seem surprising, for is it not only in the later Wittgenstein that we find Wittgenstein critiquing others' 'views' on the grounds that, considered as philosophy, they are nonsensical? And, more importantly, did not the early Wittgenstein in fact *build* a philosophical system?

Roughly, the answer to both questions is no; or at least so Jim Conant and Cora Diamond have been on the forefront, among recent scholars/philosophers, of cogently arguing. It will be worth fairly extensively quoting from one detailed instance in Diamond, to show how in particular she thinks that we are deeply mistaken if we imagine that Wittgenstein's early work enables us to—or even genuinely tries to—show a number of philosophical things which 'unfortunately' cannot be said:

When Wittgenstein says that we cannot say [e.g.] 'There are objects,' he does not mean 'There are, all right, only *that there are* has to get expressed another way.' That the sentence means nothing at all and is not illegitimate for any other reason, we do not see. We are so convinced that we understand what we

are trying to say that we see only the two possibilities: *it* is sayable, *it* is not sayable. But Wittgenstein's aim is to allow us to see that there is no 'it'.

(Diamond 1991b:197–8)³¹

It is not that one cannot assign a meaning to 'There are objects'.³² It is that one has strong grounds for thinking that no assignment of meaning will be satisfying to one:

[A]nd so you see that there is no coherent understanding to be reached of what you wanted to say. It dissolves: you are left with the sentence-structure 'A is an object,' standing there, as it were, innocently meaning nothing at all, not any longer thought of as illegitimate because of a violation of the principles of what can be put into words and what goes beyond them. *Really to grasp that what you were trying to say shows itself in language is to cease to think of it as an inexpressible content: that which you were trying to say.*

Take Wittgenstein's remark that there is only logical necessity [1921:6.37, 6.375]. It is a wonderful remark. Logical necessity is that of tautologies. It is not that they are true because their truth conditions are met in all possible worlds, but because they have none. 'True in all possible worlds' does not describe one special case of truth conditions being met but specifies the logical character of certain sentence-like constructions formulable from sentences. But the remark that there is only logical necessity is itself ironically self-destructive. It has the form, the syntactic form, of 'There is only this sort of thing,' i.e. it uses the linguistic forms in which we say that there are only thises rather than thises and thats. It belongs to its syntax that it itself says something the other side of which can be represented too. If there is only squiggledly wiggle, the language allows wiggles that are not squiggledly as well. But whatever the sentence aims to do for us, it is not to place the kind of necessity there is as this sort rather than that. It *does not convey to us the philosophical but unsayable fact* that there is only tautology not genuinely substantial necessity. In so far as we grasp what Wittgenstein aims at, we see that the sentence-form he uses comes apart from his philosophical aim. If he succeeds, we shall not imagine necessities as states of affairs at all. *We throw away the sentences about necessity; they really are, at the end, entirely empty.* But we shall be aware at the end that when we go in for philosophical thinking, the characteristic form of such thought is precisely that *the sentence-forms we use come apart from what we have taken to be our aims.* Not because we have chosen the wrong forms.

(Diamond 1991b:197–9; my emphasis)³³

Diamond *et al.* seek properly to understand the 'logic' of the *Tractatus*, while leading up to the conclusion that it has in a certain important sense no logic whatsoever. Its 'logic' is a logic of illusion, of what we are inclined to believe, of a set of psychologically attractive but ultimately *empty* pseudo-claims. It lures one into thinking that one has finally found a satisfactory philosophical system, and then undercuts that thought completely.

It is important to realize that if Diamond and Conant are right, then these points about the nonsensicality of our philosophical urgings are surprisingly general. As Wittgenstein said, in a related context:

Though it is nonsense to say 'I feel his pain', this is different from inserting into an English sentence a meaningless word, say 'abracadabra'... and from saying

a string of nonsense words. Every word in this sentence is English, and we shall be inclined to say that the sentence has a meaning. The sentence with the nonsense word or the string of nonsense words can be discarded from our language, but if we discard from our language 'I feel Smith's toothache' that is quite different. The second seems nonsense, we are tempted to say, because of some truth about the nature of the things or the nature of the world. We have discovered in some way that pains and personality do not fit together in such a way that I can feel his pain. The task will be to show that *there is in fact no difference between these two cases of nonsense, though there is a psychological distinction in that we are inclined to say the one and be puzzled by it and not the other*. We constantly hover regarding it as sense and nonsense, and hence the trouble arises.³⁴

Thus, ironically, to take seriously the *Tractatus* and Wittgenstein's notion that there can be no substantive philosophical theses, we need to take absolutely seriously his own claim that, insofar as his own work embodies theses it also is, strictly speaking, quite literally nonsense, as explicated in the quotations from Diamond above. Famously, this point is explicit in the *Tractatus* (if one is only ready to 'understand' it): it, the body of the *Tractatus*, is to be thrown away. It is *not* meaningful nonsense, or nonsense gesturing at some profound truth: it is not clear that we actually succeed in having any use for those notions, here or elsewhere. It is plain nonsense, albeit nonsense that may prove useful to us in a dialectical process of coming to be less tempted to utter nonsense in the future.³⁵

The *Tractatus* (and 'also' Wittgenstein's later philosophy) plays potentially a vital role in bringing certain traditions/hopes in philosophy to an end. If Diamond and Conant are right, then not only analytic philosophy considered as a *constructive* discipline, but also the German Kantian/Idealist tradition, involving as it does certain forms of metaphysical statements and theorizings, are decisively closed. This claim might seem extravagant, to say the least; but it follows from the Conant/Diamond reading, applied to Tractarian propositions such as that 'The limits of my language mean the limits of my world' (Wittgenstein 1921:5.6). There can be no talk of—or gesturing at—conditions of possibility, noumena, natural necessities and so on.³⁶ For, on the Conant/Diamond understanding of *Tractatus*, and of the way it sets us up for Wittgenstein's later work, which is highly continuous with it, the ideas that there could possibly be such a thing as expressing the form of our language, or of our forms of thought, or of the presuppositions of language or thought, are nonsensical. They do not amount to anything, *nor* do they 'gesture' at anything. There is no such thing as creeping up indirectly on 'profound truths' which cannot be expressed 'directly'. (Arguably, these remarks of mine must eventually be understood also to 'empty' themselves...)

One might say: this (the above) is all that is actually *shown*. (For example, then, the wish to enunciate 'the laws of nature' and specify the 'necessary connections' they embody must, if intended as an explanatory mission, or (especially) if undertaken by philosophers, be absurd, as a matter of logic. For Kant's 'law of causality' is not a law, but only an attempt to express the form of our (scientific) language (see Wittgenstein 1921:6.32.))

Wittgenstein on causation

In the light of the above, let us re-examine the key passages of the *Tractatus* on causation, passages reflective, incidentally, of the influence of Schopenhauer (who knew and was impressed by Hume's work):

5.13 That the truth of one proposition follows from the truth of other propositions, we perceive from the structure of the propositions.

5.131 If the truth of one proposition follows from the truth of others, this expresses itself in relations in which the forms of these propositions stand to one another, and we do not need to put them in these relations first by connecting them with one another in a proposition; for these relations are internal, and exist as soon as, and by the very fact that, the propositions exist.

...5.133 All inference takes place a priori.

(Wittgenstein 1921)

These remarks prepare the ground for Wittgenstein's remarks on causal and inductive reasoning—reasonings concerning matters of fact and thus 'external relations' between things, as opposed to 'internal relations'³⁷ between concepts and propositions—which follow:

5.135 In no way can an inference be made from the existence of one state of affairs to the existence of another entirely different from it.

5.136 The events of the future *cannot* be inferred from those of the present. Superstition is the belief in the causal nexus.

(Wittgenstein 1921)

Bear in mind that I am asking that one interpret these remarks *à la* Conant and Diamond. If one does so, then their appearance of being blunt assertoric claims is to be recognized as in important part illusory. They are rather moves in a dialectic to get you to stop wanting to do certain things; for example, to assert and specify the nature of 'natural necessity', and ultimately to philosophize in a theoreticist fashion at all.

Close to the close of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein returns in detail to the same theme. I quote some key excerpts:

6.3 Logical research means the investigation of all regularity. And outside logic all is accident.

6.31 The so-called law of induction cannot in any case be a logical law, for it is obviously a significant proposition.—And therefore it cannot be a law a priori either.

...6.36 If there were a law of causality, it might run: 'There are natural laws.' But that can clearly not be said: it shows itself.

6.361 In the terminology of Hertz we might say: Only *uniform* [lawlike] connections are *thinkable*.

...6.362 What can be described can happen too, and what is excluded by the law of causality cannot be described.

6.363 The process of induction is the process of assuming the simplest law that can be made to harmonize with our experience.

6.3631 This process, however, has no logical foundation but only a psychological one.

It is clear that there are no grounds for believing that the simplest course of events will really happen.

6.36311 A necessity for one thing to happen because another has happened does not exist. There is only *logical* necessity.

6.371 At the basis of the whole modern view of the world lies the illusion that the so-called laws of nature are the explanations of natural phenomena.

6.372 So people stop short at natural laws as at something unassailable, as did the ancients at God and Fate.

And they both are right and wrong. But the ancients were clearer, in so far as they recognized one clear terminus, whereas the modern system makes it appear as though *everything* were explained.

(Wittgenstein 1921)

One might put it this way: the ‘idea’ of natural necessity turns out to be only the illusion of an idea, an illusion philosophers would far better just do without. The ‘idea’ turns out to have no substance; the only necessity there is logical necessity. (Though even this cannot be said. It is important not to think that what is ‘shown’ according to the above is as it were covertly or relatively or indirectly said. On the contrary, again, *this* is in the end only one more tempting idea to be thrown away.)

Now, is not this compelling Diamondian take on Wittgenstein (for example, her reading of how we ought to understand Wittgenstein’s self-emptying ‘use’ of the word ‘object’ quite differently from a traditional metaphysician’s use of the same word) in fact heavily reminiscent of my suggestions, in the early sections of this chapter, regarding Hume? For example, does not this potentially make sense of Hume’s unwillingness even to take up what others have thought of as a ‘strong’ line, namely, to deny that inconceivable ‘objects’, inconceivable physical phenomena, exist? Does this not offer us a mode of understanding his ‘surprising’ (to some) failure to ‘make plain’ that ‘inconceivable objects’ are ‘impossible’³⁸ (unless, supposedly, he is in fact willing to entertain them on the metaphysical level, and only concerned to set up some epistemic limitations to our access to them)? Do we not now have a fairly clear ‘model’ of how one can find Hume saying the things he does, the kinds of things that Winkler and Jacobson pick up on, *without* our being tempted (with the New Humeans) to read Hume’s ‘caginess’ as covertly allowing for the postulation of the very things (‘objects’, ‘real causal powers’, and so on) that traditional readings of Hume have quite plausibly found him least inclined to allow for?

According to the New Humeans, causal powers exist. Opinion differs over whether we can know them directly or not. According to dogmatic scepticism, causal powers can be conceived, but opinion differs over whether it is the case that they do not exist, or whether it is that we can know nothing whatsoever about them. I hope that it is now plain how these—the New Hume and dogmatic scepticism—are ‘two sides of the same coin’, how a spectrum has been defined here along which argument can proceed interminably as to where exactly Hume should be placed. The alternative model I have suggested starts roughly like this, by interrogating the assumption common to the two sides of the coin here:

What *is* all this talk about ‘causal powers’ *etc.*? What does it mean? Does it amount to anything? What are we doing when we *assume* that ‘causal powers’ can be conceived, and don’t even stop to think that through before pressing on to debate their existence, our knowledge of them, *etc.*?

For Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, the very idea of necessary connection made no sense/could not be successfully enunciated; and even this insight actually could not strictly be said, and was one more temptation along the road to clarity. Clearly, the latter move does not have a *direct* analogue in Hume.³⁹ But the point is, when one has understood the challenge and force of the Conant/Diamond reading of Wittgenstein, that to take the former move seriously is already to be beyond the notion that any apparent reference to the idea of necessary connection must entail its metaphysical possibility, and beyond the notion that one can coherently speak of something ‘indirectly’ which one cannot speak of (‘directly’); beyond, perhaps back, towards Hume.⁴⁰

Implications of Wittgenstein for ‘the New Hume’ debate

Thomas Ricketts is among those who have detailed how absurd the backslider’s notion is that we can gesture at, ‘indirectly’ refer to, refer to ‘relatively’ if not ‘absolutely’ and so on, items which present us with philosophical difficulties, ‘things’ which appear not to be graspable even though we want to be able to say something about them. Wittgenstein’s famous distinction between ‘saying’ and ‘showing’ was one of the most influential apparent attempts to achieve this incoherent aim. As Ricketts has put it:

Of course, this talk of what is said and what is shown itself misleads, just like the [talk earlier in the *Tractatus*] of internal and external properties. It suggests that there are two kinds of fact: the garden variety facts set forth in true sentences and extraordinary facts about the constitution of any possible world [cf. ‘necessary connection’] shown by sentences. 4.1212 counteracts this grammatical insinuation: ‘What *can* be shown, *cannot* be said.’ Cora Diamond has persuasively urged that it is a mistake to think of what is shown as deep, ineffable, necessary truths about reality. Such an understanding of what is shown, she says, makes Wittgenstein chicken out: on the chickening-out interpretation, what is shown is ‘this whatever-it-is, the logical form of reality, some essential feature of reality, which reality has all right, but which we cannot say or think it has.’ She continues: ‘What counts as not chickening out is then this, roughly:...to throw away in the end the attempt to take seriously the language of “features of reality”.’ As I have stressed, on a resolute, consistently applied conception of truth as agreement with reality, there are no facts about or features of reality that sentences cannot represent, no ineffable truths. Rather, the attempt to say what is shown leads to nonsense, to what we on reflection recognize to be plain gibberish...sentence-like formations in which some signs have been given no significance (see Wittgenstein 1921:6.53).⁴¹

My suggestion is that Diamond’s critique of ‘chickening out’ must be applicable to philosophic efforts to indirectly refer to things which ‘cannot in any way’ be conceived. For example, that ‘relative ideas’, a concept some of the New Humeans (such as Flage, Costa, Wright, Strawson) have used in one way or another to try to defend their reading, is a hopeless halfway house (perhaps Flage now agrees—see Chapter 9 of this volume, wherein he backs away from the New Humean appropriation of ‘relative ideas’). If Diamond is right, then we need to be clear, as I think both Blackburn and Winkler (in the postscript to Chapter 4) imply in this volume, that the notion of ‘relative idea’ can *at best* be a placeholder in some

temporary manoeuvre, later to be abandoned. And thus we ought to be relieved on Hume's behalf if he uses the term in roughly this way, as I think he does (on the very few occasions when he uses it at all).

I would go a little further than Simon Blackburn in 'Hume and thick connexions' (Chapter 6): I think that it is becoming more widely recognized that 'relative ideas' not only are hopeless, but also were used only very hesitantly and occasionally and critically by Hume *just for that reason*. And that is the kind of thought which leads me to hope that perhaps the thoughts contained in a paper such as this may help refocus our attention on, among other things, what we can salvage intelligibly from Hume's severe 'criteria of intelligibility': his 'theory of ideas', and the rest of his 'semantic' and other procedures; from, in short, his thoughts on when we are to say (reluctantly) that something must as it stands be nonsense, when we are to demand clarification of something before accepting it philosophically.

For after all, do not 'New Humean' thoughts about whatever-it-is's', about 'we-know-not-whats', sound like exactly the kind of thing Hume loved to mock, that he had no time for; that, like Diamond's Wittgenstein, he was determined to eliminate? And this is arguably all that ideas such as 'necessary connection'—and the 'ineffable' objects of the likes of 'relative ideas'—can be. Is not the following interpretation of Hume then on the way to looking surprisingly reasonable: that if there were to be necessary connections, they would have to be parts of the logical form of reality; therefore there is literally nothing to be said about 'necessary connections'. The very idea should be set aside.

At the very least, the thoughts contained here may make it more thinkable that Hume means something deeply different by mentioning 'necessary connections' than a perfectly fine metaphysical concept which is unfortunately somewhat epistemically removed from us, or some such. This chapter has sought to show at least that there are alternative models available. For example, a model, very akin to Hume's in certain plain respects, on which the notion of 'natural necessity' or 'law of nature' can be temporarily or dialectically *mentioned*, but according to which mention of same does not license any conclusions concerning even its possible existence.⁴² For it is argued, as a matter of logic, that there could not be anything which we (ultimately want to) mean by its existence.

My thought is really quite simply this: is it obvious, is it plain, that Hume himself had not realized something similar, dimly in the *Treatise* and more plainly in the *Enquiry*? If we allow ourselves to take seriously the radical philosophical move of Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus*, why can we not take just as seriously the possibility that Hume was making roughly such a move: in his talk of 'determination' and so on in the *Treatise*, and in his progressive undermining of the conceivability of powers, necessary connections *et al.* in the *Enquiry*?

Let me offer some discussion of the crucial sections in the *Treatise* on necessary connection to support more concretely these bold-sounding thoughts:

[A]fter we have observ'd the resemblance in a sufficient number of instances, we immediately feel a *determination* of the mind to pass from one object to its usual attendant, and to conceive it in a stronger light upon account of that relation. 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. The several instances of resembling conjunctions lead us into the notion of power and necessity. These instances are in themselves totally distinct from each other, and have no union but in the mind, which observes them, and

collects their ideas. Necessity, then, is the effect of this observation, and is nothing but an internal impression of the mind, or a *determination* to carry our thoughts from one object to another. Without considering it in this view, we can never arrive at the most distant notion of it, or be able to attribute it either to external or internal objects, to spirit or body, to causes or effects.

(T165; my emphasis)

Now, when Hume writes that necessity is ‘nothing but an internal impression of the mind’, it can seem as though he has ended his search for what necessary connection is with some degree of success, even if most philosophers are going to be scandalized by this as a resting place; he has at least found an ‘internal impression’, perhaps an ‘impression of reflection’, to *found* the idea of causation. But of course, the wish to find or to have found specifically an *impression* upon which to base the idea in question is a consequence of Hume’s ‘theory of ideas’, narrowly construed.⁴³ If we temporarily suspend Hume’s mention then of this ‘internal impression’, something leaps out at us from the paragraph: that the word that is used thrice, rather than only once, to describe or name what Hume has ‘found’ here is ‘determination’ (and compare also T156).

Now it seems to me that ‘determination’ is, we might say, a far less ‘mentalistic’ and ‘object-like’ word to use than ‘impression’. (Though it is perhaps worth noting that even ‘impress-ion’ could be read verb-ally, as opposed to object-u-ally, more than it usually is. Why has the supposed revolution in studies of Hume’s empiricism crystallized in the slogan ‘Ideas are acts, not objects’ not made more of verbal possibilities such as this?). ‘Determination’ in this paragraph, in fact, sounds awfully like ‘disposition’, or ‘propensity’. And in fact, ‘propensity’ is exactly the word which Hume uses soon afterward:

The necessary connection betwixt causes and effects is the foundation of our inference from one to the other. The foundation of our inference is the transition arising from the accustom’d union. These are, therefore, the same.

The idea of necessity arises from some impression. There is no impression convey’d by our senses, which can give rise to that idea. It must, therefore, be deriv’d from some internal impression, or impression of reflexion. There is no internal impression, which has any relation to the present business, but that *propensity*, which custom produces, to pass from an object to the idea of its usual attendant. This therefore is the essence of necessity.

(T165; my emphasis)

Again we have the ‘theory of ideas’ scaffold, unfortunately (given its widely understood defects and limitations), structuring the prose here. But again, this still does not prevent the word ‘propensity’ from having a key place. The words ‘propensity’ and ‘determination’ almost seem to be trying to escape the straitjacket imposed upon them by the ‘theory of ideas’; they are only rather uncomfortably described as ‘impressions’, it seems to me. One might venture this: that this propensity is closer to an action, than to an idea, an object; and that it therefore actually gets us slightly away from the hopeless task of attempting to find what entity, what *object*, we can discover causation to be. The ‘theory of ideas’ tries to force Hume into thinking that if causality is not an external object, it must be an internal object. But his own good sense resists at least to some significant degree; not only is he aware of the literal absurdity of thinking of it as

an external object, but he dimly realizes, even in the *Treatise*, that it cannot really be an internal object either.

What one really has is some more or less automatic form of human behaviour (or ‘reasoning’ if you like), which deals with certain transitions that we make, or if you like (though you need to take care) *relations*⁴⁴ that we ‘encounter’. These latter are truly relations, ‘external’ relations as Wittgenstein said,⁴⁵ and thus not the kind of things that can be properly held to manifest anything actually worth calling ‘necessity’. There being nothing worth calling non-logical necessity, no sense to the idea of same,⁴⁶ and no requirement for it in the pursuit (for example) of the sciences, we might add.

Thus when Hume concludes, ‘This...is the essence of necessity’, I am suggesting he might be well understood by us now as meaning roughly: ‘You philosophers, you have a quite wrong idea of it even making sense to think that “necessity” could inhere in the world.⁴⁷ “All” we actually have is certain human propensities and determinations. (Plus the idealization of the necessity of deductive reasoning.) There *is* nothing more that can be made sense of.’

This new Hume

The ‘New Humeans’ like to press the point that genuine epistemological doubt requires that there (at least potentially) be, on the physical or metaphysical level, the things to have doubts about. There is something right about that thought; one cannot be a conventional sceptic, doubting our knowledge of such-and-such, unless one admits the intelligibility of what one is supposed to be sceptical about.⁴⁸ But Hume is not necessarily best understood as anything like a conventional sceptic, as for instance a Cartesian-ish doubter. For example, thinking of Hume as an ‘internalist epistemologist’, under the sign *either* of dogmatic scepticism *or* of the New-Hume-type alternatives to it—thinking of Hume, in fact, as *any* kind of epistemologist—fails to recognize the extent to which even Hume realized to some degree, I have argued, that introspection is not an appropriate ‘methodology’ for treating of an action, a transition, a relation. I am suggesting that we ought not to presuppose that Hume on the origin of our supposed idea of necessary connection can effectively and fully be read as an epistemologist, an internalist, an epistemic sceptic, an introspectionist (and not as a ‘naturalized epistemologist’ either!). I think Hume is reaching for the suggestion that we have NO model for understanding what ‘secret powers’ could be, not even one strictly comprehensible through an ‘impression of reflexion’. And that this is not a limitation from anything we can or should want to be able to do. When Hume argues against the thought that we can understand causation as a demonstration, and even when he appears to be attempting to understand how we could have apparently got the *idea* of causation as necessary connection at all, he is I suggest arguing implicitly against the very idea that we can intelligibly conceive (the very idea of!) ‘non-logical necessity’. (A determination on our parts, or ‘within’ us, need not, after all, be tantamount to such ‘conception’.)

So, I am saying that the New Humeans omit a possibility: that the extent to which Hume is usefully regarded as an epistemologist of any hue may be being overestimated. The extent to which he is usefully seen as having some debatable degree of epistemic doubt about things he thinks are at least intelligible may have been quite problematically exaggerated. The irony here, of course, is that it was supposed to be the *Old* Humeans who were too fixated on epistemology (albeit via

a 'fixation' on Hume *qua* sceptic). This perhaps again renders plausible the thought that readings of Hume as embracing dogmatic scepticism and 'the New Hume' are two sides of the same coin; that, remarkably, they share in common a crucial flawed assumption or two.

How can this that I am saying be squared with the extent to which, as indeed I argued earlier, there are important strands worth calling 'sceptical' in Hume's philosophy? The answer I think is in part that there are these strands; there is indeed the sceptical perspective within Hume.⁴⁹ And in part, and more interestingly, the answer is that what we take Hume's scepticism to be needs in part to be reconceived. Hume's 'scepticism' actually turns out in significant part to be in fact 'disguised' logical observations, 'reaching' even toward the thoughts (on human practices and so on) in a post-metaphysical vein which make up the core of what is, in my view, most worth-while in twentieth-century philosophy of language, particularly in those I have identified as the New Hume's (new) antagonists such as Wittgenstein (and also Goodman).

Thus it is, I think, that the New Humeans neglect the possibility that, if we are to risk co-opting Hume into our twentieth-century philosophic categories at all, it may truly be that Hume can be best understood as in important part not so much a covert Metaphysical Realist, but rather something like a deflationary philosopher of logic/language, and one oriented toward practices, albeit one writing in a quite different idiom. Hume was not a conventional sceptic; arguably, he was neither a dogmatic sceptic nor a 'Sceptical Realist' or any such-like. Winkler, Blackburn, Jacobson and so on rightly still recognize the significant elements of scepticism that figure in his philosophy. But, implicitly or explicitly, they leave a role also for the extent to which, as Goodman has suggested, to see Hume simply as the 'inductive sceptic' he has been painted as being is at best an imprecise oversimplification. And, as we have seen in our discussion of the early Wittgenstein, and crucially for our understanding of 'the New Hume debate', to see Hume as *either* an old-fashioned dogmatic sceptic about cause and effect *or* as a realist about causal powers who had some degree of epistemic doubt about our knowledge of same, is *not* compulsory.⁵⁰ Instead, we can find an important element of Hume's thought to be his questioning of whether either optimistic realists or the sceptics who severely challenge their optimistic claims on the epistemic level really know what they are talking about, quite literally. What are we talking about, when we talk about necessary connections (or about objects, 'objects-in-themselves')? Hume questions, albeit not always clearly or univocally (due to some of the baggage he carried with him), the very terms of the philosophical debate around 'necessary connection' and so on, and thus by extension the terms of the debate around what we call 'induction'. Why? Because he doubts that we can make these terms out.

I have applauded, albeit slightly guardedly, Goodman's applause of Hume's questioning of the sensicality (as Wittgenstein might put it, more felicitously), as presented by metaphysicians, of the claim that there are necessary connections between matters of fact. And I have suggested that the anti-New-Humeans are very much on the right track when they take the claim that Hume must have been a Realist about causal powers and objects and so on, if he wanted to raise doubts about our supposed grasp of these, to miss what is perhaps salvageable from the 'Old (sceptical) Hume' on causation and the 'external' world generally; for example, and crucially, to miss completely, as I have stressed, the sense in which one can read Hume as taking a quasi-Tractarian line on logical and 'natural' necessity. To say this is to reiterate that the New Humeans miss the possibility of

reading Hume as holding that there is just nothing sensical to be said about ‘natural necessity’, and as ‘reaching’ for the kinds of thoughts that Wittgenstein and Goodman, post-Sceptical philosophers of linguistic practice, have about this (non-)topic.

This (old and) new Hume, the Hume inherent in this possibility, is the one I would like to commend to the reader.

Reconceiving Hume on matters ‘sceptical’ and ‘semantical’

But is there yet an ambiguity at the heart of my paper, in that I have failed to be clear, some might say, about whether ‘the theory of ideas’ is through-and-through ‘unfortunate’ (perhaps even a disaster, a monster)...or is at its heart correct? Have I thus failed to make clear how Hume can be read as making claims about what makes sense to think and say?

Well, I think that Ken Winkler is not wrong when he says, early on in his postscript to Chapter 4 in this volume, that ‘the theory of ideas makes the very appeal to intelligibility that Hume elsewhere renounces’. But I think that one can nevertheless find some good in Hume’s appeals to intelligibility after all, especially in their purely negative, critical and deflationary aspects (directed against notions ‘put up’ by other people, before—and since!), and especially in those appeals to and investigations of intelligibility not explicitly depending on ‘the theory of ideas’ (for example, the investigation of how other philosophers and others can and do attempt to model or comprehend natural necessity). Above all perhaps, when coupled with elements of what I would call (after Jerry Katz) not ‘scientific’ but ‘deflationary’ naturalism in Hume’s thought, with the taking of care to notice when Hume can be read as at least reaching for something more like a practice than like a mental object at the end of his searching. (For example, ‘determination’; and to some extent those habits of mind in action delineated by Goodman, even if Goodman does go too far in reading Hume as a (slightly ‘rationalistic’) naturalist in a certain sense regarding ‘valid inductive reasoning’. The important thing ultimately about Goodman’s take on Hume is how Goodman helps us, by hook or by crock [sic], to see Hume’s text more clearly; that is, to see in it an interesting aspect or aspects of his approach that otherwise we tend to miss.)

The kernel of truth near the heart of the ‘theory of ideas’, and (more importantly) at the heart of much of Hume’s actual methodology in practice, of his questioning of the intelligibility of philosophical claims concerning the ‘basis’ of our reasonings and so on, is then in the kind of ‘deflationary naturalism’ (as opposed both to epistemological naturalism (externalism) and (more generally) to scientific naturalism) that we in fact find full-bloodedly in the likes of Goodman and, above all, Wittgenstein. A ‘naturalism’ which really is so only by virtue of being opposed to supernaturalism, to metaphysics, to excessive claims of a positive *or* negative kind on the part of philosophers. The kind of naturalism expressed for instance in Wittgenstein’s reminders that ‘Explanations come to an end somewhere’ (1953: para. 1; see also paras 25, 415), and in Hume’s point long before that ‘The most perfect philosophy of the natural kind only staves off our ignorance a little longer’ (E31). Hume’s thought, charitably read and not ‘chickening out’ through resort to ‘relative ideas’ or the like, is arguably something like: that there is in the final analysis nothing to be said about ‘necessary connection’; that the ‘idea’ of it does not have a sound basis, does not even amount to genuinely being an idea; that various determinations that we are

subject to are all there is to actually comprehend and perhaps detail; that any effort to turn these into some kind of metaphysical basis for our scientific reasonings is both pointless and hopeless.

Have I taken on board without question too much of what Hume thinks about necessity? Are the alternatives we have to play with here only 'genuine natural necessity/causal powers' or 'mere constant conjunction'? Well, I have said nothing in this paper about constant conjunction, because my account has been focussed on the negative moments in Hume's 'dialectic', upon his account as against other accounts, and as deflationary, not as positively philosophically constructionistic. Of course, in a fuller presentation, I should have to reckon with and interpret Hume's 'positive' remarks on constant conjunction and so on. But this has not been an attempt at a full scholarly account of Hume on necessity. It has only been an attempt to put into doubt certain accounts, at least in their value for us now, and to raise as possibilities certain other accounts. I am not committed to what Hume says about necessity, even if Goodman might be. Indeed, I have actually raised various problems with it. For example, in pointing out that we need 'full-bloodedly' to understand causation as a relation (which Hume did not do), as a flexible and deeply necessary device of our language and thought which relates events to other events. Might it be that a tenable non-Foundationalist, post-metaphysical version of causal/natural necessity (understood as a relation) could overcome not only the deep problems that Hume rightly draws our attention to with anything resembling the traditional idea of natural necessity, but also those problems which *he* is unable to escape in this area? It might; it has been no part of my purpose to argue contrariwise. (And I have space to add here only that the Wittgensteinian critique of (the non-existence of) natural necessity which I have analogized closely to Hume's account does *not* require us to adopt a substantive 'constant conjunction' view of what causation 'really' is.⁵¹)

Have I attempted to shed light on some vexed passages in Hume and on some much-misunderstood aspects of his work by means of using the obscure to explain the mysterious; in short, by means of using Wittgenstein (and Goodman) to explain Hume? I have not attempted to *settle* the New Hume debate here, and nor has my intervention in it involved an imposition of Goodman's or Wittgenstein's ideas upon Hume. Rather, I have attempted to highlight an unduly neglected interpretive possibility *vis-à-vis* the subject matter of the New Hume debate. This is a possibility which I think comes more clearly into view if we focus on what is right and wrong in Goodman's account not just of Hume but more generally of 'necessary connection' and of 'induction', and if we focus on the methodology and quasi-Humean remarks of Wittgenstein. I think that Goodman's own work is sometimes difficult, but rarely obscure. I think that Wittgenstein's work is *usually* difficult, but almost *never* obscure, if only one takes the time and effort to stay with it, to work it out. I claim that we can get a better grasp of what Hume actually said, and of what use we can make now of the ideas and methods he put at our disposal, if we look for comparison to Goodman and Wittgenstein. I hope to have provided at least some justification for that claim in the body of this paper.

So then: *if* one understands the textual architecture of Hume's works adequately, after Jacobson in this volume and elsewhere for example, and if one then sees (for example) the important respects in which their structure is not only 'multiply-voiced' (like Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*) but—most crucially in the case of the *Enquiry*—'dialectical' (like Wittgenstein's *Tractatus*), for example in withdrawing or 'throwing away' later what sometimes appears to

be allowed or posited earlier, *then* one will be in a good position to avoid chickening out, and to seize upon the (chiefly negative) insights which I have delineated above. Insights which, I claim, Hume had.

In closing

I am not going to press these points further. The point of this paper has been exploratory, with a view to rendering thinkable some perhaps surprising and deep connections between the thought of Hume and the thought of (especially) Goodman and Wittgenstein. I do not even claim to have quite proved these connections, let alone to have quite refuted the New Hume interpretation by means of them. But my hope is that what I have written may at least prove quite suggestive. In particular, perhaps, it suggests that ‘the New Hume’ can (at?) best be read as a part of Hume, (a) moment(s) in his dialectical textuality. And that most of Hume’s most central purposes are quite *orthogonal* to the interests, commitments and approach of ‘the New Hume’.

But the real topic of my paper might perhaps be said to be Hume’s legacy, Hume in relation to twentieth-century philosophy (to recent and current philosophy). Again, of course, none of what I have written is decisive as to the consequences of our attempting to reassess Hume’s legacy for contemporary philosophy (for example, for our reading and use of Wittgenstein, for our understanding of apparently ‘Humean’ passages in the *Tractatus* and in Wittgenstein’s later work, such as in his writings on ‘Cause and Effect: Intuitive Awareness’⁵²); but I trust that it *is* suggestive. If we have actively in mind the possibility that Hume’s purpose and methods may in certain respects be more akin to those of Wittgensteinians and quasi-pragmatists (such as Goodman) than to those of metaphysical philosophers, we may yet have some powerful tools to put to work in the New Hume debate; and in using insights from that debate not only in doing the philosophical history of philosophy, but also in contributing to *philosophy*, now.

For if one looks at, say, Goodman’s use of Hume, one finds it opposed to the metaphysics of causes and of possibilities current not only in ‘the New Hume’ but also in David Lewis’s (supposedly Humean) hugely popular and influential work on laws of nature. On a larger scale still, if one looks at Wittgenstein’s key philosophical targets—the still massively influential approaches and inheritances of, for example, Hume’s successors, Kant, Russell, Carnap & co.—one can see, in each of them, aspects of the philosophy of ‘the New Hume’. But as I have argued above, Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus* in particular can be plausibly claimed to have undermined ‘the New Hume’ *avant la lettre*, with considerations which again can be argued to be themselves genuinely Humean!

I do not deny that ‘the New Hume’ is an aspect of Hume’s philosophical voice(s). And the strength of one side of the debate in this volume suggests that it will continue to be so. But I do claim, in closing, that we fail to hear the voices of the New Hume’s antagonists loud and clear only at both our interpretive *and* our philosophical peril.⁵³

Notes

- 1 One might put it this way (as suggested to me by Bob Sugden): why *should* Hume claim—assert—that inconceivable objects are as a matter of fact impossible? What possible grounds could he have for making such a claim? For Hume, surely, the claim that inconceivable objects do

- not exist is just as ungrounded as the claim that they do. Whereas what I am saying is in a sense a stronger claim than these—the claim that we just cannot conceive the inconceivable—this is a claim that is also easier to see us (or to see a cautious and intelligent philosopher, such as Hume) as being in a position to make!
- 2 What I say here should make clear the sense of ‘conceivable’ most relevant to this discussion. We are not here discussing *mere* imaginability. We are not discussing a case such as ‘I cannot imagine how the pyramids were built’, nor even such as ‘I can imagine very well now what it is like to be dead’. We are discussing rather cases such as ‘I cannot imagine (conceive of) the law of non-contradiction being broken’. We are discussing what it makes sense to say. My point here is illuminated by important work in the train of Wittgenstein’s unique reflections upon imaginability (see in this connection especially Wittgenstein (1953, para. 395), work undertaken by James Guetti (1993), and by Cora Diamond (1991a). (For a more traditional epistemological/metaphysical perspective, by contrast, the recent innovative work of Stephen Yablo may be of interest.)
 - 3 For example, even the ‘middle’ Wittgenstein had only a fairly brief flirtation with anything resembling a thorough-going or familiar Verificationism (see Diamond 1992; Stern 1995:109, 115, 152). While, as will become clear to the reader below if it is not already, a sound and full understanding of the early Wittgenstein puts him at a striking remove from the Positivists, who treated *parts* of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* as something like a bible (and ignored the rest).
 - 4 See for instance Jacobson (1987); Winkler (1991, reprinted in this volume as Chapter 4).
 - 5 Jacobson (1987). Incidentally, this Jacobsonian view makes better sense of the textual architecture of this central text of Hume’s than any other I know of. See Jacobson’s essay in this volume for amplification; and see also T161 and T89, wherein Hume makes clear how he conceives of our hopeless yearning for our causative (and thus our inductive) reasonings to be able to capture or mirror a ‘demonstration’ or its like we fantasize to be going on in nature. I explore this latter point a little further below.
 - 6 One might ask what exactly Winkler means by ‘decisive’. A useful possible rendition is: having the character of ‘strength’ that I explained above, that Lightner and others sympathetic to the New Hume camp have failed to see.
 - 7 The lack of any relevant difference between the two is explicated at Goodman (1954:83).
 - 8 Thus global efforts to justify ‘the principle of induction’ are absolutely futile and unnecessary.
 - 9 The importance of this prioritizing of description over justification—indeed, insofar as, properly, they are differentiable *at all*—is not to be underestimated. Goodman was possibly the first explicitly to codify a (philosophical) way of understanding human practices such that there is no need for them to receive the kind of foundations which have often been the bread-and-butter of Western Philosophy. This is the major topic of Part 5 of my Ph.D dissertation (Read 1995).
 - 10 Again, to see how this discussion is relevant to Hume’s talk of secret powers, and of real connections in nature, it is enough to bear in mind the powerful claims made by Jacobson and Winkler concerning the relation of the ‘causative’ component of Hume’s discussion to the ‘inductive’ component, as we find that relation for instance in the footnotes to §§4 and 7 of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.
 - 11 In using this term, I mean to allude to the concept of ‘straight solution’ as purportedly opposed to ‘sceptical solution’, in Saul Kripke’s sense of these words (see Kripke 1982:66, 69).
 - 12 In this, Goodman follows Kemp Smith, the first ‘naturalistic’ reader of Hume. But Goodman, in *using* Hume and appealing to him as an authority, exceeds Kemp Smithian *exegesis*. To anticipate: a key point, to which we will return later, and that Goodman may dangerously elide, is that to a significant extent Hume’s psycho-semantics—his ‘theory of ideas’—at least risks rendering him an ‘atomistic’ empiricist engaged in a search for *impressions*, while causation (and, roughly analogously, induction) must consist in *relations* (and *determinations* or *dispositions* on the part of humans).
 - 13 Of course, Goodman goes on to undermine the thought that there can be any such logic except one ‘based’ simply in what we do, in what Hacking has called an ‘ethnographic’ understanding of our practices (see Hacking 1994). The undermining is achieved by his ‘*new riddle of induction*’.
 - 14 As the reader will probably have inferred, I would prefer to put Hume’s ‘dictum’ more carefully somewhat as follows: it has not been made clear that and how there can meaningfully be said to be any such things as ‘necessary connections between matters of fact’.
 - 15 For Goodman plainly believed that he was offering us an accurate and neglected set of points

about how to read Hume, a set of points hard to reconcile with our *categories* for reading Hume, even now.

- 16 My employment of such terms as 'right', 'rendering' and so on is modelled on usage in later works by Goodman, particularly Goodman (1978).
- 17 'Artful' is Ian Hacking's term, and his view is that there *is* equivocation (see Hacking 1993:275):

Goodman ran together 'describing and defining'. The logician was not describing induction but defining new tools for analysing it. Hume, on the other hand, especially as he is read by philosophers in the twentieth century, was not defining valid induction. Perhaps he was describing inductive practice...

The phrase 'especially as he is read by philosophers in the twentieth century' is of course of great interest to us; and may perhaps help to salvage Goodman's reading of Hume after all? See for instance p. 272 of Hacking's paper:

[T]he relation between twentieth century problems about induction and Hume's texts is not transparent. Notice that John Stuart Mill did not mention Hume when discussing induction in the *System of Logic*... I conjecture that the things that we all call Hume's-problem-of-induction is in part an artefact of analytical philosophy after World War I, and owes much to the Viennese philosophers who took Hume as mentor on so many topics.

Perhaps one ought to say then that Goodman's surprising and ahead-of-his-time Hume largely corrected the Vienna Circle's anachronistic Hume, without endorsing the anti-scepticism on causality of the New Humeans.

- 18 Beauchamp and Mappes (1975). For the other authors mentioned—whose work does *not*, in my view, yield passages from Hume substantially more convincing than those we shall consider *in respect of supporting a non-sceptical reading of Hume*—references are as follows: Arnold (1983), Broughton (1983), Rosenberg and Beauchamp (1981), Baier (1991). (Baier, it should be noted, makes some interesting connections between Hume and Wittgenstein.)
- 19 This citation is perhaps the only one not reasonably effectively addressed by Adi Parush's rebuttal of Beauchamp and Mappes; see Parush (1977).
- 20 That for Hume it was logically impossible (not just nomologically or epistemically impossible) to have a genuine external impression of causation was first convincingly argued by Ducasse; see the essays by Ducasse and by Madden and Humber in Beauchamp (1974). However, again, Hume arguably makes something like a 'category mistake' in his search for candidate-causes (as philosophers tend, metaphysically, to conceive of them); for he *looks* for an impression, rather than for a relation; see below.
- 21 Beauchamp and Mappes also attempt to offer a more general argument for their view, centred on their claim that only some 'factual beliefs are based solely on instinct...[Hume] regards some factual beliefs as additionally based on what are today commonly called "justifying reasons"' (1975:125). On p. 127, they offer quotations from T225, a dubious place from which to quote, as here Hume is once again temporarily entertaining views he will shortly throw into doubt, by means of questioning reasonings which presuppose the accessibility of necessary connections. (See my thought, below, that we need to take more seriously this frequent 'dialectical' and proto-Wittgensteinian element in Hume's writing(s)—his 'entertaining' and apparently even relying on ideas which he will progressively undermine, to the point sometimes of 'throwing [them] away'.) Hume undercuts the thought that 'justifying reasons' form a genuine class at the close of §V of the *Enquiry*, in which he is explicit that the fallacious operations of our reasoning faculty are so untrusted by nature that she *instead relies* on 'some instinct or mechanical tendency.' (E55) There is no hint of a 'virtuous circle' here, no modifying of inductive intuitions, no 'rationality' to the process at all; in short, no concept of 'valid projective inference'.
- 22 Beauchamp and Mappes (1975:126). Useful further elucidation of 'proof as it functions at different points in Hume's work is given in Ferguson (1991:105–6), and in M.Jamie Ferreira's work.
- 23 It is in this sense that Hume's definitions of causality are, I would suggest, to be understood. (Winkler gives a useful exegesis of this footnote, so crucial and yet often omitted or otherwise discounted; see p. 55 above.)
- 24 Here, as elsewhere, it is worth bearing in mind that, however exactly we understand Hume's closing judgments on scepticism in the final pages of Book I of the *Treatise*, and in the closing Section of the *Enquiry*, it is implausible to read Hume as saying that the scepticisms he has

- been considering are wrong or false. Goodman would hold that that is consistent with their not being right either, which is true, but does not vitiate my suspicion that to make sense of Hume's *corpus* one has to allow at least that at times Hume concedes a 'theoretical' lightness to 'the sceptic's' case, that one major 'voice' in Hume endorses that case. Goodman claims Hume as a 'post-Sceptic' like himself, *avant la lettre*, Beauchamp and Mappes would apparently go further than Goodman, and claim that, at least in the case of inductive scepticism, Hume was implicitly assured of the anti-sceptical line being *correct*. I have already addressed their interesting but ultimately quite unconvincing arguments.
- 25 For more detail see Read (1996), of which this portion of the present paper is an amended and updated version.
 - 26 As efficaciously argued by Jacobson (1987). (Hume's footnote referring forward from §§4 and 5 to §7 is the ungainsayable climax of the Jacobson-Winkler reading of Hume.) It is important to understand here that the Humean point is not supposed by Jacobson to be an epistemological one, but rather a post-metaphysical one: it's not the 'greater' 'certainty' of logic over natural philosophy that is claimed, but the incoherence of modelling nature on logic.
 - 27 Again, see Jacobson (1987). My point here might appear to be contradicted by T124 (and by E110–2), the (only) passage(s) in Hume's corpus I think where the notion of 'proof' might plausibly seem to take on a stronger status than I have suggested here. But I refer the reader to the critical discussion above of 'proof', and also note the philosophical undercutting of a reliance on 'proof' to be found at T103. When Hume talks of 'proofs' of (for example) the fact that the Sun will rise tomorrow, I believe that he is talking in a 'popular' sense of the word, albeit one he thinks quite legitimate—and indeed employs himself—unless one (he) is doing hard philosophy. 'Proof' is ultimately a psychological category, not a category yielding substantive philosophical conclusions.
 - 28 My own—Wittgensteinian/Goodmanian—'view' is that Hume was wrong on these matters only in thinking that one could not reasonably easily get to a place where it no longer feels/is necessary to make such demands, where one can happily give up any residual hoping for the world to work like logic, and just see instead how it (in concert with us) actually does work in concrete cases, and so on.
 - 29 Again, the question of whether this is a 'merely' sceptical solution is a moot one: one's answer depends on how compelling one finds Goodman's re-orientation and re-contextualization of the issue.
 - 30 Goodman 'deals' with this, in *Fact, Fiction and Forecast*, via his 'Theory of Projection'. As we have intimated, elements of the way Goodman lays the groundwork for this 'theory' are surely too 'rationalistic' to be truly Humean. (Though I do suggest an alternative, more deflationary/Hackingian way of taking the 'theory of projection' in Read (1995).)
 - 31 See also Wittgenstein (1969: para. 35f); and compare Hume's critique of the notion of 'object' (contrast 'the New Hume's' defence of the metaphysical idea of objects).
 - 32 That one can do this—can give meaning to peculiar terms and propositions enunciated by philosophers—has of course long been known; see for instance T124.
 - 33 In other words, not because the real/the right forms are available somewhere, only not speakable.
 - 34 Early on in (unpublished) lectures in 1934, quoted by Diamond (1991:106). See also Conant's and Witherspoon's essays in Read and Crary (2000).
 - 35 That process is the import for Conant and Diamond of 6.54. (The aim of the process clearly bears strong resemblances to Hume's aims of finding for us a place of rest, from mental torment, from the non-consolations of most philosophy.) See for instance Conant (1991).
 - 36 In a fuller presentation, I would adduce further considerations to buttress Wittgenstein's own powerful argument here against the very idea of natural necessity, and rebut objections, including Kantian objections. In future work, I intend to show how Wittgenstein, in thinking Kantianism through rigorously to its annihilation, *returns* us to a somewhat Humean philosophical vision.
 - 37 For explication of what exactly these amount to, see Read (1997).
 - 38 The mode of understanding being that indicated in my initial discussion of Lightner: inconceivability ought not to be confused with (physical nor even with 'metaphysical') impossibility, nor even with (psychological) unimaginability. Something's being inconceivable is rather simply something's not being able to be spoken/thought of *intelligibly*. This is a grammatical—(or) a logical—point.
 - 39 Though it may have some real resemblance to, or connection with, Hume's questioning of the power of Reason and of Philosophy, and with his efforts to attain an attainable *ataraxia*, to be at peace.

- 40 As will become clear then in the closing sections, below, my point is that while Hume does not, unfortunately, take seriously human practices in the nuanced and full-blooded fashion which Goodman and the later Wittgenstein do, he does at least have a good but hitherto largely unrecognized claim to have taken seriously logic and what makes sense in something like the way that the early Wittgenstein full-bloodedly does.
- 41 Ricketts (1996:93). 6.53 of *Tractatus* contains, of course, Wittgenstein's ferociously austere picture of what is permitted to the philosopher, a picture not without echoes of the close of Hume's first *Enquiry*. See also *Tractatus* 4.11 f.
- 42 For a useful brief explication of this, bringing out the link between Hume and Wittgenstein, see Newton Garver (1996:161).
- 43 As Wittgenstein remarked, it is important not to lose sight of the 'theory of ideas's status as a would-be philosophical theory, an *idée fixe*, rather than as something determinable through experience: 'Remember Hume's description of "ideas" as "faint copies"'. If he had said "When I drink beer I see things fainter", he would have described an experience. Whereas he didn't.' ('The language of sense data and private experience', reprinted in Wittgenstein (1993:344).)
- 44 See T75f., for a sense in which Hume manifests less-than-dim awareness of this.
- 45 Wittgenstein (1921:4.122). It is important to note that this quasi-opposition of Wittgenstein's, of 'internal' to external (that is, genuine) relations, which perhaps helps us to read Hume on causation as not being able to be an internal relation inscribed in the fabric of reality, as metaphysicians would like it to be, is nothing to do with Hume's own opposition of inside ('internal to') the mind versus outside ('external to') the mind. I hold in this paper that Hume was right to think that it could not mean anything to say that something like an internal relation (in Wittgenstein's sense), a deduction, or a relation of ideas, could be metaphysically real, could be in the world. Hume may have expressed this rather unfortunately in the 'theory of ideas', in the proposition that necessity must then be an internal (in his sense) impression (of reflection) of the mind.
- 46 In a fuller presentation, I should have to show how my interpretation can cope with those passages in which Hume appears to thought-experimentally envisage what it would be like were there to be real necessary connections in nature of which we could have knowledge. But that would take too long here. In brief, what I would do would again be to start by offering analogies with Wittgenstein's procedure: Wittgenstein offers us in his work (both early and late) various apparent scenarios and possibilities which, he wants us to come to understand (for ourselves), do not actually amount to anything. I think Hume has been chronically underestimated when his exegetes have failed to see him often doing much the same.
- 47 As he argues on T161f.
- 48 See Read (1995–6).
- 49 See Chapter 10 in this volume.
- 50 In fact, it may be becoming more evident to the reader what are the consequences of my claim that conventional dogmatic scepticism on the one hand and philosophical Realism on the other are arguably two sides of the same coin, opposite lanes on the same road. It is the quite orthogonal dimension explored to some extent by Hume, more thoroughly by, for example, Goodman and the Pragmatists, and full-bloodedly by Wittgenstein, which is perhaps the true topic of this paper.
- 51 Perhaps the reader can guess that, in a fuller presentation, I would in fact argue that the pernicious aspects of Hume's 'constant conjunction' view can arguably be entirely attributed to pernicious (and partially avoidable) aspects of the 'theory of ideas' view. And that Wittgenstein's account(s) of causation successfully *avoids* a substantive positive view of what causation 'really is'.
- 52 Reprinted in Wittgenstein (1993:368–426).
- 53 Acknowledgements for helpful readings of this paper go to Ken Richman, John Yolton, Martin Bell, Anne Jacobson, Kevin Meeker, Jerry Goodenough and Bob Sugden.

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