Hume’s Idea of Necessary Connexion

1. Hume’s Impression-Quest, and its Purpose
- Presented in Treatise and Enquiry; summarised in Abstract. Based on the Copy Principle in all three, with the aim of clarifying our ideas, hence the meanings of our terms and the nature of causation.
- Second paragraph of Treatise 1.14: ‘I think it proper to give warning, that I have just now examined one of the most sublime questions in philosophy, viz. that concerning the power and efficacy of causes…’

An Argument for Anti-Realism
- Hume’s entire argument is structured around the Copy Principle quest for an impression.
- The Principle is explicitly introduced as a tool for deciding questions of meaning.
- He talks of finding causal terms ‘meaning or significance’ (T 1.3.14.14, A 26).
- 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.

2. Semantics, or Epistemology?
- ‘New Humans’ claim that Hume’s statements about ‘meaning’, ‘definition’ etc., should not be crudely interpreted in the modern semantic spirit, but should instead be understood epistemologically.
- Thus Peter Kail claims that we should view Hume’s talk about ‘meaning’ as meaning ‘acquaintance with’, as opposed to ‘thinkable content’ (2001, p. 39)

An Epistemological Copy Principle?
- On Kail’s interpretation, the Copy Principle looks entirely trivial: any idea of something with which we are acquainted has to have been derived from sensory acquaintance.
- Likewise, his use of the Copy Principle to reject metaphysical terms whose corresponding ideas are not derived from impression seems hopeless, but opponent already agrees that the terms in question aren’t derived from acquaintance.

‘Meaning’ Quotations
- ‘when we talk of … power or force … [or] … necessary connexion … 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.’ (T 1.3.14.14)
- ‘but we have no idea at all of force and energy; and these words are altogether insignificant, or they can mean nothing but …’ (A 26)
- ‘There are no ideas, which occur in metaphysics, more obscure and uncertain, than those of power, force, energy, or necessary connexion … We shall, endeavour … to fix, if possible, the precise meaning of these terms, …’ (E 7.3)

Hume’s Idea of Necessary Connexion

Liberty and Necessity
- Hume’s argument that the same necessity is applicable to the moral and physical realms depends on 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.

3a. The Issue of Synonymy

3b. Simplicity and Complexity
- ‘When we have pushed up definitions to the most simple ideas, and find still some ambiguity and obscurity; what resource are we then possessed of? … Produce the impression … from which the ideas are copied … To be fully acquainted, therefore, with the idea of power or necessary connexion, let us examine its impression …’ (T 7.4)
- Mr. Locke … says, that … we arrive … by this reasoning at the idea of power. But no reasoning can ever give us a new original simple idea, as this philosopher himself confesses. This, therefore, can never be the origin of that idea. (E 7.8 n 12)

The Synonymy Puzzle

The Complexity Puzzle
- (C) Why does Hume so completely ignore the obvious possibility, highlighted by his own preamble, that the idea of necessary connexion might be a complex idea and hence prove amenable to definition?
Deeper Puzzles about Causation

- Hume makes similar comments about the impossibility of defining cause (T 1.3.2.10, E 8.25 n 19), although he himself emphasises that this is a complex idea.
- Since synonymy is transitive, it follows from Hume's claims about synonymy that cause is at least 'nearly synonymous' with necessity. But necessity is supposed to be just one component of the idea of cause, and he gives separate definitions.

What's the Best Term?

- Three criteria:
  - Hume's argument crucially depends on a deliberate confusion between causal and inferential connections.
  - A necessary connexion or power from A to B does not imply a connexion or power from B to A; the relation is not symmetrical.
  - The terms 'necessity', 'necessary connexion', etc. imply inexorability but none of Hume's other 'synonymous' terms obviously does so.

4. A Combined Solution

- Hume does not consider 'efficacy, agency, power, force, energy, necessity, connexion, and productive quality' etc. to be literally synonymous. Rather, he considers any differences in meaning between them to be irrelevant to his concerns here.
- His interest lies exclusively in a single common element of all the problematic ideas, an element which he apparently believes to be simple, so that the only way of clarifying or characterising it precisely is by identifying the impression from which it is copied.

5. Hume's Idea of Necessary Connexion

Hume's Idea of Necessary Connexion

Three criteria:

- The Vulgar and Philosophers
  - Hume's argument crucially depends on a deliberate confusion between causal and inferential connections.
  - A necessary connexion or power from A to B does not imply a connexion or power from B to A; the relation is not symmetrical.
  - The terms 'necessity', 'necessary connexion', etc. imply inexorability but none of Hume's other 'synonymous' terms obviously does so.

4. A Combined Solution

- Hume does not consider 'efficacy, agency, power, force, energy, necessity, connexion, and productive quality' etc. to be literally synonymous. Rather, he considers any differences in meaning between them to be irrelevant to his concerns here.
- His interest lies exclusively in a single common element of all the problematic ideas, an element which he apparently believes to be simple, so that the only way of clarifying or characterising it precisely is by identifying the impression from which it is copied.

5. Hume's Idea of Necessary Connexion

Vulgar

- The Vulgar and Philosophers
  - Hume's argument crucially depends on a deliberate confusion between causal and inferential connections.
  - A necessary connexion or power from A to B does not imply a connexion or power from B to A; the relation is not symmetrical.
  - The terms 'necessity', 'necessary connexion', etc. imply inexorability but none of Hume's other 'synonymous' terms obviously does so.

4. A Combined Solution

- Hume does not consider 'efficacy, agency, power, force, energy, necessity, connexion, and productive quality' etc. to be literally synonymous. Rather, he considers any differences in meaning between them to be irrelevant to his concerns here.
- His interest lies exclusively in a single common element of all the problematic ideas, an element which he apparently believes to be simple, so that the only way of clarifying or characterising it precisely is by identifying the impression from which it is copied.

5. Hume's Idea of Necessary Connexion

Vulgar

- The Vulgar and Philosophers
  - Hume's argument crucially depends on a deliberate confusion between causal and inferential connections.
  - A necessary connexion or power from A to B does not imply a connexion or power from B to A; the relation is not symmetrical.
  - The terms 'necessity', 'necessary connexion', etc. imply inexorability but none of Hume's other 'synonymous' terms obviously does so.

4. A Combined Solution

- Hume does not consider 'efficacy, agency, power, force, energy, necessity, connexion, and productive quality' etc. to be literally synonymous. Rather, he considers any differences in meaning between them to be irrelevant to his concerns here.
- His interest lies exclusively in a single common element of all the problematic ideas, an element which he apparently believes to be simple, so that the only way of clarifying or characterising it precisely is by identifying the impression from which it is copied.

5. Hume's Idea of Necessary Connexion

Vulgar

- The Vulgar and Philosophers
  - Hume's argument crucially depends on a deliberate confusion between causal and inferential connections.
  - A necessary connexion or power from A to B does not imply a connexion or power from B to A; the relation is not symmetrical.
  - The terms 'necessity', 'necessary connexion', etc. imply inexorability but none of Hume's other 'synonymous' terms obviously does so.

4. A Combined Solution

- Hume does not consider 'efficacy, agency, power, force, energy, necessity, connexion, and productive quality' etc. to be literally synonymous. Rather, he considers any differences in meaning between them to be irrelevant to his concerns here.
- His interest lies exclusively in a single common element of all the problematic ideas, an element which he apparently believes to be simple, so that the only way of clarifying or characterising it precisely is by identifying the impression from which it is copied.
Once the philosophical notion of probability, even the philosophical notion of probability, this confirms that it’s the conflation, rather than the uncertain causation of the vulgar, and the deterministic necessity of philosophers, more without the idea of a connexion or consequentiality.

This is comprehensive enough to embrace (Only) when he’s needing this conflation, and the transition arising from the accustomed union. The foundation of our inference is the very general and simple idea of a connexion or consequentiality.

These are, therefore, the same. The original title of Enquiry 7 was ‘Of the idea of POWER or necessary CONNEXION’.

In all three texts, Hume’s Idea of Necessary Connexion

In all three texts, Hume describes a whole family of terms as ‘nearly synonymous’, and treats them as completely equivalent for the purposes of his argument.

He has two understandable motives for emphasising necessity. First, this is needed for ‘Of liberty and necessity’...

Shortly before this passage he twice talks of ‘power or connexion’ (1.3.14.15)

In the first half of 7.28 refers to the necessary connexion and ‘power or necessary connexion’. The necessary connexion betwixt causes and effects is the foundation of our inference from one to the other. The foundation of our inference is the transition arising from the accustomed union. These are, therefore, the same.

Enquiry 7.28: ‘This connexion, therefore, which we feel in the mind, this customary transition, ... is the sentiment or impression, from which we form the idea of power or necessary connexion.’

But the idea whose source he seeks is less specific; it is the very general and simple idea of a connexion or consequential relation between one thing and another.

This is comprehensive enough to embrace the deterministic necessity of philosophers, the ‘uncertain’ causation of the vulgar, and even the philosophical notion of probability.

Hume’s Idea of Necessary Connexion

Not So Much of a Problem!

The original title of Enquiry 7 was ‘Of the idea of POWER or necessary CONNEXION’. In all three texts, Hume describes a whole family of terms as ‘nearly synonymous’, and treats them as completely equivalent for the purposes of his argument.

He has two understandable motives for emphasising necessity. First, this is needed for ‘Of liberty and necessity’...

Shortly before this passage he twice talks of ‘power or connexion’ (1.3.14.15)

In the first half of 7.28 refers to the necessary connexion and ‘power or necessary connexion’. The necessary connexion betwixt causes and effects is the foundation of our inference from one to the other. The foundation of our inference is the transition arising from the accustomed union. These are, therefore, the same.

Enquiry 7.28: ‘This connexion, therefore, which we feel in the mind, this customary transition, ... is the sentiment or impression, from which we form the idea of power or necessary connexion.’

But the idea whose source he seeks is less specific; it is the very general and simple idea of a connexion or consequential relation between one thing and another.

This is comprehensive enough to embrace the deterministic necessity of philosophers, the ‘uncertain’ causation of the vulgar, and even the philosophical notion of probability.