

## REVIEW ARTICLE IS HUME A CAUSAL REALIST?

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### I

What is Hume's view of the metaphysics of causation? The standard view was – and is<sup>1</sup> – that he subscribes to a regularity theory, whereby causal relations supervene on causal laws, and causal laws are brute regularities. During the 1980s John Wright, Edward Craig and Galen Strawson (among others) argued strenuously against this reading.<sup>2</sup> John Wright called his reading 'sceptical realism', a label subsequently applied to revisionist readings in general. Such readings also attracted the title of the 'New Hume', an umbrella term originating from an important article by Ken Winkler.

Hence the title of the collection, which is a mix of previously published and newly commissioned material. Two early responses – Winkler's 'The New Hume' and Simon Blackburn's 'Hume and Thick Connexions' – are reprinted with substantial postscripts. Barry Stroud contributes a reprint of his 1993 *Hume Studies* paper, "'Gilding and Staining" the world'. There are new papers from the revisionists, 'David Hume: Objects and Power' (by Strawson), 'Hume's causal realism: recovering a traditional interpretation' (by Wright), and 'Hume on causality: projectivist *and* realist?' (by Craig). The other new papers contend against some of the (perceived) claims of the

<sup>1</sup> An example plucked from a recent philosophy of science book. Brian Ellis writes '... according to Hume, the supposed ... "necessitation" of effects is really just an illusion. ... It does not exist in reality'. (*The Philosophy of Nature: A Guide to the New Essentialism*, Chesham: Acumen, 2002, p. 93)

<sup>2</sup> See, *inter alia*, John P. Wright *The Sceptical Realism of David Hume* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983); E. J. Craig *The Mind of God and the Works of Man* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), chapters 1 and 2; Galen Strawson *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism and David Hume* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989). Other realists include Janet Broughton, Michael Costa, Donald Livingston, Michael Ayers and, more recently, Stephen Buckle.

revisionists. These are: Martin Bell ‘Sceptical doubts concerning Hume’s causal realism’, Daniel Flage ‘Relative ideas re-viewed’, Anne Jaap Jacobsen ‘From cognitive science to a post-Cartesian text: what did Hume really say?’ and Rupert Read ‘In closing: The new antagonists of “the New Hume”’: on the relevance of Goodman and Wittgenstein to the New Hume debate’. The volume begins with a substantial introduction to the themes of the collection, authored by Ken Richman.

The result is somewhat of a curate’s egg. For those involved in the controversy, there are some excellent contributions that genuinely advance the debate. For those wishing for an overview, the volume will be useful, but potentially misleading. Part of the problem is that revisionists’ original target is often obscured by commentators. Furthermore, the revisionists are sometimes credited with views that they do not or need not hold. In the first half of this essay I express my disquiet about this aspect of the volume. In the second, I shall focus on a key aspect of the debate, and defend a realist reading.<sup>3</sup>

## II

The revisionists’ target was a Hume who held a regularity theory of the metaphysics of causation.<sup>4</sup> All three revisionists were further united in the conviction that the metaphysical doctrine was supposed to follow from semantic premises. Hume attempts to show that the notion of ‘necessary connection in the objects’ lacks any meaning, and so the issue of whether there is any ‘in the objects’ cannot even be intelligibly raised.<sup>5</sup> This view of Hume is not without its defenders. As two commentators put it: ‘The empiricist strictures of Hume’s impressions and ideas doctrine nudge him from this purely negative claim [*sc.* that we lack an idea of objective necessary connection] to his positive regularity theory of causation.’<sup>6</sup>

If there is no genuine content to necessary connection thought or talk, the very idea of there being anything more to causation than regularity cannot even get off the ground. A negative *ontological* conclusion follows from the fact that the disputed concept (‘power’) is exposed as bogus or empty.

Such a view is not unsupported by the texts. Consider this passage:

And how must we be disappointed, when we learn, that this connection, tie, or energy lies merely in ourselves. . . . Such a discovery not only cuts off all

<sup>3</sup> I concentrate of the issue of causal realism, and not comment on issues concerning Hume’s realism about the ‘external world’.

<sup>4</sup> Wright, *op. cit.*, p. 1; Craig, *op. cit.*, p. 76; Strawson, *op. cit.*, p. vii.

<sup>5</sup> Wright *op. cit.*, p. 1 & pp. 123ff; Craig *op. cit.*, pp. 128ff; Strawson, *op. cit.*, pp. 10ff.

<sup>6</sup> A. Rosenberg and T. Beauchamp *Hume and the Problem of Causation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) p. 81. For a recent intoning of this mantra, see Kenneth Clatterbaugh, *The Causation Debate in Modern Philosophy: 1637:1739* (New York: Routledge, 1999), pp. 203–4.

hopes of ever attaining satisfaction but even prevents our very wishes; since it appears, that when we say we desire to know the ultimate and operating principle, as something, which resides in the external object, we either contradict ourselves, or talk without a meaning.<sup>7</sup>

(T 1.4.7.5; SBN 266–7)

Either we mean the internal impression (which is obviously not real necessity) or we can mean nothing at all.

But like all our loved ones, Hume is apt to infuriate. The very next sentence reads as follows:

This deficiency in our ideas is not, indeed, perceiv'd in common life, nor are we sensible, that in the most usual conjunctions of cause and effect we are as ignorant of the ultimate principle, which binds them together, as in the most unusual and extraordinary.

(T 1.4.7.6; SBN 267)

Here he appears to talk of *ignorance* of that which binds the objects in cause and effect, not of rejection. This passage is symptomatic of two deep and conflicting strands in Hume's thought. On the one hand, an apparent rejection of necessary connection as meaningless, and on the other, a persistent and apparently sincere preparedness to refer to secret and hidden connections, and an associated talk of ignorance, inadequacy of ideas and the limitations of our faculties.

Craig, Wright and Strawson argued that we should take these avowals seriously and reject the regularity reading. Their readings were not offered in isolation from a general consideration of Hume's aims and targets. Strawson wanted to emphasize Hume's scepticism, Wright the importance of eighteenth-century science, and its relation to Cartesianism, in understanding Hume's naturalism, and Craig, the deep assumption that man is made in the Image of God.<sup>8</sup> These general views are compatible, I believe, but nevertheless differences in emphasis lead naturally to differences in position. For Craig, Hume is simply agnostic on ontological questions.<sup>9</sup> For Strawson and Wright, the textual evidence supports the idea that Hume just *assumed* that there were hidden necessary connections. Now, very occasionally Strawson claims that Hume thinks that we can *know* that there are hidden necessary connections, but (note please) he says that this is putting 'the point

<sup>7</sup> Reference to Hume's works has been recently complicated by the arrival of new Oxford editions. In what follows I shall refer to the book, part, section, and paragraph number of the *Treatise* or section, part and paragraph number of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, (henceforth EHU) followed by the page numbers for the Nidditch/Selby-Bigge editions.

<sup>8</sup> See also Donald Livingston's work, where the 'sceptical realism' is articulated within a sophisticated reading of Hume's philosophy.

<sup>9</sup> Craig op. cit., p. 76 and pp. 108–9.

<sup>10</sup> Strawson, op. cit., p. 100.

more provocatively'.<sup>10</sup> Although Strawson produces an independent argument for objective powers that he believes 'Hume would have accepted as obvious',<sup>11</sup> for the most part Strawson thinks Hume just took the matter for granted or never bothered to question existence of power.

What unites these readings is simply the *rejection* of a positive regularity reading of Hume and nothing more. It is therefore misleading (to put it mildly) for Richman to open his introduction by claiming that 'sceptical realist interpretations claim that Hume believed we can *know* that causal powers . . . exist in the world' (p. 1, my emphasis). That was not at all what was claimed (remember, Strawson's 'knows' was 'provocative'). The point was that the texts suggested that Hume assumed there were unknowable causal powers (or was agnostic, according to Craig). It is similarly mistaken to construe the debate between the revisionists and the 'Old Hume' as between readings which have it that the belief in causal power 'meets some minimal epistemic standards for assent' and ones which claim that Hume was 'a strict epistemic sceptic'; first, because the Old Hume isn't a strict epistemic sceptic, but an adherent of a reductive metaphysical thesis (the regularity theory); second, because the rejection of the Old Hume – a regularity theorist – is *prima facie* compatible with the idea that the belief fails to meet 'some minimal epistemic standards for assent'. Whether Hume thinks we should retain beliefs in absence of epistemic recommendations is a key issue in his thought, and it may (or may not) turn out that such an absence does not vitiate the realist reading. This should not blind us to the value of Richman's introduction, the bulk of which is a very useful discussion of whether the so-called 'natural beliefs' can have any epistemic standing. There is a substantial question about whether, given what else Hume says, we can in good conscience really think the 'assumption' of causal realism does (or can) survive epistemic scrutiny. Indeed, this is a problem that Craig grapples with in his contribution. But the very possibility of asking this question rests on a *rejection* of the Old Hume, and must view the notion of hidden connections as meaningful.<sup>12</sup>

It would be nice to think that this change of question is the result of the New Hume having won a significant battle (the battle of whether causal talk is literally significant). But that is too optimistic. The sting in the tail of this volume is that some very Old Hume gets poured into 'New' bottles. In his paper, Craig assures us that the 'familiar' claim 'that Hume does not allow himself enough *semantic* room, [for thoughts about necessity] since he

<sup>11</sup> Strawson, *op. cit.*, p. 222.

<sup>12</sup> Winkler's excellent paper suffers from a related blemish. A number of things he says imply that we can think of the Old Hume as allowing for the bare possibility of hidden powers. Thus, for example, he says that even if the notion were meaningful, the New Hume would not thereby be established (p. 83). He also, quite oddly to my mind, says that 'Defenders of the New Hume sometimes ease their task by supposing that according to the standard view, Hume positively denies the existence of secret powers or connections' (p. 53). But that *was* and *is* the standard view.

allows no *thought of any kind*, falling outside the theory of ideas, is now an untenable reading' (p. 119, emphasis original). Some pages later Rupert Read tells us that there is one 'new' position which the parties of the debate have 'missed' (p. 190): that Hume is really arguing that 'any would-be object which we cannot successfully conceive of in any way never gets so far as to be something which can genuinely be an object of our thought or judgment' (p. 170), and that there is 'nothing sensical [sic.] to be said about "natural necessity"' (p. 191).<sup>13</sup> Haven't we heard this one before?

### III

The real debate is whether we should maintain the standard reading, and reject, or reinterpret, the apparent references to hidden powers because of the alleged strictures of the theory of ideas or think that the presence of hidden power talk suggests that the cognitive strictures of the theory of ideas are not quite what they seem. Before we focus on this issue, some general points are in order.

First, as noted, realists generally make their claim in the context of overall readings of Hume's general philosophy. To focus on the realism without the general readings that inform it can, I think, lead to a danger of not fully understanding the grounds for the realism. Second, and relatedly, there is a burden of proof issue that has not, to my knowledge, been properly addressed. Opponents of the 'New Hume' offer subtle readings of the realist-sounding passages that purport to show that they need not be taken at face value. Even if they are successful (which I do not believe they are), offering interpretations whereby we *need* not take those passages at face value, doesn't amount to an *independent* case of why we *should* not: a silent assumption has been that the burden of proof has been on the revisionist side. *All* readings need to look to their own resources, *including* the Old story which, although well-entrenched, doesn't carry with it anything to recommend it as any more (or any less) obvious than the new one, when judged by the textual evidence alone. What we need, in fact, is a sustained case for the assumptions on which those anti-realist readings rest, and not simply its assumption. Third, I shall confine my remarks to the meaninglessness issue and the talk of hidden connections, and shall only touch upon whether Hume can allow any *epistemic* standing to the belief. Two reasons for this: first, save for Craig's paper and Richman's introduction, there is little discussion of this issue in the volume, and, second, the issue of meaning is conceptually prior. This is *not* to imply that the issue is unimportant; but if this topic becomes the focus of future debate, this will confirm that the Old Hume is dead. Finally, a point lifted directly from

<sup>13</sup> Compare also Strawson's contribution that takes the old view seriously, and argues strenuously against it.

Winkler (p. 84). The real value of the debate lies not so much on who is right about the matter, but in improving our understanding of a deep and brilliant thinker.

How can we reconcile the apparent references to hidden connections with talk of meaninglessness? One strategy is to appeal to Hume's use of 'relative ideas' to show thought about necessary connection is compatible with the theory of ideas as a theory of meaning. In this volume, Strawson is optimistic about this strategy, and Daniel Flage is pessimistic, but whether this is the right way to conduct matters is not so obvious to me. Let us instead ask why Hume might think that necessity 'in the objects' is 'meaningless'. Well, one thought is this: Hume has a theory of meaning, such that when there is no appropriate impression, there is no idea, and no idea, no meaning. There is no impression of necessity 'in the objects'. So 'necessity' is meaningless. This thought is fuelled by remarks about lack of idea, lack of meaning, found scattered through the body of the *Treatise*, and trumpeted in the *Abstract* and the opening sections of the First *Enquiry*. So, we are to take Hume's first principle of human nature, that every simple idea is copied from a corresponding impression (the Copy Principle) to serve as a criterion of meaningfulness.

Interestingly, commentators who think this way are apt to make this move next: they lament the Copy Principle's *inadequacy* as a theory of meaning. Hume's Copy Principle is genetic, contingent and a posteriori, rendering it prone to counter-examples. The agony gets piled on since Hume cheerfully admits a counter-example, the missing shade of blue, right at the outset. Given all this, Jonathan Bennett wrote some years ago, the Copy Principle is 'largely irrelevant to the matters [Hume] wants it illuminate'.<sup>14</sup> Hume also tends to ignore the resources of his own theory, making insufficient use of the possibility of complex ideas in problematic areas, and, in any case, 'often proceeds by detailed, down-to-earth argument rather than by blanket applications of his meaning-empiricism'.<sup>15</sup> We should, Bennett and many others conclude, save the remarks about meaning by *revision*: construe the Copy Principle as an analytic, rather than a genetic, principle.

But the question to be asked is not whether we should revise the Copy Principle so it can serve as a theory of meaning, but whether its genetic status actually counts *against* thinking of it as such (remember, construed *as such* it is 'irrelevant' as a theory of meaning and often ignored). Indeed, in Book I, Part 1 of the *Treatise* there is very little mention of meaning at all. In the discussion of substance early in the *Treatise* (1.1.6) he certainly uses *the word* 'meaning' (and says that we lack one), but assigning meanings to words (including the word 'meaning') is a subtle and holistic matter. For having used the term 'meaning', Hume then goes on to employ the notion of an 'unknown something' in which particular qualities are supposed to

<sup>14</sup> Locke Berkeley, *Hume: Central Themes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971) p. 230.

<sup>15</sup> Op. cit., p. 233.

inhere, and much later Hume allows the traditional notion of substance as ‘that which may exist by itself’. Granted, Hume thinks these notions are problematic, but the lack of a relevant impression is not by *itself* a worry about how we can form the *content* for the thought. The point to be noted is that Hume, both inside Book I of the *Treatise*, and outside it, is interested in *genetic* questions, of the sources of belief (compare, e.g. the accounts of the origins of the artificial virtues, and the *Natural History of Religion*). Hume’s geneticism has been emphasized by Barry Stroud<sup>16</sup> and Edward Craig, and I think that they are right about this. This approach has ramifications for the realism issue, which we’ll mention later, but remarks about meaning do not a theory of meaning make.

#### IV

That said, Hume *does* take issues of meaning to bear on ontological matters, as we shall see, but in a way that is independent of any particular *theory* of what meaning consists in. To see this, consider how Richman characterizes a sceptical realist. A sceptical realist is a ‘realist about [an] entity’s existence, but agnostic about the nature or character of that thing because it is epistemically inaccessible to us in some non-trivial way’ (p. 1). Of course, one had better not be *too* agnostic about the ‘nature’ of the relevant item, otherwise we are left with an ‘unknown *something*’ which ‘no sceptic will see fit to contend against’.<sup>17</sup> Consider what Demea, in his mystical guise, says of God in the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*.

The question is not concerning the *being* but the *nature* of *God*. This, I affirm, from the infirmities of human understanding, to be altogether incomprehensible and unknown to us. The essence of that supreme mind, his attributes, the manner of his existence, the very nature of his duration; these and every particular, which regards so divine a Being, are mysterious to men.<sup>18</sup>

(DNR, II, p. 43)

Surely the sentiments of a sceptical realist *a la* Richman: Demea is a realist about God’s existence, but agnostic with respect to His nature. The danger is that one becomes too agnostic, draining the term ‘God’ of all content, and this danger Cleanthes fully exploits, implying that Demea is an atheist ‘without knowing it’ (DNR, IV, p. 61). To give the notion of God some content, we have to think in terms of *intelligent* cause of the universe, and the word ‘intelligence’ had better have some content to it as well:

<sup>16</sup> *Hume* (London: Routledge, 1977).

<sup>17</sup> EHU 12.1.16; SBN 155.

<sup>18</sup> All page references are to Gaskin (ed.) *Dialogues and Natural History* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1993).

It seems strange to me, said CLEANTHES, that you, DEMEA, who are so sincere in the cause of religion, should still maintain the mysterious, incomprehensible nature of the Deity, and should insist so strenuously, that he has no manner of likeness or resemblance to human creatures. The Deity, I can readily allow, possesses many powers and attributes, of which we can have no comprehension: But if our ideas, so far as they go, be not just and adequate, and correspondent to his real nature, I know not what there is in this subject worth insisting on. Is the name, without any meaning, of such mighty importance?

(DNR, IV, p. 60)

So Hume is aware of the internal tensions of sceptical realism. We shall need to say more than there are 'unknown somethings' if we are to allow for unknown *necessity*, otherwise such words are of no importance.

## V

What putative content can be given to necessary connection and why might one think that it is, on reflection, really spurious? The obvious place to look for an answer is where (and why) Hume *denies* that we have an idea of necessity drawn from causally related objects. His central point, repeated in many different ways, is that if we were acquainted with the necessary connection<sup>19</sup> between objects we would (a) be able to infer a priori causal upshots and (b) become unable to conceive of the cause without its effect ('separate them in the imagination'). Hume repeatedly tells us that having an idea of necessity would have such consequences. So at first blush one would have thought that necessary connection (that of which we are ignorant) could be glossed as this: necessary connection is whatever feature, acquaintance with which, would yield both a priori knowledge of its effects, and a corresponding closure of conception. Knowledge of natural necessity would be reflected in a corresponding conceptual necessity. That is a strong requirement, but Hume nevertheless takes that to be the sole criterion for awareness of causal power. He is not alone in this, and it is frequently complained (by our contemporaries) that early modern authors 'conflate' natural necessity with conceptual necessity. I think 'conflation' is a leading way of putting the matter, but whatever the truth is about that, it is certainly true that many of Hume's rough contemporaries saw the matter as he did.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Which, I believe, amounts to the essences of objects but I cannot defend that claim here. See my *Projection and Realism in Hume* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming), and Stephen Buckle *Hume's Enlightenment Tract: The Unity and Purpose of An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> See e.g. Michael Ayers 'Natures and Laws from Descartes to Hume', in Rogers and Tomaselli (eds) *The Philosophical Canon in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: Essays in Honour of John W. Yolton* (Rochester NY: University of Rochester Press, 1996). This paper would have made a valuable addition to the collection under review.



It is this feature – the ‘intelligibility of causal relations’ – which is the focus of the best material in this volume, and figures prominently in the discussions of Blackburn, Winkler, Bell and Wright. Blackburn sees Hume as unequivocally rejecting it, whereas Winkler (in his postscript) and Bell see Hume’s relation to it as somewhat more ambiguous. Bell, who rightly sees the intelligibility requirement in the context of Hume’s reaction to Malebranche, views Hume as rejecting it for reasons similar to those we shall discuss below. Malebranche rejected necessary connections between created objects, and took God’s will as the only true cause. Bell sees Hume as trying to reject the intelligibility requirement, and instigating a fallibilist Newtonian conception of causation. Wright, on the other hand, sees Hume as operating squarely within the intelligibility requirement and endorsing it.

So that is the putative content to necessary connection; now to the ‘meaninglessness’ charge. The intelligibility requirement offers the materials to mount a *reductio*, one that purports to show that the very notion involves an incoherence and in *that sense* the notion is ‘meaningless’. Hume argues that we can *always* conceive of a cause without its effect and we *cannot* make the requisite a priori inferences. Necessity is supposed to be whatever it is, acquaintance with which, would render it impossible to conceive cause without effect; but there could be no such item, since we can *always* conceive some cause *without* its effect. Acquaintance with an object’s power is supposed to allow us to infer a priori its effect; but we can *never* make such inferences. The very notion of necessity, so specified, seems incoherent, and *hence* meaningless.

## VI

So what of the apparent references to hidden necessary connections? For Blackburn, talk of causal power for Hume is a non-metaphysically loaded expression of inferential habit, and so talk of necessity in nature is perfectly compatible with a sophisticated non-realism: like all good quasi-realists, we can talk the modal talk without walking the metaphysical walk. Winkler sees Hume’s rejection of real necessity as compatible with talk of hidden connections, since talk of ‘hidden connections’ can be harmlessly parsed as underlying ‘micro-regularities’. Bell, as we said, views this as a shift away from a rationalist conception of the world to a Newtonian one. Strong necessity is certainly incoherent or meaningless, but these weaker senses of power (which ultimately reduce to brute regularity) are perfectly permissible. All three think the metaphysical sting can be taken out of ‘hidden connections’.

But, as John Wright says, these strategies fail to relate what it is we are supposed to be ignorant of (namely hidden powers) with the reasons adduced by Hume for that ignorance, for why power is secret. These are precisely the same reasons for why we *lack* an idea drawn from the objects, namely that we cannot make the requisite a priori inferences and we can

conceive the cause independently of its effect. No *further* grounds for ignorance are given, which indicate a *different* sense of ‘hidden power’ amenable to the regularity reading. Whatever makes secret connections secret for us cannot simply be the fact that our microscopes are insufficiently powerful. The ‘hidden regularities’ interpretation of secret connections cannot make sense of why Hume thinks it is a *deep* fact about our cognitive limitations that we cannot perceive causal necessity.<sup>21</sup> It seems that they are hidden because we cannot make the right a priori inferences.

On the one hand then, the only candidate for necessity (the one Hume targets his discussion on) seems incoherent, and on the other we have talk of secret connections and ignorance which cannot be accounted for as hidden micro-regularities.<sup>22</sup> Have we reached a dead end?

## VII

The right move to make (again in line with much of what Wright says) is this. Our incapacity to make the requisite a priori inference and our capacity to conceive cause apart from effect does not amount to the claim that necessity so specified is incoherent. It rather explains *why* Hume thinks that power is *hidden*. That would relate, in a univocal manner, Hume’s rejection of acquaintance with power or necessary connection with his claim that it is hidden. Powers are hidden *because* we can conceive cause without effect and *because* we cannot make the requisite a priori inferences. But that is not to show the notion is incoherent. It just shows that our cognitive faculties are not up to the task of acquainting us with necessity.

There looks an easy way of rejecting this move. For Hume, conceivability is a near-infallible guide to possibility. So on finding it conceivable that cause A exists without effect B, we thereby reveal that it is *metaphysically* possible that A exists without B. It would then follow that A and B cannot be *necessarily* connected. Since we can always conceive, of any causally related pair A and B, A existing apart from B, it will then follow that no causal pair are necessarily connected. Why? Because conceiving A apart from B reveals

<sup>21</sup> The fact that such powers are ‘ultimately shut up’ seems a very difficult thing to cope with on Blackburn’s expressivist reading as well.

<sup>22</sup> Winkler (pp. 54ff) argues that apparently referring uses of power in First *Enquiry* are undercut by a footnote added to the 1750 edition. There Hume says that ‘power’ is used ‘in a loose and popular sense. The more accurate explication’ of the idea of power is given in section 7, where the ‘two definitions’ of cause are given. Winkler argues these apparently referring uses of power are Hume speaking with the vulgar, but not thoughts of the learned. But even when Hume is in the thick of giving these ‘definitions’, the discussion is redolent of *ignorance* and the ‘imperfections’ of human reason. As far as his claim about the origin of our idea of power goes, no conclusion ‘can be as agreeable to scepticism than such as make[s] discoveries concerning the *weakness and narrow limits* of human reason and capacity. And what stronger instance can be produced of the surprising *ignorance and weakness* of the understanding, than the present?’ (EHU 7.2.28–29; SBN 76, my emphasis).

the metaphysical, as opposed to epistemic, possibility of A existing independently of B.

It seems that Hume does believe that conceivability entails metaphysical possibility. But there is a joker in the pack. In at least one place Hume allows inferences from conceivability to metaphysical possibility *only* when our ideas are *adequate* representations of objects (T 1. 2. 2. 1; SBN 29). ‘Adequacy’, as it tends to be explicated by Locke<sup>23</sup> and Descartes,<sup>24</sup> is the notion that an idea reveals *everything* about its object. Now Humean ideas are adequate representations of *impressions* – they are ‘exact copies’ – but just about everything in Hume’s discussion of sense impressions implies that they are not adequate representations of *in re* objects. So Hume is not in a secure position to allow that conceiving two ideas apart from each other (separating them in the imagination) is sufficient to reveal the genuine metaphysical possibility of the *objects* of impressions ‘separately existing’. Our capacity to conceive ideas apart from one another is due to phenomenal separability, a separability inherited from impressions. None of this is revelatory of experience-independent modality. So there is plenty of room to allow that there is necessity as we have characterized it and yet find certain states of affairs apparently conceivable.

As our cognitive faculties stand, we cannot be acquainted with necessary connection. Impressions – the appearances of objects – are ‘loose and separable’, allowing the imagination to conceive what it likes. So it is a *deep fact* that we are ignorant of necessity. Still, Hume signals his awareness that were our faculties different, we would be able to perceive necessary connections. Thus:

*were the inmost essences of things laid open to us, we should then discover a scene, of which, at present, we can have no idea. Instead of admiring the order of natural beings, we should clearly see, that it was absolutely impossible for them, in the smallest article, ever to admit of any other disposition.*

(DNR, vl, 76–7, my emphasis)

Nothing that Hume says entails that he thinks there actually *is* some alternative faculty with which we can penetrate the essential structure of the world. The alternative – the rationalist faculty of the intellect – he thinks is disbarred by the Copy Principle (T 1.3.1.7; SBN 72). All that is needed is that such a faculty is not ruled out a priori. And Hume does not rule it out a priori.

## VIII

<sup>23</sup> *Essay* 2.13

<sup>24</sup> Reply to the Fourth Set of Objections: See also *Arnauld Of True and False Ideas*, chapter 23, first argument.

So we can allow that necessity so specified is coherent, and furthermore, explain why such connections are precisely ‘secret’. Now, given that no instance of genuine necessity is revealed to us, and reason cannot determine the belief, Hume has to explain why, nevertheless, we have this belief. This is where the geneticism comes into play. The belief doesn’t arise from sensing necessity, or reason, but is the product of the projective imagination. Stroud finds trouble for Hume here in ever explaining how we have a belief in necessity when no such necessity is cognized. I think Hume is better placed than Stroud thinks, but there is a further problem to be addressed.<sup>25</sup> The projective account seeks to explain why we believe in necessary connections when we do not detect them (by the senses or reason). But whatever the details, that explanation is consistent with there being precisely *no* necessary connections in nature. So even if Hume could allow the coherence of hidden necessary connections, why should he (or we) believe in their *existence*? The source of the belief – the imagination – just does not seem to be the kind of source that bestows any epistemic standing on the belief. This is the problem which Craig’s paper addresses, and he worries about whether Hume can believe in powers when the imagination is switched off. Perhaps in the end Hume’s lesson is that we should not turn the imagination off when it comes to certain beliefs. But that’s another matter altogether.

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<sup>25</sup> See my *Projection and Realism in Hume* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).