

Necessary Connections

1 Cause and correlation

“... men that know not what it is that we call *causing* ... have no other rule to guess by, but by observing, and remembering what they have seen to precede the like effect at some other time, or times before, without seeing between the antecedent and subsequent event, any dependence or connexion at all: and therefore from the like things past, they expect the like things to come; and hope for good or evil luck, superstitiously, from things that have no part at all in the causing of it: as the Athenians did for their war at *Lepanto*, demand another *Phormio*; the Pompeian faction for their war in *Africa*, another *Scipio*; and others have done ... since.”¹

“[Caesar] was informed that the enemies relied much upon an ancient oracle, that the family of the Scipios should be always victorious in Africa.”²

2 Descartes’s occasionalism

“... it does not follow from the fact that I existed a short time ago that I must exist now, unless some cause, as it were, creates me all over again at this moment For it is obvious ... that plainly the same force and action are needed to preserve anything at each individual moment that it lasts as would be required to create that same thing anew, were it not yet in existence.”³

3 Malebranche’s occasionalism

“... no body, large or small, has the power to move itself. ... But when we examine our idea of all finite minds, we do not see any necessary connection

¹ Thomas Hobbes. *Leviathan* [1651] Ch. 12, ¶18.

² Plutarch, “Caesar” in *Parallel Lives* [circa 100 A.D.], edited by A.H. Clough (1884).

³ René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Third Meditation, AT 48–9.

between their will and the motion of any body whatsoever. ... there is absolutely no mind created that can move a body as a true or principal cause, just as it has been said that no body could move itself.

But when one thinks about the idea of God, i.e., of an infinitely perfect and consequently all-powerful being, one knows there is such a connection between His will and the motion of all bodies, that it is impossible to conceive that He wills a body to be moved and that this body not be moved. ... The motor force of bodies is therefore not in the bodies that are moved, for this motor force is nothing other than the will of God. Thus, bodies have no action; and when a ball that is moved collides with and moves another, it communicates to it nothing of its own, for it does not itself have the force it communicates to it. Nevertheless, a ball is the natural cause of the motion it communicates. A natural cause is therefore not a real and true but only an occasional cause, which determines the Author of nature to act in such and such a manner in such and such a situation.

... All natural forces are therefore nothing but the will of God, which is always efficacious. ... He moves all things, and thus produces all effects that we see happening, because He also willed certain laws according to which motion is communicated upon the collision of bodies; and because these laws are efficacious, they act, whereas bodies cannot act. There are therefore no forces, powers, or true causes in the material, sensible world”⁴

4 Hume on occasionalism

“We are ignorant, it is true, of the manner in which bodies operate on each other: Their force or energy is entirely incomprehensible: But are we not equally ignorant of the manner or force by which a mind, even the supreme mind, operates either on itself or on body? Whence, I beseech you, do we acquire any idea of it? We have no sentiment or consciousness of this power in ourselves. We have no idea of the Supreme Being but what we learn from

⁴ Nicolas Malebranche. *The Search after Truth*. [1712] (Translated and Edited by Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 448–9.

reflection on our own faculties. Were our ignorance, therefore, a good reason for rejecting any thing, we should be led into that principle of denying all energy in the Supreme Being as much as in the grossest matter.”⁵

5 Hume’s positive account

“... when one particular species of event has always, in all instances, been conjoined with another, we make no longer any scruple of foretelling one upon the appearance of the other, and of employing that reasoning, which can alone assure us of any matter of fact or existence. We then call the one object, *Cause*; the other, *Effect*.”⁶

“we may define a cause to be *an object, followed by another, and where all the objects, similar to the first, are followed by objects similar to the second*. Or, in other words, *where, if the first object had not been, the second never had existed*. ... We may ... form another definition of cause; and call it, *an object followed by another, and whose appearance always conveys the thought to that other*. ... We say, for instance, that the vibration of this string is the cause of this particular sound. But what do we mean by that affirmation? We either mean, that *this vibration is followed by this sound, and that all similar vibrations have been followed by similar sounds*: Or, that *this vibration is followed by this sound, and that upon the appearance of one, the mind anticipates the senses, and forms immediately an idea of the other*.”⁷

⁵ David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Section 7, Part I, last paragraph.

⁶ Hume, *Enquiry*, Section 7, Part II, second paragraph.

⁷ Hume, *Enquiry*, Section 7, Part II, fourth paragraph.

