

Hume on the Will, and on Free Will

Hume on the Will, and on Free Will



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1. Hume on the Will

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What is “the Will”?

“Of all the immediate effects of pain and pleasure, there is none more remarkable than the will; and tho', properly speaking, it be not comprehended among the passions, yet as the full understanding of its nature and properties, is necessary to the explanation of them, we shall here make it the subject of our enquiry. I desire it may be observ'd, that by the *will*, I mean nothing but *the internal impression we feel and are conscious of, when we knowingly give rise to any new motion of our body, or new perception of our mind.* ...” (T 2.3.1.2)

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A Simple Impression of Reflection

“... This impression, like the preceding ones of pride and humility, love and hatred, 'tis impossible to define, and needless to describe any farther; ...” (T 2.3.1.2)

“The passions of PRIDE and HUMILITY being simple and uniform impressions, 'tis impossible we can ever ... give a just definition of them” (T 2.1.2.1)

“some internal impression, or impression of reflection” (T 1.3.14.22)

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What is Reflection?

- *Reflection* is introduced as one of the two sources of impressions (and hence ideas):

“... it has been disputed whether there be any *innate ideas*, or whether all ideas be deriv'd from sensation and reflection.” (T 1.1.1.12)

“Impressions may be divided into two kinds, those of SENSATION and those of REFLECTION.” (T 1.1.2.1)

“impressions admit of another division into original and secondary. This ... is the same [distinction as] *sensation and reflection*. ... Secondary, or reflective impressions ... proceed from ... original ones, either immediately or by the interposition of its idea” (T 2.1.1.1)

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Two Sources of Impressions

“I wou'd ask whether the idea of substance be deriv'd from the impressions of sensation or of reflection?” (T 1.1.6.1)

“The idea of time, being deriv'd from the succession of our perceptions of every kind, ideas ... and impressions of reflection as well as of sensation,” (T 1.2.3.6)

“Does it [the idea of time without any changeable existence] arise from an impression of sensation or of reflection?” (T 1.2.5.28)

“tho' the ideas of cause and effect be deriv'd from the impressions of reflection as well as from those of sensation” (1.3.2.16)

See also 1.3.14.6 (efficacy), 1.3.14.10 (force or efficacy), 1.4.5.4 (the substance of our minds), T 1.4.5.18 (Spinoza).

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Apparently Following Locke ...

"The other Fountain [besides *Our Senses*], from which Experience furnisheth the Understanding with *Ideas*, is the *Perception of the Operations of our own Minds* within us ... which Operations, when the Soul comes to reflect on, ... do furnish the Understanding with another set of *Ideas*, which could not be had from things without: and such are, *Perception, Thinking, Doubting, Believing, Reasoning, Knowing, Willing*, and all the different actings of our own Minds; which we being conscious of, and observing in our selves, do from these receive into our Understandings, as distinct *Ideas*, as we do from Bodies affecting our Senses. ... though it be not Sense, as having nothing to do with external Objects; yet it is very like it, and might properly enough be call'd internal Sense. But as I call the other *Sensation*, so I call this *REFLECTION* ... These two ... are, to me, the only Originals, from whence all our *Ideas* take their beginnings." (*Essay II i 4*)

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... But Not in Extension

"the impressions of reflection, viz. passions, desires, and emotions, which principally deserve our attention, ..." (*T 1.1.2.1*)

"the impressions of reflection resolve themselves into our passions and emotions, ..." (*T 1.1.6.1*)

"Our internal impressions are our passions, emotions, desires and aversions; ..." (*T 1.2.3.3*)

"Of the first [original] kind are all the impressions of the senses, and all bodily pains and pleasures: Of the second [reflective impressions] are the passions, and other emotions resembling them." (*T 2.1.1.1*)

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Two Curious Blind-Spots

- Why does Locke overlook the ideas that Hume highlighted: "passions, emotions, desires and aversions"?
- Where does Hume think we get the ideas that Locke highlighted: "*Perception, Thinking, Doubting, Believing, Reasoning, Knowing, Willing*"?
- Hume discusses *belief* and *will*, and treats them both as some sort of *feeling* (presumably here constrained by his narrow view of what reflection can deliver). Likewise his "impression" of necessary connexion (which I have argued is most plausibly interpreted as *reflective awareness of making an inference*).

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The Will Cannot Be an Impression

- Hume talks about the will as performing *actions* (*T 2.3.1.15, 2.3.2.8, 2.3.3.1*), causing things through acts of *volition* (*T 1.3.14.12, 2.3.3.4*), and *exerting* itself (*T 1.1.4.5, 2.3.9.7*).
- He also describes it as *inconstant* (*T 2.1.10.6 & 9, 2.3.2.2*) and frequently discusses how it is *affected, determined, governed, influenced, or operated on* by a variety of factors (*T 1.3.10.2 & 5, 2.3.3.4, 7, 9 & 10, 2.3.4.1, 2.3.6.5 & 7, 2.3.7.3, 4, 6 & 8, 2.3.8.13*).

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- Apart from *T 2.3.1.2*, only one other passage even gets close to hinting that the will is an impression:

"the will being ... consider'd as a cause, has no ... discoverable connexion with its effects, ... So far from perceiving the connexion betwixt an act of volition, and a motion of the body; 'tis allow'd that no effect is more inexplicable from the powers and essence of thought and matter. Nor is the empire of the will over our mind more intelligible. ... No internal impression has an apparent energy, ..." (*T 1.3.14.12*)

- Hume seems to be thinking of an impression of *volition* – of *willing*, rather than of the faculty of will.
 - Indeed it's hard to see how one could possibly have an impression of any faculty (and Hume never suggests this with regard to any other faculty).

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2. "Of Liberty and Necessity":

Motivation and Significance

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Hume's Loss of Religious Faith

- 1751 letter to Gilbert Elliot of Minto:
 - Hume recently “burn’d an old Manuscript Book, wrote before I was twenty; which contain’d, Page after Page, the gradual Progress of my Thoughts on that Head”. Began “with an anxious Search after Arguments, to confirm the common Opinion”, “a perpetual Struggle of a restless Imagination against Inclination” (HL i 154).
- Deathbed interview with James Boswell:
 - Hume said that he was “religious when he was young”, but that “the Morality of every Religion was bad” and “he never had entertained any belief in Religion since he began to read Locke and Clarke”.

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What Connects Locke and Clarke?

- *Treatise* 1.3.3 – which disputes the basis of the Causal Maxim (*whatever begins to exist, must have a cause of existence*) – identifies both Locke and Clarke by name in footnotes; this is the *Treatise’s* only mention of Clarke.
- Both Locke and Clarke advocated the Cosmological Argument for the existence of God, based on the Causal Maxim.
- Both also appealed crucially to the principle that matter cannot give rise to thought.

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Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696-1782)



- Hume’s relative, and mentor while at Edinburgh University; family home at Kames, 9 miles southwest of Chirnside.
- Corresponded with Samuel Clarke (about free will and necessity) and Andrew Baxter, a Scottish Clarkean (1723).
- Told Boswell that Locke’s “chapter on *Power* crucified him” – it deals with the idea of power, free will, necessity etc.

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Thinking about “Of Power”

- 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 xxi) 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).

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Hume’s Early Memoranda

- Composed in the late 1730s or early 1740s.
- Show Hume’s intense interest in the Causal Maxim, necessity, free will and its implications for God’s existence and the Problem of Evil.



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Free Will and the Problem of Evil

- Liberty not a proper Solution of Moral Ill: Because it might have been bound down by Motives like those of Saints & Angels.
- Did God give Liberty to please Men themselves. But Men are as well pleas’d to be determin’d to Good.
- God cou’d have prevented all Abuses of Liberty without taking away Liberty. Therefore Liberty no Solution of Difficultys.

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The Causal Nexus

- The Cosmological Argument:
 - The Causal Maxim;
 - Matter cannot produce thought.
- Henry Home of Kames:
 - Correspondence with Clarke and Baxter;
 - Interest in Locke's chapter "Of Power".
- Free Will and Necessity:
 - Clarke and Baxter, Collins and Dudgeon etc.;
 - Problem of Evil.

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A Hypothesis About the Origin of Hume's Philosophy

Hume was strongly motivated at an early stage by the prospect of applying Locke's concept empiricism to settle the debate over free will and necessity by clarifying and delimiting what could possibly be meant by causal "necessity".

For more on all this, see "Hume's Determinism" (CJP 2010), "Hume, Causal Realism, and Causal Science" (Mind 2009), and especially "Hume's Chief Argument" (in Paul Russell's *Oxford Handbook of Hume*, 2016), all available at <https://davidhume.org/scholarship/millican>.

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Hume's Determinism

- Hume argues at length that "the actions of the mind" are as determined as "the operations of external bodies" (T 2.3.1.3, 5-15; E 8.4, 7-20).
- He denies genuine chance or indifference (e.g. T 1.3.12.1, 2.3.1.18; E 6.1, 8.25).
- "The same cause always produces the same effect, and the same effect never arises but from the same cause." (T 1.3.15.6)
- Determinism features in Hume's discussions on Evil (e.g. E 8.32 ff.) and suicide ("Of Suicide" para. 5).
- "I never asserted so absurd a Proposition as that any thing might arise without a Cause: I only maintain'd, that our Certainty of [its] Falshood ... proceeded neither from Intuition nor Demonstration; ..." (HL i 186)

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Science: Seeking Hidden Causes

"The vulgar ... attribute the uncertainty of events to such an uncertainty in the causes, as makes them often fail of their usual influence, ... But philosophers observing, that almost in every part of nature there is contain'd a vast variety of springs and principles, which are hid, by reason of their minuteness or remoteness, find that 'tis at least possible the contrariety of events may not proceed from any contingency in the cause, but from the secret operation of contrary causes. This possibility is converted into certainty by farther observation, when they remark, that upon an exact scrutiny, a contrariety of effects always betrays a contrariety of causes, and proceeds from their mutual hindrance and opposition. ... From the observation of several parallel instances, philosophers form a maxim, that the connexion betwixt all causes and effects is equally necessary, and that its seeming uncertainty in some instances proceeds from the secret opposition of contrary causes."

(T 1.3.12.5; E 8.13 is almost *verbatim*)

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Hume: Morality requires Determinism

- Hume argues (E 8.28-30) that viewing human behaviour as causally necessary, so far from being *contrary* to morality, is actually *essential* to it, since blame and punishment are useful and appropriate only where actions are caused by the agent's durable character and disposition:

"Actions are, by their very nature, temporary and perishing; and where they proceed not from some cause in the character and disposition of the person who performed them, they can neither redound to his honour, if good; nor infamy, if evil."

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Morality as Founded on Sentiment

- Hume defends morality against such metaphysical worries by appeal to his *sentimentalism*:

A man, who is robbed of a considerable sum; does he find his vexation for the loss any wise diminished by these sublime reflections? Why then should his moral resentment against the crime be supposed incompatible with them? (E 8.35)

- If morality is founded on *emotions* that naturally arise within us in certain circumstances, then we shouldn't expect these emotions to disappear just because we reflect on the inexorable chain of causation that led to the criminal's action.

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3. “Of Liberty and Necessity”: Hume’s Main Argument

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- 1) A cause may be defined in one of two ways:
- *either* “an object, followed by another, and where all the objects, similar to the first, are followed by objects similar to the second”
 - *or* “an object followed by another, and whose appearance always conveys the thought to that other”

(E 7.29, cf. T 1.3.14.31, A 32)

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- 2) “Necessity may be defined two ways, conformably to the two definitions of *cause*, of which it makes an essential part. It consists
- *either* in the constant conjunction of like objects,
 - *or* in the inference of the understanding from one object to another.”

(E 8.27, cf. T 2.3.1.4, T 2.3.2.4, A 32, E 8.5)

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- 3) “These two circumstances form the whole of that necessity, which we ascribe to matter. Beyond the constant *conjunction* of similar objects, and the consequent *inference* from one to the other, we have no notion of any necessity, or connexion.”

(E 8.5, cf. T 1.3.14.33, E 8.21–2)

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- 4) “If it appear, therefore, that all mankind have ever allowed ... that these two circumstances take place in the voluntary actions of men, and in the operations of the mind; it must follow, that all mankind have ever agreed in the doctrine of necessity” [i.e. the doctrine that determinism applies to human actions and the mind’s operations, just as it does to material things]

(E 8.6, cf. T 2.3.1.3)

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- 5) “it appears, not only that the conjunction between motives and voluntary actions is as regular and uniform, as that between the cause and effect in any part of nature; but also that this regular conjunction has been universally acknowledged among mankind”

(E 8.16, cf. T 2.3.1.16, T 2.3.2.4, A 32–3, E 8.27)

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6) “this experienced uniformity in human actions, is a source, whence we draw *inferences* concerning them ... this experimental inference and reasoning concerning the actions of others enters so much into human life, that no man, while awake, is ever a moment without employing it”

(E 8.16-17, cf. T 2.3.1.17, T 2.3.2.4, A 33, E 8.18-20, E 8.27)

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7) “It may ... perhaps, be pretended, that the mind can perceive, in the operations of matter, some farther connexion between the cause and effect; and a connexion that has not place in the voluntary actions of intelligent beings.”

(E 8.21, cf. E 8.27, T 2.3.2.4, A 34)

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8) But the mind cannot even frame an idea of any such farther connexion: “a constant conjunction of objects, and subsequent inference of the mind from one to another ... form, in reality, the whole of that necessity which we conceive in matter”, and “there is no idea of any other necessity or connexion in the actions of body”

(E 8.22 and E 8.27, cf. T 2.3.2.4, A 34)

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This Argument Kills the “New Hume”

- Hume’s argument that the same necessity is applicable to the moral and physical realms very explicitly turns on the claim that our understanding of necessary connexion is completely exhausted by the two factors of constant conjunction and customary inference.
- Yet the “New Hume” position is that Hume himself is committed to some understanding of necessary connexion that goes beyond these two factors (e.g. some sort of “AP property”).

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“the most zealous advocates for free-will must allow this union and inference with regard to human actions. They will only deny, that this makes the whole of necessity. But then they must shew, that we have an idea of something else in the actions of matter; which, according to the foregoing reasoning, is impossible.” (A 34, cf. T 2.3.1.3-18, T 2.3.2.4, E 8.4-22, E 8.27)

- Here the New Humean position is very clearly that of Hume’s *opponent*, who thinks that “we have an idea of something else ...”.

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Hume’s Mistake

- In conflating the causation of human actions with the causation of billiard balls etc., *Hume is making a tempting mistake*. Even if everything that happens is determined, we can still distinguish between *purposive explanation* and *physical explanation* (and hence, *contra* Hume, “betwixt *moral* and *physical*” causes/necessity, T 1.3.14.32-3, cf. E 8.19)
 - If planning, purposive agents exist, then their plans, thoughts, and purposes will play a crucial explanatory role, *even if these are mediated by causal physical mechanisms*.

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4. From *Treatise* 2.3.2 to *Enquiry* 8

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Denying “Liberty or Free-Will”

“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; and consequently liberty, by removing necessity, removes also causes, and is the very same thing with chance. As chance is commonly thought to imply a contradiction, and is at least directly contrary to experience, there are always the same arguments against liberty or free-will. 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)

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■ Hume then starts T 2.3.2 by explaining ...

“... the prevalence of the doctrine of liberty, however absurd it may be in one sense [i.e. as implying chance or indifference], and unintelligible in any other. *First*, After we have perform'd any action; tho' we confess we were influenc'd by particular views and motives; 'tis difficult for us to perswade ourselves we were govern'd by necessity, and that 'twas utterly impossible for us to have acted otherwise; the idea of necessity seeming to imply something of force, and violence, and constraint, of which we are not sensible. Few are capable of distinguishing betwixt the liberty of *spontaneity*, as it is call'd in the schools, and the liberty of *indifference*; betwixt that which is oppos'd to violence, and that which means a negation of necessity and causes. The first is even the most common sense of the word; and as 'tis only that species of liberty, which it concerns us to preserve, our thoughts have been principally turn'd towards it, and have almost universally confounded it with the other.” (T 2.3.2.1)

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5. Interlude on Hume's Abandonment of Subjectivism about Causal Necessity

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- “Necessity, then, ... is nothing but an internal impression of the mind” (T 1.3.14.20);
- “necessity is something, that exists in the mind, not in objects” (T 1.3.14.22);
- “the necessity or power ... lies in the determination of the mind ... The efficacy or energy of causes is [not] plac'd in the causes themselves ...; but belongs entirely to the soul ... 'Tis here that the real power of causes is plac'd, along with their connexion and necessity. (T 1.3.14.23);
- “power and necessity ... are ... qualities of perceptions, not of objects, and are internally felt by the soul, and not perceiv'd externally in bodies” (T 1.3.14.24);
- “this connexion, tie, or energy lies merely in ourselves, and is nothing but that determination of the mind ...” (T 1.4.7.5);
- “the necessity ... is nothing but a determination of the mind” (T 2.3.1.4);
- “the necessary connexion is merely a perception of the mind” (T 2.3.1.6).

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Rejection of Subjectivism in the *Enquiry*

■ By contrast, the *Enquiry* only twice suggests that causal necessity is subjective:

- a) “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” (E 8.22 n. 18)
- b) “When we say, therefore, that one object is connected with another, we mean only, that they have acquired a connexion in our thought, and give rise to this inference, by which they become proofs of each other's existence ...” (E 7.28)

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a) E 8.22 n. 18 is in a footnote largely copied verbatim from T 2.3.2.2, aiming to explain “the prevalence of the doctrine of liberty”. And it clearly describes necessity in terms of *potential* (not *actual*) inference:

“... 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; ... however we may imagine we feel a liberty within ourselves, a spectator can commonly infer our actions from our motives and character; and even where he cannot, he concludes in general, that he might, 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.”

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b) E 7.28 seems subjectivist, but it occurs in the paragraph immediately before the two definitions of cause. As soon as the definitions have been presented, an alternative objectivist understanding becomes available:

■ “When we say, therefore, that one object is connected with another, we mean only, that they have acquired a connexion in our thought, and give rise to this inference, ...” (E 7.28)

<E 7.29: Two definitions of cause>

■ We say, for instance, that the vibration of this string is the cause of this particular sound. But what do we mean by that affirmation? We either mean, *that this vibration is followed by this sound, and that all similar vibrations have been followed by similar sounds*: Or, *that this vibration is followed by this sound, and that upon the appearance of one, the mind anticipates the senses, and forms immediately an idea of the other*. We may consider the relation of cause and effect in either of these two lights; but beyond these, we have no idea of it. (E 7.29)

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6. The “Hypothetical Liberty” of the *Enquiry*

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“it will not require many words to prove, that all mankind have ever agreed in the doctrine of liberty as well as in that of necessity, and that the whole dispute, in this respect also, has been hitherto merely verbal. For what is meant by liberty, when applied to voluntary actions? We cannot surely mean, that actions have so little connexion with motives, inclinations, and circumstances, that one does not follow with a certain degree of uniformity from the other, and that one affords no inference by which we can conclude the existence of the other. For these are plain and acknowledged matters of fact. 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 chuse to remain at rest, we may; if we chuse to move, we also may. Now this hypothetical liberty is universally allowed to belong to every one, who is not a prisoner and in chains. Here then is no subject of dispute.” (E 8.23)

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What is “Hypothetical Liberty”?

“if we chuse to remain at rest, we may;
if we chuse to move, we also may”

■ Is the following enough?

Either I willed to move, and did move; *or*
I willed to stay at rest, and did stay at rest.

■ Or is a counterfactual condition also required?

If I had willed differently, *then* my action
would have been correspondingly different.

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A Lockean Influence?

■ Locke does seem to require the counterfactual condition:

“so far as a Man has a power to think, or not to think; to move, or not to move, according to the preference or direction of his own mind, so far is a Man *Free*. Where-ever any performance or forbearance are not equally in a Man’s power; where-ever doing or not doing, will not equally follow upon the preference of his mind directing it, there he is not *Free*, though perhaps the Action may be voluntary.” (Essay II xxi 8)

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Hypothetical Liberty and “Liberty of Spontaneity”

- Most commentators consider these the same:

“a power of acting or not acting, according to the determinations of the will; that is, if we chuse to remain at rest, we may; if we chuse to move, we also may. Now this ... liberty ... [belongs to] every one, who is not a prisoner and in chains” (E 8.23)

“that [liberty] which is oppos’d to violence, ... is ... the most common sense of the word; and ... [the] only ... species of liberty, which it concerns us to preserve” (T 2.3.2.1)

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Botterill’s Three-Way Distinction

“liberty_c is libertarian liberty. It is a contra-causal freedom of the will. Hume sometimes marks this sense of ‘liberty’ by saying that it is ‘opposed to necessity’.

liberty_a is that in virtue of which a person is an agent in respect of what he does, and it is therefore a condition of responsibility. It is what is present in intentional action and absent in such things as hiccuping and snoring.

liberty_f is the absence of unwelcome restrictions affecting choice of action. It is what you have when you act without being subject to coercion, compulsion, or an influence that is resented. The dominant species of liberty_f is sociopolitical freedom, although it is also true that circumstances can compel you to do something you would otherwise prefer not to do.”

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Textual Evidence Supporting “Hypothetical = Spontaneity”

- In both the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*, Hume appears to consider only two senses of “liberty”, one of which is contra-causal (hence “incompatibilist”): prima facie, this strongly suggests that he takes there to be just one main “compatibilist” sense of the word.
- In the *Treatise*, “liberty of spontaneity” is said to be “oppos’d to violence” (T 2.3.2.1), while the hypothetical liberty of the *Enquiry* involves “actions ... [that] are indications of the internal character, passions, and affections” as opposed to being “derived altogether from external violence” (E 8.31)

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- In the same *Treatise* paragraph, Hume remarks that indifference – the absence of causal necessity – is easily confused with spontaneity, because “the idea of necessity seem[s] to imply something of force, and violence, and constraint”.

- But then if liberty of spontaneity is to be characterised, as this suggests, in terms of the absence of violence or constraint, this comes fairly close to Hume’s apparent passing reference to the hypothetical liberty of the *Enquiry* as “liberty, when opposed ... to constraint” (E 8.25).

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“Force, and Violence, and Constraint”

- “Violence” can refer both to physical force acting on one’s body to produce an involuntary movement (e.g. “he violently pushed my hand onto the lever”) and also something *threatened* to generate a motive (e.g. “I had to push the lever, for fear of violence”).
- Likewise “constraint” can mean both a physical constraint such as a straitjacket, which prohibits any voluntary movement, but also a non-physical limitation on one’s behaviour (e.g. “I was constrained by the need for secrecy”).

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A Simple Hypothesis

- *Contra* Botterill, Hume indeed means the same by “liberty of spontaneity” and “hypothetical liberty”, but ...

... he has *misdescribed* “liberty of spontaneity” when calling it “that species of liberty, which it concerns us to preserve.”

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“Spontaneity” = Agency?

- “*Liberty of Spontaneity or Voluntariness*. ... in this sense every Act of the Will is and must be *free*, for every Act is *spontaneous* or voluntary; and indeed this *Freedom* ... signifies nothing more than that it is an Act of the Will.” (Watts 1732, pp. 5-6)
- “Spontaneity, as we have said, is simply volition without any foreign constraint; ... the modern Epicureans ... destroy all ideas of Liberty, which they reduce to a simple spontaneity, and so confound what is voluntary with what is free.” (Ramsay 1751, pp. 107, 295)

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“Spontaneity” = *Considered* Agency?

- “... as for the liberty that consists only in being free from constraint, or in spontaneity, ... it is found in animals. ... Has not a hungry dog the strength to abstain from a piece of meat when he is afraid of being beaten if he does not abstain? Does this not amount to having the power to act or not act?” (Bayle 1697, “Rorarius” note F, pp. 228-9)
- “We enjoy ... the liberty called spontaneity; that is, our will is determined by motives when there are any; and these motives are always the last result of the understanding or instinct. ... I have a violent passion for something, but my understanding tells me, I must resist this passion; it represents to me a greater good ... This last motive preponderates, and I oppose my desires by my will. ... I do not what I desire, but what I will; and, in this case, I am free ...” (Voltaire 1764, p. 31)

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- Self-disciplined “spontaneity” may be a form of “liberty” worth cultivating, but it can hardly be described as “that species of liberty, which it concerns us to preserve” when compared with socio-political freedom (nor is it “the most common sense of the word”, T 2.3.2.1).
- However since it is very unlikely that Hume would have used the term “spontaneity” for socio-political freedom, it seems most probable that the “liberty of *spontaneity*” of the *Treatise* is indeed more or less the same as the “power of acting or not acting” of the *Enquiry*.
- So at T 2.3.2.1, it seems that Hume may have succumbed to the same confusion which Botterill notes as being traditional in the compatibilist literature, of confusing *liberty_a* with *liberty_r*, (and thereby tempted lots of his future readers into that confusion).

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Clarity in the *Enquiry*

- “as actions are objects of our moral sentiment, so far only as they are indications of the internal character, passions, and affections; it is impossible that they can give rise either to praise or blame, where they proceed not from these principles, but are derived altogether from external violence.” (E 8.31)
 - But a forced bodily movement is not a genuine action.
- “liberty, when opposed to necessity, not to constraint, is the same thing with chance; ...” (E 8.25)
 - This can be interpreted as *physical* constraint.

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- If the sorts of constraints that Hume has in mind as *thwarting* hypothetical liberty are *physical* constraints such as prison walls and chains, then this seems to tip the scales quite strongly in favour of the counterfactual reading.
- When thus constrained, the causal operations of our decision-making mental processes seem beside the point: our liberty is undermined in a far more straightforward way.
- So I believe that Hume would agree with Locke (*Essay* II xxi 10) that a man who is *locked* in a room where he wishes to stay (owing to the “desirable Company”), may be staying *voluntarily*, but he is not *free* with regard to staying or leaving. Regardless of the operation of his will, or whatever might determine it, he does not physically have the power to leave.

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A Resolution?

- Of course the man in the locked room is still free with regard to *other* choices (e.g. whether to speak or remain silent, to move or remain still). Indeed, as Botterill points out, “even a prisoner in chains still ... retains the power to rattle his chains or not, as he thinks fit” (2002, p. 294).
- So “power of acting or not acting” is *relative to the choice in question*. That being so, it might not after all be unreasonable to see this kind of liberty as one that we are anxious to preserve, not just minimally (e.g. moving our finger or not), but with as much scope as possible.

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