36. Causality

I examined it in one of my essays. The thing that couldn't be dispensed with but stubbornly chose at least when examined closely and with a fastidious eye to be *not* simple and straightforward. That could play itself out as a subjective or objective event or both at the same time. That playing itself out as not just subjective or objective event but something else, also had to *not* play itself out. That is, not play itself out in the sense that the attempt to deal with it theoretically always involved a reliance upon it that was muted, camouflaged, or concealed. That truly was a problem then that had to be ignored or forgotten every time an explanation, great or small, was called for. And this for purely practical reasons that, although they had everything to do with the basis of reasoning itself, were not quite reasons in and of themselves but more like acts of faith. For reasons then that were not dissociable from *non*-reason and, for that reason, had nothing to do with theory apart from allowing it to happen.

– Can you run that by me again?

"**Hume and Kant on Causality**"

"Thinking deeply on the matter of causality is an area in which one important philosopher, David Hume (1711-1776) greatly influenced another, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Indeed, this last point cannot be too much emphasized. In discussing Hume's inquiry into the nature of causality in his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, Kant states that the former 'was the very thing which . . . first interrupted [his] dogmatic slumber and gave [his] investigations in the field of speculative philosophy a quite new direction.' The reason for this abrupt awakening and profound influence lies in Kant's realization of the challenge which Hume's inquiry into this area posed. In other words, he saw that nothing less was at issue than the possibility of doing metaphysics and thus attaining certain and comprehensive knowledge. I think it is best to proceed immediately to a straightforward account of Hume's inquiry into the nature of causality and, once having done this, take stock of Kant's critical reaction.

"Hume's discussion of causality takes place in two separate works: *A Treatise of Human Nature* and *An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding.* The second work deals with the matter of causality in a more concise and general way than the first. In order to be as clear as I can, I shall examine its treatment first in one work and then the other. I shall start with the more concise and general one.

"Before beginning his discussion of causality in the *Inquiry*, Hume states that '[he] . . . shall endeavour . . . to fix if possible the precise meaning of [metaphysical] terms and thereby remove some part of that obscurity which is so much complained of in this species of philosophy.' Specifically, this involves the doctrine which he introduces earlier in the work and which states that all ideas, both simple and complex, originate from impressions, particularly sense-impressions.[1] In order to render an idea clear and unambiguous then, it is necessary to trace it to this source. Now the situation in Hume's day (and the same holds true in our own in many or most respects) had it that causal relationships are unique in that they are invested with an inner force or power. It naturally followed for Hume that, if such were the case, this force or power as an idea in the mind should have its corresponding impression. However, in the *Inquiry* he is quick to draw the conclusion that this impression is precisely what is missing.

> When we look about us toward external objects and consider the operation of causes, we are never able in a single instance, to discover any power or necessary connection, any quality which binds the effect to the cause and renders the one an infallible consequence of the other.[2]

"If there really were such a power, it should supply the mind with an impression and idea separate from those impressions and ideas that correspond with the two events which form the causal relationship. Further, it should allow for the immediate identification of such a relationship, that is, without numerous experiences of a conjunction of two events being necessary in order to reveal it to the mind. Nor, as Hume goes on to say, is such a power-impression to be found in the mind's willing some bodily motion or mental event.

> We learn the influence of our will from experience alone. And experience teaches us how one event constantly follows another, without instructing us in the secret connection which binds them together and renders them inseparable.

"The familiar feeling of having to exert one's self to effect some task or purpose is popularly thought to represent some inner force or power. Hume points out, however, that this feeling does not identify but merely accompanies the relatively limited range of mind-body operations. Were it

1 *Professor Shimizu*: "May we ask whether this is a causal relation?"

2 *Professor Shimizu*: "What can the relation of these external objects to Hume be if it not causal?"

really the essence of causality, it should allow for a single instance recognition. Hence what is really going on here is an interpretation by the perceiving self to the effect that certain events are not only connected but *necessarily* so. This notion of necessity, however, only arises out of a repeated witnessing of event B following event A such that the mind comes to the point where, according to Hume, it automatically envisions the effect upon its receiving the impression of the cause. Thus:

> What alteration has happened to give rise to the new idea of *connection*? Nothing but that [the observer] now *feels* these events to be *connected* in his imagination, and can readily foretell the existence of one from the appearance of the other.

It is this feeling which Hume claims is the impression directly leading to the idea of power or necessary connection.[3] Hume goes on to say that '[n]othing further is in the case. Contemplate the subject on all sides, you will never find any other origin of that idea.'

"I shall now take a look at Hume's treatment of causality in the *Treatise*. He begins by distinguishing between those propositions which he terms 'relations of ideas' and those which he calls 'matters of fact' (i.e., what become with Kant the distinction between *analytic a priori* and *synthetic a posteriori* judgements). The first are recognized by virtue of their having, in order to be universal and necessary propositions, predicates in agreement with their corresponding subjects. Thus the proposition 'A triangle is a three-sided figure' permits no other predicate which stipulates a different number of sides. Again, the proposition 'Red and orange are more similar than red and yellow' (Hume's example) does not permit the reverse of its predicate. By contrast, matter of fact propositions can predicate contrasting states of affairs, neither of which conflicts with what the subjects can conceptually permit. In the *Treatise* Hume identifies matter of fact propositions in terms of three kinds of relation between objects. They are identity, contiguity, and causality. As Hume points out, these three are dependent on one another for the purposes of reasoning. With respect to propositions involving causality then, there is nothing in the concept of a particular thing or event which indicates that it must be the cause of only one effect and no other. For example, the proposition 'A moving billiard ball striking another will put the second one in motion' has as its subject an event which, conceptually speaking, cannot rule out any number of predicates (that is, any number of effects). In short, such a proposition entirely rests upon a repeated

3 *Professor Shimizu*: "But not with the impression *causing* the idea of necessary connection or else Hume is begging the question."

observation and an accompanying or informing belief which cannot itself be based upon reason but helps to form its basis.

"Hume states in the *Treatise* that, in order for a causal relationship to be identified as such, it must involve things or events which are contiguous, successive, and constantly conjoined. However, once the first two aspects imprint themselves upon the mind as impressions, the third aspect of this relationship does not add anything. In other words, the third and most important aspect is not inherent in the sequence but in the mind's grasp of it via familiarity and repetition. Or, to put it another way, the mind brings something strictly of its own to repeated impressions of the same sequence. The mere repetition of the sequence does not generate any new impression that would be proper to the sequence. Rather, the repetition itself forms an entirely new impression which is the source of the causal identification as the idea of a necessary connection between event A and event B. This new impression, specifically speaking, is a development in the mind wherein the imagination customarily unites one particular idea with another.

"Halfway through his inquiry into the nature of causality in the *Treatise*, Hume states the following:

> [T]here is no question which, on account of its importance, has caused more disputes among ancient and modern philosophers, than this concerning the efficacy of causes, or that quality which makes them to be followed by their effects.

"Testimony to the above can be found in the reaction to Hume's inquiry into causality. Immanuel Kant eloquently gives an account of it in his *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*.

> . . . Hume suffered the usual misfortune of metaphysicians of not being understood. It is positively painful to see how utterly his opponents . . . missed the point of the problem; for while they were ever taking for granted that which he doubted, and demonstrating with zeal and often with impudence that which he never thought of doubting, they so misconstrued his valuable suggestion that everything remained in its old condition, as if nothing had happened. The question was not whether the concept of cause was right, useful, and even indispensable for any knowledge of nature, for this Hume had never doubted; but whether that concept could be thought by reason *a priori*, and consequently whether it possessed an inner truth, independent of

> all experience, implying a more widely extended usefulness, not limited merely to objects of experience. This was Hume's problem. It was a question concerning the *origin* of the concept, not concerning its indispensability in use. Were the former decided, the conditions of its use and the sphere of its valid application would have been determined as a matter of course.

"It is fair to say that the *Critique of Pure Reason* is the large-scale outgrowth of Kant's attempt to solve the Humean problem: solve it, that is, insofar as it became his problem and the threat which he perceived it to be to the dignity of metaphysics and philosophy in general.

"Now the problem as it faced Kant starts with the traditional conception of the world as being something completely independent of the mind or self. It is the conception to which Hume subscribes and which naturally informs his account of the way the mind acquires knowledge of the world. Following Locke, Hume regards it in the main as a receiver of sense impressions and a retainer of ideas which are mnemonic and conceptual copies of these impressions. In so doing, he propounds a doctrine which denies validity to those ideas which, even though they be compounded of other ideas, ultimately do not have their source in the impressions which, as he admits, form the mind's inexplicable link to physical reality. The immediate and most devastating impact of such a doctrine is to the metaphysical tradition which, with its teachings, disputations, and institutionalized practises, bases itself on such ideas as God, soul, and substance. All causal reasoning in this area becomes suspect and, if this were the only consequence, Kant would have judged Hume's investigation to be a scourge driving out the accumulated falsity which eventually brings the search for highest knowledge into disrepute. However, the ramifications of Hume's reasoning went much further in that, not only did it challenge the metaphysical endeavour as it stood in his day, it also brought into serious question the nature of knowledge and reasoning even as they pertain to the seemingly straightforward and self-evident operations of the world. As Kant reformulated the problem, it became a question as to whether there are universal and necessary truths regarding the accounts given natural events as there are in those which merely relate the various aspects of a concept to the concept per se. The former, as he saw it, necessarily involve the conjoining of distinct concepts and therefore must express themselves in synthetic propositions as opposed to analytic ones. However, these synthetic propositions cannot be derived from some descriptive account of the world's operation since, as Hume so convincingly demonstrated, the causal reasoning which is at the heart of such an account is itself in the form of

synthetic propositions and so the very thing in question. It follows that they then must be discovered independent of experience and so, as a first step, Kant asked himself whether synthetic a priori propositions (i.e., assertions which, necessarily and universally true, are also informative about nature) were possible in and of themselves. He thereupon came to the conclusion that both mathematics and geometry include such propositions and that the latter issue from a particular way of viewing time and space. That is, time and space as mental constructs are the medium by which sensible intuition, conceptually ordered or organized, leads to objects of thought. The question then facing Kant was the one which he felt Hume inadequately addressed, namely, the question of how these objects of thought relate to one another to form the unity which is our conceptual grasp or experience of the world. His answer, at least with respect to the objects of sensible intuition, was the famous transcendental deduction. Herein he posited that certain concepts themselves (i.e., what he called the category of pure concepts) are the organizing principles by which experience is shaped or grasped (e.g., duration, succession, and co-existence). However, the latter are not independent of a larger reality which grounds them objectively or ontologically. This larger reality he calls the noumenal realm or things-in-themselves.[4]

"Thus the concept of causality is an a priori synthetic proposition which operates as a rule or law in the determination of the world as it manifests itself phenomenally in time. It is the Kantian solution to the Humean problem. The latter, by grounding the *necessar*y aspect of causality in pure subjectivity (i.e., with no apparent relation to the external), leaves the matter of its universality unsatisfactorily explained. That is, it is easier to see how the mind, with respect to Hume's account, develops the idea of a necessary connection between two events than how it comes up with the idea of an inner force or power pervading all events. On the other hand, without this aspect of universality, it is difficult to make sense of the mind's identifying certain impressions that are constantly conjoined as causally related but not others. In other words, repeated sequences in and of themselves do not establish such relatedness. And if such is the case, the question then becomes one of how causality in events discloses itself to the mind. Kant himself asks the question when he points out that any happening in time presupposes an earlier time but that no further information is to be derived simply from the concept of *happening.* 'How come I then to

4 *Professor Shimizu*: "To say this would seem to imply that Kant can't account for objective experience without reference to things-in-themselves after all and that empirical reality is merely appearance in a sense which leaves scepticism intact. and triumphant. Can this be interpreting Kant correctly?"

predicate,' he inquires, 'of that which happens something quite different, and to apprehend that the concept of cause, though not contained in it, yet belongs, and indeed necessarily belongs to it?' His thoroughgoing answer to this question is an account of those transcendental concepts which correspond with the three relations which Hume specifies as being not of ideas but of matters of fact. They are duration, succession, and co-existence (as opposed to Hume's identity, causality, and contiguity). Kant calls the scheme or operation by which these concepts interpret or order the manifold of sensible intuition *analogies of experience*. That is, they are transcendental judgements which are analogous to the empirical ones made in the realm of experience. These empirical ones operate in and of themselves upon the principle of universally valid and necessary connections between particular phenomena. The transcendental judgements subsume these empirical ones by extending their universality such that all phenomena fall under the law of an implacable causality.

"Causality, it may be said, manifests itself as the subjective identification of that which has been made objective in the phenomenal realm by all the concepts of the understanding (i.e., the category of pure concepts). Specifically, it is that which is objectively or independently undergoing change in the phenomenal realm. It is the characterization of this change as necessary and sequentially ordered such that preceding events determine those which follow them. This objective aspect of the phenomenal realm prevents subjectivity or idealism and points to the ground of the phenomena which is the noumenal realm.[5] Thus the alterations which an enduring substance accommodates are objective from the point of view of their being grounded in this substance which is both a concept of the understanding and, as noumenal, an undisclosed thing-in-itself. On the other hand, these alterations are subjective from the point of view of being a mere sequence of representations. As such, they are united merely by the imagination and this 'determines inner sense in respect of the time-relation.' In other words, this faculty unites representations into a sequence which in itself reveals no determination and so indifferently subsumes representations into this sequence. Kant designates the objectively ordered sequences as the *succession of appearances* and the subjectively ordered ones as the *representations of apprehension*. 'Experience,' Kant says, '. . . is thus possible only in so far as we subject the succession of appearances, and therefore all alternation, to the law of causality; and, as likewise follows, the appearances, as objects of experience, are themselves possible only in

5 *Professor Shimizu*: "Isn't it enough that the categories and principles provide intersubjective and public requirements (criteria)? To require an untenable noumenal ground would make us hostage to sceptical doubt once again."

conformity with the law.' Without the overriding law of causality and with merely the imaginatively united sequence of representations, experience as such would be a phantasmagoria of inexplicable appearances. The main point, however, is that the universal and necessary rule of causality makes possible a distinguishing of the succession of appearances from the manifold of representations which in itself comes to consciousness as subjectively ordered only. A boat moving downstream, for example (Kant's example), is a succession of appearances which the causal law renders as objectively ordered representations and so representations *of a specific kind*. By contrast, all other representations remain subjectively ordered, as is the case when one views a house (also Kant's example) in terms of a sequential observation of its various parts."

– Well, it's clear Kant didn't want the relationship between the noumenal and phenomenal to be understood as causal.

– I get the feeling Professor Shimizu wants to save Kant from the sort of criticism made against Hume.

– Yes, by implying the noumenal realm is nothing more than ideal.

– And yet this ideal represents something real, doesn't it? I mean, a world that's supposed to be there before it's ever experienced.

– There's this ontological confusion Kant probably didn't think so important because what he primarily explained was how we experience this world at the empirical level such that this empirical understanding is what we really know and are most certain about.

– You mean as a theory then that gives the world we normally have no doubts about (except when we philosophize or have a religious experience) a sort of extra certainty?

– Perhaps. It takes as much to curb the scepticism that, if left to its own devices, would declare everything forfeit.

I ended the essay on causality with some general thoughts.

"By traditionally setting itself over and against everything else, reason either sets about investigating this 'everything else' with an underestimation of its inclusiveness (that is, it more or less turns a blind eye towards this 'everything else' as it impinges on and pervades reason itself) or, what

amounts to the same thing, investigating itself with an overestimation of its (i.e., reason's) *exclusiveness*. Thus Plato and Aristotle, as representatives of the first tendency, have the ground of truth conceived as an external order (be it physical or extra-physical) separate from their own thoughts whereas Hume and Kant, as representatives of the second, have this ground of truth conceived as being a mind or ego essentially separate from everything else. It is roughly the difference between wanting to know all about what lies *outside* us and all about what lies *inside* us and, in both cases, without thinking much or even at all about their mutual implication. Descartes is pivotal of course: he looked at the self, essentially the rational self, and came to the conclusion that it was the only thing absolutely certain. Simply the self's sense of itself and its ability to think, doubt, imagine, etc. convinced him that the sense of self and thinking about it must include and presumably exhaust the whole subject. But once the self has been so objectified, it is only a matter of time before various aspects of it present themselves as potential candidates for conceptualization. With Hume, this took the form of his theory of impressions. He postulated these impressions as atomic entities that, in the form of ideas, join together to render thought possible. But these impressions that become ideas arise spontaneously for the most part in a self that is still their primary ground. Or at least so is the implication when these same impressions are presented as being active recipients of the world without a remainder that would be their *indeterminately* being determined.

"The significance of Hume's not being able to find out or determine the necessity of a connection between two events which simply present themselves sequentially and repeatedly is that it shows that the distinguishing of these events in conceptual isolation is already an assumption that they are in fact separate. In other words, it is the presentation of the matter wholly at the level of the mind's ability to distinguish and then unite things without any regard for what quite possibly is united irretrievably. To put it another way, causal explanation is the overcoming of the implicit contradiction that anything is when it is taken to be made up of parts both *necessary* and *not necessary* to it. Insofar as this interconnecting of parts reaches to the very limits of the universe, it implies that the whole is neither object nor event but both.

"By identifying rational being with phenomenal being, Kant largely overcomes the Cartesian dualism still strong in Hume. However, because he makes the noumenal – the things-in-themselves – in some sense accountable for the phenomenal and, furthermore, because he allows a new dualism to emerge as such, he must also bring back into his account a sort

of causality precisely where it is not meant to be, that is, in the noumenal realm beyond reason and beyond the area that Kant himself demarcates as the only area of causal explanation. He is caught in a bind that, as much as it is logical or rational, reflects what takes in philosophy as both problem and program. This as much as to say that, while Kant sinks most of the world into the self such that the world's subjectively ordered character is revealed, he does not do the opposite of sinking the self into the world. As a consequence, he maintains the former in its traditional pristine state such that, instead of taking it as the result of a long schooling in community, in history, in pre-history, in animality, in non-sentient matter, instead of taking it as a long hard painful pregnancy and messy delivery, he comes to it with the intellectual imagination that treats the self as issuing full-blown out of God or something like God in much the way that Athena issues fully armed from the forehead of Zeus. Of course it is grossly unfair to present the matter as if Kant could or should have conceived things differently. For the longest time there was nothing behind the rational self except God or gods. With the modern-day dismissal of the latter and the untenability of the self as a subject apart from others, however, there are good grounds once again for the sort of scepticism that Kant reacted against. With reason always divided into a for and against itself, it is forever a mixture of strategic belief and strategic doubt. Either one of these is no less the servant of the other and so, with respect to causality, it is continually vindicating itself, continually removing itself from doubt in a more or less effective way. Perhaps this is due to the fact that, to take a leaf out of the neo-pragmatists' book, we really do go on what works more than anything else. And the causal principle still shows a liveliness for extending itself all over the place and giving us interesting stories. Perhaps this too is something we want."

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