

An Appraisal of Hume's Theory of Causation: Is Hume a Causal Realist?

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ABSTRACT: *Hume's construal of causation historically lays out a philosophical puzzle towards realism and anti-realism; in fact, this scholarship deliberately offers a bit of thoughts for causal realism - in virtue of the Old Hume and New Hume debate, as well as its contextual language. Nevertheless, this dialectic is significantly underestimated by plenty of counterexamples such as empiricism, liberty and necessity, the immateriality of the soul, and copy principle. In response to these brainstorming facets, this research article intends to determine that Hume is a causal anti-realist; I have, in turn, explored three supporting arguments to defend the compelling idea: conventional manifestation of causality - Hume's advocacy of necessary connection - the idea of liberty and necessity. However, this critical study is restricted to examine other substantial reflections on those which are included in the compositions of Treatise and Enquiry.*

KEYWORDS: causal realism, old Hume, new Hume, necessary connection, liberty and necessity

INTRODUCTION

Hume's view on causality seems to be a centrepiece of his entire philosophy in the eighteenth century. Since the last couple of decades, the Humean account of causation has inevitably been related to a substantial controversy in-between realism and anti-realism - with regards to his compositions of Treatise and Enquiry (Strawson, 1989). Above all, the scholarly debate of Hume's causation has gained fresh prominence with many - arguing that although his textual language of causality appears to be necessarily realist, it is, unavoidably, undermined by the prime account of causation as such, owing to the empirical incompatibility (McBreen, 2007). In addition, this historical debate is an influential upshot of the New Hume and the Old Hume interpretation: Hume is a causal realist because causal powers are predominantly motivated by the commitment to causal science and causal linguistics. Conversely, Hume is a causal anti-realist in respect to his fundamental analysis of causation such as 'copy principle', 'the immateriality of the soul', 'liberty and necessity', and so forth. (Millican, 2009, p. 647). However, the central thesis of this article is that Hume is a causal anti-realist. *Ergo*, the study

has been organised in the following way: traditional interpretation of causality - the idea of necessary connection - Hume's advocacy of liberty and necessity.

Contents

1. The traditional interpretation of causality

The conventional understanding of causation precisely derives from the Old Humean view that is supposedly more accurate and cohesive. In general, the core manifestation of causality mainly attempts to encompass a couple of claims: negative phase with the Old Hume and positive phase with the New Hume. On the one hand, some Hume scholars like Smith, Wright, Costa have argued that Hume affirms a causal realist position in terms of temporal priority, constant conjunction alongside contiguity; accordingly, this positive claim of causation is an objective matter that occurs in the external world, or mind-independent world (Beebee, 2006). On the other hand, some Hume scholars, for instance, Aikins, Knight, Winkler have asserted that Hume deliberately puts forward a causal anti-realist view by means of illegitimacy and incoherence of the necessary connection to external objects; this negative claim of causation is internal and rests in the human mind, or consciousness (Beebee, 2006). In brief, it is evident that the Old Hume interpretation has been determined more systematically and logically, rather than the New Humeanism.

Moreover, although they resemble distinctive natures of causation, at some length, it tends to draw a common theme between the cause and effect: the 'idea of necessary connection' (McBreen, 2007, p. 422); in fact, Hume has significantly focused on this principle - as this spells out a consistent account of cause and effect relationship: the cause follows the effect even though the effect does not follow the cause - because this phenomenon originates in the human mind in itself, but not from the external materials. Additionally, most of the Old Hume readers have suggested regularity reductionism with substantive forms of 'projectivism' or 'quasi-realism' (Blackburn, 1990, cited in Millican, 2009, p. 648). In contrast, the New Hume readers often deny that thick causal necessity, whilst proposing the upper-case causation, instead. Thus, it is obvious that there is a shared key feature *vis-à-vis* the idea of necessary connection.

1.1 Empiricism and Projection

Hume's conceptual empiricism and phenomenal projectivism tend to explain the ordinary and necessary casual connection with the world and the human mind. Hence, in the Treatise one, he strives to hold the compelling idea of 'faint images' of plain impressions, which is called the 'copy principle' (Beebee, 2006, p. 110). According to the Treatise four, '[A]ll our simple ideas in their first appearance are derived from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent' (Hume, 1978, p. 4). It is, apparently, a genetic thesis that populates the mind and interacts with other elements including beliefs, ideas, impressions, and knowledge too. In particular, this could relate with semantic consequences because it constantly provides relevant components for thoughts. For instance, how does a blind person get the corresponding idea of redness in the mind without genuinely seeing the colour? Then, as Garrett (1997) explores, the copy principle potentially helps gain semantic contents of things

in the world, which are entitled as conceptual empiricism and mental projection. In short, it is clear how the necessary causation occurs in the human mind with reference to the world.

1. 2 Constant conjunction and contiguity

The Humean empirical advocacy of causation seeks for no textual evidence to the New Hume's hypothesis of contiguity and constant conjunction. Hume elucidates in the Treatise,

'I find in the first place, that whatever objects are considered as causes or effects, are *contiguous*; and nothing can operate in a time or place, which is ever so little removed from those of its existence. Those distant objects may sometimes seem productive of each other, they are commonly found upon examination to be linked by a chain of causes; ...' (Hume, 1978, p. 75).

This exposition could arguably claim that causation is a conceptual truth, but not a well-established scientific assumption - because contiguity often exposes a series of sensual experiences generated by the human mind; then, perhaps, distant objects might causally interrelate with others due to the mental mechanism. Likewise, Hume also comments on the constant conjunction in the Treatise as follows:

'[T]he transitions from an impression present to the memory or senses to the idea of an object, which we call cause or effect, is founded on past experience, and on our remembrance of their *constant conjunction*' (Hume, 1978, p. 88).

Accordingly, this turns out to illustrate 'observed constant conjunction', rather than 'universal constant conjunction' (Beebe, 2006, p. 133). So, it seems that there is no adequate textual evidence to accept the universal constant conjunction as it might be caused by in itself - as an ambiguous and arbitrary account of causality. It, *eo ipso*, apparent that the notion of cause and effect is certainly derived from the empirical discovery that occurs in human consciousness.

1. 3 Dispute of 'Meaning' and 'Definition'

The argument of meaning and definition has a core dominance of the Old Humean reading of causation - alongside the well-known debate at face value. The Enquiry has explicitly classified the meaning of causality by virtue of 'power, course, energy, or necessary connection' (Millican, 2009, p. 656); these fundamental elements are unambiguously employed to produce sense impressions, or genuine sentiments in common life. Similarly, Hume has tempted to reinforce the definition of cause-and-effect relation - in terms of the subjectivist implication in the Treatise and Enquiry; it essentially paves the way for the non-regularity theory of causation (Strawson, 1989). On the contrary, the New Hume readers affirm another explanatory view on this argumentation as regards the regularity theory of causation: meaning and significance; they are, apparently, oriented into epistemological analysis, rather than semantic outline (Millican, 2009, p. 657). Particularly, Wright (1983) proposes, Hume has a controversial and wide-ranging scenario describing plentiful technical terms of meaning and definition towards the historical conflict of causal realism. Nevertheless, it therein lies that the Old Humean doctrine shows a prominent plausibility driving upon this debate.

2. The idea of necessary connection

The hypothesis of necessary connection plays a vital role in the causal anti-realist position of the standard Old Hume reading. Generally, on the basis of Hume's account of causality, there

are mainly a couple of ways of arising and existing ideas in the mind: sense impression (external impression), or impression of reflection (internal impression). In the same vein, Beebe (2006) has also emphasised this crucial differentiation of Hume's causation in the lens of negative and positive phase of causality. Correspondingly, the Treatise frankly puts the matter as follows:

'The idea of necessary connection arises from some impressions. There is no impression conveyed by our senses, which can give rise to that idea. It must, therefore, be derived from some internal impression, or impression of reflection. There is no internal impression, which has any relation to the present business, but the 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' (Hume, 2000, p. 22).

The following exegesis helps distinguish the distinctive nature of causal realism and causal anti-realism: the negative rationale discusses that the idea of necessary connection together with power, force, and efficiency does not derive from either sensation, or internal impression, where the process of the will arises. Conversely, the positive argument elucidates that the genuine source of the idea is the customary transition of the imagination, or the associative mechanism of object and causal attendant. Nonetheless, as a whole, the accurate exposition of Hume's causation would arguably state that the fundamental connection in-between cause and effect occurs in the human mind, but not in any physical objects. This is briefly clarified that the assumption of necessary connection carries out a remarkable stance of causal anti-realism throughout the dilemma.

2. 1 Transition of the mind

Interestingly, the transition of the mind makes a crucial movement for the causal anti-realist position of Humeanism. In the Enquiry, he first declares the Old Humean way of causation:

'But when our particular species of event has always, in all instances, been conjoined with another; we make no longer any scruple of foretelling one upon the appearance of the other; and of employing that reasoning, which can alone assure us of any matter of fact or existence. We then call the one object, *Cause*: the other, *Effect*' (Hume, 1975, p. 75).

In view of causal anti-realism, the idea of necessary connection only springs up after having adequate experiences of causal impressions, those which are followed by effect-impressions; in fact, this strongly determines that the primary source of impression for the idea of necessary connection should not be the sensory impression at all. In contrast, the positive claim of Hume's causation does, seemingly, consist in the Enquiry as follows:

'It appears, then, that this idea of necessary connection among events arises from a number of similar instances which occur of the constant conjunction of these events. ... But there is nothing in a number of instances, different from every single instance, which is supposed to be exactly similar; except only, that after a repetition of similar instances, the mind is carried by habit, upon the appearance of one event to expect its usual attendant, and to believe that it will exist' (Hume, 1975, p. 75).

This explanation designates the constant location of the source. As a result, the notion of necessary connection can only emerge in the mind after frequent repetition; indeed, it does also arise in the mind - where the habit of inferring effects from impressions of causation; the mind, *ipso facto*, intends to transfer to the belief from the sensory impression. However, it is evidently

clear that the negative claim of Hume's causation has a higher plausibility, rather than this positive aspect of the New Humean way.

2. 2 *The two definitions of causation*

Defenders of causal-anti-realists engage in a huge amount of profound discussion - in favour of the two-definition dispute in Hume's causality. As Beebe (2006, p. 94) expounds, Hume herein provides necessary and sufficient technical conditions for the compatible application of the conception of 'cause' related with 'effect'. Furthermore, it entails no hallmark of the mind - independent necessary correlation or forces or power; perhaps, he might have an approximate idea of causation, but not the exact realisation of what is to be a cause - this could be an existential-phenomenological view of causation - but somehow, in the Treatise, Hume attempts to straddle with the couple of definitions for causality:

'If this definition [i.e., the first, based on constant conjunction] be esteemed defective, because drawn from objects foreign to the cause, we may substitute this other [i.e., the second, based on the mind's tendency to infer]. Should this definition also be rejected for the same reason, I know no other remedy, than that the persons, who express this delicacy, should substitute a jester definition in its place. But for my part I must own my incapacity for such an undertaking' (Hume, 2000, p. 31).

In response to this, as Robinson (1962) scrutinises, these interpretations, if not most, spell out the above two phenomena schematically in the following way:

1. Incident *a* is a cause of incident *b* if and only if *a* proceeds and is contiguous with *b* and constantly conjoined with *bs*.
2. In a similar way, incident *a* is a cause of incident *b* if and only if *a* proceeds and contiguous with *b* and the idea of *a* determines the mind to build the idea of *b*, and the impression of *a* determines the mind to construct the belief in *b*.

Overall, Hume's presentation of two definitions appears to be grossly engaging with each other, while confirming the negative perspective of causality.

2. 3 *Natural and philosophical relation*

In line with Hume, causation has a philosophical and natural relation by its very nature - on the ground of two definitions and causal anti-realism that are facilitated by the idea of cause and effect. By and large, the first definition explains the input to the machinery process as regards the constant conjunction. By contrast, the second definition explains the career of the associative mechanism in responding to the mind and believer's inference towards the cause and effect. Moreover, Noonan (1999) has argued that the first interpretation describes what is happening in the objective, or mind-independent world, whilst the second interpretation concerns what is going in the mind, or thoughts of the observer. It, presumably, seems that there is a mutually different relationship amongst both explanations. Despite that, in the Treatise, it has explicitly been stated that what sort of philosophical and natural connection does occur in-between the two definitions of causality:

'Thus, though causation be a philosophical relation, as simplifying contiguity, succession, and constant conjunction, yet it is only so far as it is a natural relation, and produces a union among our ideas, that we are able to reason upon it, or draw any inference from it' (Hume, 1978, p. 94).

In effect, Hume has considered a distinctive approach to the prevailing correlation of philosophy and nature - that indicates the separate understanding and parallel prospect of causality. Hence, Hume's causation can be identified as a philosophical relation by reference to the contiguity and constant conjunction, those which are characteristic conditions in the objective contents. Similarly, it could be recognised as a natural relation with respect to mental sentiments that are referred to the subjective elements. In all, it is certain that the Old Hume direction of causality could be more perceivable in comparison to the New Hume treatment.

3. Liberty and necessity

Liberty and necessity are an argumentative strategy taken to set up the doctrine of necessity, whilst eliminating causal realism. As Millican (2009) explores, it clearly and consistently demonstrates human physical actions and mind's contributions to it - with reference to the Treatise, the Abstract, as well as Enquiry. For instance, Hume remarkably asserts the notion of necessity for 'matter' in the Enquiry:

'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. ... Would we, therefore, form a just and precise idea of necessity, we must consider whence that idea arises, when we apply it to the operation of bodies' (Hume, 1975, p. 4).

On this account, it has distinctly manifested the uniformity of human actions in the similar way to the material world; *de facto*, this could also suggest a preliminary establishment of inductive prediction. Put differently, this explanation is supposed to be completing the central argument: Hume intends to show that both interpretative criteria for prescribing necessity are collectively fulfilled by human actions - along with the basic characteristics of actions; in fact, he attempts to proceed with this agenda until it comes to the substance of all mankind. Besides, Hume has emphasised the idea of necessity by making the concept of liberty in the Enquiry:

'By liberty, then, we can only mean a power of acting or not acting, according to the determinations of the will; that is, if we choose to remain at rest, we may; if we choose to move, we also may' (Hume, 1975, p. 23).

The following illustration determines voluntary actions of human beings are an essential component of the human mind; then, either liberty or slavery is caused by human thoughts, imaginations, and mental sentiments. Rather, for these reasons, it could be said that necessity is an impression, but neither an internal nor an external object. Overall, human action is ascertained as things in the physical realm of the world - that seem to be depended on - where Hume sees causation as a typical way of amounting to the constant conjunction; then, it becomes obvious that the dispute of liberty and necessity certainly explodes the causal realistic view.

3.1 The immateriality of the soul

Surprisingly, this is a disregarded section of the Treatise even though this doctrine has done an influential task for the Old Humean principle of causality. It is, apparently, to divert the critical attention to internal perception including the nature of human consciousness from the external material world (Millican, 2009). On the basis of copy principle, Hume strives to observe the

fundamental argument of the immateriality of the soul - via understanding the real difficulty of assigning a physical location to human thoughts and cognitive perception. In spite of this primary concern, Hume attributes this to distinguishing the perception of sight and feeling - which consist of spatial locality, moral reflections, sounds, tastes, and smells. Assumingly, Hume also sketches this immaterial account of causation that explicitly contrasts with the fallacy of materialism. To put this bluntly, he could comprehend the actual substance of human perception in an anti-materialist way. Above all, as Garrett (1997) proposes, on the Old Hume's application, this involves more energetically because there is a significant favour to subjective roots in the human mind, rather than objective elements. Thus, this principal matter can be the cause of thought, and again this claim seems to be driven upon - where Hume sees causation as amounting to the constant conjunction. In short, it is evident that the dilemma of causal anti-realism has relatively been clarified thereto.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the present study was designed to elaborate on Hume's causal anti-realist position. In order to address the following thesis, I have discovered a few supporting arguments in detail: first, I examined the traditional interpretation of causality with regards to the philosophical debate of the Old Hume and New Hume, the empirical approach and projectivism, the constant conjunction and contiguity, and the dispute of meaning and definition. Second, I broadly investigated the most prominent fact of this essay, that is the idea of necessary connection in respect of the transition of the mind, the argument of two definitions of causality, including natural and philosophical relation with causation. Eventually, I concisely scrutinised Hume's advocacy of liberty and necessity together with the immateriality of the soul. There are, *ipso facto*, an overwhelming number of facts to clarify for us to read that Hume is a causal anti-realist, instead of the so-called New Hume dialectic.

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