One old view is that Hume endorsed a reductive analysis of causation: all causation can be reduced to the regular succession of events, and there are no irreducible causal relations, connecting causes to their effects. Recently, however, this old interpretation has been challenged, and a new understanding of Hume’s view on causation has been proposed. According to this new interpretation, Hume never intends to give a reductive analysis of causation; he never believes that causation is nothing more than regular succession.

The defenders of the new Hume draw attention to the language used in the pages of the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry* where the notion of an irreducible causal relation is discussed; in these pages, they maintain, Hume asserts merely that one can never conceive of “necessary connections” or “causal powers”; all of Hume’s talk of inconceivability about irreducible causal relations, they argue, is used in making an epistemological point about our knowledge of causal relation and the ways in which we arrive at causal truths. Their view is that it is a distortion of Hume to see him as making a metaphysical point about the nature of reality.

The new Hume clearly holds that there is a discrepancy between what we know of causation and what causation in itself is; causal relations in so far as we know them can be analyzed in terms of regular successions of causes and effects; but evidently, he thinks, causation is more than that; there are “necessary connections” that must be taken into consideration.

Unfortunately, the issue is obscured by a lack of clarity on the part of Hume and his recent commentators. In both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*, Hume never addresses the question of whether there are irreducible causal relations head on; he never asserts unambiguously or argues clearly that there can be no “necessary connections” or “causal powers”. What he asserts (instead) is that we can never observe such causal relations and that our causal inferences are never based on the supposition that there are such items in nature. Hume’s text, therefore, seems to suggest that the metaphysical issue about the existence of causal relations is never uppermost in his thinking. That leaves two very interesting questions open: (i) Is there a case to be made for the claim that Hume accepts the existence of such relation that we can never know? And if not, then (ii) does he have anything against the existence of “necessary connections” and “causal powers”.

In this paper, a return to the old Hume will be proposed. In defending this position, we will tackle these two questions. In connection with the question (i), I will try to show that Hume’s text doesn’t support the new Hume: there is no evidence that Hume presupposes the existence of irreducible causal connections. The discussion of the question (ii) will be more thorough. I will show that Hume has a case to be made against the existence of such causal connections; and this case will be formulated on behalf of Hume.

1. CAUSAL RELATIONS

Whether one considers the Treatise or the Enquiry, we can see Hume employing a number of referring expressions such as “necessary connexion”, “causal power”, “real power”, “ultimate cause”, “agency”, “force”, “efficacy”, “energy”, etc.; according to the defenders of the new Hume, these expressions are different characterizations of one and the same item which is supposed to connect causes with their effects. Leaving aside (for a moment) the question of whether those commentators are right, one needs to consider the question of how we must understand the notion of an irreducible causal relation; what kind of item can provide a tie between cause and effect.

The defenders of the new Hume do not give an ontology for causal relations and say precious little about them. Among those authors, Craig specifies them in an intuitive way. He says: when we observe a causal interaction, we believe that along with the two events which are said to be related as cause and effect, there is a third item that we try to capture with the phrases “causing”, “producing”, “bringing about” and so on; according to Craig, necessary connections or causal powers are nothing other than this additional third item which is thought to be involved in causal interactions.1

Craig’s characterization reflects what we intuitively think about causal relations. Take a causal interaction between the blow of a hammer and the shattering of a coffee cup. We describe such an interaction by saying “the blow of the hammer causes or produces or brings about the shattering of the glass”. No matter how we formulate the case, we express it by a sentence of the form “c causes e”.

Now any causal statement of the form “c causes e” contains three syntactic components: two subject terms and one two-place predicate. But does this show that along with cause and effect there is a third item which corresponds to the relational predicate? But surely, though, if we follow Craig and read off our ontology from the structure of a sentence of that sort, we must acknowledge that along with the two items which are related as cause and effect, there is a two-place entity, tying these two items together. Now this two-place entity answers to the two-place predicate “… causes …” in the same way as some items in the world answer to the subject expressions “the blow of the hammer” and “the shattering in the glass”.

There is something annoying, however, in using a syntactical criterion for determining whether there are relational facts. Take the sentence “Sam is wise”. There is nothing relational about the predicate “… is wise …”. And it seems to correspond to a completely intrinsic characteristic of the individual, Sam. Nonetheless, one can