

I. OVERVIEW

Intuitive gloss

- It is “an absurdity” to use, say, the term ‘force’ to illuminate the term ‘power’. [See A]
 - Why? The term ‘force’ is at least as opaque as the term ‘power’.
 - Hence appealing to *force* does not illuminate the term ‘power’.
-
- Hume appeals to *mental determination* to illuminate modal terms like ‘necessity’.
 - But mental determination cannot be specified without use of modal terms.
 - So the term ‘mental determination’ is at least as opaque as modal terms.
 - Hence Hume’s appeal to mental determination does not illuminate modal terms.

Formalization

1. Hume explains modal thought and talk partly by appeal to mental determination.
2. On standard interpretations, mental determination cannot be specified without modal thought or talk.

-
- ∴ 3. On those interpretations, Hume explains modal thought and talk partly by appeal to an explanans that cannot be specified without modal thought or talk.

(CONSTRAINT) A constitutive explanation of thought and talk of kind K illuminates them only if the explanans can be specified without thought or talk of kind K.

→ On standard interpretations, Hume’s semantics fails to illuminate modal thought and talk.

II. MODALITY AND MENTAL DETERMINATION

Aim: Defend (1) by showing that, no matter how Hume’s modal semantics is understood, it involves *some* appeal to mental determination.

Hume as causal reductionist

- (R1) Thought and talk are of causal necessity in virtue of representing objective regularity and the subject’s taking it to produce idealized mental determination. [See B]
→ MD is a condition under which thought or talk of regularity counts as modal. [See C]
- (R2) Thought and talk are of causal necessity in virtue of representing idealized mental determination and the subject’s taking it to be produced by objective regularity. [See C]
→ MD is the core representational content of such thought and talk.
- (R3) Thought and talk are of causal necessity in virtue of representing states of affairs specifiable through objective regularity or idealized mental determination. [See D]
→ MD is a specification of the core representational content of such thought and talk.

Hume as causal projectivist

- (P1) Thought and talk are of causal necessity in virtue of representing objective regularity and mental determination as a feature of the constantly conjoined objects. [see E]
→ MD figures in the representational content of such thought and talk.
- (P2) Thought and talk are of causal necessity partly in virtue of representing a regularity, and partly in virtue of mental determination—instantiated in thought and expressed in talk.
→ MD is a functional change in the mind instantiated in such thought and expressed in such talk.

Hume as causal realist

- (S1) Thought and talk are of causal necessity in virtue of indirectly representing a feature in objects that metaphysically determines regularity and mental determination. [See F]
→ MD partly constitutes the indirect representational content of such thought and talk.
- (S2) Thought and talk are derivatively of causal necessity partly in virtue of quasi-directly representing a feature in objects, and partly in virtue of indirectly representing a feature that determines regularity and mental determination. [See G]
→ MD partly constitutes the quasi-direct representational content of such thought and talk.

III. INTERPRETATIONS OF MENTAL DETERMINATION

Aim: Defend (2) by showing that mental determination—construed as a *causal transition*, *cognitively unavoidable process*, or *dispositional outcome*—cannot be specified without modal thought or talk.

Causal Transition | Barry Stroud, Harold Noonan, Peter Millican [see H–J]

MD = the mind's temporally ordered transition from one state to another, in which the former causes the latter. [See K]

*How to specify a transition as causal? Partly by referring to a **necessary** connection that goes beyond mere regularity. [See L]

Cognitively Unavoidable Process | David Pears, Tom Holden, Don Garrett [see M–O]

MD = a cognitively unavoidable process by which the mind transitions from a state of one type (e.g., a perception of an A) to a state of another type (e.g., a belief in some B). [See P]

*How to specify a process as cognitively unavoidable? By referring to **nonactual** cognitive alternatives: other processes that do not occur, but would preclude that process if they did. [See Q]

Dispositional Outcome | Jonathan Bennett, Helen Beebe, Tom Holden [see R–T]

MD = an outcome of a mental (e.g., inferential) disposition—that is, of the mind's disposition to enter a state of one type upon being in a state of another type. [See U]

*How to specify a mental occurrence as an outcome of a mental disposition? By referring both to its **necessary** (causal) connection with the disposition and to the disposition's outcomes in **merely possible** circumstances. [See V]

IV. IMPLICATION

NOT that Hume's semantics fails to illuminate modal thought and talk.

RATHER, Hume's modal thought and talk about mental determination concern *his* theorizing about ordinary cognition—which needs a strictly non-modal specification of mental determination.

Texts

- [A] “...the terms of *efficacy*, *agency*, *power*, *force*, *energy*, *necessity*, *connexion*, and *productive quality*, are all nearly synonymous, and therefore ’tis an absurdity to employ any of them in defining the rest.” (T 1.3.14.4; SBN 157)
- [B] “Had it been said, that a cause is *that* after which *any thing constantly exists*; we should have understood the terms [...] this constancy forms the very essence of necessity, nor have we any other idea of it.” (EHU 8.1.25 n. 19; SBN 96)
- [C] “The necessity of any action, whether of matter or of mind, is not, properly speaking, a quality in the agent, but in any thinking or intelligent being, who may consider the action; and it consists chiefly in the determination of his thoughts to infer the existence of that action from some preceding objects [...] 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.” (EHU 8.1.22 n. 18; SBN 93-4)
- [D] “Our idea, therefore, 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.” (EHU 8.1.5; SBN 82)
- [E] “...the mind has a great propensity to spread itself on external objects, and to conjoin with them any internal impressions, which they occasion [...] 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; 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, to pass from the idea of an object to that of its usual attendant.” (T 1.3.14.25; SBN 167)
- [F] “...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...” (T 1.3.14.27; SBN 168)
- [G] “The farthest we can go towards a conception of external objects [...] 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.” (T 1.2.6.9; SBN 68)
- [H] “...the first complex mental event (having an impression of an A [...]) causes the second (believing that a B will occur).” (Stroud 1981: 79-80)
- [I] “...the feeling of determination is not an impression *of* a necessary connection obtaining between the complex cause event – *observing a constant conjunction of A’s and B’s + perceiving an A* – and the effect event – *believing in the imminent occurrence (forming a lively idea) of a B*.” (Noonan 1999: 142)
- [J] “...a “determination of the mind” or “customary transition” – apparently a causal process or a change in mental state – seems very unlike what Hume supposes an “impression” to be: namely a sensation or feeling.” (Millican 2018: 366)
- [K] “When any object is presented to us, it immediately conveys the mind to a lively idea of that object, which is usually found to attend to it; and this determination of the mind forms the necessary connexion of these objects. But when we change the point of view, from the objects to the perceptions; in that case the impression is to be consider’d as the cause, and the lively idea as the effect...” (T 1.3.14.29; SBN 169)
- [L] “...when one particular species of events 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*. 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.” (EHU 7.2.27-28; SBN 74-5)
- [M] “No doubt [Hume’s] description of [the impression of necessity] is faulty, but it does pick out something essential to the experience of making causal inference, the feeling of inevitability.” (Pears 1990: 104)

- [N] “This inexorability makes itself felt when we ‘consider and compare’ the relevant ideas, and find, for instance, that, as a causal-psychological matter, we just cannot form an idea of two pairs of objects that is not also an idea of four objects.” (Holden 2014: 383)
- [O] “Causal necessity, too, involves a kind of inability to think otherwise for Hume, but it is an inability with a different source. This inability is grounded [...] in the psychological change produced by experience of a constant conjunction [...] a lively conception of—that is, belief in—the separation of effect from cause becomes psychologically impossible, even with the greatest voluntary effort.” (Garrett 2015: 188-9)
- [P] “...having found, in many instances, that any two kinds of objects, flame and heat, snow and cold, have always been conjoined together; if flame or snow be presented anew to the senses, the mind is carried by custom to expect heat or cold, and to *believe*, that such a quality does exist, and will discover itself upon a nearer approach. This belief [...] is an operation of the soul, when we are so situated, as unavoidable as to feel the passion of love, when we receive benefits; or hatred, when we meet with injuries.” (EHU 5.1.8; SBN 46)
- [Q] “The idea of cause and effect is deriv’d from experience, which presenting us with certain objects constantly conjoin’d with each other, produces such a habit of surveying them in that relation, that we cannot without a sensible violence survey them in any other.” (T 1.3.11.4; SBN 125)
- [R] “...an increased proneness [...] to infer from observing a K_1 event that a K_2 event will soon follow.” (Bennett 2001: 271)
- [S] “...an associative mechanism by which the impression of the cause engenders belief in the effect in our minds.” (Beebee 2006: 234)
- [T] “a habit of mind [...] including, for instance, our custom-induced readiness to infer the imminent occurrence of the one sort of event from the occurrence of the other.” (Holden 2014: 402)
- [U] “It is more conformable to the ordinary wisdom of nature to secure so necessary an act of the mind, by some instinct or mechanical tendency, which may be infallible in its operations, may discover itself at the first appearance of life and thought, and may be independent of all the laboured deductions of the understanding.” (EHU 5.2.22; SBN 55)
- [V] “The idea of sinking is so closely connected with that of water, and the idea of suffocating with that of thinking, that the mind makes the transition without the assistance of the memory. The custom operates before we have time for reflection [...] experience may produce a belief and a judgment of causes and effects by a secret operation, and without being once thought of.” (T 1.3.8.13; SBN 104)

Abbreviations of Hume’s works

- EHU** Hume, D. (2006) *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Section.Subsection.Paragraph, followed by pages in Selby-Bigge/Nidditch), T. Beauchamp (ed.). Oxford: OUP
- T** Hume, D. (2007) *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Book.Part.Section.Paragraph, followed by pages in Selby-Bigge/Nidditch), D. F. Norton and M. J. Norton (eds.). Oxford: OUP.

Works by other others

- Beebee, H. (2006) *Hume on Causation*. London: Routledge.
- Bennett, J. (2001) *Learning from Six Philosophers* (Vol. 2). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Garrett, D. (2015) *Hume*. London: Routledge.
- Holden, T. (2014) “Hume’s Absolute Necessity,” *Mind* 123(490): 377-413.
- Millican, P. (2018) “Hume on Modality.” In J. Bueno and S. Shalkowski (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Modality*, 365-389. London: Routledge.
- Noonan, H. (1999) *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hume on Knowledge*. London: Routledge.
- Pears, D. (1990) *Hume’s System*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Stroud, B. (1981) *Hume*. London: Routledge.