



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

Paul Russell

*Hume Studies* Volume X, Number 1 (April, 1984) 1-25.

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## HUME'S "TWO DEFINITIONS" OF CAUSE AND THE ONTOLOGY OF "DOUBLE EXISTENCE"

Throughout this paper my objective will be to establish and clarify Hume's original intentions in his discussion of causation in Book I of the Treatise.<sup>1</sup> I will show that Hume's views on ontology, presented in Part IV of that book, shed light on his views on causation as presented in Part III. Further, I will argue that Hume's views on ontology account for the original motivation behind his two definitions of cause.<sup>2</sup> This relationship between Hume's ontology and his account of causation explains something which has baffled Hume scholars for some time; namely, why does Hume's discussion of causation in I,iii,14 have such a paradoxical air about it? I will show that Hume's views on causation have a paradoxical air about them because they rest on an ontology of "double existence" - an ontology which Hume describes as *the monstrous offspring of two principles, which are contrary to each other, which are both at once embrac'd by the mind, and which are unable mutually to destroy each other* (T 215)

My interpretation will centre on the following two claims:

(i) When Hume wrote Section 14, *Of the idea of necessary connexion*, he was primarily concerned to attack the view that the origin of our idea of necessity was to be discovered in the operations of matter or bodies. Of the suggested sources from which our idea of necessity could be thought to originate this is the source which, initially, interested Hume the most. It is, therefore, of great importance that we interpret Hume's remarks in light of this fact.

(ii) Hume offers the first definition of cause as an account of causation as it exists in the material world *independent of our thought and reasoning*. He offers the second definition as an account of causation as we find

it in our perceptions. It will also be argued, in this context, that necessity constitutes "an essential part" of both of Hume's two definitions of cause.

## I

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

*When men considered the several effects and operations of nature, they were led to examine into the force or power by which they were performed ... all the ancient philosophers agreed, that there was a real force in matter ... No one, till Descartes and Malebranche, ever entertained an opinion that matter had no force... These philosophers last-mentioned substituted the notion of occasional causes... [sc. But this opinion] never gained great credit, especially in England, where it was considered as too much contrary to received popular opinions, and too little supported by philosophical arguments, ever to be admitted as any thing but a mere hypothesis.<sup>3</sup>*

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

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

The most obvious difference between the section entitled *Of the idea of necessary connexion* in the Treatise and its counterpart in the first Enquiry is that the former is mostly concerned with the first suggested source of our idea of necessity whereas the latter places the most emphasis on the third source. That is, in the Treatise Hume is primarily concerned to refute the claim that our idea has its source in the *known qualities of matter* while in the Enquiry he is more concerned to refute the claim that its origin is to be found by reflecting upon our willings. This change of emphasis is not without significance and is of some importance in coming to an understanding of Hume's views of causation as he originally put them forward in Book I.<sup>4</sup>

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

... Bodies, by our senses, do not afford us so clear and distinct an idea of active power, as we have from reflection on the operations of our minds... The idea of the beginning of motion, we have only from reflection on what passes in ourselves, where we find by experience, that barely by willing it, barely by a thought of the mind, we can move the parts of our bodies, which were before at rest.<sup>5</sup>

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

*Now our minds afford us no more notion of energy than matter does. When we consider our will or volition a priori, abstracting from experience, we should never be able to infer any effect from it. And when we take the assistance of experience it only shows us*

*objects contiguous, successive, and constantly conjoined.* (A 23)

This argument is somewhat expanded in the Appendix to the Treatise (published with Book III in November, 1740). Here again he argues *that 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.* (T 632) By the time the first Enquiry was published eight years later (April, 1748) it was Locke's suggestion which had come to preoccupy Hume. (See EHU VII,i) However, even up to the time of writing the Appendix Hume retained his original view that the most natural and plausible place to look for the origin of our idea of necessity is in external objects or matter.

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

Further evidence of Hume's primary concern in Book I with matter considered as a source of our idea of necessity can be found in his discussion of liberty and necessity in Book II. In that discussion Hume regards his opponents as taking the view that while there can be little doubt that necessity exists in the material world it does not exist in the realm of our thought and action. Accordingly, Hume begins his discussion by describing necessity as it exists in the operations of bodies. Hume suggests that his opponents *may refuse to call [constant union and inference of the mind] necessity because they assume that there is something else in the operations of matter.* (T 410 - my emphasis; see also A. 31 where Hume makes much the same point) Hume goes on to point out to his opponents that they should be careful not to take him to be ascribing *to the will*

that unintelligible necessity, which is suppos'd to lie in matter. (T 410 - my emphasis) I believe that there can be little doubt that it is this *unintelligible necessity which is suppos'd to lie in matter* which serves as Hume's prime target in Book I.<sup>6</sup>

Hume notes in the Abstract that he confines most of his remarks to *the relation of cause and effect, as discovered in the motions and operations of matter*. (A 21) This reflects the emphasis that we find in Book I. Although he believes that *the same reasoning extends to the operations of mind* and that the causal relation remains the same between both internal and external objects his attention was, at that time, firmly fixed on the case of matter.<sup>7</sup>

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

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

Hume held that we naturally suppose that there exists an independent, external world of bodies. These bodies are taken to exist quite independently of mind and are also supposed to operate upon one another quite independently of our thoughts about them. (Cf. T 195-7) In this way it seems quite natural to suppose that the efficacy of these causes must lie in the bodies themselves and not in the mind that considers them. Accordingly, our natural tendency to believe in the existence of body leads us to believe that the efficacy of causes lies in matter. The two suppositions are connected.

There is also some evidence that Hume misunderstood Locke's position in so far as Hume misrepresents Locke's views about the origin of our idea of necessary connexion. That is, it seems that Hume, initially, took Locke to be as much of a rationalist with regard to the origin of our idea of necessity as he rightly took him to be with regard to our belief in the causal maxim. (Cf. T 81 and ECHU 620 (IV,x,3)) Locke suggests that we get the idea of necessity (or power, to use his term) in two ways.

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

The order in which Locke places these two sources of our idea of power is not without significance. As we have already noted Locke is committed to the view that the first of these two sources of our idea of power is of greater importance because "bodies, by our senses, do not afford us so clear and distinct an idea of

active power, as we have from reflection on the operations of our minds". Despite this Hume, in Book I, only discusses the second and less important of Locke's two suggestions.

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

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

Nowhere in Book I does Hume even mention Locke's first and more important suggestion. That is to say, of the two proposed solutions to this problem which Locke put forward Hume, in Book I, attacks the one which Locke clearly regards as being of the least importance. Evidently Hume came to realize sometime shortly after Books I and II were published that he had misrepresented Locke's position and that Locke's alternative account of the origin of our idea of necessity (i.e. reflection upon our willings) raised difficulties for his own views which he would need to address himself to.<sup>8</sup>



## II

Let us now try and reconstruct Hume's problem in I,iii,14 as he originally saw it when he wrote that passage. Given that in this section he does not discuss Locke's suggestion that the will is a source of our idea of necessity his view of the problem of the origin of our idea of necessity must centre on the following two points. First, Hume accepted the negative conclusion of "the Cartesians" that matter "is endowed with no efficacy" and therefore cannot be the source of our idea of necessity. Second, he rejected the "occasionalist" claim of Malebranche that God is "the prime mover of the universe". Against this suggestion Hume points out that we have "no idea of power or efficacy in any object" as in "neither body nor spirit" are we able to discover a single instance of it. Hume here seems to be in agreement with Locke's remarks at ECHU 548 (IV,iii,17):

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

In other words, looking to "spirits" (i.e. spirits other than ourselves) such as God for the origin of our idea of necessary connexion is even less likely to be of any help to us.<sup>9</sup> Hume's rather disparaging remarks in his subsequent writings concerning the attempts of occasionalists to resolve the problem they generated by robbing matter of its power and efficacy make it clear that he never thought that their "hypothesis" was even a starter.<sup>10</sup>

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

*Thus upon the whole we may infer, that when we talk of any being, whether of a superior or inferior nature, as endow'd with a power or force ... when we speak of a necessary connexion betwixt objects, and suppose, that this connexion depends upon an efficacy or energy, with which these objects are endowed; 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 ... 'tis more probable, that these expressions do here lose their true meaning by being wrong apply'd, than that they never have any meaning... (T 162 - my emphasis)*

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

Near the end of Part II of Book I Hume states that his *intention never was to penetrate into the nature of bodies, or explain the secret causes of their operations.* He continues:

*For besides that this belongs not to my present purpose, I am afraid, that such an enterprize is beyond the reach of human understanding, and that we can never pretend to know body otherwise than by those external properties, which discover themselves to the senses... I content myself*

*with knowing perfectly the manner in which objects affect my senses, and their connections with each other, as far as experience informs me of them. This suffices for the conduct of life: and this also suffices for my philosophy, which pretends only to explain the nature and conduct of our perceptions, or impressions and ideas. (T 64 - my emphasis)*

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

In his discussion of our natural tendency to believe in the existence of body Hume distinguishes between "objects" and "perceptions"; "perceptions" are those existents that are interrupted, perishing and dependent upon the mind and "objects" or "bodies" are those existents that are independent, continuing and external to the mind.<sup>11</sup> *The vulgar, Hume says, confound perceptions and objects (T 193) and can never assent to the opinion of a double existence and representation. (T 202) They take their perceptions to be their only objects, and suppose, that the very being, which is intimately present to the mind, is the real body or material existence. (T 206) Philosophers, however, cannot accept this view of things. They have devised the hypothesis of*

*... the double existence of perceptions and objects; which pleases our reason, in allowing, that our dependent perceptions are interrupted and different; and at the same time is agreeable to the imagination, in attributing a continu'd existence to something else, which we call objects. (T 215)*

In this way the conflicting principles of the imagination and reason create a double ontology. Hume believes that this hypothesis of double existence is

only a *palliative remedy*, and that it contains *all the difficulties of the vulgar system, with some others, that are peculiar to itself.* (T 211) However, as neither nature nor reason will "quit the field" we are left with this "philosophical hypothesis". This is a "malady" which philosophy can never cure. *Carelessness and in-attention alone can afford us any remedy.* (T 218) While Hume stops short of abandoning the common-sense belief in the existence of the material world he nevertheless argues that (a) we cannot infer the existence of a material world on the basis of our perceptions, and (b) even if we could do so we *should never have any reason to infer, that our objects resemble our perceptions.* (T 216)

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

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

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

- (1) There are no intelligible or a priori discoverable connexions between bodies themselves.
- (2) After repeated experience of one sort of object (i.e. body) being conjoined with another object, for example bodies resembling X being constantly conjoined with bodies resembling Y, we find that our perceptions of X's and Y's become connected. That is to say, our experience of constant conjunction generates connections among our ideas (i.e. generates connections in our mind).
- (3) This "connection" is a natural relation between our perceptions and therefore cannot be attributed to the bodies (i.e. objects) themselves. Nevertheless (in so far as we suppose bodies to be represented by our perceptions) we may attribute the philosophical relations which exist between these perceptions to the bodies themselves.

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

and modern philosophers from arriving at the true source of our idea of necessity.

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

Accordingly, the change of perspective from bodies to perceptions is, for the Hume of Book 1, fundamental to discovering the actual source of our idea of necessity. The reason for this is quite straightforward. The connexion which we think of as holding between cause and effect turns out to be the same as that connexion which holds between our perceptions whereby "one idea naturally introduces another". That is, the necessary connexion turns out to be a natural relation between our perceptions. Thus in one move Hume can account for both the failure of philosophers to find the origin of this idea in matter and for our natural tendency to believe that bodies themselves are necessarily connected.

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

*... that propensity, which custom produces, to pass from an object to the idea of its usual attendant. This therefore is the essence of necessity. Upon the whole, necessity is something, that exists in the mind, not in objects; nor is it possible for us ever to form the most distant idea of it,*

consider'd as a quality in bodies. (T 165-6 - my emphasis)

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

Hume completes this passage as follows:

*Either we have no idea of necessity, or necessity is nothing but that determination of the thought to pass from causes to effects and from effects to causes, according to their experienc'd union.* (T 166 - my emphasis)

The *determination of the thought* is what we have an internal impression of and it is this which is the origin of our idea of necessity. This impression would not arise were it not for the natural relation between our perceptions. The associations among our perceptions constitute the only "connections" which we will discover between things. We are *led astray by a false philosophy*, Hume suggests, *when we transfer the determination of the thought to external objects, and suppose any real intelligible connexion betwixt them; that being a quality, which can only belong to the mind that considers them.* (T 168 - my emphasis: Note that Hume mentions this *false philosophy* again at T 222-3)

I have already pointed out that Hume held that it was impossible for us to abandon our belief in the

independent and continuing existence of bodies - i.e. the material world. The question therefore naturally arises as to what relations and connexions hold between bodies themselves as distinct from our perceptions of them. The gist of Hume's answer to this question seems to be that while we may attribute philosophical relations to physical objects we cannot attribute natural relations to them (though he notes that we have a natural tendency to do this; cf. T 167).<sup>12</sup> For example, Hume states explicitly (T 168) that physical objects may *bear to each other the relations of contiguity and succession; that like objects may be observ'd to have like relations; and that all this is independent of, and antecedent to the operations of the understanding.* But, as we have seen, he will not allow that the natural relations or "connexions" between our perceptions of these objects may also be "transferred" to these bodies. As natural relations are "a kind of attraction" existing between two ideas whereby "the one naturally introduces the other" they must, obviously, be confined to our perceptions. (Cf. I, i, 4 and 5) By contrast we discover philosophical relations wherever there are qualities *which make objects admit of comparison.* (T 14 - my emphasis) There is no reason, therefore, to suppose that such relations do not exist in the material world among bodies (assuming, that is, that we also suppose that our perceptions represent these objects).

### III

The passage cited above describing causation as it exists in nature *independent of our thought and reasoning* (i.e. T 168) is almost immediately followed by Hume's "two definitions" of cause. I believe that it is significant that this account of causation as it



exists in bodies or the material world comes very close to giving Hume's first definition of cause.

Definition C<sub>1</sub>: *A cause is an object precedent and contiguous to another, and where all the objects resembling the former are plac'd in a like relation of priority and contiguity to those objects, that resemble the latter.*  
(T 172)

I suggest that Hume is here concerned to define cause as it exists in nature, independent of our thought and reasoning. Accordingly, as he is considering bodies he makes no mention of perceptions, i.e impressions and ideas, nor of natural relations (i.e. those *connexions* which relate only perceptions). By contrast, his second definition is concerned with cause as it exists in our perceptions. When we change the point of view from the objects (i.e. material objects) to the perceptions, Hume says, then the impression is to be considered as the cause, and the lively idea as the effect; and their necessary connexion is that new determination, which we feel to pass from the idea of the one to that of the other. (T 169) Thus we have Hume's second definition of cause as it exists in our thought or perceptions.

Definition C<sub>2</sub>: [A cause is] *an object precedent and contiguous to another, and so united with it, ... that the idea of the one determines the mind to form the idea of the other, and the impression of the one to form a more lively idea of the other.* (T 172 - my emphasis)

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

Hume's two definitions of cause reflect the fact that he embraces the ontology of the double existence of perceptions and bodies. The criticism of

his position which he considers prior to offering his two definitions (*i.e.* *As if causes did not operate entirely independent of the mind...*; T 167-9) makes clear the relevance of his views on ontology, as developed in Part IV, to his discussion of causation. Given that ordinary men "confound" perceptions and bodies it is understandable why they arrive at the mistaken conclusion that material bodies are necessarily connected.<sup>13</sup> They attribute those connexions which exist in their imagination, that is those natural relations which hold between perceptions, to the bodies themselves. However, as Hume points out, even philosophers, who distinguish between bodies and our perceptions of them, continue to assume that necessary connexions hold between bodies - thereby adhering to the *false philosophy* which he seeks to dispose of.

Hume seeks to establish that necessary connexions, like secondary qualities and moral qualities, can be said to exist only in the mind that considers these material objects. Thus what Hume has to say can be assimilated to other central doctrines in the *Treatise*. Necessary connexions, like colours, smells, virtue and vice, exist in the mind and not in the objects themselves and we must check our inclination to attribute these features to the objects.

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

*I define necessity in two ways, conformable to the two definitions of cause, of which it makes an essential part. I place it either in the constant union ... of like objects, or in the inference of the mind from the one to the other.* (T 409 - my emphasis, see also EHU 97)

Let us call the *constant union of like objects* definition N and the *inference of the mind from the one* [sc. object] to the other definition N<sub>2</sub>. N<sub>1</sub>, like C<sub>1</sub>, is a defini-

tion offered in terms of philosophical relations and makes no reference to our perceptions.  $N_2$  refers to *the inference of the mind* and it is, consequently, dependent upon an ontology of perceptions rather than objects. It is dependent upon an ontology of perceptions because the inference of the mind must be an association between ideas. On Hume's account inferred "objects" must be capable of "enlivening" and of possessing the phenomenological property of vivacity; clearly these are properties which only ideas (as opposed to bodies) are capable of possessing. Here again we find the change in point of view which reflects the ontology of double existence.

Given that  $N_1$  and  $N_2$  follow the ontological distinction which we found between  $C_1$  and  $C_2$  how are  $C_1$  and  $N_1$  and  $C_2$  and  $N_2$  related? Specifically, does necessity make an essential part of both Hume's definitions of cause as his remarks would seem to suggest? When Hume examined material bodies all that he could discover were the relations of contiguity, priority and constant conjunction - he could not find any relation of necessary connexion. Consider the following "part" of definition  $C_1$ : *... and where all the objects resembling the former are placed in a like relation of priority and contiguity to those ... that resemble the latter.* This is simply all that we will find of the relation of necessary connexion if we (mistakenly) look for it in material bodies - that is, constant conjunction. It is, therefore, not surprising that this "part" of  $C_1$  is simply  $N_1$  reworded. For  $N_1$ , as we have noted, confines itself to an ontology of objects and philosophical relations. Now consider the following "part" of  $C_2$ : *... and so united with it, ... that the idea of the one determines the mind to form the idea of the other...* This is simply the relation of necessary connexion as we find it in our perceptions - that is, the inference of the

mind or  $N_2$ . It is obvious, therefore, that necessity does, as Hume suggests, form an essential part of both definitions of cause.

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

As we have already noted Hume states that *either we have no idea of necessity, or necessity is nothing but that determination of the thought to pass from causes to effects and from effects to causes, according to their experienc'd union.* (T 166) This claim, while it may accord with definition  $N_2$ , makes it difficult to understand why Hume offers definition  $N_1$  at all. Further, in some contexts (e.g. T 162) Hume clearly suggests that necessity should not be ascribed to objects and does not exist in objects. Why, then, does he offer us an account of necessity as it exists independent of our thought and reason? He does this, I believe, because he is committed to the view that we naturally believe

in an independent material world - however much that belief may lack rational foundations. It is therefore understandable, given this view of things, that he offers some account of causation and necessity as they exist in that material world independent of mind. Just as Hume refuses to join Berkeley by abandoning our belief in matter (cf. EHU 155n) so too he refuses to abandon the common sense view (as expressed at T 167-9) that causation and necessity also exist independent of our thought and reasoning.

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

In short, if Hume's views on causation have a paradoxical air about them that is because they rest on an ontology of *double existence* which Hume describes as *the monstrous offspring of two principles, which are contrary to each other, which are both at once embrac'd by the mind, and which are unable mutually to destroy each other.* (T 215) In this way the dualism which we find in Hume's account of causation simply reflects the dualism of the

ontology of double existence. Hume, on the one hand, in order to set our imagination at ease and to take into consideration our natural belief in the material world, offers an account of causation as it exists in matter independent of mind (*i.e.* as at T 168). Hence he offers us the first definition of cause. This account of causation violates his sceptical principles but indicates his respect for the fact that we cannot abandon or escape from our natural beliefs. On the other hand, in order to set our reason at ease, Hume also points out that we cannot infer that there exists a material world, that we have no reason to believe that our perceptions represent such a world and also that any attempt to *penetrate into the nature of bodies* is beyond the reach of human understanding and liable to produce scepticism and uncertainty. All that we require for *the conduct of life* and for an understanding of Hume's philosophy is knowledge of the nature and operations of our perceptions. In this way Hume is primarily concerned with "the universe of the imagination" and therefore with the nature of causation as we there find it. Thus he offers us his second definition of cause. By viewing the problem in this light Hume seeks to establish that *the cement of the universe* (*i.e.* the universe of the imagination) is the association of our ideas. This, as his concluding remarks in the Abstract make clear, is what Hume set out to prove in Book I of the Treatise.<sup>14</sup>

Paul Russell  
St. John's College, Cambridge

1. References to the Treatise of Human Nature (T) are to the Selby-Bigge edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888). References to the Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (EHU) are to the Selby-Bigge edition; 3rd edition revised by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). References to An Abstract of A Treatise of Human Nature (A) are to the edition of J.M. Keynes and P. Sraffa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938).
  
2. Discussion in the secondary literature concerning this issue has centred around such questions as whether or not Hume was a supporter of the regularity view of causation; whether or not he really intended to offer two definitions of our notion of cause; which, if either, of these two definitions is primary; and, lastly, what part the idea of necessity plays in these definitions. In this paper I will not directly discuss the various interpretations that have been put forward in the secondary literature. The explanation for this is twofold. First, the various permutations and combinations of answers to these questions in the secondary literature is quite staggering and I do not believe that I have the space in this paper to profitably discuss these additional complexities. I believe that many commentators have tended to discuss the secondary literature at the expense of the more relevant primary literature (e.g. Locke and Malebranche). Second, and more importantly, my approach to these issues is quite unlike that of most of my predecessors in that it is primarily historical and my discussion would, therefore, tend to lose its coherence if it were to be repeatedly redirected towards the secondary literature. However, I should stress that I have benefited from the secondary literature and that what I have to say is obviously relevant to the secondary literature. Suffice it to mention in this context that two of the most influential interpretations will be found in Norman Kemp Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume (London: Macmillan, 1941), esp. pp. 91-2 and p. 369; and in J.A. Robinson, "Hume's Two Definitions of 'Cause'", The Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. XII (1961). For a more recent discussion see T.L. Beauchamp and A. Rosenberg, Hume and the Problem of Causation (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1981), Chpt. I; this work contains a detailed and illuminating discussion of much of the secondary literature.
  
3. A Letter from a Gentleman to his friend in Edinburgh (1745), edited by E.C. Mossner and J.V. Price (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967), pp. 27-8 - my emphasis.

4. Antony Flew has pointed out that the Enquiry has often been viewed as merely a "popularized version of Book I". (Hume's Philosophy of Belief (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), p. 1.) This is, as Flew notes, a serious mistake as it leads philosophers into missing important differences in Hume's concerns and arguments.
5. John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (ECHU), edited by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 235 (II,xxi,4).
6. In his discussion *Of the ancient philosophy* (I,iv,3) Hume refers to the view that we can attribute power, efficacy, etc. to the operations of matter as a *false philosophy*. (T 222-3) In this he may well have been influenced by Malebranche's discussion of "the most dangerous error of the philosophy of the ancients". (The Search After Truth (SAT), VI,ii,3 - Hume in fact refers to this section at T 159n). Malebranche states:

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

In his Elucidations Malebranche returns to this theme:

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

(Note too Malebranche's reference to "the false philosophy of the Pagans" in his Sixth Dialogue, Sect. II). Malebranche's discussion of "the most dangerous error of the philosophy of the ancients" seems closely related to Hume's discussion of the *false philosophy* of the ancients. Further, in his Elucidations Malebranche, like Hume in Book I, is primarily concerned to refute the view that matter possesses some force or power. However, unlike



Hume's discussion in Book I Malebranche does consider, in The Search After Truth, the Elucidations, and the Dialogues, the suggestion that we derive our idea of power by reflecting upon our willings. (See, for example, SAT 448, 449-50, 668-71 and 679.) Given Hume's obvious familiarity with Malebranche's writings it seems certain that despite his failure to discuss this suggestion in the context of Book I he must nevertheless, at the time of writing Book I, have been aware of Malebranche's comments upon it. Not surprisingly Hume's subsequent discussion of this suggestion in the Abstract, Appendix, and the first Enquiry follows Malebranche's general line of criticism. My references are to The Search After Truth, translated by T.M. Lennon and P.J. Olscamp; and in the same volume Elucidations of the Search After Truth, translated by T.M. Lennon (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1980). Dialogues on Metaphysics and on Religion, translated by Morris Ginsburg (London: Allen & Unwin, 1923).

7. Hume's examples of billiard-balls in the Treatise (T 164), the only example which he uses in I,iii,14, is a paradigm case of causation as it exists in bodies or the operations of matter and as such it is indicative of Hume's primary interest. The example is even more prominent in the Abstract and is used again by Hume in the Enquiry (EHU, Sects. IV,V and VII) in those contexts where he is concerned with causation as it exists in external objects. (It should be noted that Keynes and Sraffa incorrectly imply that this example does not appear in the Treatise; see their introduction to the Abstract, p. xxix.) Significantly Malebranche repeatedly uses the example of colliding balls (cf. SAT 448, 451, 659, 660 and the 7th Dial., Sect. XI) and Locke uses the specific example of billiard-balls at ECHU 235 (II,xxi,4).
8. It seems likely that these difficulties would have been pointed out to Hume by one of those who read the Treatise shortly after it was published. It seems certain that Hutcheson's critical comments influenced what Hume has to say in the Appendix and quite possible that the Abstract was also written in light of Hutcheson's remarks. See The Letters of David Hume, edited by J.Y.T. Grieg, 2 Vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), esp. letter 16 - this letter was written shortly after the Abstract was published and alludes to a previous conversation between Hume and Hutcheson in which Hutcheson obviously offered some critical comments of Books I and II. See also Keynes' and Sraffa's

introduction to the Abstract (section IV). On the basis of some of the evidence which they offer it may be argued that Hutcheson's influence is confined to those passages of the Appendix that differ from the Abstract. Another possible candidate for this role is Henry Home, Lord Kames.

9. Clearly, however, Hume differed from Locke in so far as he did not believe that reflecting upon our own case would be any more enlightening. (Note that Hume uses a rather Lockean argument to deal with Malebranche's "hypothesis" of occasionalism and he uses, in his subsequent writings, Malebranche's general line of attack against Locke's suggestion concerning the will.)
10. At the time of publishing the Treatise Hume suppressed his views on religion. Clearly, however, Hume thought, philosophically speaking, any appeals to "the deity" were fraught with difficulties. In A Letter from a Gentleman Hume describes occasionalism as a doctrine that was considered by most English philosophers (e.g. Locke, Cudworth, Clarke) as *too little supported by philosophical arguments, ever to be admitted as any thing but a mere hypothesis.* (p. 28) In the Enquiry Hume suggests that *we are got into fairy land, Tong ere we have reached the last steps of [this] ... theory.* (EHU 72)
11. In Part III Hume uses the term "object" to include mental as well as physical objects (i.e. bodies) and it would seem, therefore, that there is a sudden change in the meaning of this term. However, it should be kept in mind that in Part III Hume was primarily concerned with physical objects. Once this emphasis is noted then it should be apparent that his usage of the term "object" in Part IV is not as out of keeping with his usage of that term in Part III as appears at first glance.
12. We have a natural tendency to do this because we have a natural tendency to *confound perceptions and objects.* (T 193 - see also T 223: *'Tis natural for men ...* )
13. Here again the passage at T 223 already cited (*'Tis natural for men ...*) is relevant.
14. I am grateful to Bernard Williams for his very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper.