

Kant's Treatment of Causality

A. C. Ewing



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First published in 1924, this book examines one of the main philosophical debates of the period. Focusing on Kant's proof of causality, A. C. Ewing promotes its validity not only for the physical but also for the "psychological" sphere. The subject is of importance, for the problem of causality for Kant constituted the crucial test of his philosophy, the most significant of the Kantian categories. The author believes that Kant's statement of his proof, while too much bound up with other parts of his particular system of philosophy, may be restated "in a form which it can stand by itself and make a good claim for acceptance on all schools of thought".

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By
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PREFACE

WHILE the number of general commentaries on Kant is legion, I know of no English book devoted to expounding his thought on a single category abstracted from the rest. Causality, as the chief of the categories and the centre of one of the main philosophical controversies of the period, seems especially to invite the attempt. The subject is, in a sense, a very specialised one, but Kant's treatment of causality is essential to one, at any rate, of the chief sides of his thought, and appears to me to convey a very valuable message that has often been lost sight of in recent philosophy. It would surely be of great philosophical importance if a real proof of the principle of causality could be given, and, while Kant's statement of his proof is too much bound up with other parts of his particular system of philosophy to have given general satisfaction, it seems to me that it may be re-stated in a form in which it can stand by itself and make a good claim for acceptance on all schools of thought. And the close connection of "causality" with many other fundamental problems must be obvious to the reader. The intricacy, as well as the importance, of the subject is such as to make me feel very diffident in submitting my work to the ordeal of publication, but by the kind help of University, Oriel and Magdalen Colleges (Oxford), where I held an open exhibition, research scholarship and senior demyship respectively, and the Committee for Advanced Studies at Oxford, I have been encouraged, as well as enabled, to do so.

The book was accepted as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Oxford in March, 1923, and has been revised since, but without fundamental alterations. In its composition I am indebted, above all, to Prof. Kemp Smith's *Commentary on Kant*; the other writers whom I found most

useful for the purpose were Profs. Caird, Adamson, Cohen, Riehl, Vaihinger and Mr. Prichard. I am responsible for the translations from Kant given in the text, but have made free use of the translations of the three Critiques by Max Müller, Abbott and Bernard respectively, also, where possible, of the translations of various passages given by Prof. Kemp Smith and Mr. Prichard in their commentaries.

A. C. EWING.

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March, 1924.

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ABBREVIATIONS

A= Original pages in the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

B= Original pages in the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*.

H= Hartenstein's edition of Kant's works.

Berl.= Berlin edition of Kant's letters.

G= Gerhardt's edition of Leibniz's works.

KANT'S TREATMENT OF CAUSALITY

CHAPTER I

Causality in Kant's Predecessors

FOR Kant the problem of causality constituted the crucial test of his philosophy. It was Hume's attack on causality that first aroused Kant from his "dogmatic slumber"; it is in regard to the category of causality alone that the all-important argument from objectivity to necessity is worked out in detail, and, if causality is not, as Schopenhauer held, the solitary and unique form of understanding, it seems at any rate much the most important of the Kantian categories. As the clearest and most indispensable instance of a synthetic *a priori* principle causality was the obstacle before which both empiricism and rationalism had been brought to a complete standstill. The rationalist was set the very difficult task of demonstrating a principle which is indispensable for science and practical life, and cannot but be assumed to be true, and yet the opposite of which is not, at any rate *prima facie*, self-contradictory, and he was further confronted with the very awkward fact that the particular causal laws in nature which together make up one of the principal parts of human knowledge are not intelligible or demonstrable *a priori*, but can only be discovered by means of induction from particular experiences. The empiricist, on the other hand, if he wished to be consistent with his first principles, was bound to set himself the still more difficult, nay impossible, task of deriving the universal and necessary principle of causality from a mere enumeration of particulars, and so deriving it without assuming any principle of induction which could not itself be derived by induction from particulars. If Kant's philosophy fails here, it has failed in what the

author declares to be its main task, the proof of those synthetic *a priori* principles which cannot be regarded as self-evident, and yet are indispensable for natural science. In causality Kant had found a principle which could be proved neither by the empirical nor by the rationalist philosophy, but which both were bound to assume if they were to stand at all. It was Kant's claim that his philosophy alone could prove the truth of this principle, that his philosophy alone could solve the antinomies to which this principle gave rise. The main question for us to ask is simply this—does Kant succeed in proving this principle? Causality is a test-case in a larger issue. “¹Hume and Leibniz are the two protagonists that dwarf all others. They realised, as neither Malebranche, Locke, nor Berkeley, neither Reid, Lambert, Crusius, nor Mendelssohn ever did, the really crucial issues which must ultimately decide between the competing possibilities. Each maintained, in the manner prescribed by his general philosophy, one of what then appeared to be the only two possible views of the function of thought. The alternatives were these: (a) Thought is merely a practical instrument for the convenient interpretation of our human experience; it has no objective or metaphysical validity of any kind; (b) Thought legislates universally; it reveals the wider universe of the eternally possible; and prior to all experience can determine the fundamental conditions to which that experience must conform. Or to interpret this opposition in logical terms: (a) The fundamental principles of experience are synthetic judgments in which no relation is discernible between subject and predicate, and which for that reason can be justified neither *a priori* nor by experience; (b) all principles are analytic, and can therefore be justified by pure thought.

The problem of Kant's Critique, broadly stated, consists in the examination and critical estimate of these two opposed views. There is no problem, scientific, moral, or religious, which is not vitally affected by the decision which of these alternatives we are to adopt, or what reconciliation of their conflicting claims we hope to achieve, . . . Kant was a rationalist by education, temperament, and conviction. Consequently his problem was to reconcile Leibniz's view of the function of thought with Hume's proof of the synthetic character of the causal principle. He strives to determine how much of Leibniz's belief in the legislative power of pure

¹Prof. Kemp Smith, *Introduction to Commentary* XXXII, XXXIII.

reason can be retained after full justice has been done to Hume's damaging criticisms. The fundamental principles upon which all experience and all knowledge ultimately rest are *synthetic* in nature: how is it possible that they should also be *a priori*? Such is the problem that was Kant's troublous inheritance from his philosophical progenitors, Hume and Leibniz."

To show more fully what Kant's "troublous inheritance" in regard to the problem of causality was we must begin with a short survey of the views of his chief predecessors on the subject. In so doing, at the risk of seeming arbitrary, we shall practically confine ourselves to the Locke-Berkeley-Hume tradition and to the Leibnizian philosophy, which were the two main streams of influence that affected Kant's metaphysical thought.

Locke's account of causality is perhaps the least satisfactory part of his philosophy. In introducing the conception of cause he speaks as though causation were a possible object of perception like colour or shape, and so could be discovered by observation, without inference or the use of a general *a priori* principle. "In the notice that our senses take of the constant vicissitude of things we cannot but observe that several particulars, both qualities and substances, begin to exist, and that they receive this their existence from the due application and operation of some other being. From this observation we get our ideas of cause and effect."¹ Yet he insists on the mysterious and unknowable character of the causal nexus. Since we can only observe sensible "ideas" or qualities in external objects, a power can only be known as the potentiality of producing or undergoing changes in these sensible qualities, a mysterious something that can only be described in terms of its effects.² The real ground in nature of even such fundamental laws as the cohesion of matter and the communication of motion by impact is unknown to us. Hence the mathematical method must give way to empirical induction in dealing with powers, which powers in fact constitute the greater part of our idea of the physical world. For, apart from the primary qualities of extension, etc., revealed by our senses, we cannot attribute to matter any qualities save the power to produce certain sensations in our mind and certain changes in other bodies which in their turn affect our mind.

¹Essay concerning Human Understanding II., 26, 1; cf. II., 2 1, 1.

²II., 23, 23-28.

Hence the idea of spirit is no more unintelligible to us than that of matter¹; in fact, as regards causation, we acquire a better idea of active power from introspection than from the observation of physical changes, for in the latter motion is only transmitted, not generated, as by the will, and also we can acquire no idea of the second active power, thought, from our observation of matter. (The two kinds of active power are motion and thought, in the wide, Cartesian sense of the word.) Perhaps it is unfair to press too far the words of Locke quoted above, but we may point out that, if causation can as such be observed, causal powers cannot have the unknowable character ascribed to them. The view that we can observe one thing causing another and not only infer that it does so seems to involve a confusion between sequence and causation—we see B follow A, but we do not see A cause B. Causation is a relation of implication between events and not a sensible quality.

To prove the validity of the general principle that every change must have a cause Locke makes use of the argument that it is obviously impossible for nothing to produce something. "Men know by an intuitive certainty, that bare nothing can no more produce any real being than it can be equal to two right angles."² The circular character of this argument is partly concealed by confusing causal connection with connection by logical identity, to say that nothing is something involves a flagrant violation of the law of non-contradiction, to say that something occurred with nothing precedent to cause it involves no such contradiction, for it is essential to causality that cause and effect should be distinct and not capable of logical identification. The plausibility of the argument depends partly on this confusion, partly on the principle that "nothing" as such is incapable of being a cause. This principle is true enough, but cannot be applied without already assuming universal causality. For if the causal principle is denied the conclusion is not that things are caused by nothing, but that they are not caused at all. It is only because Locke assumes the universality of the causal principle that he can assume that, if an event is not caused by something, it must be caused by "nothing," yet it is just this universality that he is seeking to prove.

The problem of freedom is less closely connected with that of causation in Locke than in other writers, for he does not

¹*Essay concerning Human Understanding*, II., 23, 30–32. ²IV., 10, 3.

attempt to solve the problem by a distinction between mechanical and spiritual causation or a denial that the category of cause is adequate when applied to spiritual beings, but by a criticism of the common habit of viewing faculties like the will as independent agents, which gives rise to the meaningless question "Is the will free?," not "Is the man free?" This criticism is very effective and valuable as far as it goes, but it can hardly be said to reach the root of the problem—How far, if at all, can the category of mechanical causation be applied to psychical development?

Berkeley, while assuming without proof the general principle that every change must have a cause, denies that causal connection between physical phenomena the nature of which Locke had already asserted to be unknown. He thus makes another step forward in the direction of Hume. Berkeley's philosophy leaves in existence only spirits and their ideas; our ideas cannot have causal efficacy, because we cannot perceive any such quality in them, and by its intrinsic nature an idea in my mind cannot have any qualities beyond those I am conscious of.¹ But, since we must suppose the changes in our ideas to have some cause, and there are many cases in which we cannot suppose this cause to lie in ourselves, we are driven to postulate a spiritual being, infinitely more powerful than ourselves, namely God, to account for these changes.² Thus Berkeley makes use of his novel views of matter to arrive at a new and, to his mind, more convincing proof of God than any yet discovered.

In dealing with the "material" world he substitutes for the relation of cause and effect the relation of "sign" and "thing signified."³ Thus "the fire which I see is not the cause of the pain I suffer upon my approaching it, but the mark that forewarns me of it." We find by experience that ideas succeed each other in such a regular manner that we may frame laws of nature and use these laws for predicting future events, but this orderly succession is not dependent on any causal influence of one idea on another, but on nothing save the direct will of God. Natural science consists in the reduction of the multitudinous observed sequences to a few simple and universal laws of sequence, not explicable further except by an appeal to final causes,—in the discovery of a simple alphabet of signs from which the whole complicated natural

¹*Princ. of Human Knowledge*, 25.

²*Ib.*, 26.

³*Ib.*, 65.

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system is built up, just as a language with many thousands of words is ultimately reducible to different combinations of twenty-six letters. The main innovation lies in suggesting that the results of science express not truths about an objective physical world existing independently of being perceived, but truths about the sensations we should experience under given conditions. Even if the material world exists as a system of ideas in God's mind¹, Berkeley could not admit that this world in God's mind was either causally connected with our sensations, which are ascribed to the immediate action of the will of God without the intervention of particular "ideas" in God's mind, or an object of our perception, since it is a cardinal doctrine of his philosophy that we cannot perceive anything but ideas in our own mind. It is therefore not the world with which science deals and which surrounds us in our everyday life, but a world supposed to correspond to that world, and itself in no way connected with us.

Locke had ascribed causation to unknown "powers," Berkeley denied that such unknowable and imperceptible powers could be real qualities and reduced all so-called physical causation to necessitated, not necessitating, sequence. Since, however, there was no "activity" involved in what we regard as physical causation, he denied the title of causation to the latter altogether, satisfying himself by ascribing the necessary "activity" to God. As with substance, so with cause, Locke declared it to be unintelligible to us, Berkeley relegated it from the physical to the psychical, Hume denied altogether the possibility of justifying it, Kant justified it but on lines that involved a fundamental change both in the conception itself and in the general view of objective reality.

Hume, in carrying the principles of Locke and Berkeley to their logical conclusion, directs his main attack against causality, as being the foundation of knowledge of a physical world. He assumes as first principles that we can be immediately conscious of nothing save our own ideas, and that there is no simple idea not derived from a precedent impression of which it is an exact copy. The former was admitted by all schools, being based on the physiological account of sensation and the difficulty of explaining the subjective element in perception on any other theory; the latter was the cardinal principle of pure

¹As Berkeley suggests in the 2nd dialogue between Hylas and Philonous (*Everyman* ed., p. 248).

empiricism. Of neither principle does Hume give any proof whatever. In laying down the maxim that every simple idea must be copied from a precedent impression he first challenges his opponents to produce a simple idea that has not a corresponding impression or *vice versa*, and then asserts that, as no such idea or impression can be found, we are forced to explain the resemblance by supposing the ideas to be all derived from their corresponding impressions, since experience tells us that it is always the impression which precedes the idea. This no doubt follows if by impressions are understood sensations and emotions, but the first point, that every simple idea has a corresponding impression, is nothing but an arbitrary assumption. To assert, as Hume does, the validity of the principle on the ground of failure to produce an idea that does not conform to it, and then, later in the argument, when such an idea, namely the idea of causality, is introduced, to deny that it is a real idea, because it does not conform to the principle, is a breach of the most elementary rules of logic.

Hume's treatment of causality in his larger work resolves itself into four main parts: (1), an attempt to show that the general principle of causality is incapable of proof; (2), an attempted reduction of reasoning on particular cases of causation to mere association of ideas, due to past contiguity in experience; (3), a corresponding theory of probability; and (4), an attempt to reduce the necessary character of the causal law, as conceived by us, to a determination of the mind by custom, the feeling of which we misinterpret as representing a real necessary connection in the object itself.

Of these the first-mentioned is perhaps the most important, for it was the discovery of the synthetic character of the causal nexus that provided Kant with a starting-point for the revolutionary change he brought about in philosophy.¹ Certain knowledge, Hume says, is confined to the "agreement and disagreement of ideas," which is the same as saying that it is only found in what can be deduced from the principle of non-contradiction and immediate experience of ideas as copies of impressions. Therefore, if the general principle that every change must have a cause is to be proved, it can only be by showing that its opposite is self-contradictory. That this cannot be shown "we may satisfy ourselves by considering, that, as all distinct ideas are separable from

¹*Treatise* I., 3, 3.

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each other, and as the ideas of cause and effect are evidently distinct, it will be easy for us to conceive any object to be non-existent this moment, and existent the next, without conjoining to it the distinct idea of a cause or productive principle." There can be no self-contradiction in imagining the effect to occur without the cause since the effect certainly does not include the cause in itself or *vice versa*. That all reasoning is analytic is, of course, assumed. The arguments usually advanced to establish the proposition that every change must have a cause, on the ground that otherwise something would be caused by nothing, or by itself, or that, all the points of space and time being "equal" a cause is necessary to determine where and when anything shall begin to exist—Hume points out, all presuppose what they set out to prove, for the difficulty in each case only arises if we have already denied that anything may occur without a cause.

Hume now proceeds to the examination of reasoning about particular causes. (In the Inquiry he only discusses this question and not¹ the question of the validity of the general principle of causality.) The connection between a particular cause and effect, he maintains, can be discovered neither by rational insight nor by observation—not by rational insight because, each being a distinct idea, it involves no contradiction to suppose one existing without the other, not by observation, because powers of production are not sensible qualities. However much we talk of forces or powers of production we cannot by that means explain causality, for a "force" already presupposes a causal relation.² Nor can we argue from the fact of sequence in the past to sequence in the future because such an argument implies the principle of induction, i.e., that future events will resemble past events, and this principle can neither be proved by reason because we may without contradiction suppose a change in the order of nature, nor be shown to be probable by experience because it is itself the foundation of all probability and all arguments from experience. Now, Hume continues, there are two kinds of relation between ideas—that discovered by reason and that based on association. It has been shown that the causal relation does not belong to the former class, therefore it must belong to the latter. Now causal arguments always proceed from an impression present to the senses or memory to an

¹Except perhaps by implication.

²*Treatise* I., 3, 6.

idea which is the copy of an impression conjoined in past experience to impressions similar to the present one. It is an obvious empirical fact that ideas or impressions tend to call to mind by association both similar ideas and ideas conjoined with them in past experience. The causal relation may thus be explained by a double association of ideas—the impression calls up the idea of a similar impression in the past; this idea calls up the idea of an impression conjoined with the previous impression in experience—two stages which custom makes us resolve into one. There is still to be explained the attitude of belief which we adopt towards the idea thus called to mind, but belief does not consist in the addition of any fresh idea to those already entertained by the mind, and consequently can be nothing beyond a certain feeling with which we conceive the idea, a feeling best described as “a more vivid, lively, forcible, firm, steady conception of an object than what the imagination is ever able to attain.” This feeling is the same in character as that which accompanies a present impression, and experience shows that such an impression may communicate its vivacity to any idea which it calls to mind by the ordinary laws of association. It follows that our sentiment of belief may be explained by the theory that the idea of the cause, being called up by a present impression, has some of the vivacity belonging to the latter.

It remains to explain our consciousness of necessity in the causal connection.¹ This consciousness cannot be derived from any particular sense-impression, and similar difficulties to those already discussed arise when we try to derive it from the impression of willing. But it has the strange characteristic of resulting from a repetition of similar instances. Such a repetition cannot change the instances nor enable us to extract a new idea from them by reasoning, for no reasoning can give us an idea underived from impressions, but the consideration of it by the mind produces a new impression of reflection, or feeling of the emotional order, the feeling that upon the appearance of one of the objects the mind is *determined* by custom to consider its usual attendant, and to consider it in a stronger light upon account of its relation to the first object. This feeling is then identical with the necessity in the causal sequence, which thus, instead of being an objective connection discernible by reason,

¹*Treatise* I., 3, 14.

becomes, as far as known by us, an unavoidable but logically unjustifiable tendency of the mind to pass from one idea to another and regard the latter with a certain feeling which we call belief. Hume's theory of probability is elaborated by working out the same principle; it treats a judgment of probability as the result merely of conflicting, involuntary tendencies of the mind to fix its attention on and vividly conceive one or other of the alternatives presented.

On the representative theory of perception all arguments for an external world seemed to depend on the principle of causality, consequently Hume's criticism of the latter involved the abandonment of any hope of logically proving the former. Not only, as Berkeley had held, was the assertion of an objective physical world unjustified, but (on Hume's principles) the argument to a deity or any being external to our own mind was equally without logical justification, since any such argument was held to presuppose the principle of causality which Hume had proved to be incapable of demonstration by any known method. But it was still necessary to give some explanation of the undoubted fact that we make a distinction between the subjective and the objective, between the world of our own feelings and ideas and the world of objects. In view of the fact that Kant's vindication of causality depends largely on the argument that the distinction between the subjective and the objective already implies real causal necessity, it will be well here to quote Hume at some length in order to show what characteristics he regarded as the distinguishing mark of objective as opposed to subjective phenomena. "After a little examination we shall find that all those objects, to which we attribute a continued existence, have a peculiar *constancy*, which distinguishes them from the impressions whose existence depends upon our perception.¹ Those mountains, and houses and trees, which lie at present under my eye, have always appeared to me in the same order, and when I lose sight of them by shutting my eyes or turning my head, I soon after find them return upon me without the least alteration. My bed and table, my books and papers, present themselves in the same uniform manner, and change not upon account of any interruption in my seeing or perceiving them. This is the case with all the impressions whose objects are supposed to have external existence, and is the case with

¹*Treatise* I., 4, 2.

no other impressions, whether gentle or violent, voluntary or involuntary. This constancy, however, is not so perfect as not to admit of very considerable exceptions. Bodies often change their position and qualities, and, after a little absence or interval, may become hardly knowable. But here it is observable, that even in these changes they preserve a *coherence*, and have a regular dependence on each other, which is the foundation of a kind of reasoning from causation, and produces the opinion of their continued existence. When I return to my chamber after an hour's absence, I find not my fire in the same situation in which I left it, but then I am accustomed, in other instances, to see a like alteration produced in a like time, whether I am present or absent, near or remote. This coherence, therefore, in their changes, is one of the characteristics of external objects, as well as their constancy." Hume here unjustifiably makes use of terms involving conceptions which he had denied; thus, to be consistent, he should have spoken not of "objects" like "books and papers" presenting themselves in the same uniform manner but of "a succession of similar perceptions," not of "dependence" but of "uniform sequence." As a matter of fact in explaining our belief in an external world he takes the account in that sense. Proceeding from the above distinction between different kinds of immediate experience, he accounts for this belief by "tendencies to feign" conditions of which we have no real idea. This was indeed the only course open to him, since he was bound to deny not only that the categories of cause and substance can be shown to carry with them any objective validity, but that we have any idea of cause or substance at all, since there are no corresponding impressions. The tendencies he appealed to are two in number; first, the tendency¹ to seek uniformity in the sequence of phenomena, even beyond what is given in experience. This leads us to suppose that where one impression, which has in the past always been preceded by another, occurs without that other preceding, the latter has really occurred unperceived by us, forgetting that an impression cannot exist except as perceived. Secondly,² he alleges a tendency to confuse a sequence of closely resembling perceptions with an identical, unchanging perception. Our perceptions being obviously interrupted, this leads to a clear contradiction, which is evaded by distinguish-

¹Cf. "coherence" alone.

²Cf. "constancy" alone.

ing between *objects* which remain identical and the *perceptions* of them which do not.

It is a further corollary from Hume's principles that there can be no distinction between moral and physical necessity. Causal necessity has been analysed as involving (1) the constant conjunction of "cause" and "effect" in past experience, (2) the consequent necessary passage of the mind from one to the other, but it is obvious that both characteristics may belong to those actions which are called free. Similar events are in human life, as elsewhere, followed by similar; human nature is fundamentally the same at all times and all places; at every moment of life we act and think on the assumption that human nature is uniform and calculable; if a man leaves a purse full of gold on the pavement at Charing Cross at noon "he may as well expect that it will fly away as a feather, as that he will find it untouched an hour later." This account of necessity, of course, implies, not that each psychical event is caused mechanically by the train of preceding events, but that psychical events are shown by experience to follow on each other with a certain uniformity which is not really incompatible with a belief that *some* acts are not *wholly* determined.

Hume established two important points in metaphysics: (1) that the causal principle is synthetic in character, (2) that empiricism must lead to scepticism. Both of these were whole-heartedly adopted by Kant and formed the starting-point of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, which was primarily an attempt to find a new logical basis for those principles, which, though incapable of demonstration from the law of contradiction or induction from experience, yet were implied in all, even so-called empirical, knowledge of the objective world. Hume strongly emphasised the dependence of all scientific and empirical reasoning on the principle of causation, but he did not take the further step and discover that the principle was implied in all experience of objects in time. His philosophy must be regarded rather as a confession of the bankruptcy of empiricism than as an attempt to establish a doctrine of complete scepticism, which latter is indeed, as the philosopher himself saw, impossible to human nature. He did not deny causality, in fact he admitted that we must believe in it, what he denied was that our belief in it is capable of justification on logical grounds. Hence he was not guilty of inconsistency in attempting to explain our belief in causality by a psychological theory which in itself involves the

assumption of causality. His psychological explanation of causality is no doubt open to a good deal of criticism—it may be pointed out that it is rather unusual than usual occurrences that imprint on our minds the consciousness of necessity; that the judgment of causal connection, which must be distinguished, if only as a psychological fact, from the mere feeling of it, implies a synthesis of perceptions which is not possible for a mind that is itself nothing but a series of separate perceptions; that, as we generally only look at an object at disconnected moments and not continuously, the number of times in which we observe the effect without the cause is probably much greater than the number of times we observe both; that, although for example we generally in the morning see the objects around us lighted up before we see the sun, we do not for that reason infer that the light is the cause of the sun but *vice versa*; that the judgment of probability cannot be either a feeling or an estimate of our feelings, because we may often feel as though a future event were unlikely and remote while judging it to be likely and imminent. However, the value of Hume's metaphysical work lies much more in his criticism of earlier positions than in his psychological theory, which, as he fully realises, is a way of inquiry that could never establish the logical validity, as opposed to the historical origin, of any belief. But the breakdown of empiricism rendered it necessary to reconsider its fundamental doctrine that all ideas are the copies of detached sensations or feelings, a doctrine which ruled out from the beginning any principle like causality. Hume did not attempt to conceal, but rather to emphasise, the failure of the empirical principles on which his philosophy was based, he did not, for instance, try to reduce causality to constant sequence, but insisted that we needed something more than that for scientific reasoning. But by stating in its acutest form the fundamental difficulty connected with the principle of causality he at the same time suggested a solution.

In a sense it might actually be said that Hume's deficiency lay in not carrying his sceptical principles far enough. Had he pushed his atomistic sensationalism to its logical conclusion it would have been shown to be quite inconsistent with the very possibility of cognition, and so would have provided its own refutation; had he shown that the synthetic, indemonstrable principle of causality was implied in all our empirical knowledge and not only a foundation for all scientific argu-