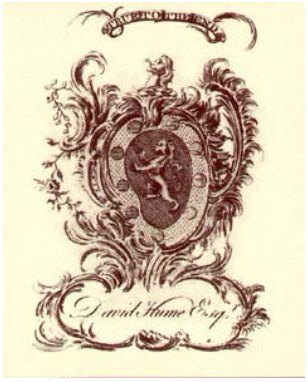

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FRED WILSON. *Hume's Defence of Causal Inference.* Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997. Pp. xii + 439. ISBN 0-8020-4158-2, cloth, $80.00.

The aim of Fred Wilson's detailed treatment of Hume's theory of causal inference is to show that although Hume posed a skeptical challenge concerning the justification of beliefs through causal inference, Hume also presents a solution to that challenge, a solution that includes a justification of causal inference. Wilson's Hume is not a skeptic, but rather a vindicator of the norms of scientific inquiry. This study is wide-ranging, both in terms of the texts Wilson interprets and the connections he draws to the views of other philosophers, both modern and contemporary.

Hume's Defence of Causal Inference is divided into three large chapters. In the first chapter, Wilson attacks interpretations of Hume that treat Hume as a Kantian about causal inference and mental activity more generally. Instead of taking the causal principle "same cause, same effect," as an *a priori* truth, on Wilson's reading, philosophical "practice and discipline" (39) can support its empirical discovery. Wilson cites Hume's rules for judging causes and effects as well as Hume's treatment of identity in support of what he calls the case for the "active mind." Wilson contrasts his view with the interpretations of Lewis White Beck and Robert Paul Wolff, whose Kantian readings of Hume Wilson couples with the claim that the mind is passive.

The second chapter bears the book's title, and contains the core interpretation. While Hume provides neither *"proof* nor *guarantee* of the principle of causation, the principle is morally certain" (192). Much of this chapter is devoted to showing how Hume's account of probable inference can be understood within the framework of Bayesian probability theory. According to Wilson, Hume's prior probabilities begin with the beliefs of the vulgar. Reflection leads to the refinement of belief, and support for a "wide network of causal processes." Philosophical reflection on the success of the network supports the principle of universal causation itself. Wilson writes, *". . . the evidence that we have from the successful discovery of laws in many areas implies on Bayesian grounds that the principle of universal causation is, as Hume and Mill claim, morally certain"* (183, italics Wilson's).

In the final chapter Wilson takes up Hume's skeptical argument concerning reason from Book I, part 4, section 1 of the *Treatise.* Having defended a non-skeptical reading of part 3 of Book I of Hume's *Treatise,* Wilson addresses the question of whether Hume's skepticism about reason in part iv is real or apparent. The chapter includes a long discussion of Hume's treatment of testimony, particularly Hume's attention to the way reflection on testimony leads to long chains of inference to historical fact. Explicating Hume's views on testimony, Wilson suggests, sheds light on the skeptical argument of "Of scepticism with regard to reason."

Although this is a work on causal inference, Wilson fans out from the central concern to a host of related issues. Among the topics that receive treatment are Hume's account of the experimental method, identity, and, as just noted, testimony. These issues are broached through consideration of both historical and contemporary sources. Wilson is as likely to discuss the views of Kuhn or Russell as he is those of Descartes or Locke.

Wilson takes great pains to employ the tools of modern logic to explicate Hume's views, with varying degrees of success. One area of concern is the symbolization of causal relations. Wilson uses the arrow of material implication and the double arrow of material equivalence to represent causal relations. For example, Wilson's gloss on

'soluble' means by definition 'if in water then dissolves'

is

'x is soluble' means 'x is in water $\rightarrow$ x dissolves.' (32)

If the arrow is the symbolization for material implication, then Wilson's formalization suffers from a number of well-known defects, the most important of which is that in material implication a conditional is true whenever the antecedent is false. So any x which is not in water is soluble.

Any hope that Wilson isn't using the arrow of material implication to represent causal relations is dashed when we see his corresponding use of the double arrow as the material biconditional a bit later, where he introduces causal hypotheses using the double arrow, with the following example of a "causal hypothesis":

$$(x)\ (G_1x \leftrightarrow D_1x),$$

where G_1x is 'x is a germ of kind 1' and D_1x is 'x is a disease of kind 1.' This expresses the material equivalence of the two predicates, not a causal relation between them. Further, if the double arrow is material equivalence, then it is equivalent to:

$$(x)\ ((G_1x \rightarrow D_1x)\ \&\ (D_1x \rightarrow G_1x)).$$

This commits us to the causal relation going both ways, clearly an undesirable result, compounding the existing problem of representing causation by the material conditional.

The central thesis of the book, however, can be summarized apart from Wilson's logical apparatus, and it is that Hume is not a skeptic, that Hume is in fact committed to the moral certainty of the principle of universal causa-

tion. Wilson is well aware that to make the non-skeptical interpretation plausible, he must deal with the circularity objection, namely that a justification of the causal principle by the success of generalizations from past regularities presupposes the causal principle. Hume himself raises this problem, so it's all the more important to see how Hume can avoid it, if he is to accept the "moral certainty" of a principle of universal causation.

Wilson defends the non-skeptical reading with both textual support and on general interpretive grounds. The textual support for the claim that Hume's positive view does not fall prey to the circularity objection is presented in chapter 2. The textual evidence Wilson provides comes from Mill's *System of Logic* and does support the claim that *Mill* tackled the circularity objection head-on. Quotations from Hume on this issue are conspicuously lacking.

The general case for Wilson's non-skeptical reading is wide-ranging. A central element in Wilson's interpretation is the thesis that the mind is active, not passive. The mind is not simply a receptacle for impressions which fade into ideas. Instead, the mind actively organizes perceptions, sometimes as it ought and sometimes in ways that call out for correction. Wilson takes Hume's treatment of general rules, the account of testimony and Hume's criticism of belief in miracles, and Hume's recovery from the implosion of the faculty of reason brought on in "Of scepticism with regard to reason" as evidence for the active mind, anti-skeptical interpretation. Here Wilson brings together an impressive range of texts and issues.

Readers may be put off by the bluntness and even unfairness of some of Wilson's attacks on other interpreters. For example, Wilson dismisses Beauchamp and Rosenberg's interpretation, complaining that Beauchamp and Rosenberg "don't show what exactly is the solution that Hume gives to Hume's problem" (5). In light of this charge, and the centrality of Beauchamp and Rosenberg's work to Wilson's own, one would expect an elaboration and defense of Wilson's charge. It's surprising, then, that Wilson cites Beauchamp and Rosenberg on only two other occasions, and there only briefly.

Wilson seems downright nasty toward Fogelin's contributions. After leveling the charge that "Fogelin takes it for granted that only the first definition gives the Humean account of cause," Wilson finds it appropriate to add: "It is of course not surprising that such commentators end up attributing to Hume a position that he does not hold; that is what happens when one ignores half of what Hume says about a subject" (12). This is both harsh and unfair. Fogelin explicitly discusses both definitions in *Hume's Skepticism*, the work to which Wilson is referring.[1]

In places Wilson seems more interested in dismissing alternative interpretations than in appreciating their details. Ducasse is cited as someone who holds the interpretation of Hume's theory of belief as requiring the observation of a constant conjunction for belief to take place. Wilson objects that on such an interpretation, Hume cannot account for beliefs from single cases.

However, Ducasse addresses Hume's treatment of causal inferences from one case, and Hume's rules for judging causes and effects.[2]

In spite of these difficulties, Wilson takes on an important issue in Hume interpretation. He discusses a wide range of sources, many from contemporary philosophy of science. This work will be of particular interest to those who are interested in the intersection of Hume's views and those of such philosophers of science as Popper and Kuhn.

NOTES

1 Robert J. Fogelin, *Hume's Skepticism in the* Treatise of Human Nature (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985). The discussion of the second definition of causation begins on 39.

2 C. J. Ducasse, *Nature, Mind, and Death* (La Salle: Open Court, 1951), 101 ff.

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