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David Hume's Notion of Perception and his Problem with Causality

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Abstract

This work is a critical exposition of the core aspects of Hume's empiricist epistemological views. The epistemological problem of the origin, scope and certainty of knowledge was a subject of fierce debate between the Continental Rationalists and the British Empiricists. While the rationalists argued for the supremacy of reason, the empiricists stood for experience. As an empiricist Hume believed that certain knowledge is only gained through experience which consists of sensations, emotions and passions. Hume reduced the contents of the mind to perception which he divided into impressions and ideas. He also copiously addressed the idea of causality questioning the impressions that provide one with such an idea. This work employing the critical and expository methods surveyed the key points in Hume's discussion on perception and the association of ideas as well as Hume's analysis of the idea of causality. It gave a background of the empiricists project before presenting his epistemological theory of perception. The work further treated Hume's position with regard to the association of ideas and his analysis of causality. In the area of causality, the work critically looked at Hume's consideration of temporal succession, contiguity and necessary connection. In conclusion the work praised Hume's courageous, rigorous and consistent empiricist stance whose intensity led to a skeptic logical conclusion which is a necessary "antidote to dogmatism and fanaticism."

Key Words: Causality, Empiricism, Ideas, Impression, Perception

Introduction

The ancient problem raised by the Sophists which was astutely championed by the Skeptics with regard to whether the human mind is capable of acquiring certain and indubitable

knowledge strongly re-surfaced in the modern period of philosophy. This was undertaken by the Continental Rationalists and the British Empiricists. It was the sophists who argued against the possibility of attaining knowledge. Gorgias, for example, bluntly argued to establish three successive assertions: “1) Nothing is (Nothing exists, there is nothing). 2) Even if anything is, it is unknowable to man. 3) Even if anything is Knowable, it is inexpressible and incommunicable to others” (Owens, 1959, p.160). Gorgias' argument gave room to many controversial and opposing views in philosophy.

Unlike the Sophists and the Skeptics, the Rationalists and Empiricists accepted the possibility of acquiring a certain and indubitable knowledge. They strongly disagreed with regard to the source of such knowledge. While the Rationalists hold that reason is the source of certain and valid knowledge, the Empiricists hold that experience is the source of knowledge. For Woolhouse (1988) “the controversy concerns the relation of our knowledge, ideas and thought in general, to experience on the one hand and reason on the other hand, each school seeing more or less, importance in the one or the other of these possible sources of knowledge and ideas” (p.1).

The accomplishments of the physical sciences at the end of the 17th century made some philosophers to think that science has answer to every human problem, even moral problems. Thus the employment of scientific approach by the empirically minded British philosophers opened up new opportunities for philosophy to justify its claim to knowledge like the physical sciences. The British Royal Society, composed of scientists and philosophers, provided a great boost to British empiricism. Notable names in British empiricism of the time include: Bacon, Hobbes, Boyles, Locke, Newton, Berkeley and Hume.

In contrast with the Rationalists belief that knowledge begins with reason and that the human mind possesses innate ideas, Empiricism stresses the role of experience and evidence, especially sensory experience in forming ideas. According to them, tradition and innate ideas are generated from previous sensory experience.

John Lock in his work *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, influenced by Aristotle, describes human understanding in empirical terms, arguing that there are no innate ideas and that the mind at birth is like a blank slate (*tabula rasa*). George Berkeley argued against the existence of substance by saying that empiricism tells us only that our ideas exists, while David Hume developed a philosophy of human nature by describing the limitations of scientific reasoning insisting that what is perceived by the senses forms the foundation of knowledge.

Perception and causality are very topical notions in David Hume's epistemology. As an empiricist Hume believes that certain knowledge is only gained through experience. Like Locke and Berkeley, Hume takes as his starting point the position that everything we can understand – every mental object – is derived either directly or indirectly from experience; and also that the content of one of those experiences, when stripped of everything that we add to it on the basis of past experience, is a bare, un-interpreted sensation. Unlike Locke and Berkeley, he invents some new terminology to talk about our mental contents namely impressions and ideas. The first is the actual sensations we experience whereas the second consists of the concepts we form from them supplied by the mind on the basis of past experiences. Hence those concepts which one brings to bear on one's ‘impressions’ are ‘ideas’, and all of them are formed from preceding impressions. Thus, Hume in line with the empiricists' doctrine argued that impressions and ideas make up the total content of the human mind.

The problem of causality is one of the main questions that has confronted philosophy from antiquity through the different epochs of history. Events and things have always been attributed

to immediate or remote metaphysical, socio-ethical or religious causes. Some contemporary scholars like Iwuagwu (2018a), for instance, have attributed good socio-ethical behaviour to sound religious upbringing (Iwuagwu, 2018, p. 42).

Hume approached this problem of causality by questioning the origin of such idea. If ideas are copies of impressions, Hume wonders what impression gives one the idea of causality. He insisted there is no impression corresponding to this idea. Thus, the idea of causality, he concluded, arises in the mind when we experience certain relations between objects.

This work employing expository and analytic methods critically examined the substance of Hume's epistemology as contained in his theory of perception which consists of the contents of the mind as well as association of ideas. This was done by critically examining the various aspects of Hume arguments about Perception. The work also examined Hume's objection to the principle of causality. Here an analysis of Hume's position on causality as well as his objections to our presumptions about cause and effect were made. This discussion was preceded by a brief presentation of the background of David Hume before making an objective appraisal of Hume's notion of perception and his problem with the principle of causality. In conclusion the work acknowledged Hume's down to earth and ruthless empiricist stance seeing his apparent drift to skepticism as a logical consequence of such rigorous empiricist position. The work agreed with Hume that the question of causality, which principally hinges on the issue of necessary connection, can neither be logically nor empirically verified.

Hume's Epistemological Theory of Perception

According to Stumpf and Fieser (2008), Hume avers that the only way to solve the problem of disagreements and speculations regarding "abstruse questions" is to "enquire seriously into the nature of human understanding and show from an exact analysis of its powers and capacity, that it is by no means fitted for such remote and abstruse subject" (p. 246). Prior to Hume's emergence there has been several disagreements, regarding the nature of abstruse reality, due to its illusions and imprecise state. Hume made up his mind, first to query such reality and also investigate the nature of human understanding, to find out if man has the capacity to grasp realities of such realms. These agitations informed Hume and led to his theory of knowledge.

Faithful to the empiricist tradition Hume holds that all that the mind contains is derived from experience. Hume employed the word perceptions to cover all that is contained in the mind in general. In the words of William Turner (1903): "According to Hume, the mind is its contents. His analysis of the mind is, therefore, merely an inventory of the contents of the mind, or of perceptions. In Hume's philosophy, perception is synonymous with state of consciousness, the term being equivalent to the Cartesian thought and to the idea of Locke and Berkeley" (p. 519). These contents of the mind or perceptions are divided by Hume into two kinds, namely: impressions and ideas. Whereas impressions consist of the immediate data of experience accruing from the senses (sensations), passions and emotions; ideas consist of copies or faint images of impressions in thinking and reasoning. According to Hume (1739), if I look at my room, I receive an impression of it. "When I shut my eyes and think of my chamber, the ideas I form are exact representations of the impressions I felt; nor is there any circumstance of the one, which is not to be found in the other.... Ideas and impressions appear always to correspond to each other" (1.1.1.p.8). From the foregoing it seems like just as John Locke sought to derive all our knowledge from "simple ideas", Hume wishes to derive them from impressions which consists of immediate data of experience. As to whether our impressions and ideas are innate Hume (1751) says that, "if by innate we mean contemporary with our birth, the dispute seems to be frivolous ; but if by innate we understand what is original or copied from no precedent

perception, then we may assert that all our impressions are innate and our ideas not innate” (Notes in the *Enquiry* on Origin of Ideas, 22).

With regard to how impressions differ from ideas Hume says impressions are livelier, more vivid than ideas. According to him, “The difference between these consists in the degree of force and liveliness with which they strike upon the mind and make their way into our thoughts or consciousness. Those perceptions which enter with most force and violence we may name *impressions*; and under this I comprehend all sensations, passions and emotions as they make their first appearance in the soul. By *ideas* I mean the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning; such as, for instance, are all the perceptions excited by the present discourse, excepting only those which arise from the sight and touch, and excepting the immediate pleasure or uneasiness it may occasion” (1739, 1.1.1. p.7). Irrespective of these differentiations Hume did acknowledge that there are times when our ideas are so close to our impressions and when our impressions are so low and faint as to distinguish them from our ideas. He said: “in sleep, in a fever, in madness, or in any violent emotions of soul, our ideas may approach to our impressions: as on the other hand, it sometimes happens that our impressions are so faint and low that we cannot distinguish them from ideas” (1739, 1.1.1. p. 7). The above observation notwithstanding Hume insists that the general rule that impressions are more vivid than ideas still stands. He said: “the most lively thought is still inferior to the dullest sensation” (1751, 2. 11. p.17). It is understandable that since ideas are copies or images of impressions, their vividness cannot be the same. The original thing and its image cannot be the same.

Further in his discussion of perception Hume distinguished between simple and complex perceptions which also apply to both impressions and ideas. Hence, we have simple and complex impressions as well as simple and complex ideas. According to him whereas simple ideas always correspond to simple impressions, complex ideas do not always correspond to complex impressions. When one perceives a blue patch, he has a simple impression; the thought of this patch constitutes a simple idea. But when one standing at the balcony of a tall building gazes at a nearby airport, he gets a complex impression of the tarmac, the control towers, the airplanes on the ground, the airport buildings, etc. When afterwards one thinks of the airport, he has a complex idea which to some degree corresponds to his previous complex impression of the airport. But there are some complex ideas which do not correspond to complex impressions. According to Hume, “I can imagine to myself a city as the New Jerusalem, whose pavement is gold, and walls are rubies, though I never saw any such” (1739, 1.1.1.p.8). This is a case where a complex idea does not correspond to a complex impression. All the same Hume insists that in all cases simple ideas correspond with simple impressions. He says, “I venture to affirm that the rule here holds without any exception, and that every simple idea has a simple impression which resembles it, and every simple impression a correspondent idea” (1739, 1. 1. P.8).

According to Hume, as a general rule impression precedes ideas. It presupposes here that impressions are the epistemological foundation for ideas. Without impression, ideas would be impossible, because their being is necessitated by the impressions we have. For if an idea is simply, a copy of an impression, it follows that for every idea there must be a prior impression.

Hume however mentions an exception to this rule where through the power of imagination one can conceive an idea without ever having an impression of it (1739, 1.1.1. p.10). Hume also holds that we can form ideas of ideas or “secondary ideas” which emanate from previous ideas and not immediately derived from impressions. He further divided impressions into two, impressions of sensation and impressions of reflection. Impression of sensation, he says, “arises in the soul originally from unknown causes” (1739, 1.1.2. p.11), whereas impressions of

reflection are derived “in great measure” from ideas. As a core empiricist Hume denied that knowledge can arise from reason. Having argued that all our information about the world arises from experience, Hume adds the corollary that none of our knowledge about the world arises from reason. Reason can tell us only about the relationship between our own ideas. In other words, reason can map the connections between the ideas in our minds, but it cannot establish connections between those ideas and the external world.

Among the notable objections to Hume’s notion of impressions and ideas is the idea of thinking. The question raised here is, if all our ideas follow from impressions; how can we explain the act of thinking or the patterns by which ideas group themselves in our minds? Impressions may elicit thinking, but thinking does not necessarily arise from impressions, it is not an idea, it is an activity of the mind carried out in an attempt to proffer solution to existential human problems. Hume did not really explain this mental activity called thinking which may be different from reflecting on an impression.

According to Lawhead (2011), “Hume drives empiricism to a radical extreme. He thinks that Locke and Berkeley have been inconsistent in working out the implications of empiricism. Hume’s basic argument is: If all we know are the contents of experience, how can we know anything about what lies outside our experience? Hence, instead of empiricism leading us out of skepticism, Hume argues that it leads us to skeptical doubt” (p.108).

Association of Ideas

In his bid to explain how ideas associate with each other Hume introduced two faculties: memory and imagination. Memory is the faculty that helps impressions received by the mind to reappear with a degree of vividness which is intermediate between the vividness of an impression and the faintness of an idea whereas the faculty of imagination is that which enables the impressions received by the mind to reappear as mere ideas, as faint copies or images. Ideas of memory and ideas of imagination are distinguished by their vividness or liveliness just like impressions and ideas. In addition to this difference Hume says that memory preserves not only simple ideas but also their sequence and position whereas imagination is not tied down in this way. Imagination can combine simple ideas arbitrarily or break down complex ideas into simple ones and then rearrange them (1739, 1.1.3. p.12).

With regard to the association of ideas Hume holds that in memory there is an inseparable connection between ideas which is lacking in the case of imagination. In imagination, however, there is a “uniting principle” among ideas, “some associating quality by which one idea naturally introduces another” (1739, 1.1.4. p.12). Imagination works generally according to some general principles of association. Hume calls it “a gentle force, which commonly prevails...pointing out to every one those simple ideas, which are most proper to be united in a complex one” (1739, 1.1.4.p.12-13). Hume believes that we can ascertain the qualities responsible for this innate force or impulse in man which moves him, though without necessity, to combine together certain types of ideas. These qualities “are three, viz: RESEMBLANCE, CONTIGUITY in time or place and CAUSE AND EFFECT” (1739, 1.1.4. p.13). For Hume the connections of all ideas to each other could be explained by these three qualities. According to him, A picture naturally leads our thoughts to the original (resemblance): the mention of one apartment in the building naturally introduces an enquiry...concerning the others (contiguity): and if we think of a wound, we can scarcely forebear reflecting on the pain which follows it (cause and effect).

Hume made a further division with regard to the complex ideas of the imagination namely, imaginative ideas that represent flights of fantasy and imaginative ideas that represent solid

reasoning. The first such as the fanciful idea of a golden mountain is derived from the faculty of fancy and is the origin of fantasies, superstitions and bad philosophy whereas the second one such as predicting the trajectory of a thrown ball is derived from the faculty of understanding or reason. This second type are of two kinds: that involving relations of ideas and that involving matters of fact. The former consists of mathematical relation that is “discoverable by the mere operation of thought, without dependence on what is anywhere existent in the universe” e.g. The statement “the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the square of the two sides” (1751, 4.1.1), whereas the latter the matter of fact is any object or circumstance which has physical existence, such as “the sun will rise tomorrow.” According to Fieser (2019), “this split between relations of ideas and matters of fact is commonly called ‘Hume’s Fork’, and Hume himself uses it as a radical tool for distinguishing between well-founded ideas of the understanding, and unfounded ideas of the fancy.” It is with this “fork” that Hume made his famous derogatory statement of committing metaphysics to flames for containing nothing but sophistry and illusion (1751, p.4).

Hume’s Problem with Causality

The question of cause and effect is an age long philosophical problem which has engaged philosophers of all the epochs of history. Contemporary religious thoughts equally reflect this belief in the activities of beings. Christian biblical scholars, for example, acknowledge the fact that the orientation of the lives, activities and challenges of Christians are direct consequences of the choices they have made to be followers of Jesus Christ (Naseri,2016, 114, 118).

It is argued by Stumpf and Fieser (2003, p. 270) that Hume’s most original and influential ideas deal with the problem of causality. Neither Locke nor Berkeley challenged the basic principle of causality. Although Berkeley did say that we cannot discover efficient cause in things, his intention was to look for the cause of phenomena. Hume’s analysis of causality also occupied a more prominent position in his *Treatise* than his treatment of substance and this was because of his believe that causal inference plays a very important role in the sciences and in human life in general. Hume’s originality and merit lies in his attempt to combine a consistent empiricist approach with a recognition of the meaning which people ordinarily attribute to causation.

Hume approached his analysis of causality the same way he approached the question of substance. He asks, from what impression or impressions the idea of causality is derived. In the words of William Lawhead (2011), “According to Hume, most of our judgments about the world are based on our understanding of causes and effects. But our ability to infer causal connections between events assumes the *principle of induction*. The principle of induction could be summarized as the assumption that ‘the future will be like the past.’ This principle requires belief in the *uniformity of nature*, or the thesis that the laws of nature that have been true thus far will continue to be true tomorrow. But how do we know that the uniformity of nature is true?” (p.108). Haven denied that any quality of those things which people call *causes* can be the origin of the idea of causation, Hume went ahead to derive this idea from some *relation* among objects (1739, 1.3.2. p.53). The first relation posited by Hume is **contiguity**. For him cause and effect are always contiguous, either immediately or mediately (1739, 1.3.2.p.54). However, Hume denied that spatial contiguity is essential to the causal relation (1739, 1.4.5. p.154).

The second relation discussed by Hume is priority in time. It is his argument that a cause must be temporally prior to the effect. It will be absurd to conceive of effects contemporary with their causes. Hume does not still regard the above two relations of contiguity and temporal succession as the only two essential elements of the causal relation. This led him to introduce the third relation which for him, is of greater importance: *necessary connection*. According to

him, “An object may be contiguous and prior to another, without being considered as its cause. There is a NECESSARY CONNECTION to be taken into consideration; and that relation is of much greater importance than any of the other two above mentioned” (1739, 1.3.2. p.55).

The issue of necessary connection is the crux of Hume’s problem with causality. The relations of contiguity and temporal priority can be empirically verifiable. But from what impression or impressions does the idea of necessary connection arise? What experience provides us with this idea? In his bid to tackle this problem Hume raised two important questions that must be addressed first. According to him, “first, for what reason (do) we pronounce it *necessary* that everything whose existence has a beginning, should also have a cause? Secondly, why (do) we conclude that such particular causes must *necessarily* have such particular effects; and what is the nature of that inference we draw from the one to the other, and of the belief we repose in it?” (1739, 1.3.2. p.55).

With regard to the first question Hume said that this principle is neither intuitively certain nor demonstrable, we must have recourse to experience and observation. With regard to the second question he argued that causal inference is not a product of intuitive knowledge of essences (1739, 1.3.6. pp.62-63). Hence, “it is only by experience that we can infer the existence of one object from another” (1739, 1.3.6.p.61). Hume brings in here the idea of constant conjunction which arises from experience and observation.

One’s frequent observance of the conjunction of two objects, A (flame) and B (the sensation of heat) makes one remember that the two objects A and B have regularly appeared in recurrent order of contiguity and succession, then “without any further ceremony we call the one cause and the other effect and infer the existence of the one from that of the other” (1739, 1.3.6.p.61). This assumption, Hume recognizes, rests on the principle of uniformity in nature which, though a necessary principle, is neither intuitively certain nor demonstrable. This is because the notion of change in the course of nature is not self-contradictory. Hence, though Hume’s skepticism does not dispense of the principle of uniformity in nature he simply observes that we cannot prove our belief in causal inference by means of a principle which itself cannot be proved as certain neither by reason nor intuition. This principle can only tacitly be presupposed by habit and custom. He says, the “supposition that the future resembles the past is not founded on arguments of any kind, but is derived entirely from habit, by which we are determined to expect for the future the same train of objects to which we have been accustomed” (1739, 1.3.12. p.92). In another place Hume argues, “It is not, therefore, reason which is the guide of life, but custom. That alone determines the mind, in all instances, to suppose the future conformable to the past” (1740, 16. p. 411). According to Stroud (2010), “Hume is often described as a sceptic in epistemology... largely because of his rejection of the role of reason, as traditionally understood, in the genesis of our fundamental beliefs. That rejection, although allied to the scepticism of antiquity, is only one part of an otherwise positive general theory of human nature which would explain how and why we think and believe and do all the things we do” (p. 422).

It must be noted that Hume’s introduction of the idea of constant conjunction derived from the principle of uniformity in nature to account for causal inference could not answer Hume’s second question, of the impression or impressions from which the idea of necessary connection is derived. This is because the idea of constant conjunction does not comprise that of necessary connection even if repeated to infinity. We cannot also derive the idea of necessary connection from observation of regular sequences or causal connections. In order not to throw away the idea of necessary connection Hume moved to derive it from some subjective source, i.e. from some impression of reflection. According to Hume, “after we have observed the resemblance in a sufficient number of instances, we immediately feel a determination of the mind to pass

from one object to its usual attendant.... Necessity, then, is the effect of this observation, and is nothing but an internal impression of the mind, or a determination to carry our thoughts from one object to another.... There is no internal impression which has any relation to the present business, but that propensity, which custom produces, to pass from an object to its usual attendant” (1739, 1.3.14. p.111).

It can be said that for Hume the idea of necessary connection appears to be derived from this propensity produced by custom or association to pass from one of the things which have been observed to be constantly conjoined to the other. In this case the given, the impression, is the propensity caused by custom whereas the reflection of this impression, its image in consciousness, is the idea of necessary connection.

It is from the foregoing that Hume gave his definitions of cause both as a philosophical relation and as a natural relation. Considering cause as a philosophical relation he defined it as “an object precedent and contiguous to another, and where all the objects resembling the former are placed in like relations of precedency and contiguity to those objects that resemble the later.” In the same place he defined cause considered as a natural relation as “an object precedent and contiguous to another, and so united with it that the idea of the one determines the mind to form the idea of the other, and the impression of the one to form a more lively idea of the other” (1739, 1.3.14. p.114).

According to Hume “though causation be a *philosophical* relation, as implying contiguity, succession and constant conjunction, yet it is only so far as it is a *natural* relation and produces a union among our ideas, that we are able to reason upon it or draw any inference from it” (1739, 1.3.6.p.65). We can now affirm that Hume has, in his own way, answered the above two crucial questions. In answering the first he said that it is custom that makes us to expect that every event and object must have a cause and also prevents us from imagining an uncaused event or object. With regard to the second question of particular causes necessarily having particular effects, Hume went psychological, for him it is the psychological effect of observation of instances on constant conjunction that is responsible for this inference which he believes can be validated by empirical verification in line with the empiricist tradition.

At the end of his analysis of causality in the *Treatise* and his definition of cause Hume did remark that “we may easily conceive that there is no absolute nor metaphysical necessity that every beginning of existence should be attended with such object” (1.3.14.p.115-116). However, considering the absurdity of seeing anything or event in nature existing by *chance*, Hume in the first *Enquiry* affirms our customary belief in causation. According to him, “... and that chance, when strictly examined, is a mere negative word, and means not any real power which has anywhere a being in nature... it is universally allowed that nothing exists without a cause of its existence” (8.1.95. p.85). This position of Hume, which denies some empirically verifiable effects an accidental status, is in agreement with the age long religious belief in miracles. Contemporary views in philosophy of Religion firmly affirm the reality of miracles as effects of divine intervention realized through prayers. According to Iwuagwu (2018b), “miracles do happen. There are real miracles proven to be acts of God which are beyond any natural explanation. Some of these have come in the form of spontaneous, instantaneous and complete healing of terminal sicknesses considered hopeless but which disappeared after prayer” (Iwuagwu, 2018, p.71).

Stumpf and Fieser (2003, p.271) opined that insofar as Hume assumed that the causal principle is central to all kinds of knowledge, his attack on this principle undermined the validity of all. He saw no reason for accepting the principle that “whatever begins to exist must have a cause of existence as either intuitive or capable of demonstration. In the end, Hume considered

thinking or reasoning a species of sensation and as such our thinking cannot extend beyond our immediate experience.”

In critically looking at Hume’s analysis of causality it must be observed that though constant conjunction can cause the mind to relate a cause to an effect to the extent that after seeing one object or event one expects another one which is the effect, this is not always the case. We can relate a cause to an effect without any form of past experience of them.

Though Hume tried to explain the issue of necessary connection psychologically from habit and custom rather than from any ontological nexus, his inquiry into the problem of causality stopped only at showing *how* one event is connected to another in our past experiences but falls short of showing us *why* we are entitled to expect that events which have been connected in the past will be connected in the future. Hume, therefore in spite of his thorough going stance, like other empiricists stopped where the real problem of philosophy begins. As Turner (1903) says, “Empiricism can show a *connectio facti*, but it cannot show a *connectio juris*, between antecedent and consequent, between cause and effect” (p.523).

Hume’s Indebtedness in his Analysis of Causality

Apart from the influence of ancient skepticism, the great French sceptic, Pierre Bayle, Descartes, Spinoza, Locke and Berkeley, Hume’s indebtedness to Malebranche on the question of causality, especially on the issue of necessary connection, is immensely crucial. He mentioned him by name twice in Book 1 of the *Treatise* (1,3, 14. p.108 & 1,4,5 p.163). According to McCracken (1983, 258), Hume not only had Malebranche’s *Search after Truth* in mind as he wrote on causation, but he even had it open for consultation while writing. For Malebranche as well as for Hume the power by which a cause produces its effect is perfectly unknowable.

Malebranche as an occasionalist denied the existence of any true cause except the infinite will of God. Every other thing irrespective of how constantly conjoined with any other object, is seen merely as a secondary cause or a mere occasion on which the divine power, the one true cause, acts to bring about its effect. Malebranche (1980) defines a true cause thus: “A true cause as I understand it is one such that the mind perceives a necessary connection between it and its effect” (p.450). In spite of this assertion, Malebranche insists that such a necessary connection between any two finite beings is never perceivable. For him only God can be a true cause since it will be a contradiction that He should will something and what He wills fails to happen. But there is no contradiction that a finite being should will and the event willed fails to occur.

Hume agreed with Malebranche that the cause of peoples’ mistake is that a constant conjunction of two things in their experience make their minds to create a habit of expectation, so that whenever they see one of the objects they form an expectation of the other; this habit which is the product of the imagination, they mistake for a necessary connection between the two things, making them to believe that one is the true cause of the other. According to Malebranche, this is why people erroneously conclude that a moving ball which strikes another is the true cause of the motion it communicates to the other.

According to Noonan (1999), though not an occasionalist “Hume’s agreement with Malebranche is very considerable: like Malebranche he insists that in defining causation there is a necessary connection to be taken into account; like Malebranche he argues that no necessary connection can be discovered between any two finite things because there is no contradiction given any two distinct things, that one should exist and the other not; like Malebranche he denies that we can ever perceive the operation of any power or productive principle; like Malebranche he thinks, nevertheless, that we universally hold the mistaken belief that such finite items as the movements of two billiard balls are necessarily connected; and, finally, like

Malebranche he explains this mistake as resulting from the operation of the imagination, acted on by experienced constant conjunctions, which creates a habit of expectation which the mind externalizes as a necessary connection between the constantly conjoined objects” (p. 25-26).

From the foregoing one can say that while not doubting Hume’s originality and thorough going empiricist approach, he was very much influenced by the thoughts of many previous philosophers foremost of who are the Skeptists, Malebranche, Descartes, Spinoza, Locke and Berkeley. Hume’s legacy lies not only in his astuteness in drawing the logical conclusions of an unrelenting empiricist tradition but his courage in standing by those rational truths discovered in his rigorous logical inferences.

Conclusion

David Hume is undoubtedly one of the most brilliant, courageous and thorough going scholars in the empiricist tradition. His rigorous and consistent empiricist stance married with logical dexterity took epistemology to the next level, establishing its primacy in every philosophical enterprise. Hume’s unrelenting insistence on establishing every object of knowledge or belief on experience led to the logical conclusion of his questioning many objects of belief in our daily experience namely: the notion of substance, cause and effect, God, metaphysics, self-identity etc. This has led to his being called one of the most consistent skeptist of the modern times. For Hume, skepticism is not only a necessary conclusion accruing from the application of his logico-empirical principles but also “a healthy antidote to dogmatism and fanaticism” (Copleston,1994). Hume dared to say what many scholars feared to say because of public perception and condemnation. He dared into apparently forbidden areas in search of the truth and in order to established a firm foundation for a certain and indubitable knowledge devoid of sentiments and free from the stranglehold of dogmatism, custom and tradition. Hume, like many scholars before him who embarked on such an audacious project, may have failed to sustain such a highly complex intellectual edifice which attracted a barrage of criticisms from different quarters, but it is undeniable that he did make a bold statement in epistemology which woke, not only Kant but also, many future scholars from their “dogmatic slumber.” His dexterity, consistency and sound logic makes his arguments forcefully convincing and sometimes difficult to reject. Hume's analysis of causality is not a rejection of the principle of causation but an eye opener to the origin of such belief which is neither founded on experience nor logic.

Hume’s argument is that the demonstration of even our most fundamental beliefs transcend the ability of reason and that there is no need to rationally demonstrate our fundamental beliefs for them to be practically relevant. For him reason leaves us with abstractions and convinces us it is no more rational to believe fire will feel hot than to believe it will feel cold.

One must agree that Hume’s sledge hammer on the notion of certainty in knowledge and common-sense beliefs chatted a new course in epistemology and philosophy in general. Through his rigorous arguments he categorically debunked the belief that the principle of causality can be empirically demonstrated and also proved that it cannot be logically affirmed since its denial will not involve any logical contradiction. The assertions and belief in the theory of causality, according to him, is nothing but a product of custom and habit, a mere gentle force compounded and transposed by one's experiences and immediate surroundings.

This work concludes by affirming that David Hume is the most consistent empiricist who was courageous enough to argue the empiricist doctrine to its logical conclusion. This he did through his down-to-earth discussion of the contents of the mind (perception), association of ideas and the principle of causality. The work also agreed with Hume that the problem of cause

and effect, which principally hinges on the issue of necessary connection, can neither be logically nor empirically verified. It can only be postulated, influenced by custom and habit.

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