



## **Hume on Liberty, Necessity and Verbal Disputes**

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## HUME ON LIBERTY, NECESSITY AND VERBAL DISPUTES

Although Hume's discussion "Of Liberty and Necessity" in Section VIII of the first Enquiry has become a paradigm of compatibilism with respect to the issue of free will and determinism, it is not without its perplexing features. For instance, it is far from clear how Hume's arguments and illustrations help to establish his claim that "The same motives always produce the same actions: The same events follow from the same causes."<sup>1</sup> Nor is it obvious that Humean liberty is reconcilable with Humean causation or constant conjunction, or that the latter takes the sting out of determinism and makes the case for compatibilism more plausible. In this paper I want to examine a further, perhaps related, perplexing feature of Hume's discussion, namely, his contention that the dispute concerning liberty and necessity has been a merely verbal one. Although perhaps portions of the dispute may turn "merely upon words" as Hume contends, still it seems extreme to claim that the "whole controversy" is of this nature.

I shall begin by examining the notion of a merely verbal dispute as it is discussed by Hume in other parts of his philosophy, and shall isolate three conditions for such a dispute. I shall then show why the dispute over liberty and necessity as presented in the Enquiry fails to meet these conditions. I want to suggest that there is a tension between Hume's psychological account of particular mistaken beliefs or natural illusions and his views about particular verbal disputes involving these beliefs. Even if this tension can be eased or eliminated, it will not make the dispute about liberty and necessity verbal.

## I

Before we can hope to assess Hume's claim that the dispute about liberty and necessity is a merely verbal one, we must be clear on what he understands by such a dispute. Fortunately, the notion is discussed in each of his four most important philosophical works -- the Treatise, the two Enquiries and the Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion. Perhaps the most detailed discussion is found in the Appendix to the second Enquiry, where Hume examines an apparent disagreement discovered in a comparison of various natural languages over the question of whether particular personal qualities are virtues or rather talents (and the corresponding question of whether other qualities are vices or rather defects).

In contending that the disagreement is merely verbal, Hume has two important things to say. First, he notes that "I do not find that in the English, or any other modern tongue, the boundaries are exactly fixed between virtues and talents, vices and defects, or that a precise definition can be given of the one as contradistinguished from the other." (E 313) Secondly, he states, "...it is no wonder that languages should not be very precise in marking the boundaries between virtues and talents, vices and defects; since there is so little distinction made in our internal estimation of them." (E 314) Hume goes on to point out that the sentiments which arise from the contemplation of qualities that are designated virtues are similar to those which arise from the contemplation of qualities which in some languages are designated talents. (E 316)

The preceding comments suggest an account of the nature of verbal disputes along the following lines. In a verbal dispute there is an underlying agreement about specific impressions, perceptions or experiences of objects. Thus, in the case of the dispute about whether specific qualities are talents or virtues, this would include the fact that the qualities elicit a similar feeling of approval for Hume whether they are designated in one way or the other. Moreover, Hume's comment about the lack of a clear distinction between "virtue" and "talent" implies that the terms express or refer to ideas that are compatible, that is, both of which can apply to a given object. Hence, there can be instances of qualities which fall under both designations. Given the underlying "factual" agreement between the parties to the dispute and given the compatibility of ideas, it would seem that for Hume in a verbal dispute there is no real disagreement between them and neither party is mistaken. Consequently, Hume expresses the view that verbal disputes are only about words or names, not about things, and says that such disputes are of little importance. (E 314, 316, 322)

In the case of the verbal dispute concerning virtues and talents, the compatibility of terms and ideas is at least partly attributable to their vagueness or imprecision.<sup>2</sup> Yet there seems no reason for Hume to rule out verbal disputes involving precise or more precise terms and ideas. Perhaps then in talking about the claims involved in verbal disputes, we should say for Hume that to the extent that the terms and ideas involved are precise, neither claim is erroneous; to the extent that the terms and ideas are vague or imprecise, we cannot

justify saying that either party is in error. In either case, in a verbal dispute for Hume, we cannot show that either party holds a false belief.

Bringing the strands of the above discussion together, we can say that where two individuals, A and B, are disputing whether an object O is x or is y, that the dispute will be verbal for Hume if and only if (1) A and B agree on their impressions, perceptions or experiences of O, (2) The terms "x" and "y" express or refer to ideas such that the statements are not incompatible,<sup>3</sup> and (3) Neither statement can be shown to be false. Let us call (1) the factual agreement condition or FAC, (2) the compatibility of statements condition or CSC and (3) the unfalsified claim condition or UCC.

## II

In what follows I want to show that Hume's discussions of verbal disputes in the Treatise and the Dialogues accord with the preceding analysis, although each is more complicated than the discussion in the second Enquiry. The discussion in the Treatise occurs at the end of the section "Of Personal Identity" and is confined to a single paragraph in which Hume notes:

Identity depends on the relations of ideas; and these relations produce identity, by means of that easy transition they occasion. But as the relations, and the easiness of the transition may diminish by insensible degrees, we have no just standard, by which we can decide any dispute concerning the time, when they acquire or lose a title to the name of identity. All the disputes concerning the identity of connected objects are merely verbal, except so far as the

relation of parts gives rise to some fiction or imaginary principle of union, as we have already observ'd.

To comprehend Hume's meaning, we must recapitulate what he claims to have shown in his discussion of identity. In the section on personal identity, Hume reiterates a point that he had first made in the section "Of Scepticism with Regard to the Senses" -- that a succession of related perceptions or objects which fail to satisfy the conditions of strict identity over time, i.e., which are not invariable or uninterrupted in their existence, may, nevertheless, have an effect on the mind that is similar to and simulates the perception of an identical object. (see T 203-4, 253ff). Because of the particular relations among the perceptions, an identity will be ascribed to them and they will be taken to constitute the same object. This process of simulation involves the fiction that Hume refers to at the end of the passage quoted above.

Now if the concept of strict (or perfect) identity were the only concept of identity, it would be hard to see how there could be verbal disputes about the identity of objects. As Hume himself remarks about ascriptions of strict identity,

...the controversy ... is not merely a dispute of words. For when we attribute identity, in an improper sense, to variable or interrupted objects, our mistake is not confin'd to the expression, but is commonly attended with a fiction, either of something invariable and uninterrupted, or of something mysterious and inexplicable, or at least with a propensity to such fictions. (T 255)

In short, in such cases the UCC would not be met.

Throughout the section on personal identity, however, Hume speaks as if objects that lack strict identity have an identity of sorts; in at least one

place he refers to this sort of identity as "imperfect identity": "it must be the uninterrupted progress of thought, which constitutes the imperfect identity." (T 256) What Hume appears to be saying is that specific sets or successions of perceptions produce connections in thought, 'easy transitions,' which distinguish them from other sets or successions and which constitute their imperfect identity. The connections, that is the imperfect identity, will thus depend upon the particular ways in which the perceptions are related. I believe that Hume is referring to imperfect identity in the quoted passage, and although I will examine in more detail the relation between the two kinds of identity later in this paper, I think at least this much can be said. Unlike perfect identity, the notion of imperfect identity is not an absolute notion. For instance, it does not require the total or complete absence of change of the former. In the passage above (T 262), Hume seems to be stating that imperfect identity is not an extremely precise concept either. Although for Hume the minuteness of change appears to be a factor in the retention of an object's imperfect identity (see T 256), he seems to be claiming that there will not be an exact or definite point at which the easy transition, the connection in thought, is broken, and, thus, the imperfect identity destroyed. This allows for situations in which two individuals may disagree about the imperfect identity of what they are perceiving, even where they have similar perceptions and agree on phenomenal descriptions of what they perceive.

In such cases the dispute about imperfect identity will, therefore, satisfy FAC. In the aforementioned passage Hume clearly implies that UCC is satisfied, since there is no way of resolving the

disagreement by showing that one party is right and the other wrong. Finally, although it might seem as if an account of verbal disputes extracted from the discussion of identity must differ from the one derived from Hume's discussion of virtues and talents -- since the former does appear to involve incompatible claims -- this I think is not the case. When A says that a given object or set of perceptions is imperfectly identical and B says that it is not, there is no incompatibility, since the idea of imperfect identity appears to be always relative to a given perceiver and the connection in his or her mind. This is to say that every ascription of imperfect identity is implicitly self-referential. In disputes about imperfect identity, each party will in effect be employing a personal or subjective standard, and according to Hume there is no inter-subjective standard available.

### III

The discussion of verbal disputes in the Dialogues<sup>5</sup> presents special interpretive problems. Each of the two paragraphs that comprise the discussion was composed at different times. Thus, even ignoring the question of whether Philo speaks for Hume and the intermingling of verbal disputes with disputes which are "more incurably ambiguous" (D 218) than verbal disputes, there is the question of whether the discussion contains a single position or two separate positions.

Ostensibly, the discussion concerns the dispute between theist and atheist over whether the cause of the universe is intelligent or a mind. As formulated in the first paragraph of the discussion, both parties are taken to agree about the "great

analogy" as well as the "considerable differences" between natural objects and the works of human art, and, thus, between their respective causes. The apparent disagreement concerns whether the cause can be called "mind" or "intelligence." But as Philo notes, "if we make it a question, whether, on account of these analogies, we can properly call him a mind or intelligence, notwithstanding the vast difference, which may reasonably be supposed between him and human minds; what is this but a mere verbal controversy?" (D 217)

It seems as if Philo's point is that once the two parties agree on the "facts" concerning analogy, the only dispute concerns the scope of one's idea of mind -- whether it is narrowly fixed to human mental processes or sufficiently broad to include the properties required of a creator vastly different from human beings. Such a dispute about the scope of the meaning of "mind" seems to be intimated in Section V of the Dialogues.<sup>6</sup> Interpreted in this way the dispute is virtually a model of the tripartite analysis of verbal disputes we have presented. For according to Philo's presentation of the dispute, FAC is met; given that the dispute would concern different ideas of mind, CSC could be satisfied. When understood against the background of the different ideas of mind, the claims of each party will accord with the facts or satisfy UCC.

What greatly complicates the interpretation of the discussion of verbal disputes in the Dialogues is the presence of a second paragraph, added in 1776. Is it a gloss on the first paragraph or does it present an additional respect in which the dispute between theist and atheist is verbal in nature?

In the added paragraph Philo states that the dispute's being verbal turns on its being a case of a dispute about the "degrees of any quality or circumstance." (D 217) Philo proceeds to explain that the theist will concede "that there is a great and immeasurable, because incomprehensible, difference between the human and the divine mind" (D 218); the atheist will admit that "the principle which first arranged, and still maintains, order in this universe, bears ... some remote inconceivable analogy to the other operations of nature, and among the rest to the oeconomy of human mind and thought." (D 218) Summarizing the situation, Philo says:

The theist allows, that the original intelligence is very different from human reason: The atheist allows, that the original principle of order bears some remote analogy to it. Will you quarrel, Gentlemen, about the degrees, and enter into a controversy, which admits not of any precise meaning, nor consequently of any determination? (D 218)

What exactly is the verbal dispute according to Philo? James Duerlinger has claimed that it is found in the first two sentences of the above passage, and concerns the similarity in meaning of two vague expressions, "very different from human intelligence" and "remotely similar to human intelligence."<sup>7</sup> But surely these expressions no more constitute a dispute, even an apparent or prima facie one, than do the following different descriptions of the same object: The glass is nearly full, the glass is very far from empty; the painting is not totally ugly, the painting has some beauty to it.

It would seem that far from the first two sentences expressing a verbal dispute for Philo, they represent the agreement between the parties. For according to Philo, despite the apparent

incompatibility of their positions, the theist and atheist can be shown to agree on the "facts" of analogy, that is, on particular features or respects in which natural objects are similar to or different from the products of human reason, and on particular respects in which the causes of each are similar or different. Both sides agree that there are great differences between the respective causes and (although greatly weakened from the claim of agreement on the "great analogy" in the first paragraph) both sides agree on the existence of analogies. The verbal dispute arises because each side wants to go beyond the very general agreement expressed in the first two sentences. Neither side is satisfied leaving the matter as stated there. So, the theist might allow that there are great differences between human reason and the cause of natural order, but still wish to maintain that the analogies are considerable or sufficiently strong to infer an intelligent cause. The atheist, while admitting that there are analogies, wants to contend that they are inconsiderable and too weak to infer such a cause. In short, the disagreement concerns the degree of similarity and difference in a comprehensive comparison of natural objects and works of human art. Whatever the agreement on particular points of similarity and difference may be, the parties disagree as to whether on balance the former sufficiently outweigh the latter and justify the inference to an intelligent cause.

According to Philo the preceding dispute, which turns on ideas or standards of degrees of similarity and difference, turns on ideas that are exceedingly vague and imprecise. Because of this, disagreements involving such ideas will not admit of any determination or resolution. As Philo notes,

"...the degrees of these qualities are not, like quantity or number, susceptible of any exact mensuration, which may be the standard in the controversy." (D 218) This is to say that the disputants are employing different standards, which are so vague that it is impossible to say that one's claim is correct and the other's mistaken. Hence the dispute between theist and atheist will satisfy UCC. The agreement about particular points of analogy and disanalogy appears to fulfill FAC. Because of the lack of precision or clarity of the ideas of degrees of similarity, there can always be cases to which both ideas apply. Thus, CSC will be satisfied.

If we can summarize Philo's position in the second paragraph of the discussion about verbal disputes, it seems to be this: The dispute between theist and atheist about whether or not the cause of the universe is mind or intelligence rests on a verbal dispute about degrees of similarity. For the determination of whether or not the cause is intelligent presupposes a weighing or balancing of analogies and disanalogies between natural objects and works of human art, and this in turn presupposes imprecise and incommensurable standards or ideas of degrees of similarity and difference. Read in this way the discussion in the second paragraph may explicate the position Philo expresses in the passage from the first paragraph quoted above. (D 217)

#### IV

Although most of the components of Hume's discussion of liberty and necessity in the Enquiry are present in the Treatise account, where Hume implies that indeterminists are confused about meanings (for instance, the distinction between two

sorts of liberty) (T 404, 407-8), Hume does not claim in the latter work that the dispute turns merely on words, as he does in the former. His aim in the Treatise is to vindicate determinism against the defenders of liberty, whom he indicates hold a false belief that particular events or actions are uncaused.<sup>8</sup>

Connected with the preceding is, I believe, a difference for Hume in the scope of the dispute in the two works. Hume's discussion and criticism in the Treatise seem directed towards philosophers and their positions.<sup>9</sup> While initially this might also seem to be the case in the Enquiry -- for Hume does talk of questions disputed since the "first origin of science and philosophy" -- it is ultimately clear that the supposed disputants include not only philosophers but the so-called "vulgar" as well. Hume repeatedly talks of opinions or positions held by "all mankind" and contends that everyone, whether a philosopher or not, really agrees on the facts concerning liberty and necessity. (E 80, 83, 92, 95, 99)

Of course this raises the question of what Hume takes the vulgar position to be. Philosophical discussions of the issue of free will and determinism have typically described three basic positions, which might be summarized as follows:

- (H) Every event is caused (necessitated). No event is free.
- (I) Not every event is caused (necessitated). Some events are free.
- (S) Every event is caused (necessitated). Some events are free.

It is apparent from Hume's discussion that he is advocating (S), and I think it is also the case that Hume is ascribing (I) to the vulgar. To see how this is so is to understand why Hume thinks that CSC is satisfied.

Both Hume's account of the origin of the belief in cause and effect and a major argument that he employs in Section VIII of the Enquiry indicate that the vulgar are supposed to hold a necessitarian view of causality. For example, in Section VII of the work, when discussing how each of us develops the idea of cause and effect and begins to reason causally, Hume states:

But when one particular species of event has always, in all instances, been conjoined with another ... [W]e then call the one object, Cause; the other, Effect. We suppose that there is some connexion between them; some power in the one, by which it infallibly produces the other, and operates with the greatest certainty and strongest necessity. (E 74-75)<sup>10</sup>

In his discussion of liberty and necessity, Hume builds on this point by using it as a factor in the vulgar belief that their actions are uncaused:

...men still entertain a strong propensity to believe that they penetrate farther into the powers of nature, and perceive something like a necessary connexion between the cause and the effect. When again they turn their reflections towards the operations of their own minds, and feel no such connexion of the motive and the action; they are thence apt to suppose, that there is a difference between the effects which result from material force, and those which arise from thought and intelligence. (E 92)

In short, the vulgar, that is all of us, believe that causality involves a necessary connection; when we are unable to find any necessary connection in our

own actions, we infer that such actions are uncaused or free. Thus, according to Hume, the vulgar hold (I). Moreover, the supposed conflict between Hume and the vulgar can be shown to satisfy CSC.

The formal point of disagreement between (S) and (I) concerns the first sentence of each position. The proponent of (S) holds that all events are caused or necessitated; the proponent of (I) holds that some events are not caused or necessitated. But the proponent of (S), such as Hume, means by 'caused' or 'necessitated' merely 'constantly conjoined with' or 'constantly conjoined with and connected in the imagination,' whereas the supporter of (I), like the vulgar, means by 'caused' or 'necessitated' something like 'necessarily connected with.' On this view there is no incompatibility or disagreement between the claims, since events can be constantly conjoined with other kinds of events, even where the events are not necessarily connected with such events. In turn a case can be made for the compatibility of the second sentences of the two positions. For the second sentence of (S) states that events are free in a manner consistent with the presence of constant conjunctions among them, while the same sentence in (I) states that some events are not necessitated or rendered inevitable by the existence of any other event.

Yet if the dispute involving (S) and (I) satisfies CSC, Hume fails to show that it also satisfies FAC or UCC. In the case of the first sentence of each position, the dispute about determinism, Hume attempts to secure FAC by focusing on the 'practice' and 'reasoning' of the vulgar. Presumably what he wishes to show is that although they may deny determinism, in part because of their confusion about causality, their expectations,

inferences and behavior show that tacitly they accept Humean determinism. Since Humean determinism, i.e., constant conjunction or the connection in thought, is a weaker condition than the vulgar necessary connection, they may actually acknowledge the former in their judgments and reasoning, in the absence of the latter.

Likewise, in the discussion of liberty, Hume claims that "all mankind have ever agreed in the doctrine." (E 95) Again he cannot mean that the vulgar explicitly accept his analysis of liberty. What he might contend is that vulgar practice, in this case referring practice, indicates that Hume's analysis is correct. Upon examination the feature common to events or actions designated as 'free' or considered cases of liberty, and not found in events or actions that are not so designated, is that they are examples of "a power of acting or not acting, according to the determinations of the will." (E 95)

Against Hume's claim that FAC is satisfied in the dispute between the vulgar and the supporter of (S) and that, consequently, the dispute about liberty and necessity is merely verbal, I want to argue (1) that it is doubtful whether there is agreement, even tacit agreement, about fulfillment of the conditions for universal Humean determinism in the experience of the vulgar; and (2) even if there were, this would not show that the dispute is merely a verbal one. I shall try to show that by Hume's own account, the vulgar neither find Humean determinism in their experience, nor assume it to be true of their experience. Moreover, Hume's attempt to secure the FAC appears to run counter to his own account of beliefs about causality.

Both in the Treatise and in Section VIII of the Enquiry, Hume acknowledges that not only do the vulgar perceive gaps in the uniformity of their experience, the constant conjunction of presumed causes and effects, but also that they do not feel these gaps require further explanation. As he notes in the Enquiry, "The vulgar ... attribute the uncertainty of events to such an uncertainty in the causes as makes the latter often fail of their usual influence." (E 86-87)<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, although Hume contends that we must distinguish beliefs about one's own actions from the inferences others make about them, he admits that even in the observations of the actions of others, we do not always find constant conjunctions, nor are we always able to infer specific actions in given contexts. (E 94n)

What Hume might want to say about such cases is suggested by a comment he makes in a long footnote in which he discusses inferences about the actions of others. He notes that "a spectator can commonly infer our actions from our motives and character; and even where he cannot, he concludes in general, that he might, were he perfectly acquainted with every circumstance of our situation and temper, and the most secret springs of our complexion and disposition." (E 94n) According to Hume we seem to assume or believe in determinism even where we do not find it. Perhaps Hume wants to claim that on this basis we can distinguish the unsophisticated vulgar who make no assumption and accept a primitive contingency of causes, from the rest of us, who operate with the belief in universal determinism in our practice and reasoning.<sup>12</sup>

One puzzling thing concerns how this assumption can be worked into the vulgar view. To avoid the incoherence of attributing to the vulgar

both the belief that all events are caused and the belief that some are free, that is, uncaused, Hume would have to claim that the vulgar do not make the assumption about their own actions. But this attenuation of the scope of free actions to one's own actions seems to distort the vulgar view, which purportedly makes a general distinction between voluntary actions and events that have physical cause. (see E 83, 92-93)

In any event, appeal to this assumption will not establish that the dispute is merely verbal. For in making the assumption, the vulgar would be assuming the presence or existence of necessary connections that Hume and the supporters of (S) deny. That is to say that the assumption that there are unexperienced causes by the vulgar would have to be understood against the background of their view of causality, which according to Hume, himself, is a necessitarian one. Thus, even if we suppose that agreement between the vulgar and the supporters of (S) about actual and assumed causes is as pervasive as Hume supposes, the 'facts' will be described quite differently by each. If this is not reason for saying that the FAC is not satisfied, it is at least reason for saying that the UCC is not. As Hume notes, the vulgar have a false belief ("erroneous supposition") about caused events, namely that they are necessarily connected or bonded to each other.<sup>13</sup>

In general, therefore, it is insufficient to argue as Hume does that the dispute about liberty and necessity is merely a verbal one because all agree on the existence of Humean causality. Even if vulgar practice and reasoning were to indicate that events are taken to be constantly conjoined with other events, the vulgar, who hold a necessitarian view of causality, hold that there is more to causally

related events than that. Hume's discussion of liberty and necessity, with its emphasis on the realm of human actions, where neither the proponent of (I) nor the proponent of (S) holds there to be necessary connections, is apt to direct attention away from this disagreement. Still, in holding, in the first sentence of (I), that not all events are caused, the vulgar are clearly implying that some are caused. About these there is disagreement. Even confining the dispute to the area of human actions or those events that are taken to be uncaused by the vulgar, UCC does not seem to be satisfied. The vulgar believe that such events are not related to any other event in the way in which purely physical or material causes are related to their effects. (E 92) As we have already noted, Hume disagrees and claims that this is the root of the belief in indeterminism.

I believe that not only does Hume fail to show that the dispute about liberty and necessity is a merely verbal one, but that there is a tension between his attempt to do so and his account of the development of the belief in cause and effect and causal reasoning. As already noted, according to Hume observed constant conjunction is supposed to generate causal inference, the use of causal language and the belief in necessary connection. Given Hume's account, the clear implication is that where the belief that two events are necessarily connected is not generated, a lack of connection in thought and ultimately a lack of observed constant conjunction must be assumed. Yet Hume's approach in Section VIII is to claim that the vulgar in fact do observe and agree on the existence of constant conjunctions and make inferences about events, which they still take to be free or uncaused, i.e., which they do not take to be necessarily connected. Although Hume does offer

an explanation of why the belief in necessary connection might not occur in the case of one's own actions as one performs them (E 94n), he does not explain how the vulgar could believe in general that human actions are not caused, that is, not necessarily connected with other events. To the extent that Hume minimizes observed constant conjunctions, he weakens the case for fulfillment of FAC; to the extent that he emphasizes observed constant conjunctions, he jeopardizes his account of causal reasoning and belief.

The tension between Hume's psychological accounts and his views on verbal disputes seems to run even deeper than the preceding. For these accounts seem to imply that in two areas which according to Hume give rise to verbal disputes -- causality and identity -- ordinary or natural beliefs are inherently false or mistaken. For example, in his discussion of personal and object identity, Hume appears to characterize the notion of imperfect identity in terms of the mistaken ascription of strict or perfect identity to individuals and objects. For Hume holds that perceptions or objects that are related in specific ways but are not perfectly identical are taken to be so because of the similarity of these objects to perfectly identical ones and the similarity of the acts of mind involved in perceiving objects of each kind (see T 204n, 254). Thus, in cases in which objects are imperfectly identical, they are naturally believed to be perfectly identical. This account makes it appear impossible for there to be verbal disputes about identity. In cases in which imperfect identity is present, it is perfect identity that is predicated; when individuals disagree about identity it would seem to be perfect identity about which they must

disagree. According to Hume's position as expressed in the Treatise passage quoted earlier (T 255), such disagreement could be factual in nature and at least one of the parties will have a false belief. Hume may be willing or even anxious to allow that objects that are related in specific ways but are not perfectly identical have an imperfect identity; but surely given the truth of Hume's psychological account this cannot be what the man in the street believes in ascribing identity to such objects.

Similarly, in the case of causality and the dispute about liberty and necessity, given the truth of Hume's account of causal reasoning, causal judgments involve the mistaken belief in necessary connection. The very condition for two events being causally related, constant conjunction, is for Hume a cause of the mistaken belief that causes and effects are connected by something stronger than constant conjunction. Consequently disputes bound up with the idea of cause and effect will invariably involve false beliefs and will not be merely verbal in nature.

Since it seems to be Hume's contention in the Treatise that there can be verbal disputes about imperfect identity, the implication is that individuals can somehow be purged of the seemingly natural belief in the perfect identity of objects. A similar implication holds in the case of the belief in necessary connection. Perhaps Hume can be read as claiming that although beliefs about identity and cause and effect are, like beliefs about the external existence of objects and the uniformity of nature, habitual and involuntary, such beliefs are separable from beliefs about perfect identity and necessary connections. On such a view, though it would be futile to seek to avoid viewing objects in particular

situations as the same and objects that are constantly conjoined as causally related, one could at least avoid certain conceptual confusions and gain clear understanding of just what our experience warrants. A number of Hume's remarks in Section VIII are suggestive of the above distinction.<sup>14</sup>

Yet even if such a reconstruction of Hume's intent does not build false beliefs into causal reasoning, it is not clear how it allows for merely verbal disputes about liberty and necessity. In disputes about imperfect identity, even where we realize that the only kind of identity that can properly be ascribed to the objects of daily life is imperfect identity, we can still disagree about imperfect identity in particular cases because of the imprecision and subjectivity of the concept. But in the case of disagreements about the presence or absence of causes, as in the dispute about liberty and necessity, the ideas do not appear to have the same imprecision, nor do disputes involving them appear to be unresolvable in the same way. On the contrary, they seem typical cases of factual disputes.<sup>15</sup>

Hume may believe the dispute about liberty and necessity is merely verbal because assuming that the vulgar could be persuaded that the conditions for Humean determinism are satisfied both in natural events and human actions and that their beliefs about the former are unjustified, the only way in which the dispute could go on would be as a verbal dispute about the meaning of "necessity." As Hume notes, "If these circumstances form, in reality, the whole of that necessity, which we conceive in matter, and if these circumstances be also universally acknowledged to take place in the operations of the mind, the dispute is at an end; at least, must be owned to be

thenceforth merely verbal." (E 93) Yet it is just these two conditions which are in question and which Hume has not decisively established. The vulgar certainly claim to "conceive" more about matter than Humean causation; it is doubtful that they acknowledge universal Humean causation either explicitly or implicitly. So, even if we can agree with Hume about the "thenceforth" verbal dispute, we should not accept the "hitherto" (E 81) one as well.

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1. David Hume, Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals, edited by L.A. Selby-Bigge, Third Edition, with text revised and notes by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 83. Further references will be cited as 'E' followed by the relevant page number(s).
2. The lack of clarity or obscurity of ideas is noted by Hume in Section II of the first Enquiry, p. 21.
3. Given Hume's position about the origin and relation of ideas and impressions, i.e., that the former are copies of the latter, it might seem as if (1) and (2) are not logically independent. For where there is agreement about impressions, it might seem as if ipso facto there will be agreement about and hence compatibility among ideas. Yet in fact this is not the case. For one thing, the relationship between impressions and ideas for Hume is not nearly as simple as described above. Some ideas refer to sets or series of impressions and not to single impressions. Thus, a given object or impression may produce different ideas in the minds of different perceivers. More to the point, Hume claims in numerous places in A Treatise of Human Nature (Selby-Bigge, Second Edition, pp. 60ff, 203ff and 253ff), that different, even

incompatible ideas are confused with each other because similar "dispositions of mind" are involved in the two ideas. So, particular objects or impressions may call up one idea instead of the other, which is its copy. Therefore, it is plausible to suppose not only that two perceivers whose impressions or experiences of an object O are in fact similar might make incompatible statements about O, but also that they might do so while they agree about particular phenomenal descriptions of O. The latter situation would typically be the case where one or more of the terms employed in the statements is taken to refer to what is beyond the present experience of O. For example, disputes about the continued and distinct existence and the strict identity of an object would seem to be for Hume cases where (1) but not (2) could be satisfied.

4. David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, edited by L.A. Selby-Bigge, Second Edition with text revised and notes by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 262. Further references will be cited as 'T' followed by the relevant page number(s).
5. David Hume, Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion, edited by Norman Kemp Smith (Indianapolis and New York: Bobbs-Merrill, (1947), pp. 216-9. Further references will be cited as 'D' followed by the relevant page number(s).
6. Philo could be viewed as holding a broader concept of mind and Cleanthes as holding a more narrow one in the following exchange in Section V. Philo says,
 

All the new discoveries in astronomy, which prove the immense grandeur and magnificence of the works of nature, are so many additional arguments for a Deity, according to the true system of theism: But according to your hypothesis of experimental theism, they become so many objections, by removing the effect still farther from all resemblance to the effects of human art and contrivance. (D 165)

 Philo adds, "And what say you to the discoveries in anatomy, chemistry, botany? ... These surely are no objections, replied Cleanthes: They only discover new instances of art and contrivance. It is still the image of mind reflected on us

from unnumerable objects. Add, a mind like the human, said Philo. I know of no other, replied Cleanthes." (D 166)

7. James Duerlinger, "The Verbal Dispute in Hume's Dialogues," Archiv fur Geschichte der Philosophie, 53, I (1971), pp. 22-34.
8. See Treatise, pp. 407, 412 and 609. One reason for Hume's position in the Treatise that the dispute is not merely verbal is that he takes the libertarians to deny causality even in a Humean sense:  
 According to my definitions, necessity makes an essential part of causation; and consequently liberty, by removing necessity, removes also causes, and is the very same thing with chance. As chance is commonly thought to imply a contradiction ... there are always the same arguments against liberty or free-will. (T 407) (Italics are mine.)
9. See, for example, Treatise, pp. 404 and 412.
10. A similar point is made at the beginning of Section VIII, p. 82.
11. Cf. Treatise, p. 132.
12. For Hume to make his point he must do more than show that we (often) seek explanations of human actions or behavior. For what we seek may fall short of a Humean deterministic explanation.
13. See Enquiries, p. 93 and Treatise, p. 168. Although Hume implies in these places that the vulgar have a false belief about the necessary connection of objects, it might seem as if his official position is inconsistent with this view. For given Hume's empiricist theory of meaning, if there is no impression of necessary connection along the lines asserted by the vulgar, the vulgar can have no idea of necessary connection and, thus, no belief (not even a false one) about the existence of such connections. Hume's official position, however, would seem to make any dispute along the lines of the one discussed in Section VIII of the first Enquiry assuredly not a verbal one. For without some idea of necessary connection, however confused, it is hard to see how the vulgar view can be characterized or how the CSC could be fulfilled.

14. Enquiries, pp. 92 and 93-4. "The only method of undeceiving us is to mount up higher; to examine the narrow extent of science when applied to material causes; and to convince ourselves that all we know of them is the constant conjunction and inference above mentioned." (E 93)
15. To the extent that one stresses the subjectivist character of Hume's analysis of the idea of cause and effect, that is, the association or connection mentioned in his second analysis of that idea, disputes about causality would be assimilated to other cases of verbal disputes discussed in this paper. Hume's suggestion (T 130-1) that such associations involve habits which admit of degrees would provide additional evidence for assimilation.

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