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## An Evaluation Of David Hume's Theory Of Causation

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**Abstract:-** According to David Hume, there is no necessary connection between cause and effect. The idea of cause- effect relationship is based on contiguity, succession and constant conjunction. Hume holds that the idea of necessary connection is formed by the mind on the basis of laws of association, imagination, customs and belief. Hume analysis that mind cannot observe the universal, certain and necessary connection between cause and effect, and this Hume regards as the limitation of mind. In Hume's view, 'power' seems to be inherence in something spiritual or mental. Since according to Hume, there is no spiritual or material substance, so there is no 'power' to produce an effect. In Hume's view all our impression and ideas are derived from either 'sensation' or 'reflection' and the idea of the supernatural entity cannot be acquired through either 'sensation' or 'reflection', so there is no existence of any supernatural entities which may be considered as the basis for producing the effect. In Hume's view, the experience of man is not similar at different times. Hume gives the example, we are more master of our thought in the morning than in the evening and fasting than after a full meal. It is difficult to explain the reason of variations and fluctuations in our experiences. So he holds that the mind cannot explain the problems of variation of experience and it cannot be the basis of the 'power' of cause to produce an effect.

**Keywords:-** Contiguity, Succession, Constant conjunction, Repetition, Resemblance.

In order to understand Hume's view of causation properly, let us start with comparing his views with that of Aristotle, who Analysis causation in fourfold manner. Aristotle discusses four kinds of causes, namely – material cause, efficient cause, formal cause and final cause. He defines four causes in the following words: "we call a cause (1) that from which a thing comes into being, i.e. the bronze of the statue and silver of the saucer and the class which include these, (2) the form or pattern, i.e. the formula of the essence, and the classes which include this and the parts of the formula, (3) that form which the change or the freedom of change first begins, i.e. the man who has deliberated is a cause, and the father is a cause of the child and in general, the maker of a cause of things made and the change production of the changing, (4) the end, i.e. that

for the sake of which a thing is"<sup>1</sup>. Later on Aristotle reduces all four causes into two namely – potential and actual. He argues that first three namely – material, efficient and formal causes, may be identified as potential and final cause as the actual cause. While discussing cause and effect, he holds that the categories of substance, activity, quality and passivity are also involved in it.

A comparison between the views of Aristotle and Hume on causation brings out the fact that Hume repudiates the very basic assumption of Aristotle. Aristotle holds that 'substance' is the basis of all other categories and the relation between the cause and effect is certain, universal and necessary because the categories which are involved in cause and effect relation or either 'substance' or dependent on 'substance' to superior and other to be inferior because others like quality, activity and passivity may be predicated to 'substances'. David Hume rejects the basic assumption of Aristotle regarding the existence of substance; therefore he also rejects Aristotle's analysis and elaboration of causation. While rejecting Aristotle's notion of causation in four fold manner, Hume writes: "All causes are of the same kind and that in particular there is no foundation for that distinction, which we sometimes make betwixt efficient causes and causes sine qua non or betwixt efficient causes and formal and material, and exemplary and final causes"<sup>2</sup>.

Another difference between Aristotle and Hume is that while Aristotle holds that 'reason' and 'experience' both are inevitable for acquiring knowledge of relation between 'cause and effect', Hume is of the opinion that the source of knowledge of 'matters of fact' is only 'sense-experience' and 'cause-effect' relationship is the only 'sense-experience'.

David Hume gives two definitions of cause and effect relationship. First definition in his words is: "We define a cause to be an object precedent and contiguous to another, and where all objects resembling the former or placed in like relations of precedent and contiguity to those objects that resemble the latter"<sup>3</sup>. While starting the second definition of cause and effect relationship, he writes: "A causes 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, the impression of the one to form a more lively idea of the other"<sup>4</sup>.

We find that in David Hume view there is no necessary connection between cause and effect. The problem which has been put forth by Hume, is that if there is no necessary connection, what are reasons which compel people to believe in necessary connection between cause and effect. While answering this question, Hume elaborates those conditions, which he puts in the first definition of cause-effect relationship. In order to explain the idea of cause-effect relationship, he discusses three conditions namely- contiguity, succession and constant conjunction. While Arguing that 'contiguity' is essential in order to explain, why we call one object cause and another to be effect, Hume states, "I find in the first place, that whatever objects or considered a causes and effects are contiguous; and that nothing can operate in a time or place, which is

ever little removed from those of its existence. Though distant objects may sometimes seem productive of each-other, they are commonly found upon examination to be linked by a chain of causes, which are contiguous among themselves, and to the distant objects; and when in any particular instances we cannot discover this connection, we still presume it to exist. We may therefore consider the relation of contiguity as essential to that of causation”<sup>5</sup>.

David Hume’s analysis of ‘contiguity’ we find that he holds that spatial contiguity is ways not necessary for calling one event to be cause and another to be effect. This is so because in his view, there are some examples where cause and effect relation, cannot be explained through spatial contiguity. He puts forwards the examples of moral reflection which cannot be stated in terms of the right or on the left hand, and on the similar track passion, or sound circular, or sequence figure cannot be explained in this term. Temporal contiguity, according to Hume, is to say that cause exists before the effect. While describing the necessity of temporal contiguity for considering one event to be cause and another to be effect, Hume starts his discussion of succession of impression. In his view, temporal contiguity and succession of impression are related. In Hume’s view the denial of temporal contiguity is resulted in the denial of the succession of impression. He argues in the following words: “The consequence of this would be no less than the destruction of that succession of causes, which we observe in the world; and indeed, the utter annihilation of time. For if one cause were co-temporary with its effect, and this effect with its effect and so on, there would be no such thing as succession, and all objects must be co-existent”<sup>6</sup>.

According to Hume, what we call cause and effect are constantly conjoined? He explained constant conjunction in the following words, “The idea of cause and effect is derived from experience, which informs us that such particular objects in all past instances, have been constantly conjoined with other; and as an object similar to one of these is supposed to be immediately present in the impression, we thence presume on the existence of one similar impression to its usual attendant”<sup>7</sup>.

In Hume’s view all events of past which may be considered ‘cause and effect’ are constantly conjoined but there is no necessary connection between them. He completely denies the necessary causal-connection and holds that all impression which are considered cause and effect are separated. In order to deny certain, universal and necessary connection ‘cause-effect’, Hume denies the concept of ‘power’ in cause to produce an effect. In Hume’s analysis of causation, the concept of ‘power’ and its denial is very important. Through denying the concept of power in cause to produce an effect, he thinks, he denies the necessary connection between cause and effect. David Hume provides three arguments in order to deny the mind to be the source of power of cause to produce an effect.

First, Hume holds that the very circumstances, which enable cause to produce an effect, should be along with the power and one should know the relation between cause and effect. According to Hume, one neither can know mind nor the nature of ideas and the process of production of one from the other. So the power of cause to produce an effect does not belong to human mind. He describes this, as follows: “at least it must be owned, that such a power is not felt, not known, nor even conceivable by the mind, we only feel the event, namely, the existence of an idea, consequent to command of the will: but the manner in which this operation is performed, the ‘power’ by which it is produced, is entirely beyond our comprehension”<sup>8</sup>.

Hume’s second arguments for stating that why mind is not the source of the idea of ‘power’, of cause to produce an effect, is that mind has limited capacity to command over mind and body, therefore, he holds that there is no connection between them. He writes, “Our authority over our sentiments and passions is much weaker than that over ideas; and even the latter authority is circumscribed with in very narrow boundaries. Will any one present to assign the ultimate reason of these boundaries? Or show by the ‘power’ is deficient in one case, not in another”<sup>9</sup>.

Hume’s third argument is connected with the second one. In Hume’s view, the experience of man is not similar at different times. Hume gives the example, “we are more master of our thought in the morning than in the evening, fasting than after a full meal”<sup>10</sup>. According to Hume it is difficult to explain the reason of variations and fluctuations in our experiences. Since, he holds that the mind cannot explain the problem of variation of experience. So it cannot be the basis of the ‘power’ of cause to produce an effect.

According to Hume, mind cannot observe the universal, certain and necessary connection between causes and effect, and this he regards as the limitation of mind. In Hume’s view, ‘power’ seems to inhere in something spiritual or mental. Since according to Hume, there is no spiritual or material substance, so there is no ‘power’ to produce an effect. After giving Hume’s arguments for why mind cannot be the basis of the power of cause to produce an effect, let us now discuss Hume’s argument for denying the role of the supernatural ‘power’ in producing the effect.

In Hume’s view all our impression and ideas are derived from either ‘sensation’ or ‘reflection’ and the ideas of the supernatural entity cannot be acquired through either ‘sensation’ or ‘reflection’, so there is no existence of any supernatural entities which may be considered as the basis for producing the effect.

Since Hume refutes that there is any necessary casual - connection between two events which is considered to be cause and effect, therefore, here again comes a question, why does any one believe in the necessary casual connection? How does the idea of necessary causal connection arise? while answering this question, he spells out, “our ideas therefore , of necessary connection and causation arise entirely from the uniformity

observable in the operations of nature, where similar objects are constantly conjoined together and the mind is determined by customs to infer the one from the appearance of the other"<sup>11</sup>.

Hume maintains that the idea of cause and effect relationship is derived from experience. In his view, through repetition of similar events, mind is prone to believe the necessary casual connection. Hume opines that the events which are conjoined. He states, "The idea of cause and effect is derived from experience, which presents us with certain objects constantly conjoined with each other, produces such a habit of surveying them in that relation, that we cannot without a sensible violence, survey them in any other"<sup>12</sup>.

Hume asserts that through the repetition of similar events in a similar way, we develop the habit and expectation for future events, which may not occur in similar manner as in past. So, he holds that these occurrences are matter of chance and chance itself is a contradictory concept of causation in terms of necessary connections. So he holds that the habit of making transition from cause to effect is a psychological propensity of mind and it cannot provide the impression of necessary connection between cause and effect.

According to Hume, imagination which is involved with the principle which is the basis of cause-effect relationship is responsible for the idea of necessary connection between cause - effect. In Hume's view, through imagination, after repetition of various similar events connects two ideas and considers them to be cause and effect. Mind through imagination connects two ideas which are regarded as cause and effect and for this purpose it takes the help of three laws association, i.e., resemblance, contiguity and causation.

According to Hume, although objects and events, which are considered to be cause and effect are entirely disjointed, mind after observing some similar objects, develops a psychological expectation as he holds that our reasoning and the conclusions concerning the events are similar and due to the habit of customs we transfer the past to the future in all our inferences. But the fact is that the past has been entirely regular and uniform which is not true in the future and may be only assurance.

While explaining in depth how mind develop the psychological expectation to relate cause to their effect, Hume holds that it is only due to the custom and habit. In his view customs gives rise to a propensity in the mind to believe that there is necessary causal connection between cause and effect, even though he believes that there is no such connection. Due to customary transition, mind believes in the idea of necessary connection, that is to say, according to Hume, mind attempts to relate the past events with the coming events or incident and hopes that the same will occur as it happened in the past. He concludes that "this belief is the necessity of mind in such circumstances"<sup>13</sup>.

After stating Hume's conception of customs, let us analysis his concept of belief. For Hume 'belief' is nothing more than a lively idea related to or associated with a present impression. He further says, " Belief is nothing more but vivid lively, forcible, firm, steady conception of an object, than what the imagination alone is ever to attain "<sup>14</sup>.

Since in Hume's view, belief is also dependent on 'sense-experience', it cannot provide the idea of necessary causal connection. Hume holds that belief only can change our own way to perceive the impression and this is done by the help of imagination.

According to Kant, Hume is right in regarding that the knowledge of necessary causal connection is not possible through 'sense – experience' , but Hume is wrong in denying necessary connection between cause an effect. In order to show that there is necessary connection between cause an effect, Kant holds that the category of 'cause and effect' is not derived from 'sense – experience' but originates from understanding. Kant is an opinion that Hume is wrong in challenging the role of reason, because in Kant's view reason and understanding is the basis of universality, certainty and necessity of causal – relation.

According to Kant, the acceptance of Hume's analysis of causation i.e. that experience is the only source of knowledge will destruct the necessity as well as the validity of the causal laws.

Ackerman criticize Hume's view regarding 'contiguity' in his view cause an effect are connected and not contiguous. Elaborating his view he utters, "it is not required in scientific cases that cause be contiguous to one of its effects, but only that cause and effect be related by a series of objects or events such that each object or event in this series be contiguous to the object or event preceding it and following it; and such that each event or object in the series is the effect of the object or event preceding it; and the cause of the object or event following it. In this way we may speak causal chains connecting to events in the relationship of cause and effect which are not considered, themselves, contiguous"<sup>15</sup>. Here, we may note the point that Ackerman differs from Hume because of his ontological assertions. For Hume, only loose and unconnected impression, and ontological entities which are not having any necessary connection may be contiguous. But, while talking about scientific cases, he refutes contiguity to be essential element in the explanation of relation between cause and effect and he accepts the assumption of science, that, there is an objective reality along with necessary causal connection.

To outline the whole thing we have discussed till now is that according to Hume there is no necessary connection between cause and effect. The idea of cause effect relationship is based on contiguity, succession and constant conjunction. Hume holds that the idea of necessary connection is formed by the mind on the basis of laws of association, imagination, custom and belief, but none of them can provide the idea of

necessary causal connection. The above stated elements lead mind to believe in the necessary casual connection, when there is no connection as such. But, in his view, mind cannot produce the necessary connection between cause and effect.

To conclude we may state here that Hume denies all the basis of providing necessary causal connections. Through denying 'reason' as the source of knowledge and necessity of connection, he denies the categories of universals involved in cause effect relationship. Through analyzing the whole process, we find that Hume's denial of necessary causal connection are based on his ontological and epistemological position. This is so because through 'sense -experience' with Hume's limitation no one can acquire the knowledge of necessary causal connection between unconnected impressions and ideas.

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