

David Hume 3 Causation

Jeremy Dunham

The University of the West of England



THIS PLAN
Was begun to be carried into Execution
in the
Year 1765
By the Right Honourable, Gilbert Elliot Esq.
Lord PRISTON.

George Street is now just in the middle of the new path
a Carriage 5 or 6 feet on each side for a Foot path
Queen Street Prince Street Frederick Street Hanover
Street and Gt. Street are the first in breadth 40 feet
for a Carriage, and 10 feet on each side for a
Foot path
The Area between the Foot paths on each side is 3 feet

To His Majesty, GEORGE III. The Most Excellent
This PLAN of the New Streets and Squares, intended for His ancient CAPITAL of
Edinburgh, by His Majesty's most Excellent Government, IS, with the utmost Humility,
Presented to His Majesty's most Excellent Government.



Patron of a POLITE and LIBERAL Education
NORTH-BRITAIN; One of the happy Consequences of the Peace, Humanity, and
Invented By
His Majesty's Most devoted, devoted and faithful
JAMES CRAIG.

Introduction



David Hume

- The Copy Principle
- The Association of Ideas
- The Problem of Induction and the Principle of Custom

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- 2 The most obscure and uncertain of all the terms used by metaphysicians are those of power, force, energy or necessary connexion.
- 3 Passing powers around.

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- 1 I intend 'only to give a mathematical notion of those forces, without considering their physical causes and seats... the reader is not to imagine by those words that I anywhere take upon me to define... the causes or the physical reason thereof, or that I attribute forces, in a true and physical sense, to certain centres.' (Newton, *Principia*, Definition VIII)

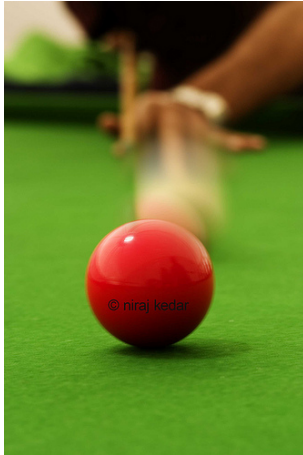
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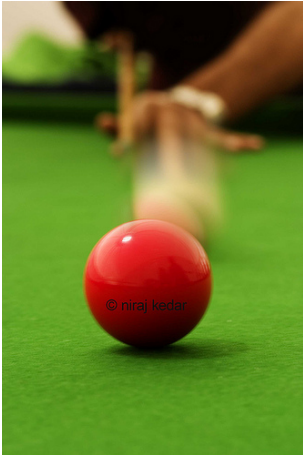
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- 3 From where do we get the idea of power or necessary connexion?

Of the Idea of Necessary Connexion



External Objects

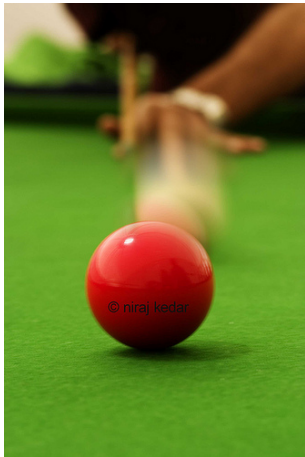
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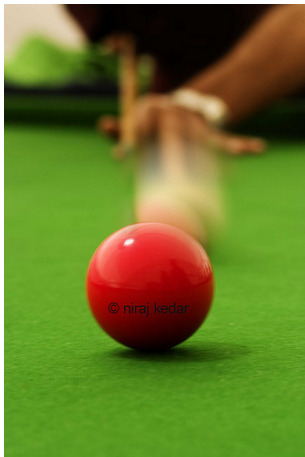
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- 2 **Billiard Balls** and the **trick** Billiard Ball table.
- 3 Newton's **inertial force** 'Every object in a state of uniform motion **tends to remain in that state of motion** unless an external force is applied to it.'

Of the Idea of Necessary Connexion

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- 1 Are we at any moment conscious of an **internal power** by which we can '**will**' to move our arms, or bite our lips or direct our thoughts?
- 2 We are aware that event **C** (willing the arm to move) is almost always followed by event **E** (the movement of the arm) but we have no knowledge of the **power** by which this happens.

Test the theory!



David Hume

- Can you obtain any *impression* of power or necessary connexion from either external objects or from reflecting on the nature of your own mind?

Hume and Occasionalism



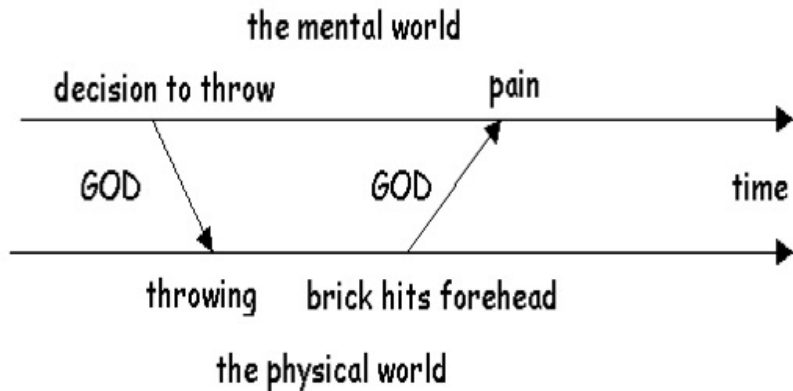
Nicolas Malebranche
(1638-1715)

- Divine Power
- A belief in natural powers was the 'most dangerous error of the philosophy of the ancients'.

Occasionalism

- ① There are bodies and there are minds.
- ② Bodies contain nothing that could contribute to movement.
- ③ If bodies do not cause their own movement, then minds must be the cause of this movement [by 1 & 2].
- ④ There is no necessary connection between the willings of finite minds and movements in bodies.
- ⑤ Minds *do not* move bodies.
- ⑥ As God is an infinitely perfect being, everything he wills must necessarily occur. There is, therefore, a necessary connection between the will of God and its outcome.
- ⑦ God is the only true cause. All other causes are therefore *occasional*.

Occasionalism



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- 3 'The universal energy and operations of the supreme being' are beyond human comprehension. 'We are got into fairy land' and have no reason to trust our methods of argumentation at this level.
- 4 If our ignorance is a reason for rejecting natural powers, then it is equally as good a reason to reject divine powers.

Sceptical Doubts

'Upon the whole, there appears not, throughout all nature, any one instance of connexion, which is conceivable by us. All events seem entirely loose and separate. One event follows another; but we never can observe any tie between them. They seem *conjoined*, but never *connected*. And as we have no idea of any thing, which never appeared to our outwards sense or inward sentiment, the necessary conclusion seems to be, that we have no idea of connexion or power at all, and that these words are absolutely without any meaning, when employed either in philosophical reasonings, or common life.' (7.26)

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- ④ C regularly precedes E ✓

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- ④ The **idea** is meaningful; however, it is imperfect because it does not come from an impression derived from the **cause itself**, rather it reflects the instinctive tendencies of the mind.

The Missing Shade of Blue



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- 3 There is a *necessary connexion* between C & E ✗
- 4 C regularly precedes E ✓
- 5 C will always convey the thought of E to whomever has experienced C regularly conjoined with E ✓

An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding

'What stronger instance can be produced of the surprising ignorance and weakness of the understanding than the present? For surely, if there be any relation among objects which it purports to know perfectly, it is that of cause and effect. On this are founded all of our reasonings concerning matters of fact or existence'. (7. 60)

Problems with Hume's Account and the Contemporary Problem of Causation

- 1 Hume's definition(s) of **causation**: 'an object, followed by another, and where all the objects, similar to the first are followed by objects similar to the second. **Or in other words**, where if the first object had not been, the second never had existed.' (7.29)

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- 3 The Counterfactual Analysis: **C** causes **E** iff... **C** & **E** occur; **C** precedes **E**; If **C** had not occurred, then **E** would not have occurred.

Philosophy Film Club

Screening of

Žižek!

Dir. Astra Taylor, US, 2007 (71 mins.)



Tuesday 20 March 2012, 6pm

A123, St Matthias

The screening is free & all are very welcome!!!

Any questions please contact Mike Lewis (Mike.lewis@uwe.ac.uk)
or Havi Carel (Havi.carel@uwe.ac.uk)