

# ***Kant on Categories Compared with Mulla Sadra on Secondary Intelligibles in Example of Causality***

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**Abstract:** *One of the most important philosophical questions raised by Hume was the meaning, truth and justification of some philosophical issues like causality, existence, substance, necessity, etc. Kant tried to put all his epistemology in an overall framework that these issues earn their suitable place in a philosophical study. His treatment of those issues as a priori concepts which shape all of our concepts is the most important improvement in the philosophy. He argued that we can understand phenomena by these categories of concepts and emphasized on the importance of these categories for every kind of epistemology that origin from experience.*

*Just this philosophical problem was seriously analyzed by Mulla Sadra in another part of the world in Iran two centuries before Kant. But his treatment was different from Kant. He distinguished between primary and secondary the intelligibles in philosophy and logic. Then he accounted the meanings like causality, existence, necessity and so on as “secondarily philosophical the intelligibles”. While Kant tried to reach categories of concepts through beginning from experience, Mulla Sadra attempted to find secondarily philosophical the intelligibles through intellectual origination.*

*In this paper, I am going to compare these two ideas in the example of causality with each other and explain the advantages and disadvantages of every one.*

When Hume tried to evaluate the meaning of causality, he found that the meaning of causality has no referent in reality. We saw the fire and the burning

and we have some impressions of both, but we can not find any referent in external world for causality and necessary relation between cause and caused. He had no choice to attribute causality other than mental situation of concepts. He argued that the meaning causality can not be other than mental concept that is ascribed by

### ***The Analysis of Causality in View of Modern Western Philosophers***

#### ***3. Hume***

In Hume's point of view, perceptions are of two categories: impressions and conceptions. The impression of data without the mediation of senses and conceptions is indeed the annihilation of impression. Their difference is in the degree of their influence.

Hume believes that true conception is one which is eventually based on an impression. A conception that is not converted into an impression has no experiential origin and is the result of relations that mind establishes among conceptions.

Hume separates analytical and composed propositions. In propositions about real affairs (composed), drawing a distinction between two objects, or refuting one while substantiating the other, does not involve contradiction. Causal deductions fall into the category of composed propositions. Then, we can imagine a being coming into existence without having any cause; thereby, Hume negates the causal necessity (ibid, p. 294).

At the end, Hume explains causality with the following characteristics:

1. Following John Locke, Hume divides conceptions into simple and composed and regards causality as a philosophical relation under the category of composed conceptions.
2. Hume describes causality as a natural and a philosophical relation. Natural causality refers to the causal relation between two objects in such a way that they have a similar relation with each other. If an inseparable relation is established between the conceptions we have about two objects, then natural relation has materialized. This relation is such that the conception of one object shapes the mind to attain a conception of the other and the impression of one shapes the mind to have a clearer conception of the other. The origin of this relation is the association of ideas.
3. Philosophical causality is divided into components like spatial proximity, temporal succession and regular continuation (repetition):

In philosophical causality, the relation among conceptions is not inseparable. That is, we can conceptualize one without the other and face no contradiction; because, as was said before, causal deductions fit into the category of composed propositions.

4. Hume gives a psychological explanation of causality. He is in the belief that the repetition of proximity or the succession of two events results in the establishment of causal relations (Hume, 1975, p. 11). Based on the law of association, memory provides one conception after the other and by repeating this, makes us habituated to issuing causal laws:
5. Causal inference is neither the result of intuitive perception of quiddities nor capable of substantiation. Hume contends that in causal inference, we go beyond the immediate verification by senses and therefore in empiricism, it is not possible to prove causality:

It is clear that to extract causality from experience, we can find no better way than the one Hume has suggested.

### ***Critique of Hume's Reasoning***

In explaining conceptions, Hume claims that we do not have any conception which is not taken from an impression; to substantiate his claim, he asks 'can you show a conception not taken from a corresponding impression?' However, when several pages later he encounters the concept of causality, he contends that as causality is not taken from any impression, it cannot have any objective basis; he does not consider the conception of causality real then, because without the mediation of senses there is no evidence for that. In this reasoning of Hume, there exists for sure a latent *petitio principii* (reasoning in a circle), because the objectivity of causality is denied for that same reason which substantiates the objective basis of conceptions. It is clear that in response to his first question that 'can you show a conception not taken from an impression?' we can argue that conceptions like causality (or the essence or the unity of existence or ...) are some examples. We should take into account that conception is wider than mental image and mental image is in fact included in conception. Hume's empiricist presupposition has prevented him from taking note of this issue. Hume presupposes that there is no external causality and puts all blame on the impression that has not occurred. He bases real conceptions on sensual impressions, while this correlation is not accepted in Islamic philosophy, because secondary philosophical intelligibles, though not taken from an impression, are real. Therefore, the conception of causality does not originate from any sensual impression, but its attribution is due to the external world. Russell and Whitehead too have not denied Hume their criticisms. In Russell's view, Hume criticizes the principle of causality based on

his presupposition about causality, and according to Whitehead, though Hume has casted grave doubts on causality, we cannot ignore his introspection and the part it played in the development of our conception of causal relations (John Wall, 1370, pp. 324-5).

### ***Kant's Explanation of Causality***

Kant follows the logical conditions of acquiring knowledge. He classifies all propositions issued based on Aristotelian logic and in correspondence to each of them, proposes a general meaning:

“If we decompose all composed propositions with respect to whether they have objective reality or not, we come to the conclusion that they are not made up of pure percepts; in fact, if one of the pure mental concepts were not attached to the concepts abstracted from perception, then, such propositions would be totally impossible.” (Kourner, 1367, p. 177)

These concepts are *a priori* and are not abstracted from observable data. Among these concepts known as pure mental categories is the principle of causality. The concept of “necessity” falls into this same category. However, this *a priori* principle informs us solely of the relations among objects and merely indicates that each given caused should have a causative cause. Within the existence of the caused and by relying on this principle, we cannot determine the cause, for Kant believes that concept without experience is void and does not yield knowledge.

Kant's definition of experience is different from that of the empiricists and rationalists. Experience, for Kant, forms in the interaction between mind and matter. Objectivity of experience lies in the application of pure mental categories to the plurality of pure perception. (Kant, 1950, p. 48)

Therefore, Kant's philosophy forms in contrast to Hume's conception of causality; because, Kant is extremely influenced by Newton's physics, and to confirm it, he requires the general authority of the law of causality. Hume justified causality using his empirical doctrine. He explained causal necessity with the law of association which is one of the psychological principles of human mind. In fact, the concept of necessity was an entanglement in Hume's metaphysics, for he did not know where to place it in his philosophy. Hume deemed causal propositions composed and related to reality and he thought that since necessity can merely be sought in analytical propositions – for predicate is implied in the subject – we cannot talk about causal necessity. Kant, on the other hand, was in the belief that necessity has a more extended meaning. The necessity of a proposition does not depend on the implicit inclusion of predicate in the subject; rather, it refers to the *a priori* nature of concepts employed in it. Kant does not justify necessity by psychological

inclinations or induction; he rather holds that experience does not make for necessity and the generality of propositions and merely indicates the proximity or the succession of phenomena.

Thus, the generality and the necessity of a proposition depend on the *a priori* images of mind; images which are predicated upon sensual representations and give them objectivity. Kant takes issue with those who see the principle of causality as the abstraction of mind and rely on the frequent occurrence of phenomena:

We should take into account that Hume looks for the source of causal inference, while Kant deals with causal knowledge. One who seeks the source of acquiring knowledge will finally turn to psychological explanations. But Kant thinks about the logical conditions of acquiring knowledge, though we cannot claim that he managed to leave subjectivism behind.

### ***General Features of Causality in Islamic Philosophy***

If we now draw a comparison between the analysis of causality in Islamic philosophy and in Western philosophy, we observe that in Islamic philosophy, unlike Western philosophy, causality is not taken from experience, but it is something arrived at with rational analysis, and it is one of the philosophical secondary intelligibles that cannot be perceived through experiential analysis which is in fact the approach of modern Western philosophy to the analysis of causation.

Below, see the summary of the attitude of the Transcendent Philosophy towards causality in comparison with other thoughts, based on Motahari's expositions:

1. The law of causality and all laws derived from that are self-evident laws, independent from our mind and perceptions.
2. Our perceptual conception of causality and causedness does not originate from an external sense, but from an internal examination, the essence of self and sensual states ...
3. Our confirmative conception of the law of causality and causedness (based on the need to have a cause) and its derivatives originate from mental reasoning and are independent from experience.
4. The law of causality is an aspect of absolute reality and is not specific to matter and material relations.
5. The law of causality and its derivatives are philosophical laws and their investigation is beyond the scope of particular and individual sciences.

6. The law of causality and its derivatives should inevitably be employed as the principal subject in particular individual sciences and these sciences cannot claim that they do not need this law at all.
7. Knowing the perfect cause results in knowing the effect, and therefore, the existence of cause can lead us to the existence of effect.
8. The events of this world have ‘temporal necessity’; that is, an event can take place merely in a determined instant, not sooner or later.
9. Temporal conditions are not the perfect cause of later conditions; rather, they prepare the grounds for later conditions and yet, complete knowledge about these grounds gives rise to conclusive prediction.
10. Metaphysical destiny and will are not meaningful in parallel with natural causes (but in hierarchical relation with them).

(Motahari, pp. 232, 233).

In Islamic philosophy the origin of the conception of causality is introspection, i.e., with conscious knowledge about oneself and one’s states, the meaning and the referent of causality is perceived existentially and is then transferred to the external world. “When we observe this relation (i.e., human actions arising from inner self), we also observe the existential needs and their taking refuge in the soul and the existential independence of soul ... The turn to the general law of causality and causedness starts right here.” (Tabataba’i, n.d., p. 291)

### ***The Comparison of Causality in Modern Western Philosophy and Islamic Philosophy***

Based on what we observed in the historical attitudes of modern Western philosophers, we can now briefly discuss the evolution of causality in Western philosophy. In this philosophical attitude, causality is reduced from an external existential analysis to a mental subjective analysis brought along with Western subjectivism. Berkeley changed it into “reason” which is a subjective relation; Locke put forth the relation among conceptions; Malebranche negated all causalities beyond divine act; Leibniz transformed the principle of causality to the principle of sufficient reason which is a kind of mental expectation; and Kant obtained causality from mental categories. After that, in modern science, the only thing that remained from causality was its interpretation as a scientific law, in such a way that even in the twentieth century, in confrontation with some physical phenomena, its validity was questioned. The challenges modern Western philosophy faced in discussing causality originated from the fact that for the analysis of causality, these philosophers made experience their point of departure. And experience would neither require a necessity nor become meaningful without interaction with senses.

In general, in comparison between causality in modern Western philosophy and Islamic philosophy, we can enumerate the following differences:

1. In the discussion of causality in modern Western philosophy, experience was the point of departure, in such a way that even rationalist philosophers like Leibniz based their analysis of causality on experiential observations. In this regard, Hume, rightly illustrated the requirements of this kind of attitude towards causality which finally results in the association of ideas. It is true that Hume looked at causality from the perspective of empiricism, but he is yet a philosopher. He could not evade the subjective aspect of causality and he finally filled this gap with psychological rules. Materialists, in contrast, held themselves aloof from anything that had a trace of intellect and followed causality in material evidence; for instance, they deemed heat the cause of boiling of water and gravity the cause of movement of earth (Bochenski, 1383, pp. 1-4). In Islamic philosophy, however, causality is a rational discussion known to us through intellectual perception and is considered one of the philosophical secondary intelligibles; experience is also examined with this intellectual basis, but in Western philosophy mental analyses are performed via empirical observations.

2. Since the basis of the analysis of causality in the West was experience and experience could not offer any necessity, explanation of causal necessity faced many challenges. When Newtonian physics was at its zenith, this necessity changed into the conclusiveness of laws of physics which were formulated on the basis of accurate mathematical relations. Therefore, the meaning of necessity changed into determinism and in the twentieth century, the determinacy of Newtonian laws were questioned with issues like Heisenberg uncertainty principle, and in the eye of some Western physicists and philosophers, it is interpreted as the negation of causal necessity. However, in Islamic philosophy, because causal necessity is something rational and self-evident, no physical phenomena can question it. Therefore, in such cases, the uncertainty originates from epistemological restrictions or the mutual influence and effect between the experimenter and the experiment.

3. In modern Western philosophy, causality would be inferred from the relations observed in the external world, and it is clear that it would be explained by the interaction of these data and our epistemological system, and therefore, the basis of this principle was empirical findings. In Islamic philosophy, however, causality is inferred from the relationship between self and will which man existentially perceives, and it is then employed in epistemology.

4. Another distinction between the ideas of Western philosophers and Islamic sages is the priority they have placed on their epistemological or ontological discussions. Of course, there is no doubt that in many cases ontology and epistemology have proceeded in parallel with each other. "There has always been some sort of harmony between ontology and epistemology, i.e., the

explanation each individual gives about knowledge is logically related with his attitude towards existence and existential issues” (Javadi Amoli, 1384, p. 63). However, it seems that for Western philosophers, especially those after Descartes – which created a radical change in philosophical subjects, and shifted their attention from metaphysical and ontological concerns to epistemological ones – epistemology had priority, whereas to Muslim sages ontology has always had precedence over epistemological issues and “the discussion of knowledge”, in their view, “has always begun with ontological propositions.” (ibid)

Thus, for the investigation of causality, the starting point and the reliance of Western philosophers had been an epistemological point, while for Muslim philosophers, the examination of causality had an ontological point of departure; this created divergence among them as to how to make the principle of causality their base and foundation. For the Western thinker who sees epistemology as successful and superior, the source of knowledge and the principle of causality have their roots in sense and experience, while to the Islamic thinker who gives priority to ontology, the principle of causality is seen not only as the basis and foundation of man’s knowledge, but rather as an existential issue which should not only justify and explain human deeds, but also describe divine acts (Netton, 1998).

5. In modern Western philosophy, with its epistemological approach to philosophy, causality changed from an objective issue to a subjective one and therefore the reliance of causality on external phenomena, with regard to the dualistic problems of subject-object, brought about many challenges. As we witnessed, the principle of causality in modern Western philosophy is analyzed subjectively, while in Islamic philosophy this principle flows throughout the universe, from mind to matter. In modern Western philosophy, this has created problem: generalizing the principle of causality to the whole world, especially the world of matters (objective world) encounters the problem of the relation between subject-object, whereas in Islamic philosophy, the principle of causality is known as a self-evident issue, which embraces the whole universe including mind and matter. Not only we perceive the principle of causality existentially, but we also perceive its self-evidence quality existentially, and as a result, that also embraces the whole external world and will have the causal necessity in the external world.

6. Since in Western philosophy the basis of the perception of causality is experience and it is tried to reach the principle of causality through experience, in the analysis of causal necessity, certain problems may arise, and this will cast doubt on this necessity which is not observed in most of the relations between external cause and effect. However, since in Islamic philosophy causality is seen as a self-evident and philosophical secondary intelligible, there is no doubt as to



its necessity in the external world. Consequently, when between two phenomena which appear to be cause and effect, such a necessity is not observed, this is related to the deficiency of our knowledge about cause and effect; that is to say, we have not been able to perceive the perfect cause, and what is here called cause is in fact an imperfect cause. It is clear that knowing perfect cause in the material world and in the relations among objects is not possible, but its necessity is accepted. Different kinds of causes that Aristotle proposes are developed in the context of his attention to experience. In effect, material, formal, final, and agentive causes are the external evidence of causality and are classified inductively and based on empirical evidence. The Muslim philosopher does not consider the principle of causality responsible for finding cause and effect in the context of reality; that is why if he does not find the cause and effect, he does not struggle to negate a rational principle.

In modern physics where causality reduced to determinism, facts like Heisenberg uncertainty principle were interpreted as the negation of the law of causality, whereas in Islamic philosophy no inconclusiveness can refute the law of causality and inconclusiveness is related to the weakness of epistemology or to other things.

7. Analysis of causality in modern Western philosophy was based on the obligation of spatial succession and contiguity of cause and effect, because Western philosophers found this analysis upon empirical observations. In Islamic philosophy, however, cause and effect are temporally simultaneous and their anteriority and posteriority are a matter of causal priority. In this regard, Western attitude and the attitude of Muslim theologians were along the same lines. Therefore, we see that in his arguments to substantiate the existence of God, Leibniz uses the sufficient reason and the impossibility of the infinite regression of sufficient reasons, which is somehow the priority of occasional cause over effect, which is a temporal priority. Thus, in the West, any discussion about causality leads to occasional cause, while in Islamic philosophy doubts about infinite regression can be removed rationally, and even in the Transcendent Philosophy where the caused is an attribute of the cause, the explanation of the cause of all causes and the negation of the infinite regression are not a problem at all; rather, the attitude of the principality of existence to causality, at the very beginning, points to the all-sufficient existence of God and then to other existents which have an innate existential dependence.

8. Islamic philosophy too, in spite of acknowledging causal necessity, shares with modern Western philosophy the fact that in composed propositions, we cannot arrive at a necessary relation in the world. But, that we cannot arrive at necessity is not because necessity does not exist in the external world; rather, we are unable to perceive the perfect evidence of cause and effect via our faculties of perception like our senses. Hence, the problem of most Western

philosophers in negating external causality – i.e., using the law of causality itself and carelessly presupposing it (refer to Russell’s critique of Hume) to negate causality – is no problem for Islamic philosophy at all.

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