

Law of Causation

And the Material World

By Gabriel Hage

The Formula

- Constant Conjunction – The habitual perception that particular events are always linked to other particular events.
- Necessary Connection – “Any quality which binds the effect to the cause and renders the one an infallible consequence of the other” (AW, 558A).
- Cause = Constant Conjunction + Necessary Connection

The Problem

- “The mind feels no sentiment or *inward* impression from this succession of objects. Consequently, there is not anything which can suggest the idea of power or necessary connection” (AW, 558A).
- But, Locke said, from experience of new productions in matter, there must be a power that produces and drives them.
- So, we have an idea of power – we have an idea of necessary connection. But, an idea is not an experience.

Cause →

- For Hume, cause is a mental perception.
- We perceive successions of events through our minds; since the process of these events (i.e. the stuff between cause and effect) cannot be experienced by our senses, then we only have thoughts and ideas of it.
- “And experience only teaches us how one event constantly follows another [constant conjunction], without instructing us in the secret connection which binds them together and renders them inseparable [necessary connection]” (AW, 559B).

...Material World?

- Other philosophers say that God is the stuff between cause and effect.
- Hume's problem – God, as an answer to this mystery, is problematic because such an extraordinary conclusion is beyond our faculties.
- So what does that say about the material world? If God is the link between cause and effect, is there any reality in the motions of our world? If a cause is mental and not in the objects, then are the objects even there?

Creatures of Habit

- “Our belief that events are related by cause and effect is a completely *nonrational* belief. We have no good reason to think this. We *do* believe in causation. We cannot help it. But we believe in it by a kind of instinct. That is just how human nature works: When we experience the *constant conjunction* of events, we form a habit of expecting the second when we observe the first, and we believe the first causes the second” (Melchert, 407A).

What We Are Left With

- “Every idea is copied from some preceding impression or sentiment” (AW 564A).
- Relation of cause and effect:
 - 1) Vibration of the string follows the sound, and all similar strings are followed by similar sounds.
 - 2) Vibration of the string follows and sound, and the mind anticipates the senses and associates all similar instances with the current instance.
- We are human and we cannot help these thoughts. It’s in our minds – it’s in our nature.