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Hume's skeptical non-realism

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Abstract: The proponents of skeptical realism as an interpretation of Hume's causal theory suggest the philosopher held a belief in the existence of causality as an intrinsic property of the objects of knowledge and, concurrently, the impossibility to obtain such knowledge. However, there are scarce arguments in favor of the justification of that belief. In the present article, the intention is i) to briefly introduce the skeptical realist interpretation, in order to explain the relevance of the subject discussed; ii) to describe one of these arguments - presented by J. Wright; iii) based on a problem which will be pointed to it, to defend that the belief in the existence of causality as an intrinsic property of the objects of knowledge is anterior to the realm of justification of beliefs concerning concrete causal relations and independent from it. In the light of this, I conclude that Hume the philosopher cannot be considered a defender of skeptical realism.
Keywords: Hume; skeptical realism; justification of beliefs; causality; epistemology; modern philosophy.

1.Introduction[1]: contextualization

The thesis that proponents of skeptical realism - as a proposed interpretation of Hume's causal theory - share is that causality consists of something more than observable regularity, namely, that which would underlie it, or the property of objects that makes them present themselves (to observation) in a regular way. His first defense was made by J. Wright[2] (in his 1983 work *The Sceptical Realism of David Hume*, which enshrined the name of the proposal)[3]. Indeed, the commentators who have most extended themselves in defense of skeptical realism-J. Wright and G. Strawson - have endeavored to explain that Hume was not only a causal realist but also a metaphysical realist, that is, one who believed that the objects of perception exist externally and independently of the mind and have the intrinsic property of relating causally to one another (cf. WRIGHT, 1983, cp. 2; STRAWSON, 1989, cp. 13)[4].

Before the argument to be refuted (item 2) and the refutation itself (items 3 and 4) are presented, and to show the sense and coherence of the proposed interpretation of skeptical realism, three determinant aspects to understand that argument are presented, namely, the modification of the theory of ideas that they propose, their interpretation of the two definitions of causality that Hume offers, and the relationship between realism and skepticism.

One of the main theses that support the defense that Hume was advocating a realistic causal theory is that the mind does not only possess ideas that are in strict accordance with the copy principle. Therefore, to argue that Hume was a causal realist, the proponents of skeptical realism[5] argue for the attribution of a genuine thought status to the idea of an objective causality - that property of objects in themselves that makes them present themselves in a regular way - which means to open space in Hume's epistemology for the possibility of conceiving something beyond copies of impressions or a direct composition between them[6]. In this sense, commentators argue that the yielding of the

[1] I thank the referees at DoisPontos for their comments and suggestions to this article, which allowed me to clarify some considerations and deepen the counter-argument presented to Wright's proposal, especially regarding the hypothesis that the belief in the existence of objective causality is unjustified

[2] Nevertheless, H. Home (aka Lord Kames) was already showing an oddity at a tension, in Hume's epistemology, between two theses: i) the impossibility of obtaining a clear or adequate idea of causality beyond observable regularity, and ii) Hume's willingness to accept that causality can go beyond this scope (cf. HOME, 2005, pp. 188-9). Also K. Smith already suspected that Hume's main purpose in presenting his causal theory was not to establish what causality (in itself) is, but rather to establish the epistemic limits of the mind in relation to it (cf. SMITH, 1941, p. 397).

[3] The main textual evidence relied on shows that Hume seems to accept, even if implicitly, causal realism: "Indeed, I am ready to admit that there may be various qualities, both in material and immaterial objects, which we are entirely ignorant of; and whether we are to call them power or efficacy, it matters little to the world." (T 1.3.14.27); "As for the claim that the operations of nature are independent of our thinking and reasoning, I admit it. This is how I have observed that objects maintain relations of contiguity and succession among themselves; that we can observe various examples of similar objects with similar relations; and that all this is independent of the operations of the operations of the understanding and precedes them." (T 1.3.14.28); "I have already observed that there is not a single case in which the ultimate connection between objects could be discovered by our reason or by our senses, and that we are unable to penetrate so deeply into the essence and structure of bodies as to perceive the principle on which their mutual influence depends." (T 2.3.1.4)

[4] Indeed, there are some differences regarding the explanation Hume offers for the emergence of the belief in the existence of causality beyond observable regularity and in the external and independent character of the objects of perception in general (cf. T 1.4.2). There are interesting connections between these two processes that will merit attention later.

[5] Nevertheless, even B. Stroud - advocate of an essentially anti-realist interpretation - already noted that this is a meaningful idea, or that the idea of causality one has goes beyond simple observable regularity and refers to a power of the objects themselves (cf. STROUD, 1977, pp. 68-95). Moreover, even though he remains agnostic about the metaphysical status of causality in Hume's epistemology, Craig had noted that Hume's theory of ideas is not a theory about all thought. In other words, one can see from his criticism that for the commentator, Hume's theory legitimizes or makes room for ideas that are not copies of impressions, as is the case with causality (cf. CRAIG, 1987, pp. 123, 129).

[6] The textual evidence available to these interpreters concerns the possibility of conceiving ideas outside the scope of copy principle, albeit in a way that they think is confusing, which Hume himself seems to identify calls assumption (cf. CRAIG, 1987, pp.

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existence of relative ideas (outside the scope of the copy principle) explicitly applies to the idea of causality (beyond observable regularity, according to these authors)[7], from the following textual evidence:

> The idea of *power* is as relative as that of *cause*, and both contain a reference to an effect or other event that is constantly conjoined to the first. (I 7.2.29.n7)[8]

The proposal of skeptical realism also includes an epistemic interpretation of the definitions of causality that Hume offers (in his argument about the origin of the idea of causality) and the dissatisfaction he reveals with them[9]. For these commentators, this is due to the fact that the definitions do not show everything that Hume thinks that causality is - that by virtue of which the observable regularities are such as can be observed, and on which they depend. The circumstance that would allow completing the definition (which would not be "foreign" to causality itself) would be the power that objects objectively maintain among themselves[10].

125-6): "The farthest we can go in regard to the conception of external objects, when we suppose them to be specifically different from our perceptions, is to form a relative idea of them [italics ours], without claiming to understand the related objects. Generally speaking, we do not suppose them to be specifically different; we merely attribute to them different relations, connections, and durations." (T 1.2.6.9); "Let us remind that since every idea is derived from a previous perception, it is impossible that our idea of a perception can represent something specifically different from what is represented by the idea of an external object or existence. Any difference we may suppose between them is incomprehensible to us; we are obliged to conceive of an external object either as a mere relation if a correlate, or as the same thing as a perception or an impression." (T 1.4.5.19; emphasis added); "We may suppose, but never conceive of a specific difference between an object and an impression." (T 1.4.5.20; emphasis added; cf. Strawson (1989, 6.2), Craig (1987, pp. 125-6) and Costa (1989, p. 181).

[7] Commentators go further and identify supposition with relative idea. In particular, Strawson explains that to have a relative idea would be to conceive indirectly or to conceive something (which no longer constitutes a perception) as maintaining certain relations with that of which we have adequate ideas (cf. STRAWSON, 1989, p. 45, 137; WRIGHT, 2007, p. 94). This identification starts from the definition of adequate or genuine idea from the principle of copy, such that adequate ideas are formed directly from impressions by Hume (as is the case with the golden mountain; cf. T 1.2.2.8), and also relies on some instances where Hume refers to operations of the mind involving confusion, which can easily be referred to the use of ideas that are unclear (cf. T 1.1.6.1; T 1.1.7.6; T 1.2.2.8; T 1.3.1.7; T 1.3.14.6, 7, 14, 17 and 27; T 1.4.5.1; T 1.3.2.4; T 1.3.5.5;

T 1.3.6.5; T 1.3.9.10; T 1.4.5.5; I 4.18; I 7.1). In some passages, Hume also seems to identify clarity with intelligibility (cf. T 1.3.14.7; T 1.4.6.2), comprehension with the formation of a clear idea (cf. T 1.2.6.9) and supposition with the formation of the idea of something that cannot be understood (cf. T 1.4.5.19). The original version of the articles by Strawson and Wright referred to in this note dates from 2000, when the collection was first edited.

[8] This, in itself, shows that K. Winkler and J. Broakes are wrong in affirming that Hume never used the notion of 'relative idea' to address the question of causality (WINKLER, 2007, pp. 80-1; cf. BROAKES, 1993, pp. 106-7), even though it is the only instance in which it does so. The original version of Winkler's article dates back to 1991 and was reprinted in the collection The New Hume Debate, the first edition of which was in 2000 and the second in 2007. The latter is the one used in this article.

[9] "An object, followed by another, such that all objects similar to the first are followed by objects similar to the second; An object followed by another, and whose appearance always leads the thought to that other" (I 7.2.29). To see the same definitions in the Treaty, cf. T 1.3.14.35. Despite the appearance of clarity, precision, and consistency in the definitions that Hume offers, immediately afterwards, the author is displeased and considers them to be imperfect, "because they are drawn from objects foreign to the cause" (cf. T 1.3.14.31): "While both of these definitions have been drawn from circumstances extraneous to the cause, we cannot remedy this inconvenience nor obtain any more perfect definition that can point to that circumstance in the cause that provides it with a connection to its effect [emphasis added]." (I 7.2.29). Hume's same statement in the Treatise is less explicit than in the Investigation. Later in the same section, he confesses that he is unable to offer a more precise definition than these (cf. T 1.3.14.31).

[10] Wright claims that definitions are imperfect precisely because they are not a priori definitions, in which the notion of cause would be deducible from that of effect and vice versa - thus, by demonstration, which would dispense with the observation of regularities (cf. WRIGHT 2007, p. 91). Moreover, Strawson judges that the reason one must reject the thesis that Hume was not interested in determining causality beyond the possibilities of its determination by cognitive agents, or even that he did not believe in the existence of something more than observational regularity, is this dissatisfaction with his definitions of cause (cf. STRAWSON, 1989, p. 88). Strawson presents another argument, which seems convincing: if Hume held that causality is reduced to observable regularity, he would not consider that definitions have a drawback, nor that cognitive agents are ignorant in relation to causality, since his definition would leave nothing outside the scope of what constitutes causality "as it is in itself" (cf. I 7.2.29. n17; STRAWSON, 1989, p. 190; 2000, pp. 45-7).

As Craig rightly notes, objects of suppositions are not possible objects of knowledge, but they are not meaningless for this reason (which is shown by the quotes in which Hume shows the conceive-suppose binomial). In the realm of ideas with positive (adequate) content, the meaning of the idea of causality - and its term - does not go beyond the aspects to which the definitions refer (BROUGHTON, 1983, p. 235; STRAWSON, 1989, p. 155, 157, 174-5; COSTA, 1989, p. 188)[11]. Therefore, epistemic boundaries would be signaled by semantic boundaries (cf. STRAWSON, 1989, p. 126, pp. 193-4), and the two definitions of cause would only concern what one can have an adequate idea of, and their failure would consist in not giving access to causality as it is in itself (cf. STRAWSON, 1989, p. 156; COSTA, 1989, pp. 182-3)[12]. Observable regularity is thus seen as a *sign* or *effect of* objective causality (cf. BROUGHTON, 1987, p. 234; STRAWSON, 1989, p. 119)[13].

In this sense, these commentators suggest a more proper definition of causality (which has been called *objective causality*; cf. p. 3), which Hume supposedly believed in. This would be 'something in objects that underlies the regularities we observe' (cf. BROUGHTON, 1987, p. 238), ' whatever there is about objects that is that by virtue of which reality is regular as it is'(STRAWSON, 1989, p. 46), or even 'something objective about the world that explains[accounts for] the relations about regularities that we experience' (cf. COSTA, 1989, p. 181), "that which would allow an a priori inference *and* make it impossible to conceive of cause without effect, if we had access to it" (cf. KAIL, 2007b, p. 84, 92, 103).

This epistemic interpretation of the two definitions of cause that Hume offers is an essential part of the proposal of skeptical realism as an interpretation of the Hume an theory of causality, because it is a topic that, in the opinion of its proponents, shows the possibility of reconciling realism in relation to the causality to which all concrete causal reasoning refers and skepticism in relation to the possibilities of accessing it, due to the non-demonstrative nature of both the defense of the existence of objective causality and concrete causal reasoning[14].

The proponents of skeptical realism are not unaware of the need to give a normative status to the naturalness of the belief in the existence of objective causality, otherwise it will always be seen as a kind of epistemic slip or weakness in relation to the conclusions of reason. As Kail (a proponent of the skeptical realism interpretation) rightly notes, proponents of skeptical realism seem to recognize that the widespread belief in causal and metaphysical realism cannot be equated with the philosophical defense of skepticism (also causal and metaphysical) unless one satisfies the condition of offering a justification for it (cf. KAIL, 2007a, pp. 253-4). Aware of the impossibility

[11] It seems to be implicit in Craig's statement (cf. CRAIG, 1987, p. 124). This interpreter seems to further suggest that the truth value of an assumption is indeterminable: "something of a different kind from some possible perception, so that reason which operates by locating relations between ideas cannot pronounce itself in any way" (CRAIG, 1987, p. 126 (CRAIG, 1987, p. 126).

[12] This component of the interpretation accords with some passages in which Hume sets this limit to the faculties in the knowledge of causes: "In the most usual conjunctions of cause and effect, we are as ignorant of the ultimate principle which unites cause and effect as in the most unusual and extraordinary." (T 1.4.7.6); "As we are utterly ignorant of the power on which the reciprocal action of bodies depends, we are no less ignorant of that power on which the action of mind on body, or of body on mind, depends, and equally unable to indicate the ultimate principle, in either case, from our senses or our consciousness." (I 7.1.21); "We are ignorant, it is true, of the manner in which bodies operate upon each other. Its power and energy are entirely incomprehensible to us." (I 7.1.25); "If we examine the operations of bodies and the production of effects from their causes, we shall find that our faculties, all of them, can never lead us, so far as knowledge of this relation is concerned, beyond the simple observation that particular objects are constantly conjoined with each other, and that when one of these objects appears, the mind is led by a habitual transition to belief in the other. (...)We know nothing about any kind of causation beyond the simple constant conjunction of objects and the consequent inference from one to the other." (I 8.21; cf. STRAWSON, 1989, p. 193).

[13] This interpretation is associated with the belief that Hume's causal theory would have received influence from the Cartesians and Newton. For a more extensive reading on this topic, cf. WRIGHT, 1983, cp. 2; STRAWSON, 1989, cp. 11 (Hume and the Cartesians); WRIGHT, 1983, pp. 161-86; BROUGHTON, 1987, pp. 229-34; STRAWSON, 1989, pp. 186-7 (Hume and Newton)

[14] Incidentally, some proponents of this proposal strive to justify that causal realism is more compatible with skepticism about causal reasoning than anti-realism (cf. COSTA, 1989, pp. 182-3), if not the only position compatible with it (cf. STRAWSON, 1989, p. 8, 15, 95, 97, 140, 168).

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of demonstrating the existence of objective causality, Wright[15] presents an argument to try to justify this *a posteriori* belief - which is described below.

2. Wright's argument

Several proponents of skeptical realism judge that, for Hume, the belief in objective causality is natural (cf. WRIGHT, 1983, pp. 150-5; LIVINGSTON, 1984, pp. 155, 161; COSTA, 1989, pp. 181-2; BROUGHTON, 2007, p. 199)[16]. In turn, none of them claim certainty about the existence of objective causality nor of the objects of perception, even going so far as to consider that their belief is unjustified (cf. STRAWSON, 1989, p. 8, 100; COSTA, 1989, p. 174; BROUGHTON, 2007, p. 198).

However, they appeal to a justification for believing in them, detached from the deductive criterion for validating reasoning. The explanation of Wright's argument comes next.

The commentator notes that the process of searching for the origin of ideas exhibits the notion of causality, and this is visible even in the case of the idea of causality. In this investigation, the mind is treated as a natural object or object of scientific knowledge. The mind is programmed to respond in a certain way to certain stimuli, and the belief in causal relationships (as well as in objective causality) is explained by the simultaneous and cooperative functioning of several faculties. In particular, in relation to the belief in the existence of objective causality, Wright describes Hume's explanation of its generation as a way of overcoming the operative deficiencies of reason and the senses (by themselves) to generate it through imagination. Therefore, for the commentator, the explanation of the generation of the belief in objective causality from the conjugation of natural principles of the mind is integrated in the treatment of the mind from the scientific point of view that Hume envisaged for the science of man itself - from the observation of constant conjunctions (by similarity and contiguity), from which general rules about the functioning of the object in question are inferred (cf. WRIGHT, 1983, p. 151, 154). In this sense, Wright implies that the process of justifying a particular state of mind consists in describing - and generalizing - the mechanisms of the faculties that engender it.

Wright understands that there are two principles of imagination that contribute to the generation of this belief. He explains that since experience only shows constant conjunction (by similarity and contiguity in space and time), but never causality - defined as the power that one object has over the existence of another - the expectation that the future will be as the past was - from the 'propensity, produced by custom, to pass from an object to the idea of that which usually accompanies it' (cf. T 1.3.14.22) - has an entirely subjective origin. Therefore, according to Wright, Hume needs to postulate a principle beyond the principle of habit to explain the origin of belief in objective causality. This would result from the conjunction of the habit principle with another propensity:

> [A] the mind has a great propensity to spread itself over external objects, attaching to them all the internal impressions which they occasion, and which always appear at the same time as these objects manifest themselves to the senses (...) *The same propensity is the reason why we suppose that necessity and power are found in the objects* we *observe*, and not in the mind *which* observes them. (T 1.3.14.25; italics added)

As can be seen from the quote, Hume explicitly confirms that this propensity is responsible for the assumption of the existence of objective causality (cf. WRIGHT, 1983, pp. 151-2; 2000, p. 94)[17].

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[15] Strawson also presented an argument to try to justify the belief in the existence of objective causality that succinctly points to the defense that the existence of objective causality is more plausible than its non-existence, because the observation of regularities already indicts, in itself, that there is something equally regular behind it, and not mere chance (cf. STRAWSON, 1989, pp. 203-5). For comments on this argument, cf. WINKLER, 2007, p. 63 and MILLICAN, 2007, p. 217 and p. 248.

[16] K. Smith (1941, p. 397) already claimed the same, although he did not take a position on Hume's position on the metaphysical status of causality (as well as the external and independent (mind's) existence of the objects of perception).

[17] J. Broughton and D. Livingston also recognize that the belief in the existence of objective causality is due to this more general propensity of the mind (cf. LIVINGSTON, 1984, p. 153; BROUGHTON, 2007, p. 200).

For three reasons it is easy to conclude that Hume would agree with Wright's claim that the principles or propensities he enunciated are in fact responsible for the assumption of the existence of objective causality. First, there is bibliographic evidence that the section in which it explains that habit is the principle that helps the principles of association (that assemble constant experience into observable regularities) to function in causal inference (concrete, that is, relative to specific observable regularities, such as fire or the falling of an object) is the same section that affirms the precedence of the belief in the existence of objective causality over the mind's propensity to spread out in external objects. Second, it seems easy to conclude that this propensity needs the concurrence of the habit principle (which acts on the principles of association) in order for the scientist to draw a causal inference about the very phenomenon of belief in the existence of objective causality. Third, it seems to be a matter of logic that in order for the mind's propensity to spread to external objects to act, it requires an object on which to act. Since we are dealing with causal relationships, it makes sense that to explain this process, of course, the process of generating causal inference is required.

To support the thesis that this propensity produces justified beliefs, Wright draws on the distinction that Hume presents between two types of principles or propensities of the imagination:

> [D] I should make a distinction, in the imagination, between permanent, irresistible, and universal principles - such as the customary transition from causes to effects and from effects to causes - and variable, weak, and irregular principles (...). The former are the foundation of all our thoughts and actions, so that, if eliminated, human nature would immediately perish and disappear. The latter are neither inevitable to mankind, nor necessary, or even useful for the conduct of life (T 1.4.4.1)

In turn, about the irregular principles to which he refers in this quote, Hume states:

> Human nature has a remarkable inclination to attribute to external objects the same emotions it observes in itself; and to see everywhere those ideas that are most present to it. It is true that this inclination is eliminated by a small reflection, and persists only in children, poets and ancient philosophers. In children, for example, in their desire to hit the stones that hurt them; in the poets, in the ease with which they personify all things; and in the ancient philosophers, in these fictions of sympathy and antipathy. (T 1.4.3.11; cf. WRIGHT, 1983, p. 154)

Wright understands that Hume accepted that the propensity of the imagination to extend itself by external objects is part of the group of those propensities that the philosopher considers natural, that is, that define the mind as an object susceptible of being subsumed into general rules (of an empirical science). In turn, the justification criterion that Wright defends for the belief in the existence of objective causality is based on this distinction between two types of principles or propensities of the imagination, such that a belief is justified if it results from a regular and constant principle or propensity of the imagination, and unjustified if this is not the case[18].

Wright's argument seems to be immune to the objection that there is, in Hume's epistemology, no criterion linked to standards of theoretical rationality (concerning the possibilities of obtaining knowledge) for this belief (which, by the way, we see that Kail tries to get rid of by proposing that skeptical realism is a metaphysical preference, irrelevant from the epistemic, scientific and pragmatic point of view) (cf. KAIL, 2007a, pp. 261-2). Moreover, Wright seems to be right in asserting that Hume's entire investigation into the origin of the idea of causality is carried out as a scientific investigation and under the criterion of scientificity that Hume proposes for the Science of Man, namely, observational regularity. However, the oddities that are identified in the next section, from certain elements of Hume's texts, lead us to the interpretation that this belief can be explained (from a scientific point of view, by explaining the processes of the mind that lead to it), but never rationally justified.

[18] For a reading on a possible rejection of this argument, cf. WINKLER, 2007, pp. 65-6. For his part, Broughton, admitting to accept this argument of Wright's, extends or exhaustively applies Wright's argument about the existence of objective causality to the external and independent (mind) existence of the objects of perception, giving full meaning to Costa's thesis that Hume could be seen as a proponent of a causal and metaphysical realism (cf. COSTA, 1989, pp. 173-4). For a complete reading of the author's argument, cf. BROUGHTON, 2007, pp. 202-4.

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A relatively recent proposal to reject skeptical realism is that of J. Hakkarainen. However, his reading ignores Wright's argument that is commented upon here, as well as ignores the possibility that observational regularity itself serves as a possible criterion for justifying natural beliefs, perpetuating the primacy of deductive over probabilistic reason. Thus, Hakkarainen does not face the consequence of Wright's argument, namely, that the very proposal of the Science of Man may carry with it a criterion for justifying beliefs that can be justified neither by reason nor by the senses[19]. This consequence, regarding the question of the existence of objective causality, does not seem to have been faced in the commentary literature. This is what is intended to be done next.

Wright's argument is that because of their ability to produce general beliefs in all (human) cognitive agents, principles of mind that are regular, permanent, and irresistible are able to offer or produce justified beliefs, and that since the source of the belief in the existence of objective causality is one of these principles, this belief is one of them. Therefore, even if it contradicts the conclusions of the senses and reason, the belief in the existence of objective causality is justified by principles as natural as those by which those faculties operate.

In this sense, Wright subsumes the two forms of reason (deductive and empirical) into the vast array of natural faculties of the mind, asserting that they must all be considered in parallel, by virtue of the fact that they equally possess the characteristic of being natural, and that their operation generates beliefs. According to the commentator, the entire analysis of the origin of beliefs (whatever they may be) should be interpreted as an exercise of scientific investigation by Hume, and their contents, as results that belong to a certain empirical science[20]. In this way, he subsumes the whole philosophical analysis of the Scotsman in one more exercise of empirical reason, responsible for the very construction of the Science of Man, even overlapping the use of a demonstrative (deductive) rationality. The same criterion by which causal reasoning can be justified - regularity in observation - is applied to the whole mind and its faculties to justify any and all results of its operations, and is employed in a twofold manner. With this argument, Wright thinks he has gone beyond the observation that Hume believed in the existence of objective causality, having (apparently) offered a rational justification for causal realism.

However, there are, in the philosopher's epistemology, elements that invalidate Wright's claim, and thereby also the only robust argument that the proponents of skeptical realism have put forward to argue that belief in the existence of objective causality would be *rationally justified*. If one puts into practice Wright's purpose of subsuming belief in the existence of objective causality to the criterion of justification of causal reasoning (the regularity of observation), one realizes that the relation between beliefs in concrete causal relations and the faculty responsible for them is different from the relation between this same faculty and belief in the existence of objective causality. It is argued here that of this one must conclude that one cannot apply the criterion of the regularity of observation to the belief in the existence of objective causality in order to defend its justification.

In the following paragraphs, an attempt is made to show that the belief in the existence of objective causality is *beyond* the possibilities of rational justification that Hume's epistemology offers. This means that such a belief should be considered neither rationally justified nor unjustified, but rather *impassable* of rational justification. Instead, it seems to be a belief that - possibly along with the belief in the external, mind-independent existence

[19] For a detailed reading of his arguments, cf. HAKKARAINEN, 2012a and 2012b.

[20] In this case, the most general of all, namely, the Science of Man, which aims to explain the processes by which the mind functions in various domains. Each science that makes it up deals with a distinct object, but its investigation is carried out by the only method or criterion that Hume deems reliable, namely, experience or observation (T 0.7). In this sense, Wright's thesis is in line with Hume's consideration that, in a sense, not even logic escapes this empirical investigation, as a science that explains the workings of the faculty of reason (responsible for causal and demonstrative reasoning; cf. T 0.5).

of the objects of perception - gives a kind of background to other beliefs and, combined with these, forms a network or entanglement of beliefs about matters of fact. This belief must be considered *prior to* the plane on which it is possible to justify beliefs - that of rationality - and *independent of* it. The reason for this is that neither the criterion of regularity nor the demonstrative criterion seems to be able to offer a justification for the belief in the existence of objective causality, and these are the only criteria for justifying beliefs that Hume's epistemology has at its disposal.

3. Evidence to the contrary

We now proceed to the enumeration, from textual evidence, of five elements of Hume's epistemology that I believe are relevant to the conclusion of this article. First, Hume grants two senses of *reason* and *truth*:

> *Truth* and *error* consist of agreement or disagreement with either the *actual relations of ideas* or with actual *existence and facts*. Therefore, everything that is not susceptible of this agreement or disagreement cannot be *true* or *false and* can never be the object of our *reason* (T 1.3.1.1; italics ours)

Thus, there are only two ways in which something can be true and justified by reason, namely through the agreement between ideas within the two possible forms of knowledge: demonstration (of relations of ideas) and knowledge of causes (of matters of fact). Hume ends the quote by stating that this is the domain of *truth* and *rationality*.

This domain seems to be identified with the one in which philosophical relationships are established. In this sense, immediately before enumerating relations one can associate ideas with, Hume clarifies what he means by *relation*:

> The word RELATION is commonly used in two very different senses: to designate the quality by which two ideas are connected in the imagination, one of them naturally introducing the other (....); or to designate the particular circumstance in which, although the union of two ideas in fantasy is merely arbitrary, we may consider it appropriate to compare them. (T 1.1.5.1)

> [E] Hume further adds that "the relation of cause and effect is (...) the seventh species of philosophical relation, besides being also a natural relation" (T 1.1.5.9; as well as that of similarity), that is, it can be established more or less voluntarily or intentionally, or it can consist in the simple presence of two objects associated with each other (in which one is the cause of the other). Hume further considers that: although causality is a philosophical relation (...), it is only while it is a natural relation, producing a union between our ideas, that we are able to reason or make any inference from it (T 1.3.6.16)

The philosopher also clarifies what he means by *reasoning*:

> All types of reasoning consist only of a *comparison and* a discovery of the relations, constant or inconstant, between two or more objects. (T 1.3.2.2; author's italics)

Second, by explaining that in causal reasoning, the understanding - seen as the set of principles of association and habit - does not go beyond the plane of experience or observation:

> [Since nothing is ever really present to the mind except its perceptions, it is impossible not only for us to acquire a habit otherwise than by the regular succession of these perceptions, but also that any habit should never exceed this degree of regularity. Hence no degree of regularity in our perceptions can ever serve as a ground for inferring a higher degree of regularity in some objects which we do not perceive; this would suppose a contradiction, namely, an acquired habit of something which has never been present to the mind. (...) What do we suppose in this case, therefore, if not that these objects maintain an ordinary connection in spite of their apparent discontinuity, and that the irregular appearances are united by something to which we are insensitive? But since our reasonings on questions of fact arise solely from custom, and since custom can only result from repeated perceptions, the extension of custom and reasoning beyond perceptions could never be a direct and natural effect of constant repetition and connection, but must rather arise from the cooperation of some other principles. (T 1.4.2.21)[21]

[21] This is one of the textual reasons why one must conclude that reasoning has a strictly phenomenal component, in the sense that it essentially concerns the repetition of past regularities in the future. This evidence is consistent with two important moments in Hume's causal theory where he refers to more than one phenomenal instance in the discovery of causal relations, showing a certain detachment from the question of the metaphysical status of the causal relations to be discovered. The first is that in

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Third, I recall that in addition to Hume's claim that the senses never bring the mind into contact with causality beyond observable regularity (cf. T 1.3; I 4, 7), also claims that the senses do not bring it into contact with what underlies perception - the unperceived object as it is in itself:

> [The senses] are unable to give rise to the notion of the continuous existence of their objects when these no longer appear to them. This would be a contradiction in terms; it would be to suppose that the senses continue to operate even after they have ceased to operate at all. (...) Everything they transmit to us is a singular perception, and they never give us the slightest indication of anything beyond it. (T 1.4.2.3, 4)

Fourth and finally, there is the evidence that, for Hume, it is not possible to be certain about the possible similarity between perceptions and objects:

> Since we may *suppose*, but never conceive a specific difference between an object and an impression, we can never know with certainty whether the conclusions we form concerning the connection or incompatibility of impressions can be applied to objects; on the other hand, whatever conclusions we form concerning objects will certainly be applicable to impressions. The reason for this is not difficult to understand. Since an object is *supposed to* be different from an impression, we cannot be sure that the circumstance on which we base our reasoning is common to both, assuming that we form this reasoning starting from the impression. That is, it is always possible that the object is different from the impression as to that particular circumstance. (T 1.4.5.20; italics added)

Therefore, although it is a matter of fact whether objects as they are in themselves, beyond the field of perception, exist or not (cf. I 12.1.12) - from which it can be thought that causality is included in this field as a property of these objects as related to each other, since they can and indeed are believed to possess this property - there is no guarantee of a correspondence between these objects and a sensation. This is because it is an *assumption* and not a proper idea.

> The last textual evidence presented asserts the impossibility of a certainty concerning what goes beyond the field of sensible experience by the senses, the understanding, and demonstrative reason. It is well known that the thesis that that which is contrary is conceivable without contradiction and therefore possible is used by Hume to show that it is not a case of necessity in the sense logical (of relations between abstract objects, which obey the principle of contradiction). In particular, with regard to this one, it can be said that its operativity is limited to the field of Algebra and Arithmetic, in relation to questions of fact. Moreover, the operations of the latter do not allow any discovery beyond the observation that, *a priori*, anything can be the cause of anything (cf. T 1.3.6.1, 1.3.15.1, 1.4.5.30). This conclusion extends even to the existence or non-existence of external objects (cf. T 1.4.2.42). Therefore, it might be thought that with regard to the existence of objective causality, its operativity is restricted to the same kind of ascertainment, namely, of two interexcluding possibilities; after all, it offers no more reason to believe one than the other. This brings us to the question of whether, eventually, this belief could be considered *unjustified* conclusion that would be the result of demonstrative-type reasoning, much to Wright's displeasure.

However, unless one argues for the Reid-Green interpretation or that Hume would be an error theorist[22], one might think - from the suggestions of P. Stanley - that demonstrative reason proves incapable of offering means or clues towards making one belief concerning objects outside its scope more justified than another. Moreover, it is not the purpose of this article to discuss whether or not Hume was a deductivist, i.e., whether he privileged deductive validity as a criterion for justifying reasoning - which would make it legitimate to consider that, from the point of

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his explanation of the origin of the idea of causality, when explaining that causal reasoning would be empirically or deductively justified if the principle that the future will be as the past was (cf. T 1.3.6.5, 6-7, 10) Hume makes no mention of the metaphysical (external and mind-independent) status of this future and past. The second is the section in which Hume presents the general rules for judging causes and effects (cf. T 1.3.15) simply as guidelines for evaluating observable regularities, making no reference to the metaphysical status of causality.

[22] The clearest case, regarding the question of the existence of objective causality, seems to be that of Stroud (cf. 1977, pp. 52-4). This interpretation would allow the conclusion - from a demonstrative analysis of the origin of beliefs - that beliefs in objects or relations that are beyond the scope of observation by the senses would fictions, and that it is unjustified to believe in the existence of an object of a fiction. The main reason why this interpretation does not seem plausible is that sympathy for a descriptivist interpretation of the origin of beliefs seems as compatible with the textual evidence as an error theory, without prejudice to the fact that any part of the mental life of cognitive agents that goes beyond the possibilities of their experience is considered fictitious. There will be no opportunity to deal with this issue in detail in this article.

view of demonstrative reasoning, the belief in the existence of objective causality (in addition to causal reasoning itself) is *unjustified*. Instead, we presuppose here, as a possible answer to this problem, Stanley's view that the criterion of justification for each type of reasoning rests with the faculty responsible for it, even if the attempt to apply the criteria of justification and correctness (which obey the contradiction principle)23 to causal reasoning results in a skepticism (which is, in fact, a scepticism).However, the attempt to apply the criteria of justification and correctness of demonstrative reasoning (which obeys the principle of contradiction)[23] to causal reasoning results in skepticism (cf. STANLEY, 1935, pp. 427-8).

To recapitulate: with the first set of evidence, we aimed to show that in Hume's epistemology there are two types of reasoning, defined by the employment of philosophical relations, and which therefore form two distinct planes of rationality: the demonstrative and the causal or empirical. In turn, the second, third, and fourth evidences show the limits of the faculties of the senses, the understanding, and demonstrative reasoning in relation to determining what lies beyond the field of possibilities of these two types of reasoning. That is, what is beyond the field of perception: none of these faculties gives the mind an access to what underlies the phenomenal plane. Perhaps the inability of demonstrative reason to show certainty concerning the existence of this plane is slightly more obscure than that of the senses and the understanding, so we hope that the explanation we have given has clarified it.

4. An alternative interpretation

There are three factors that, signaling an inadequacy of the object in question - the existence of objective causality - to a scientific treatment of the respective belief, make Wright's interpretation that is analyzed here strange.

The first is the absence of evidence, in Hume's texts, that there is a passage between a phase in which one reasons about regularities of the past and the future (and in which one expects the repetition of that in this) to another phase, in which, beyond that, one would believe that there is something objective (which is not created by the mind, but is part of the objects themselves) by virtue of which these regularities exist or present themselves.

The second is that the gathering of this evidence justifies the conclusion that the assumption of the existence of objective causality does not seem to fit within the scope of the domains that Hume refers to in the quote I presented (T 3.1.1.1): of truth, rationality, and rational justification (in its two forms).

The third and last is that if the plane of rationality is restricted to that in which philosophical relations are employed, and if all philosophical relations are based on natural relations, i.e., that the latter are prior to the former, one may conclude that the field of natural relations provides a kind of non-rational basis for the field of rationality itself. Moreover, the mind's propensity to "spread out" over objects is not included in the principles that engender philosophical relations (reasonings). It is true that they are also not included in the principles that explain natural relations. Nevertheless, nothing in Hume's epistemology seems to constitute an impediment to interpreting it in this way.

Hume seems, especially throughout the first book of the *Treatise*, to explain the various mental processes and convictions of the mind ascertained from observation, without showing conviction that the process by which belief in or assumption of the existence of objective causality is generated is subsequent to the

[23] This criterion becomes apparent in Hume's considerations on logical possibility, namely, in the assertion that that whose opposite is conceivable without contradiction remains possible (cf. T 1.2.2.1; T 1.2.4.10; T 1.2.5.3; T 1.3.6.1; T 1.3.7.3; T 2.1.2.8; I 4.1.2), but also in defining the scope of demonstrative knowledge (of relations of ideas, the opposite of which implies contradiction for the mind, from which it follows that their relation is necessary (cf. T 1.3.1). Otherwise, K. Smith already recognized this (cf. 1905, p. 156).

process by which causal inferences are generated. It is certain that the opposite would not be possible, since the principle of habit (responsible for the expectation of the repetition of the past in the future) is the principle with which the propensity of the mind to extend itself by objects operates. However, its anteriority to this one seems to be only logical, and not temporal.

Wright's claim is consistent neither with the body of evidence that has been presented nor with one's own experience of elaborate causal reasoning as referring to a (supposed) intrinsic power of the objects of experience. By resorting to the criterion of regularity in observation (by which causal reasoning can be considered *knowledge*) to justify the belief in the existence of objective causality, the commentator treats his object (the alleged objective causality) as if the continuity of experience makes its existence more *probable*. An object of a causal reasoning is considered more probable as the cognitive agent's experience becomes more numerous and similar to successive past experiences. It can be said that the sun is more likely to rise tomorrow because of the numerous similar experiences in the past that one has, and the occurrence of the sunrise is all the more likely the more experience of it one has. But the conviction in the existence of this star and its intrinsic power over experience and over other objects (whose existence is external and independent of our mind I believe through other mechanisms[24]) does not intensify as one has more and more experiences of the sunrise. That is, we no longer believe that objective causality exists as our observational experience (the only way of knowing matters of fact) becomes more numerous, or the fact that one has more and more experiences of the sunrise does not make it more likely that this object holds, intrinsically or in itself, this power. If Wright's proposal were correct, the continuity of experience should have the ability to convince the cognitive agent that the existence of objective causality is more probable than its opposite, just as it convinces him of any other probability.

By arguing that the naturalness of the belief in the existence of causal powers intrinsic to objects makes it justified, Wright attempts to confer rational justification on a belief that has no possibility of being justified by the two criteria of rationality that Hume's philosophy provides: regularity, because the operation of the understanding does not go beyond the field of experience, and necessity present in demonstration, because demonstrative reason merely asserts that both the existence and nonexistence of something beyond the field of experience do not entail contradiction. That is, from a demonstrative point of view, there is no more evidence in favor of one than of the other hypothesis.

Returning to the example of the sunrise, with his argument, the commentator thinks the possible intrinsic power of this object and the (phenomenal) experience of its rising on the horizon as if experiencing it repeatedly makes it more likely that the sun maintains intrinsic causal relations with other objects. Therefore, when one has little experience, one should have less conviction in the existence of these intrinsic powers than when one has more experience. But there is not a moment when one *starts to* believe in the existence of objective causality. Rather, it seems to be the case that experience itself does not contribute to this conviction - as it does to convictions about the repetition of the past in the future - and that any causal reasoning is already accompanied by this conviction.

Moreover, Wright's argument to justify skeptical realism as Hume's philosophical proposal is considered to result from an inappropriate application of the criterion of justification of causal reasoning to a domain that is not susceptible to justification, or for which any attempt at justification fails. Rather than being used as an element in favor of the rationally *justified* or *unjustified* character of the belief in the existence of objective causality, its *natural , permanent, and irresistible* character should rather favor the interpretation that it can only be ascertained, but is not justifiable. Rather, this assumption is *prior to* and *independent of* the plan of rational justification.

[24] Which, as said, are not the main focus of this article. However, there remains a strong conviction that they are as closely linked to those who explain the belief in the existence of objective causality as they are to the formation of causal reasoning.

The reason for this is that given the two senses of reason cited and the corresponding possible senses of rational justification (under the criteria of observable regularity and noncontradiction), the assumption of the existence of objective causality seems neither rational nor irrational. It does not seem to be rationally evaluable, because it is not part of the plane of rationality, so it is not amenable to rational justification. That is why that belief seems to be part of the set of beliefs that are neither more nor less rational than their opposites - which in this case would be causal regularism (a proposition opposed by skeptical realism).

Thus, we conclude that skeptical realism remains devoid of arguments in favor of the thesis that Hume philosophically defended a simultaneously realistic and skeptical position in relation to causality, since the assumption of the existence of objective causality (which, admittedly, Hume took for granted) is unjustifiable, that is, its status in Hume's epistemology seems to be apart or beyond the possibilities of justification of beliefs, being neither justified nor justified in any way. Perhaps it is closer to an assumption or supposition ancillary to concrete causal reasoning.

The purpose of this paper was to show why the only argument used by the proponents of skeptical realism (Wright) to turn their interpretation into a real philosophical proposal does not work, keeping the interpretative proposal of skeptical realism without elements that allow going beyond the observation that Hume did believe in the existence of an objective causality. Wright's argument fails because the criterion of justification for the belief in the existence of objective causality only serves, legitimately in Hume's epistemology, to justify the belief in the existence of an objective causality. This is not the case for the existence or non-existence of properties by virtue of which objects intrinsically have causal relations with each other. What we are left with is then, an impossibility of offering a rational-type justification for belief in the existence of such properties, since Hume's epistemology seems to have room for only two types of epistemic justification –demonstrative and causal – each of these fields being restricted to the objects about which the respective faculties produce reasoning, that is, abstract relations and perception.

In this sense, according to the gathering textual evidence and the arguments presented, the alternative interpretation that, for the moment, seems most plausible for the place of the belief in the existence of objective causality in Hume's epistemic framework is that it must be considered logically prior and temporally contiguous to the natural relation of resemblance, that is, that all reasonings of causality presuppose not only the natural relation of resemblance, but the natural belief in the existence of objective causality (cf. T 1.3.14.25). It seems to be beyond the realm of rationality and rational-type justification. Thus, we have seen that it seems plausible to think that, in a temporal sense, it is concomitant with the causal beliefs generated by the understanding - for there does not seem to be a moment when one moves from beliefs in pure concatenations of phenomena to beliefs in causal relations external to and independent of the mind. In turn, in a sense that has been called logical, this belief seems to predate those, for Hume's consideration that the belief in the existence of objective causality is due to the mind's propensity to "scatter" on objects (T 1.3.14.25) does not indicate that there are any exceptions to the operation of this propensity: it seems to shape the way any object is experienced. Therefore, it is not plausible to think that the understanding can forge causal beliefs independently of the functioning of that propensity, but rather that they function concomitantly from the very beginning of the cognitive agent's mental life.

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