

# Cause and Effect\*

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Having now made an abstract of Mr. Hume's Treatise and Essays on the subject of the relation of cause and effect, I shall proceed to examine each part in as regular an order as I conveniently can; and endeavor to answer the two questions first proposed, in a more popular, and, I hope, not more illogical method than Mr. Hume has followed, by attempting to prove,

**First**, that *reason*, not *fancy* and "custom," leads us to the knowledge, that every thing which begins to exist must have a cause.—**Secondly**, that reason forces the mind to perceive, that *similar causes* must necessarily produce *similar effects*.—**Thirdly**, I shall thence establish a more philosophical definition of the relation of cause and effect.—**Fourthly**, show, in what respects Mr. Hume's definition is faulty.—**Fifthly**, proceed to prove that nature cannot be supposed to alter her course without a contradiction in terms; and, finally, show, that *custom and habit* alone are not our guides; but chiefly reason, for the regulation of our expectations in ordinary life.

After this, I shall endeavor to point out some material faults in Dr. Brown's reasoning, tending rather to support Mr. Hume's erroneous arguments, than to repel them: arguments which Mr. Lawrence avails himself of, in the Physiological Lectures, at present before the public; which have drawn so much of its notice; and upon which I shall not consider it irrelevant to make a few remarks.<sup>1</sup>

## Section the First

First, then, let me show, why Mr. Hume's argument, in favor of the possibility of beings commencing their own existence is sophistical; as well as his attempted confutation of those philosophers who have argued to the contrary. Mr. Hume says, the proposition, "that whatever has

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\*This is Chapter 2 of Shepherd's *An Essay upon the Relation of Cause and Effect, Controverting the Doctrine of Mr. Hume, Concerning the Nature of That Relation* (1824); the original chapter bears no title. Original text from the [Internet Archive](#); notes and modernized text by [Trevor Pearce](#).

<sup>1</sup>[Thomas Brown's *Inquiry into the Relation of Cause and Effect* (3rd ed., 1822) and William Lawrence's *Lectures on Physiology, Zoology, and the Natural History of Man* (1822) are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 of Shepherd's *An Essay upon the Relation of Cause and Effect* (1824).]

a beginning, has also a cause of existence,” cannot be demonstrated, because the ideas of cause and effect are “distinct” and “separable”; and it will be easy to conceive “any object to be non-existent this minute,” and “existent the next”; without “conjoining to it the idea of a cause, or a productive principle.”<sup>2</sup>—This imagination is plausible, and may perhaps appear well founded until thoroughly sifted. On a first impression, causes and their effects may seem separable, because two things are mentioned; one is distinct from the other, and may be *imagined* separated from it.

They may also *seem* to follow one another, and *time* to elapse between the *operation of the cause*, and the *appearance of the effect*; so that during the interval of the supposed period, the effect might be *imagined in suspense*, and so indifferent to existence or non-existence; but upon a strict and rigid attention to the real nature of a thing in opposition to its accidental appearances, one cannot, for a moment, suppose that the circumstances here mentioned, namely, of antecedency of cause and subsequence of effect; or of that *distinctness of language* which occasions two words to be used for two ideas; should in any degree render it possible for causes and their effects to exist apart in nature. That it is impossible for them to do so, without involving a direct contradiction in terms, is a proposition I hope to prove in the course of this Essay.

But before examining into this notion, concerning the possibility of effects being held in suspense, and then of being liable to begin their own existence, or, in Mr. Hume’s words, “of the separation of the idea of a cause from that of a beginning of existence,” it will be necessary to render the expressions in which it is conveyed more intelligible.<sup>3</sup> This can in no way be done so long as the *definition of the word effect* presupposes a cause; for the supposition of the objection lies, in its being possible for *effects* to be held in suspense: but in order that this should be possible, the meaning of the word *effect* must be altered. Then, if the ideas are altered that lie under the term, according as the varied occasion seems to require, there can be no philosophy; and it never can be insisted on, that the *effects*, which are *supposed to be conjoined* with their causes at one period of time; and to require, in order to their exhibition, those causes or others; and to receive the name of *effects*, on account of requiring causes; can again, upon another occasion, not be *effects*, not require *causes*, be held in suspense, and be *imagined capable of beginning their existence by themselves*, without conjoining to them the distinct idea of any “productive principle.”—It might as well be reckoned sound reasoning, after defining the figure 2 to be a sign signifying that two units are necessary to its composition, to maintain, that because it stands *singly*, it can be *imagined a unit itself*, without a contradiction; so that it does not stand in need of 2 units to its composition:—that is, a word may be taken in two contradictory senses, and then it may be reasonable to predicate of each, affections that belong only to the other; and so to form any contradictory scheme in the world. To make, therefore, anything like a rational meaning in this sentence of Mr. Hume’s, nothing more can be intended by it, than that we should imagine,

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<sup>2</sup>[Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), 1.3.3.1–3.]

<sup>3</sup>[Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), 1.3.3.3.]

those existences which we always observe conjoined with others in such a manner, that they *appear* to be their effects, properties, or qualities, to owe them *no real existence or dependence*; and therefore capable of being independent objects, and of beginning their own existence. In like manner, it may be said of *causes*, that although the word signifies something calculated to introduce a certain quality, yet that in fact it does not introduce a new quality; thus naming the object in one sense, and imagining its essence in another sense.

This also is as though we should agree to designate each unit by the figure 1; and to assert, that the union of two units introduces a compound notion, which shall be made known by the sign 2; and on account of this relation, the union of the units shall be called the cause of the compound quality two, under a single term; and the sign 2 shall be named its *effect*; and afterwards assert, that we can *imagine* the *cause*, that is the *union of the two units*, to exist without, and separate from, the effect, the result 2. All this cannot take place whilst we assign the same meaning to our words; and if we use the terms in different senses, there can be no philosophy.—Therefore, to make any meaning whatever of the proposition, “we may imagine causes to exist separate from their effects”; the objects we call *causes* are not to be imagined as *causes*, but may be supposed *not to cause anything*, but to exist without *determining their own effects, or any others*; that is, causes and their effects are so evidently distinct, that they may be imagined to be unconnected objects, that are *not causes and effects*, and to exist separately without a contradiction, though they are named expressly as signs of the ideas we have, that they are necessary to one another.

Thus, the original question, namely, “Whether everything which begins to exist requires a cause for its existence?” resolves itself into two others; viz.

First, whether objects called EFFECTS, necessarily require causes for their existence? Or, whether they may begin to exist with, or without them indifferently?—As also,

Secondly, Whether any objects whatever, without being considered as having the *nature of effects*, can begin their existences?

It may be plainly seen, that the first of these questions is sunk in the latter, because, if objects *usually considered as effects* need not be considered as effects, then they are forced to begin their existences *of themselves*; for, conjoined or not to their causes, we know by our senses that they do begin to exist: we will, therefore, immediately hasten to the consideration of the second question, which may be stated in the following terms: Whether every object which begins to exist must owe its existence to a cause?

Let the object which we suppose to begin its existence of itself be imagined, abstracted from the nature of all objects we are acquainted with, saving in its capacity for existence; let us suppose it to be *no effect*; there shall be no preventing circumstances whatever that affect it, nor any existence in the universe: let it be so; let there be nought but a blank; and a mass of whatsoever can be supposed not to require a cause START FORTH into existence, and make the first breach on the wide nonentity around;—now, what is this starting forth, beginning, coming into existence, but an action, which is a quality of an object not yet in being, and so not possible to have its

qualities determined, nevertheless exhibiting its qualities?

If, indeed, it should be shown, that there is no proposition whatever taken as a ground on which to build an argument in this question, neither one conclusion nor the other can be supported; and there need be no attempt at reasoning.—But, if my adversary allows that, no existence being supposed previously in the universe, existence, in order to be, must *begin to be*, and that the notion of *beginning an action* (the being that *begins* it not supposed yet in existence), involves a *contradiction in terms*; then this *beginning* to exist cannot appear but as a *capacity some nature hath* to alter the presupposed nonentity, and to act for itself, whilst itself is not in being.—The original assumption may deny, as much as it pleases, all cause of existence; but, whilst in its very idea, the commencement of existence is an effect predicated of some supposed cause, (*because the quality of an object which must be in existence to possess it,*) we must conclude that *there is no object which begins to exist, but must owe its existence to some cause*.

For this reason it is, that the answers to Dr. Clarke and Mr. Locke are unsound, in as far as they are an endeavor to show, that their arguments are altogether sophistical.—Mr. Hume objects to them, that the existence supposed to begin by itself, “is not to be considered as an *effect*; and that these authors assume what is not granted, viz. that the existence in question requires a *cause*”; as where Dr. Clarke shows it is an absurdity to imagine an object its *own cause*, and Mr. Locke asserts that it is equally so, to conceive of *nothing* as a cause.<sup>4</sup> It is undoubtedly true, that these authors assumed that which was in question; namely, that every existence must have a cause: but, as everything not yet in existence, *to exist at all*, must *begin*, and as the *beginning* of anything must always be supposed, by the *nature of the action*, to be a quality of something in existence, which existence is yet DENIED by the statement of the question, these philosophers felt the involved absurdity so great, that they passed over the first question as too ridiculous, probably, to consider formally; then showed, that the mind of man was forced to look upon all things which begin to exist as *dependent QUALITIES*; and thus, that an object could neither depend upon *itself for existence*, nor yet upon *nothing*.

Let it be remembered, too, that although Mr. Hume inveighs against this method as sophistical, by conceiving it begs the question, yet his own argument, the whole way, consists in the possibility of imagining an *effect* “*non-existent* this minute,” and “*existing* the next”; and does not himself consider any other “*sort of being*” possible; and has no other way of supporting his own notion of the beginning of existence by itself, except under the *idea of an effect in suspense*; which is still a *relative term*, and begs the question for the necessity of its correlative, i.e. its *cause*, just as much as he asserts his adversaries do, whom he declares to be illogical reasoners.

If then (as I hope I have shown) all objects whatever, which *begin to exist*, must owe their *existence to some cause*, those we usually consider as effects CANNOT be held in suspense; suddenly alter their nature; be “*non-existent* this minute, and *existent* the next”; and, though always introduced as *qualities of other objects*, be easily separated from the ideas of their causes, and require

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<sup>4</sup>[Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), 1.3.3.5–6.]

no “productive principle.”

“That cause and effect are distinct and separable”; so “that any object may be conceived, as therefore *capable of beginning its own existence*,” must be considered as among the notions adopted in *the Essays*: what else is the meaning of such propositions as these: “There appears not throughout all nature, any one instance of connection, as conceivable by us”; “one event follows another,” “but we never can observe *any tie between them*, etc.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the not admitting “*any relations of ideas*,” or “*any reasonings a priori*,” (so as to be capable of supporting the idea of CAUSATION as a *creating principle* absolutely necessary in the universe) is but repeating “the *juvenile ideas*” of the Treatise, and “*casting them anew in these later pieces*.”<sup>6</sup>

Before I proceed further, I wish my reader to grant the proposition, “that a being cannot begin its existence of itself”; because I mean to make use of it in my further reply to Mr. Hume’s doctrines; and, unless this step is allowed, I can make no further progress in this argument.

## Section the Second

We will now proceed to the second part of the original inquiry; that is, “why we conclude that such particular causes must necessarily have such particular effects; and what is the nature of that inference we draw from one to the other, and of the belief we repose in it?”<sup>7</sup> The question, however, ought to stand thus, “why LIKE CAUSES must necessarily have LIKE EFFECTS?” Because what is really enquired into, is the *general notion of necessary connection*, between *all like* cause and effect; and by thus putting the question respecting *particulars only*, although they might be included in an universal answer, yet no answer applicable to them MERELY, could authorize a *universal axiom*. The manner of stating the enquiry in *the Essays*, is also too vaguely expressed, (although it be evident that it is the *general relation* which is enquired into.) Mr. Hume says, “we will now enquire, how we arrive at the *knowledge of cause and effect*.”<sup>8</sup> It ought to be stated, how we arrive at the knowledge of the *necessary connection*, between *like* cause and effect?

Let it be remembered, that Mr. Hume says, “this principle is nothing but custom and habit”; that “belief in necessary connection is nothing but an intense and steady conception, arising from the customary conjunction of the object with something present to the memory or senses; that when flame and heat, cold and snow, have always been conjoined together, there is such a customary conjunction between them, that when flame and snow are anew presented to the senses, the mind is carried by custom to expect heat and cold.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), 7.26.

<sup>6</sup>[Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), 4.18]; Hume, *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* (1777), Advertisement.

<sup>7</sup>[Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), 1.3.2.15.]

<sup>8</sup>Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), 4.5.

<sup>9</sup>[Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), 5.8.]

“That *reason* can never show us the connection of one object with another, though aided by experience”; for “we can at least *conceive a change in the course of nature*.”<sup>10</sup> That necessary connection is “nothing but an internal act of the mind, determined to carry its thoughts from one object to another.”<sup>11</sup> Thus necessary connection of cause and effect is only a custom of the mind! Power is only a custom of the mind! Expectations, and experience, are only customs of the mind! The consequence of which doctrine is, that as a *custom of the mind* is entirely a different circumstance from the *operation of nature*, we may “*conceive*” at least the contrary of what we have been accustomed to may take place,—we may conceive the “course of nature to change.”

Now it is my intention to show, in contradiction to these ideas of Mr. Hume, that it is reason, and not custom, which guides our minds in forming the notions of necessary connection, of belief and of expectation.<sup>12</sup>

In order to this let us bear in mind the reasoning already adduced in the foregoing chapter, and it thence immediately follows, that objects which we know by our senses do begin their existences, and by our reason know they cannot begin it of themselves, must begin it by the operation of some other beings in existence, producing these new qualities in nature, and introducing them to our observation. The very meaning of the word cause, is *producer* or *creator*; of effect, the *produced* or *created*—and the idea is gained by such an observance of nature, as we think is efficient in any given case, to an *experimentum crucis*.<sup>13</sup>

Long observation of the invariableness of antecedency, and subsequency, is not wanted; many trials are not wanted, to generate the notion of *producing power*.

One trial is enough, in such circumstances, as will bring the mind to the following reasoning. Here is a new quality, which appears to my senses:

But it could not arise of itself; nor could any surrounding objects, but one (or more) affect it; therefore that one, (or more) have occasioned it, for there is nothing else to make a difference; and a *difference* could not “*begin of itself*.”

This is an argument, which all persons, however illiterate, feel the force of. It is the only foundation for the demonstrations of the laboratory of the chemist; which all life resembles, and so closely, in many instances, that the philosopher, and the vulgar, are equally sure of what

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<sup>10</sup>[Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), 1.3.6.12, 1.3.6.5.]

<sup>11</sup>[Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), 1.3.14.20.]

<sup>12</sup>I conceive it impossible to have a complete conviction that every effect is inherent, or contained in its cause, until the mind be imbued with the knowledge, that objects are but unknown circumstances in nature, when unperceived by the senses; which when perceived, exhibit their appropriate qualities accordingly; and which then appear in certain defined masses, as to the different senses they affect, as to their figure, etc.; and receive an arbitrary name for their assemblage. They must have also among each other certain proportions. When these unknown circumstances, (or affections, or substances,) in nature, *mix*, and are thereby *altered*, *the qualities which affect the senses* are in the *same proportions altered*, and are necessarily included in those objects as their effects. But this part of the subject, is of such moment that a separate consideration of it is intended.

<sup>13</sup>“A decisive test that shows which one of several hypotheses is correct.” (OED).]

cause is absolutely necessary to the production of certain effects; for instance, each knows that in certain given circumstances, *the closing of the eye* will eclipse the prospect of nature; and the slight motion of reopening it, will restore all the objects to view. Therefore, the eye (in these circumstances,) is the *cause or producer of vision*. ONE trial would be enough, under certain *known* circumstances.<sup>14</sup> Why? Not from “*custom*,” because there has been *one trial only*; but from *reason*, because vision not being able to *produce itself, nor any of the surrounding objects by the supposition*; it is the *eye* which must necessarily perform the operation; for there is nothing else to make a difference; and a different quality could not “*begin its own existence*.” It is this sort of REASONING UPON EXPERIMENT, which takes place in every man’s mind, concerning every affair in life, which generates the notion of power, and necessary connection; and gives birth to that maxim, “*a like cause must produce a like effect*.” The circumstances being supposed the same on a second occasion as on a former one, and carefully observed to be so; the eye when opened would be expected to let in light, and all her objects. “I observe (says the mind) in this or any other case, all the preveing circumstances the same as before; for there is nothing to make a difference; and a difference cannot arise without something to occasion it; else there would be a beginning of existence by itself, which is impossible.”

It is this compound idea, therefore, *the result of the experience of what does take place upon any given trial*, MIXED with the *reasoning that nothing else could ensue*, unless on the one hand, *efficient causes were allowed for the alteration*; or, on the other, that things could “*alter their existences FOR THEMSELVES*”; which generates the notion of *power* or “*producing principle*,” and for which we have formed the word.

It is in vain to say that a habit of association of ideas from observing “*contiguity in time, and place*,” between objects is all we know of *power*; a habit of the mind will not begin *existence*, will not *introduce a quality*.<sup>15</sup> The really philosophical method of viewing the subject is this: that objects in relation to us, are nothing but masses of certain qualities, affecting certain of our senses; and which, when independent of our senses, are *unknown* powers or qualities in nature. These masses change their qualities by their mixture with any other mass, and then the corresponding qualities determined to the senses must of course also change. These changed qualities, are termed *effects*; or *consequents*; but are really no more than NEW QUALITIES arising from *new objects*, which have been formed by the *junctions of other objects* (previously formed) or might be considered as the *unobserved qualities of existing objects*; which *shall be observed when properly exhibited*.

If then an existence now in being, *conjoined with any other*, forms thereby a *new nature*, capable of exhibiting *new qualities*, these new qualities must enter into the definition of the objects; they become a part of their natures; and when by careful experiment, or judicious observa-

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<sup>14</sup>When more trials are needed than ONE, it is in order to *detect* the circumstances, not to lay a *foundation for the general principle*, that a LIKE cause repeated, a LIKE effect will take place.

<sup>15</sup>[Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), I.I.4.I.]

tion, no new preveing circumstances are supposed to make an alteration in the conjunction of the same bodies, the *new qualities*, that are named *effects*, are expected without a doubt to arise upon every such conjunction; because, they as much belong to this *newly combined nature*, as the original qualities did to each separate nature, before their conjunction. So little is custom the principle of cause and effect, that if upon the *first* and original trial of the element of fire, all surrounding circumstances were put away from having any influence over it, saving the body it destroyed; that power of *discerptibility* would be ever after considered as one of its qualities; as much as its color or its light, or its warmth, without the presence of which, it would not be fire.

This conjunction with a grosser material than itself, is the new circumstance, on which it exhibits its essential and permanent quality of discerptibility to the senses; now if the trial be complete, when upon a second occasion an object having the same sensible qualities as fire hath, known also to have been elicited from the same preveing circumstances, meets with the same gross body as heretofore, it must of *necessity* consume it. There is nothing to make a *difference*. A *difference* is an *effect*, a *change of being*, an *altered existence*, an existence which *cannot "begin of itself"* any more than any other in nature; could the fire be supposed not to consume the gross body, there would be a difference of qualities, that is, new qualities, which by the data there is no cause for. The original circumstances, of which fire is the compound effect, from which it results as a *formed object*, are supposed to be ordered the same as on a former occasion; these are necessarily compelled to be attended with the same effects or combined qualities; otherwise there would be the "*beginnings of existence*" by themselves, which has before been shown to be impossible. But the *combined qualities*, are the whole qualities that fire in every circumstance, is capable of producing. Meeting, therefore, with a gross body, which on any one occasion, in certain circumstances, it once consumed; under the same circumstances, it must necessarily again consume it. That DIFFERENCES OF EXISTENCE cannot begin of themselves; is therefore the second conclusion supposed to be established.

"*Antecedency and subsequency*," are therefore immaterial to the proper definition of cause and effect; on the contrary, although an object, in order to act as a cause, must be in being antecedently to such action; yet when it *acts as a cause*, its *effects* are *synchronous with that action*, and are *included in it*; which a close inspection into the nature of cause will prove. For effects are no more than the new qualities, of newly formed objects. Each conjunction of bodies, (now separately in existence, and of certain defined qualities,) produces upon their union those new natures, whose qualities must necessarily *be in, and with them, in the very moment of their formation*.

Thus *the union of two distinct natures*, is the *cause, producer or creator* of another; which must instantly, and immediately, have all its peculiar qualities; but the cause has not acted, is not completed, till the *union* has taken place, and the new nature is formed with all its qualities, *in, and about it*. *Cause producing effect*, therefore, under the strict eye of philosophical scrutiny, is a *new object exhibiting new qualities*; or shortly, the formation of a new *mass of qualities*. A *chain*



*of conjunctions of bodies*, of course, *occupies time*; and is the reason why the careless observation of philosophers, enabling them to take notice only of some one distinct effect, (after perhaps innumerable successive conjunctions of bodies,) occasions the mistake, by which they consider *subsequency of effect*, as a part of the *essential definition* of that term; and *priority*, as *essential* to the nature of cause.

As a short illustration of the doctrine unfolded, let us take the idea of nourishment, considered as the effect, subsequent to the taking of food, its cause. Here the *nature* of nourishment, is a *process* which begins to act immediately that food is in conjunction with the stomach. "That we are nourished" is only the last result of a continuous chain of causes and effects, in formation from the first moment the food enters the stomach, to that, in which every particle is absorbed and deposited in the proper place in the body. Here, the capacity of food to exhibit certain qualities, when in conjunction with the body, is shown; the nature of the human body, to exhibit certain other qualities, in consequence of that conjunction, is also shown; but the *effect of nourishment*, being *subsequent* to, and at such a distance of time from, the original cause, is only so, on account of its being the effect of a vast number of causes, or unions of objects in succession, of which the union of the stomach and the food was first in order.

Our deficient observation, is apt to prevent our taking notice of the second, third, or indefinite number of effects; which arise in consequence of as many conjunctions of objects.

But the first, and other *effects* successively, are as much and entirely synchronous with their *causes*, as any other quality of any single object, which is always exhibited along with it.

Secondly. It is also quite immaterial to the definition of this relation, whether an untried, or unobserved quality, be called *quality*, or *effect*. The unknown or at present undetermined quality, which is termed an effect, might always change its place with some *known quality*, and not bear the name of effect; and *vice versa*: Thus, a blind man may call the object which warmed, or burned him, fire; but his eyes being supposed suddenly to open, he would consider the flame and its brilliant colour as the *effects* of fire; whilst he who sees fire constantly, being able always to take notice of its flame and color, considers them as the constant and unvarying *qualities* of fire, and which render the substance before him worthy of bearing that name; but the quality of burning, which he does not *constantly* experience, he names an *effect* or *consequence* of fire previously being in existence. But the true method of looking upon the subject is this—that fire, in order to deserve the name it bears, must comprehend all its qualities *tried* and *untried*; *observed* and *unobserved*; *determined* and *undetermined*; it deserves the name only on account of its being a certain defined object; *elicited from certain causes observed to be efficient to its production*; and by the very conditions of the question, is allowed to be *the same*. But an object is nothing else (in relation to *us*,) than a mass of peculiar qualities; and when observations inform us, that any known mass is produced by similar circumstances, on various occasions; such mass or object must necessarily contain all its qualities, and be equal to exhibit all its effects in hitherto untried events. Upon any occasion where we are either certain, or have a high probability, that an object

presented to us is truly similar to a former one, and was created by the same causes; we expect all tried qualities to be the same as before, and any *untried* quality, (that is, any quality not in present operation, though previously ascertained,) must belong ever after to its definition. All that is necessary is to be correct, as to the preventing or influencing circumstances which gave *birth to the object*. They being the same on any two or more occasions, the object elicited must necessarily be the same—but it is not the same, unless it hath all its *qualities*, and no other than its qualities. Therefore fire, in order to have a right to the sign of the word fire, for an expression of its attributes, in order to be a “*like cause*,” must of necessity burn as much as it must be red, otherwise the red object were not fire; and *could not have been produced by those causes that elicit that element*. I mean therefore to conclude, that effects are but the qualities of an object not experienced by some of the senses of the human frame, whilst certain others at present touch it; *the knowledge of which last*, being joined to the observation of the WHENCE the object was produced, beget the knowledge of what new untried qualities may be expected in future under given circumstances. It becomes therefore part of the definition of fire to burn certain bodies, to melt others; of bread to nourish the human body; of snow to be cold, and white; and these qualities they must have, in order to compose that entire *enumeration of qualities*, for which appropriate names have been formed, and to the exhibition of which similar and efficient causes have been in action.

If it should be said, that in considering objects as masses of combined qualities, the *result* of like causes previously in action, we beg the question not yet supposed to be granted,—I answer; that *like causes*, that is, *like objects*, are by the supposition admitted, and then the question arises, whether it is demonstrable they must have like effects or qualities, *under like circumstances in future*? I answer, they must have like effects, or qualities, because there is nothing else *given* that can be supposed to make a difference; and a difference of qualities could not arise of *itself*, could not begin its own existence; and I add, not only, there is nothing else *supposed* that can make a difference; but that when we also know that in the FORMATION of any object no difference took place; then, *there is no ground whatever*, for imagining *the possibility* of an *alteration in the effects of that object*. But although it be very difficult in the analysis of this question, not to use the word *cause* in its intended sense, before the definition of the word is given, and although it be true that in this last observation I may have done so in saying, *that objects must be the same which are elicited from like causes*, i.e. *from the junction of like preventing circumstances*; (and which position will be fully borne out in the process of the argument;) yet a fastidious reader may omit every such reference to the notion of cause; for the argument is perfect without it, and stands thus:

*Effects* are nothing but those *same conjunctions of qualities*, which in other words are admitted as *similar causes*, in the supposition of the question. The objects (whose *union is necessary* to a given result,) must certainly exist, *antecedent* to such an union. But it is *in their UNION*, there exists those *newly formed objects*, or masses of qualities called *effects*, which are therefore *identical* with the *similar cause*; for in *this union*, cause and effect are *synchronous*, and they are

but different words for the same *essence*. Fire and wood must be antecedent to combustion, no doubt; but in the *union of fire and wood*, there exists immediately *combustion* as a new event in nature;—also in this union exists the similar *cause* allowed by the *data*, whilst combustion is also termed the *effect* of the union of fire and wood; but, however termed, an *effect*, is in fact a new but similar object as heretofore. A *similar* mass of qualities, in kind, which cannot therefore be a *different* mass of qualities in kind.—Equals added to equals upon any two occasions, the whole must be equal; add equal qualities to equal qualities, the sum of the qualities must be equal upon every repetition of the junction;—and the *sum* must be the *same result* taken twice over, not two *different*, or possibly *altered sums*. Therefore I repeat, that in the consideration of the nature of cause and effect, it is immaterial whether the yet unframed qualities of objects, previous to their junction, be named *effects*; they are to be considered as qualities; and qualities may be considered as *effects*, under any circumstances that prevent their usual exhibition. Effects when developed are no more than qualities; and qualities previous to their development are in our imagination considered as effects.

Thirdly. Again, it is immaterial to the definition of the relation of cause and effect, that we are not acquainted with the “secret powers” of natural objects, either before or after experience; for when we find, that in any distinct and given circumstances they put on certain qualities to the senses, their secret powers and properties must be qualified in all *like circumstances* to be the same, and are obliged to be so; because no contrary qualities could “begin their existences of themselves”; and by the *supposition* there is no *cause in the circumstances*, to give rise to any *differences in the qualities*. Indeed, Mr. Hume makes a great mistake in supposing it necessary to demonstrate, in every particular instance, what *particular* effect must necessarily flow from its object, in order to gain the idea of *necessary connection*. The *how* and the *why* have nothing to do with the general reasoning affecting the general proposition; for “whether like Causes shall produce like Effects” is *not* a question exactly the same as whether “such particular causes shall have such *particular* effects?”<sup>16</sup> Which Mr. Hume seems to consider as precisely of the same import; whereas *one is a general* question, which however answered, in the *affirmative* or *negative*, would apply to *particulars*. But supposing in each *particular* instance under our notice, we could descry the “*secret powers of nature*,” the general question concerning *all* like causes would still remain unanswered; and an universal conclusion could not logically be deduced from the particular premises concerning it: as will be more fully argued in the discussion upon Dr. Brown’s reasoning.

If it should be asked, (as Mr. Hume presently does,) how is it known when objects are similar upon any two occasions; the “sensible qualities may be the same, and not the *secret powers, upon which the effects depend*?”<sup>17</sup> I answer, this is to *shift* the question from the examination of *like*

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<sup>16</sup> [Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), 1.3.15.8, 1.3.2.15; note that these are not the exact sections cited by Shepherd.]

<sup>17</sup> [Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), 4.16.]

*causes supposed*, to the consideration of the *method whereby their presence may be detected*.<sup>18</sup> But this difficulty is met, and considered in, its proper place; I shall only here say, that as the *secret powers* are the real external unknown causes in nature, which determine the sensible qualities, as well as *every other effect*; so when we find the sensible qualities the same on any two occasions, we are sure the secret powers are similar *thus far*, and therefore fitted to exhibit their further similar effects;—(or *combined secret powers and sensible qualities*;) and although some *unobserved* cause might creep in to alter the object, whilst appearing the same, yet this we do not *imagine* when we are not aware of it, especially in cases where the same sensible qualities have been regularly exhibited along with like secret powers; for this regularity is perceived as an *effect*, for which there must be a proportional *cause*, and begets a proportional belief accordingly.—We argue from the *regular effects*, (the sensible qualities;) to the *regular causes*, (the secret powers;) which having been equal to certain other *effects or properties*, we expect again the same, under similar circumstances. We argue from the regular *ends* nature keeps in view, up to nature's God, who ordained them, and who must be supposed still to continue true to those ends; and along with the grander operations of nature, we may often in many cases observe our own actions, and those of others, conspiring only to fashion similar objects. But when the *secret powers*, and sensible qualities, are known, or *supposed the same*, the conclusion is demonstrative; *so must be the effects*. Whilst, were it possible to know the secret powers in each *particular* past instance, *universal* truth would not thence result. Neither has Mr. Hume any right to make this argument; because to conceive “there may be secret powers which may change the effects, dependent on them,” is to make use of the relation between cause and effect, as of a really necessary connection, in order to oppose his adversary: a principle which he previously refuses to admit. Also the objection forms an illogical argument in another way. For it virtually draws a general conclusion from *two negative premises*. To assert, that like sensible qualities merely, will NOT produce like effects; and, that *like sensible qualities* are NOT *like causes*, is to separate the middle term both from the subject and from the predicate of the general question. By *such an argument* Mr. Hume is certainly right in supposing, that REASON cannot support “*our conclusions concerning the operations of cause and effect*.”

Having thus cleared a way, towards the comprehension of this relation of cause and effect, we will proceed to a definition of those terms in the next section.

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<sup>18</sup>I should not here have taken notice of this objection, but that as Mr. Hume does suddenly shift the question, so I would not appear to avoid an answer to it: otherwise it is something too early to enter upon the subject; obliging me to make use of my argument previously to its complete development. But the reader may pass over to the next section if he please.

### Section the Third

A cause, therefore, is such action of an object, as shall enable it, in conjunction with another, to form a new nature, capable of exhibiting qualities varying from those of either of the objects unconjoined. This is really to be a producer of new being.—This is a generation, or *creation*, of qualities not conceived of, antecedently to their existence;—and not merely an “*idea always followed by another*,” on account of a “*customary association between them*.”<sup>19</sup>

An effect is the produced quality exhibited to the senses, as the essential property of natures so conjoined. Necessary connection of cause and effect is the obligation qualities have to inhere in their objects, and to exhibit their varieties according to the different human senses with which they come in contact. Power is but another word for efficient cause, or “productive principle”; and signifies the *property* which lies in the *secret nature of objects*, when unobserved by the senses, and which determines the qualities that can be exhibited to them upon every new conjunction.—An *object* may be defined, a *combined mass of qualities*; the result of proportional unknown circumstances in nature, meeting with the human senses.

But Mr. Hume’s three definitions of the relation of cause and effect are, in many respects, faulty, and not borne out by his own arguments; for he defines a cause “an object followed by another, and where all the objects similar to the first are followed by objects similar to the second.”<sup>20</sup>—Now, if he means an object that will in *future*, as in *past* times, be always followed by another; an *invariable* necessity in the antecedent to be followed by its subsequent, his whole argument tends to prove the *contrary*, and to show that experience has power to answer for the *past* only, and cannot for the future; for, that we may conceive a “change in the course of nature,” and that imagination supplies only the notion of *invariable* expectation from “custom”; that this is the sense of the passage containing the original definition, we may be sure of, from what follows; for he goes on to say, “or in other words, where if the first object had not been, the second never had existed”; but this idea expresses a much stricter necessity of connection than does the relation of any number of objects, which had only followed each other in *past time*, however often their antecedency and subsequency had been repeated. Such a necessity is contradicted the whole way by the argument. It is quite another sentiment, from that which arises from the ideas of *always before and after*. That which requires another object to its existence, must be *necessarily connected* with it; and I contend that it is so connected, as a *new quality* of an altered mode of existence. But Mr. Hume says, it is only connected, as an invariable subsequent, must always be understood to require its invariable antecedent.—But I retort, why does the definition assume more than the argument can possibly bear out?

How can the *invariableness* of the future be answered for by the experience of any invariableness in the past? It is truly impossible that it should be so. Custom can only, at the most, lead us

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<sup>19</sup>[Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), 7.30.]

<sup>20</sup>[Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), 7.29.]

to *expect* that the future would be similar to the past; but it never could so sufficiently answer for it, as to enable us to form a definition concerning its *absolute INVARIABLENESS of phenomenon*.

Indeed, in many cases there are *single* exceptions to universal experience, and to any habit of expectation founded on it; which at once proves Mr. Hume's definition to be erroneous; for hence the *invariableness* of the sequence becomes altered, and custom shown to be utterly incapable of affording a *universal definition*, of the relation in question.—Now, *experiment* is what decides as to a real and necessary cause, under given circumstances.—When an event happens under one set of circumstances, not under another in all respects the same, save ONE; *that* one is a *true cause*, and a *necessary one*; and under the same circumstances, it must be invariably wanted to that end; and every mind feels it so, because it perceives that an *alteration* could not begin of itself. This, and nothing but this, is a *strict necessity*, and can enable the mind to predicate for the future as for the past.

But the first definition is also faulty in another instance; because in every just definition, the ideas that are included in the terms, must not suit any other object. Now many objects are invariably antecedents and subsequents, that are not causes and effects; and it can be no good definition, to warrant the arguing in a circle, which *this definition* evidently does.

The second definition is also erroneous, because although similar causes must have similar effects, yet *diverse* causes may produce the same effects also—therefore the *second object might exist* without the first, by the operation of any other cause efficient to it.<sup>21</sup> The third definition, viz. “an object followed by another, and whose appearance always conveys the *thought to that other*,” does not differ materially from the first—yet it is worthy of observation, that the thought always being carried by the appearance of one object to the idea of another, proves nothing but *an accidental though strong association of ideas*; and is in like manner objectionable, on account of *suiting other objects than the thing defined*. Every *Andrew* is not necessarily “*Simon Peter's Brother*,” although my thought always recurs to that idea, upon every mention of the name of *Andrew*.<sup>22</sup>

## Section the Fourth

It follows then from the definitions given in the preceding section, and the reasonings on which they are formed, that were a body, in all other respects resembling snow, to have the taste of salt and feeling of fire, it would be an extraordinary phenomenon, no doubt; and one which might for ought we know take place, but it would not be snow; and such a body could not fall from the clouds but by new causes efficient to its formation;—it would, therefore, be entirely a different

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<sup>21</sup>I make this remark however, rather with respect to Mr. Hume's notion of cause than my own; in order to show there is an inconsistency between his argument and his definition; for *diverse antecedents* might invariably be followed by *similar subsequents*; then, in each separate case the second object might exist without the first.

<sup>22</sup>[John 1: 40.]

object, and would require a new name; and the phenomenon could offer no ground for the conclusion, that *reason* does not afford an argument, for the expectation of similar effects from similar causes.<sup>23</sup>

Nature, it is true, varies all her operations; but not in a manner that can ever make it appear otherwise than a contradiction to reason, that it should be through interferences with her regular course. For instance, something similar to the case imagined does take place; we all know that various substances fall from the clouds; but they are all named by various names accordingly; they are known by reason to be different *masses of qualities*, different objects, which must have been produced by different circumstances. Such variety, therefore, offers no contradiction to our REASON, our EXPECTATIONS, or our TERMS. Yet Mr. Hume seems to think that nature, without a contradiction to our ideas, may be supposed to alter her course in the *determination of her qualities*; and occasion contrary and different qualities, from otherwise similar objects. Nature, no doubt, preserving in many objects certain appearances to some of the senses, may vary the remaining qualities.

But this cannot be, without her using preventing causes of an altered kind, efficient to the new production; and then it is a new object and must be *newly named*. Such events as these, which are nothing else than all the various events, in the uni-verse, (for all things are *alike* to some of the senses, and *diverse* in others;) nature is full of; but this does not prove, there is not a *necessary connection* between CAUSE AND EFFECT; and that custom only guides our expectations. On the contrary, it is because there can be no “*beginnings of existences*” by themselves, that we know, when new phenomena arise, from *apparently* similar circumstances, that we must lie under a mistake; and that the new objects cannot be *the same objects altered*, and elicited from similar circumstances. We might as well deem meteoric stones to be snow, as a body, which had the taste of salt and the feeling of fire. Nature, therefore, cannot, when employing *like* causes in action, alter her course in determining different and contrary “*effects*” from otherwise similar objects; because in such a case, these *new qualities* would absolutely be *uncaused*; *different* qualities would be exhibited from *precisely similar conjunctions of bodies*, i.e. *different* and *contrary* qualities, (or effects) from otherwise similar objects, (or causes) which is impossible.

Should it be said that nature is supposed to be employing different causes in action; by altering the “*secret powers*” (whilst the “*sensible qualities*” remain the same,) that it is in this way she changes her course—then the preventing *conjunctions of bodies* which produced these secret powers, being supposed different; the *natures* of the objects are different; they are truly *other* objects, and there is no astonishment at the production of their altered effects; *there is no alteration in the course of nature*; and the phenomena will not support Mr. Hume’s argument *against* REASON, and in favor of CUSTOM only; it follows, therefore, that if “we imagine the course of nature *may change*,” it must be under the notion of a *cause equivalent to it*:—*in which case there is no contradiction offered to the notion of causation as founded on REASON*. But for nature otherwise

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<sup>23</sup>[Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), 4.18.]

to change, and to vary either her “*effects*,” or “*secret powers*” without varying the causes or preventing circumstances whose junction formed the objects, whence these result;—is so obviously impossible, that we cannot even suppose the will and power of the Deity to be able to work the contradiction. He could not make a finite quality, *dependent* upon himself or some other cause for its exhibition, to become *independent* and able to *exist of itself*; he could not otherwise than by himself altering the determination of the causes that form the objects; then there is a cause for the alleged change—the objects are not *similar* objects; the *whole* preventing circumstances are not the same; and it is only *unlike* causes again that beget *unlike* effects; unlike objects that vary in their qualities.

But the following sentence, which contains the passage alluded to, involves an ambiguity of expression, which ought to be noticed, lest it should appear as though I had mistaken it, and consequently my answer not appear sufficiently applicable, viz. “Nature maybe supposed to change her course since it implies no contradiction, that an object SEEMINGLY like those which we have experienced, may be attended with different or contrary effects.”<sup>24</sup> There is here an ambiguity of sense on account of the expression “SEEMINGLY”; for it may either intend, *an alteration in the determination of effects from objects, in ALL OTHER respects similar, save in these CONTRARY effects; or an “ARBITRARY” change in the “secret powers” “which mix with the sensible qualities; and on which the effects entirely depend.”* In either sense, such an arbitrary change in the course of nature, is a “CONTRADICTION TO REASON” and an IMPOSSIBILITY.

Mr. Hume however seems to use it in either of these senses, as the occasion serves, and without conceiving there is much difference between them.

The former sense however appears to be that in which it is used, as applicable in the instance concerning the changes upon snow. Compare these passages, “may I not distinctly conceive, a body *in all other respects* resembling snow having the taste of salt, and feeling of fire,”—with, “every effect is a distinct event from its cause”; and “even after it is suggested, its conjunction must appear *arbitrary* with its cause, since there are always many other effects, which to *reason* might seem fully as consistent and natural.”<sup>25</sup> But it is in the latter sense, viz.: in the “*arbitrary*” alteration of the “*secret powers*,” (*in order to form DIFFERENT causes for the determination of DIFFERENT effects*), which must explain the following passage: “Let the course of nature be allowed hitherto ever so regular proves not that for the future it will continue so.” “The secret nature of objects, and consequently all their effects and influences, may change without any change in the sensible qualities”<sup>26</sup>; In either of the senses in which Mr. Hume uses the notion in question, it is equally absurd; for as *cause* is not by him granted, nature must be supposed to change her regular march *uncaused*; whether in striking off *different* and *contrary* qualities, from objects in

<sup>24</sup>Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), 4.18.

<sup>25</sup>Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), 4.18, 4.11.

<sup>26</sup>Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), 4.21; the method in which this idea begs the question, has been taken notice of before.



every other respect similar, *save in these arbitrary and contrary determinations*; or in the mixing *different secret powers* amidst the *sensible qualities*. Nor will it answer for Mr. Hume to shift his position, and say; that the “secret powers” may be considered, as *changed* by the *regular operations of nature*; and that, on account of our inability to detect them, we are necessarily obliged to consider, the *sensible qualities* ONLY, as *like causes*; thereby concluding the *effects* will be *similar* upon *insufficient grounds*; and thus REASON, not able to support the idea of a *really* necessary connection between them.

For upon this supposition, the *real relation* of cause and effect, is *assumed as granted*—

First. In order to account for the change in the secret powers.

Secondly. To account for the change in the effects dependent upon them.

And this is at once yielding the whole argument to the adversary!<sup>27</sup> Enabling him justly to retort, that he makes use of the general principle concerning cause and effect (which is now granted), and which he supports upon “*general reasoning*,” whereby in many instances to *suspect*, and in many others to *detect*, UNlike secret powers amidst the sensible qualities, by which means it becomes applicable, as an AXIOM founded on REASON, wherewith to try every kind of experience both in philosophy and common life—whilst also he can maintain;—that unless it were for the knowledge of such a general principle, *no knowledge* of the “secret powers” of nature in ever so many *past* instances, could be of any material service to us *for the future*.

All mathematical demonstration is built upon the notion; that where quantities, or diagrams, resemble each other, the relations which are true, with respect to ONE of each kind will be true with respect to *all* others of a *like* kind; ONLY *because there is nothing else to make a difference among them*. So, if in all *past time*, such *secret powers* could be shown necessarily connected with such *sensible qualities*; yet in *future* it could not thence be proved to continue so, *unless supported by the axioms*;—that LIKE causes must EXHIBIT *like* effects, and that DIFFERENCES CANNOT ARISE *of themselves*.

Upon the whole, therefore, Mr. Hume must be understood to mean, that as we know nothing of “*cause and effect*,” or of the “*secret processes of nature*” so she might be supposed indifferently to strike off contrary effects from similar preveing causes, or else to alter their “secret powers,” whilst their FORMATION was produced by the same means as usual. Thus that exactly the same circumstances might prevene the falling of snow, (precisely the same objects might unite to produce that object,) upon any two occasions, yet, it might have the taste of salt or feeling of fire! That the “secret powers” of vegetation might in future be altered; although the seasons should roll the same as before; and every power in nature be only equal to the contrary supposition!

To all which I answer, nature cannot alter her course when she is employing *similar means*

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<sup>27</sup>This sort of argument forms a sophism which logicians term “*ignoratio elenchi*”; “something being proved which is not necessarily inconsistent with the proposition maintained”: see Watts, *Logick* (1725), Part 3, Chapter 3, Section 1. And this is the real gist, of the whole of Mr. Hume’s argument (*a posteriori*) and which is generally considered, I believe, as both acute and *logical*.

in the formation of objects, by changing any of the “secret powers,” or altering any effects; because the prevenient circumstances being supposed in any two cases similar, there would be no assignable reason for the difference. A difference, or change, *either* in the “secret powers” of objects, or the *effects* of causes, (other things remaining the same) is exactly equal to the CREATION of so many new qualities, which could not, without a CONTRADICTION, *arise of themselves*.

I can conceive it said by some, although Mr. Hume would have no right to do so, that a miraculous interference might alter the course of nature; not so, not in determining the production of dissimilar objects from similar causes. No miracle could form an *uncaused* change in nature (which is the notion in question).

A miraculous interference, that is, an interference of God as a cause, might alter the production of objects, yet still there is a *cause* equivalent to the *change*, and again *unlike* objects beget *unlike* qualities: I therefore draw a conclusion from the whole of this reasoning, exactly contrary to Mr. Hume’s inference from his; admitting indeed with him, that before experience we cannot know what *particular* effects will flow from given causes; yet *after experience* I judge that it is “*reason* which guides us in our expectations”; because it convinces us, that “instances” (of *effects*,) “of which we have had no experience must resemble” (when causes are similar) “those of which we have had experience,” for that “the course of nature must continue uniformly the same,” *by the regular determination of like cause and effect*.<sup>28</sup>

The same kind of answer will serve for other paradoxical questions which Mr. Hume puts in these Essays.

Is there, says he, any more intelligible proposition than to affirm, that all the trees will flourish in December and January, and decay in May and June?<sup>29</sup> Certainly not, to those who conceive that the “course of nature may without an implied contradiction alter the determination of effects that proceed from like causes,” or, which is the same thing, exhibit different or contrary qualities, from similar objects. But according to the method I have laid down of viewing the operations of nature, there cannot be a more *unintelligible proposition* than to assert of those trees, which have usually flourished in May and June, that they may cease to do so, and only thrive in December and January.

So far from the mind being able distinctly “*to conceive*” such a change in their qualities, when the proof has been once afforded, that it is their nature to require warmth for their growth; and that cold kills their blossoms; it must be ever after considered impossible for these objects to affect qualities not originally included in their *natures*;—or, for their *natures* to alter, without a cause equivalent to the alteration—or a cause equivalent to it to be *supposed*, without REASON being the foundation of the whole principle of CAUSATION.

To suppose that the circumstances which at first stamped them the objects they are, could enable them to preserve themselves similar objects, and yet arbitrarily put on wholly contrary

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<sup>28</sup>[Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739), 1.3.6.4.]

<sup>29</sup>[Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), 4.18.]

qualities, seems to be about as reasonable as to assert that black may become white, and white become black, and yet each color merit its original name, of *black* or *white*; whilst, at the same time, these changes take place on account of such a “change in the course of nature,” as determine that although all the causes in action are sufficient only to produce black, yet white shall appear; and *vice versa*. Indeed, before “*nature could be conceived to alter her course*”; the question about which Mr. Hume is *examining experience* (namely, whether she will support the knowledge of the necessary connection of like objects and their qualities,) must be supposed to be *already* answered in the *negative*; and that it is KNOWN *that nature may be supposed to exhibit similar antecedents followed by different subsequents*, or in other words that there is *no necessary connection* between like objects and like qualities; which is begging the question; and in a different way from that in which he means to answer it, for he means to support the doctrine of necessary connection, though upon principles peculiarly his own. Should it be said that I assume the contrary position, I answer, I do not *assume* it; but have previously proved the general conclusion, that “all like causes must have like effects”; (because otherwise, *objects would begin of themselves*;) in order purposely to show that “nature cannot alter her course.” Mr. Hume makes also a great mistake in supposing because we can conceive in the fancy the existence of objects contrary to our experience, that therefore they may really exist in nature; for it by no means follows that things which are incongruous in nature, may not be contemplated by the imagination, and received as possible until reason shows the contrary. Indeed, the fallacy, on which his whole sceptical doctrines are *built*, may be seen at the very outset of his first Essay.<sup>30</sup> He imagines it impossible to conceive the *contrary* to any *known relation* in quantities; but that we may *conceive the contrary of every matter of fact as possible*—impossible, under *the same circumstances*, and if the *circumstances alter*, the fact is a *different fact*; but not a *contrary one*—any more than the *different* relations of various quantities are not *contrary* to each other. Mr. Hume did not perceive that all objects whatever in relation to us, are but masses of certain qualities elicited from certain preveining circumstances, and therefore incapable of having different qualities, (or of showing diverse effects) whilst yet they remain similar objects *born under like circumstances*. He did not perceive that the “*productive principle*,” or *the cause of an effect*, is to be found *in the junction of objects already existing*, by which new objects are formed; but conceiving the nature of the operation of this principle to be wholly unknown, he imagined and alleged all things to be only “*conjoined, and not connected*”; and that they might change their places fortuitously; custom only connecting them in the fancy; and a contrary fancy as capable of unconnecting them again.

Strange philosophy! “Effects may be supposed non-existent this minute, and existent the next”; (and so in suspense,) and may therefore “begin their existence by themselves.”—If this be so, undoubtedly we want no causes for our effects; our rose-trees may suspend their blossoms in June; the flower require no warmth for its expansion, and remain non-existent till December!

That different objects have different qualities, all are well acquainted with;—The Chinese

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<sup>30</sup>[Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), 4.1–2.]

rose, and the holly, can thrive in winter; but the same kind of rose, that hitherto has grown only in spring, and flourished in summer, can no more put forth its leaves and expand its blossoms in winter, than the mercury in a *tried* thermometer can suddenly contract to the freezing point, in a burning summer's day.

Let us however, before quitting this important and interesting argument, choose an example to prove, that "nature cannot without a contradiction be imagined to alter her course." Let a receiver be imagined void of every substance whatever; and nothing but an *uncolored space* within it. Now it is surely the "course of nature," for this uncolored space to *remain as it is*, without some *cause steps in to alter it*; and if *some cause steps in to alter it*, "nature does *not* alter her course." Then let nature be supposed to alter her course, and a *scarlet color uncaused* to enter. Does not every reader perceive the impossibility that scarlet uncaused could enter? That it could "start of itself into existence?" Yet such is the idea that is veiled under Mr. Hume's argument; that different and contrary qualities can take place in similar circumstances; that a rose may blow in winter, when the causes were efficient to its blowing only in June! No circumstances are supposed changed; and yet "*of itself*," the nature of the rose may change!—And so may a new phenomenon take place in an *empty receiver*, as the entrance of a scarlet color, or of a dove, or any other imaginable being, without an equivalent change of circumstances for its introduction.

The sum of Mr. Hume's argument is, that we knowing nothing of the "secrets of nature," we cannot know there is really a necessary connection between objects; but *imagining* there is, this *imagination* arises, from a CUSTOMARY OBSERVATION, of *the invariableness of their antecedence and subsequence*; which invariableness, however, does not prove, that each connection may be more than an *insulated casual event*; not obligatory in nature; therefore *other subsequent* events might, without a contradiction, be imagined to happen after *similar antecedents*, and a *different order of events* might be supposed in the "course of nature."

Now shortly the whole of this reasoning concerning *the possibility of nature altering her course*, is but a circle! For the argument is invented to show that CUSTOM *not* REASON, must be the only ground of our belief in the relation of cause and effect.—But it is *impossible to imagine such a change in nature*, unless *reason* were previously excluded as the principle of that relation;—*and it is impossible to exclude reason as the principle of that relation*, except by supposing that *nature may alter her course*.—Thus the idea of causation, is founded only on experience<sup>31</sup>, experience is supplied with arguments by *custom* not by *reason*<sup>32</sup> and custom is supported in her

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<sup>31</sup>"The opinion that a cause is necessary to every new production arises from experience" (Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* [1739], 1.3.3.9).

<sup>32</sup>"All inferences from experience are effects of *custom* not of *reasoning*" (Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* [1748], 5.5).

authority by a supposed change in nature<sup>33</sup>, *impossible* to any idea of causation<sup>34</sup>, *unless* ALREADY SUPPOSED TO BE MERELY THE EFFECT OF CUSTOM.<sup>35</sup>

Nor must we conclude this branch of the subject, without observing the contradiction that lies in the very endeavor to persuade the world that custom is the true “CAUSE of BELIEF” in *necessary connection*, when before assenting to such a doctrine it must give up all usual habits of thinking upon the subject, and believe upon Mr. Hume’s reasoning, what it never before believed!—

Mr. Hume himself recapitulates his argument thus:

“Every idea is copied from some preceding impression (idea being an effect *derived* from impression as its cause). In all single instances of the operation of bodies there is nothing that produces, nor consequently can suggest the idea of necessary connection. But when many instances appear, we *feel* a new impression, a customary connection in the thought, between one object and its usual attendant.”<sup>36</sup>

Now this method of placing the argument is but the statement of *another circle*; for *causation* is used as the very principle which lies at the foundation of the whole system; and afterwards we are desired to search for the *impression*, which is the CAUSE of that EFFECT, viz. the *idea causation*.

And it is no answer to say that the notion of causation is spoken of in his own sense, not in his adversary’s; for in either sense it is equally illogical, to prove the conclusion by the premises, and the premises by the conclusion.

What should we think of an author, who, in attempting to account for the original discovery of metals, proved that it was effected by the use of instruments framed from a material termed *iron*, drawn from the bowels of the earth?

In like manner there is *a want of logical precision* in referring all the principles which connect our ideas to three kinds of associations amongst them; of which *causation* is ranked as one;—and then (in order to account for causation,) show the power that lies in the associations of ideas. Such a notion ends in the formation of a mere identical proposition; viz. a certain association of ideas is causation; and causation consists in an association of ideas.

But there is still another passage in Mr. Hume’s Essays, of greater consequence than any I

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<sup>33</sup>“Since it implies no contradiction that the course of nature may change, there can be no demonstrative arguments in the case”; “Wherever there is a propensity without being impelled by any reasoning we say this propensity is the *effect* of custom” (Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* [1748], 4.18, 5.5).

<sup>34</sup>“If *there* were nothing to bind objects together the inferences from present facts would be entirely precarious” (Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* [1748], 4.4).

<sup>35</sup>“Our belief in causation is the effect of custom” (Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* [1748], 7.28).

<sup>36</sup>[Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* [1748], 7.30]. Compare the Treatise and Essays,—in both works *impressions* are considered as absolutely necessary to *cause* ideas—to create them;—to *produce* them;—they are considered as the truly “productive principle” of ideas—*Objects* without which they could not exist.

have quoted, or argued on; and which I shall yet detain the reader for a few moments in order to consider; it is this following:

“As reason is incapable of any variation, the conclusions which it draws from one circle, are the same which it would form from surveying all the circles in the universe. But no man having seen one body move after being impelled by another would infer, that *every body* will move after a like impulse.”<sup>37</sup>

This passage I consider as containing the whole gist of Mr. Hume’s error, and therefore it points out where my answer should meet it. The error consists, in making an *incomplete comparison*, between the two subjects compared. *Every body* is taken in an indefinite sense for every *kind of body*; but *circle* is not taken for every *kind of figure*. The reason whence the CONCLUSIONS concerning all circles are *general*, is upon the very principle of cause and effect; for I know by experience, that upon the first study of mathematical science, I found much difficulty in a philosophical objection I could not easily answer; namely; that the relations of the quantities in one figure did not seem *necessarily* applicable to *all* of a like kind; until I perceived that the affections of *all*, were INVOLVED in *one* of *each kind*; as there was nothing to occasion a *difference* amidst their relations. Now then let the data be the same, and the IMPULSE *given* not only be *like*, but the BODY *given* be *like*; and I conceive that every man, and every child, would expect, upon a second trial, that the same body would move in the same manner as before. The inference would be drawn from the mind perceiving, (in the first instance,) that no motion would have taken place except from the conjunction of the body with the impulsive force; and in the second case would add to the memory of this effect, the reasoning, that there being nothing else to make a difference, a like effect would again take place. Nay, I am persuaded, that reason might go so far as, from calculating the proportions of the impulse used, and the body moved, to conclude the varieties, which would take place under proportionably different circumstances.

Mr. Hume draws two inferences of much consequence from his doctrine; First, that as our *custom of thinking* is not the *operation of nature*, so we have no positive proof, that a cause is wanted for the existence of the universe as of a *truly “productive principle.”* Secondly, that it is *unreasonable to believe in miracles*, because it is foolish to allow of our *customary habits of thinking*, which arise from “experience in the course of nature,” to be interfered with by an “experience of a less frequent occurrence”; which dependence upon testimony can only afford. This latter inference he professes in his Essay against Miracles.<sup>38</sup> The former opinion is less openly acknowledged; not being stated in explicit terms, but of immediate inference from the doctrine; and which he was well aware of, was the case.

The sum of my answer and argument is, that although we know not the “secrets of nature,” yet we know that nothing can “begin its own existence”; therefore there must truly be a “productive principle,” a cause necessary for every new existence in nature;—that we gain the knowledge

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<sup>37</sup>Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* [1748], 5.5.

<sup>38</sup>[Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), 10.10–13].

of a “necessary connection between cause and effect,” by an *experimentum crucis*, and therefore no greater number of invariable antecedents and consequents are wanted, than what is necessary, in order *to observe* what circumstances *affect* each other, or the contrary. That neither *fancy* nor *custom* creates the notion by an association of ideas; but the UNDERSTANDING gains it, by an observation of what is *that circumstance, without which a new object does not exist*. Things therefore could not change their places, nor nature alter her course, without a contradiction.

Hence it is that a cause is wanted in the universe equivalent to the change from non-existence to existence! And also that it is not more unreasonable to believe in miracles than in any other extraordinary phenomena in nature, when we may suppose, that *efficient causes have been in action*, towards their production; and that *final causes* are of *sufficient weight to justify the altered work of providence!*

But a minute investigation of Mr. Hume’s Essay on Miracles is much wanted. The purport of it, and the method by which it is drawn out as a consequence from the three preceding Essays, has not (that I know of) been observed by the learned. One would think at first sight that Mr. Hume, in admitting that the “course of nature might change,” conceded much to the Christians. Instead of which he adroitly turns round upon them, and says, “so it may in fact”; but in “custom” you *think it cannot*, therefore it is absurd to allow this custom of thought to be overthrown by testimony. In this struggle of fancy, against fancy, the more powerful must and ought to prevail!—If these pages should find favor before the public, an examination of the Essay on Miracles is intended to follow them; without which the answer to these on cause and effect is hardly complete.

Should an objection arise to my doctrine, that on account of supposing causes to act as the junctions of different qualities, and yet by pushing back all causes to the ONE UNCAUSED ESSENCE; I thereby prevent the idea of him being reposed in as a cause; as he forms ONE object only: I answer, that the uncaused essence, however mysterious in his nature, and however awful and distant to our speculations, must nevertheless have attributes; or in other words, its own peculiar qualities, which required no former beings, to *give birth to them*.

*The unions of such qualities among themselves*, might well be equal to the going forth of the great creation! The union of *wisdom*, with benevolence; and of these with the “*power*” arising out of the inexhaustible resources of his essence, might well occasion the “starting forth” of innumerable beings; the highest orders of which, without the slightest philosophical contradiction, might be considered as coeval and coequal with the Father “as touching the Godhead.”<sup>39</sup> But after this, the wide universe, with all its gradations of wonderful beings, with all its powers of life and heat, and motion, must have come out from him according to the laws with which

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<sup>39</sup>[In the Chalcedonian Creed (451 CE), Jesus was declared to be “consubstantial with the Father as touching the Godhead, and the same consubstantial with us as touching the manhood” (William Berriman, *A Historical Account of the Controversies That Have Been in the Church, Concerning the Doctrine of the Holy and Everblessed Trinity* [1725], 306).]

they were endowed. And although the original undivided essence, whose qualities were equal to such creation, must be considered as antecedent to his own work; yet the *operation* of that essence must ever have been the same from all eternity; and in that point of view, the *junction* of wisdom and benevolence, with whatever "*capacities*" of that essence were efficient to their ends, must have been accompanied with their instant synchronous effects;—the *formation of inferior beings*. "Let there be light," said God, "and there was light."<sup>40</sup>

Thus God, the universal Father, and with him any noble *manifestations* of his essence; then archangel, and angel; man (or beings analogous to him) and animals; mind, and matter; may be considered as having existed eternally, coming forth from him, living in him, and supported by him; whilst an analogous state of being must be expected to continue eternally, in like manner and it may also be expected as a circumstance consistent and probable with the whole of so grand an arrangement, that some inferior orders of beings may be raised in the scale of nature, to be inhabitants of a kindlier world than this; with enlarged capacities for happiness and virtue.

The consideration of the method the understanding has recourse to, in order to judge of the probable presence of similar causes on the contrary, will come under our view in the next chapter.

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<sup>40</sup>[Genesis 1: 3.]