The discussion culminates with two arguments crucially turn on the claim that there is nothing to causal necessity beyond the two definitions.

Hume's main discussions of "the idea of necessary connexion" (Treatise 1.3.14 and Enquiry 7) both culminate with two "definitions of cause".

The first definition is based on regular succession of the "cause". A followed by "effect" B (plus contiguity in the Treatise).

The second definition is based on the mind's tendency to infer B from A.

Hume's causal realism

"Since therefore 'tis possible for all objects to become causes or effects to each other, it may be proper to fix some general rules, by which we may know when they really are so." (T 1.3.15.1)

"Philosophers [observe] that, almost in every part of nature, there is contained a vast variety of springs and principles [and often a] secret operation of contrary causes." (E 8.13)

Hume's References to Powers

In the Enquiry, Hume makes numerous references to objects' powers:

- "the ultimate cause of any natural operation ... that power, which produces any single effect in the universe ... the causes of these general causes ... ultimate springs and principles" (E 4.16: "the secret powers of bodies ... those powers and principles on which the influence of ... objects entirely depends")
- "the power or force, which actuates the whole machine" (E 7.8)

Causing and the Mind

Hume is keenly aware of causality and necessity in respect of the mind:

- In principle, matter could be the cause of thought (T 1.4.6: "Of the immensity of the Soul")
- "The doctrine of necessity applies as much to the mental world as to the physical world" (T 2.3.1.2: "Of Liberty and Necessity")

Both arguments crucially turn on the claim that there is nothing to causal necessity beyond the two definitions.

Kames and a Footnote

Kames (1751) quoted Hume's references to powers in the Enquiry (at 4.16) against him, as evidence of inconsistency; he knew each other well and swapped manuscripts prior to publication.

In 1750 Hume added a footnote to E 4.16: "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."

Causation and the Mind

Enquiry

Abstract 31–, and Enquiry 7...

The Onus of Proof

Hume's references to causes and causal necessities, and his enthusiasm for causal science, imply only (lower-case) Causal Realism, not (upper-case) Causal Realism.

So they provide no counterbalance to the clear onus of proof deriving from the overall thrust of his arguments on "the Idea of Necessary Connexion", in Treatise 1.3.14, Abstract 31–, and Enquiry 7...

Anti-Realism supporting realism

all objects, which are found to be constantly conjuncted, are upon that account only to be regarded as causes and effects. ... the constant conjunction of objects constitutes the very essence of cause and effect ... (T 1.4.5.32, my emphasis)

two particulars [are] essential to necessity, viz. the constant union and the inference of the mind ... wherever we discover these we must acknowledge a necessity. (T 2.3.1.4)

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An Argument for Anti-Realism

Hume's entire argument is structured around the Copy Principle with an impression.

The Principle is a tool for deciding questions of meaning (T 1.1.6.1, A 7, E 2.9).

He aims to find causal terms' meaning or significance (T 1.3.14; 4.27, A 26, E 7.3, 26 & 28).

When the subjective impression is identified, the apparently anti-Realist implication is stated.

The discussion culminates with two definitions of "cause", incorporating this anti-Realism.
New Hume: The State of the Debate

Power and Necessary Connexion
Galen Strawson acknowledges that Hume adopts a “global subjectivism” about necessity (1988, pp. 156-20) while insisting that he is unquestioningly realist about causal power.

Hume’s “Strict Scepticism”
C. Strawson dubs Hume a “strict sceptic” who “does not make positive claims about what ... knowably ... does not exist” (p. 54).

Imperfect Ideas, not Definitions
Hume describes our ideas as “imperfect”, but the definitions as “just”.

Quantitative Forces
In the Enquiry, Hume is clear that mechanics involves forces: theoretical entities that can be quantified and enter into equations describing objects’ behaviour. (e.g. E 4.12-13)

Defective Definitions?
F. One of the most commonly cited passages in support of the New Hume:

Moving Onto the Offensive
The arguments in favour of the New Hume are all rather weak – none of those we’ve considered seems sufficient to dent the onus of proof generated by the context, structure and content of Hume’s argument.

Is the Enquiry Realist?
D. “All the main support for the view that Hume was an outright, unqualified, positivist derives from the Treatise, and vanishes in the Enquiry” (Strawson 2000, p. 32). But this is not true:

1. “The anti-realist interpretation is a twentieth-century positivist invention”
2. “Causal anti-realism is too outrageous to have been contemplated by Hume”

The “AP” Property
E. In Enquiry 7 Part 1, Hume repeatedly argues that perception of an object or an internal feeling cannot yield an impression of necessary connexion, because if it could, this would enable us to infer the effect a priori, which we cannot do.

The footnote to E 7.29 makes clear that the relevant “circumstance” is identifiable only by experiment, and even then can be hard to isolate (e.g. it could be the velocity, or the square of the velocity).

New Hume: The State of the Debate
### New Hume: The State of the Debate

#### The Conceivability Principle
- Causal realism is hard to square with Hume’s prominent *conceivability principle* (that whatever is conceivable is possible).
- If Hume were prepared to countenance a “hidden” objective necessity connecting A with B, then the fact that we can conceive A’s being not followed by B could not imply that this is a genuine possibility. So conceivability would not imply possibility.

#### Kail on Conceivability
- Kail finds “a joke in the pack” (2003: 519, cf. 2003a: 49, 2007a: 95-6) to respond to this objection, suggesting that Hume, when most careful, allows the inference from conceivability to possibility only when ideas are adequate, basing this on the passage: – “Wherever ideas are adequate representations of objects, the relations, contradictions and agreements of the ideas are all applicable to the objects….”

#### Liberty and Necessity
- Hume’s argument that the same necessity is applicable to the moral and physical realms depends on taking our understanding of necessary connection to be completely exhausted by the two factors of constant conjunction and customary inference. These two factors can be shown to apply in the moral realm, and he insists that we can’t even ascribe any further necessity to matter.

#### Kail’s Defence (a)
- Such objections “crucially miss the fact that Hume reframes the dispute at the level of common life rather than as an issue in the metaphysics of causation”. (2007b: 264)
  - But this, based on E 8.1 alone, looks extremely tenuous: moreover E 8.16, 8.23 and 8.27 all seem to tell strongly against it.
  - Besides, the corresponding discussions in the Treatise and Abstract give the same argument, but no passage corresponding to E 8.1…

#### Kail’s Defence (b)
- Even in the midst of the discussion … Hume’s language, when treating of powers, sounds more naturally epistemic and sceptical than semantically restrictive and reductive: … our faculties can never carry us farther in our knowledge of this relation than (constant conjunction) … But though this conclusion concerning human ignorance … we know nothing farther of causation of any kind.”
  - (2007b: 266)

#### Kail’s Defence (c)
- “In the midst of the discussion Hume is prepared to grant, for the sake of argument, power in matter, but that it makes no difference to the reconciliation. But if the reconciliation turned on the claim that no further thought is possible with regard to causation in this small concession would violate this alleged central move. … Here is an opportunity for him to reassert his alleged conclusion that no such … thought is possible … But he does not take this opportunity…”
  - (2007b: 266)

#### Beebee’s Defence (a)
- Beebee argues (and Kail hints) that Hume cannot intend his definitions to yield the meaning of “causal” because they are not intentionally or extensionally equivalent. Beebee goes on to develop an alternative story of what Hume is doing, based on the thought that ascription of Causal powers is a natural belief, which we have reason to ascribe equally to mind and to matter.
New Hume: The State of the Debate

Definitions and Meaning

- However Hume's account of meaning and understanding is genetic, based on ideas copied from impressions, not on analytic necessary and sufficient conditions.
- His definitions seem designed to capture our complete grasp of causal notions in terms of their origin: the experiences that lead us to make causal inferences and thus acquire the idea of causal power.

We may consider Hume's genetic account of meaning based on his Copy Principle to be hopeless, but that's no good reason for reinterpretting the well-known texts expounding it, which are so explicit.

Instead, we should acknowledge that someone who advances such an account is likely to see definitions in a very different light from ourselves, as doing something quite different from specifying necessary and sufficient conditions.

Beebee's Defence (b)

- Beebee's account based on a natural belief in Causation is also problematic because for Hume, belief is an enlivened idea, and his argument in T 1.3.14 and E 7 insists that we have no such idea.
- More fundamentally, there is no local evidence in Hume's text that natural belief plays any such role in the argument. It very clearly turns on limits to thinkability.

Conclusion

- The New Hume has little to recommend it. A la carte selection of texts, principles, and pretexts for flexible interpretation can be used to support any number of Humean readings, but only those that can make sense of the detailed flow of his arguments are worth taking seriously.
- On causation, his arguments seem to be quite unambiguously anti-Realist.