



Cause and Effect in Catharine Beecher (1800-1878)

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In Chapter XII *Association* of Catharine Beecher's *Common Sense*, effect is defined as "some change of state or mode of existence in matter or mind"; cause is defined as "that without which no change would take place in matter or mind, and with which it will take place." Cause and effect are "conjoined in all our acts of perception" and as "objects of conception." Because our minds are so formed that they hold certain intuitive truths, Beecher reasoned in Chapter II *Principles of Reason, or Intuitive Truths*, that "the first principle of reason, or intuitive truth" is that every change has a cause. Evidence proves that all causes tend to produce correct ideas of the reality of things. Not to accept this in the "practical affairs of life" is to demonstrate loss of reason. From this "first principle" Beecher deduced that a "great First Cause" that has no beginning must exist. The "second intuitive truth" is that two classes of causes exist, material things which act on the mind, and immaterial or spiritual things, which act on matter. The third truth: cause differentiates mind from matter in that, unlike matter, "mind is an independent cause of its own volitions." A fourth truth: intelligent cause and intention of the author is evident in the nature of design. Beecher repeated Bishop Butler's argument on the immortality of the soul, that until "there is evidence of change or of a cause for a change [...] things will continue as they are." In deciding the *direction* of the will, Beecher classified three causes: producing (decided by nature), occasional (decided by circumstance), and deciding, when the mind causes by choosing. Change occurs in matter by *ab extra* cause. Mind is cause of its own actions, its free agency the cause that regulates the power of the will.

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