

Hume's Central Principles

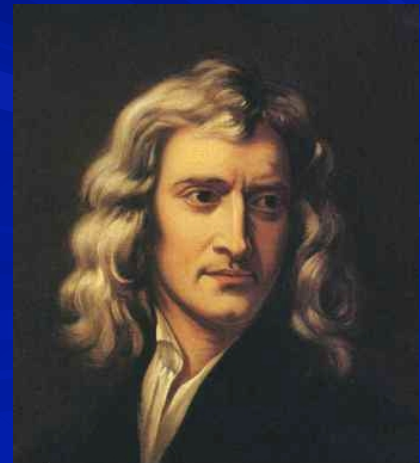
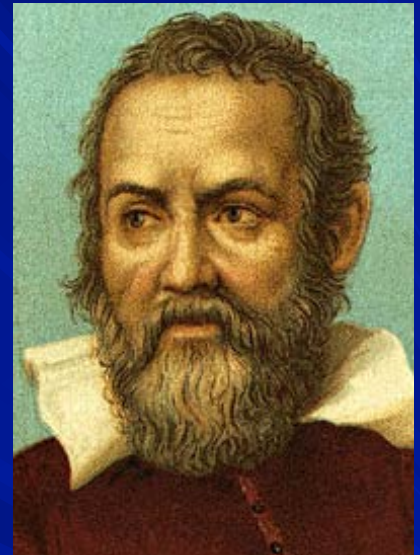
1. Historical Background, and His "Chief Argument"



Peter Millican
Hertford College, Oxford

Born in 1711, in Edinburgh

- 1610, Galileo, *The Starry Messenger*
 - Refutes the Aristotelian theory of the universe.
- 1620, Bacon, *Novum Organum*
 - Advocates the empirical method of science
- 1641, Descartes, *Meditations*
 - Matter understood as pure extension
- 1660, Formation of the *Royal Society*
 - Promoting the development of empirical science
- 1661, Boyle, *The Sceptical Chymist*
 - The corpuscularian theory of matter
- 1687, Newton, *Principia*
 - Gravitational force subject to inverse-square law



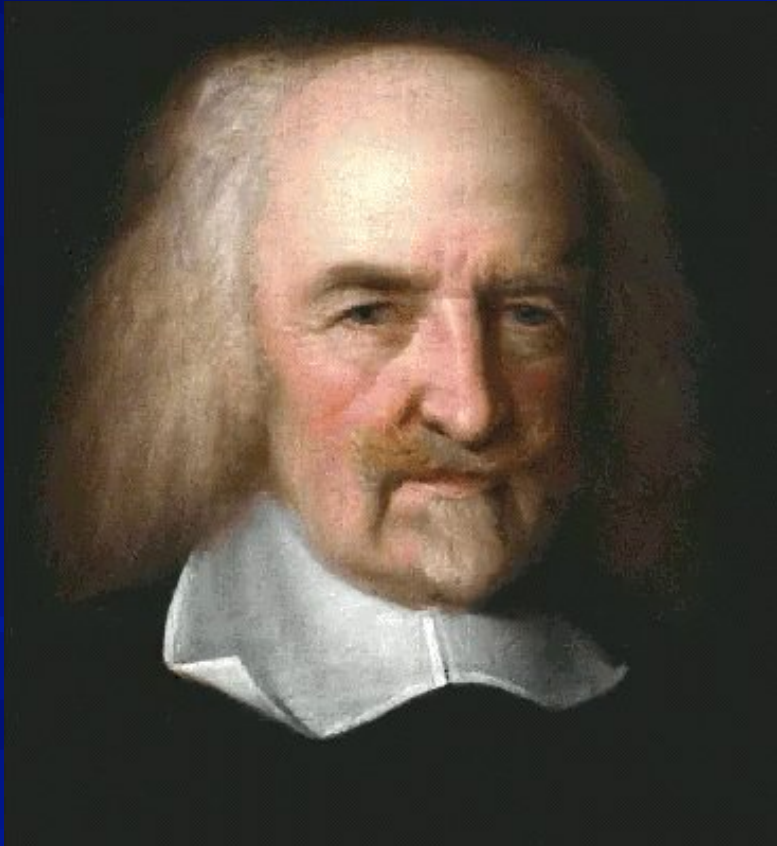
Mechanism and Scepticism

■ The “Mechanical Philosophy”

- Championed especially by Descartes (matter is just extension) and Boyle (matter is extended, impenetrable, and corpuscular).
- The physical world is composed of (particles of) inert matter acting through mutual impact and mathematically calculable forces.
- This seems *intelligible* (because mechanical interaction appears to make sense to us).
- But it potentially opens a sceptical gap between the world as it is and how it appears.

The Monster of Malmesbury

(and Magdalen Hall = Hertford College!)



- Thomas Hobbes wholeheartedly accepts the mechanical philosophy:
 - Everything that exists in the universe is material (hence no immaterial substance).
 - Everything is causally determined by the laws of mechanics.
 - A perfect science would be demonstrative.

Leviathan (1651)

- Hobbes is most famous as a political philosopher, arguing that in the state of nature, the life of man is “solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short”.
- The only solution is *absolute* sovereignty, over religion and morals as well as policy.



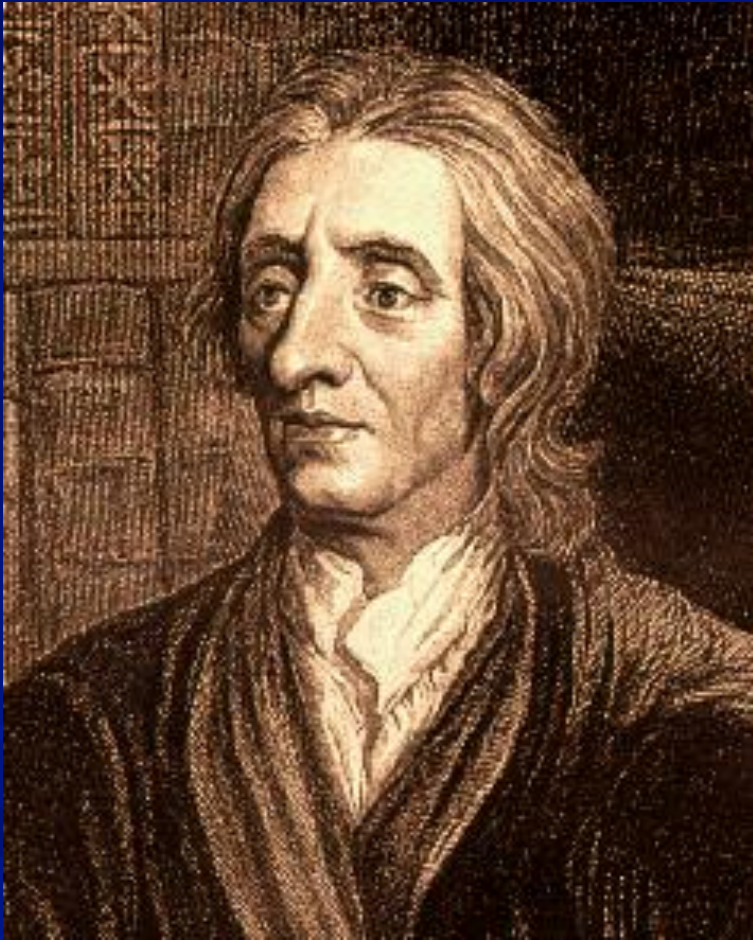
Materialism and Atheism

- Hobbes did not deny the existence of God, but many took his materialism to be atheistic and dangerous (e.g. denying immortality):
 - In 1666 Parliament cited his “atheism” as probable cause of the plague and fire of London!
 - His “Pernicious” books were publicly burned in Oxford in 1683, because of their “Damnable Doctrines ... false, seditious, and impious, and most of them ... also Heretical and Blasphemous ... and destructive of all Government”.

Opposing Materialism

- The main *argument* against Hobbist materialism was to insist on the limited powers of “brute matter”, which:
 - is necessarily *passive* or *inert*;
 - cannot possibly give rise to mental activity such as perception or thought.
- This point was pressed by Ward (1656), More (1659), Stillingfleet (1662), Tenison (1670), Cudworth (1678), Glanvill (1682), and ...

John Locke



- Strongly influenced by his friend Boyle.
- *Essay concerning Human Understanding* of 1690 sets out to account for *human thought* and *human knowledge*, within the this new mechanical world-order.
- Emphasis on *empiricism* and *probability*, rather than a priori knowledge and certainty.

Two Kinds of Empiricism

- Distinguish *concept-empiricism*:

All our ideas derive from experience

(i.e. there are no innate ideas)

from *knowledge-empiricism*:

All knowledge of the world derives from experience

(i.e. in Kant's terms, there is no synthetic a priori knowledge)

- Hobbes and Locke are both concept-empiricists, not knowledge-empiricists.

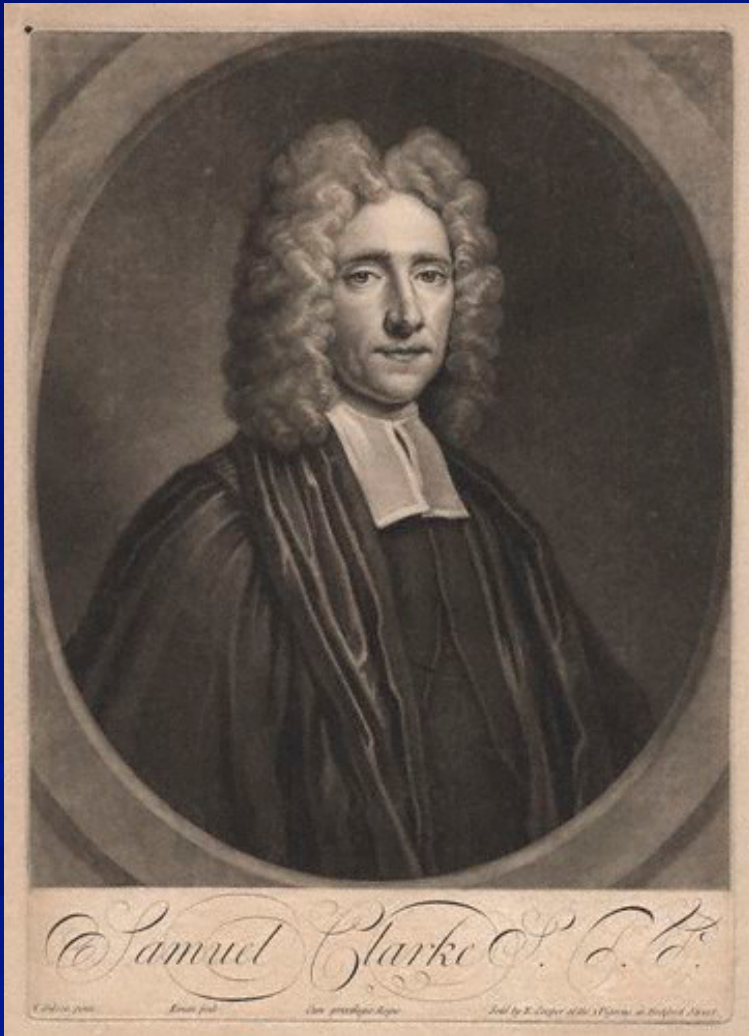
Hume's Copy Principle

- Hume's version of Locke's *concept-empiricism* is expressed in what is commonly known as his Copy Principle:
“that all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent.” (T 1.1.1.7)
- At *Enquiry* 2.9 n. 1, Hume suggests that this is really the essence of Locke's empiricist doctrine that there are no innate ideas.

Locke's Cosmological Argument

- “There is no truth more evident, than that something must be from eternity. ... This being of all absurdities the greatest, to imagine that pure nothing, the perfect negation and absence of all beings, should ever produce any real existence.” (IV x 8)
- “If then there must be something eternal, let us see what sort of being it must be. ... it is very obvious ... that it must necessarily be a cogitative being. For it is as impossible to conceive, that ever bare incogitative matter should produce a thinking intelligent being, as that nothing should of itself produce matter.”

Samuel Clarke



- Most prominent advocate of Newtonian philosophy.
- Had vigorous debate with Anthony Collins (a well-known “freethinker”, who argued that human behaviour is subject to *necessity*, just as much as the actions of matter.

Clarke's Cosmological Argument

- Hume gave a paraphrase of Clarke's argument in Part 9 of his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*:
 - “Whatever exists must have a cause or reason of its existence; ... What was it, then, which determined Something to exist rather than Nothing?”
 - “Nothing ... can never produce any thing.”
 - “an infinite succession of causes, without any ultimate cause at all; ... is absurd,”
 - “We must, therefore, have recourse to a necessarily existent Being, who carries the REASON of his existence in himself ... There is, consequently, such a Being; that is, there is a Deity.”

Hume on Locke and Clarke

- On his deathbed, Hume told Boswell that he “never had entertained any belief in Religion since he began to read Locke and Clarke”
- Both Locke and Clarke advocated the Cosmological Argument, and insisted that matter cannot give rise to thought.
- *Treatise* 1.3.3 – which disputes the basis of the Causal Maxim – identifies both Locke and Clarke by name (in footnotes).

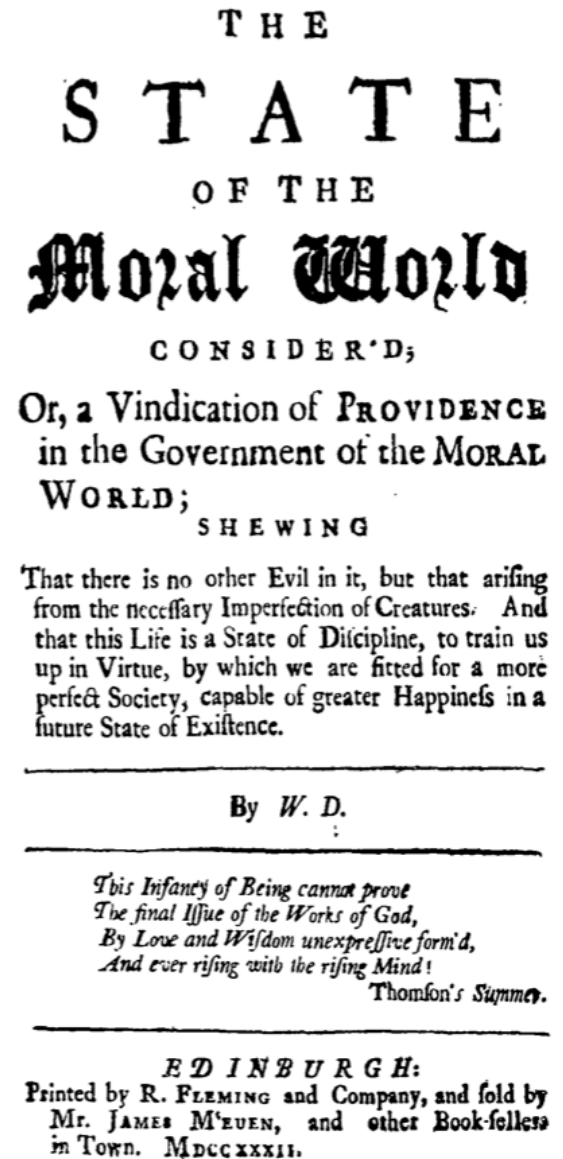
Hume at Chirnside

- Though born in Edinburgh, Hume spent most of his early years in the village of Chirnside, near Berwick in the Scottish borders.



William Dudgeon

- Tenant of Lennel Hill farm near Coldstream.
- Published *The State of the Moral World Considered* in 1732, defending optimism (i.e. everything that happens is for the best) and necessitarianism (i.e. causal determinism).



Andrew Baxter

- Tutor for the Hays of Drumelzier at Duns Castle.
- Published an attack on Dudgeon, also in 1732.
- A prominent supporter of Samuel Clarke, and likely target of some of Hume's later criticisms (in his *Letter from a Gentleman* of 1745 and his *Enquiry* of 1748).

S O M E
REFLECTIONS
On a late
PAMPHLET,
CALLED,
The State of the MORAL
WORLD Considered.



EDINBURGH,
Printed by GAVIN HAMILTON and COMPANY,
and sold at his Shop opposite to the *Parliament-
Cloſs*, North-side of the Street, MDCCLXXXII.

Baxter's *Enquiry*

- In 1733, published *An Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul*.
- Second edition in 1737, third edition in 1745, *Appendix* in 1750.
- Best known now as the first substantial English critique of George Berkeley's philosophy.

AN
ENQUIRY
INTO THE
Nature of the Human SOUL;
WHEREIN THE
Immateriality of the SOUL
Is evinced from the
PRINCIPLES
OF
REASON and PHILOSOPHY.

Ἐγὼ δὲ τί βέβαιον καὶ ἀδιαφθάν τι τὸ φύσει, καὶ ταύτη ἐπιστάω. Epict.
ζητῶ γὰρ τί τὸ ἀλήθειαν, ὃν ἢς εἰδὲς πάποτε ἐβλάβε. Marc. Antonin.

L O N D O N :

Printed by JAMES BETTENHAM, for the AUTHOR;

And fold by G. STRAHAN, over-againſt the *Royal-Exchange* in *Cornehil*; J. GRAY, at the *Croſs-Keys* in the *Poultry*; A. MILLAR, at *Buchanan's Head* in the *Strand*; A. LYON, in *Ruſſel-ſtreet*, *Covent-Garden*; O. PAYNE, in *Round-Court*, in the *Strand*; and G. HAMILTON, oppoſite to the *Parliament-Chefe*, *Edinburgh*: at whoſe Shops Subſcribers may call for their Books.

Prosecution at Chirnside

- Dudgeon was charged by the Presbytery of Chirnside (where George Home, David Hume's uncle, was minister):
 - 1st, That he denies and destroys all distinction and difference between moral good and evil, or else makes God the author of evil, and refers all evil to the imperfection of creatures;
 - 2d, That he denies the punishment of another life, or that God punishes men for sin in this life,
 - yea, that man is accountable.

Henry Home, Lord Kames



- Lawyer and distant cousin of David Hume.
- Corresponded with Andrew Baxter, criticising his Newtonian theory.
- Especially interested in causation and the Causal Maxim (that every change has a cause).

Hume's Early Memoranda

- Composed in the late 1730s or early 1740s.
- Show Hume's intense interest in the Causal Maxim, necessity, free will and its implications for God's existence and the Problem of Evil.

Philosophy

Notwithstanding the cruelty of their gladiatorial Spectacle, the Romans shew many signs of Humanity. It was regarded as a Piece of Cruelty to burn a Slave with a hot Iron for stealing Gable Timber. Tac. Lib. 14

Too careful & elaborate an Education prejudicial; because it learns one to trust to others for ^{one's} Judgement. L'Abbe de Boze

In a young Man, who applies himself to the Arts & Sciences, the Stomach with which he forms himself for the World is a good Sign. D.

The the Antients speak often of God in the singular Number, that proves not they belied in his Unity, since Christians speak in the same manner of his Trinity. Baile

The Dictionary of Politicians cannot be united to that of Christians against the Atheists; since they never found one Proposition that there is a God & afterwards that there is ~~no~~ more than one. These two Propositions were always the same. D.

Men love Pleasure more than they hate Pain. D.

Men are vicious; but hate a Religion that authorizes Vice. D.

The Center of Unity of all Men with Relation to Religion is, That there is a first Cause. As you augment the Propositions you find Non-conformists. Atheists, Epicureans, Politicians, those who maintain the Eternity, Necessity of the first Cause. &c. D.

Free Will and the Problem of Evil

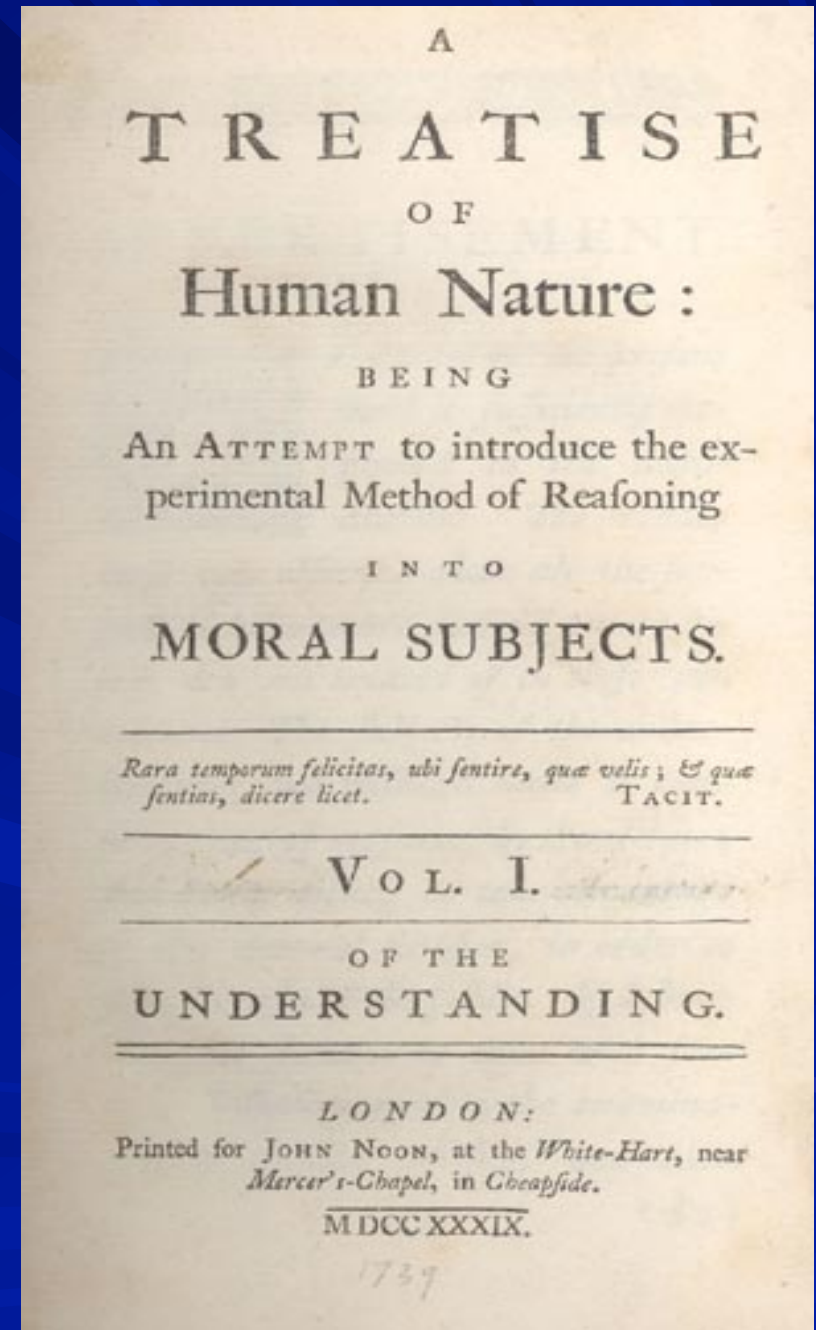
- Liberty not a proper Solution of Moral Ill: Because it might have been bound down by Motives like those of Saints & Angels.
- Did God give Liberty to please Men themselves. But Men are as well pleas'd to be determin'd to Good.
- God cou'd have prevented all Abuses of Liberty without taking away Liberty. Therefore Liberty no Solution of Difficultys.

Thinking about “Of Power”

- Locke’s empiricism naturally raises the issue of the origin of the idea of causal necessity, central to the Cosmological Argument.
- Locke’s “Of Power” (*Essay* II xxi) gives an inadequate account: Hume sees this, and attempts to remedy the omission.
- Locke’s chapter focuses also on Free Will. Hume sees his account as supporting Collins against Clarke (a debate very familiar to him through Dudgeon, Baxter, Desmaizeaux).

Hume's "Chief Argument"

- Hume's *Abstract of the Treatise* (1740) identifies his extended discussion of induction, belief, causation and free will as "the Chief Argument" of the 1739 *Treatise*.
- But in the *Treatise* itself, the search for the idea of *cause* is the primary theme of this discussion.



The Idea of Cause

- In *Treatise* 1.3.2, Hume identifies the components of the idea of causation as *contiguity*, *priority in time* (of *A* to *B*), and *necessary connexion* (see especially *T* 1.3.2.11).
- In *Treatise* 1.3.6, he finds *constant conjunction*, rather than perception of any necessary connexion, to be the key to inductive inference.
- At *Treatise* 1.3.14, he finally sets out to identify the impression from which the idea of necessary connexion is copied.

Synonymy and Definition

■ Hume begins his quest for the impression:

“I begin with observing that the terms of *efficacy*, *agency*, *power*, *force*, *energy*, *necessity*, *connexion*, and *productive quality*, are all nearly synonymous; and therefore 'tis an absurdity to employ any of them in defining the rest. By this observation we reject at once all the vulgar definitions, which philosophers have given of power and efficacy; and instead of searching for the idea in these definitions, must look for it in the impressions, from which it is originally deriv'd. If it be a compound idea, it must arise from compound impressions. If simple, from simple impressions.” (T 1.3.14.4)

Refuting Locke

- Locke's account of the origin of the idea of power or necessity is quickly refuted:

“I believe the most general and most popular explication of this matter, is to say, that finding from experience, that there are several new productions in matter, such as the motions and variations of body, and concluding that there must somewhere be a power capable of producing them, we arrive at last by this reasoning at the idea of power and efficacy. But to be convinc'd that this explication is more popular than philosophical, we need but reflect on two very obvious principles. First, That reason alone can never give rise to any original idea, ...” (*T* 1.3.14.5)

No Idea from Single Instances

- Powers cannot be found among the known or perceived properties of matter (*T* 1.3.14.7-11).
- Nor among the properties of mind (added in the *Appendix* of 1740, *T* 1.3.14.12, SB 632-3).
- We cannot find any *specific* impression of power in these various sources, hence they cannot possibly yield any *general* idea of power either (*T* 1.3.14.13; cf. the theory of “general or abstract ideas” of 1.1.7).

Repeated Instances

- The actual source of the key impression is revealed when we turn to *repeated* instances of observed conjunctions of “objects”. In these circumstances,

“... we immediately conceive a connexion betwixt them, and ... draw an inference from one to another. This multiplicity of resembling instances, therefore, constitutes the very essence of power or connexion, and is the source, from which the idea of it arises.” (*T* 1.3.14.16)

Necessity in the Mind, not in Objects

“[customary inference] is the essence of necessity. ... necessity is something, that exists in the mind, not in objects; nor is it possible for us ever to form the most distant idea of it, consider’d as a quality in bodies. ... necessity is nothing but that determination of the thought to pass from causes to effects and from effects to causes, according to their experienc’d union.” (*T* 1.3.14.22)

“When we say, therefore, that one object is connected with another, we mean only, that they have acquired a connexion in our thought, and give rise to this inference ...” (*E* 7.28)

“There may two definitions be given of this relation, which are only different, by their presenting a different view of the same object ... We may define a CAUSE to be ‘An object precedent and contiguous to another, and where all the objects resembling the former are plac’d in like relations of precedency and contiguity to those objects, which resemble the latter.’ If this definition be esteem’d defective, because drawn from objects foreign to the cause, we may substitute this other definition in its place, *viz.* ‘A CAUSE is 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.’ Shou’d this definition also be rejected for the same reason, I know no other remedy ...”

(T 1.3.14.31)

Of Liberty and Necessity

- Hume's conclusion about our idea of necessity is directly applied to the debate:

“the ... advocates for [libertarian] free-will must allow this union and inference with regard to human actions. They will only deny, that this makes the whole of necessity. But then they must shew, that we have an idea of something else in the actions of matter; which, according to the foregoing reasoning, is impossible.” (A 34, cf. *T* 2.3.1.3-18, *T* 2.3.2.4, *E* 8.4-22, *E* 8.27)

Constant Conjunction and Causation

- “all objects, which are found to be constantly conjoin’d, are *upon that account only* to be regarded as causes and effects. ... the constant conjunction of objects constitutes *the very essence* of cause and effect ...”
(*T* 1.4.5.32, my emphasis)
- “two particulars [are] essential to necessity, *viz.* the constant *union* and the *inference* of the mind ... wherever we discover these we must acknowledge a necessity.” (*T* 2.3.1.4)

Of the Immateriality of the Soul

- The standard anti-materialist argument insists that material changes cannot cause thought, because the two are so different.

“... and yet nothing in the world is more easy than to refute it. We need only to reflect on what has been prov'd at large ... that to consider the matter *a priori*, any thing may produce any thing, and that we shall never discover a reason, why any object may or may not be the cause of any other, however great, or however little the resemblance may be between them ” (T 1.4.5.30)

- Hume then goes further to insist that material motion *is indeed* found to be the cause of thought:
 - “we find ... by experience, that they are constantly united; which being *all the circumstances, that enter into the idea of cause and effect* ... we may *certainly* conclude, that motion may be, and *actually is*, the cause of thought and perception.” (*T* 1.4.5.30, my emphasis)
 - “as *the constant conjunction of objects constitutes the very essence of cause and effect*, matter and motion may often be regarded as the causes of thought, as far as we have any notion of that relation.” (*T* 1.4.5.33, my emphasis)

An Integrated Vision

- Hume's argument about causation refutes:
 - The Cosmological Argument;
 - Anti-materialist arguments;
 - The Free Will Theodicy (i.e. appealing to free-will to solve to the Problem of Evil);
 - Aprioristic causal metaphysics in general.
- At the same time it supports:
 - Empirical, causal science: the *only* way to establish anything about “matters of fact”;
 - Extension of causal science into moral realm.