

Oxford Lectures on David Hume, 2021-22

David Hume, 1711-1776



1. *Major Themes and Puzzles in Hume, Historical Context, and His “Chief Argument”*

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Hume’s Most Relevant Works

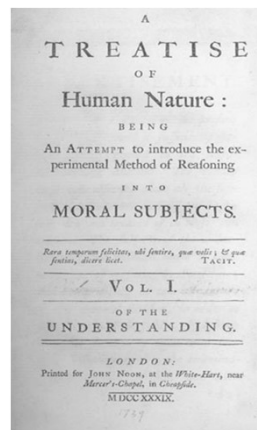
- *T: A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40)
 - Book 1 is on epistemology and metaphysics; Book 2 on the passions (1739); Book 3 on morals (1740) was published with a famous Appendix.
- *A: Abstract of the Treatise* (1740)
 - Summarises the *Treatise*’s “Chief Argument”.
- *E: Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*
 - Many editions from 1748 to 1777. More polished than the *Treatise*, but less comprehensive.

Find all Hume’s texts at www.davidhume.org.

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(a) Major Themes in the *Treatise*, and Some Puzzles



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The Three “British Empiricists”

- Hume is commonly thought of as one of the three great “British empiricists”, along with:
 - John Locke
Essay concerning Human Understanding, 1690
 - George Berkeley
A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge, 1710; *Three Dialogues between Hylas and Philonous*, 1713
- Hume is also commonly thought of as the greatest modern sceptic. But this seems in significant tension with empiricism.

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Two Kinds of Empiricism

- Distinguish *concept-empiricism*:
 - All our ideas derive from experience (i.e. *contra* Descartes, there are no innate ideas)
- from *knowledge-empiricism*:
 - All knowledge of the world derives from experience (i.e. no “synthetic a priori knowledge”, *contra* Kant)
- Locke is noted for his concept-empiricism, but he is *not* a pure knowledge-empiricist. Hume is strongly empiricist in *both* senses.

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Hume’s Copy Principle

- Hume’s *concept-empiricism* is expressed in his “first principle” (*T* 1.1.1.12) which is now commonly known as his *Copy Principle*:
 - “that all our simple ideas [i.e. thoughts] in their first appearance are deriv’d from simple impressions [i.e. sensations or feelings], which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent.” (*T* 1.1.1.7)
- Hume sees this as a more precise formulation of Locke’s denial of innate ideas (as made explicit at *Abstract* 6 and *E* 2.9 n. 1).

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Humean “Atomism”

- Hume is *atomistic* about mental contents, seeing complex ideas as built up from simple ideas (and hence mentally divisible into them):
 - T 1.1.3.4, 1.1.7.3: the *Separability Principle*;
 - T 1.2.2: Atomism about space and time;
 - T 1.3.12.24: Atomism about passions (desires);
 - T 1.4.2.3-13: *The senses* cannot give rise to the idea of external bodies;
 - T 1.4.4.8: Idea of extension consists of simple parts, either coloured or solid;
 - T 1.4.5.5: Perceptions could exist independently;
 - T 1.4.6.4-6: No coherent idea of personal identity.

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Scepticism in the *Treatise*

- “the philosophy contain’d in [the *Treatise*] is very sceptical” (A 27)
- “we have no reason to draw any inference concerning any object beyond those of which we have had experience” (T 1.3.12.20)
- “all the rules of logic require ... at last a total extinction of belief and evidence” (T 1.4.1.6)
- “This sceptical doubt, both with respect to reason and the senses, is a malady, which can never be radically cured ... Carelessness and in-attention alone can afford us any remedy.” (T 1.4.2.57)
- See also the sceptical meltdown at 1.4.7.3-8.

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Various “Species of Scepticism”

- Scepticisms can be distinguished by subject-matter (e.g. induction, external world, religion) and force.
- The *Enquiry* explicitly considers various types:
 - *Antecedent* scepticism “recommends an universal doubt”, requiring we be assured of our faculties’ reliability before depending on them (E 12.3).
 - *Consequent* scepticism arises when we find problems with our mental faculties (E 12.5).
 - Both of these come in *extreme* (“Pyrrhonian”, “excessive”) and more *moderate* forms.
 - Hume in the *Enquiry* recommends “*mitigated* scepticism or *academical* philosophy” (E 12.24-25).

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Humean “Naturalism”

- The full title of the *Treatise* is as follows –
A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects
 - The subtitle strongly suggests that Hume sees the *Treatise* as a contribution to “moral science” or the “science of man”.
 - Many sections offer causal explanations of human thought and psychology, based especially on the Copy Principle and “association of ideas”.
- 10 – But how does this fit with extreme scepticism?

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Three Humean “Naturalisms”

- Natural science of human behaviour, with down-to-earth causal mechanisms
 - *explanatory naturalism*
- Man is part of the natural world, alongside the animals
 - *biological naturalism*
- Against “invisible intelligent powers”, and hostile to established religion
 - *anti-supernaturalism*

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Humean “Associationism”

- Hume introduces the principles of association of ideas in T 1.1.4, and later uses these to explain many mental processes, for example:
 - T 1.3.6.12-13: Inductive inference;
 - T 1.3.8.2: Belief (principle of *custom* 1.3.8.10);
 - T 1.3.9: Enlivening of (e.g. religious) ideas;
 - T 1.3.9.10: Illusion of a priori mechanics;
 - T 1.3.11.9-12: Probable expectation;
 - T 1.3.14.20: Idea of necessary connexion;
 - T 1.4.2.15 ff.: Belief in body;
 - T 1.4.6.5 ff.: Belief in personal identity.

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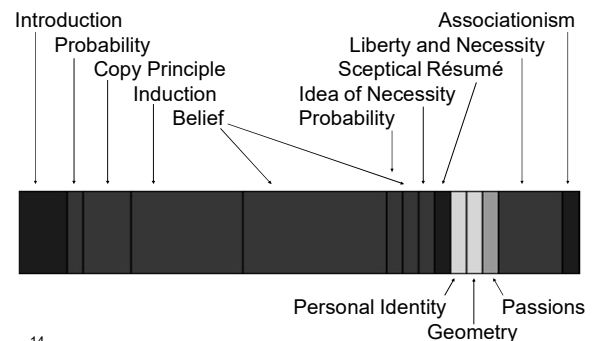
Why Is Causation So Prominent?

- *Treatise* Book 1 Part 3 – the most extensive part – is structured around the analysis of causation, and the search for the impression from which the idea of (causal) necessary connexion is derived.
- Book 1 Part 1 gives most prominence to the Copy Principle: “the first principle I establish in the science of human nature” (T 1.1.1.12).
 - The 1740 *Abstract* presents the “Chief Argument” of the *Treatise* as centred around the topics of *Treatise* 1.3;
 - The 1748 *Enquiry* then follows a broadly similar structure, with the Copy Principle early on, and the idea of causal necessity its only significant application.

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The Topics of the *Abstract*



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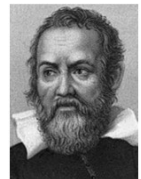
(b) Some Historical Background

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Born in 1711, in Edinburgh

- 1610, Galileo, *The Starry Messenger*
 - Refutes the Aristotelian theory of the universe.
- 1620, Bacon, *Novum Organum*
 - Advocates the empirical method of science
- 1641, Descartes, *Meditations*
 - Matter understood as pure extension
- 1660, Formation of the *Royal Society*
 - Promoting the development of empirical science
- 1661, Boyle, *The Sceptical Chymist*
 - The corpuscularian theory of matter
- 1687, Newton, *Principia*
 - Gravitational force subject to inverse-square law



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Descartes

- Attacks Aristotelian orthodoxy by employing sceptical arguments.
- Rejects scepticism himself by appeal to clear and distinct God-given “innate” ideas, in particular of God and extension.
- Qualities of matter – e.g. *passivity* – follow from its essence as geometrical *extension* (quite distinct from *active*, thinking, mind).
- Other laws of nature (e.g. conservation of motion) can be inferred from God’s essence.



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Mechanism and Scepticism

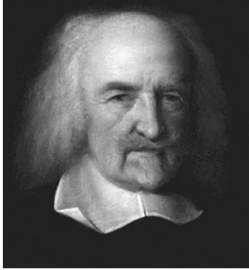
- The “Mechanical Philosophy”
 - Championed not only by Descartes (matter is just extension), but also notably by Boyle (matter is extended, impenetrable, and corpuscular).
 - The physical world is composed of (particles of) inert matter acting through mutual impact and mathematically calculable forces.
 - This seems *intelligible* (because mechanical interaction appears to make sense to us).
 - But it potentially opens a sceptical gap between the world as it is and how it appears.

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The Monster of Malmesbury (and Magdalen Hall = Hertford College!)



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- Thomas Hobbes wholeheartedly accepts the mechanical philosophy:
 - Everything that exists in the universe is material (hence no immaterial substance).
 - Everything is causally determined by the laws of mechanics.
 - A perfect science would be demonstrative.

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Leviathan (1651)

- Hobbes is most famous as a political philosopher, arguing that in the state of nature, the life of man is "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short".
- The only solution is *absolute* sovereignty, over religion and morals as well as policy.

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Materialism and Atheism

- Hobbes did not deny the existence of God, but many took his materialism to be atheistic and dangerous (e.g. denying immortality):
 - In 1666 Parliament cited his "atheism" as probable cause of the plague and fire of London!
 - His "Pernicious" books were publicly burned in Oxford in 1683, because of their "Damnable Doctrines ... false, seditious, and impious, and most of them ... also Heretical and Blasphemous ... and destructive of all Government".

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Opposing Materialism

- The main *argument* against Hobbist materialism was to insist on the limited powers of "brute matter", which:
 - is necessarily *passive* or *inert*;
 - cannot possibly give rise to mental activity such as perception or thought.
- This point was pressed by Ward (1656), More (1659), Stillingfleet (1662), Tenison (1670), Cudworth (1678), Glanvill (1682), and ...

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John Locke (1632-1704)



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- Strongly influenced by his friend Boyle.
- *Essay concerning Human Understanding* of 1690 sets out to account for *human thought* and *human knowledge*, within this new mechanical world-order.
- Emphasises *empiricism* and *probability*, rather than a priori certainty (except in the special case of God's existence).

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(c) Early Influences on Hume

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Hume's Education

- Edinburgh University 1721-5 (age 10-14)
 - Traditional, in Latin, infused with religion;
- Home at Chirside, 8 miles west of Berwick
 - Read classics (Cicero, Seneca, Plutarch etc.);
 - Shaftesbury *Characteristics* (bought 1726);
 - Attempted to follow Stoic moralists;
 - Experienced personal breakdown, as described in his famous draft letter to a physician of early 1734:

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"I found that the moral Philosophy transmitted to us by Antiquity, labor'd under the same Inconvenience that has been found in their natural Philosophy, of being entirely Hypothetical, & depending more upon Invention than Experience. Every one consulted his Fancy in erecting Schemes of Virtue & of Happiness, without regarding human Nature, upon which every moral Conclusion must depend. This therefore I resolved to make my principal Study, ... I believe ... that little more is requir'd to make a man succeed in this Study than to throw off all Prejudices ... At least this is all I have to depend on for the Truth of my Reasonings, which I have multiply'd to such a degree, that within these three Years, I find I have scribbled many a Quire of Paper, in which there is nothing contain'd but my own Inventions." (HL i 16)

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Loss of Religious Faith

- 1751 letter to Gilbert Elliot of Minto:
 - Hume recently "burn'd an old Manuscript Book, wrote before I was twenty; which contain'd, Page after Page, the gradual Progress of my Thoughts on that Head". Began "with an anxious Search after Arguments, to confirm the common Opinion", "a perpetual Struggle of a restless Imagination against Inclination" (HL i 154).
- Deathbed interview with James Boswell:
 - Hume said that he was "religious when he was young", but that "the Morality of every Religion was bad" and "he never had entertained any belief in Religion since he began to read Locke and Clarke".

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A Missing Piece in the Puzzle

- So far we have seen why Hume might be:
 - *Sceptical* about established orthodoxies, both moral and religious;
 - Keen to study human nature, through solid empirical methods rather than "invention" (i.e. *explanatory naturalism*);
 - Seeking a theory that is quite independent of religion (i.e. *anti-supernaturalism*).
- But how does all this fit with his great enthusiasm for *conceptual* empiricism?

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(d) Seeking the Missing Piece of the Jigsaw

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What Connects Locke and Clarke?

- *Treatise* 1.3.3 – which disputes the basis of the Causal Maxim (*whatever begins to exist, must have a cause of existence*) – identifies both Locke and Clarke by name in footnotes; this is the *Treatise's* only mention of Clarke.
- Both Locke and Clarke advocated the Cosmological Argument for the existence of God, based on the Causal Maxim.
- Both also appealed crucially to the principle that matter cannot give rise to thought.

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Locke's Cosmological Argument

- "There is no truth more evident, than that something must be from eternity. ... This being of all absurdities the greatest, to imagine that pure nothing, the perfect negation and absence of all beings, should ever produce any real existence." (IV x 8)
- "If then there must be something eternal, let us see what sort of being it must be. ... it is very obvious ... that it must necessarily be a cogitative being. For it is as impossible to conceive, that ever bare incogitative matter should produce a thinking intelligent being, as that nothing should of itself produce matter." (IV x 10)

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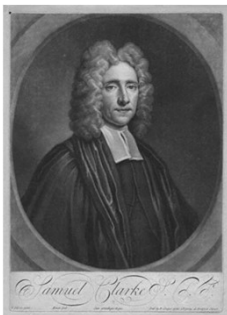
Clarke's Cosmological Argument

- Hume paraphrased the heart of Clarke's Cosmological Argument in Part 9 of the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (published posthumously in 1779):
 - "Whatever exists must have a cause or reason of its existence; ... What was it, then, which determined Something to exist rather than Nothing?"
 - "Nothing ... can never produce any thing."
 - "an infinite succession of causes, without any ultimate cause at all; ... is absurd,"
 - "We must, therefore, have recourse to a necessarily existent Being, who carries the REASON of his existence in himself ... There is, consequently, such a Being; that is, there is a Deity." (D 9.3)

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Samuel Clarke



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- Most prominent advocate of Newtonian philosophy.
- Debated with Anthony Collins, who argued that human behaviour is subject to *necessity*, just as much as the actions of matter.
- In response, Clarke firmly distinguished *physical* from *moral* necessity, real necessity from mere predictability.

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Henry Home, Lord Kames (1696-1782)



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- Hume's relative, and mentor while at Edinburgh University; family home at Kames, 9 miles southwest of Chirnside.
- Corresponded with Samuel Clarke (about free will and necessity) and Andrew Baxter, a Scottish Clarkean (1723).
- Told Boswell that Locke's "chapter on *Power* crucified him" – it deals with the idea of power, free will, necessity etc.

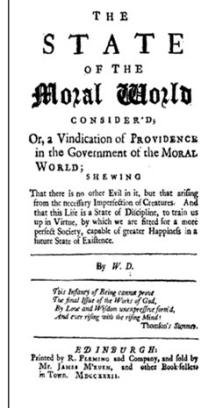
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William Dudgeon

- Tenant of Lennel Hill farm near Coldstream (8 miles south of Chirnside).
- Published *The State of the Moral World Considered* in 1732, defending optimism (i.e. everything that happens is for the best) and necessitarianism (i.e. causal determinism).

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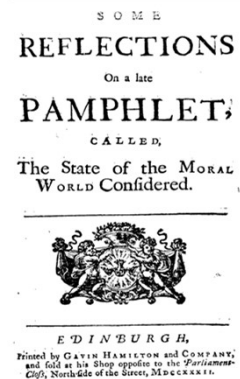


Andrew Baxter

- Tutor for the Hays of Drumelzier at Duns Castle (6 miles west of Chirnside).
- Published an attack on Dudgeon, also in 1732.
- A prominent supporter of Samuel Clarke, and likely target of some of Hume's later criticisms (in his *Letter from a Gentleman* of 1745 and his *Enquiry* of 1748).

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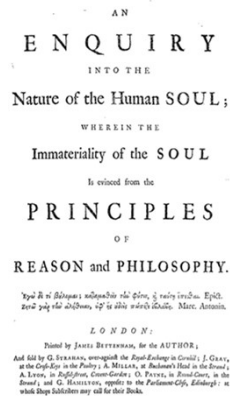
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Baxter's *Enquiry*

- In 1733, published *An Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul*.
- Second edition in 1737, third edition in 1745, *Appendix* in 1750.
- Best known now as the first substantial critique in English of George Berkeley's philosophy.



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Prosecution at Chirnside

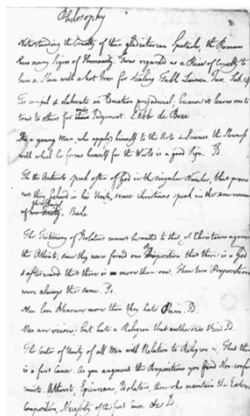
- Dudgeon was charged by the Presbytery of Chirnside (where George Home, David Hume's uncle, was minister):
 - 1st, That he denies and destroys all distinction and difference between moral good and evil, or else makes God the author of evil, and refers all evil to the imperfection of creatures;
 - 2d, That he denies the punishment of another life, or that God punishes men for sin in this life, – yea, that man is his accountable.

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Hume's Early Memoranda

- Composed in the late 1730s or early 1740s.
- Show Hume's intense interest in the Causal Maxim, necessity, free will and its implications for God's existence and the Problem of Evil.



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Free Will and the Problem of Evil

- “Liberty not a proper Solution of Moral Ill: Because it might have been bound down by Motives like those of Saints & Angels.”
- “Did God give Liberty to please Men themselves. But Men are as well pleas'd to be determin'd to Good.”
- “God cou'd have prevented all Abuses of Liberty without taking away Liberty. Therefore Liberty no Solution of Difficultys.”

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The Causal Nexus

- The Cosmological Argument:
 - The Causal Maxim;
 - Matter cannot produce thought.
- Henry Home of Kames:
 - Correspondence with Clarke and Baxter;
 - Interest in Locke's chapter “Of Power”.
- Free Will and Necessity:
 - Clarke and Baxter, Collins and Dudgeon etc.;
 - Problem of Evil.

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The Missing Jigsaw Piece

- Hypothesis
that Hume was strongly motivated at an early stage by the prospect of applying Locke's concept empiricism to settle the debate over free will and necessity by clarifying and delimiting what could possibly be meant by causal “necessity”.
 - This would bring Hume's *empiricism* entirely into line with his *explanatory naturalism*, *anti-supernaturalism* and *irreligious scepticism*.

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(e) Hume's Analysis of Causation and Its Applications

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Hume's Own Account

- Hume argues that the impression of necessary connexion (from which the corresponding idea is copied) arises in our minds when we perform inductive inferences (*T* 1.3.14.20).
- After having seen *A* followed by *B* repeatedly, and then seeing *A* again, we naturally find ourselves inferring *B* by a tendency that Hume calls "custom". The feeling (or awareness) of making the inference is the impression of necessary connexion.
 - We'll be coming back to this in a subsequent lecture; for now, this simple summary will do.

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Two "Definitions of Cause"

- Hume's main discussions of "the idea of necessary connexion" (*Treatise* 1.3.14 and *Enquiry* 7) both culminate with two "definitions of cause" (*T* 1.3.14.31, *E* 7.29).
- The first definition is based mainly on the *constant conjunction* of the "cause" *A* and the "effect" *B* (with *A* prior to *B* and, in the *Treatise*, also contiguous).
- The second definition is based on the mind's tendency to *infer B* from *A*.

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Applying the Definitions

- Hume sees his account of the relevant impression, and the corresponding definitions, as capturing *all that we can legitimately mean* by causal necessity.
- Immediate corollaries are that "All causes are of the same kind" (*T* 1.3.14.32) and (*contra* Clarke) "there is but one kind of *necessity* ... and ... the common distinction betwixt *moral* and *physical* necessity is without any foundation" (*T* 1.3.14.33).
- Further, we can now see why the Causal Maxim of *T* 1.3.3 is not demonstratively provable (*T* 1.3.14.35).
- Hume also refers back to his definitions later, in sections *T* 1.4.5, 2.3.1, and 2.3.2 (cf. *Enquiry* 8) ...

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Causation and the Mind

- Hume is especially keen to establish causality and necessity in respect of the mind:
 - Matter [and motion] can, and does, cause thought (*T* 1.4.5.29-32, "*Of the Immateriality of the Soul*");
 - The "doctrine of necessity" applies as much to the mental world as to the physical world (*T* 2.3.1-2 and *E* 8 "*Of Liberty and Necessity*");
- Both arguments crucially turn on the claim that there is nothing to causal necessity beyond the two definitions ...

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Constant Conjunction and Causation

- "all objects, which are found to be constantly conjoin'd, are *upon that account only* to be regarded as causes and effects. ... the constant conjunction of objects constitutes *the very essence* of cause and effect ..."
(*T* 1.4.5.32-3, my emphasis)
- "two particulars [are] essential to necessity, *viz.* the constant *union* and the *inference* of the mind ... wherever we discover these we must acknowledge a necessity." (*T* 2.3.1.4)

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Of the Immateriality of the Soul

- The standard anti-materialist argument insists that material changes cannot cause thought, because the two are so different.
 - "... and yet nothing in the world is more easy than to refute it. We need only to reflect on what has been prov'd at large ... that to consider the matter *a priori*, any thing may produce any thing, and that we shall never discover a reason, why any object may or may not be the cause of any other, however great, or however little the resemblance may be between them " (T 1.4.5.30)

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- Hume then goes further, to insist that material motion *is indeed* found to be the cause of thought:

- "we find ... by experience, that they are constantly united; which being *all the circumstances, that enter into the idea of cause and effect* ... we may *certainly* conclude, that motion may be, and *actually is*, the cause of thought and perception." (T 1.4.5.30, my emphasis)
- "as *the constant conjunction of objects constitutes the very essence of cause and effect*, matter and motion may often be regarded as the causes of thought, as far as we have any notion of that relation." (T 1.4.5.33, my emphasis)

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Of Liberty and Necessity

- Hume's argument that the same necessity is applicable to the moral (i.e. human) and physical realms depends on taking our understanding of necessary connexion to be exhausted by the two factors of *constant conjunction* and *customary inference*.
- These two factors can be shown to apply in the moral realm, and Hume insists that we cannot even *ascribe* any further necessity (going beyond these two factors) to matter:

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"the ... advocates for [libertarian] free-will must allow this union and inference with regard to human actions. They will only deny, that this makes the whole of necessity. But then they must shew, that we have an idea of something else in the actions of matter; which, according to the foregoing reasoning, is impossible." (A 34, cf. T 2.3.1.3-18, T 2.3.2.4, E 8.4-22, E 8.27)

- This argument is explicitly based on Hume's definitions, which he views as revealing "the very essence" of causation and necessity.

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An Integrated Vision

- Hume's empiricist analysis of the idea of causal necessity claims to refute:
 - The Cosmological Argument;
 - Anti-materialist arguments;
 - The Free Will Theodicy (i.e. appealing to free-will to solve to the Problem of Evil);
 - Aprioristic causal metaphysics in general.
- At the same time it aims to support:
 - Empirical, causal science: the *only* way to establish anything about "matters of fact";
 - Extension of causal science into moral realm.

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Further Reading

(These papers are also available online from www.davidhume.org/scholarship/papers/millican)

- Peter Millican (2009), "Hume, Causal Realism, and Causal Science", *Mind* 118, pp. 647-712.
 - §7 discusses T 1.4.5, §8 Liberty and Necessity, and §9 Hume's overall vision.
- Peter Millican (2016), "Hume's Chief Argument", in Paul Russell (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of David Hume* (Oxford University Press), pp. 82-108.
 - Offers an overall account of Hume's main aims and arguments, covering all the material of this lecture.

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David Hume, 1711-1776

2. Hume's Conceptual Empiricism (Centred on His Copy Principle)



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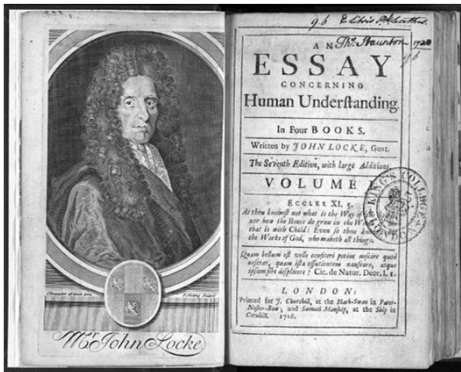
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From Last Time ...

- Hume's early philosophical interests seem to have focused on various issues involving *causation*, many of these also having significant implications for religion:
 - Cosmological Argument, materialism and the mind, free-will, Problem of Evil.
- He applies Lockean *concept empiricism* to draw radical conclusions about these matters, starting from an adapted version of Locke's "theory of ideas".

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2(a) The Lockean Inheritance



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Reacting to Descartes

- Locke follows Descartes by understanding mental content in terms of "ideas", but fundamentally disagrees with Descartes's claim that some of our ideas – for example those of God and of extension – are *innate* (see M 3 AT 7:37-8; CCB AT 8B:357-61).
- Locke's 1690 *Essay concerning Human Understanding* – mostly in Book 2, "Of Ideas in general, and their Original" – aims to explain how all our ideas are derived from experience, i.e. to establish *conceptual empiricism*.

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What is an "Idea"?

- Locke defines an *idea* as "whatsoever is the Object of the Understanding when a Man thinks" (Essay I i 8)
- This is supposed to include all types of "thinking", including perception and feeling as well as contemplation. So our *ideas* include thoughts and sensations, and also "internal" ideas that we get from *reflection*.

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"White Paper" and "Two Fountains"

- "Let us then suppose the Mind to be, as we say, white Paper, void of all Characters, without any *Ideas*; How comes it to be furnished? ... To this I answer, in one word, From *Experience* ... Our Observation employ'd either about *external, sensible Objects*; or about *the internal Operations of our Minds* ... These two are the Fountains of Knowledge, from whence all the *Ideas* we have ... do spring." (II i 2)

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Ideas and Impressions

- Hume thinks Locke's usage of "idea" is too broad, so he adopts different terminology:
 - An *impression* is a *sensation* (e.g. from seeing a blue sky, smelling a flower, or physical pain) or a *feeling* (e.g. anger, desire, disapproval, envy, fear, love, or pride);
 - An *idea* is a *thought* (e.g. about the sky, or about a pain, or about the existence of God);
 - A *perception* is either an *impression* or an *idea*. (So Hume uses the word *perception* to cover everything that Locke calls an *idea*.)

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Conceptual Empiricism: A First Approximation

- To a first approximation, Hume's conceptual empiricism is the claim *that all of our ideas* (i.e. thoughts) *are derived from impressions* (i.e. sensations or feelings).
- But Hume takes conceptual empiricism more strictly than Locke, insisting (again to a first approximation) *that all of our ideas are copies of impressions, which almost exactly resemble the corresponding impressions.*

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Imagism versus Cartesian Intellect

- If ideas are literal copies of impressions, and impressions are sensory (or quasi-sensory) *perceptions*, then it follows that our thought is *imagistic* (in a way that embraces all external and internal senses, not just vision).
- Hence all our thought involves *imagination*, and we have no *pure intellectual ideas* (e.g. of God), as Descartes supposed.
 - Hume wields the Copy Principle against such "pure and intellectual" ideas at *T* 1.3.1.7.

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"Sensation" and "Reflection"

- Hume follows Locke in calling the two sources of ideas "sensation" and "reflection" (*T* 1.1.2.1, cf. *Essay* II i 3-4), but there are differences ...
- First, whereas Locke takes for granted that we have "sensitive knowledge" of the existence of external objects (*Essay* IV xi), Hume describes the impressions of sense (e.g. perceptions of colour, taste, smell, bodily pain) as arising "in the soul originally, from unknown causes" (*T* 1.1.2.1). This suggests from the start a more sceptical attitude towards the senses.

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Humean Reflection

- Impressions of *reflection* are "deriv'd in a great measure from our ideas", particularly the ideas of pleasure or pain that arise when we feel e.g. "heat or cold, thirst or hunger" (*T* 1.1.2.1).
- *Thinking* or *reflecting* about pleasures and pains gives rise to "desire and aversion, hope and fear, which may properly be call'd impressions of reflection because deriv'd from it". At *T* 1.1.6.1 Hume says that impressions of reflection are either *passions* (e.g. the desire for something) or *emotions* (e.g. happiness).

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"Reflection": A Contrast with Locke

- When Locke discussed ideas of *reflection*, his focus was very different from Hume's:
 - "By *REFLECTION* ... I ... Mean, that notice which the Mind takes of its own Operations, ... by reason whereof, there come to be *Ideas* of these Operations in the Understanding."
 - "... such are, *Perception, Thinking, Doubting, Believing, Reasoning, Knowing, Willing*, and all the different actings of our own Minds;" (II i 4)
- Locke seems to overlook *feelings* and *passions*; Hume is more interested in these, but seems to overlook *mental operations*!

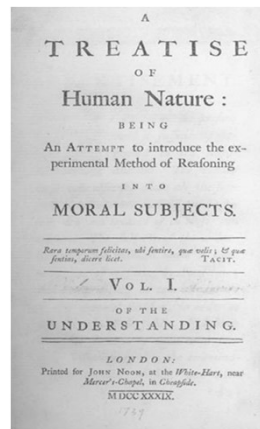
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2(b)

Force and Vivacity



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Distinguishing Impressions and Ideas

- Hume says that impressions have more *force, vivacity, or liveliness* than ideas:

"All the perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into two distinct kinds, which I shall call IMPRESSIONS and IDEAS. The difference betwixt these consists in the force and liveliness, with which they strike upon the soul, and make their way into our thought or consciousness. Those ... which enter with most force and violence, we may name *impressions* ..." (T 1.1.1.1).

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Starting from Internalism?

- Hume seems to be wanting to define the distinction between impressions and ideas in terms of their *internally perceptible* qualities rather than their causes.
- Perhaps – as with his “unknown causes” comment about impressions of sensation (above) – he wants to remain sceptically non-committal, and to build a theory which starts without dogmatic commitments.

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Doubts about Force and Vivacity

- Hume seems to recognise that relying on “force and vivacity” is problematic here:

“in sleep, in a fever, in madness, or in any very violent emotions of soul, our ideas may approach to our impressions: [And] it sometimes happens, that our impressions are so faint and low, that we cannot distinguish them from our ideas.” (T 1.1.1.1)

- Compare, for example, dreaming of an attack of spiders, with watching paint dry!

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Why Emphasise “Force and Vivacity?”

- Hume is looking for a way that ideas can differ from impressions while still having the same *content* (to defend his concept empiricism).
 - T 1.3.7.6: “the same idea can only be vary'd by a variation of its degrees of force and vivacity”
- Hume emphasises this when developing his theory of belief:
 - If I believe proposition *P*, and you don't, the same ideas must be involved, or it wouldn't be the same proposition (T 1.3.7.3-4).

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Distinguishing Belief from Mere Conception

- Hume's theory of belief defines it in terms of force and vivacity or “liveliness”, as derived from an associated impression:

“An opinion, therefore, or belief may be most accurately defin'd, A LIVELY IDEA RELATED TO OR ASSOCIATED WITH A PRESENT IMPRESSION.” (T 1.3.7.5)

- This force and vivacity – acquired by association from impressions – thus constitutes “*belief or assent*” (T 1.3.5.7).

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The Hydraulic Theory of Belief

"I wou'd willingly establish it as a general maxim in the science of human nature, *that when any impression becomes present to us, it not only transports the mind to such ideas as are related to it, but likewise communicates to them a share of its force and vivacity.*" (T 1.3.8.2)

- T 1.3.8 gives various "experiments" to illustrate how force and vivacity can be conveyed from impressions to their "associated ideas", confirming this as a general phenomenon of human nature.

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A Hydraulic Theory of Probability

- Suppose I throw a die ...

"When ... the thought is determin'd by the causes to consider the dye as falling and turning up one of its sides, the chances present all these sides as equal, and make us consider every one of them, one after another, as alike probable ... The determination of the thought is common to all; but no more of its force falls to the share of any one, than what is suitable to its proportion with the rest. 'Tis after this manner the original impulse, and consequently the vivacity of thought, arising from the causes, is divided and split in pieces by the intermingled chances. (T 1.3.11.12)

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Further Doubts

- This isn't entirely satisfactory:
 - A fictional story can be much more "forceful and vivacious" than a dull historical account.
 - "Force and vivacity" isn't a separate impression, so how does it fit into Hume's theory of ideas?
 - If it's part of the ideas believed, then how can we distinguish between the belief in a dull red door and the imagination of a bright red door?
 - "Manner of conception" suggests an *attitudinal* change, rather than a change in the ideas.

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Is "Force and Vivacity" Univocal?

- Hume's hydraulic theory seems to assume that a single dimension of "force and vivacity" can capture the differences between:
 - An impression of *X* (most forceful/vivacious)
 - A memory of *X*
 - A belief or expectation of *X*
 - Mere contemplation of *X* (least forceful/vivacious)
- Dauer (1999) suggests that this implausibility later pushed Hume away from the hydraulic model, which does not feature in the *Enquiry*.

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Symptoms of Unease

- In a paragraph added in the 1740 Appendix, Hume expresses discomfort with his account:

"An idea assented to *feels* different from a fictitious idea ... And this different feeling I endeavour to explain by calling it a superior *force*, or *vivacity*, or *solidity*, or *firmness*, or *steadiness*. ... 'tis impossible to explain perfectly this feeling or manner of conception. We may make use of words, that express something near it. But its true and proper name is *belief*, which is a term than every one sufficiently understands ..." (T 1.3.7.7)

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Abandoning (Some of) the Theory

- In the *Enquiry*, Hume seems to retreat from the hydraulic theory:

"Were we to attempt a *definition* of this sentiment, we should, perhaps, find it ... impossible ... BELIEF is the true and proper name of this feeling; ... It may not, however, be improper to attempt a *description* of this sentiment; ... I say then, that belief is nothing but a more vivid, lively, forcible, firm, steady conception of an object, than what the imagination alone is ever able to attain." (E 5.12)

Probable belief, as in the case of a die, arises from "an inexplicable contrivance of nature" (E 6.3).

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Phenomenological or Functional?

- Trends in philosophy are often mirrored by trends in interpretation, especially to defend a revered figure! Accordingly, Hume's "Force and Vivacity" has been interpreted (e.g. by Everson 1988) as *externalist* and *functional* rather than *internalist* and *phenomenological*.
 - Marušić (2010) argues strongly on the other side, citing Hume's emphasis on *feeling* (e.g. in paragraphs 7-9 of the *Appendix* to the *Treatise*) as *causally* key to the functional difference between belief and mere conception. It looks as though the difference in "feeling" is more fundamental.

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Feeling and Thinking

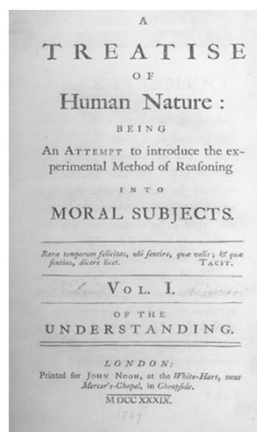
- The impression/idea distinction seems most defensible as (roughly) that between *feeling* and *thinking*, which Hume takes to be introspectable:
 - "I believe it will not be very necessary to employ many words in explaining this distinction. Every one of himself will readily perceive the difference betwixt feeling and thinking." (T 1.1.1.1)
- On this account, Hume's claim is that impressions are *generally* more "vivacious" than ideas, but not *by definition*; so the "spiders/watching paint dry" objection is defused.

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2(c)

The Copy Principle



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Conceptual Empiricism: Refining the Approximation

- Obviously, some of our ideas (e.g. of a unicorn) are not copies of any single impression.
- Hume acknowledges this, but wants to insist that all of the *content* of our ideas is copied from impressions – we might say that ideas are entirely composed of *impression-copied content*.
- His way of dealing with this is to draw a distinction between *simple ideas* (which are directly copied from simple impressions) and *complex ideas* (which may be constructed from simple ideas)

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Simple and Complex Ideas

- At *Treatise* 1.1.1.2, Hume divides all ideas and impressions into *simple* and *complex*:
 - "Simple perceptions or impressions and ideas are such as admit of no distinction nor separation. The complex are the contrary to these, and may be distinguished into parts."
- Hume writes as though this distinction is really straightforward, but it isn't! Take, for example, the idea of a red circle: that seems to be a complex idea, but what exactly are the parts, and how many (maybe two: the red colour, and the circular shape, or maybe the size also)?

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Spatial Ideas and Atomism

- At *Essay* II v 1 and II viii 9, Locke describes the ideas of *space*, *extension*, and *figure* – i.e. shape – as simple (though II xiii on "the simple modes of space" complicates the story a bit.)
- Hume has a much stricter "atomist" view of spatial ideas, taking them to be formed of *minima*, in much the way that a computer image is formed of individual coloured pixels.
 - *Extension* and *figure* only arise when we have *multiple* minima, and hence complexity.

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The Copy Principle

- Hume's statement of concept-empiricism, commonly called his Copy Principle, critically depends on the simple-complex distinction:

"that all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent." (T 1.1.1.7)

- Hume later refers to this as "the first principle I establish in the science of human nature" (T 1.1.1.12).

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Weaponising the Copy Principle?

- The 1748 *Enquiry* boldly flourishes the Copy Principle as a weapon against bogus ideas:

"When we entertain ... any suspicion, that a philosophical term is employed without any meaning or idea (as is but too frequent), we need but enquire, from what impression is that supposed idea derived? And if it be impossible to assign any, this will serve to confirm our suspicion." (E 2.9)

- But in practice, Hume almost always uses it not to *dismiss* ideas but to *clarify* them, by tracing them to their impression-source.

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Hume's First Argument for the Copy Principle

- There seem to be no counterexamples:

"After the most accurate examination, of which I am capable, I venture to affirm, that the rule here holds without any exception, and that every simple idea has a simple impression, which resembles it; and every simple impression a correspondent idea." (T 1.1.1.5)

- And since the impressions come before the ideas (T 1.1.1.8), they must cause the ideas rather than vice-versa.

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Hume's Second Argument for the Copy Principle

- People who lack any particular sense modality always lack also the corresponding ideas:

"wherever by any accident the faculties, which give rise to any impressions, are obstructed in their operations, as when one is born blind or deaf; not only the impressions are lost, but also their correspondent ideas; ... likewise where they have never been put in action to produce a particular impression [such as] the taste of a pine-apple ..." (T 1.1.1.9)

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The Missing Shade of Blue

- After arguing for the Copy Principle, Hume himself strangely presents a counter-example: the famous "missing shade of blue" (T 1.1.1.10).

- He seems, however, to think this isn't a *serious* problem for his position, maybe because:

- The "new" simple idea is being constructed (by something like blending) from materials that are provided by impressions, so his concept-empiricism isn't being fundamentally threatened.
- The new idea *could* be derived from sensory experience, even if in this case it hasn't been – it's still *imagistic* (so clearly thinkable on Hume's view).

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Problems with Hume's Arguments

- Hume's first argument doesn't seem to fit very well with his use of the Copy Principle against opponents:

- Suppose someone claims to have an idea which *doesn't* derive from a corresponding impression; he will simply deny Hume's generalisation and hence his argument for the Principle. Bennett (2002, pp. 100-1) presses this sort of objection.
- Garrett (1997, pp. 46-8) mounts a defence on Hume's behalf:

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Garrett's First Defence of Hume

- “when [Hume] argues against the existence of a certain (putative) idea, he never argues *merely* that we do not find such a corresponding impression in experience; he also always argues that no impression could possibly satisfy the requirements we implicitly demand for such a perception.” (1997, p. 49)
- So such an idea would not merely contradict the Copy Principle, “it would ... require the admission of an entirely distinct representational faculty”, in addition to our imagistic imagination.

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Responding to Garrett

- But the point that “no impression could possibly satisfy the requirements” for serving as the source of a particular idea is double-edged.
- Hume’s opponent can point out that the ideas in question – *those that are not obviously imagistic* and that Hume has to work so hard to explain in imagistic terms (necessary connexion, body, the self etc.) – are precisely the ones for which the Copy Principle is least plausible to start with.
- Is it really legitimate to extend an argument which seems plausible in the case of sensory ideas to these more contentious cases?

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- Hume’s second argument also has problems. It may seem very plausible that a blind man can have no idea of *red*, for example. But *how can Hume know that this is the case?* Might it not be that the man has private mental experiences that involve the colour red?
- At some risk of anachronism, some authors (e.g. Bennett, Dicker) argue that Hume’s point is best understood as being not about private mental experience, but about *public meaningfulness*. The blind man *cannot use the word “red” correctly*, and they take this (positivist) moral to be the real point of Hume’s position.

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Garrett's Second Defence of Hume

- Garrett (1997, pp. 46-8) defends Hume more straightforwardly, arguing that although one might not be able to *demonstrate* to others that one was having a simple idea without a simple impression, the fact that blind and deaf people (etc.) don’t claim to have such ideas can be taken as significant.
 - If they, like us, find that “the presented content of those mental representations that are less ‘lively’ than (Humean) impressions is copied from the experienced content of those impressions” (p. 47), then that gives empirical support to the Copy Principle.

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- Further evidence, Garrett suggests, comes from people whose senses are repaired, who as adults become able to see for the first time. They report *new* sensations, apparently: sensations that they could not imagine prior to the repair.
- Note, however, that this second argument explicitly focuses on ideas that are acknowledged from the start to be sensory, so it doesn’t help in the more contentious cases that are not obviously sensory.
- For those ideas (necessity, body, self etc.), Hume’s case for empiricism – like Locke’s – perhaps has to depend on the strength of his specific account of those ideas. Can he actually explain their nature in terms of impression-copy content?

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Some Examination Questions on These Topics

- ‘Given that Hume admitted “the missing shade of blue” as a counterexample to his maxim that every simple idea derives from a simple impression, he had no right to employ this maxim to attack the notion of substance as something distinct from a collection of qualities’. Discuss. (2003, 16)
- Should Hume be more concerned about his missing shade of blue? (2014, 17)

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- 'I therefore ask, wherein consists the difference betwixt believing and disbelieving any proposition?' (HUME, Treatise 1.3.7.3). What is Hume's answer, and is it satisfactory? (2010, 17)
- Can Hume draw a satisfactory distinction 'betwixt feeling and thinking'? (2016, 31)
- Is there anything worth retaining in Hume's notion of 'force and vivacity'? (2018, 31)
- 'Hume uses "force and vivacity" in too many different ways for the notion to be useful in any of them.' Discuss. (2020, 32)
- Is Hume too casual about the distinction between impressions and ideas? (2021, 31)

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- Explain and assess the arguments that Hume offers to support his principle '[t]hat all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent'. (*Treatise of Human Nature*, 1.1.1.7) (2019, 31)
- 'There may well be objections to Hume's theory that the differences between impressions and ideas, between memory and imagination and between thought and belief can each be explained in terms of their differing levels of force and vivacity, but at least it recognises that these are all distinctions which may be drawn introspectively'. Discuss. (2001, 16)

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Slides from the 2019 Lectures

- The following slides, taken from the 2019 Lectures, highlight some of Hume's key uses of his Copy Principle to illuminate the nature of key ideas.
- They can be found in the complete set of 2019 slides, at numbers 167, 168, 169, 173, 237, 238, 291, 312, 326, 336, 337, 356, 357, 358, 359

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Extension as a "Manner of Appearance"

- The Copy Principle should reveal the nature of our idea of extension (*T* 1.2.3.1), but we don't seem to have any distinct *impression* from which it could be derived.
- The idea of extension is *abstract* (in Hume's sense of a revival set linked to a general term) and derived from the resemblance in the "manner of appearance" of our spatially disposed impressions, whether of coloured points or impressions of touch (*T* 1.2.3.5).

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Time and Perceivable Succession

- "The idea of time [is] deriv'd from the succession of our perceptions ... ideas as well as impressions ... of reflection as well as of sensation, ... [it is] an abstract idea, which comprehends a still greater variety than that of space, and yet is represented in the fancy by some particular individual idea of a determinate quantity and quality." (*T* 1.2.3.6)
- So the idea of duration "must be deriv'd from a succession of [perceivably] changeable objects" (*T* 1.2.3.8), and – since it is not separable from such a succession (*T* 1.2.3.10) – cannot properly be applied to anything unchangeable (*T* 1.2.3.11).

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Spatial Atoms

- "The idea of space is convey'd to the mind by ... the sight and touch ... That compound impression, which represents extension, consists of several lesser impressions, that are indivisible to the eye or feeling, and may be call'd impressions of atoms or corpuscles endow'd with colour and solidity. ... There is nothing but the idea of their colour or tangibility, which can render them conceivable by the mind." (*T* 1.2.3.15)
- "We have therefore no idea of space or extension, but when we regard it as an object either of our sight or feeling." (*T* 1.2.3.16)

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Our Idea of Existence

- The final section of Part 2 applies similar considerations to our idea of existence:
“The idea of existence ... is the very same with the idea of what we conceive to be existent. To reflect on any thing simply, and to reflect on it as existent, are nothing different” (T 1.2.6.4)
- The Copy Principle also implies that we cannot think of external objects as anything “specifically different from our perceptions” (T 1.2.6.7-9) – this is important in T 1.4.2.

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Applying the Copy Principle

- Hume’s *Copy Principle* (T 1.1.1.7) states that all simple ideas are copied from impressions. In T 1.3.14 he repeatedly refers back to this principle.
- The principle provides “a new microscope” (E 7.4) for investigating the nature of ideas, by finding the corresponding impressions.
- In *Treatise* 1.3.14, he accordingly sets out to identify the impression from which the idea of necessary connexion is copied.
- 1.3.14.1 summarises the argument to come ...

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“What is our idea of necessity, when we say that two objects are necessarily connected together. ... as we have no idea, that is not deriv’d from an impression, we must find some impression, that gives rise to this idea of necessity, if we assert we have really such an idea. ... finding that necessity is ... always ascrib’d to causes and effects, I turn my eye to two objects suppos’d to be plac’d in that relation; ... I immediately perceive, that they are *contiguous* in time and place, and that the object we call cause *precedes* the other we call effect. In no one instance can I go any farther, nor is it possible for me to discover any third relation betwixt these objects. I therefore enlarge my view to comprehend several instances; where I find like objects always existing in like relations of contiguity and succession. At first sight this seems to serve but little to my purpose. The reflection on several instances only repeats the same objects; and therefore can never give rise to a new idea. But upon farther enquiry I find, that the repetition is not in every particular the same, but produces a new impression, and by that means the idea, which I at present examine. For after a frequent repetition, I find, that upon the appearance of one of the objects, the mind is *determin’d* by custom to consider its usual attendant, and to consider it in a stronger light upon account of its relation to the first object. ’Tis this impression, then, or *determination*, which affords me the idea of necessity.”

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(T 1.3.14.1)

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Empiricism and Projectivism

- Hume’s Copy Principle obliges him to seek an “impression of reflection” to ground any idea that is not straightforwardly sensory:
 - Necessary connexion is grounded in (something like) the awareness of inductive inference;
 - Moral notions are grounded in generalised approbation and disapprobation;
 - Beauty is grounded in “a peculiar delight and satisfaction”; deformity in a corresponding pain.
- Thus the ascription of these ideas *inevitably* involves *some* element of “projection”.

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Eliminating the Senses

- In discussing the *senses* as a potential source of the belief in body, Hume seems to treat them as bare sources of impressions. As such,
 - They obviously cannot “give rise to the notion of the *continu’d* existence of their objects, after they no longer appear to the senses”. (T 1.4.2.3)
 - Nor can they “offer ... their impressions as the images of something *distinct*, or *independent*, and *external* ... because they convey to us nothing but a single perception, and never give us the least intimation of any thing beyond.” (T 1.4.2.4)

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Fallacy and Fiction

- Having explained how the vulgar view arises, Hume emphasises (T 1.4.2.43) how much falsehood and error it involves:
 - False attribution of identity, into which we are “seduced” by the resemblance of perceptions.
 - The *fiction* of a continued existence, which “is really false” but serves “to remedy the interruption of our perceptions”.
 - “experiments [reveal that] ... the doctrine of the independent existence of our sensible perceptions is contrary to the plainest experience” (T 1.4.2.44).

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Inventing Substance

- When we realise these supposedly identical things have actually changed over time,
“the imagination is apt to feign something unknown and invisible, which it supposes to continue the same under all these variations; and this unintelligible something it calls a *substance*, or *original and first matter*.” (T 1.4.3.4)
- We likewise imagine this *original substance* to be simple and un compounded, supplying
“a principle of union or cohesion among [the object’s] qualities” (T 1.4.3.5)

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Substantial Forms and Accidents

- The Peripatetics (i.e. Aristotelians) then ascribe the differences between substances to their different *substantial forms* (T 1.4.3.6).
- Qualities of objects such as colour and figure are then considered as *accidents* (i.e. accidental as opposed to essential qualities) “inhering in” the substance, so these philosophers:
“suppose a substance supporting, which they do not understand, and an accident supported, of which they have as imperfect an idea. The whole system, therefore, is entirely incomprehensible.” (T 1.4.3.8)

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Of Personal Identity

- *Treatise* 1.4.6 addresses the topic of personal identity, wielding the Copy Principle (T 1.4.6.2) to deny that we have any idea of the self which is anything like the conventionally presumed notion with its “perfect identity and simplicity” (T 1.4.6.1).
- There is no such impression, and hence no such idea, of *self* (T 1.4.6.2). When I look inside myself, “I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception.” (T 1.4.6.3)

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The Bundle Theory

- Hence the only genuine idea of self is that of:
“nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions [impressions and ideas], which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement. ... The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance ... There is properly no *simplicity* in it at one time, nor *identity* in different. ... The comparison of the theatre must not mislead us. They are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind; nor have we the most distant notion of the place, where these scenes are represented ...” (T 1.4.6.4)

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Explaining the Attribution of Identity

- Hume now goes on to explain our “propension to ascribe an identity to these successive perceptions, and to suppose ourselves possess of an invariable and uninterrupted existence” (T 1.4.6.5).
- He takes this to involve the same sort of imaginative principles that are at play when we attribute identity “to plants and animals”. The similarity of the sequence of perceptions over time “facilitates the transition of the mind from one object to another, and renders its passage as smooth as if it contemplated one continu’d object” (T 1.4.6.6). Thus we come to think of them as “as invariable and uninterrupted”.

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Confusion, Absurdity, and Fictions

- So just as with external objects (cf. T 1.4.2 and 1.4.3), when we consider a gradually changing sequence of perceptions, we are apt to confuse this with an ongoing identity (T 1.4.6.6).
- Reflection on the changing sequence shows this to be absurd, so to resolve “this absurdity, we ... feign some new and unintelligible principle, that connects the objects together ... Thus we ... run into the notion of a *soul*, and *self*, and *substance*, to disguise the variation.” The next sentence calls this a *fiction*.

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David Hume, 1711-1776



3. Hume's Associationism

Peter Millican
Hertford College, Oxford

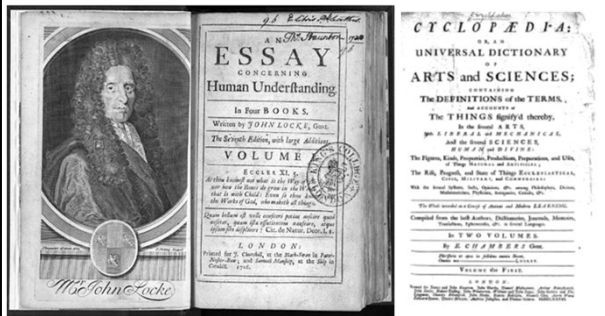
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Last Time ...

- We saw how Hume's conceptual empiricism follows Locke in taking all of our ideas to come through *sensation* or *reflection*. However:
 - Hume's terminology of *impressions* and *ideas* helps to clarify the issue, though his distinction in terms of *force and vivacity* is problematic.
 - Hume takes *feelings* (not mental operations) to be the paradigmatic objects of ideas of reflection.
- Hume's arguments for his Copy Principle (and his complacent assumption of the simple/complex distinction) are not entirely convincing.

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3(a) Association of Ideas: The Lockean Background



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Locke on the Association of Ideas

- Hume will appeal to the association of ideas with great enthusiasm, but this is in striking contrast to Locke's attitude to association:

"[3] this sort of Madness ... [4] this ... Weakness to which all Men are so liable, ... a Taint which so universally infects Mankind ... [5] ... there is [a] Connexion of *Ideas* wholly owing to Chance or Custom; *Ideas* that in themselves are not at all of kin, come to be so united in some Mens Minds that 'tis very hard to separate them ..."

(Locke, *Essay* II xxxiii 3-5)

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Chambers' *Cyclopaedia* (1728)

"ASSOCIATION of *Ideas*, is where two or more *Ideas*, constantly and immediately follow or succeed one another in the Mind, so that one shall almost infallibly produce the other; whether there be any natural Relation between them, or not."

"Where there is a real Affinity or Connection in *Ideas*, it is the excellency of the Mind, to be able to collect, compare, and range them in Order, in its Enquiries: But where there is none, nor any Cause to be assign'd for their accompanying each other, but what is owing to mere Accident or Habit; ..."

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... this unnatural *Association* becomes a great Imperfection, and is generally speaking, a main Cause of Error, or wrong Deductions in reasoning."

"Thus the Idea of Goblins and Sprights, has really no more Affinity with Darkness than with Light; and yet let a foolish Maid inculcate these often on the Mind of a Child, and raise them there together, 'tis possible he shall never be able to separate them again so long as he lives, but Darkness shall ever bring with it those frightful *Ideas*. Let Custom, from the very Childhood, have joined the Idea of Figure and Shape to the Idea of God, and what Absurdities will that Mind be liable to, about the Deity?"

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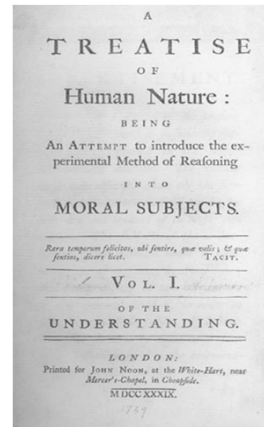
“Such wrong combinations of Ideas, Mr. *Lock* shews, are a great Cause of the irreconcilable Opposition between the different sects of Philosophy and Religion: For we can’t imagine, that all who hold Tenets different from, and sometimes contradictory to one another, shou’d wifully and knowingly impose upon themselves, and refuse Truth offered by plain Reason: But some loose and independent Ideas are by Education, Custom, and the constant Din of their Party, so coupled in their Minds, that they always appear there together: These they can no more separate in their Thoughts, than if they were but one Idea, ... This ... is the Foundation of the greatest, and almost of all the Errors in the World.” (p. 161)

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3(b)

Hume: Strict separability, a weaker form of association, and relations



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The “Liberty of the Imagination”

- We have already seen that some ideas are complex, and can be divided imaginatively into components:
 - An apple has a particular shape, a colour, a taste, a smell ... Its shape is also complex ...
- We can also *put ideas together* in new ways:
 - gold + mountain = golden mountain.
- At T 1.1.3.4 Hume refers to this “*liberty of the imagination to transpose and change its ideas*” as his “second principle”.

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The Separability Principle (SP)

- Later, that relatively modest “second principle” seems to morph into what is commonly called Hume’s Separability Principle, which has strikingly paradoxical results later in the *Treatise*:
 - “We have observ’d, that whatever objects are different are distinguishable, and that whatever objects are distinguishable are separable by the thought and imagination. And ... these propositions are equally true in the *inverse*, and that whatever objects are separable are also distinguishable, and that whatever objects are distinguishable are also different.” (T 1.1.7.3)

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Arguing for the Separability Principle

- Hume’s argument for the Separability Principle is extremely cursory:
 - “For how is it possible we can separate what is not distinguishable, or distinguish what is not different?” (T 1.1.7.3)
- This makes the Separability Principle look trivially true, but Hume will later use it to maintain, for example, that a perception (i.e. an impression or idea) could exist quite independently of any perceiver.

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Taking Separability Too Far?

- This happens at T 1.4.5.5, where Hume considers the standard (e.g. Descartes, Chambers) definition of a substance as *something which may exist by itself*:
 - “this definition agrees to every thing, that can possibly be conceiv’d; ... Whatever is clearly conceiv’d may exist; ... every thing, which is different, is distinguishable, and every thing which is distinguishable, is separable by the imagination. My conclusion ... is, that since all our perceptions are different from each other, and from every thing else in the universe, they are also distinct and separable, and may be consider’d as separately existent, and may exist separately, and have no need of any thing else to support their existence. They are, therefore, substances, as far as this definition explains a substance.”

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Hume on the Association of Ideas

- Despite “the liberty of the imagination”, there is a pattern to our thoughts:

“all simple ideas may be separated by the imagination, and may be united again in what form it pleases ... [yet there is] some bond of union among them, some associating quality, by which one idea naturally introduces another” (T 1.1.4.1)
- Hume calls this “a gentle force” which explains why languages “so nearly correspond to each other” in the complex ideas that are represented within their vocabulary.

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Three Principles of Association

- Ideas may be associated in three ways:

“The qualities, from which this association arises ... are three, viz. RESEMBLANCE, CONTIGUITY in time or place, and CAUSE and EFFECT.” (T 1.1.4.1)
- Association is “a kind of ATTRACTION, which in the mental world” has remarkable effects like gravity in the physical world (T 1.1.4.6).
 - The complex ideas that arise from such association “may be divided into RELATIONS, MODES, and SUBSTANCES” (T 1.1.4.7). Hume then sets out to examine these systematically.

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Natural and Philosophical Relations

- T 1.1.5 starts with a distinction between two senses of the word “relation”. In one sense, we think of things as *related* when the idea of one *naturally* leads the thought to the other.
- So the “natural relations” are those that correspond to our associative tendencies – resemblance, contiguity, cause and effect.
- But when philosophers talk about “relations”, they include *any kind of arbitrary* “subject of comparison”. Hume develops Locke’s taxonomy of such “philosophical relations”, for a reason that will become clear in the next lecture ...

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Locke on the Types of Relation

- Locke (*Essay* II xxv-xxviii) emphasises:
 - “Cause and Effect” (II xxvi 1-2)
 - “Relations of Time” (II xxvi 3-4)
 - “Relations of Place and Extension” (II xxvi 5)
 - “Identity and Diversity” (II xxvii)
 - “Proportional Relations” (II xxviii 1)
 - “*Natural Relations*” such as “*Father and Son, Brothers ... Country-men*” (II xxviii 2)
 - “*Instituted, or Voluntary*” relations such as “*General ..., Citizen, ... Client*” (II xxviii 3)
 - Various moral relations (II xxviii 4-16)

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Locke to Hume on Relations

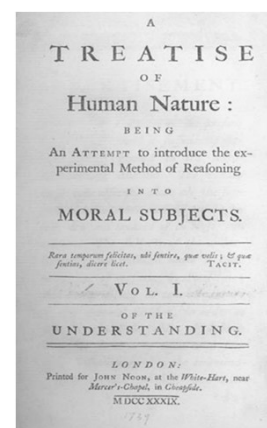
LOCKE	HUME
“Agreement”	Resemblance
Cause and effect	Cause and effect
Natural, Instituted, Moral	(see T 1.1.4.3, 1.1.4.5)
Relations of time	Space and time
Relations of place	
Identity	Identity
Diversity	Contrariety
Proportional relations	Proportions in quantity Degrees in quality

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3(c)

The Crucial
Role of Custom
in Induction
(and also
General Ideas)



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How Induction Fits In

- *Treatise* Book 1 Part 3, the longest part of the work, is entitled “Of Knowledge and Probability”.
 - T 1.3.1 deals with “Knowledge” (in a *strict* sense, requiring absolute certainty).
 - At T 1.3.2.3, *causation* is found to be the only relation that can ground a “probable” inference from one object to another.
 - Accordingly the rest of *Treatise* 1.3 focuses on *causation* and *causal reasoning*, framed around the search for the impression from which the idea of *causal necessity* is derived ...

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- At T 1.3.2.6-8, *individual* causes are (tentatively) found to be related to their effects by the relations of *contiguity* and *priority*.
- But a key element – identified at T 1.3.2.11 as “NECESSARY CONNEXION” – is more elusive.
 - At T 1.3.2.13, Hume decides to search two “neighbouring fields” to find this element’s source:
 - First, he shows that the Causal Maxim is neither intuitively nor demonstratively certain (T 1.3.3).
 - Secondly, he turns to consider “why we conclude, that such particular causes must necessarily have such particular effects, and why we form an inference from one to another?” (T 1.3.3.9).

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Second “Field”: Causal Inference

- *Treatise* 1.3.4 argues that causal reasoning, if it is to result in real belief, must start from something perceived or remembered.
- T 1.3.5.1 sets out a corresponding agenda:

“Here therefore we have three things to explain, viz. *First*, The original impression. *Secondly*, The transition to the idea of the connected cause or effect [*i.e. causal inference*]. *Thirdly*, The nature and qualities of that idea [*i.e. Hume’s theory of belief*].”

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T 1.3.5: “Of the impressions of the senses and memory”

- *Treatise* 1.1 said that memory presents *ideas*, not *impressions*, but T 1.3.4.1 explains that these ideas “are equivalent to impressions”.
- Hume’s main point here is that the perceptions of the senses and memory are alike in being more *strong and lively* – having more *force and vivacity* – than the ideas of the imagination.
- That force and vivacity, apparently, is what enables them to act as a “foundation of that reasoning, which we build ... when we trace the relation of cause and effect” (T 1.3.5.7)

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T 1.3.6: “Of the inference from the impression to the idea”

- This section contains the first presentation of Hume’s famous argument concerning causal reasoning (or “induction”), which apparently raises the notorious “problem of induction”.
- In context, however, this topic is reached as a “neighbouring field” in Hume’s search for the origin of the idea of causal necessity, answering the question raised at T 1.3.3.9:

Why we conclude, that such particular causes must necessarily have such particular effects, and why we form an inference from one to another.

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The Famous Argument (×3)

- In *Treatise* 1.3.6, Hume doesn’t seem fully to appreciate his new argument’s significance – it is mainly a staging post in his search for the origin and nature of our idea of causation, and is not explicitly presented as sceptical in nature.
- In the *Abstract* of 1740 it is elevated to a much more prominent position, as the centre-piece of Hume’s “Chief Argument”.
- The fullest and clearest version is in the first *Enquiry*, Section 4, whose title acknowledges that it raises “Sceptical Doubts”.

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Causal Inference Is Not A Priori (1)

- In the *Treatise*, Hume starts by arguing that causal inference cannot be a priori, just because we can *conceive* of things coming out differently (*T* 1.3.6.1).
- Here he evinces the [common, but debatable] assumption that *any a priori inference would have to yield complete certainty*.
- “’Tis therefore by EXPERIENCE only, that we can infer the existence of one object from that of another” (*T* 1.3.6.2).

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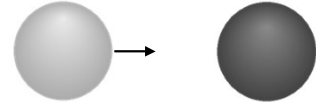
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A Thought Experiment

- In the *Abstract* and *Enquiry*, Hume imagines Adam (or ourselves, prior to experience), trying to predict the result of a billiard-ball collision:



how could he possibly make any prediction at all in advance of experience?



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Causal Inference Is Not A Priori (2)

- Hume's subsequent argument is stronger now, because he doesn't rely just on *conceivability*, but puts more emphasis on *arbitrariness*:
“Were any object presented to us, and were we required to pronounce concerning the effect, which will result from it, without consulting past observation; after what manner, I beseech you, must the mind proceed in this operation? It must invent or imagine some event, which it ascribes to the object as its effect; and it is plain that this invention must be entirely arbitrary. ...” (*E* 4.9)

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Experience and Constant Conjunction

- The kind of experience on which causal inference is based is repeated patterns of one thing, *A*, followed by another, *B*:
“Without any farther ceremony, we call the one *cause* and the other *effect*, and infer the existence of the one from that of the other.” (*T* 1.3.6.2)
“Thus ... we have ... discover'd a new relation betwixt cause and effect [in addition to *individual case* contiguity and priority] ... This relation is their **CONSTANT CONJUNCTION**.” (*T* 1.3.6.3)

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“Perhaps ’twill appear in the end ...”

- The capitalisation in *T* 1.3.6.3 clearly links back to *T* 1.3.2.11, as does the text:
“Contiguity and succession are not sufficient to make us pronounce any two objects to be cause and effect, unless ... these two relations are preserv'd in several instances [i.e. there's a constant conjunction].”
- But how can this give rise to the new idea of necessary connexion? Anticipating *T* 1.3.14.20,
“Perhaps ’twill appear in the end, that the necessary connexion depends on the inference, instead of the inference's depending on the necessary connexion”.

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A Question of Faculties

- Since causal reasoning from the impression of cause *A* to the idea of effect *B* is “founded on past *experience*, and on our remembrance of their *constant conjunction*” (*T* 1.3.6.4),
“the next question is, whether experience produces the idea [i.e. expectation of *B*] by means of the understanding or imagination; whether we are determin'd by reason to make the transition, or by a certain association and relation of perceptions?”
- Hume famously goes on to argue that reason (i.e. the understanding) cannot ground this inference, and concludes that it must be due to *association*.

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Hume's Alternative Explanation

- Reason can't explain inductive inference; so instead, it must arise from associative principles of the imagination:

"When the mind, therefore, passes from the idea or impression of one object [the cause A] to the idea or belief of another [the effect B], it is not determin'd by reason, but by certain principles, which associate together the ideas of these objects, and unite them in the imagination." (T 1.3.6.12)

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Reminder: A Hydraulic Theory

- Recall from Lecture 2 how Hume (at least in the *Treatise*) proposes associative transference of *force and vivacity* as the basis of a general "hydraulic" theory of belief and probability:

"I wou'd willingly establish it as a general maxim in the science of human nature, *that when any impression becomes present to us, it not only transports the mind to such ideas as are related to it, but likewise communicates to them a share of its force and vivacity.*" (T 1.3.8.2)

– See also the example of anticipating the throw of a die at T 1.3.11.12.

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Custom the Guide of Life

- Hume later calls this associative principle "custom" (T 1.3.7.6, 1.3.8.10, 1.3.8.12-14).

- In contrast with Locke, Chambers and others, Hume's attitude to it is far from negative:

"Tis not, therefore, reason, which is the guide of life, but custom." (A 16)

"Custom, then, is the great guide of human life. It is that principle alone, which renders our experience useful to us ..." (E 5.6)

- Custom also plays a central role in Hume's empiricist account of the origin of general ideas.

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General Ideas and Custom

"When we have found a resemblance among several objects ... we apply the same name to all of them ... After we have acquir'd a custom of this kind, the hearing of that name revives the idea of one of these objects, and makes the imagination conceive it with all its particular circumstances and proportions. But as the same word is suppos'd to have been frequently apply'd to other individuals ... the word not being able to revive the idea of all these individuals, only ... revives that custom, which we have acquir'd by surveying them. They are not really ... present to the mind, but only in power ... we ... keep ourselves in a readiness to survey any of them" (T 1.1.7.7, referred back to at T 1.3.6.14)

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The Revival Set

"... after the mind has produc'd an individual idea, upon which we reason, the attendant custom, reviv'd by the general or abstract term, readily suggests any other individual, if by chance we form any reasoning, that agrees not with it." (T 1.1.7.8)

"*some ideas are particular in their nature, but general in their representation.* A particular idea becomes general by being annex'd to a general term ... which from a customary conjunction has a relation to many other particular ideas, and readily recalls them in the imagination." (T 1.1.7.10)

– Garrett calls this *the revival set* of associated ideas.

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"Of the Reason of Animals"

- Significantly, *three* parts of the *Treatise* (1.3, 2.1, and 2.2) end with sections comparing humans with animals (and the last paragraph of T 2.3.9 says the similarity regarding "the will and direct passions" is too "evident" to need discussing).

– This is a major aspect of what Lecture 1 called Hume's "biological naturalism".

– It is noteworthy that over a century later, Charles Darwin was reading Hume "on the reason of animals" (*Enquiry* 9) around the time that he came up with the theory of natural selection.

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- Hume's main point in *T* 1.3.16 is to argue in favour of his "system concerning the nature of the understanding" (§4) by showing that "it will equally account for the reasonings of beasts".

"let any philosopher make a trial, and endeavour to explain that act of the mind, which we call *belief*, and give an account of the principles, from which it is deriv'd, independent of the influence of custom on the imagination, and let his hypothesis be equally applicable to beasts as to the human species; and after he has done this, I promise to embrace his opinion." (§8)

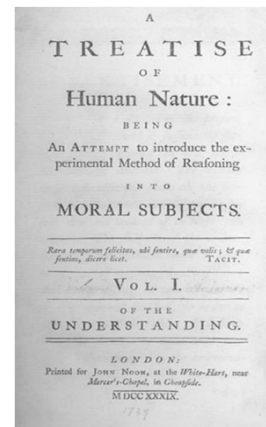
- "Reason" – in both humans and animals – "is nothing but a wonderful and unintelligible instinct" that enlivens our ideas according to custom (§9).

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3(d)

Associationism Later in the *Treatise*



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The Final Paragraph of the *Abstract*

- Oddly, the *Abstract* says relatively little about association of ideas, until the final paragraph which emphasises it hugely:

"Thro' this whole book, there are great pretensions to new discoveries in philosophy; but if any thing can intitle the author to so glorious a name as that of an *inventor*, 'tis the use he makes of the principle of the association of ideas, which enters into most of his philosophy." (*Abstract of the Treatise*, para. 35)

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Explaining Belief in Body

- With the senses and reason eliminated, our belief in "the continu'd and distinct existence of body ... must be entirely owing to the IMAGINATION" (*T* 1.4.2.14).
- Most of the rest of that section is devoted to an explanation of how the imagination generates the belief on associative principles.
- The key factor here is our tendency to confuse *similar* impressions, and falsely take them to be *identical* (and hence *enduring over time*, even across gaps in our perceiving them).

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Explaining the "Vulgar" Belief

- Hume summarises the account he is about to give at *T* 1.4.2.24:

"When we have been accustom'd to observe a constancy in certain impressions, and have found, that the perception of the sun or ocean, for instance, returns upon us after an absence or annihilation with like parts and in a like order, as at its first appearance, we are not apt to regard these interrupted perceptions as different, (which they really are) but on the contrary consider them individually the same, upon account of their resemblance. ..."

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"But as this interruption of their existence is contrary to their perfect identity, and makes us regard the first impression as annihilated, and the second as newly created, we find ourselves somewhat at a loss, and are involv'd in a kind of contradiction. In order to free ourselves from this difficulty, we disguise, as much as possible, the interruption, or rather remove it entirely, by supposing that these interrupted perceptions are connected by a real existence, of which we are insensible. This supposition, or idea of continu'd existence, acquires a force and vivacity from the memory of these broken impressions, and from that propensity, which they gives us, to suppose them the same; and ... the very essence of belief consists in the force and vivacity of the conception."

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The “Philosophical” Belief

- Philosophers realise that perceptions are not independent, but they are very reluctant (or psychologically unable) to give up belief in the continued and distinct existence of body.
- Hence they invent a new theory “of the double existence of perceptions and objects” as a “palliative remedy” (T 1.4.2.46).
- This “*has no primary recommendation either to reason or the imagination*”, and acquires all its imaginative appeal from the vulgar view.

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The False Simple Idea of Substance

- “The most judicious philosophers” [e.g. Locke, *Essay* II xxiii] consider “that our ideas of bodies are nothing but collections form’d by the mind of the ideas of the several distinct sensible qualities, of which objects are compos’d” (T 1.4.3.2).
- But the sorts of confusions outlined in T 1.4.2 lead us naturally to think of objects as *simple* things that retain their *identity* through time:
“The smooth and uninterrupted progress of the thought ... readily deceives the mind, and makes us ascribe an identity to the changeable succession ...” (T 1.4.3.3)

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The False Simple Idea of Identity

- In *Treatise* 1.4.6, Hume explains our “propension to ascribe an identity to [our] successive perceptions, and to suppose ourselves possess of an invariable and uninterrupted existence” (T 1.4.6.5).
- He takes this to involve the same sort of imaginative principles that are at play when we attribute identity “to plants and animals”. The similarity of the sequence of perceptions over time “facilitates the transition of the mind from one object to another, and renders its passage as smooth as if it contemplated one continu’d object” (T 1.4.6.6). Thus we come to think of them as “as invariable and uninterrupted”.

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Association and Identity

- “To prove this hypothesis”, Hume aims “to show ... that the objects, which are variable or interrupted, and yet are suppos’d to continue the same, are such only as consist of a succession of parts, connected together by resemblance, contiguity, or causation”, that is, by the association of ideas (T 1.4.6.7).
- We tend to attribute identity when changes are *proportionately* small and *gradual* (T 1.4.6.9-10), or when the changing parts are relevant to “some *common end* or purpose”, and all the more so when they bear “the reciprocal relation of cause and effect” to each other (T 1.4.6.11-12).

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Explaining Personal Identity

- The attribution of personal identity is just another instance of this phenomenon: “The identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one, and of a like kind with that which we ascribe to vegetables and animal bodies.” (T 1.4.6.15)
- Hume backs this up by appeal to his Separability Principle and his theory of causation, which tell us “that the understanding never observes any real connexion among objects, and that even the union of cause and effect ... resolves itself into a customary association of ideas”. So identity cannot *really* apply between our perceptions (T 1.4.6.16).

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Resemblance, Causation, Memory

- So “our notions of personal identity, proceed entirely from the smooth and uninterrupted progress of the thought along a train of connected ideas” (T 1.4.6.16).
- Contiguity plays little role here, so it is the mutual *resemblance* and *causation* between our perceptions that are crucial (T 1.4.6.17-19).
- Memory produces resemblance between our perceptions, and our concern about our future adds to their causal linkages. Memory also reveals the sequence of linked perceptions to us, and so is the chief “source of personal identity” (T 1.4.6.18-20).

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Sympathy in Books 2 and 3

- In *Treatise* 2.1.11, “Of the love of fame”, Hume appeals to the mechanism of *sympathy* (the word *empathy* is now closer in meaning) to explain the considerable impact of *pride* and *humility*.

“No quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself and in its consequences, than that propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, ... This is not only conspicuous in children, who implicitly embrace every opinion propos'd to them; but also in men of the greatest judgment and understanding, who find it very difficult to follow their own reason or inclination, in opposition to that of their friends and daily companions.” (T 2.1.11.2)

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- Sympathy plays a huge role in Hume's theory of the passions and morals, explaining (at least in the *Treatise*) why we feel concern for others, because *their* pleasures and pains become *our own*.
- Hume's explanation of sympathy is based mainly on association of ideas through resemblance, which enlivens *ideas* of others' feelings into *impressions* of the feelings themselves:

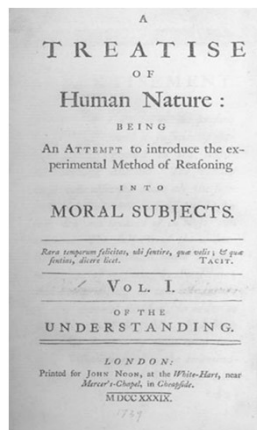
“We have a lively idea of every thing related to us. All human creatures are related to us by resemblance. Their persons, therefore, their interests, their passions, their pains and pleasures must strike upon us in a lively manner, and produce an emotion similar to the original one; since a lively idea is easily converted into an impression.” (T 2.2.7.2)

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3(e)

Custom and Association



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Mere Association, versus Custom

- The *Treatise* does not distinguish clearly between mere *association of ideas* (based on *resemblance*, *contiguity*, or *cause and effect*) and *custom*.
- These are fundamentally different, because the latter involves *inference to something unobserved*, whereas the former typically involves *flow of a train of thought to something previously observed*.
- So in the *Treatise*, Hume is faced with the problem of explaining why *association by causation* produces belief, whereas *association by resemblance or contiguity* does not ...

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Treatise 1.3.9: “Of the effects of other relations and other habits”

- §2: *causation* is not the only associative relation that conveys force and vivacity to a related idea: *resemblance* and *contiguity* do too (cf. T 1.1.4.1). Why does only *causation* generate *belief*?
- Hume proposes a neat associative answer:
 - §3-4: causal inference enables us to construct a *system of realities* that we combine with the realities that we perceive or remember.
 - §6-7: *resemblance* and *contiguity* lead our minds capriciously in various directions; causation presents objects that “are fixt and unalterable” (quotes follow).

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Resemblance and Contiguity

“There is no manner of necessity for the mind to feign any resembling and contiguous objects; and if it feigns such, there is as little necessity for it always to confine itself to the same, without any difference or variation. And indeed such a fiction is founded on so little reason, that nothing but pure *caprice* can determine the mind to form it; and that principle being fluctuating and uncertain, 'tis impossible it can ever operate with any considerable degree of force and constancy. The mind forseees and anticipates the change; and even from the very first instant feels the looseness of its actions, and the weak hold it has of its objects.” (T 1.3.9.6)

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“The relation of cause and effect ...

... has all the opposite advantages. The objects it presents are fixt and unalterable. The impressions of the memory never change in any considerable degree; and each impression draws along with it a precise idea, which takes its place in the imagination, as something solid and real, certain and invariable. The thought is always determin'd to pass from the impression to the idea, and from that particular impression to that particular idea, without any choice or hesitation.”

- Causal inference *focuses* our thought towards one particular idea, thus avoiding dissipation of the force and vivacity transfer, and resulting in *belief*.

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Religion and Association

- Although in the *Treatise* Hume conflates *custom* and *association*, he generally sees the former as epistemologically essential, and the latter as leading to confusion and fallacy. Further examples of such fallacy concern religion:
 - T 1.3.8.4 The “mummies” of Roman Catholicism enhance belief in saints (etc.) by perception of statues and associational *resemblance*.
 - T 1.3.8.6 Relics have a similar effect, associated to saints through *causation*.
 - T 1.3.9.9 *Contiguity* enhances the belief of pilgrims to Mecca or the Holy Land.

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Custom and Association in the *Enquiry*

- In the *Enquiry*, Hume treats *custom* as clearly distinct from *association of ideas* by causation.
 - *Custom* operates when, having previously seen *A* followed by *B* repeatedly and then seeing *A*, I *infer* that *B* will follow.
 - *Association of ideas by causation* operates when, having come to the belief that *A* and *B* are causally related, my thought of *A* leads me to thought of *B*. This will not usually involve any specific *inference*.

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“No one can doubt but causation has the same influence as the other two relations of resemblance and contiguity. Superstitious people are fond of the reliques of saints and holy men, for the same reason, that they seek after types or images, in order to enliven their devotion, and give them a more intimate and strong conception of those exemplary lives, which they desire to imitate.” (E 5.18)

“Suppose, that the son of a friend, who had been long dead or absent, were presented to us; it is evident, that this object would instantly revive its correlative idea, and recal to our thoughts all past intimacies and familiarities, in more lively colours than they would otherwise have appeared to us. This is another phænomenon, which seems to prove the principle above-mentioned [i.e. that the relation of *causation* gives rise to association of ideas and consequent increase in vivacity]. (E 5.19)

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“We may observe, that, in these phænomena, the belief of the correlative object is always presupposed; without which the relation could have no effect. The influence of the picture supposes, that we believe our friend to have once existed. Contiguity to home can never excite our ideas of home, unless we believe that it really exists. Now I assert, that this belief, where it reaches beyond the memory or senses, is of a similar nature, and arises from similar causes, with the transition of thought and vivacity of conception here explained.” (E 5.20)

- Thus he argues that *custom* is an associational principle, “analogous” to *association of ideas* (E 5.13), but his carefully chosen examples make clear that he is distinguishing between the two, rather than conflating them.

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Some Examination Questions

- What are natural relations for Hume? Why do they matter to him? (2008, 17)
- Critically examine the role of the association of ideas in Hume’s philosophy. (2018, 32)
- ‘Thro’ this whole book, there are great pretensions to new discoveries in philosophy; but if any thing can intitle the author to so glorious a name as that of an inventor, ‘tis the use he makes of the principle of the association of ideas.’ (HUME, Abstract of the *Treatise*) Examine the role of the association of ideas in Hume’s philosophy.

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David Hume, 1711-1776



4. Hume's Faculty and Logical Frameworks, and His Argument Concerning Induction

Peter Millican
Hertford College, Oxford

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Last Time ...

- We saw Hume's enthusiasm for *association of ideas*, in stark contrast with Locke and others, who had viewed it as a source of error.
 - Ideas can be associated by *resemblance*, *contiguity*, and *causation* (the three "natural relations"). But the associated ideas are still "separable" in imagination.
 - Inference from observed to unobserved operates by *custom*, which is a kind of associative principle (but is more than mere association by causation).
 - *Custom* thus provides the essential "guide of life", both for us and for animals. Without it, we could never draw inductive inferences.

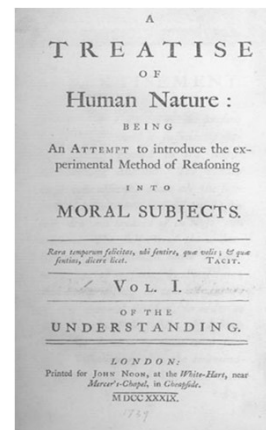
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- We also saw how the *association of ideas* plays a crucial role in Hume's account of *general ideas* (T 1.1.7), of *sympathy* (T 2.1.11, 2.2.7.2), and in the explanation of a number of key beliefs:
 - In external bodies (T 1.4.2);
 - In simple "substances" (T 1.4.3);
 - In objects that persist through time, and in particular, personal identity over time (T 1.4.6).
- Hume sees these beliefs as involving not bona fide *ideas* (copied from *impressions*), but rather, *confusions of ideas* or *fictions*.
 - In a sense, therefore, they are "quasi-beliefs" rather than genuine beliefs (i.e. enlivened ideas).

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4(a) Introducing Hume's Faculty Psychology



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Hume and the Faculties

- Some of Hume's most famous arguments are expressed in terms of *faculties*:
 - T 1.3.6 (and E 4): inductive inference results from processes of *the imagination*, and is not "determin'd by" *reason* or *the understanding*.
 - T 1.4.2: belief in external objects is produced by *the imagination* rather than by *reason*.
 - T 2.3.3: *reason* alone cannot motivate action.
 - T 3.1.1 (and EPM): morals are "deriv'd from" *moral sense* or *sentiment* rather than *reason*.

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Faculties, Induction, and Body

- "... the next question is, whether experience produces the idea by means of the understanding or imagination; whether we are determined by reason to make the transition, or by ... association ... of perceptions." (T 1.3.6.4)
- "The subject, then, of our present enquiry, is concerning the *causes* which induce us to believe in the existence of body: ... we ... shall consider, whether it be the *senses*, *reason*, or the *imagination*, that produces the opinion of a *continu'd* or of a *distinct* existence." (T 1.4.2.2)

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Faculties and Morality

- "... we need only consider, whether it be possible, from reason alone, to distinguish betwixt moral good and evil, or whether there must concur some other principles to enable us to make that distinction." (T 3.1.1.3-4)
- "... The rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason" (T 3.1.1.6)
- "There has been a controversy started of late ... concerning the general foundation of MORALS; whether they be derived from reason, or from SENTIMENT ..." (M 1.3)

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Outline of Humean Faculties

- *The (external) Senses*
These present to the mind *impressions of sensation* (e.g. of sight, touch, sound, smell, and gustatory taste), thus creating within the mind *ideas* that are copies of those impressions.
- *Reflection (or internal sense)*
Presents to the mind *impressions of reflection* ("secondary" impressions – see T 2.1.1.1 – that arise from the interplay of ideas in our mind, such as passions and emotions), thus again creating *ideas* that are copies of those impressions.

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■ *Imagination (or the Fancy)*

Traditionally the faculty of *having images* (but not confined to the *visual*). Hume takes *all* of our ideas to be *imagistic* (as they are copied from sense or feeling), so this is therefore *our primary thinking faculty*. The imagination can replay ideas in our thinking (often guided by *associative relations*), but can also *transpose, combine and mix* them.

■ *Memory*

Replays ideas in their original order (lacking the freedom of the imagination), and *with great vivacity*, almost like that of an impression. Thus Hume often refers to "impressions of the memory" (as at T 1.3.9.7, and note the title of T 1.3.5).

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Distinguishing Between Faculties

- imagination/reason (T 1.4.2.2); imagination/memory (T 1.3.5); imagination/the senses (T 1.4.2.2); imagination/passions (T 2.2.2.16).
- reason/memory (T 3.3.4.13); reason/the senses (T 1.4.2.2); reason/the will (T 2.3.3.4).
- memory/the senses (T 1.1.2.1).
- Hume *never* distinguishes between "reason" and "the understanding", or between either of these and "the judgment". And he insists that our "intellectual faculty" is undivided (T 1.3.7.5 n.20).

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Reason and Will: The Traditional Major Division

■ *Reason (or the Understanding)*

Traditionally the overall *cognitive* faculty: discovers and judges truth and falsehood.

■ *The Will*

Traditionally the *conative* faculty: forms intentions in response to desires and passions.

Hume only rarely refers to the will as a faculty, and his view of reason is complicated by his treating all of our reasoning as taking place – through imagistic ideas – within "the imagination".

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Hutcheson on the Faculties

"Writers on these Subjects should remember the common Divisions of the Faculties of the Soul. That there is 1. *Reason* presenting the natures and relations of things, antecedently to any Act of Will or *Desire*: 2. *The Will*, or *Appetitus Rationalis*, or the disposition of Soul to pursue what is presented as good, and to shun Evil. ... Below these [the Antients] place two other powers dependent on the Body, the *Sensus*, and the *Appetitus Sensitivus*, in which they place the particular *Passions*: the former answers to the *Understanding*, and the latter to the *Will*."

Illustrations upon the Moral Sense (1742), 219-20

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Hume on Reason and Understanding

- Hume, like Hutcheson, implicitly identifies reason with “the understanding” dozens of times, for example:
 - “When the mind [makes an inductive inference] it is not determin’d by *reason*, but by certain principles, which associate together the ideas of these objects, and unite them in *the imagination*. Had ideas no more union in *the fancy* than objects seem to have to *the understanding*, ...” (T 1.3.6.12)
 - Other examples are at T 1.3.6.4, 1.3.13.12, 1.4.1.1 & 12, 1.4.2.14, 46, & 57, 1.4.7.7, 2.3.3.2-6, 3.1.1.16-18 & 26; also compare 2.2.7.6 n. with 1.3.9.19 n.

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Hume on Reason as Cognition

- “Reason is the discovery of truth or falshood.” (T 3.1.1.9)
- “That Faculty, by which we discern Truth and Falshood ... the Understanding” (E 1.14, note in 1748/1750 editions)
- “*reason* ... conveys the knowledge of truth and falsehood” (M App 1.21)
- “... reason, in a strict sense, as meaning the judgment of truth and falsehood ...” (DOP 5.1)
- See also T 2.3.3.3, 2.3.3.5-6, 2.3.3.8, 2.3.10.6, 3.1.1.4, 3.1.1.19 n. 69, 3.1.1.25-27, 3.2.2.20, M 1.7, M App 1.6.

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Garrett on Humean “Reason”

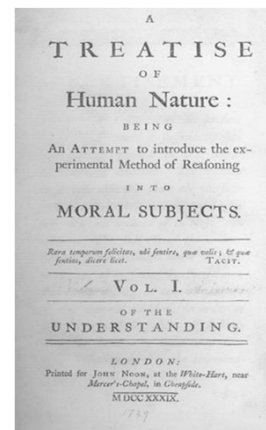
- Don Garrett claims that Hume thinks of reason as “the inferential or argumentative faculty of the mind” (e.g. 1997, p. 85).
- Although much debated, this does not make a huge difference to the significance of Hume’s positions, given that Garrett acknowledges:
 - Hume often includes *intuition* (i.e. perception of the self-evident) within the sphere of reason.
 - When considering whether or not reason can achieve something, Hume standardly considers only *good* inferences or arguments.

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4(b)

“Kinds of Evidence”, and Hume’s Fork



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“The Kinds of Evidence”

“It is common for Philosophers to distinguish the Kinds of Evidence into *intuitive, demonstrative, sensible, and moral*”.

(Hume, *Letter from a Gentleman*, 1745, para. 26)

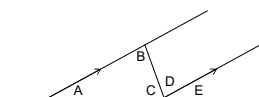
- By *intuition*, Hume means immediate self-evidence: the way we know that something is identical with itself, or that 2 is greater than 1.
- *Sensible* evidence means *from the senses*.
- *Demonstrative* and *moral* (or *probable*) reasoning are types of inference identified by John Locke ...

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Locke’s Account of Reasoning

- In *demonstrative reasoning*, each link in the inferential chain is “intuitively” certain.
 - Characteristic of mathematical reasoning.
 - Locke often cites the proof that a triangle’s angles sum to two right angles (Essay IV i 2, IV xv 1 etc.):
 - A = E
 - B = D
 - ∴ A + B + C = E + D + C
- Hume’s *Enquiry* (4.18) also calls this “*reasoning concerning relations of ideas*”



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- In *probable reasoning*, [some or all] links in the inferential chain are merely probable.

"Tell a Country Gentlewoman, that the Wind is South-West, and the Weather lours, and like to rain, and she will easily understand, 'tis not safe for her to go abroad thin clad, in such a day, after a Fever: she clearly sees the probable Connexion of all these, viz. South-West-Wind, and Clouds, Rain, wetting, taking Cold, Relapse, and danger of Death ..." (Locke, *Essay IV xvii 4*)

– Hume's *Enquiry* also calls this "*moral reasoning*" and "*reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence*" (we can say "*factual inference*" for short).

- For Locke, both types of reasoning involve rational *perception* of the links (*Essay IV xvii 2*).

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Is this the Same as the Modern *Deductive / Inductive Distinction*?

- A *deductive* argument (in the informal sense) is an argument in which the premises *logically guarantee* the truth of the conclusion: *it is not possible for the premises to be true and the conclusion to be false* (at the same time).

– There is also a related *formal* notion, in which a deductive argument is one that is *formally* valid.

- An *inductive* argument is one that draws a conclusion about the unobserved, by extrapolating from past experience.

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Hume's Conceivability Principle

- Hume frequently appeals to what is generally known as his *Conceivability Principle*:

"'Tis an establish'd maxim in metaphysics, *That whatever the mind clearly conceives includes the idea of possible existence*, or, in other words, *that nothing we imagine is absolutely impossible*. ..." (T 1.2.2.8)

"To form a clear idea of any thing, is an undeniable argument for its possibility, and is alone a refutation of any pretended demonstration against it." (T 1.3.6.5)

"whatever we *conceive* is possible, at least in a metaphysical sense: but wherever a demonstration takes place, the contrary is impossible, and implies a contradiction." (A 11, cf. E 12.28)

(See also e.g. T 1.3.3.3, 1.3.9.10, E 4.2, E 4.10, E 4.18.)

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Hume's Fork: Relations of Ideas ...

- Some propositions – which Hume in the *Enquiry* calls "relations of ideas" – are such that their falsehood is *inconceivable*.

– *Relations of Ideas* (in modern terms, *analytic* statements, understood as those whose meaning entails their truth) can be known *a priori* – without any dependence on experience or real existence – by inspecting ideas; hence their falsehood is inconceivable and they are necessarily true.

e.g. Pythagoras' Theorem. (E 4.1)

$3 \times 5 = \frac{1}{2} \times 30$. (E 4.1)

All bachelors are unmarried.

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... and Matters of Fact

– *Matters of Fact* cannot be known *a priori*, and their truth or falsehood are equally conceivable:

e.g. The sun will rise tomorrow. (E 4.2)

The sun will not rise tomorrow. (E 4.2)

This pen will fall when released in air.

– Perhaps the closest modern term is *synthetic*: a proposition whose truth "is determined by the facts of experience" (Ayer, *LTL* 1971, p. 105).

– But Hume (like Ayer) presumes that the analytic/synthetic, a priori/a posteriori, and necessary/contingent distinctions all coincide.

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Hume's Epistemological Empiricism

- Lecture 1 distinguished between *conceptual empiricism* (*all ideas* are derived from experience) and *epistemological empiricism* (roughly, *all knowledge* is derived from experience).

– Hume's Fork expresses the latter, with a refinement: *all knowledge (or even evidence) of matter of fact is founded on experience*.

– This is entirely compatible with *knowledge of relations of ideas* being a priori, based on the inconceivability of their falsehood (or more precisely, recognition that a proposition's falsehood would imply a contradiction).

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Inconceivability and Impossibility

- Hume is sometimes thought to accept the so-called the *Inconceivability Principle*, that *inconceivability implies impossibility*. The best evidence for this is:
 - “... We can form the idea of a golden mountain, and from thence conclude that such a mountain may actually exist. We can form no idea of a mountain without a valley, and therefore regard it as impossible.” (T 1.2.2.8)
- But this evidence is weak, and he appeals to the Conceivability Principle around 30 times without ever explicitly stating or implying the converse principle.
 - Hume also accepts that animals may have senses that yield ideas inconceivable to us, that there may be a vacuum or objects “specifically different” from our perceptions. For detailed discussion, see Millican (“Hume’s Fork”, 2017, §5).

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‘No Matter of Fact is Demonstrable’ (T 1.3.7.3, A 18, E 4.2, E 12.28)

- Suppose I claim to *demonstrate* that all crows are black.
 - Ridiculous, you would say! How can I possibly demonstrate such a contingent claim?
 - “Well”, I reply, “here’s my demonstration”:
 1. All crows are birds.
 2. All birds are black. \therefore All crows are black.
 - That’s a demonstrative argument, isn’t it?

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An Important Distinction

- The crows argument is indeed *demonstrative* in Locke’s sense, but that isn’t enough to make it a *demonstration of* its conclusion.
- To demonstrate *Q from P* is not the same as demonstrating *Q tout court*. The latter requires that the argument’s premises are known with certainty to be true.
- Hume denies that any matter of fact can be *demonstrated (tout court)*. He nowhere denies that one matter of fact can be demonstrated *from another*.

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But Isn’t Demonstrative Reasoning Limited to Mathematics?

- “There remain, therefore, algebra and arithmetic as the only sciences, in which we can carry on a chain of reasoning to any degree of intricacy, and yet preserve a perfect exactness and certainty.” (T 1.3.1.5)
- “It seems to me, that the only objects of the abstract sciences or of demonstration are quantity and number ...” (E 12.27)
- Hume’s account of this limit is in terms of the *relative clarity* of mathematical and moral ideas.
 - So if we want to find a *posteriori* demonstrative arguments of any complexity, we have to look to applied mathematics ...

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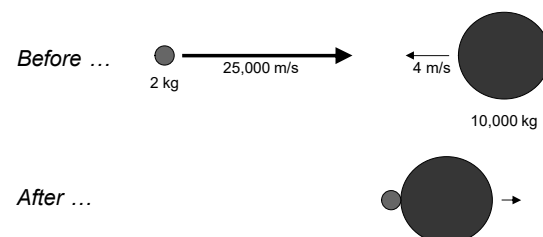
Hume on Applied Mathematics

- Hume’s most explicit discussion of “mixed mathematics” is in *Enquiry* Section 4:
 - “it is a law of motion, discovered by experience, that the moment or force of any body in motion [what we now call *momentum*] is in the compound ratio or proportion [i.e. is proportional to the *product*] of its solid contents [*mass*] and its velocity; and consequently, that a small force may remove the greatest obstacle ... if, by any contrivance ... we can encrease the velocity of that force, so as to make it an overmatch for its antagonist.” (E 4.13)

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- The momentum of a body is equal to its mass multiplied by its velocity.
- In any collision the total momentum of the colliding bodies (in any given direction) is conserved.



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"Geometry assists us in the application of this law ... but still the discovery of the law itself is owing merely to experience, and all the abstract reasonings in the world could never [give us any] knowledge of it." (E 4.13)

- "Abstract reasonings" encompasses demonstrative mathematics, as in the *Treatise*:

"Mathematics ... are useful in all mechanical operations ... But 'tis not of themselves they have any influence. ... Abstract or demonstrative reasoning ... never influences any of our actions, but only as it directs our judgment concerning causes and effects." (T 2.3.3.2)

- So it is very clear that Hume does not restrict "demonstrative" reasoning to the a priori.

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Is Hume's Fork Defensible?

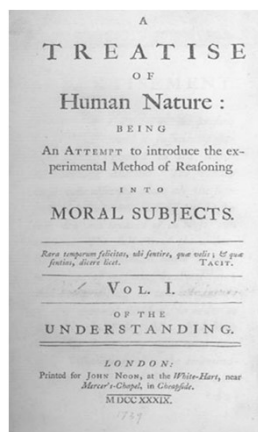
- Though orthodox for many years, Hume's Fork has been seriously challenged more recently:
 - W. V. O. Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (1951) attacked the analytic/synthetic distinction.
 - Saul Kripke's *Naming and Necessity* (1972) argued against identification of the a priori/a posteriori and necessary/contingent distinctions.
 - Hilary Putnam's "The Meaning of Meaning" (1975) attacked the idea that meaning resides in our "ideas" (or anything else "in the head").
 - Millican (2017) argues that Hume's Fork stands up surprisingly well to these and other challenges.

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4(c)

Hume's Dubious Dichotomy in the *Treatise*



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The Progress of Hume's Logic

- Hume's Fork is stated clearly in his first *Enquiry* of 1748, but it is foreshadowed in the *Treatise*, where he bases his logical framework on a theory of relations based loosely on Locke's (as we saw briefly in Lecture 3).
- This theory impacts superficially on the argumentative structure of the *Treatise*, but for understanding Hume's philosophy – both in the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* – Hume's Fork (based on the Conceivability Principle which is prominent in both works) is a more reliable guide.

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Hume's Dichotomy

- Hume starts T 1.3.1 by dividing his seven types of relation into two groups (T 1.3.1.1):
 - The Four "Constant" Relations
Those relations that "depend entirely on the ideas, which we compare together" (i.e. resemblance, contrariety, degrees in quality, proportions in quantity or number);
 - The Three "Inconstant" Relations
Those relations that "may be chang'd without any change in the ideas" (i.e. identity, relations of time and place, cause and effect).

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A Taxonomy of Mental Operations

- Hume argues, rather simplistically, that his seven relations map neatly onto four different mental operations:
 - *resemblance, contrariety, and degrees in quality* are "discoverable at first sight" (T 1.3.1.2)
 - *proportions of quantity or number* are susceptible of demonstration (T 1.3.1.2-5)
 - *identity and relations of time and place* are matters of perception rather than reasoning (T 1.3.2.1)
 - *causation* is the only relation "that can be trac'd beyond our senses, [to] existences and objects, which we do not see or feel" (T 1.3.2.3)

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	Constant relations	Inconstant relations
Perception	<u>Intuition</u>	<u>Sensory Perception</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ resemblance ■ contrariety ■ degrees in quality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ identity ■ situations in time and place
Reasoning	<u>Demonstration</u>	<u>Probability</u>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ proportions in quantity and number 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ causation *

* This explains why most of *Treatise* 1.3.2-14, nominally on "probability", focuses on causation and causal reasoning.

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Hume's Dichotomy – the motive

- Hume gives his taxonomy of relations in order to facilitate his arguments:
 - That the Causal Maxim cannot be intuitively certain (*T* 1.3.3.2);
 - That relations of virtue and vice are not demonstrable (*T* 3.1.1.19).
- He seems to be arguing from the principle:
 - Any proposition that is intuitively or demonstratively certain can contain only constant relations.

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The Failure of the Dichotomy

- Sadly, this is nonsense. There are many "intuitive" or "demonstrable" propositions involving identity, relations of time and place, or causation:
 - If A=B and B=C, then A=C.
 - Anything that lies inside a small building lies inside a building.
 - Every mother is a parent.
 - Anyone whose paternal grandparents have two sons, has an uncle.
- Garrett (2015, pp.92-3) attempts to defend Hume's theory, but this seems unlikely to work ...

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Demonstrability Is Not Analysable in Terms of Relations

- It is now well understood that whether a complex proposition is logically provable will often depend on things like order, bracketing, and scope, not on the nature of the specific relations involved. The first of the formulae below is demonstrable, the second is not, but they contain exactly the same relations:

$$\exists x (\forall y Bxy) \rightarrow \forall y (\exists x Bxy)$$

$$\forall y (\exists x Bxy) \rightarrow \exists x (\forall y Bxy)$$

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The Source of Hume's Mistake?

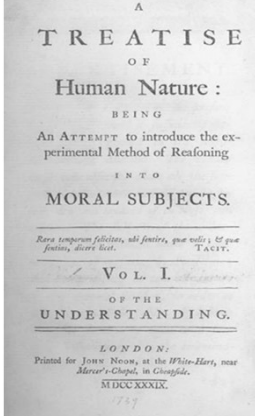
- I suggest that Hume confused, when considering propositions about objects:
 - Supervenience: *what is implied by the properties of the objects themselves*, independently of their relative situation etc.
 - Analyticity: *what is implied by our ideas (or impressions) of the objects themselves*, independently of ideas about their situation etc.

(See Bennett 1971: 250-6 and 2001: 242-4; also Millican 2017: §3, which highlights Hume's tendency to conflate objects and perceptions.)

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4(d) The Argument Concerning Induction



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The Role of Hume's Argument

- We saw in Lecture 3 how the argument of *Treatise* 1.3.6 arises in the course of Hume's explanation of causal inference.
 - He first argues that such inference cannot be a priori (from *conceivability of alternatives* in the *Treatise*; the *Adam thought-experiment* and *arbitrariness* in the *Abstract and Enquiry*).
 - Instead, causal inference seems to arise from experience of *constant conjunctions*.
 - Hume's argument rules out *reason* as the basis of such inference, leading to the conclusion that an associative process called *custom* is responsible.

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The Need for Extrapolation

- All inference to matters of fact beyond what we perceive or remember seems to be based on causation, and all our knowledge of causal relations comes from experience.
- Such learning from experience takes for granted that observed phenomena provide a guide to unobserved phenomena.
- We thus *extrapolate* from past to future on the assumption that they resemble. But do we have a rational basis for doing so?

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UP: The Uniformity Principle

- Hume then focuses on the principle (UP) presupposed by such extrapolation:
 - “If reason determin'd us, it wou'd proceed upon that principle, *that instances of which we have had no experience, must resemble those of which we have had experience, and that the course of nature continues always uniformly the same.*” (*T* 1.3.6.4)
 - This seems *conditional*: *IF* reason is involved, *THEN* the inference must be based on this principle.
 - Elsewhere, it's unconditional: “probability is founded on the presumption of a resemblance ...” (*T* 1.3.6.7)

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UP in the *Enquiry*

- In the *Enquiry* UP is less explicitly stated:
 - “all our experimental [experiential] conclusions proceed upon the supposition, that the future will be conformable to the past”. (*E* 4.19)
 - No suggestion of conditionality here (likewise *E* 5.2: “in *all* reasonings from experience, *there is a step taken by the mind*” corresponding to UP).
 - Vaguer than original *Treatise* UP, and so more plausible: we expect the future to “resemble” (*E* 4.21) the past, but not copy exactly.

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The Role of the Uniformity Principle

- Hume need not be suggesting that we think of UP *explicitly* when making inductive inferences (and *T* 1.3.8.13 says we mostly don't: *such inferences are typically immediate and unreflective*).
- Rather, in making an inductive inference, we *manifest* the assumption of UP:
 - Inferring from observed to unobserved is *ipso facto* treating “the past [as a] rule for the future” (*E* 4.21)
 - Hence the question arises: *can this assumption of UP be founded on reason* (and if not, what is the alternative explanation for why we make it)?

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Can UP be Founded on *Argument*?

- After stating UP in the *Treatise*, Hume immediately continues:
 - “In order therefore to clear up this matter, let us consider all the arguments, upon which such a proposition may be suppos'd to be founded; and as these must be deriv'd either from *knowledge* or *probability*, let us cast our eye on each of these degrees of evidence, and see whether they afford any just conclusion of this nature.” (*T* 1.3.6.4)
- By *knowledge*, Hume means *demonstration*, as becomes evident in the next sentence.

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- Both forms of argument for UP are ruled out, *demonstration* by the Conceivability Principle:

"We can at least conceive a change in the course of nature; which ... proves, that such a change is not absolutely impossible [and thus yields] a refutation of any pretended demonstration against it." (T 1.3.6.5)
- And *probable* argument by circularity:

"probability ... is founded on the presumption of a resemblance betwixt [observed and unobserved]; and therefore 'tis impossible this presumption can arise from probability." (T 1.3.6.7)

(At T 1.3.6.6-7 Hume needs the lemma that probable inference is causal and hence dependent on UP: diagram below shows duplication in *Treatise* version)

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Enquiry More Complete

- At T 1.3.6.4, Hume assumes that *demonstration* and *probable inference* are the only possible foundations for UP. In the *Enquiry*, he first rules out *sensation* and *intuition*:

"there is no known connexion between the sensible qualities and the secret powers; and consequently, ... the mind is not led to form such a conclusion concerning their constant and regular conjunction, by any thing which it knows of their nature." (E 4.16)

"The connexion ... is not intuitive." (E 4.16)

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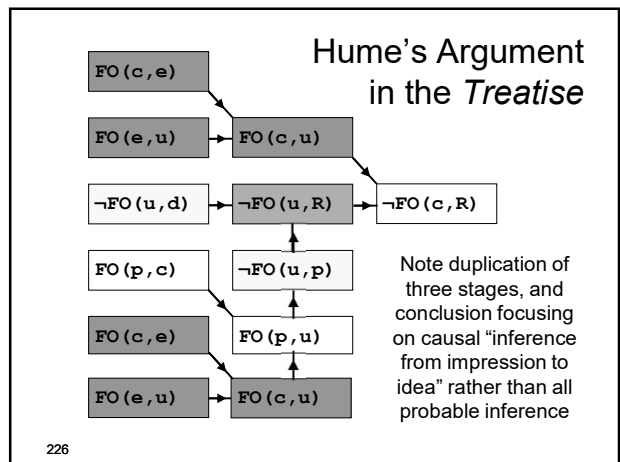
Argument Summary

- The logical structure of the argument can be represented in outline using the "founded on" relation (FO), together with:

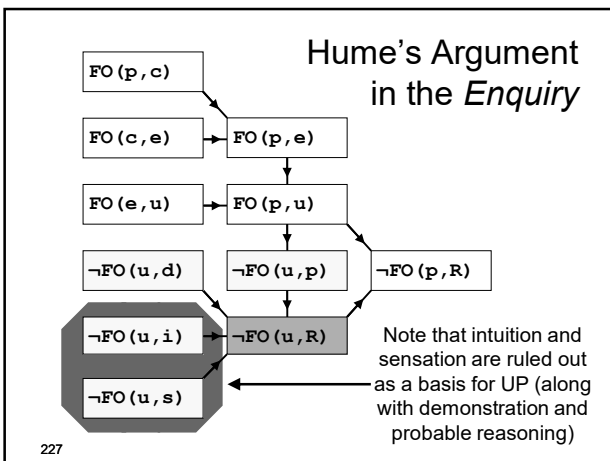
p Probable inference (observed to unobserved)	d Demonstration
c Causal reasoning	i Intuition
e (Reasoning from) Experience	s Sensation
u Uniformity Principle	
R Reason	

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"Sceptical Doubts ..." (*Enquiry* 4)

- Recall Hume's 1745 statement:

"It is common for Philosophers to distinguish the Kinds of Evidence into *intuitive*, *demonstrative*, *sensible*, and *moral*".
- His argument in the *Enquiry*:
 - Starts by showing that all factual inference is founded on the Uniformity Principle;
 - Then goes on to undermine all four possible evidential foundations for UP;
 - This looks very much like a sceptical strategy, as the title of the section suggests (*Treatise* 1.3.6 gave less evidence of sceptical intent).

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The “Sceptical” Conclusion

“even after experience has inform’d us of [causal] *constant conjunction*, ’tis impossible for us to satisfy ourselves by our reason, why we shou’d extend that experience beyond those particular instances, which have fallen under our observation.” (T 1.3.6.11, cf. 1.3.12.20)

“even after we have experience of the operations of cause and effect, our conclusions from that experience are *not* founded on reasoning, or any process of the understanding” (E 4.15)

“in all reasonings from experience, there is a step taken by the mind, which is not supported by any argument or process of the understanding” (E 5.2)

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Epistemology, or Cognitive Science?

- Does Hume view his discussion of induction, and its upshot, as being *epistemological* (concerning the possibility of good reasons for inductive belief) or *psychological* (concerning how our mind works)?
- The plausible answer here is: “*both!*”:
 - Hume does indeed draw conclusions about how our mind works in making inductive inferences.
 - But his argument proceeds by *ruling out* the competing hypothesis that we suppose continuing uniformity on the basis of having good evidence for it. It shows that *we do not in fact* base our inferences on “reason”, because *it would be impossible for us to do so*.

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But Is Hume Himself Sceptical?

- In the final section of the *Enquiry*, Hume revisits his argument of Section 4, apparently putting it in the mouth of “the sceptic”:

“The sceptic ... seems to have ample matter of triumph; while he justly insists ... that we have no argument to convince us” of UP (E 12.22)

- Hume then (at E 12.23) goes on to *answer* the sceptic, suggesting that his extreme doubts are pointless, and ultimately advocating (in the final Part 3 of Section 12) a form of “mitigated scepticism” which looks rather like scientifically informed common sense.

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- Summarising the sceptical argument:
 1. All inference to the unobserved depends on UP.
 2. UP cannot be given any independent (e.g. non-circular) epistemological foundation.

∴ We should give up inference to the unobserved.
- This way of arguing emphasises the sceptical premise 2, but Hume’s response to the sceptic implicitly emphasises instead premise 1:
 1. All inference to the unobserved depends on UP.

∴ We should take UP for granted.
- We shall be saying more about Hume’s attitude to scepticism in due course ...

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Some Examination Questions

- ‘The rationalists thought knowledge was possible in case where the empiricists thought we may only attain probability.’ Discuss. (2007, 10)
- What does Hume mean by ‘the imagination’, and what role does this faculty play in Book 1 of his *Treatise of Human Nature*? (2019, 34)
- What purpose is served by Hume’s analysis of philosophical relations into seven categories and his later division of these seven into ‘two classes’, depending on whether or not they ‘depend entirely on the ideas’ (*Treatise* 1.3.1.1)? Is his analysis of relations successful? (2019, 32)

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- Does Hume show that our propensity to expect the future to resemble the past is unreasonable? (2001, 16)
- Does Hume’s *Treatise* present a good case for the thesis that inductive inference is fundamentally irrational? (2006, 16)
- If ‘we have no reason to draw any inference concerning any object beyond those of which we have had experience’ (*HUME, Treatise* 1.3.12.20), does this mean Hume thinks that all inferences about the future are completely irrational? (2009, 18)
- Does custom justify inductive inferences or does it only explain why we make them? (2011, 18)
- Is Hume a sceptic about induction? (2020, 33)

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David Hume, 1711-1776



5. *Hume's Theory of Causation: Texts and Interpretation*

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Agenda

- Introduction – brief setting of the scene.
- The significance of causation in Hume's philosophy.
- 12 "Key Points" of Hume's theory of causation.
- Philosophical interpretation of Hume's theory: reductionist, subjectivist, projectivist, or sceptical realist?
- Are Humean powers in objects or the mind?

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Introduction

- "Of the idea of necessary connexion" (*Treatise* 1.3.14 and *Enquiry* 7):
 - Starts from Hume's "Copy Principle" that all ideas are copies of impressions;
 - Seeks the *impression* from which the *idea* of causal power or necessary connexion is copied;
 - This impression turns out to be the inductive "customary transition of the mind" that we make in response to constant conjunctions;
 - In both the *Treatise* and *Enquiry*, the argument culminates with two "definitions of

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Causation's Significance for Hume

- Only causation can ground inference to the unobserved, which is key to the *Treatise* project.
- *Treatise* 1.3, the longest part of the entire work, is framed by the analysis of causation.
- Other topics there include the Causal Maxim, induction, belief, probability, rationality, rules of scientific enquiry, and the reason of animals.
- Hume's analysis of causation impacts crucially on his later treatment of materialism (in *T* 1.4.5) and "liberty and necessity" (in *T* 2.3.1-2).
- The 1740 *Abstract* describes this nexus as constituting "the Chief Argument" of the *Treatise*.

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12 Key Points of Hume's Theory

1. Whether *A* causes *B* is an objective matter of fact, (often) discoverable by investigation.
2. Causes are standardly understood to be prior and contiguous to their effects.
3. The principal – and essential – component of the concept of causation is *necessary connexion*.
4. Causal necessity is not the same as *absolute* or *metaphysical* necessity.
5. Hume is a convinced determinist.
6. *Necessary connexion* is virtually synonymous with *efficacy*, *agency*, *power*, *force*, *energy* etc.

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7. Understanding these terms involves a simple *idea*, copied from an *impression of reflection*.
8. That impression arises from observed *constant conjunction* and our consequent experience of making inductive inference.
9. There are accordingly two "definitions of cause".
10. Hume also provides two definitions of necessity, applied to the issue of "liberty and necessity".
11. Where the two definitions come apart, *constant conjunction* dominates *inference of the mind*.
12. In the first *Enquiry*, Hume recognises quantitative powers, going beyond the *Treatise*'s relatively crude relations between discrete events.

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1. Objective Causation

- “Since therefore 'tis possible for all objects to become causes or effects to each other, it may be proper to fix some general rules, by which we may know *when they really are so*.” (T 1.3.15.2, my emphasis)
- “philosophers, observing, that, almost in every part of nature, there is contained a vast variety of springs and principles, which are hid, by reason of their minuteness or remoteness, find, that it is at least possible the contrariety of events may ... proceed ... from the secret operation of contrary causes. This ... is converted into certainty by farther observation; when they remark, that, upon an exact scrutiny, a contrariety of effects always betrays a contrariety of causes, and proceeds from their mutual opposition.” (E 8.13, copied from T 1.3.12.5)

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2. Causes are Prior and Contiguous

- “I find in the first place, that whatever objects are consider'd as causes or effects, are *contiguous*; and that nothing can operate in a time or place, which is ever so little remov'd from those of its existence.” (T 1.3.2.6 cf. T 1.3.15.1).
 - However a footnote refers to T 1.4.5 (§§10-14), where Hume explains that many perceptions have no spatial location. Contiguity is dropped in the *Enquiry* (7.29).
- “The second relation I shall observe as essential to causes and effects, is ... that of **PRIORITY** of time in the cause before the effect.” (T 1.3.2.7, cf. T 1.3.15.2)

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3. Necessary Connexion is Essential

- “An object may be contiguous and prior to another, without being consider'd as its cause. There is a **NECESSARY CONNEXION** to be taken into consideration; and that relation is of much greater importance, ...” (T 1.3.2.11)
- “we have ... discover'd a new relation betwixt cause and effect, ... their **CONSTANT CONJUNCTION**. We may now see the advantage of quitting the direct survey of [cause and effect], ... to discover the nature of that *necessary connexion*, which makes so essential a part of it.” (T 1.3.6.3)
- “According to my definitions, necessity makes an essential part of causation” (T 2.3.1.18, cf. E 8.25)
- “I define necessity two ways, conformable to the two definitions of cause, of which it makes an essential part” (T 2.3.2.4, cf. E 8.27).

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4. Causal Necessity is Not Absolute

- “[it is not] possible ... to conceive any thing contrary to a demonstration. But ... in reasonings from causation ..., this absolute necessity cannot take place, and the imagination is free to conceive both sides ...” (T 1.3.7.3)
- “... without consulting experience, ... Any thing may produce any thing. Creation, annihilation, motion, reason, volition; all these may arise from one another, or from any other object we can imagine.” (T 1.3.15.1)
- “to consider the matter *a priori*, any thing may produce any thing” (T 1.4.5.30, cf. 1.4.5.32)
- “The mind can always conceive any effect to follow from any cause, and indeed any event to follow upon another: whatever we conceive is possible, at least in a metaphysical sense ...” (A 11, cf. E 12.28 9)

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5. Hume's Determinism

- Hume argues at length that “the actions of the mind” are as determined as “the operations of external bodies” (T 2.3.1.3, 5-15; E 8.4, 7-20).
- He denies genuine chance or indifference (e.g. T 1.3.12.1, 2.3.1.18; E 6.1, 8.25).
- “The same cause always produces the same effect, and the same effect never arises but from the same cause.” (T 1.3.15.6)
- Determinism features in Hume's discussions on Evil (e.g. E 8.32 ff.) and suicide (“Of Suicide” para. 5).
- “I never asserted so absurd a Proposition as that any thing might arise without a Cause: I only maintain'd, that our Certainty of [its] Falshood ... proceeded neither from Intuition nor Demonstration; ...” (HL i 186)

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6. A Family of “Power” Terms

- “I begin with observing that the terms of *efficacy, agency, power, force, energy, necessity, connexion, and productive quality*, are all nearly synonymous; and therefore 'tis an absurdity to employ any of them in defining the rest. By this observation we reject at once all the vulgar definitions, which philosophers have given of power and efficacy; and instead of searching for the idea in these definitions, must look for it in the impressions, from which it is originally deriv'd. If it be a compound idea, it must arise from compound impressions. If simple, from simple impressions.” (T 1.3.14.4, cf. E 7.3, 8.25 n. 19)

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7. A Simple Idea (and hence Impression)

- “Mr. LOCKE, in his chapter of power, says, that, finding from experience, that there are several new productions in matter, and concluding that there must somewhere be a power capable of producing them, we arrive at last by this reasoning at the idea of power. But *no reasoning can ever give us a new, original, simple idea*; as this philosopher himself confesses. This, therefore, can never be the origin of that idea.” (E 7.8 n. 12, emphasis added)
- Note that *Hume’s quest for the impression succeeds*, so the “idea of necessary connexion” is *legitimated*: his account is not *debunking* the idea.

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8. The Impression depends on Inductive Inference (initially at least)

- “Perhaps ’twill appear in the end, that the necessary connexion depends on the inference, instead of the inference’s depending on the necessary connexion” (T 1.3.6.3)
- But having ascribed a causal connexion between A and B, we can then go on to make further inferences – often of great complexity – based on that ascription (so now the inference depends on the ascription of causal necessity). This is no longer instinctive: careful reflective reasoning is often needed to identify genuine causes (see point 11 below).

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9. Hume Provides Two Definitions of Cause

- “There may two definitions be given of this relation, which are only different, by their presenting a different view of the same object ... We may define a CAUSE to be ‘An object precedent and contiguous to another, and where all the objects resembling the former are plac’d in like relations of precedency and contiguity to those objects, which resemble the latter.’ If this definition be esteem’d defective, because drawn from objects foreign to the cause, we may substitute this other definition in its place, viz. ‘A CAUSE 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, and the impression of the one to form a more lively idea of the other.’” (T 1.3.14.31, cf. E 7.29)

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10. Hume Also Provides Two Corresponding Definitions of Necessity

- “Necessity may be defined two ways, conformably to the two definitions of *cause*, of which it makes an essential part. It consists either in the constant conjunction of like objects, or in the inference of the understanding from one object to another.” (E 8.27; T 2.3.2.4 is very similar)
- In the index to *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* (which includes the two *Enquiries*) “CAUSE and EFFECT ... Its Definition” refers to E 7.29 and 8.25 n. 19; “NECESSITY, its definition” refers to E 8.5 and 8.27.

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11. When the Two Definitions Come Apart, *Constant Conjunction* Dominates

- We should seek for reliable causal conjunctions underlying superficial inconsistencies (T 1.3.12.5, E 8.13-15), identify high-level *general rules* that can overcome prejudices (T 1.3.13.11-12), and apply the rules by which to judge of causes and effects (T 1.3.15).
- When we cannot identify *constant* relationships, we should base our expectations on experienced frequencies (i.e. *probability*, e.g. E 10.3-4, T 1.3.11-12).
- “The very essence” or power, cause and effect, or necessity, is constituted by constant conjunction (T 1.3.14.1.6, 1.4.5.33, 2.3.1.10, E 8.25 n. 19 etc.).

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A Significant Parallel in Hume’s Treatment of Virtue or Personal Merit

- In the second *Enquiry* of 1751, Hume gives two definitions of virtue or personal merit, one “objective” and one “subjective”:
 - “PERSONAL MERIT consists altogether in the possession of mental qualities, *useful or agreeable* to the *person himself* or to *others*. ... The preceding ... definition ...” (M 9.1, 9.12)
 - “[My] hypothesis ... defines virtue to be *whatever mental action or quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation*; ...” (M Appendix 1.10)

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Correcting the Scope of the Idea of Virtue

"every quality, which is useful or agreeable to ourselves or others, is ... allowed to be a part of personal merit [and] no other will ever be received, where men judge of things by their natural, unprejudiced reason ... Celibacy, fasting, penance, mortification, self-denial, humility, silence, solitude, and the whole train of monkish virtues; ... are ... every where rejected by men of sense, ... because they serve to no manner of purpose; neither advance a man's fortune in the world [not useful to self], nor render him a more valuable member of society [nor others]; neither qualify him for the entertainment of company [not agreeable to others], nor encrease his power of self-enjoyment [nor self]. We observe, on the contrary, that they cross all these desirable ends; stupify the understanding and harden the heart, obscure the fancy and sour the temper. We justly, therefore, transfer them to the opposite column, and place them in the catalogue of vices" (M 9.3)

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The Rules of *Treatise* 1.3.15

- These come immediately after the two definitions and their corollaries (T 1.3.14.31-36), and seem to be refinements of the first definition:

"Since therefore 'tis possible for all objects to become causes or effects to each other, it may be proper to fix some general rules, by which we may know when they really are so.

1. The cause and effect must be contiguous in space and time.
2. The cause must be prior to the effect.
3. There must be a constant union betwixt the cause and effect. 'Tis chiefly this quality, that constitutes the relation.
4. The same cause always produces the same effect, and the same effect never arises but from the same cause. ...

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5. ... where several different objects produce the same effect, it must be by means of some quality, ... common amongst them ...

6. ... The difference in the effects of two resembling objects must proceed from that particular, in which they differ. ...

7. When any object encreases or diminishes with the encrease or diminution of its cause, 'tis to be regarded as a compounded effect, deriv'd from the union of the several different effects, which arise from the several different parts of the cause."

8. ... an object, which exists for any time in its full perfection without any effect, is not the sole cause of that effect ...

Here is all the LOGIC I think proper to employ in my reasoning; ... [Phenomena] in nature [are] compounded and modify'd by so many different circumstances, that ... we must carefully separate whatever is superfluous, and enquire by new experiments, if every particular circumstance of the first experiment was essential to it."

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(T 1.3.15.2-11)

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12. Quantitative Powers in the *Enquiry*

- In the *Enquiry*, Hume fully recognises applied mathematics (cf. T 2.3.3.2), and that it involves forces: theoretical entities that can be quantified, and which enter into equations describing objects' behaviour:

– "it is a law of motion, discovered by experience, that the moment or force of any body in motion is in the compound ratio or proportion of its solid contents and its velocity; ..." (E 4.13)

– Two footnotes in *Enquiry* 7 (7.25 n.16, 7.29 n.17) help to bring such quantitative "powers" within the scope of Hume's theory of causation, generalising beyond constant conjunction and the rules of *Treatise* 1.3.15.

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"We find by experience, that a body at rest or in motion continues for ever in its present state, till put from it by some new cause; and that a body impelled takes as much motion from the impelling body as it acquires itself. When we call this a *vis inertiae*, we only mark these facts, without pretending to have any idea of the inert power; in the same manner as, when we talk of gravity, we mean certain effects, without comprehending that active power." (E 7.25 n.16)

"According to these explications and definitions, the idea of power is relative as much as that of cause; and both have a reference to an effect, or some other event constantly conjoined with the former. When we consider the *unknown* circumstance of an object, by which the degree or quantity of its effect is fixed and determined, we call that its power: And accordingly, it is allowed by all philosophers, that the effect is the measure of the power. ... The dispute whether the force of a body in motion be as its velocity, or the square of its velocity; ..." (E 7.29 n. 17)

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Philosophical Options for Interpreting Hume's Theory

- A. **Reductionism**: Hume's analysis aims to uncover the *meaning* of causal "power" and "necessity". Causation *just is* regular relations of succession (or more complex functional relationships etc.).
- B. **Projectivism** (includes Simon Blackburn's "Quasi-Realism"): Ascriptions of causal relations involve "*projection*" of something mental.
- C. **The New Hume** (named "Sceptical Realism" by John Wright): Hume's analysis concerns only causation *as it appears to us*. Real causation involves *absolute* (a prioristic) necessities in the objects, lying beyond our apprehension.

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(A) Reductionism and the Key Points

- The 12 Key Points all fit easily with a traditional reductionist account, which seems the most natural way of reading Hume's empiricist quest for the origin of the relevant idea (§§6-8).
- Such an account is also fully consistent with:
 - Causal objectivity (§1);
 - Definition in non-causal terms (§2 and §9);
 - *Necessary connexion* being essential to causation (§3), as long as it is defined in a parallel way (§10) and not conflated with *absolute* modality (§4);

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Hume's Semantic Argument

- Hume's entire argument is structured around the Copy Principle quest for an impression.
- The Principle is a tool for deciding questions of *meaning* (T 1.1.6.1, A 7, E 2.9).
- He aims to find causal terms' *meaning* or *significance* (T 1.3.14.14 & 27, A 26, E 7.3, 26 & 28).
- When the *subjective* impression is identified, the apparent "paradox" is embraced (T 1.3.14.24-7).
- The discussion culminates with two *definitions* of "cause", and consequences are drawn which apparently treat these as *genuine* definitions ...

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Corollaries of the Definitions

- "All causes are of the same kind ... For the same reason we must reject the distinction betwixt *cause* and *occasion* ... If constant conjunction be imply'd in what we call occasion, 'tis a real cause. If not, 'tis no relation at all ..." (T 1.3.14.32) *So what Nicolas Malebranche thought of as mere occasional causes are real causes.*
- "there is but one kind of *necessity* ... and ... the common distinction betwixt *moral* and *physical* necessity is without any foundation in nature." (T 1.3.14.33) *So Samuel Clarke is refuted with regard to liberty and necessity.*
- It is now easy to see why the Causal Maxim of T 1.3.3 is not intuitively or demonstratively certain. (T 1.3.14.35)
- "we can never have reason to believe that any object exists, of which we cannot form an idea." (T 1.3.14.36)

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Hume's Later Applications of his Two Definitions: T 1.4.5 and 2.3.1-2

- If we search for later paragraphs in the *Treatise* that mention definitions of "cause", "power" or "necessity", we find just three, at T 1.4.5.31 (on materialism), 2.3.1.18, and 2.3.2.4 (on liberty and necessity).
- If we search instead for "constant conjunction" or "constant union", we find mainly T 1.4.5.30-33, 2.3.1.416, and 2.3.2.4 (T 1.4.1.2 and 1.4.3.2 also mention "constant union" briefly).
- Similar searches in the *Enquiry* point very clearly to Section 8 (10.5, on miracles, is the only other).

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Causation and the Mind

- Hume is especially keen to establish causality and necessity in respect of the mind:
 - In principle, matter could be the cause of thought (T 1.4.5, "Of the Immateriality of the Soul")
 - The "doctrine of necessity" applies as much to the mental world as to the physical world (T 2.3.1-2 and E 8 "Of Liberty and Necessity")
- *Both turn on the claim that there is nothing to causal necessity beyond the two definitions.*
 - We'll return to these key arguments later, when considering the New Hume.

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The Two Main Problems for a Reductionist Reading

1. The two definitions are not co-extensive, so they cannot apparently both be correct reductive definitions of the same thing.
 - *Reply*: We have seen from §11 and §12 that when the two definitions come apart, the first definition – in terms of "constant conjunction" and objective functional relationships – dominates the second.
2. Positive reductionism is inconsistent with Hume's notorious (and oft-repeated) insistence that necessity is only "in the mind" ...

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- "Necessity, then, ... is nothing but an internal impression of the mind" (T 1.3.14.20);
- "necessity is something, that exists in the mind, not in objects" (T 1.3.14.22);
- "the necessity or power ... lies in the determination of the mind ... The efficacy or energy of causes is [not] plac'd in the causes themselves ...; but belongs entirely to the soul ... 'Tis here that the real power of causes is plac'd, along with their connexion and necessity. (T 1.3.14.23);
- "power and necessity ... are ... qualities of perceptions, not of objects, and are internally felt by the soul, and not perceiv'd externally in bodies" (T 1.3.14.24);
- "this connexion, tie, or energy lies merely in ourselves, and is nothing but that determination of the mind ..." (T 1.4.7.5);
- "the necessity ... is nothing but a determination of the mind" (T 2.3.1.4);
- "the necessary connexion is merely a perception of the mind" (T 2.3.1.6).

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Rejection of Subjectivism in the *Enquiry*

- By contrast, the *Enquiry* only twice suggests that causal necessity is subjective:
 - a) "The necessity of any action, whether of matter or of mind, is not, properly speaking, a quality in the agent, but in any thinking or intelligent being, who may consider the action; and it consists chiefly in the determination of his thoughts to infer the existence of that action from some preceding objects" (E 8.22 n. 18)
 - b) "When we say, therefore, that one object is connected with another, we mean only, that they have acquired a connexion in our thought, and give rise to this inference, by which they become proofs of each other's existence ..." (E 7.28)

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- a) E 8.22 n. 18 is in a footnote largely copied verbatim from T 2.3.2.2, which aims to explain "the prevalence of the doctrine of liberty". And it clearly describes necessity in terms of *potential* (not *actual*) inference:

"... The necessity of any action, whether of matter or of mind, is not, properly speaking, a quality in the agent, but in any thinking or intelligent being, who may consider the action; and it consists chiefly in the determination of his thoughts to infer the existence of that action from some preceding objects; ... however we may imagine we feel a liberty within ourselves, a spectator can commonly infer our actions from our motives and character; and even where he cannot, he concludes in general, that he might, were he perfectly acquainted with every circumstance of our situation and temper, and the most secret springs of our complexion and disposition. Now this is the very essence of necessity, according to the foregoing doctrine."

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- b) E 7.28 seems subjectivist, but it occurs in the paragraph immediately before the two definitions of cause. As soon as the definitions have been presented, an alternative objectivist understanding becomes available:

- "When we say, therefore, that one object is connected with another, we mean only, that they have acquired a connexion in our thought, and give rise to this inference, ..." (E 7.28)

<E 7.29: Two definitions of cause>

- We say, for instance, that the vibration of this string is the cause of this particular sound. But what do we mean by that affirmation? We either mean, that this vibration is followed by this sound, and that all similar vibrations have been followed by similar sounds: Or, that this vibration is followed by this sound, and that upon the appearance of one, the mind anticipates the senses, and forms immediately an idea of the other. We may consider the relation of cause and effect in either of these two lights; but beyond these, we have no idea of it. (E 7.29)

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(B) Projectivism

- "'Tis a common observation, that the mind has a great propensity to spread itself on external objects, and to conjoin with them any internal impressions, which they occasion, ... the same propensity is the reason, why we suppose necessity and power to lie in the objects ..., not in our mind, ..." (T 1.3.14.25)
- "Thus the distinct boundaries and offices of *reason* and of *taste* are easily ascertained. ... The one discovers objects as they really stand in nature, without addition or diminution: The other has a productive faculty, and gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment, raises, in a manner, a new creation." (M App 1.21)

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- So first, Hume thinks of causal projectivism as *an error* that explains why we are naturally biased *against* his [correct] theory.
- Secondly, he distinguishes *reason* from *taste*:
 - *reason* presents objects "without addition or diminution", is "cool and disengaged", and is the domain of truth and falsehood (M App 1.21);
 - *taste* "gilds or stains" with "colours, borrowed from internal sentiment", and "as it gives pleasure or pain, ... becomes a motive to action" (M App 1.21).
- Crucially, causal judgements are on the side of *reason*; "gilding or staining" *distinguishes* judgements of taste from causal judgements.

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Empiricism and Projectivism

- Hume's Copy Principle obliges him to seek an "impression of reflection" to ground any idea that is not straightforwardly sensory:
 - Necessary connexion is grounded in (something like) the awareness of inductive inference;
 - Moral notions are grounded in generalised approbation and disapprobation;
 - Beauty is grounded in "a peculiar delight and satisfaction"; deformity in a corresponding pain.
- Thus the ascription of these ideas *inevitably* involves *some* element of "projection".

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(C) The "New Hume"

- Some scholars (most influentially John Wright, Galen Strawson, and Edward Craig) argue that Hume believes we have a deeper conception of causal necessity, going beyond what is yielded by the impression-copied idea and the two definitions.
 - Strawson calls this supposed deeper notion "Causation" (with a capital "C").
 - Blackburn calls it "thick" causal connexion.
- But what can this supposed deeper conception be, when it cannot involve a bona fide *idea* (as there is no impression that such an idea could copy)?

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The Alleged AP Conception

- As interpreted in the "New" way, Hume thinks that *genuine* causation in things must involve an absolute necessity *which, if only we knew it, would license a priori inference of the effect, with complete certainty*. Strawson calls this the "AP" (a priori) Property.
 - One obvious objection is that this conflicts with Hume's oft-repeated Conceivability Principle that "whatever we *conceive* is possible, at least in a metaphysical sense" (A 11), because if there were a "hidden" absolute necessity connecting *A* with *B*, then the fact that we can conceive of *A* not being followed by *B* could not imply that this is a genuine metaphysical possibility. (Strawson, strangely, ignores this problem!)

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The Most Serious Objection to the "New Hume"

- On the "New" reading, Hume understands genuine causation, and causal necessity, to involve *more* than satisfaction of his paired definitions.
- But if we look at how Hume himself *applies* his paired definitions later in the *Treatise and Enquiry* – in the corollaries of T 1.3.14, at the end of T 1.4.5, and especially the discussions of "liberty and necessity" (T 2.3.1-2; E 8), he is clearly relying on the claim that *the two definitions do in fact capture what genuine causation, and causal necessity, are*.

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Of the Immateriality of the Soul

- The standard anti-materialist argument insists that material changes cannot cause thought, because the two are so different. Yet ...
 - "to refute it ... We need only reflect on what has been prov'd ..., that we are never sensible of any connexion betwixt causes and effects, and that 'tis only by our experience of their constant conjunction, we can arrive at any knowledge of this relation. Now as all objects, which are not contrary, are susceptible of a constant conjunction, and as no real objects are contrary; ... to consider the matter a priori, any thing may produce any thing, ... however little the

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- Hume then goes further, to insist that material motion *is indeed* found to be the cause of thought:

- "we find ... by experience, that they are constantly united; which being all the circumstances, that enter into the idea of cause and effect ... we may certainly conclude, that motion may be, and actually is, the cause of thought and perception." (T 1.4.5.30)
- "all objects, which are found to be constantly conjoin'd, are upon that account only to be regarded as causes and effects" (T 1.4.5.32)
- "as the constant conjunction of objects constitutes the very essence of cause and effect, matter and motion may often be regarded as the causes of thought, as far as we have any notion of that relation." (T 1.4.5.33)

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Of Liberty and Necessity

- Hume's argument that exactly the same necessity is applicable to the moral and physical realms (evident also in the corollaries to his two definitions at T 1.3.14.32-33) depends on taking our understanding of necessary connexion to be completely exhausted by the two factors of constant conjunction and customary inference.
- These two factors can be shown to apply in the moral realm, and he insists that we cannot even *ascribe* any further necessity to matter:

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"the ... advocates for free-will [of a sort Hume opposes] must allow this union and inference with regard to human actions. They will only deny, that this makes the whole of necessity. But then they must shew, that we have an idea of something else in the actions of matter; which, according to the foregoing reasoning, is impossible." (A 34, cf. T 2.3.1.3-18, T 2.3.2.4, E 8.4-22, E 8.27)

- Hume is arguing here *against* a (capital "C") Causal Realist, who denies that satisfaction of his paired definitions "makes the whole of necessity", and who accordingly believes that we are able to consider that there is "something else [to necessity] in the actions of matter".

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"A New Definition of Necessity"

- Even more explicitly than in "Of the Immateriality of the Soul", Hume portrays his argument about "liberty and necessity" as turning crucially on his new understanding of necessity:
"Our author pretends, that this reasoning puts the whole controversy in a new light, by giving a new definition of necessity." (A 34)
- This requires that his definitions be understood as specifying "the very essence of necessity", an emphatic phrase used four times in this context (T 2.3.1.10, 2.3.2.2; E 8.22 n. 18, 8.25 n. 19).

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Humean Objective Powers?

- Hume does believe in real causes, and – since he thinks that causation essentially involves causal power or necessity – it seems to follow that, *on his own interpretation of the relevant terms*, ...
- Hume also believes in real causal powers and real causal necessity.
- But does he (or should he, on his own principles) believe in powers in objects? This is less clear.

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"Powers" as Marks/Measures of an Effect

"When we call this a *vis inertiae*, we only mark these facts, without pretending to have any idea of the inert power; in the same manner as, when we talk of gravity, we mean certain effects, without comprehending that active power." (E 7.25 n.16)

"When we consider the *unknown* circumstance of an object, by which the degree or quantity of its effect is fixed and determined, we call that its power: And accordingly, it is allowed by all philosophers, that the effect is the measure of the power. ... The dispute whether the force of a body in motion be as its velocity, or the square of its velocity; ..." (E 7.29 n. 17)

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Objective Powers, without Powers in Objects?

- But in many cases, the outcome of some causal interaction will depend, perhaps in some complex manner, on *many* quantitative factors rather than just one (e.g. momentum or kinetic energy).
- In such cases, it seems inappropriate to refer to *the "power" of an object* as that single factor "by which the degree or quantity of its effect is fixed and determined".
- But apparently the Humean *can* nevertheless continue to speak of "objective powers".

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Some Examination Questions

- 'The central defect of Hume's discussion of causation is that from beginning to end we do not know what "necessary connexion" means.' Do you agree? (2000, 17)
- 'Either we have no idea of necessity, or necessity is nothing but that determination of the thought to pass from causes to effects and from effects to causes, according to their experience'd union' (HUME). Should Hume have drawn the first rather than the second of these two conclusions? (2002, 17)
- 'If I can perceive a knife and perceive a cake, Hume has no good reason for denying that I can perceive a knife cutting a cake.' Discuss. (2011, 17)

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Hume's Account of the Idea of Necessary Connexion

- Was Hume right in equating power and necessary connexion? (2004, 18)
- Where, according to Hume, does the idea of necessary connexion come from? (2005, 16)
- 'We must distinctly and particularly conceive the connexion betwixt cause and effect, and be able to pronounce, from a simple view of the one, that it must be follow'd or preceded by the other. This is the true manner of conceiving a particular power in a particular body.' (HUME, *Treatise* 1.3.14). Discuss. (2016,36)

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Implications of Hume's Account

- Does Hume's account of our idea of necessary connexion preclude him from believing that there are hidden causal powers? (2006, 17)
- What is the point of Hume's account of the idea of necessary connexion? Does it succeed? (2010, 18)
- What are the implications of Hume's account of the origin of our idea of causal power for the metaphysics of causation? (2013, 18)
- Why does Hume give two definitions of 'cause'? (2017, 34)

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Is Hume a Regularity Theorist?

- Does Hume hold a regularity theory of causation? (2003, 17)
- Does Hume think that his two definitions of 'cause' exhaust the nature of causation? Is he right? (2015, 18)

Projectivism

- 'The mind has a great propensity to spread itself on external objects.' (HUME) Could this be why we believe in causal power? (2007, 18)

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- 'We ... are never sensible of any connexion betwixt causes and effects, and ... 'tis only by our experience of their constant conjunction, we can arrive at any knowledge of this relation. Now as all objects, which are not contrary, are susceptible of a constant conjunction, and as no real objects are contrary; I have inferr'd from these principles [cf. *T* 1.3.15], that to consider the matter *a priori*, any thing may produce any thing, and that we shall never discover a reason, why any object may or may not be the cause of any other, however great, or however little the resemblance may be betwixt them. ... we find ... by experience, that [thought and motion] are constantly united; which being all the circumstances, that enter into the idea of cause and effect, when apply'd to the operations of matter, we may certainly conclude, that motion may be, and actually is, the cause of thought and perception.' (HUME, *Treatise* 1.4.5.30) Discuss. (2019, 35)

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Note that it's also worth knowing about another author's theory (e.g. Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz)

- Critically compare and contrast Hume's theory of causation with that of at least one other author covered by this paper. (2018, 36)
- Critically compare and contrast Hume's views on causation with those of another author on this paper. (2020, 35)

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David Hume, 1711-1776



6. Hume on the External World and Material Substance

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Treatise Book 1 Part 4 “Of the Sceptical and Other Systems of Philosophy”

- We have seen that *Treatise* Book 1 Part 3 was mostly focused on causation and associated topics: causal reasoning, belief, probability, and the source of the idea of necessary connexion or causal power.
- Book 1 Part 4 has a radically different flavour, starting with an extreme sceptical argument in Section 1.4.1, scepticism about external objects in 1.4.2-4 and about mental substance in 1.4.5, then denying a substantial self in 1.4.6, and leading ultimately to what looks like a sceptical meltdown in the concluding Section 1.4.7.

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Scepticism with Regard to Reason

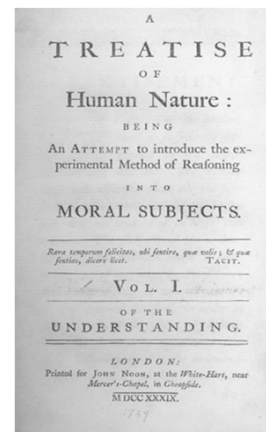
- “Of Scepticism with Regard to Reason” (*Treatise* 1.4.1) contains a radical sceptical argument which seems to wreak havoc in the Conclusion of Book 1.
 - It first argues that we are humanly fallible, even when we do mathematical reasoning; hence “all knowledge degenerates into probability”.
 - To take this fallibility into account, we have to judge the probability of error in our mathematical judgements.
 - But such judgements of error are themselves fallible, so we are rationally obliged to judge that probability of error too, leading to a fatal regress. Thus “all the rules of logic require ... a total extinction of belief and evidence”.
- We’ll return to this in the final lecture.

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Treatise 1.4.2 “Of Scepticism with Regard to the Senses”



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Presupposing the Existence of Body

- *Treatise* 1.4.2 is complex, difficult, and confusing, but nevertheless rewarding.
- Hume starts out by alluding to a point that he had emphasised in *T* 1.4.1, that the sceptic continues to believe even when his beliefs cannot be defended, now applied to the belief in body:

“We may well ask, *What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body?* But 'tis in vain to ask, *Whether there be body or not?* That is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasonings.” (*T* 1.4.2.1).

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Doubts About the Existence of Body

- Hume accordingly announces that his agenda is to explain “the causes which induce us to believe in the existence of body” (*T* 1.4.2.2)
- But by the end of the section, his explanation of these causes is generating sceptical doubts:

“I begun ... with premising, that we ought to have an implicit faith in our senses ... But ... I feel myself *at present* of a quite contrary sentiment, and am more inclin'd to repose no faith at all in my senses, or rather imagination, than to place in it such an implicit confidence.” (*T* 1.4.2.56).

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Analysing the Belief

- Hume analyses the belief in body into two aspects, each of which is to be explained:
 - “why we attribute a CONTINU'D existence to objects, even when they are not present to the senses”
 - “why we suppose them to have an existence DISTINCT from the mind and perception”
 - He goes on to explain that the *distinctness* of bodies involves both their *external* position and also their *independence*. (T 1.4.2.2)

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Which Faculty?

- Having distinguished *continuity* from *distinctness*, Hume remarks that each implies the other. He then declares his aim, to:
 - “consider, whether it be the *senses*, *reason*, or the *imagination*, that produces the opinion of a *continu'd* or of a *distinct* existence. These are the only questions, that are intelligible on the present subject. For as to the notion of external existence, when taken for something specifically different from perceptions, we have already shown its absurdity [in T 1.2.6]”

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Eliminating the Senses

- In discussing the *senses* as a potential source of the belief in body, Hume seems to treat them as bare sources of impressions. As such,
 - They obviously cannot “give rise to the notion of the *continu'd* existence of their objects, after they no longer appear to the senses”. (T 1.4.2.3)
 - Nor can they “offer ... their impressions as the images of something *distinct*, or *independent*, and *external* ... because they convey to us nothing but a single perception, and never give us the least intimation of any thing beyond.” (T 1.4.2.4)

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Fallacy, Illusion, and Transparency

- “If our senses, therefore, suggest any idea of distinct existences, they must convey the impressions as those very existences, by a kind of fallacy and illusion.” (T 1.4.2.5)
- This is an illusion because the perceptions of the senses are, so to speak, *transparent*:
 - “all sensations are felt by the mind, such as they really are” (T 1.4.2.5)
 - “since all actions and sensations of the mind are known to us by consciousness, they must ... appear in every particular what they are ...” (T 1.4.2.7)

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Externality to the Body

- It might seem relatively unproblematic for our senses to present things as external to our body, but this presupposes that we have identified our body to start with:
 - “ascribing a real and corporeal existence to [our limbs etc.] is an act of the mind as difficult to explain, as that which we examine at present.” (T 1.4.2.9)
- Hume adds considerations from the nature of our various senses, and the primary/secondary quality distinction (T 1.4.2.12-13).

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Reason and the Vulgar View

- Children, peasants, and the “vulgar” in general clearly believe in the external world without consulting philosophical reason (T 1.4.2.14):
 - “For philosophy informs us, that every thing, which appears to the mind, is nothing but a perception, and is interrupted, and dependent on the mind; whereas the vulgar confound perceptions and objects, and attribute a distinct continu'd existence to the very things they feel or see. This sentiment, then, as it is entirely unreasonable, must proceed from some other faculty than the understanding.”

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Eliminating Reason

- Even if we adopt the philosophers' view, and "distinguish our perceptions from our objects", we still can't reason from one to the other.
- Hume spells this out at *T* 1.4.2.47 (cf. *E* 12.12), arguing that since we are directly acquainted only with the perceptions, we are unable to establish any causal correlation with objects, and so cannot infer the latter by causal reasoning, the only kind of "argument ... that can assure us of matter of fact" (*T* 1.4.2.14).

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Turning to the Imagination

- With the senses and reason eliminated, our belief in "the continu'd and distinct existence of body ... must be entirely owing to the IMAGINATION" (*T* 1.4.2.14).
- Most of the rest of the section is devoted to an explanation of how the imagination generates the belief.
- At *T* 1.4.2.18-19, Hume identifies *constancy* and *coherence* as the key factors that induce us to judge perceptions as external to us.

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Constancy and Coherence

- *Constancy* of perceptions involves their similarity, when they "return upon me" (e.g. after closing then opening my eyes) "without the least alteration" (*T* 1.4.2.18).
- *Coherent* perceptions change, but in regular (and hence expected) or explicable patterns.
 - At *T* 1.4.2.19, Hume seems to gesture towards "Inference to the Best Explanation" (IBE), whereby we infer the existence of unperceived objects to give a coherent explanation of our observations. (This contrasts with *T* 1.4.2.47, which assumes that only crude induction could ground inference to an object.)

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Explaining the Vulgar View

- Hume summarises the account he is about to give at *T* 1.4.2.24:

"When we have been accustom'd to observe a constancy in certain impressions, and have found, that the perception of the sun or ocean, for instance, returns upon us after an absence or annihilation with like parts and in a like order, as at its first appearance, we are not apt to regard these interrupted perceptions as different, (which they really are) but on the contrary consider them individually the same, upon account of their resemblance. ..."

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"But as this interruption of their existence is contrary to their perfect identity, and makes us regard the first impression as annihilated, and the second as newly created, we find ourselves somewhat at a loss, and are involv'd in a kind of contradiction. In order to free ourselves from this difficulty, we disguise, as much as possible, the interruption, or rather remove it entirely, by supposing that these interrupted perceptions are connected by a real existence, of which we are insensible. This supposition, or idea of continu'd existence, acquires a force and vivacity from the memory of these broken impressions, and from that propensity, which they give us, to suppose them the same; and ... the very essence of belief consists in the force and vivacity of the conception."

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The Four-Part Account

- At *T* 1.4.2.25 (cf. *T* 1.4.2.43), Hume summarises the four parts of this account, which he then discusses in depth:
 - The principle of individuation, *T* 1.4.2.26-30
 - How resemblance leads us to attribute identity to interrupted perceptions, *T* 1.4.2.31-36
 - Why we unite interrupted perceptions by "feigning a continu'd being", *T* 1.4.2.37-40
 - Explaining the force and vivacity of conception, which constitutes belief (though it's a vivacious *fiction* rather than bona fide *idea*), *T* 1.4.2.41-42

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A Problematic Assumption

- In Hume's complex discussion of parts two to four of his "system" – from paragraphs 31 to 46 – he speaks with the vulgar by supposing "that there is only a single existence, which I shall call indifferently *object* or *perception*, according as it shall seem best to suit my purpose" (§31).
 - But the *causal* explanation of the vulgar belief is not a *rational* explanation: it turns out to involve *subcognitive* confusions and conflation on the part of the believer.
 - So we should not expect this explanation to be expressible in vulgar terms: philosophical distinctions (e.g. between object and perception) might be essential.

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Fallacy and Fiction

- Having explained how the vulgar view arises, Hume emphasises (*T* 1.4.2.43) how much falsehood and error it involves:
 - False attribution of identity, into which we are "seduced" by the resemblance of perceptions.
 - The *fiction* of a continued existence, which "is really false" but serves "to remedy the interruption of our perceptions".
 - "experiments [reveal that] ... the doctrine of the independent existence of our sensible perceptions is contrary to the plainest experience" (*T* 1.4.2.44).

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The Key Experiment

- "When we press one eye with a finger, we immediately perceive all the objects to become double" (*T* 1.4.2.45)
 - "But as we do not attribute a continu'd existence to both these perceptions"
 - "and as they are both of the same nature"
 - "we clearly perceive that all our perceptions are dependent on our organs, and the disposition of our nerves and animal spirits."
- A similar argument will come at *T* 1.4.4.4.

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The Philosophical System

- Philosophers realise that perceptions are not independent, but they are very reluctant (or psychologically unable) to give up belief in the continued and distinct existence of body.
- Hence they invent a new theory "of the double existence of perceptions and objects" as a "palliative remedy" (*T* 1.4.2.46).
- This "*has no primary recommendation either to reason or the imagination*", and acquires all its imaginative appeal from the vulgar view.

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Recapitulation and Overview

- In spelling out these points, Hume repeats or expands some of his earlier arguments:
 - Reason cannot establish continuing objects causing our perceptions (*T* 1.4.2.47).
 - The imagination leads naturally to the vulgar, rather than philosophical, view (*T* 1.4.2.48).
 - Hence the philosophical view must acquire its force from the vulgar view (*T* 1.4.2.49-52).
 - This explains various aspects of the philosophical view (*T* 1.4.2.53-55).

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The Despairing Conclusion

"I cannot conceive how such trivial qualities of the fancy, conducted by such false suppositions, can ever lead to any solid and rational system. ... Philosophers deny our resembling perceptions to be identically the same, and uninterrupted; and yet have so great a propensity to believe them such, that they arbitrarily invent a new set of perceptions, to which they attribute these qualities. I say, a new set of perceptions [because] ... 'tis impossible for us distinctly to conceive, objects to be in their nature any thing but exactly the same with perceptions. What then can we look for from this confusion of groundless and extraordinary opinions but error and falshood? And how can we justify to ourselves any belief we repose in them?" (*T* 1.4.2.56)

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Carelessness and Inattention

“As long as our attention is bent upon the subject, the philosophical and study’d principle may prevail; but the moment we relax our thoughts, nature will display herself, and draw us back to our former opinion.” (T 1.4.2.51 cf. 53)

“Tis impossible upon any system to defend either our understanding or senses; and we but expose them farther when we endeavour to justify them in that manner. As the sceptical doubt arises naturally from a profound and intense reflection on those subjects, it always encreases, the farther we carry our reflections, whether in opposition or conformity to it. Carelessness and in-attention alone can afford us any remedy.” (T 1.4.2.57)

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“Tis impossible ... to defend either our understanding or senses”

- The passage just quoted implicitly refers back to the “scepticism with regard to reason” of T 1.4.1 (note that “the understanding” and “reason” are the same).
- T 1.4.1 and 1.4.2 thus *combine* to deliver a radically sceptical message: that the only thing able to protect us from extreme scepticism is our own failure to attend to, or follow, the sceptical arguments (cf. T 1.4.1.9-11).
- Laying such scepticism aside, Hume will now go on to consider some philosophical systems, “antient and modern” (T 1.4.2.57) regarding the external world.

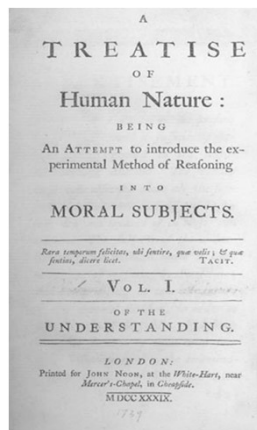
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Treatise 1.4.3

“Of the Antient Philosophy”



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Of the Antient Philosophy

- Section 1.4.3 of the *Treatise* is largely devoted to debunking Aristotelianism:
 - “the fictions of the antient philosophy, concerning *substances*, and *substantial forms*, and *accidents*, and *occult qualities*; which, however unreasonable and capricious, have a very intimate connexion with the principles of human nature.” (T 1.4.3.1)
- Hume explains these “fictions” as naturally arising from the imagination, by which the “Peripatetics” (i.e. Aristotelians) allowed themselves – far too easily and naively – to be seduced.

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False Simplicity and Identity

- “The most judicious philosophers” [e.g. Locke, *Essay* II xxiii] consider “that our ideas of bodies are nothing but collections form’d by the mind of the ideas of the several distinct sensible qualities, of which objects are compos’d”.
- But the sorts of confusions outlined in T 1.4.2 lead us naturally to think of objects as *simple* things that retain their *identity* through time:
 - “The smooth and uninterrupted progress of the thought ... readily deceives the mind, and makes us ascribe an identity to the changeable succession ...” (T 1.4.3.3)

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Inventing Substance

- When we realise these supposedly identical things have actually changed over time,
 - “the imagination is apt to feign something unknown and invisible, which it supposes to continue the same under all these variations; and this unintelligible something it calls a *substance*, or *original and first matter*.” (T 1.4.3.4)
- We likewise imagine this *original substance* to be simple and uncompounded, supplying “a principle of union or cohesion among [the object’s] qualities” (T 1.4.3.5)

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Substantial Forms and Accidents

- The Peripatetics (i.e. Aristotelians) then ascribe the differences between substances to their different *substantial forms* (T 1.4.3.6).
- Qualities of objects such as colour and figure are then considered as *accidents* (i.e. accidental as opposed to essential qualities) “inhering in” the substance, so these philosophers:

“suppose a substance supporting, which they do not understand, and an accident supported, of which they have as imperfect an idea. The whole system, therefore, is entirely incomprehensible.” (T 1.4.3.8)

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Faculties and Occult Qualities

- Alluding back to his theory of causal inference, Hume remarks that men naturally “imagine they perceive a connexion” between constantly conjoined objects. Philosophers who investigate further cannot find any such connexion,

“But ... instead of drawing a just inference from this observation, and concluding, that we have no idea of power or agency, separate from the mind, and belonging to causes ..., they ... [invent] the words *faculty* and *occult quality*. ... They need only say, that any phaenomenon, which puzzles them, arises from a faculty or an occult quality ...” (T 1.4.3.9-10)

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Ridiculing Sympathies and Antipathies

“But among all the instances, wherein the Peripatetics have shown they were guided by every trivial propensity of the imagination, no one is more remarkable than their *sympathies, antipathies, and horrors of a vacuum*. There is a very remarkable inclination in human nature, to bestow on external objects the same emotions, which it observes in itself ... This inclination, 'tis true, is suppress'd by a little reflection, and only takes place in children, poets, and the antient philosophers. ... We must pardon children, because of their age; poets, because they profess to follow implicitly the suggestions of their fancy: But what excuse shall we find to justify our philosophers in so signal a weakness?” (T 1.4.3.11)

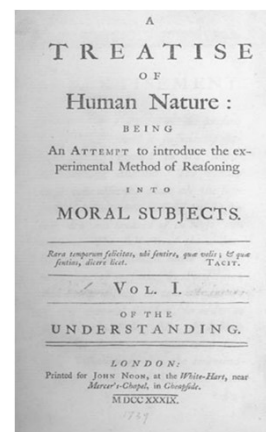
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Treatise 1.4.4

“Of the Modern
Philosophy”



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Imaginative Principles, Good and Bad

- Hume has strongly criticised the Aristotelians for basing their philosophy on the imagination. But this might seem very unfair, when he has earlier (in T 1.3.6) argued that all inductive “experimental reasoning” – which he advocates as the only legitimate basis of science (and trumpets in the subtitle of the *Treatise*) – is itself founded on custom, which he seems to view as a principle of the imagination (T 1.3.6.4, 1.3.7.6).
- He addresses this objection in a famous passage at T 1.4.4.1, distinguishing between two sorts of imaginative principles, one sort philosophically respectable and the other disreputable ...

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“In order to justify myself, I must distinguish in the imagination betwixt the principles which are permanent, irresistible, and universal; such as the customary transition from causes to effects, and from effects to causes: And the principles, which are changeable, weak, and irregular; such as those I have just now taken notice of. The former are the foundation of all our thoughts and actions, so that upon their removal human nature must immediately perish and go to ruin. The latter are neither unavoidable to mankind, nor necessary, or so much as useful in the conduct of life; but on the contrary are observ'd only to take place in weak minds, and being opposite to the other principles of conduct and reasoning, may easily be subverted by a due contrast and opposition. For this reason the former are receiv'd by philosophy, and the latter rejected.” (T 1.4.4.1)

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Hume's Way Out?

- It initially seems as though the distinction at *T* 1.4.4.1 is intended to give Hume a way of distinguishing his own positive scientific position (based on causal inference and probability etc.) from the “fancies” and “fictions” of the ancient philosophers and others.
- If so, this paragraph is one of the most important in the entire *Treatise*, providing the basis of rational normativity by distinguishing between the respectable and disreputable “principles of the imagination”.
- But as we shall see, Hume himself proceeds to cast doubt on the distinction, both in *Treatise* 1.4.4 and – more radically – in *Treatise* 1.4.7.

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“Of the Modern Philosophy”

- Modern (Lockean) philosophy claims to be based on the “solid, permanent, and consistent principles of the imagination”, rather than those that are “changeable, weak, and irregular” (*T* 1.4.4.1-2).
- But now Hume will argue – through an attack on the primary/secondary quality distinction – that it has no such secure foundation.
- He suggests that the only “satisfactory” argument for the distinction “is deriv'd from the variations of [sensory] impressions” depending upon our health, constitution, situation etc. (*T* 1.4.4.2).

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A Causal Argument

“Tis certain, that when different impressions of the same sense arise from any object, every one of these impressions has not a resembling quality existent in the object. ... Now from like effects we presume like causes. Many of the impressions of colour, sound, &c. are confest to be nothing but internal existences, and to arise from causes, which in no way resemble them. These impressions are in appearance nothing different from the other impressions of colour, sound, &c. We conclude, therefore, that they are, all of them, deriv'd from a like origin.” (*T* 1.4.4.4)

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A Berkeleian Objection

- Hume focuses on one objection, which takes inspiration from George Berkeley:
 - “If colours, sounds, tastes, and smells be merely perceptions, nothing we can conceive is possess'd of a real, continu'd, and independent existence; not even motion, extension and solidity, which are the primary qualities chiefly insisted on [by Lockeans].” (*T* 1.4.4.6)
- To form an idea of a moving extended body, my idea of extension must have some content, which can only come from sight or touch, hence ultimately from coloured or solid simples.

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Annihilating Matter

- Colour “is excluded from any real existence” (as a subjective secondary quality).
- “The idea of solidity is that of two objects, which ... cannot penetrate each other” (*T* 1.4.4.9). So understanding solidity requires some *antecedent* grasp of what an object is, and with colour and solidity itself excluded, there's nothing left which can give this.
- “Our modern philosophy, therefore leaves us no just nor satisfactory idea ... of matter.”

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Reason Against the Senses

- Hume elaborates this argument further over *T* 1.4.4.10-14, and then sums up:
 - “Thus there is a direct and total opposition betwixt our reason and our senses; or more properly speaking, betwixt those conclusions we form from cause and effect, and those that persuade us of the continu'd and independent existence of body.” (§15)
- Causal reasoning concludes that secondary qualities aren't objective; but without appeal to subjective colour and feel, we cannot form any coherent notion of an extended body.

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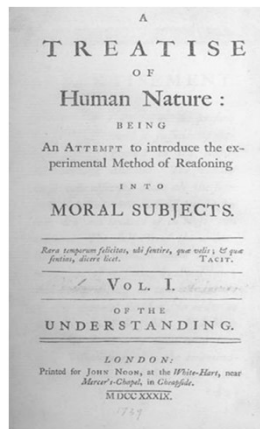
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6(d)

How Does Hume View the Belief in the Continued and Distinct Existence of Body?

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(i) The Belief is Dubiously Coherent

- "I cannot conceive how such trivial qualities of the fancy, conducted by such false suppositions, can ever lead to any solid and rational system. ... 'Tis a gross illusion to suppose, that our resembling perceptions are numerically the same; and 'tis this illusion, which leads us into the opinion, that these perceptions ... are still existent, even when they are not present to the senses. ... What ... can we look for from this confusion of groundless and extraordinary opinions but error and falshood?" (T 1.4.2.56)
- "Thus there is a direct and total opposition betwixt our reason and our senses; or more properly speaking, betwixt those conclusions we form from cause and effect, and those that persuade us of the continu'd and independent existence of body." (T 1.4.4.15)

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(ii) Clearly False in its Vulgar Form

- "the vulgar *suppose* their perceptions to be their only objects, and at the same time *believe* the continu'd existence of matter ... Now upon that supposition, 'tis a false opinion that any of our objects, or perceptions, are identically the same after an interruption; and consequently the opinion ... can never arise from reason, but must arise from the imagination" (T 1.4.2.43)
- "a very little reflection and philosophy is sufficient to make us perceive the fallacy of that opinion ... we quickly perceive, that the doctrine of the independent existence of our sensible perceptions is contrary to the plainest experience" (T 1.4.2.44)

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- "we clearly perceive, that all our perceptions are dependent on our organs, and ... our nerves and animal spirits" (T 1.4.2.45)
- "Whoever wou'd explain the origin of the common opinion concerning the continu'd and distinct existence of body ... must proceed upon the supposition, that our perceptions are our only objects, and continue to exist even when they are not perceiv'd. Tho' this opinion be false, 'tis the most natural of any, and has alone any primary recommendation to the fancy." (T 1.4.2.48)
- "a little reflection destroys this conclusion, that our perceptions have a continu'd existence, by shewing that they have a dependent one" (T 1.4.2.50)

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(iii) Nevertheless Universal and Irresistible

- "The persons, who entertain this opinion ... are in general all the unthinking and unphilosophical part of mankind, (that is, all of us, at one time or other) ..." (T 1.4.2.36)
- "almost all mankind, and even philosophers themselves, for the greatest part of their lives, take their perceptions to be their only objects, and suppose, that the very being, which is intimately present to the mind, is the real body ..." (T 1.4.2.38)
- "philosophers ... upon leaving their closets, mingle with the rest of mankind in those exploded opinions, that our perceptions are our only objects, and continue identically and uninterruptedly the same in all their interrupted appearances" (T 1.4.2.53)
- "I ... take it for granted, whatever may be the reader's opinion at this present moment, that an hour hence he will be persuaded there is ... an external ... world" (T 1.4.2.57)

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(iv) Is the Philosophical Form Worse?

- The philosophical double-existence view "has no primary recommendation either to reason or the imagination" (T 1.4.2.46)
- "'tis only a palliative remedy, and ... contains all the difficulties of the vulgar system, with some others, that are peculiar to itself. There are no principles either of the understanding or fancy, which lead us directly to embrace this opinion of the double existence of perceptions and objects, ..." (T 1.4.2.46)
- "This philosophical system ... is the monstrous offspring of two principles, which are contrary to each other, which are both at once embrac'd by the mind, and which are unable mutually to destroy each other. ... Not being able to reconcile these two enemies, we endeavour to set ourselves at ease as much as possible, ... by feigning a double existence, where each may find something, that has all the conditions it desires." (T 1.4.2.52)

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(v) Rejecting Both Forms of the Belief?

- “Tis a gross illusion to suppose, that our resembling perceptions are numerically the same ... [as does the] popular system. And as to our philosophical one, 'tis liable to the same difficulties; and is over-and-above loaded with this absurdity, that it at once denies and establishes the vulgar supposition. Philosophers deny our resembling perceptions to be identically the same, and uninterrupted; and yet have so great a propensity to believe them such, that they arbitrarily invent a new set of perceptions, to which they attribute these qualities. I say, a new set of perceptions: For we may well suppose in general, but 'tis impossible for us distinctly to conceive, objects to be in their nature any thing but exactly the same with perceptions. What then can we look for from this confusion of groundless and extraordinary opinions but error and falshood? And how can we justify to ourselves any belief we repose in them?” (T 1.4.2.56)

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(vi) And Yet ...

- If the vulgar view is so *obviously false*, can Hume really become a vulgar believer as soon as he leaves his study?
- Even within his study – where he is clearly aware of the falsehood of the vulgar view – Hume generally evinces a firm belief in external objects such as billiard balls (T 1.3.14.18, E 4.8-10) and dice (T 1.3.11.6-13, E 6.2-3).
- Likewise in the people whose thought and behaviour constitutes the subject-matter of so much of his philosophy.
- Thus many interpreters have considered that Hume must, in the end, be a “representative realist”, adopting the “double existence” or “philosophical” view (which, despite his harsh words, at least has the merit of *not being so obviously false!*).

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The Discussion in the *Enquiry*

- Again the vulgar belief is natural and universal:
 - “It seems evident, that men are carried, by a natural instinct ..., to repose faith in their senses; and that, without any reasoning, or even almost before the use of reason, we always suppose an external universe, which depends not on our perception, ... Even the animal creation are governed by a like opinion, ...” (E 12.7)
 - It seems also evident, that, when men follow this blind and powerful instinct of nature, they always suppose the very images, presented by the senses, to be the external objects, and never entertain any suspicion, that the one are nothing but representations of the other. This very table, which we see white, and which we feel hard, is believed to exist, independent of our perception, and to be something external to our mind” (E 12.8)

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- And again the vulgar belief is easily seen to be false:

- “But this universal and primary opinion of all men is soon destroyed by the slightest philosophy, which teaches us, that nothing can ever be present to the mind but an image or perception, and that the senses are only the inlets, through which these images are conveyed ... The table, which we see, seems to diminish, as we remove farther from it: But the real table, which exists independent of us, suffers no alteration: It was, therefore, nothing but its image, which was present to the mind. These are the obvious dictates of reason; and no man, who reflects, ever doubted, that the existences, which we consider, when we say, *this house* and *that tree*, are nothing but perceptions in the mind, and fleeting copies or representations of other existences, which remain uniform and independent.” (E 12.9)
- This last sentence, however, *appears* to commit Hume to some form of representative realism after all!

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- But then Hume goes on to say that the representative realist view cannot be justified either, with an elegant summary of the argument from T 1.4.2.47:

- “By what argument can it be proved, that the perceptions of the mind must be caused by external objects, entirely different from them, though resembling them (if that be possible) [rather than] from the energy of the mind itself, or ... some invisible ... spirit, or ... some other cause still more unknown to us?” (E 12.11)
- “It is a question of fact, whether the perceptions of the senses be produced by external objects, resembling them: How shall this question be determined? By experience surely; as all other questions of a like nature. But here experience is, and must be entirely silent. The mind has never any thing present to it but the perceptions, and cannot possibly reach any experience of their connexion with objects. The supposition of such a connexion is, therefore, without any foundation in reasoning.” (E 12.12)

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- If the truth of the philosophical view “is a question of fact”, then that view must at least be *coherent*, which did not seem to be the view of the *Treatise*.

- Perhaps Hume has given up the view that identity of an object over time requires *invariableness* (cf. T 1.4.2.31, 1.4.3.2, 1.4.6.6)? The *Enquiry* does not discuss identity.
- E 12.16 also seems to imply that the philosophical view of T 1.4.2 is at least coherent, since (unlike the instinctive vulgar view) it is not said to be “contrary to reason”, but only “contrary to natural instinct” and without “rational evidence ... to convince an impartial enquirer”.
- But apparently the “second objection” (descended from the discussion of T 1.4.4) “goes farther”, representing the belief in body as “contrary to reason” (E 12.16).

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- This “second objection”, spelled out in *E* 12.15, focuses on the alleged impossibility of forming an idea of primary qualities – like extension – as mind-independent, given that our visual idea of extension is inevitably *coloured*, our tactile idea of extension is inevitably *felt*, while both *colour* and *feeling* are acknowledged by Lockean “modern philosophers” to be only in the mind.
- The only way out of this, Hume suggests, is by appeal to *abstraction* – e.g. abstracting the idea of the *shape* of a coloured rectangle without thinking about its *colour*. But this, he thinks, has already been refuted by Berkeley:

“An extension, that is neither tangible nor visible, cannot possibly be conceived: And a tangible or visible extension, which is neither hard nor soft, black nor white, is equally beyond the reach of human conception.” (*E* 12.15)

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Hume’s Tantalizing Last Words on Body

“The second objection goes farther, and represents this opinion as contrary to reason: at least, if it be a principle of reason, that all sensible qualities are in the mind, not in the object. Bereave matter of all its intelligible qualities, both primary and secondary, you in a manner annihilate it, and leave only a certain unknown, inexplicable something, as the cause of our perceptions: a notion so imperfect, that no sceptic will think it worth while to contend against it.” (*E* 12.16)

- Question 1: Does Hume think that “all sensible qualities are in the mind, not in the object” is indeed a “principle of reason”?
- Question 2: What is the final sentence – *added only in the posthumous 1777 edition of the Enquiry* – saying? That the belief in “a certain unknown, inexplicable something, as the cause of our perceptions” is *so hopeless as to be unworthy of critical consideration*, or that it is *so thin as to be harmless*?

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Some Examination Questions

The Adequacy of Hume’s Psychological Account of Our Belief in Objects

- Does Hume have an adequate explanation of our belief in the external world? (2000, 18)
- Explain and assess Hume’s explanation of our belief in an external world. (2004, 17)
- Does Hume have an adequate account of our ideas of external objects? (2016, 34)

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Is Hume Himself Realist about External Objects (and if so, of what sort)?

- Could Hume believe that there is an external world? (2006, 18)
- Is Hume a realist about material objects? (2009, 19)
- Must Hume think that there are no bodies? (2012, 19)
- Why does Hume think that the philosophical version of the belief in body is more ‘absurd’ than the vulgar version? Is he right? (2021, 33)

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An Invitation to Discuss Hume’s Account

- ‘I began this subject with premising, that we ought to have an implicit faith in our senses, and that this wou’d be the conclusion, I shou’d draw from the whole of my reason. But to be ingenuous, I feel myself at present of a quite contrary sentiment, and am more inclin’d to repose no faith at all in my senses, or rather imagination, than to place in it such an implicit confidence.’ (HUME, *Treatise* 1.4.2) Discuss. (2017, 36)

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Comparison with Other Philosophers

- Compare and contrast the views of one empiricist and one rationalist on the nature of the material world. (2008, 19)
- ‘We have no idea of substance.’ Discuss with reference to at least TWO philosophers (INCLUDING AT LEAST ONE of Locke, Berkeley, and Hume). (2013, 20)
- Compare and contrast at least TWO philosophers of the period on scepticism about the external world (INCLUDING AT LEAST ONE of Locke, Berkeley and Hume). (2014, 20)
- Compare Hume’s account of substance with at least one other author covered in this paper. (2017, 35)

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David Hume, 1711-1776



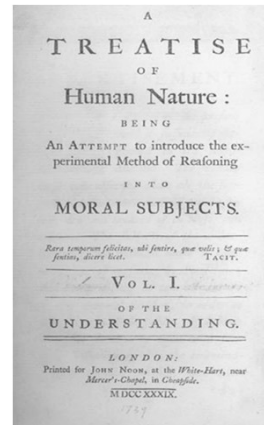
7. *Hume on Mental Substance, Materialism, Personal Identity, and Scepticism about Reason*

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7(a)

Of the Immateriality of the Soul



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Turning to the Internal World

- “Of the Immateriality of the Soul” marks a turn to “the intellectual world”. This, “tho’ involv’d in infinite obscurities”, is not perplex’d with any such contradictions, as those we have discovered in the natural” (*T* 1.4.5.1).
- From *T* 1.4.5.2-6, Hume attacks the notion of mental *substance* – and the related notion of *inhesion* – in various ways, including an appeal to the Copy Principle (at *T* 1.4.5.4). Both notions are condemned as meaningless.

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Taking Separability Too Far?

- At *T* 1.4.5.5, Hume responds to the attempt to “evade the difficulty, by saying, that the definition of a substance is *something which may exist by itself*”:
“this definition agrees to every thing, that can possibly be conceiv’d; ... Whatever is clearly conceiv’d may exist; ... every thing, which is different, is distinguishable, and every thing which is distinguishable, is separable by the imagination. My conclusion ... is, that since all our perceptions are different from each other, and from every thing else in the universe, they are also distinct and separable, and may be consider’d as separately existent, and may exist separately, and have no need of any thing else to support their existence. They are, therefore, substances, as far as this definition explains a substance.”

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Reification of Perceptions

- Many have considered that Hume’s “reification” of perceptions – his assertion that impressions and ideas are “substances” that could exist without a perceiver, is utterly absurd, for example John Cook (1968, p. 8, quoted by Noonan 1999, p. 195):

“[It follows from Hume’s position] that there could be a scratch or a dent without there being anything scratched or dented. Indeed if we take Hume at his word, we must take him to be saying that he would see no absurdity in Alice’s remark: ‘Well, I’ve often seen a cat without a grin, but a grin without a cat! It’s the most curious thing I ever saw in all my life!’”

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The Location of Perceptions

- From *T* 1.4.5.7-16, Hume discusses the issue of the location and extension of perceptions:
 - Note in particular his insistence that only perceptions of sight and feeling have spatial location (*T* 1.4.5.10). Other, non-spatial, perceptions prove that “*an object may exist, and yet be no where*”. So causation cannot require spatial contiguity (cf. *T* 1.3.2.6 n. 16).
 - Note also the illusion whereby we are seduced by the imagination into ascribing sensations of taste (which have no physical location) to the object – e.g. a fig – that produces them (*T* 1.4.5.13-14); this discussion was referenced by the footnote at 1.3.14.25 n. 32.

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A Spinozistic Parody

- From *T* 1.4.5.17-28, Hume parodies standard arguments against the “hideous hypothesis” (*T* 1.4.5.19) of Spinoza, deploying them against the orthodox theological idea of a simple soul.
- Spinoza sees “the universe of objects” as being modifications of a “simple, un compounded, and indivisible” substance (*T* 1.4.5.21). This is supposed to be outrageous. And yet theologians see “the universe of thought” – my impressions and ideas – as being all modifications of a simple, un compounded and indivisible soul.

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Defending Materialism

- The most important part of *Treatise* 1.4.5 for Hume’s own philosophy – discussed in our first lecture – is his attack on the popular argument standardly used against Hobbist materialism, where he crucially appeals to his own theory of causation as constant conjunction:

“Matter and motion, ’tis commonly said in the schools, however vary’d, are still matter and motion, and produce only a difference in the position and situation of objects. Divide a body as often as you please, ’tis still body. ...” (*T* 1.4.5.29)

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“... Place it in any figure, nothing ever results but figure, or the relation of parts. Move it in any manner, you still find motion or a change of relation. ’Tis absurd to imagine, that motion in a circle, for instance, shou’d be nothing but merely motion in a circle; while motion in another direction, as in an ellipse, shou’d also be a passion or moral reflection: That the shocking of two globular particles shou’d become a sensation of pain, and that the meeting of two triangular ones shou’d afford a pleasure. Now as these different shocks, and variations, and mixtures are the only changes, of which matter is susceptible, and as these never afford us any idea of thought or perception, ’tis concluded to be impossible, that thought can ever be caus’d by matter.” (*T* 1.4.5.29)

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“’tis only by our experience of ... constant conjunction, we can arrive at any knowledge of causation”

“Few have been able to withstand the seeming evidence of this argument; and yet nothing in the world is more easy than to refute it. We need only to reflect on what has been prov’d at large, that we are never sensible of any connexion betwixt causes and effects, and that ’tis only by our experience of their constant conjunction, we can arrive at any knowledge of this relation. Now as all objects, which are not contrary, are susceptible of a constant conjunction, ...” (*T* 1.4.5.30)

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“To consider the matter *a priori*, any thing may produce any thing”

“... and as no real objects are contrary; [note 48] I have inferr’d from these principles, that to consider the matter *a priori*, any thing may produce any thing, and that we shall never discover a reason, why any object may or may not be the cause of any other, however great, or however little the resemblance may be between them ” (*T* 1.4.5.30)

- Here note 48 refers to *T* 1.3.15, “Rules by which to judge of causes and effects”, paragraph 1.

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- Hume then goes further to insist that material motion *is indeed* found to be the cause of thought:

- “we find ... by experience, that they are constantly united; which being *all the circumstances, that enter into the idea of cause and effect* ... we may *certainly* conclude, that motion may be, and *actually is*, the cause of thought and perception.” (*T* 1.4.5.30, my emphasis)
- “as *the constant conjunction of objects constitutes the very essence of cause and effect*, matter and motion may often be regarded as the causes of thought, as far as we have any notion of that relation.” (*T* 1.4.5.33, my emphasis)

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- *T* 1.4.5.31 poses a dilemma, whether causation is to be understood as involving some intelligible connexion, or instead just constant conjunction.
- Hume clearly opts for the second of these, thus implying that thought could have a material cause:
"all objects, which are found to be constantly conjoin'd, are upon that account only to be regarded as causes and effects. Now as all objects, which are not contrary, are susceptible of a constant conjunction, and as no real objects are contrary; it follows, that for ought we can determine by the mere ideas, any thing may be the cause or effect of any thing; which evidently gives the advantage to the materialists above their antagonists." (*T* 1.4.5.31)

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Applying the Definition of Cause

- Thus at the end of *Treatise* 1.4.5 – just as in the discussion of "Liberty and Necessity" which is to come in 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 (and *Enquiry* 8) – Hume is applying his (first) definition of cause in terms of constant conjunction.
- As emphasised in the first lecture, these are *positive* (rather than sceptical) implications of his definition: they *vindicate* the application of causation to mental phenomena.
- Hume's analysis of causation, culminating at *Treatise* 1.3.14-15, has thus served the purpose of supporting materialism and determinism.

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A Puzzling Conclusion

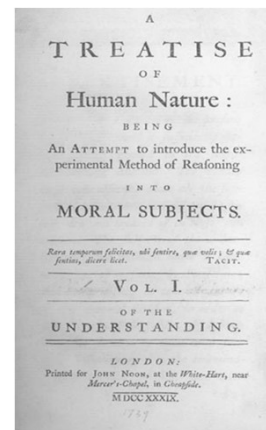
- The final paragraph, *T* 1.4.5.35, starts by repeating Hume's key principle (cf. *T* 1.3.15.1 and 1.4.5.30) that causes and effects can be known only by experience, since "*whatever we can imagine, is possible*" (i.e. the Conceivability Principle).
- However the last two sentences refer to "the immortality of the soul", which hasn't so far been mentioned! This seems to be a trace of one of the "noble parts" on religion which Hume excised from the *Treatise* manuscript when he "castrated" it in 1737 (cf. letter to Henry Home, *NHL* 2)

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7(b)

Of Personal Identity



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Of Personal Identity

- *Treatise* 1.4.6 addresses the topic of personal identity, wielding the Copy Principle (*T* 1.4.6.2) to deny that we have any idea of the self which is anything like the conventionally presumed notion with its "perfect identity and simplicity" (*T* 1.4.6.1).
- There is no such impression, and hence no such idea, of *self* (*T* 1.4.6.2). When I look inside myself, "I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch *myself* at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception." (*T* 1.4.6.3)

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The Bundle Theory

- Hence the only genuine idea of self is that of:
"nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions [impressions and ideas], which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement. ... The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance ... There is properly no *simplicity* in it at one time, nor *identity* in different. ... The comparison of the theatre must not mislead us. They are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind; nor have we the most distant notion of the place, where these scenes are represented ..." (*T* 1.4.6.4)

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■ Later Hume suggests another comparison:

"the true idea of the human mind, is to consider it as a system of different perceptions or different existences, which are link'd together by the relation of cause and effect, ... Our impressions give rise to their correspondent ideas; and these ideas in their turn produce other impressions. ... In this respect, I cannot compare the soul more properly to any thing than to a republic or commonwealth, in which the several members are united by the reciprocal ties of government and subordination, and give rise to other persons, who propagate the same republic in the incessant changes of its parts. And as the same individual republic may not only change its members, but also its laws and constitutions; in like manner the same person may vary his character and disposition, as well as his impressions and ideas, without losing his identity. Whatever changes he endures, his several parts are still connected by the relation of causation. And in this view our identity with regard to the passions serves to corroborate that with regard to the imagination, by the making our distant perceptions influence each other, and by giving us a present concern for our past or future pains or pleasures...." (T 1.4.6.19)

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Identity Requires Constancy

- In the previous passage, Hume seems to allow for change without loss of identity. However:

"one of the essential qualities of identity [is] *invariableness*" (T 1.4.2.31)

"The acknowledge'd composition is evidently contrary to this suppose'd *simplicity*, and the variation to the *identity*. ... such evident contradictions" (T 1.4.3.2)

"We have a distinct idea of an object, that remains invariable and uninterrupted thro' a suppos'd variation of time; and this idea we call that of *identity* or *sameness*." (T 1.4.6.6)

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Explaining the Attribution of Identity

- Hume thus explains what he takes to be our *mistaken* "propension to ascribe an identity to these successive perceptions, and to suppose ourselves possess'd of an invariable and uninterrupted existence" (T 1.4.6.5).
- He takes this to involve the same sort of imaginative principles that are at play when we attribute identity "to plants and animals". The similarity of the sequence of perceptions over time "facilitates the transition of the mind from one object to another, and renders its passage as smooth as if it contemplated one continu'd object" (T 1.4.6.6). Thus we come to think of them as "as invariable and uninterrupted".

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Confusion, Absurdity, and Fictions

- So just as with external objects (cf. T 1.4.2 and 1.4.3), when we consider a gradually changing sequence of perceptions, we are apt to confuse this with an ongoing identity (T 1.4.6.6).
- Reflection on the changing sequence shows this to be absurd, so to resolve "this absurdity, we ... feign some new and unintelligible principle, that connects the objects together ... Thus we ... run into the notion of a *soul*, and *self*, and *substance*, to disguise the variation." The next sentence calls this a *fiction*.

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Association and Identity

- "To prove this hypothesis", Hume aims "to show ... that the objects, which are variable or interrupted, and yet are suppos'd to continue the same, are such only as consist of a succession of parts, connected together by resemblance, contiguity, or causation", that is, by the association of ideas (T 1.4.6.7).
- We tend to attribute identity when changes are *proportionately* small and *gradual* (T 1.4.6.9-10), or when the changing parts are relevant to "some *common end* or purpose", and all the more so when they bear "the reciprocal relation of cause and effect" to each other (T 1.4.6.11-12).

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Explaining Personal Identity

- The attribution of personal identity is just another instance of this phenomenon: "The identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one, and of a like kind with that which we ascribe to vegetables and animal bodies." (T 1.4.6.15)
- Hume backs this up by appeal to his Separability Principle and his theory of causation, which tell us "that the understanding never observes any real connexion among objects, and that even the union of cause and effect ... resolves itself into a customary association of ideas". So identity cannot *really* apply between our perceptions (T 1.4.6.16).

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Resemblance, Causation, Memory

- So “our notions of personal identity, proceed entirely from the smooth and uninterrupted progress of the thought along a train of connected ideas” (*T* 1.4.6.16).
- Contiguity plays little role here, so it is the mutual *resemblance* and *causation* between our perceptions that are crucial (*T* 1.4.6.17-19).
- Memory produces resemblance between our perceptions, and our concern about our future adds to their causal linkages. Memory also reveals the sequence of linked perceptions to us, and so is the chief “source of personal identity” (*T* 1.4.6.18-20).

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Who is Confused Here?

- It is natural to ask here: if “our notions of personal identity, proceed entirely from the smooth and uninterrupted progress of the thought along a train of connected ideas”, then *who is the thinker whose thought is moving along this train of ideas?*
- For discussion of this issue, see for example Harold Noonan, *Hume on Knowledge*, pp. 193-4, who goes on to link it (pp. 194-8) with the related issue of Hume’s reification of perceptions. This is also related to the issue of “bundling”, discussed below and by Noonan at pp. 205-9.

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Notorious Second Thoughts

- In the *Appendix* to the *Treatise*, published with Book 3 in late 1740 (just 21 months after Books 1 and 2), Hume famously expresses despair about his account:

“upon a more strict review of the section concerning *personal identity*, I find myself involv’d in such a labyrinth, that, I must confess, I neither know how to correct my former opinions, nor how to render them consistent.” (*T App* 10).

- Unfortunately, Hume leaves it very obscure what exactly he takes the problem to be:

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Two Inconsistent Principles?

“In short there are two principles, which I cannot render consistent; nor is it in my power to renounce either of them, viz. *that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences*, and *that the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences*. Did our perceptions either inhere in something simple and individual, or did the mind perceive some real connexion among them, there would be no difficulty in the case.” (*T App* 21)

- But the two cited principles aren’t apparently inconsistent! So this has left an intriguing puzzle for Hume’s interpreters.

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Multiple Interpretations

- Don Garrett’s starts his paper “Rethinking Hume’s Second Thoughts about Personal Identity” (2011) by remarking:

“Why did Hume become so dissatisfied with [his] ‘former opinions’ ...? ... The question ... has received what is surely a far greater number of distinct answers – well over two dozen, even by a conservative count – than has any other interpretive question about Hume’s philosophical writings. ... To my knowledge, ... no other commentator has ever simply endorsed the answer of any other commentator.” (p. 16)

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A “Bundling Problem”?

- Many have seen the heart of Hume’s difficulty as some sort of *bundling problem*, e.g.:
 - What is it that makes our perceptions part of “our bundle” in the way that enables us to be seduced into thinking of them as a continuing self?
 - After all, I have no temptation to think of *your* perceptions as part of *my* self, because they don’t even come to my awareness!
 - This all seems to presuppose that the perceptions must *genuinely* be bundled in some way *before* Hume’s account of the error can even get going.

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Garrett's Proposal

- Garrett's carefully argued proposal in his 2011 paper seems as good as any other. He sees Hume's problem as arising from three of his "central doctrines":

- *Placeless Perceptions*

No nonvisual and nontactile perception is in any "place," either spiritual (such as a soul or mental substance) or spatial, by which it is located relative to any other perception. Even visual and tactile perceptions are not in any place by which they are located relative to any other perceptions except to those (if any) with which they form a spatially complex perception.

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- *Conjunctive Causation*

Taken together, the following are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for the existence of a causal relation between two objects: (i) priority in time; (ii) contiguity in time and, *where applicable*, in place; and (iii) constant similar conjunction of like objects.

- *Causal Bundling*

Perceptions are in the same mind if and only if they are elements in a system of relevant causal relations holding among them.

- Garrett argues that these three doctrines together made it impossible for Hume to achieve a coherent conception of how perceptions have a "place" within any particular mind.

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Changes of Mind?

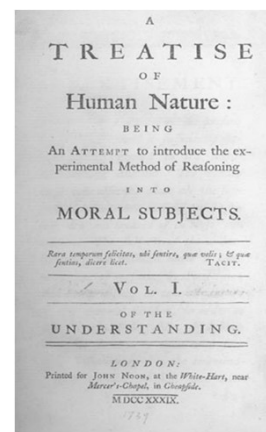
- The issue of personal identity isn't discussed at all in Hume's later works (apart from a hint in the posthumously published *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, at D 4.2).
- The 1748 *Enquiry* doesn't discuss identity over time, but seems to view the continuing identity of changing objects as coherent (E 12.12).
- The Separability Principle also disappears, so Hume may have changed his mind on the principles that made identity, especially of persons, so intractable in the *Treatise*.

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Of Scepticism with Regard to Reason



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From Knowledge to Probability

- *Treatise* 1.4.1 contains a famous – and highly corrosive – sceptical argument.
- Its first stage argues that, even if we assume that in "demonstrative sciences the rules are certain and infallible" (T 1.4.1.1), some doubt is still appropriate because our faculties are imperfect and we sometimes make mistakes.
- "All knowledge degenerates into probability" (T 1.4.1.1) when we take into account our *experienced probability* of such mistakes.

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An Arithmetical Example

- Suppose, for example, that I am trying to solve a quadratic equation, and conclude that the only positive solution is $x=16$. Should I believe this with *total conviction*? Hume argues that if experience suggests I sometimes go wrong, then I should not.
 - To make this question vivid, suppose that getting the answer wrong will cost me £1000, and I am given the opportunity to take out insurance against error: should I be prepared to pay to insure, and if so, how much?
 - If in practice I have got such equations right about 95% of the time, then it indeed seems prudent to pay up to £50 to insure (thus backing up Hume's argument).

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“A history of all the instances”

“We must, therefore, ... enlarge our view to comprehend a kind of history of all the instances, wherein our understanding has deceiv'd us, compar'd with those, wherein its testimony was just and true. Our reason must be consider'd as a kind of cause, of which truth is the natural effect; but such-a-one as by the irruption of other causes, and by the inconstancy of our mental powers, may frequently be prevented. By this means all knowledge degenerates into probability; and this probability is greater or less, according to our experience of the veracity or deceitfulness of our understanding, and according to the simplicity or intricacy of the question.”

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- When Hume says “Our reason must be consider'd as a kind of cause”, he is alluding back to *Treatise* 1.3.12, “Of the Probability of Causes”. There he gave an associationist account of probable reasoning from *inconstant* past experience, typically where a *mix of unknown causes* is involved, so we have to base our expectation on past statistics alone.

“when an object is attended with contrary effects, we judge of them only by our past experience, ... and that effect, which has been the most common, we always esteem the most likely.” (T 1.3.12.8)

“when in considering past experiments we find them ... contrary ... each partakes an equal share of ... force and vivacity, ... Any of these past events may again happen; and we judge, that when they do happen, they will be mix'd in the same proportion as in the past.” (T 1.3.12.10)

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An Obligation to Embark on “Reflex Judgment”

- Hence when we consider what confidence to place in a mathematical calculation that we have carried out (for instance), we need to make, and take account of, a reflexive judgment about the reliability of our reason or understanding:

“we ought always to correct the first judgment, derived from the nature of the object [e.g. the mathematical judgment that $x=16$], by another judgment, deriv'd from the nature of the understanding [e.g. the experiential judgment that we tend to go wrong 5% of the time].” (T 1.4.1.5)

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A Further Obligation of Reason

- Hume thinks exactly the same sort of correction is appropriate for probable judgments – which will include our reflexive judgments about our own reliability. (T 1.4.1.5)
- Thus since that first reflexive judgment – e.g. that I'm 95% reliable in solving quadratic equations – is itself subject to error, I need to take this into account by making a second correction:

“we are oblig'd by our reason to add a new doubt deriv'd from the possibility of error in the estimation we make of the truth and fidelity of our faculties.” (T 1.4.1.6)

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Iterative Weakening to Nothing

- This obligation iterates, repeatedly weakening the evidence left by the previous judgments:

“this decision, tho' it should be favourable to our preceding judgment, being founded only on probability, must weaken still farther our first evidence, and must itself be weaken'd by a fourth doubt of the same kind, and so on *in infinitum*; and even the vastest quantity ... must in this manner be reduc'd to nothing. ... all the rules of logic require a continual diminution, and at last a total extinction of belief and evidence.” (T 1.4.1.6)

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Hume's Assessment of the Argument

- Hume repeatedly implies that he considers the sceptical argument to be *rationally* compelling:

“all the rules of logic require a continual diminution, and at last a total extinction of belief and evidence.” (T 1.4.1.6)

“I have here prov'd, that the very same principles, which make us form a decision upon any subject, and correct that decision by the consideration of our genius and capacity, ... when we examin'd that subject; I say, I have prov'd, that these same principles, when carry'd farther, and apply'd to every new reflex judgment, must, by continually diminishing the original evidence, at last reduce it to nothing, and utterly subvert all belief and opinion.” (T 1.4.1.8 – see also T 1.4.2.57, 1.4.7.7)

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Does Hume Accept the Conclusion?

“Shou’d it be ask’d me, whether I sincerely assent to this argument ... and whether I be really one of those sceptics, who hold that all is uncertain, and that our judgment is not in *any* thing possest of *any* measures of truth and falshood; I shou’d reply, that this question is entirely superfluous, and that neither I, nor any other person was ever sincerely and constantly of that opinion. Nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determin’d us to judge as well as to breathe and feel; ...” (T 1.4.1.7)

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The Irresistibility of Belief

“... nor can we any more forbear viewing certain objects in a stronger and fuller light, upon account of their customary connexion with a present impression, than we can hinder ourselves from thinking as long as we are awake, or seeing the surrounding bodies when we turn our eyes towards them in broad sunshine. Whoever has taken the pains to refute the cavils of this *total* scepticism, has really disputed without an antagonist ...” (T 1.4.1.7)

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Hume’s Intention Here

“My intention then in displaying so carefully the arguments of that fantastic sect, is only to make the reader sensible of the truth of my hypothesis, *that all our reasonings concerning causes and effects are deriv’d from nothing but custom; and that belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures.* ... I have prov’d, that ... If belief ... were a simple act of the thought, without any peculiar manner of conception, or the addition of a force and vivacity, it must infallibly destroy itself, and in every case terminate in a total suspence of judgment.” (T 1.4.1.8)

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Refuting Alternative Theories of Belief

- Hume attacks alternative theories of belief – which are based on the general notion that our beliefs result from *rational* oversight and judgment – on the basis that they would result in total absence of belief, which is clearly empirically false.
 - This attack presupposes that the sceptical argument is *rationally* correct – hence that a rational-oversight theory of belief would indeed be compelled by it.
 - By contrast, Hume’s theory is that belief arises from the causal operation of *custom* – which acts by enhancing the vivacity of ideas – in a way that “mere ideas and reflections” cannot prevent (T 1.4.1.8).

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How Does Hume Escape?

- How does Hume’s own account of belief escape this iterative weakening and eventual reduction to complete suspence?

“I answer, that after the first and second decision; as the action of the mind becomes forc’d and unnatural, and the ideas faint and obscure; tho’ the principles ... be the same ...; yet their influence on the imagination [weakens] ...” (T 1.4.1.10)

- As Hume remarks, the difficulty of following and being moved by abstruse arguments is very familiar to us. (T 1.4.1.11, cf. 1.3.13.17)

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The Significance of the Argument

- Hume anticipates T 1.4.1 in the previous Part:

“we shall find afterwards, [note to T 1.4.1] ... one very memorable exception [to iterative psychological weakening], which is of vast consequence in the present subject of the understanding.” (T 1.3.13.5)
- He also draws on it in the conclusion of Book 1:

“I have already shown, [note to T 1.4.1] that the understanding, when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either in philosophy or common life.” (T 1.4.7.7)

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A Trivial Property of the Fancy

- We shall see in the final lecture that this point is extremely significant: we are saved “from ... total scepticism only by means of that singular and seemingly trivial property of the fancy [i.e. the imagination], by which we enter with difficulty into remote views of things”.
- This ultimately raises serious doubts about the adequacy of Hume’s response to scepticism in the *Treatise*: scepticism seems to be avoidable only by relying on what we would normally consider to be *irrational* principles of the imagination.

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Is Hume’s Argument Strong?

- The *T* 1.4.1 argument seems dubious:
 - Suppose I make a mathematical judgment.
 - Suppose also experience suggests to me that I go wrong about 5% of the time in such judgments; so I adjust my credence to 95%.
 - Then it occurs to me that my estimate of 5% might be wrong ... but why should this make me assume that my estimate is likely to be too *optimistic* rather than *pessimistic*? Maybe my credence should be *greater than* 95%?

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A Spreading “Margin of Error”?

- Some defenders of Hume (e.g. Bennett, Owen) admit that reduction isn’t forced, but suggest that iteration implies a “spreading” of the probability estimate, so it becomes completely non-specific.
- But this doesn’t fit Hume’s account of belief as a vivacious idea – belief involves a *specific level of felt vivacity*, not reflective judgment over a range.
- Moreover like other defences of Hume, it has never been spelled out beyond vague hand-waving, and no such defence has achieved sufficient rigour to yield mathematical plausibility.

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Why Iterate?

- More fundamentally, *the case for repeated iteration is hopeless*. My credence in my mathematical judgment should – on the very principles explained at *T* 1.4.1.1 – depend on my reliability [and hence remembered track record] in judging *mathematics*, not on my reliability in judging my reliability in judging ... (etc.).
 - Hume’s argument *itself* relies on memory and records, explicitly appealing to the “history of the instances” of my past judgments (*T* 1.4.1.1), and expressing no scepticism about our memory or record-taking ability etc. These remembered/recorded statistics remain what they are, *irrespective of how good or bad I might be at iterative reflexive judgments*.

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Where is the Obligation of Reason?

- Even if there were some good reason *in principle* to iterate up lots of levels, *in practice* doing so is clearly impossible for us (as Hume emphasises), and it apparently doesn’t make us better judges (since it both confuses us and pulls us away from the true statistics). So how can it possibly be an *obligation of reason* to iterate, as *T* 1.4.1.6 insists?
- On Hume’s own conception of reason, reflexive checking can only make sense if it is warranted by *experience* (applying reflective rules such as those of *Treatise* 1.3.15). There is no *a priori* requirement to do it, and hence the lack of any *a posteriori* benefit entirely undermines the supposed obligation.

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A Failed Argument

- Many other scholars have attempted to defend Hume’s argument of *Treatise* 1.4.1, but I have recently argued that they all fail decisively (“Hume’s Pivotal Argument, and His Supposed Obligation of Reason”, *Hume Studies* 2018).
 - I argue that it is impossible *even to elucidate the argument* with any plausibility if one focuses on *examples* (rather than relying on the handwaving “and so on” of *T* 1.4.1.6). And I speculate that this makes it extremely likely that Hume himself would have come to appreciate the problem when he came to work on the *Enquiry*, which (in striking contrast to the *Treatise*) illustrates its discussions with a large number of examples.

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Some Examination Questions

Scepticism with Regard to Reason

- 'Our author ... concludes, that we assent to our faculties, and employ our reason only because we cannot help it. Philosophy wou'd render us entirely *Pyrrhonian*, were not nature too strong for it.' (HUME, *Abstract of the Treatise*, para. 27). Does Hume give an adequate answer to scepticism, or is he overwhelmed by it? (2010, 19)
- 'Our reason must be consider'd a kind of cause, of which truth is the natural effect.' (HUME). What, if anything, does this tell us about the status of reason in Hume's *Treatise*? (2015, 17)
- Has Hume a satisfactory answer to his scepticism with regard to reason? (2016, 33)

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Of the Immateriality of the Soul

- How did Hume argue that perceptions are substances? Is that a good argument? (2018, 33)
- 'We ... are never sensible of any connexion betwixt causes and effects, and ... 'tis only by our experience of their constant conjunction, we can arrive at any knowledge of this relation. Now as all objects, which are not contrary, are susceptible of a constant conjunction, and as no real objects are contrary; I have inferr'd from these principles [cf. T 1.3.15], that to consider the matter a *priori*, any thing may produce any thing, and that we shall never discover a reason, why any object may or may not be the cause of any other, however great, or however little the resemblance may be betwixt them. ... we find ... by experience, that [thought and motion] are constantly united; which being all the circumstances, that enter into the idea of cause and effect, when apply'd to the operations of matter, we may certainly conclude, that motion may be, and actually is, the cause of thought and perception.' (HUME, *Treatise* 1.4.5.30) Discuss. (2019, 35)

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The False Idea of a Simple Substantial Self

- 'There are some philosophers, who imagine we are every moment intimately conscious of what we call our SELF Unluckily all these positive assertions are contrary to that very experience, which is pleaded for them, nor have we any idea of *self*, after the manner it is here explain'd.' (HUME) What conclusion does Hume draw from this observation? What conclusion should we draw from it? (2007, 19)
- Why doesn't Hume merely say that we do not know that there is a substantial self? Is he right to deny its existence? (2008, 18)
- How might someone who held that the self is a simple substance respond to Hume's objections to such a conception? (2013, 19)

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The Humean Notion of Self

- Is Hume right to think that the idea of personal identity involves a 'confusion and mistake'? (2002, 18)
- Does Hume's account of how one forms the erroneous belief in an enduring self presuppose the existence of an enduring self? (2003, 18)
- Does Hume give a satisfactory account of the unity of the self? (2005, 18)
- 'The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations.' (HUME). Assess Hume's arguments for this claim. (2015, 19)
- How can a Humean self 'feign' anything? (2021, 34)

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The *Appendix* Problem

- 'In short, there are two principles which I cannot render consistent; nor is it in my power to renounce either of them, viz. that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and that the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences. (HUME). Is Hume's own criticism of his account of self the best criticism of it? (2001, 18)
- Where does Hume go wrong in his account of personal identity? (2014, 19)
- 'Upon a more strict review of the section concerning *personal identity*, I find myself involv'd in such a labyrinth, that, I must confess, I neither know how to correct my former opinions, nor how to render them consistent.' (HUME, *Treatise*, Appendix) Why did Hume abandon his own account of personal identity? Was he correct to do so? (2018, 35)

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Comparison with Other Philosophers

- Compare and contrast any two of the set authors on knowledge of the self. (2006, 22)
- What is a person? Compare and contrast the views on this question of any TWO OR MORE of the philosophers you have studied for this paper (INCLUDING AT LEAST ONE of Locke, Berkeley and Hume). (2010, 20)
- Does personal identity differ significantly from the identity of a physical object? Answer with respect to ONE or MORE of the philosophers you have studied for this paper (INCLUDING AT LEAST ONE OF Locke, Berkeley and Hume). (2011, 20)
- Compare and contrast Hume's account of the self with that of at least one other author covered by this paper. (2016, 35)

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David Hume, 1711-1776



8. *Hume's Sceptical Crisis, and His Second Thoughts*

Peter Millican
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So Far in *Treatise* 1.4 ...

- *Treatise* 1.4.1, "Of Scepticism with Regard to Reason", and 1.4.2, "Of Scepticism with Regard to the Senses", conclude that our beliefs – whether concerning the inferences we draw, or the objects we seem to perceive, – are rationally unsustainable. But in both cases, we are humanly unable to maintain such radical scepticism, and retain our beliefs through "carelessness and in-attention".
- In *Treatise* 1.4.3, "Of the Ancient Philosophy", Hume ridicules Aristotelians for following their imagination (like children and poets) in attributing purposes to objects.
 - But his own philosophy of induction and belief is founded on custom and hence "the imagination"; so isn't he being unfair?
 - At T 1.4.4.1, Hume sketches a defence against this objection, distinguishing between two categories of "imaginative" principle:

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"In order to justify myself, I must distinguish in the imagination betwixt the principles which are permanent, irresistible, and universal; such as the customary transition from causes to effects, and from effects to causes: And the principles, which are changeable, weak, and irregular; such as those I have just now taken notice of. The former are the foundation of all our thoughts and actions, so that upon their removal human nature must immediately perish and go to ruin. The latter are neither unavoidable to mankind, nor necessary, or so much as useful in the conduct of life; but on the contrary are observ'd only to take place in weak minds, and being opposite to the other principles of conduct and reasoning, may easily be subverted by a due contrast and opposition. For this reason the former are receiv'd by philosophy, and the latter rejected." (T 1.4.4.1)

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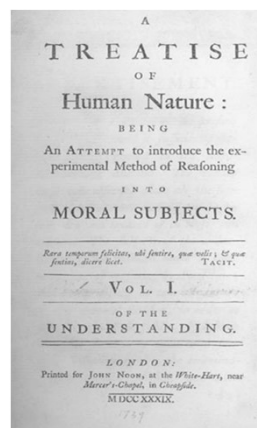
- *Treatise* 1.4.4, "Of the Modern Philosophy", then goes on to reveal yet another problem with the conventional Lockean belief in external objects, making at least three in all:
 - Identity over time, e.g. T 1.4.2.31-2, 1.4.3.2-4;
 - Impossibility of inference to objects, e.g. T 1.4.2.47;
 - We cannot form an idea of primary qualities without relying on secondary qualities, which are acknowledged to be "nothing but impressions in the mind" (T 1.4.4.3). So we can form no coherent idea of a mind-independent object (T 1.4.4.6-9).
- *Treatise* 1.4.5-6, "Of the Immateriality of the Soul" and "Of Personal Identity", may well be radically sceptical from a traditional perspective, but Hume does not see them as leading to "such contradictions and difficulties" as he claims to have found by now "in every system concerning external objects, and in the idea of matter" (T 1.4.5.1).

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Complications
Regarding
the Humean
"Imagination"



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"Imagination" as the Faculty of Having, and Operating on, Ideas

- In Lecture 2 (slides 8-9), we saw how Hume's conceptual empiricism leads him – following Locke – to assimilate *thinking* to the having of mental *images*.
- In particular, Hume denies that we can form purely intellectual, non-imagistic ideas (T 1.3.1.7).
- This implies that the *imagination*, traditionally conceived of as the faculty we use when *imagining* things (e.g. fanciful ideas that we have created ourselves, cf. Lecture 3 slide 9), becomes more generally where all of our thinking takes place (not counting ideas or "impressions" of *memory*).

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“Imagination” as Opposed to “Reason” or “the Understanding”

- In Lecture 4, we saw that Hume implicitly identifies “reason” with “the understanding” (slide 13), and two of his most famous discussions – of induction and the external world – set this faculty *in opposition* to “the imagination” (also called “the fancy”).
- Moreover they proceed by showing first that reason *cannot* explain the belief in question (either about the unobserved, or about the existence of body), and then concluding that the imagination must be responsible, apparently because the belief requires a *non-rational* explanation.

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Slide 4.6: Faculties, Induction, and Body

- “... the next question is, whether experience produces the idea by means of the understanding or imagination; whether we are determined by reason to make the transition, or by ... association ... of perceptions.” (T 1.3.6.4)
- “The subject, then, of our present enquiry, is concerning the *causes* which induce us to believe in the existence of body: ... we ... shall consider, whether it be the *senses*, *reason*, or the *imagination*, that produces the opinion of a *continu’d* or of a *distinct* existence.” (T 1.4.2.2)

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Yet Custom Remains Respectable

- Although Hume consistently treats our *belief in body* as rationally questionable (e.g. involving “fiction” “error and falshood”, cf. slides 6.20, 6.24), he treats our *inductive beliefs* with far more respect.
- He becomes more explicit about this in the *Abstract and first Enquiry*:
 - “’Tis not, therefore, reason, which is the guide of life, but custom.” (A 16)
 - “Custom, then, is the great guide of human life” (E 5.6)
- *He continues to treat causal inductive inference as an operation of reason* (even though it’s founded on custom, an associative principle of the imagination):

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Causal Inference Continues to be Considered an Operation of Reason

- T 1.3.11.2 (“human reason” includes *proofs* and *probabilities*);
- 1.4.2.47, 1.4.4.15 (“reason” includes inference from cause and effect);
- 2.3.3.3 (“reason is nothing but the discovery of” cause and effect relations);
- 3.1.1.12 (“reason, in a strict and philosophical sense, ... discovers the connexion of causes and effects”);
- 3.1.1.18 (“the operations of human understanding [include] the inferring of matter of fact”).

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A Distinction between Types of Principle, Not Parts of the Mind

- In slides 5.17-21 we saw Hume advocating higher-order reflection and formulation of “general rules”, so as to enable us reliably to identify the genuine causal factors in similar situations, avoiding crude prejudice. Note what he says about this in faculty terms:
 - “The general rule is attributed to our judgment; as being more extensive and constant. The exception to the imagination; as being more capricious and uncertain.” (T 1.3.13.11)

The distinction is being drawn between types of principle – apparently on the basis of their *reliability* – rather than in terms of parts of the mind.

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A Tension in “the Imagination”

- A related tension emerges in the course of T 1.3.9.4, given that custom is itself supposedly a principle of the imagination:

“All this, and every thing else, which I believe, are nothing but ideas; tho’ by their force and settled order, arising from custom and the relation of cause and effect, they distinguish themselves from the other ideas, which are merely the offspring of the imagination.”

- Thus custom is apparently distinguished from less reliable principles which are merely “the offspring of the imagination”. This phrase occurs at only one other point in Hume’s writings ...

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A Last-Minute Footnote

- Hume inserted a footnote at the end of Section 1.3.9, by means of a specially printed “cancel” leaf, while the *Treatise* was in press:

“as our assent to all probable reasonings is founded on the vivacity of ideas, it resembles many of those whimsies and prejudices, which are rejected under the opprobrious character of being the offspring of the imagination. By this expression it appears that the word, *imagination*, is commonly us’d in two different senses; and ... in the following reasonings I have often [fallen] into [this ambiguity].” (T 1.3.9.19 n. 22)

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An Ambiguity in “the Imagination”

- The footnote at T 1.3.9.19 continues:

“When I oppose the imagination to the memory, I mean the faculty, by which we form our fainter ideas. When I oppose it to reason, I mean the same faculty, excluding only our demonstrative and probable reasonings.” (a similar note, deleted from T 2.2.7.6, refers to “the understanding” rather than “reason”)

- So the narrower sense of “the imagination” includes “whimsies and prejudices”, but excludes “probable reasonings”, even though the latter are based on custom, which in T 1.3.6 had clearly been considered to be an associational principle of the imagination.

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Garrett’s Account of the Ambiguity

- *Inclusive Imagination*

“In this broad sense of the term ‘imagination’, in which it denotes a faculty of having any ideas that are naturally less lively or ‘fainter’ than memories, all of the operations that determine the ways in which the mind generates or modifies non-memory ideas qualify as operations of the imagination. This includes what he calls ‘reason’.”

- *Unreasoning Imagination*

“Hume also uses the term ‘imagination’ in a narrower sense, ... differing from the broader sense only in its exclusion of reason* from its scope.” (2015, pp. 87-8)

* Note here that Garrett takes Humean “reason” to denote *only demonstrative and probable reasoning*

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An Alternative Account

- *Inclusive Imagination*

Similar in scope to Garrett’s interpretation: the “canvas” on which all of our (impression-copied and hence imagistic) ideas play out. Accordingly, this embraces all of our reasoning, as well as fantasies and “fictions”.

- *Fanciful Imagination*

Restricted to those imaginative operations which are insufficiently respectable to count as “reason”. In this sense – aptly called *the fancy* – the imagination excludes not only (suitably disciplined) *demonstrative and probable reasoning*, but also *intuition* (and perhaps *custom*): these all count as operations of *reason*.

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Why Does This Matter?

- Understanding Hume’s Faculty Structure

Note that this fits with a long-running debate over what Hume means by “reason” – Garrett understands this as restricted to *inference or argument* (i.e. ratiocination); whereas I understand it as our *cognitive* faculty.

- Understanding The Impact of *Treatise* 1.4.7

Garrett interprets *Treatise* 1.4.7 as carefully choreographed and under control; I consider it to be a sceptical meltdown as Hume’s would-be faculty structure comes tumbling down.

- For a fairly recent skirmish within this debate, see our articles in *Hume Studies*, November 2014, where Garrett poses the following two objections to my account ...

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Defending the Alternative Account

1. **Objection:** In the footnote at T 1.3.9.19, Hume seems to exclude “only our demonstrative and probable reasonings” from “the imagination” in the narrower sense. This fits closely with Garrett’s reading.

- **Reply:** the footnote was a last-minute insertion, fitted into a very limited space that Hume had made at the end of the section. So it’s not surprisingly imprecise.

2. **Objection:** In *Treatise* 1.3.6 (paras 4 and 12-15), Hume repeatedly denies that inductive inference is “determine’d by reason”, and treats custom as being instead an operation of the imagination.

- **Reply:** Hume’s view of the reason/imagination distinction developed while he was writing the *Treatise*.

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Is This The Same Distinction?

- “as our assent to all probable reasonings is founded on the vivacity of ideas, it resembles many of those whimsies and prejudices, which are rejected under the opprobrious character of being the offspring of the imagination.”
(T 1.3.9.19 n. 22)
- “The general rule is attributed to our judgment; as being more extensive and constant. The exception to the imagination; as being more capricious and uncertain.”
(T 1.3.13.11)
- “I must distinguish in the imagination betwixt the principles which are permanent, irresistible, and universal; such as the customary transition from causes to effects, and from effects to causes: And the principles, which are changeable, weak, and irregular; ...” (T 1.4.4.1)

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Blurring the Reason/Imagination Divide

- “... the understanding or imagination can draw inferences from past experience ...” (T 1.3.8.13)
- “... the judgment, or rather the imagination ...” (T 1.3.9.19)
- “The memory, senses, and understanding are ... all ... founded on the imagination” (T 1.4.7.3)
- “... the imagination or understanding, call it which you please ...” (T 2.3.9.10, also DOP 1.8)
- “[suppose that we resolve] to reject all the trivial suggestions of the fancy, and adhere [instead] to the understanding, that is, to the general and more establish'd properties of the imagination” (T 1.4.7.7)

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Principles of “the Imagination”

That last quotation, from T 1.4.7.7, seems to be alluding to the same distinction that Hume invokes at T 1.4.4.1, but this time labelled as “general” versus “trivial”:

- The Respectable “General” Principles
 - These are the “permanent, irresistible, and universal” principles (e.g. customary inference) that Hume himself relies on in his experimental philosophy.
- The Disreputable “Trivial” Principles
 - These are the “changeable, weak, and irregular” principles (e.g. imaginative fancies) for which Hume criticizes the ancient philosophers and superstitious.

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A Significant Identification

- But if this is indeed the case, then when Hume refers to “the understanding, that is, ... the general and more establish'd properties of the imagination”, he appears to be identifying “the understanding” with the “general” principles of the imagination. (As Garrett himself seems to agree in his 1997 book, p. 29).
- And as we have observed before (Lecture 4, slide 13), Hume identifies “reason” with “the understanding” literally dozens of times. (One highly pertinent example of this identification is implicit in the rewording of the footnote originally at T 2.2.7.6 to create the last-minute-inserted footnote at T 1.3.9.19, where “the understanding” has been replaced by “reason”.)

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Summing Up These Points ...

- Again, Hume thinks that all our ideas are imagistic, and attacks the rationalist view that we have pure intellectual ideas (T 1.3.1.7).
 - If so, then all of our reasoning must take place in the “imagination” (as traditionally conceived), and “reason” cannot be some separate part of the mind.
- Thus the distinction between “reason” and “the imagination” must be drawn on the basis of the kinds of principles that govern our thinking:
 - Rational principles are disciplined and reliable;
 - Imaginative principles are unreliable and capricious.

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The Significance of the Distinction

- Although Hume seems to have no sceptical intent when presenting his famous argument concerning induction at T 1.3.6, it seems that he later saw the need to draw a clear distinction between the respectable and disreputable principles that act on the imagination, considering the former (notably *customary inference*, at least when disciplined by general rules) to be part of “reason”, but the latter mere “imagination”.
 - This distinction seems to be potentially crucial to Hume’s attempt to vindicate custom as providing a respectable basis of probable reason. If that’s correct, but the distinction ultimately fails, then this could seriously threaten his attempt to build a rational science of human nature!

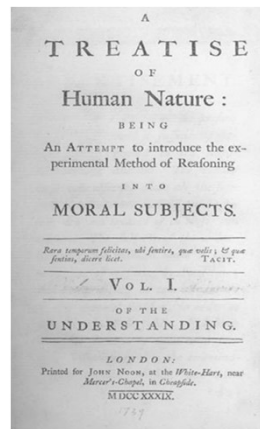
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Treatise 1.4.7: “Conclusion of this Book”



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“Conclusion of This Book”

- *Treatise* 1.4.7 is especially hard to interpret, partly because it is presented as a dynamic sequence of first-personal reflections on the position in which Hume has been left by the sceptical results from earlier sections.
- Most of our mental processes have been revealed as dependent on the imagination and its mechanisms, which generate “the vivacity of ideas” (*T* 1.4.7.3).
- Worse, *T* 1.4.4 has found a “manifest contradiction” between our causal reasoning and our belief in the independent existence of matter (*T* 1.4.7.4).
- The analysis of causation in *T* 1.3.14 also shows our thoughts about that to be deeply confused (*T* 1.4.7.5).

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The “Dangerous Dilemma”

- We have now seen several seductive “illusions of the imagination” to which we are naturally prone, “and the question is, how far we ought to yield to these illusions. This question is very difficult, and reduces us to a very dangerous dilemma, whichever way we answer it.” (*T* 1.4.7.6)
- On the one hand,
“if we assent to every trivial suggestion of the fancy; beside that these suggestions are often contrary to each other; they lead us into such errors, absurdities, and obscurities, that we must at last become ashamed of our credulity.” (*T* 1.4.7.6)

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- “But on the other hand,

if [we] take a resolution to reject all the trivial suggestions of the fancy, and adhere to the understanding, that is, to the general and more establish'd properties of the imagination; even this resolution, if steadily executed, wou'd be dangerous, and attended with the most fatal consequences. For I have already shewn, [note to *T* 1.4.1] that the understanding, when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either in philosophy or common life. We save ourselves from this total scepticism only by means of that singular and seemingly trivial property of the fancy, by which we enter with difficulty into remote views of things, and are not able to accompany them with so sensible an impression, as we do those, which are more easy and natural.” (*T* 1.4.7.7)

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Recall from Lecture 7 ...

- Hume's explanation why our beliefs survive the radical sceptical argument of *T* 1.4.1:
“I answer, that after the first and second decision; as the action of the mind becomes forc'd and unnatural, and the ideas faint and obscure; tho' the principles ... be the same ...; yet their influence on the imagination [weakens] ...” (*T* 1.4.1.10)
- Hence his statement, as quoted from *T* 1.4.7.7:
“We save ourselves from this total scepticism only by means of that singular and seemingly trivial property of the fancy, by which we enter with difficulty into remote views of things”

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- Could the sceptical calamity of *T* 1.4.1 be avoided if we “establish it for a general maxim, that no refin'd or elaborate reasoning is ever to be receiv'd”? Such a principle would be hugely damaging:

“By this means you cut off entirely all science and philosophy: You proceed upon one singular quality of the imagination, and by a parity of reason must embrace all of them: And you expressly contradict yourself; since this maxim must be built on the preceding reasoning, which will be allow'd to be sufficiently refin'd and metaphysical. What party, then, shall we choose among these difficulties? If we embrace this principle, and condemn all refin'd reasoning, we run into the most manifest absurdities. If we reject it in favour of these reasonings, we subvert entirely the human understanding. We have, therefore, no choice left but betwixt a false reason and none at all.” (*T* 1.4.7.7)

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“A Manifest Contradiction”

“For my part, I know not what ought to be done in the present case. I can only observe what is commonly done; which is, that this difficulty is seldom or never thought of ... Very refin'd reflections have little or no influence upon us; and yet we do not, and cannot establish it for a rule, that they ought not to have any influence; which implies a manifest contradiction.

But what have I here said, that reflections very refin'd and metaphysical have little or no influence upon us? ...” (T 1.4.7.7-8)

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In “the Deepest Darkness”

“The *intense* view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another. Where am I, or what? From what causes do I derive my existence, and to what condition shall I return? ... I am confounded with all these questions, and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environ'd with the deepest darkness, and utterly depriv'd of the use of every member and faculty.” (T 1.4.7.8)

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Carelessness and Inattention Again

- *Psychological* (though not *philosophical*) resolution comes from a now-familiar direction: the “carelessness and in-attention” of T 1.4.2.57.

“Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, ... I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and [afterwards] these speculations ... appear so cold, and strain'd, and ridiculous, that I cannot find it in my heart to enter into them any farther.” (T 1.4.7.9)

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A Sceptical Disposition

“Here then I find myself absolutely and necessarily determin'd to live, and talk, and act like other people in the common affairs of life. ... I may, nay I must yield to the current of nature, in submitting to my senses and understanding; and in this blind submission I show most perfectly my sceptical disposition and principles. Does it follow, that I must strive against the current of nature ... and that I must torture my brain with subtilities and sophistries ... Under what obligation do I lie of making such an abuse of time?” (T 1.4.7.10)

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The Title Principle

- Don Garrett sees a *philosophical* resolution to all these sceptical quandaries as lying in what he calls Hume’s “Title Principle”, which is proposed at T 1.4.7.11:

“... if we are philosophers, it ought only to be upon sceptical principles, and from an inclination, which we feel to the employing ourselves after that manner. Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate upon us.”

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- The Title Principle is supposed to play the role of blocking the corrosively sceptical argument of *Treatise* 1.4.1 – on the ground that this leads to reasoning which is faint and unconvincing, and not in line with our propensities – while allowing customary inference (in everyday life and empirical science) to survive unscathed.

– Hsueh Qu, *Hume’s Epistemological Evolution* (2020, ch. 6, pp. 129-31) explains this clearly, suggesting that the Title Principle is indeed the best textual candidate for making sense of Hume’s apparent change in manner between the dark depths of T 1.4.7.7-8 and the relatively sunlit uplands of T 1.4.7.12-13, motivated by the positive propensities of *curiosity* and *ambition*.

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Curiosity and Ambition

"I cannot forbear having a curiosity to be acquainted with the principles of moral good and evil, the nature and foundation of government, and the cause of those several passions and inclinations, which actuate and govern me. ... I feel an ambition to arise in me of contributing to the instruction of mankind, and of acquiring a name by my inventions and discoveries." (T 1.4.7.12)

- This seems to point forward to *Treatise* Books 2 and 3, on the passions and morals, plausibly fitting with the idea that the Title Principle has provided a basis on which to continue philosophy.

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Philosophy versus Superstition

- Unfortunately, "philosophy" (or what we would call *science*) is not the only kind of reasoning that is "lively and mixes itself with some propensity", for humans have a strong propensity towards lively superstitions. Hume's answer:

"we ought only to deliberate concerning the choice of our guide, and ought to prefer that which is safest and most agreeable. And in this respect I make bold to recommend philosophy, and ... give it the preference to superstition of every kind ..."

(T 1.4.7.13)

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An Impasse

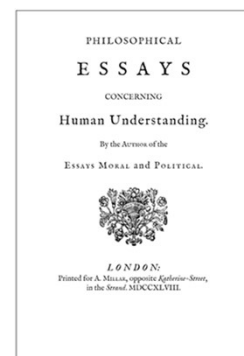
- But how, given all his sceptical arguments, can Hume claim any solid basis for saying that philosophy (which on his own account contradicts itself) is safer or more agreeable than superstition?
- He is reduced to the apparently rather lame observation that "the errors in religion are dangerous; those in philosophy only ridiculous" (T 1.4.7.13).
- This invites the response that religious truth is crucial for the avoidance of hellfire etc., and so we should follow religion if we want to be "safest" with regard to our future prospects. Without a rational basis for discrimination, Hume seems to have no answer.

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Enquiry 12: Hume's Second Thoughts



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A Developmental Hypothesis

- Hume's discussion "Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy", Section 12 of the 1748 *Enquiry* (originally published as *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding*), evinces a very different attitude to scepticism, facing up to the extreme sceptic and advocating instead a "mitigated" variety.
- One key driver of this change might have been Hume's realisation – on writing up his arguments for the new publication – that *the extreme sceptical argument of Treatise 1.4.1 cannot be coherently expounded with any practical example beyond the first couple of stages*. The "and so on" move in T 1.4.1.6 (and likewise in commentators' attempts to defend the argument) is really just hand-waving ...

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Revealing His Vague Handwaving

"we are oblig'd by our reason to add a new doubt deriv'd from the possibility of error in the estimation we make of the truth and fidelity of our faculties. ... [which] must weaken still farther our first evidence, and must itself be weaken'd by a fourth doubt of the same kind, and so on *in infinitum*; and ... must in this manner be reduc'd to nothing. ... all the rules of logic require a continual diminution, and at last a total extinction of belief and evidence." (T 1.4.1.6)

- In "Hume's Pivotal Argument, and His Supposed Obligation of Reason" (*Hume Studies*, 2018), I suggest a particular reason why Hume might have almost inevitably come to realise the failure of this argument, as he prepared the *Enquiry* in the 1740s ...

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Examples in the *Treatise*

- “Of the inference from the impression to the idea”
 - *Treatise* 1.3.6 briefly mentions only one example (flame and heat at T 1.3.6.2).
- “Of the idea of necessary connexion”
 - *Treatise* 1.3.14 barely mentions the examples of billiard balls (T 1.3.14.18), a couple of mathematical relations (T 1.3.14.23), and a blind man’s false suppositions that scarlet is like a trumpet sound, and light like solidity (T 1.3.14.27).

By contrast ...

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Examples in the *Enquiry*

- “Sceptical Doubts concerning ... the understanding”
 - *Enquiry* 4 contains over twenty examples, some of which are developed extensively (e.g. billiard balls at E 4.8-10; momentum at E 4.13, 16; the nourishing qualities of bread at E 4.16, 21).
- “Of the idea of necessary connexion”
 - *Enquiry* 7 mentions billiard balls repeatedly (E 7.6, 21, 28, 30), heat and flame (E 7.8), the influence of will on our limbs and other organs (E 7.9, 12, 14), a man struck with palsy (E 7.13), our power to raise up a new idea (E 7.16), the effects of sickness, time of day, and food (E 7.19), descent of bodies, growth of plants, generation, and nourishment (E 7.21), and vibration of a string causing a sound (E 7.29).

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Implicitly Rejecting *T* 1.4.1?

- Hume’s dismissal of antecedent scepticism in the *Enquiry* (at E 12.3) seems to involve denying that reflexive checking is a rational requirement for relying on our faculties.
 - If so, that also casts doubt on the argument of *T* 1.4.1, which functioned precisely by insisting that we should perform such checking (and indeed should do so *ad infinitum*).
- Now Hume seems to think that we should start with *trust in our faculties by default*, unless and until we find positive reason to distrust them.

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Dismissing “Antecedent” Scepticism

“There is a species of scepticism, *antecedent* to all study and philosophy, which is much inculcated by Des Cartes and others ... It recommends an universal doubt ... of our very faculties; of whose veracity, say they, we must assure ourselves, by a chain of reasoning, deduced from some original principle, which cannot possibly be fallacious ... But neither is there any such original principle, which has a prerogative above others ... Or if there were, could we advance a step beyond it, but by the use of those very faculties, of which we are supposed to be already diffident. The Cartesian doubt, therefore, were it ever possible to be attained by any human creature (as it plainly is not) would be entirely incurable; and no reasoning could ever bring us to a state of assurance and conviction upon any subject.”

(E 12.3)

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Rejecting the Appropriateness of High-Level Iterated Checking?

- In the following paragraph, Hume recommends a more moderate “antecedent scepticism”:
 - “To begin with clear and self-evident principles, to advance by timorous and sure steps, to review frequently our conclusions, and examine accurately all their consequences” (E 12.4)
- This also fits well with the hypothesis that he has seen what is wrong with his argument of *T* 1.4.1: checking should be done at the bottom level (e.g. our arithmetic calculations), not by iterating to higher and higher meta-levels.

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Convergence: the Onus of Proof

- What the *Enquiry* calls *consequent* scepticism (E 12.5) instead puts the onus *on the sceptic* to identify problems with our faculties.
- At E 12.22-3, we see the same strategy deployed very effectively to answer Hume’s famous “sceptical doubts” about induction (as presented in Section 4).
- Here we see a *striking convergence in Hume’s approach to topics that were treated quite differently in the Treatise*. He now finds a satisfactory resolution of scepticism, and a plausible criterion of respectable scientific enquiry, in *mitigated scepticism* (E 12.24-5) and his Fork (E 12.26-34).

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“Ample Matter of Triumph”

“The sceptic ... seems to have ample matter of triumph; while he justly insists, that all our evidence for any matter of fact, which lies beyond the testimony of sense or memory, is derived entirely from the relation of cause and effect; that we have no other idea of this relation than that of two objects, which have been frequently *conjoined* together; that we have no argument to convince us, that objects, which have, in our experience, been frequently conjoined, will likewise, in other instances, be conjoined in the same manner; and that nothing leads us to this inference but custom or a certain instinct of our nature; which it is indeed difficult to resist, but which, like other instincts, may be fallacious and deceitful. .” (E 12.22)

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What is the Sceptic’s Point?

- Hume’s response is to stress that such “Pyrrhonian” scepticism is pointless:

“a PYRRHONIAN cannot expect, that his philosophy will have any constant influence on the mind: Or if it had, that its influence would be beneficial to society. On the contrary, he must acknowledge, if he will acknowledge any thing, that all human life must perish, were his principles universally and steadily to prevail. ... It is true; so fatal an event is very little to be dreaded. Nature is always too strong for principle.” (E 12.23)

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Why Rely on Custom?

- As in the Treatise, Hume thinks that practical scepticism is pre-empted by our animal nature:

[Belief arising from inference through custom] “is the necessary result of placing the mind in such circumstances. It is an operation of the soul, when we are so situated, as unavoidable as to feel the passion of love, when we receive benefits; or hatred, when we meet with injuries. All these operations are a species of natural instincts, which no reasoning or process of the thought or understanding is able, either to produce, or to prevent.” (E 5.8, cf. T 1.4.1.7)

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The Whimsical Condition of Mankind

- The Pyrrhonian arguments, in the end,

“can have no other tendency than to show the whimsical condition of mankind, who must act and reason and believe; though they are not able, by their most diligent enquiry, to satisfy themselves concerning the foundation of these operations, or to remove the objections, that may be raised against them.” (E 12.23)

- But this can have a beneficial effect, by leading us to “a more *mitigated* scepticism or *academical* philosophy” (E 12.24).

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Two Types of Mitigated Scepticism

- The first type leads to “more modesty and reserve”, less confidence in our opinions and “prejudice against antagonists”.
- The second type – whose basis Hume does not make entirely clear, involves:

“the limitation of our enquiries to such subjects as are best adapted to the narrow capacity of human understanding. ... avoiding all distant and high enquiries, confin[ing] itself to common life, and to such subjects as fall under daily practice and experience”. (E 12.25)

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Virtuous Bootstrapping

- If custom is indeed our primary belief-forming mechanism, is irresistible (at least in “obvious” cases), vital to our survival and daily life, and if the sceptic can give no strong *consequent* argument against it, then:

- We can use induction to *refine* our own use of induction: to discover what more sophisticated methods actually work in practice (e.g. confining our enquiries to some subjects rather than others).
- We can appeal to “methodological consistency” to check bogus uses of induction.

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Opposing Superstition

- Now Hume has an answer to “superstition”:
 - Arguments from miracle reports (*Enquiry* 10) rely on the inductive strength of testimony; but if properly weighed, the evidence of induction – that such things don’t actually happen in practice – points *against* miracles more than for them.
 - The Design Argument (*Enquiry* 11) relies on analogy (which is a weaker form of induction), but if properly analysed, the analogies in favour of theism are weak and others are stronger.
 - Hume’s Fork rules out *a priori* metaphysics, such as the Cosmological Argument (see *E* 12.28-29).

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From the *Treatise* to the *Enquiry*

- In the first *Enquiry*, several sources of radical sceptical doubt are dropped, in particular:
 - The extreme sceptical argument of 1.4.1;
 - The claim that identity over time (either of objects or selves) is incompatible with change;
 - The Separability Principle;
 - Scepticism about personal identity.
- The *Enquiry* thus finds a coherent way of defending inductive science based on customary inference (a key *respectable* principle). For more on this and on the reconciliation between Hume’s “naturalism” and “scepticism”, see my “Hume’s Chief Argument” (2016).

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Some Examination Questions

Scepticism – General and Comparative

- ‘Our author ... concludes, that we assent to our faculties, and employ our reason only because we cannot help it. Philosophy wou’d render us entirely *Pyrrhonian*, were not nature too strong for it.’ (HUME, *Abstract of the Treatise*, para. 27). Does Hume give an adequate answer to scepticism, or is he overwhelmed by it? (2010, 19)
- ‘Whatever his own personal attitude may have been, the net effect of Hume’s philosophy is to give a powerful boost to the sceptic.’ Is that fair? (2018, 34)
- Critically compare the views of Hume and at least one other author covered by this paper, on the topic of scepticism. (2019, 36)

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Scepticism and/or Naturalism

- ‘The great subverter of Pyrrhonism or the excessive principles of scepticism is action, and employment, and the occupations of common life’ (HUME). Discuss. (2004, 16)
- ‘Nature is always too strong for principle’ (HUME). Explain and discuss. (2005, 17)
- ‘Hume’s naturalism is undermined by his scepticism.’ Discuss. (2008, 16)
- In what sense(s), if any, is Hume a naturalist? (2009, 17)
- Does Hume’s naturalism answer his scepticism? (2011, 19)
- What is ‘natural’ in Hume’s *A Treatise of Human Nature*? (2017, 31)
- In what sense(s), if any, is Hume a ‘naturalist’, and what is the relationship between his naturalism(s) and his various sceptical arguments? (2019, 33)

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The Sceptical Crisis of *Treatise* 1.4.7

- ‘The intense view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another.... Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, Nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of backgammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when, after three or four hours’ amusement, I would return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strained, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any further.’ (HUME, *Treatise* 1.4.7) Discuss. (2020, 36)

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The General/Trivial Distinction

- ‘...I must distinguish in the imagination betwixt the principles which are permanent, irresistible, and universal; such as the customary transition from causes to effects, and from causes to effects: And the principles, which are changeable, weak, and irregular; such as those I have just now taken notice of. The former are the foundation of all our thoughts and actions, so that upon their removal human nature must immediately perish and go to ruin. The latter are neither unavoidable to mankind, nor necessary, or so much as useful in the conduct of life...’ (HUME, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 1.4.4) Discuss. (2021, 35)

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