The “New Hume”
- Hume has generally been read as denying the existence of any causal “power” or “necessity” going beyond his two definitions (i.e. any upper-case Causation or “thick connexions”).
- The “New Hume” is the view of John Wright, Edward Craig, Galen Strawson, Peter Rail and others that Hume is instead a “Causal Realist”.
- Their most persuasive argument: Hume’s texts show him to be taking causation, causal power and causal necessity very seriously…

Hume’s Advocacy of Causal Science
- Hume seems in general to have a very positive attitude towards causal science:
  - a. He says that causation is the basis of all empirical inference.
  - b. He proposes “rules by which to judge of causes and effects.”
  - c. He talks of “secret powers”.
  - d. He advocates a search for hidden causes underlying inconstant phenomena.

(a) The Basis of Empirical Inference
- “The only connexion or relation of objects, which can lead us beyond the immediate impressions of our memory and senses, is that of cause and effect…” (T 1.3.6.7)
- “Tis evident, that all reasonings concerning matter of fact are founded on the relation of cause and effect” (A 8)
- “All reasonings concerning matter of fact seem to be founded on the relation of Cause and Effect.” (E 4.4, cf. E 7.29)

(b) The Rules of Treatise 1.3.15
- “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)
- “[Phenomenal] in nature [are] compounded and modified by so many different circumstances, that we must carefully separate whatever is superfluous, and enquire by new experiments, if every particular circumstance of the first experiment was essential to it” (T 1.3.15.11)

(c) Hume’s Talk of “Secret Powers”
- Most prominent in Enquiry 4:5:
  - “the ultimate cause of any natural operation… that power, which produces any… effect in the universe…” (E 4.12).
  - “the secret powers of bodies…” (E 4.10).
  - “those powers and forces, on which this regular course and succession of objects totally depend” (E 5.22).

(d) The Search for Hidden Causes
- “philosophers, observing, that, almost in every part of nature, there is contained a vast variety of springs and principles, which are hid by reason of their minuteness or remoteness, find, that it is at least possible the contrariety of events always betrays a contrary of causes, and proceeds from their mutual opposition.” (E 8.13, copied from T 1.3.12.5)

Necessity as Essential to Causation
- “Power” is a term from the same family — derived from the same impression — as “necessity”, which Hume sees as an essential part of our idea of causation:
  - “According to my definitions, necessity makes an essential part of causation.” (T 2.3.1.18)
  - “Necessity may be defined two ways, conformably to the two definitions of cause, of which it makes an essential part.” (E 8.27)

Practical Limits on the Search
- “the utmost effort of human reason is, to reduce the principles, productive of natural phenomena, to a greater simplicity, and to resolve the many particular effects into a few general causes, by means of reasonings from analogy, experience, and observation.” (T 1.3.12.4)
1. Berkeley’s Instrumentalism

- The difference there is between natural philosophers and other men, with regard to their knowledge of the phenomena, consists, not in an exact knowledge of the efficient causes that produce them, for that can be no other than the will of a spad, but only in a greater largeness of comprehension, whereby analogies, harmonies, and agreements are discovered in the works of Nature, and the particular effects explained, that is, reduced to general rules, which rules are grounded on the analogy, and uniformities observed in the production of natural effects. (Principles i 105)

2. An Argument for Anti-Realism

- Hume’s entire argument is structured around the Copy Principle quest for an impression.
- The Principle is a tool for deciding questions of meaning (T.1.6.1, A 7, E 2.9).
- He aims to find causal terms meaning or significance (T.1.3.14.14 & 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.

3. Kames and a Footnote

- Kames (1751) quoted Hume’s references to powers in the Enquiry (4.16) against him, as evidence of inconsistency, they 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.”

Semantics or Epistemology?

- New Humeans claim that Hume’s statements about “meaning”, “definition” etc. should not be interpreted semantically, but epistemologically.
- Thus Peter Rail insists that we should “view Hume’s talk about ‘meaning’ as meaning “acquaintance with”, as opposed to thinkable content” (2001, p. 38).
- Even if possible, this gives no positive evidence for the New Hume. The texts of 7.1.3.14 and E 7 remain prima facie strongly anti-Realist.

Other “New Humean” Arguments

A. “The anti-realist interpretation is a twentieth-century positivist invention”

- Clearly false. Kames (1751), Leibniz (1757), and Reid (1785) all see Hume as anti-realist.

B. “Causal anti-realism is too outrageous to have been contemplated by Hume”

- “Of all the paradoxes, which I have had, or shall hereafter have occasion to advance in the course of this treatise, the present one is the most violent ...” (T.1.3.14.24).

Hume’s “Strict Scepticism”

C. Strawson dubs Hume a “strict skeptic” who “does not make positive claims about what is knowable ... does not exist” (p. 54).

- But Hume’s anti-realism about causation is a limit on our ideas and what we can mean by “power” etc., not a limitation on reality.
- Anyway the claim that he is a “strict skeptic” begs the question. Where are the texts?
- Hume does deny the existence of some things, e.g. substantial forms, occult qualities.

Defective Definitions?

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

- “so imperfect are the ideas which we form, that it is impossible to give any just definition of cause, except what is drawn from something extraneous and foreign to it ... we cannot remedy this inconvenience, or attain any more perfect definition, which may point out that circumstance in the cause, which gives it a connexion with its effect.” (E 7.29)

Imperfect Ideas, not Definitions

- Hume describes our ideas as “imperfect”, but the definitions as “just”.
- He’s discussing his definitions of cause, not of necessary connexion (which he clearly distinguishes, e.g. in the Enquiry index).
- “that circumstance in the cause, which gives it a connexion with its effect” is very unlikely to mean the necessary connexion, especially given the footnote to this paragraph.
Hume, Causal Realism, and Causal Science

"That Circumstance in the Cause"

- A "circumstance" is a factor that is variable between situations, to which eliminative methods can be applied to identify the true causal factor (e.g. 7.1.3.13.11, E 7.30).
- 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).

Quantitative Forces

- In the Enquiry, Hume is clear that mechanics involves forces: theoretical entities that can be quantified and entered into equations describing objects' behaviour. (e.g. E 4.12-13)
- "Force" is in the same family as "power" etc.
- This, rather than Causal Realism, explains the Enquiry's prominent "power" language.
- E 7.25n and E 7.29n both suggest an attitude to such forces corresponding exactly to the anti-realist spirit of Enquiry 7. Forces are to be treated instrumentally (cf. Newton and Berkeley).

Inconsistent Definitions?

G. The argument of T 1.3.14 and E 7 ends, notably, with two definitions of cause:
- The first definition is based on regular succession of "T cause," followed by "effect/"B (plus contiguity in the Treatise).
- The second definition is based on the mind's tendency to infer B from A.
- Beebes (2007: 430) and Kail (2007: 266) claim that the two definitions -- being inconsistent -- cannot be intended as semantic.

- Nothing in Hume's theory requires that, having once acquired the idea, we must restrict its application to those paradigm cases that characteristically generate it.
- Indeed his advocacy of "rules by which to judge of causes and effects" etc. implies that he must think we can go beyond these cases by systematising our application of the idea (cf. his discussion of the "system of realities" at T 7.1.3.9.5).
- Accordingly the two definitions can be seen as complementary rather than conflicting. The second identifies the relevant idea; the first specifies the criterion for applying it.

- There is a parallel case in Hume's treatment of virtue or personal merit in the Moral Enquiry. Here again he gives two definitions:
  - "personal merit consists altogether in the possession of mental qualities, useful or agreeable to the person himself or to others ..." (M 61.1, 9.12)
  - "[My hypothesis ... defines virtue to be whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation, ..." (M Appendix 1.10)
- Again we have a characteristic idea, whose application is then to be systematised.

Moving On To 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 oxus of proof generated by the context, structure and content of Hume's argument.
- But there are far stronger arguments to be added to the other side of the debate. The "New Hume" literature -- very strikingly and surprisingly -- almost entirely ignores the point of Hume's two definitions.

Hume's Use of His Two Definitions

- If we search for subsequent paragraphs in the Treatise that mention the definition of "cause", "power" or "necessity", we find just three, at T 1.4.5.31, 2.3.1.18, and 2.3.2.4 ("F 1.4.1.2 and 1.3.9.5 also mention "constant union" briefly). Similar searches in the Enquiry point very clearly to Section 8 (10.5.1 and the only other).

Causation and the Mind

- Hume is especially keen to establish causality and necessity in respect of the mind:
  - In principle, matter could be the cause of thought (T 1.4.5. "Of the Immateriality of the Soul")
  - The "doctrine of necessity" applies as much to the mental world as to the physical world (T 7.3.1.9. and 9.1).
- Both arguments crucially turn on the claim that there is nothing to causal necessity beyond the two definitions ...

Of the Immateriality of the Soul

- The standard anti-materialist argument insists that material changes cannot cause thought, because the two are so different.
  - "... and yet nothing in the world is more easy than to refute it. We need only to reflect on what has been proved at large ... that to consider the matter a priori, any thing may produce any thing, and that we shall never discover a reason, why any object may or may not be the cause of any other, however great, or however little the resemblance may be between them " (T 1.4.5.30).
- Hume then goes further to insist that material motion is indeed found to be the cause of thought:
  - "we find ... by experience, that they are constantly united, which being all the circumstances that enter into the idea of cause and effect ... we may certainly conclude, that motion may be, and actually is, the cause of thought and perception." (T 1.4.5.30, my emphasis)
  - "as the constant conjunction of objects constitutes the very essence of cause and effect, matter and motion may often be regarded as the causes of thought, as far as we have any notion of that relation." (T 1.4.5.33, my emphasis)
Hume, Causal Realism, and Causal Science

The 1.4.5 Dilemma

- Hume starts paragraph 1.4.5.31 with a dilemma, before arguing for its second horn in the remainder of the paragraph:
  - "There seems only this dilemma left us … either to assert, that nothing can be this cause of another, but where the mind can perceive the connexion in its idea of the objects: Or to maintain, that all objects, which we find constantly conjoint, are upon that account to be regarded as causes or effects." (T 1.4.5.31)

- The word "perceive" here might seem to open the door to a New Humean response. Hume’s interest is epistemological rather than semantic.
- However on this view, Hume is essentially in agreement with his opponents on what causation involves; his difference with them lies only in his dogmatic claim that either we should demand complete transparency to human reason before admitting a causal link, or else we should accept it on the basis of mere constant conjunction.
- This would make his argument very misleading: why has he portrayed the disagreement as one concerned with the understanding of causation?

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 connexion 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.

“A New Definition of Necessity”

- Even more explicitly than with “Of the Immateriality of the Soul”, Hume portrays his argument here as turning on his new understanding of necessity:
  - “Our author pretends, that this reasoning puts the whole controversy in a new light, by giving a new definition of necessity.” (A 34)
- Again, the New Humean interpretation fails to make any sense of this portrayal.

Anti-Realism supporting realism

- all objects, which are found to be constantly conjoint, 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)

Reconstructing Hume’s Vision

- The “chief argument” of the Treatise is almost entirely devoted to causation. – Treatise 1.3 is the central part of the work.
- Applying the Causally Principle to the idea of necessary connexion reveals the nature of causal necessity, settling fundamental issues about causation in the moral sphere, and eliminating aprioristic causal metaphysics.
- The “New Hume” provides no such overall coherent vision behind Hume’s Treatise.

The Cosmological Argument

- Hume told Boswell that he “never had entertained any belief in Religion since he began to read Locke and Clarke.
- Both Locke and Clarke advocated the Cosmological Argument, and insisted that matter cannot give rise to thought.
- Treatise 1.3 – which disputes the basis of the Causal Maxim – identifies both Locke and Clarke by name (in footnotes).

The Origin of Ideas

- Locke’s empiricism naturally raises the issue of the origin of the idea of causal necessity, central to the Cosmological Argument.
- Locke’s “Of Power” (Essay II xxii) gives an inadequate account. Hume sees this, and attempts to remedy the omission.
- Locke’s chapter focuses also on Free Will. Hume sees his account as supporting Collins against Clarke (a debate very familiar to him through Dudgeon, Baxter, Desmaizeaux).

The End of Ideas

- Hume’s causal anti-Realist refutes:
  - The Cosmological Argument;
  - Anti-materialist arguments.
- The Free Will Theodicy (cf. Hume’s early memoranda, from the late 1730s);
- Aphoristic causal metaphysics in general.
- At the same time it supports:
  - Empirical, causal science; the only way to establish anything about “matters of fact”;
  - Extension of causal science into moral realm.
Hume, Causal Realism, and Causal Science

Additional Slides

The remaining 5 slides were not provided on the handout, but used in discussing Bob Fogelin’s response to the paper ...

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)
- “Force” is in the same family as “power” etc.
- This, rather than Causal Realism, explains the Enquiry’s prominent “power” language.
- E 7.25n and E 7.28n both suggest an attitude to such forces corresponding exactly to the anti-realist spirit of Enquiry 7. Forces are to be treated instrumentally (cf. Newton and Berkeley).

“What’s going on? I think it is important to note that in both the Treatise and the Enquiry these definitions of necessity occur in a discussion of freedom and necessity. The view of causation challenged in book 1, is that causation involves necessary connectedness, or power in the sense of oomph. Treated necessarily in a parallel regularist way serves Hume’s purposes in discussion freedom and necessity. I find this a bit shifty. I am interested to hear what Peter thinks.” (Bob Fogelin)

“I dare be positive no one will ever endeavour to refute these reasonings otherwise than by altering my definitions, and assigning a different meaning to the terms of cause, and effect, and necessity, and liberty, and chance. According to my definitions, necessity makes an essential part of causation … if any one alters the definitions, I cannot pretend to argue with him, till I know the meaning he assigns to these terms.” (T 2.3.1.18)

“Necessity may be defined two ways, conformably to the two definitions of cause, of which it makes an essential part.” (E 8.27)

In the opening section of the Enquiry, Hume has Nature offering the following admonition:

Abstruse thought and profound researches I prohibit, and will severely punish, by the pensive melancholy which they introduce, by the endless uncertainty in which they involve you … (EHU 7:9)

… this glum assessment … arises from Hume’s recognition of … the natural limitations of our mental faculties.”

(Bob Fogelin)