Natural Fiction and Artifice in Hume's *Treatise*

Brent Delaney

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Humanities

York University

Toronto, Ontario

August 2021

ABSTRACT

David Hume's early philosophy appeals to 'fiction' and 'artifice' to explain several important features in our cognitive and social activity. The exact meaning of these concepts, however, remains ambiguous because of the unsystematic way in which Hume employs them. In this dissertation, I develop a typology of Humean fictions and artifices to clarify and render his account consistent. In so doing, I identify a special class of fictions I divide into (a) natural fictions and (b) natural artifices. I argue that this special class of cognitive and social fictions represent a significant break with prior English-speaking philosophers, such as Francis Bacon and John Locke, in so far as these fictions and artifices of the imagination are recognized as natural, irresistible, and pragmatically useful in human cognition and social activity.

That fictions and artifices are naturally generated by the imagination in epistemic and moral contexts, I argue, is a watershed discovery in the history of philosophy. Indeed, it is a philosophical conclusion that poses serious, perhaps fatal, problems for philosophers who espouse thoroughgoing realist positions. More broadly, Hume's pursuit of applying the experimental method to the moral subject reveals that human nature is 'mightily governed' by the imagination, and that fictions and artifices are ubiquitous across the domains of science, morality, theology, logic, mathematics, and philosophy. For that reason, I suggest Hume ought to be recognized as a central figure in the history of philosophical fictionalism. Specifically, via a comparative analysis of Hume and Hans Vaihinger, I make the case that Hume functions as a vital link between Hobbes, Berkeley, and Kant in the development of early modern fictionalism.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to my supervisor, Stanley Tweyman, for being the gentle force that commonly prevailed. Much of how I read Hume has been shaped by his thought, particularly his formalization of Hume's doctrine of natural beliefs. I wish to thank my committee members, Georges Moyal, Mark Cauchi, David Jopling, and Saul Traiger for their generous support of my project and stimulating feedback on the conceptual ambiguity of fiction. I am fortunate to have pursued this research within the Department of Humanities under the leadership of Markus Reisenleitner and Victor Shea. Finally, I extend my gratitude to the Hume scholars whose influence on my interpretation has been undeniable and profound: Saul Traiger, Jonathan Cottrell, Timothy Costelloe, Robert McRae, Robert Sokolowski, Stefanie Rocknak, and Wayne Waxman.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

T	*A Treatise of Human Nature*
E	*An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*
M	*An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*
D	*Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*
N	*The Natural History of Religion*
HL	*The Letters of David Hume*
PD	*Of Polygamy and Divorces*
PGB	*Of the Parties of Great Britain*
AD	*Advertisement (1777)*
AB	*An Abstract of a Book Lately Published (1740)*

These principles of human nature, you'll say, are contradictory: But what is man but a heap of contradictions!

— David Hume

CHAPTER ONE: EXPERIMENTAL VERIFICATION METHOD

1. The Elements of Hume's Philosophy

In the first seven sections of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, David Hume establishes the foundation of his philosophy. The most basic tenet is that "all the perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into two distinct kinds" (T 1.1.1.1; SBN 1).[1] The first kind is *impressions*, namely, "our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul" (T 1.1.1.1; SBN 1). The second kind is *ideas*, which are faint images of impressions we use in thinking and reasoning (T 1.1.1.1; SBN 1). Impressions and ideas constitute the whole of Hume's ontological framework.

Beyond that, Hume remains agnostic to the possibility of other ontological entities. That is, he adopts the view that manifold causes "must be resolv'd into *original* qualities of human nature," which he cannot pretend to explain (T 1.1.4.6; SBN 13). The ontology of these original qualities may be actual, but Hume prudently leaves the investigation to those best suited to it, namely, the natural philosophers and anatomists. Metaphysicians, to that end, must observe the limits of philosophical inquiry.

Contrary to his prescription, Hume posits mental faculties that are guided by a principle of association. Curiously, these mental faculties may not be analyzed into ideas or impressions. The same is true for the principle of association. Of the mental faculties, there are two: memory

[1] References to Hume are cited as follows: 'T' are to *A Treatise of Human Nature*; followed by Book, part, section, paragraph (from 2000 Norton and Norton edition), and then corresponding page number in the 1978 Selby-Bigge edition revised by Nidditch: 'SBN'; 'AD' are to the 1777 (posthumously published) Advertisement to his collection of essays, which included the *Enquiries*; Hume's "Abstract of a Book Lately Published" is preceded by 'AB,' followed by paragraph number; 'AP' are to the Appendix of the *Treatise*; 'E' are to *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, followed by section and paragraph (from 2007 Millican edition); 'M' are to *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, followed by section and paragraph (from 1998 Beauchamp edition) 'D' are to *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, followed by section and paragraph (from 2007 Coleman edition); 'N' are to "The Natural History of Religion," followed by section and paragraph (from 2007 Beauchamp edition).

and imagination.[2] With respect to memory, Hume provides limited analysis. We learn that memory "preserves the original form" of objects presented to the senses via impressions (T 1.1.3.3; SBN 9). The only aspect that distinguishes memory from the imagination is the "superior force and vivacity" of its ideas (T 1.3.5.3; SBN 85). Apart from the ability to preserve the original form and vivacity of impressions, memory is inert.

On the other hand, the imagination is, for Hume, the central faculty of human nature. First, it ties all our impressions and ideas into cognizable perceptions. It accomplishes this by virtue of a "gentle force, which commonly prevails" in the imagination (T 1.1.4.1; SBN 10). Similar to natural laws of the physical world, this gentle force—otherwise titled the 'principle of association'—acts as a natural law in the mind of moral subjects. It is a "kind of attraction" in the mental world that unites our simple ideas (T 1.1.4.6; SBN 12). Second, the imagination is free to join and combine any ideas from past perceptions. Artistic creation and the ability to feign "past scene[s] of adventures" is a consequence of such liberty (T 1.3.5.3; SBN 85). Third, the imagination includes our ability to reason. Causal reasoning is predicated on imaginative custom, whereas deductive reasoning depends on the liberty of the imagination to combine ideas in a formal manner. That said, Hume's description of the imagination is not unambiguous. Even though the "empire of the imagination" rules over his entire philosophy, Hume fails to offer a complete and systematic account of the faculty (AB 35; SBN 662). I offer several ways to render his account of the imagination more complete in Chapter 2.

---

[2] In later passages, Hume suggests that the 'senses' and 'reason' (or 'judgment') account for two further faculties (see T 1.4.2.3; SBN 188-9 on the sense faculty; T 1.3.13.11; SBN 149 on the judgment faculty). Hume likewise regards the 'passions' as a faculty: T 2.2.2.16; SBN 339. On my interpretation, I take the elements of Hume's philosophy to be his considered view. That is, the imagination and memory are the *only* two faculties, where the imagination includes three sub-faculties: reason (judgment), the active imagination, and the passive imagination. In Chapter 2, I examine the imagination in detail. The senses and the passions, on the other hand, are not faculties, even though, in common language, it is easy to confuse them as such. The reason they are not faculties is that they are not purely cognitive or mind-dependent, as is the case with the imagination and memory.

After his brief sketch of the memory and imagination, Hume presents his theory of relations. Relations are divided into two kinds: natural and philosophical. Natural relations obtain as a result of the principle of association. The natural relations are threefold: resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect. What makes these relations *natural* is the fact that we have no active control over them. Impressions and ideas are passively arranged based on the associational principle operating as a law of attraction; it is a law of nature that may not be altered.[3] Philosophical relations, on the other hand, are generated by *active* comparisons of the mind. They obtain when *we think proper to compare* two or more ideas. Philosophical relations are thus posterior to natural relations. We do not perceive the world in atomistic parts; instead, we perceive the world as already connected by natural relations. On that basis, we may decide to isolate, combine, separate, or distinguish simple and complex ideas to gain philosophical understanding.

Priority is key. Hume denominates relations as natural for the reason that they are irresistible—the mind cannot, by definition, *think proper to compare* them because the mind generates natural relations before philosophical thinking begins. Natural relations are, therefore, necessarily prior to philosophical relations. Hume's subsequent division between the vulgar and philosophical mind seems to support such a reading. Contemporary psychology likewise lends credence to the view: a child's ideas are likely associated by resemblance, but not necessarily by the philosophical relation of identity, which presumably generates what psychologists call object permanence.[4] Accepting the priority of natural relations, however, is not obligatory to accept my

[3] I call the principle of association a 'law of nature' given that "all the operations of the mind must, in a great measure, depend on them" (AB 35; SBN 662). It is important to note that, for Hume, the phrase 'law of nature' does not necessarily imply mind-independence. Indeed, human nature may *invent* laws of nature; Hume even emphasizes the point when referring to our social structure: "men *invented* the three fundamental laws of nature" (T 3.2.8.5; SBN 543). That humans may *invent* natural laws is a feature of Hume's philosophy central to understanding the subsequent interpretation.

[4] It is debated among psychologists as to when exactly a child gains the idea of object permanence, but the idea itself is strikingly similar to Hume's fiction of continued existence. Recall that the fiction of continued existence is dependent upon the relation of identity, which Hume classifies as a philosophical relation.

interpretation. There is another way to construe the matter. Natural relations may be understood as the genus or highest categories under which philosophical relations are species. I offer a comprehensive justification for my account of Hume's theory of relations in Chapter 3.

Hume concludes Part I with a discussion of abstract ideas. On his nominalist account, following George Berkeley, universals are reduced to general terms, for which "a customary conjunction has a relation to many other particular ideas, and readily recalls them in the imagination" (T 1.1.7.10; SBN 22). The rejection of universals is a cornerstone of Hume's philosophy, and it serves as a useful tool of verification in his experimentalist project. At the end of his discussion of abstract ideas, Hume includes a brief note concerning distinctions of reason. Distinctions of reason are vital to what I call, following Robert Fogelin, Hume's *philosophical perspectivism*.[5] For instance, even while thinking of a figure without colour is impossible, we are still able, through a distinction of reason, to keep an eye on *either* one (T 1.1.7.18; SBN 25). In that way, Hume ends Part I by revealing an essential operation of the mind: we may separate the inseparable.[6] The paradoxical nature of this ability is considered in Chapter 6.

1.1. Hume's Experimental Method

Hume announces in the subtitle to his *Treatise* his attempt "to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects" (T 0.0; SBN xi). Similar to the Baconian experimental

[5] In Chapter 6, I discuss Hume's philosophical perspectivism. Robert Fogelin argues "that Hume's writings exhibit a radical form of epistemological, or better, doxastic perspectivism. What we believe and what we think it appropriate to believe is a function of the level of investigation we are indulging in. Indeed, Hume comes very close to saying just this in the closing paragraph of Book I of the *Treatise*. In the course of explaining his apparent lapses into dogmatic modes of speech, he defends himself by telling us that it is indeed proper 'we should yield to that propensity, which inclines us to be positive and certain in particular points, according to the light in which we survey them in any particular instant' (T 273)" ("Consistency of Hume's Philosophy," 164). Later, Fogelin claims that Hume is committed to a "strong version of perspectivism" (Ibid., 166). Fogelin's influence on my interpretation relative to this particular issue is unambiguous.

[6] Stanley Tweyman's emphasis on distinctions of reason in Hume's philosophy informs my view here. Indeed, I borrow the exact phrase from his "Hume on Separating the Inseparable."

method in natural philosophy, Hume aims to introduce the experimental method into moral philosophy. The innovative application of the experimental method to the human mind situates Hume as one of the pioneers of modern psychology.

In developing an account of Hume's science of the mind, several questions deserve our attention: what is Hume's experimental methodology? How can a scientist of the mind test on incorporeal ideas? How are experiments of the mind validated?

In Part I, Hume addresses each of these questions. First, the verification criteria for experimentation on the human mind are distinct from the verification criteria applied to the mind-independent world. In other words, the moral philosopher must pursue a different kind of experimentation than that of the natural philosopher:

> The examination of our sensations belongs more to anatomists and natural philosophers than to moral.… And as the impressions of reflection…. arise mostly from ideas, 'twill be necessary to reverse that method, which at first sight seems most natural; and in order to explain the nature and principles of the human mind, give a particular account of ideas. (T 1.1.2.1; SBN 8)

Therefore, Hume sets out to develop a scientific way to verify *ideas*. He may not rely upon the same experimental method employed by Newton or Boyle. Ideas may not be tested upon by a vacuum pump or a law apparatus. Instead, as Hume believes, his project is revolutionary; it requires an unprecedented experimental methodology.

I submit that Part I of Hume's *Treatise* constitutes his attempt at a novel experimental methodology. It consists of a three-part verification system.[7] That is to say, what Hume calls the "elements of his philosophy" is his experimental model for the verification of ideas of the human

[7] Although it is, in fact, a four-part verification system, one of the parts—namely, *relational* verification—ends up becoming the primary focus of Hume's investigation in Book I. Therefore, I exclude it from the interpretive model herein. In Chapter 3, I discuss Hume's theory of relations in detail.

mind. The entire *Treatise*, subsequent to Part I of Book I, is, to that end, an application of Hume's experimental method to a range of ideas across science, morality, religion, and philosophy.

The seven sections of Part I supply Hume's *verification criteria*. By this means, ideas may be experimentally tested to discover their "nature and origin" (T 1.3.14.14; SBN 162). Over the course of his experimental inquiry, we find that Hume's science of the mind yields shocking conclusions. Fundamental ideas of science, morality, religion, and philosophy—e.g., identity, causality, and liberty—are revealed to be ultimately unverifiable. Moreover, these ideas appear to be generated by the mind itself, that is, *mind-dependent*. Associational propensities of the imagination are responsible for generating sacred ideas embedded in our most esteemed domains of intellectual life. Furthermore, these ideas—what I call *natural fictions*—are not only features, but also constitutive of these domains.

Hume's complete schema in Part I may be divided into three separate experimental controls: *empirical verification* (section I and II), *faculty verification* (section III), and *property verification* (section VI and VII):

(1) *Empirical verification* evaluates an idea by tracing it to an original impression. "If you cannot point out *any such impression*, you may be certain you are mistaken, when you imagine you have *any such idea*" (T 1.2.5.28; SBN 65).

(2) *Faculty verification* evaluates an idea by examining the faculty responsible for its derivation or generation. Two faculties are available: an idea may be *derived* from (a) the memory (that is, the senses) or *generated* by (b) the imagination.

(3) *Property verification* evaluates ideas so far as particular ideas may be traced to general terms. Hypostatization is a common error that is revealed by property verification.

The threefold verification criteria function as Hume's innovative approach to experimentation in the mental world.[8] Ideas are thus examined in light of the following experimental questions:

(1) From what impression does the idea derive?

(2) What faculty is responsible for the idea?

(3) To what general term is a particular idea annexed?

Hume poses these questions broadly, applying his experimental method to all aspects of human nature. Hume does not circumscribe his project to undermining a single domain of thought, as some commentators seem to suggest.[9] On the contrary, he sets out to analyze the *moral subject*. The experience of the moral subject is varied and diverse; it may include science, mathematics, art, and philosophy. The *Treatise* considers all areas of human nature, and Hume's experimental findings demonstrate that, even in science and mathematics, fictions are constitutive of human theory and practice. Therefore, human nature always involves uncertainty in as much as these fictions are unverifiable or contradictory. In light of this discovery, Hume ultimately maintains a

---

[8] An important addendum here is that I have *purposely* left out the fourth verification criterion: *relational verification*. Sections IV and V provide the criterion for natural and philosophical relations. Relational verification evaluates relations in so far as they may be known intuitively, demonstratively, or probabilistically. The reason for their absence as experimental controls is that relations end up becoming the protagonists in Hume's epistemological drama. The focus of Book I, in other words, is on the relations of space and time, causality, and identity. In that sense, to assess relations by way of relational verification would be to reason circularly. More importantly, the ontological status of relations appears to be empirically unverifiable on Hume's account, given that the principle of association—born of unknown, *original* qualities of human nature—is the cause of all relations. Unlike ideas which are caused by impressions and thus empirically verifiable, Hume is unclear on whether relations have corresponding impressions. In one case, Hume suggests that only the relation of resemblance may be traced to impressions (T 2.1.4.3; SBN 283). It seems odd, however, to suggest that impressions are not related by contiguity.

Indeed, Lorne Falkenstein seems to think that "[a]ccording to Hume's account, spatiotemporal structure is given. Impressions consist of parts that occur after and alongside one another" ("Space and Time," 72). Yet, Falkenstein does not address the passage where Hume clearly says that impressions are *only* associated by resemblance (T 2.1.4.3; SBN 283). Moreover, it is unclear whether relations obtain mind-independently, that is, without the faculty of imagination or the principle of association. Therefore, whether by design or chance, Hume's experimental methodology, as rigorously applied to relations in Book I, fortuitously reveal the uncertainty involved in the metaphysics of relations. As I will discuss in further detail, Hume's analysis of relations is vital to understanding his theory of natural fictions.

[9] Paul Russell interprets Hume's *Treatise* as a systematic attack on religion; whereas, on my interpretation, the *Treatise* is regarded as an attack on (a) science, (b) mathematics, (c) logic, and (d) philosophy—just as much as an attack on religion. See Paul Russell's *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise Skepticism, Naturalism, and Irreligion*.

philosophical position of humility in the face of dogma, especially as it is espoused by natural philosophers, theologians, and mathematicians.

It seems clear that Hume intends his use of the term 'experiment' in a qualified sense. Experiments on ideas are qualitatively distinct from experiments on gases or chemicals. There are no scientific instruments, for instance, that Hume may use in his experiments on ideas. Instead, Hume's experimental method is akin to *thought experiments*, but in the literal sense, where perceptual data is analyzed on a subjective basis. The verification process of his thought experiments employs causal reasoning as a means to test an idea's veracity:

(1) What impressions *caused* the idea?

(2) What mental faculty *caused* the idea?

(3) What particular ideas *caused* the general term?

Again, the series of questions act as experimental controls: (1) the questions may be replicated, and (2) the answers may be logically analyzed. Indeed, further experiments may be undertaken to verify the results. Hume even encourages replication of his findings—for instance, with regard to ideas of time and extension, he asks: "For whence shou'd it be deriv'd? Does it arise from an impression of sensation or of reflexion? Point it out distinctly to us, that we may know its nature and qualities" (T 1.2.5.28; SBN 65). While subjective perceptions cannot be shared in their original form, Hume seems to think that the general terms representing our particular ideas are enough to verify our individual thought experiments in an intersubjective manner.

Anticipating the verificationism of A.J. Ayer and the school of logical positivism, Hume discovers that central ideas in science (causality), mathematics (equality), and logic (identity) are all unverifiable in a certain sense. Whereas logical positivists followed the later Hume of the *Enquiries* in so far as accepting relations of ideas as representative of certain knowledge, I submit

that the early Hume was far more radical in his rejection of certainty.[10] In concert with several salient criticisms, Hume's experiments in the *Treatise* seem to suggest that the only metaphysical certainties are those particular ideas derived from the senses, namely, impressions. All other ideas which may *not* be directly traced to impressions, such as relations, are metaphysically uncertain. That does not mean relations are fictions or mind-dependent necessarily, but it does mean that relations at the foundation of science, mathematics, and logic are ontologically uncertain and may only ever attain a degree of probability.[11]

---

[10] Hume's early philosophy shares important features with the constructive scepticism of Pierre Gassendi and Marin Mersenne. Indeed, it seems likely that Hume was exposed to the work of both Mersenne and Gassendi while writing the *Treatise* and visiting the Jesuit College of La Flèche, the college Mersenne attended. While outside of the scope of this dissertation, fascinating parallels between Hume, the developing philosophical attitude toward uncertainty in the 17th century, and constructive scepticism may be found in Chapter 7 of Richard Popkin's *The History of Scepticism: From Savonarola to Bayle* and Henry G. Van Leeuwen's *The Problem of Certainty in English Thought*.

[11] While the early Hume may accept the synthetic *a priori* or the analytic *a priori* as true in a certain sense, that does not entail a commitment to the absolute certainty of either. All synthetic *a priori* propositions, for instance, still turn on relations. '5 + 7 = 12' relies on the validity of the notion of 'addition' and 'equality.' Therefore, the extent to which such an equation is true is dependent upon the validity of the relations involved. That said, relations, on my interpretation, are not available to the principle of bivalence by virtue of their inability to be verified by impressions. The consequence is that '5 + 7 = 12' is ultimately unverifiable because not only do the numbers need to be traced to impressions but so must relations, too.

Of course, it is, on my view, uncharitable to read into Hume distinctions of '*a priori/a posteriori*' and, more seriously, 'synthetic/analytic.' Hume is relatively silent on the issue of *a priori* knowledge, but, where he does consider it, he accords it little respect (see especially D 9.11 and T 1.4.5.35; SBN 250). With respect to analytic v. synthetic knowledge, Hume is adamant that verbal matters be left to the grammarians (see T 1.4.6.21; SBN 262; E 8.22; E 8.23; M Appendix 4.1). For Hume, questions of linguistic meaning are not questions for the philosopher. Whether the morning star has the same sense or reference as the evening star is a topic for the grammarian. On Hume's account, no ideas can be analytic, unless it involves a fiction (of identity), because all ontologically valid ideas are individuated, and thus never analytic, synonymous, or perfectly identical in any respect—numerical, qualitative, or otherwise.

Jonathan Bennett, I submit, makes this very mistake by assuming that, for instance, "Hume fails to do justice to identity-statements…because his tool kit lacks the sense/reference distinction" (*Learning from Six Philosophers*, 299). Bennett, in this respect, imposes his own contemporary philosophical commitments onto Hume's philosophy. Hume, however, does not have that tool for good reason—it is not necessary in the province of philosophy. Indeed, contemporary analytic philosophy's infatuation with math, logic, and semantics is a love affair that, I think, Hume would find rather distasteful. For a related discussion on analytic philosophy's failure to understand Hume, see Nicholas Capaldi's "The Dogmatic Slumber of Hume Scholarship." I follow Capaldi in several important ways, which will subsequently become clear. I am likewise inclined toward Stefanie Rocknak's view that Hume's intention is actually "to dismantle the analytic/synthetic distinction" ("The Synthetic Relation in Hume," 123). On her account, Humean relations are *all* non-necessary synthetic relations, and "this non-necessary synthetic notion of a relation includes Hume's *arithmetical* relations, which have typically been interpreted as either '*analytic*', necessary, or both" (Ibid., 121).

Finally, Hume's experiments reveal a special class of mental phenomena generated by natural relations: I call them natural fictions.[12] As I demonstrate in subsequent chapters, natural fictions cannot properly be called *ideas*; they should only be referred to as fictions. Natural fictions are unavoidable and useful to the conduct of life. And yet, they are *fictions* because they are unverifiable (i.e., hypothetical) and contradictory.[13] Each natural relation is connected to several corresponding natural fictions, while social relations are connected to corresponding social fictions. Hume's experimental methodology is revolutionary not because it validates what scientists and metaphysicians already take for granted (namely, perceptual data), but because of what it exposes: the fact that many of the foundational ideas of human nature cannot be validated by perceptual data and are better classified as fiction.

1.2. Hume's Project

Hume's discovery of the fictional nature of ideas previously taken to be true is not without historical roots. Three philosophical and scientific movements prior to the *Treatise*—all of which were clearly influential on Hume—similarly reveal the ubiquity of fiction in science and philosophy, namely, empiricism, nominalism, and scepticism. Francis Bacon, for instance,

---

[12] Natural fictions are (a) *natural* in so far as they are natural beliefs and (b) *fictions* in so far as they are made by the mind and thus conform only to themselves. Compare Locke's view of mixed modes and relations, where "having no other reality but what they have in the minds of men, there is nothing more required to this kind of ideas to make them real, but that they be so framed, that there be a possibility of existing conformable to them. These ideas themselves, being archetypes, cannot differ from their archetypes, and so cannot be chimerical, unless any one will jumble together in them inconsistent ideas" (*Locke's Essay*, 373). Natural fictions, as I will show, are *inconsistent*. See Chapter 3 & 4.

[13] It is, on my view, vital to separate *logical* contradictions from *psychological* contradictions when interpreting Hume's *Treatise*. It is primarily in the latter sense that Hume invokes the charge of contradiction. That Hume's epistemology mainly evaluates *ideas* as opposed to *terms* or *propositions* must be remembered; Hume, in many cases, does not mean contradiction in the sense of Aristotelian or propositional logic.

anticipates Hume's account of fiction on *empiricist* grounds.[14] Montaigne's *scepticism* doubted the veracity of theoretical speculation.[15] George Berkeley, espousing a form of *nominalism*, rejected abstract general ideas, along with material substances and causes.[16] John Locke arrived at similar conclusions to Hume concerning the association of ideas. However, Locke rejected the extent to which psychological association produces fiction and artifice.[17] Finally, Pierre Bayle, prior to Berkeley, criticized the authority of mathematics.[18]

Hume's project, however, is not entirely negative or critical. He does not aim to dismiss or discard unverifiable fictions like the logical positivists. Hume's attitude toward unverifiable ideas is the opposite: they are not only essential to human nature, but they are irresistible. Fictions are

---

[14] Consider Bacon's view: "The human understanding, from its peculiar nature, easily supposes a greater degree of order and equality in things than it really finds; and although many things in nature be *sui generis* and most irregular, will yet invent parallels and conjugates and relatives, where no such thing is. Hence the fiction, that all celestial bodies move in perfect circles" (*Novum Organum*, 11). Also: "The idols imposed upon the understanding by words are of two kinds. They are either the names of things which have no existence (for as some objects are from inattention left without a name, so names are formed by fanciful imaginations which are without an object), or they are the names of actual objects, but confused, badly defined, and hastily and irregularly abstracted from things. Fortune, the *primum mobile*, the planetary orbits, the element of fire, and the like fictions" (Ibid., 24-5).

[15] Montaigne claims: "Learning does the same; even our system of Law, they say, bases the truth of its justice upon legal fictions. Learning pays us in the coin of suppositions which she confesses she has invented herself…all Philosophy does the same, presenting us not with what really is, nor even with what she believes to be true, but with the best probabilities and elegance she has wrought" (*An Apology for Raymond Sebond*, 111-2).

[16] Berkeley explicitly refers to abstract general terms as fictions by quoting directly from Locke's *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*: "For when we nicely reflect upon them, we shall find that general ideas are fictions and contrivances of the mind, that carry difficulty with them, and do not so easily offer themselves, as we are apt imagine" (*A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, 95).

[17] Locke argued in his chapter 'Of the Association of Ideas' that "…the confusion of two different Ideas, which a customary connexion of them in their Minds hath to them made in effect but one, fills their Heads with false Views, and their Reasonings with false Consequences" (*Locke's Essay*, 401). The union of two ideas into one, especially two contradictory ideas, is a theme that Hume develops in great detail. See Chapter 6.

[18] Pierre Bayle explains that, "due to the lack of self-evidence…the best logicians are incapable of coming to completely certain conclusions…there is an irreparable and most enormous difficulty with mathematical objects—they are chimeras that cannot exist. Mathematical points and, therefore, lines and geometrical surfaces, globes, and axes are fictions that can never have any existence. They are therefore inferior to the fictions of the poets, for these latter usually contain nothing impossible; they have at least some probability and possibility. Gassendi made an ingenious observation. He says that mathematicians, and especially geometers, have established their domain in the land of abstractions and ideas…when they want to descend into the land of realities, they soon find insurmountable difficulties" (*Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections*, 390-1). Berkeley, on the other hand, asks at the end of his *The Analyst*: "Whether the View of modern Mathematicians doth not rather seem to be the coming at an Expression by Artifice, than at the coming at Science by Demonstration?" (*The Analyst*, 26).

natural to human cognition. The logical positivist project then, for the early Hume, would have been a non-starter, for nowhere—that I can find—does Hume suggest that unverifiability entails meaninglessness. For instance, the idea of identity arises from combining two incompatible ideas, and thus it is unverifiable by definition, but that does not make the idea of identity meaningless.

The acceptance of naturally occurring artifices and fictions also seems to follow from Hume's true scepticism.[19] True scepticism is a species of *pragmatism* in so far as ideas may be useful to life, even when they cannot be rationally or empirically grounded. Ideas may be understood in this sense as tools of the mind. Indeed, Hume gestures at this kind of pragmatism in his discussion of abstract ideas: "This application of ideas beyond their nature proceeds from our collecting all their possible degrees of quantity and quality in such an imperfect manner *as may serve the purposes of life*…" (T 1.1.7.7; SBN 20, italics added). Hume's project discloses that a special class of imaginatively generated ideas is necessary for human survival while, at the same time, not available to scientific or rational scrutiny. In that sense, we might see this as Hume's attempt to pacify what Pascal called "the war existing between the senses and reason."[20] By drawing attention to the central role the imagination plays in human nature, Hume counters Pascal's claim by showing that the imagination is a principal cause of *both* human knowledge and error.

More importantly, natural fictions need not be understood in terms of truth or falsehood at all. A thought experiment may illustrate the point: imagine a group of humans discover a

---

[19] "A true sceptic will be diffident of his philosophical doubts, as well as of his philosophical conviction; and will never refuse any innocent satisfaction, which offers itself, upon account of either of them" (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 273).

[20] Pascal specifically writes: "Man is so happily formed that he has no...good of the true, and several excellent of the false…the most powerful cause of error is the war existing between the senses and reason…Man is only a subject full of error, natural and ineffaceable, without grace. Nothing shows him the truth. Everything deceives him. These two sources of truth, reason and the senses, besides being both wanting in sincerity, deceive each other in turn. The senses mislead the reason with false appearances, and receive from reason in their turn the same trickery which they apply to her; reason has her revenge. The passions of the soul trouble the senses, and make false impressions upon them. They rival each other in falsehood and deception" (*Pensées*, 27).

hammer in nature without having constructed it or having observed anything like it before. They begin to use this natural hammer for all sorts of purposes. The hammer is refashioned and altered to suit various circumstances. Then, the group of humans discovers (via reflection or novel empirical discovery) that the original hammer was, in fact, constructed by humans. Would we say that the hammer they thought was natural and mind-independent is now false? The genetic account may have been false, but that has no bearing on the hammer's usefulness.

Discovering that sacred ideas of human nature are fictions likewise does not degrade their significance or usefulness. Once we understand an idea to be fiction, empirical verifiability and rational justification make no difference. As far as correspondence or coherence go, we might think Hume takes truth to be "an agreement or disagreement either to the *real* relations of ideas, or to *real* existence and matter of fact" (T 3.1.1.9; SBN 458). The problem is that natural fictions are not *real* in either sense. Thus, they are not truth-apt. In discovering natural fictions and artifices across intellectual domains, Hume calls attention to the fact that we require a much broader view of ideational content than that accorded to the senses and reason.

On that note, Hume suggests we consider the relationship between *usefulness* and truth.[21] In the section 'Of curiosity, or the love of truth' in the *Treatise*, Hume makes the strikingly pragmatic claim that, for the truth to have "any effect upon us," it "must be attended with an idea of utility" (T 2.3.10.8; SBN 451). While that does not entail that natural fictions are necessarily truthful, it does seem to indicate that fictions might play a more significant role in human nature than certain analytic or formal truths.

[21] Hume equates our search for truth with hunting, reminding us of Cicero's question about natural philosophers, as quoted by Montaigne: "'Is it not a shame for a natural philosopher, that is, for an observer and hunter of nature, to seek testimony of the truth from minds prepossessed by custom?'—Cicero, De Natura Deor., i. 30" (*Essays of Montaigne*, 118). In the analogy between hunting and truth, it seems clear that Hume would be at least sympathetic to some version of pragmatism.

Likewise, verifiability and truth are not necessarily linked to naturalism. Ideas that are naturally generated by mental faculties are not always open to verification. Natural fictions, for instance, may be seen as *artificial* tools of the mind at the same time they are *natural* and constitutive of the structure of human perception. The dual nature of these ideas must be understood in light of Hume's philosophical perspectivism. By virtue of a distinction of reason, we may classify natural fictions in contradictory ways: on the one hand, they are natural; on the other, they are artificial. There is no *logical* contradiction here. That phenomena may be seen from contrary perspectives is a foundational element of Hume's cognitive psychology.

Still, the question remains: why did Hume not include the senses or reason *as faculties* in the "the elements of [his] philosophy"? (T 1.1.4.7; SBN 13). At the same time, why are there two major portions of Book I dedicated to scepticism with regard to both the senses and reason? I believe the answers are interrelated. On my interpretation, Hume's project is carving out a space for the imagination in a territory formerly ruled by rationalists, mathematicians, and theologians on one side and empiricists and scientists on the other. Against the canonic interpretation, where Hume is regarded as the anchor to the run of British empiricism, I take the *Treatise* to be an inversion of the Kantian project. Instead of synthesizing rationalism and empiricism, Hume illustrates how both projects fail to take into account the generative role of the human imagination, and thus they are missing an essential component to understanding of human nature. The science of man is the only science that reveals the empire of the imagination. It is only by various types of verification that we may uncover the human mind's influence on the union of sensory ideas and the subordination of reason to imaginative unions. The faculties of memory and the imagination are all that is required for Hume to achieve this verification process.

Indeed, *empirical verification* relies on memory exclusively. The memory provides a copy of the impression—that is, the evidence that verifies the origin of ideas. Recall: "The examination of our sensations belongs more to anatomists and natural philosophers than to moral" (T 1.1.2.1; SBN 8). The moral philosopher may empirically verify ideas entirely by virtue of the memory. Second, *faculty verification* relies on memory and the imagination exclusively. Matters of fact may be traced to copied impressions in the memory, while relations of ideas may be traced to the original associations of ideas in the imagination. Third, *property verification* relies on memory exclusively. All general terms may be traced to particular ideas in the memory. In all forms of verification, then, the senses and reason are conspicuously absent.

1.3. The Origin and Content of Hume's Ideas

Hume's science of man is ultimately an investigation into the nature and origin of our ideas. While the search for the physiological origin of our impressions is a task for natural philosophers, Hume's verification criteria aim to show whether an idea originates in the memory or the imagination. For instance, the simple idea of the taste of a pineapple is copied by the memory and verifiable as a simple impression of the senses. Memory preserves the order and position of impressions. Ideas in the imagination, on the other hand, are separated from their original order and position; that is, they lose the vivacity of their original impression and become a "perfect idea" (T 1.1.3.1; SBN 8).

In Section III of Part I, Hume declares that once impressions become ideas, they may be present to the mind in two different ways (T 1.1.3.1; SBN 8). Either an idea may be repeated in (1) the memory or (2) the imagination. These are the *only* two faculties that repeat impressions as ideas. The difference between memory-ideas and imagination-ideas is that the former ideas are

lively and strong, "whereas in the imagination the perception is faint and languid" (T 1.1.3.1; SBN 8). Memory-ideas are tied down to their original impression, while imagination-ideas may be rearranged and varied: "Where-ever the imagination perceives a difference among ideas, it can easily produce a separation" (T 1.1.3.4; SBN 10).

Several ideas of human nature do not seem to fit squarely into this model. The memory features ideas of the senses: taste, touch, smell, sight, and sound. The imagination features ideas such as "fables we meet with in poems and romances…winged horses, fiery dragons, and monstrous giants" (T 1.1.3.4; SBN 10). In extreme cases of direct sensory perception on one end and fantastical fiction on the other, there is no question whether the origin of the ideas is of the imagination or the memory. However, a considerable challenge arises when Hume examines ideas that do not seem to be derived from either the senses or the imagination.

Take the idea of identity. The idea of identity is discovered to be a combination of ideas, that is, "a medium betwixt unity and number; or more properly speaking, is either of them, according to the view, in which we take it" (T 1.4.2.29; SBN 201). Where does the idea of a 'medium' originate? It is reminiscent of ideas of relations. Where does the idea of 'resemblance' or 'causality' appear in Hume's faculty psychology? Are they originally preserved in the memory, or are they changed and transposed by the imagination as perfect ideas?

It is these hard cases that Hume focuses on in the *Treatise*. Indeed, the most important passages are devoted to examining the origin of ideas that do not seem to be either purely sensory or purely imaginative—space, time, liberty, justice, and so on. What is discovered is a special class of natural fictions generated by the imaginative desire to complete the union among sensory ideas. In that way, these ideas are neither purely sensory nor purely imaginative, but both. They partake of the natural world and the human mind. Similar to cultural tools, these ideas are

combinations of that which is naturally given, but they are distinct from cultural tools in so far as they are irresistible. We do not intentionally decide to build these tools of the mind; instead, they are unavoidably generated by the imagination and taken as natural beliefs.[22] It is only upon sceptical reflection that we recognize the imagination's role in producing natural fictions.

I offer a brief sketch of how Hume's verification criteria bear on natural epistemic relations in the following sections. Notice that, after Part I, Book I, Hume is concerned mainly with verifying the origin and content of *relations*, namely, space and time, causality, and identity. Why do relations become the focus of Hume's epistemological study? I believe it is because of the relationship between relations, the principle of association, and the various fictions that seem to arise from our tendency to 'complete the union.' The focus on this relationship serves to introduce the imagination as a neglected but leading character in the story of human nature.

2. Natural Epistemic Relations

2.1. Book I, Part II: Space and Time

After the elements of his philosophy, Hume sets out to examine two foundational ideas of human nature: space and time. Hume's initial examination of space and time prefigures a similar move made in Kant's Transcendental Aesthetic. That said, Hume's discussion, unlike Kant's, is not meant to reify the concepts of space and time as forms of intuition. Hume does not harbour idealist aspirations in any sense—whether Kantian, Hegelian, or Platonic.[23] Hume's approach to

---

[22] I follow Beryl Logan in thinking that "what makes the natural beliefs different from empirical beliefs is that the object of belief, rather than being an idea derived from an impression, is a feigned idea or fiction that the imagination produces to complete its propensity to unite where there is only relation" (*Religion Without Talking*, 80).

[23] As Wayne Waxman puts it: "Hume's analyses of our perceptions of bodies, the mind (self, person), space, time, substances, causality, and the like become, on this view, just that: analyses of the *representations* our minds are capable of forming of these things rather than idealist reductions à la Berkeley or Kant of the *things themselves*. Branding these representations fictions, as Hume did implicitly or explicitly, thus does not imply the fictitiousness of the things they represent, but instead merely serves to warn us against assuming a perfect correspondence between them, however natural we may find it to do so" ("Hume's Theory of Ideas," 142).

the *form* of human perception is altogether innovative. It is a type of naturalism, where the formal properties of perception are understood as *associations of ideas*—associations that are open to experimental examination.

For that reason, Hume's method retains a scientific and experimental ethos in opposition to the dogmatic presuppositions of Kant's forms of intuition. In other words, the form of our perceptions is derived, in Hume's view, by reflecting on the way our perceptions are arranged. That process of verification is probabilistic. If, for example, there is an instance where a human perceives temporality in a radically different way, that piece of data would be included in Hume's probabilistic model, whereas, for Kant, such an occurrence might be fatal to his project. In the *Treatise*, there is no espousal of universal and necessary categories of the mind. Hume's laws or principles of the imagination—causality, resemblance, and contiguity—are taken as probable.[24] Hume's mitigated scepticism is clear in this respect. The experimental results that Hume records from his thought experiments are replicable and consistent, but Hume does not pretend to go beyond his past perceptions and declare his findings *necessary*, *universal*, or *impossible.* Indeed, thinking in terms of these categorical modalities leads to precisely the type of dogmatism that Hume is eager to avoid.

Hume's analysis of space and time as *ideas* follows his scientific approach. What Hume wants to discover is the *origin* and *content* of space and time. Where do these ideas come from, and what do they contain?

---

[24] An argument may be made that Hume believes the principles of association to be "universal" because he says as much (T 1.1.4.1; SBN 10). Hume's use of the term 'universal' to describe his principle of association, however, does not seem to be a universal affirmative in the Aristotelian or Kantian sense. Indeed, Hume writes that the imagination seems to be "guided by some universal principles, which render it, *in some measure*, uniform with itself in all times and places." (T 1.1.4.1; SBN 10, italics added). If Hume were categorical about the universality of his principles of association, it is unlikely he would add the qualification 'in some measure.' Moreover, Hume notes that "this uniting principle is not to be consider'd as an inseparable connexion," but rather as a "gentle force" (T 1.1.4.1; SBN 10). These remarks, to my mind, provide enough evidence to show that Hume takes his principle of association as a *probable* law of attraction.

First, Hume argues that the infinite divisibility of the ideas of space and time is "utterly impossible," "for in order to form a just notion…we must have a distinct idea" (T 1.2.1.5; SBN 28). Ideas are separable, distinct, and derived from corresponding impressions. Therefore, simple ideas are something like minimum units of perception that may not be infinitely divided. He provides an experiment for the reader to replicate: "Put a spot of ink upon paper, fix your eye upon that spot, and retire to such a distance, that at last you lose sight of it" (T 1.2.1.4; SBN 27). He concludes that when you step far enough away from the dot, it will reduce to an ultimate minimum. Even though a telescope or microscope may alter the size of the black dot, there is always a minimum idea of it.

Second, Hume discusses the nature of space and time in terms of infinite divisibility. The only difference between the titles of Section I and II is the removal of the term 'ideas.' The slight change in the title suggests a new direction in Hume's approach to understanding space and time. In Section II, Hume is not speaking of the *ideas* of space and time; instead, he supposes that we already have adequate representations of space and time, and therefore he may pursue deductive arguments regarding infinite divisibility. If our ideas of space and time are already "adequate representations of objects, the relations, contradictions and agreements of the ideas are all applicable to the objects" (T 1.2.2.1; SBN 29). Therefore, Hume admits assessments of truth or falsehood with respect to the adequate representation of space and time.

Nevertheless, what does Hume mean by an 'adequate representation'? There are only a few references to the so-called 'adequacy' of representations, but he seems to mean that we have some fixed notion of an object. While representations always hold the possibility of alteration by virtue of Hume's conceivability maxim, we may nevertheless reason upon stable representations

we possess at any given time.[25] Thus, the logical incompatibility of "a mountain without a valley" holds so long as our particular ideas forming the general ideas of mountains and valleys do not include in their revival set a mountain without a valley or a valley without a mountain (T 1.2.2.8; SBN 32).[26]

Notably, in his discussion regarding general terms, Hume claims "that we may fix the meaning of the word" (T 1.1.7.10; SBN 22). On my reading, I interpret Hume's notion of 'adequacy' to mean a fixed idea or representation. Thus, despite an ever-present possibility of change in the idea or representation, we may reason deductively upon our ideas *as if* they refer to a static revival set. Once the reference is fixed, it is open to deductive reasoning.

The same is true of geometry, "by which we *fix* the proportions of figures" such that it "excels both in universality and exactness" (T 1.3.1.4; SBN 70, italics added). Still, because geometry is drawn from general appearances or "the loose judgments of the senses and imagination," it never attains "perfect precision and exactness" (T 1.3.1.4; SBN 70-1). Therefore, the contradiction of a mountain without a valley is only a *logical* contradiction if the ideas of

---

[25] The conceivability maxim runs as follows: "*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; SBN 32). What this entails is that there is always a possibility that ideas or representations we hold to be true, clear, or adequate are not so.

[26] I follow Don Garrett's idea of a 'revival set' here and elsewhere. See Don Garrett's *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy*, 24–5. In brief, a revival set is the set of particular ideas annexed to a general term.

An objection here might be that Hume clearly says that "We can form no idea of a mountain without a valley," and therefore it's impossible. What this doesn't take into account is Hume's more foundational commitment to novel empirical data. While admittedly mountains have always appeared with valleys, and thus each general term's revival set is stable such that we can make a claim of impossibility, this does not close off all empirical possibility (though it may close off logical possibility for a given fixed operation). Suppose that Hume is presented with an asteroid floating in space in the exact form of a mountain but without a corresponding valley (say it was severed somehow from its original planet), would he accept the perception as a mountain? On my interpretation, the correct way to read Hume's stance on logical impossibility is to accept logical impossibility as valid in the space of reason (where we may treat ideas *as if* they are fixed), but to remember that reason is predicated on the imagination, the principle of association, and memory—where ideas are always open to change based on novel empirical data. Thus, logical impossibility is only valid on the basis of the fiction of *fixedness*. I discuss this issue further in Chapter 4.

'mountain' and 'valley' are fixed in such a way that we regard them as universal and exact—but, of course, there are no ideas of the senses and imagination that we regard as such.[27]

In Section III of Part II, Hume returns to his experimental method regarding the ideas of space and time. On this occasion, Hume engages his *empirical verification* method—that is, "no discovery cou'd have been made more happily for deciding all controversies concerning ideas… that impressions always take the precedency of them, and that every idea, with which the imagination is furnish'd, first makes its appearance in a correspondent impression" (T 1.2.3.1; SBN 33). In other words, Hume wants to apply the principle of empirical verification to the ideas of space and time to "discover farther" their nature and composition (T 1.2.3.1; SBN 33).

The argument that follows unfolds via various thought experiments, where Hume asks us to visualize him opening his eyes and surveying his table. What does he see? "The impressions of colour'd points, dispos'd in a certain manner" (T 1.2.3.4; SBN 34). The perception of his table alone is enough to give him the idea of extension. Extension is, therefore, the general idea of points distributed in a certain manner. Therefore, the conclusion of his experiment is that space is an abstract idea, where "we omit the peculiarities of colour," and found the "abstract idea merely on that disposition of points, or manner of appearance" (T 1.2.3.5; SBN 34).

Hume reaches the same conclusion regarding the idea of time. Time is a general term representing successive moments "fill'd with some real object or existence" (T 1.2.3.17; SBN 39). In other words, space and time are not "separate or distinct ideas, but merely those of the manner or order, in which objects exist" (T 1.2.4.2; SBN 39-40). Thus, in terms of *property verification*, we learn that space and time do not fit neatly into Hume's prior discussion of general

[27] While I will discuss mathematics in several sections of this dissertation, note for now that, in order to describe the 'perfect exactness and certainty' of algebra and arithmetic, Hume conspicuously depends upon two ideas that he will later name *fictions*: equality and unity (T 1.3.1.5; SBN 71). In this, I take Hume's philosophy of mathematics to be influenced by Bayle and Berkeley, and possibly the constructive scepticism of Gassendi and Francisco Sanches.

terms in so far as there are no separate and distinct particular ideas in the revival set. Space and time seem to pose additional problems for empirical verification since abstracting from all the peculiarities of ideas such as colour or material leaves us with something reminiscent of Lockean primary qualities, which Hume subsequently rejects.

As for *faculty verification*, Hume argues that "we have…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; SBN 39). Space and time, in this respect, are ideas derived from sensory impressions and copied in memory. That said, there is a difficulty with Hume's assessment here as it relates to his principle of association. Indeed, if space and time are sensory ideas, then is the relation of contiguity a sensory relation, too? In Book II, Hume claims that this is not the case: "'Tis evident, then, there is an attraction or association among impressions, as well as among ideas; tho' with *this remarkable difference*, that ideas are associated by resemblance, contiguity, and causation; and impressions only by resemblance" (T 2.1.4.3; SBN 283, italics added).

What is the connection between the relation of space and time and contiguity? In 'Of Relations,' Hume lists contiguity as a species of space and time. Therefore, they must be synonymous in some sense, yet the principle of association, which includes contiguity, is an operation of the imagination. Likewise, in Hume's analysis of identity, he argues that sense cannot go beyond a *single* impression (T 1.4.2.4; SBN 189). It is unintelligible, as a consequence, to suggest that the senses can perceive *more than one* impression in a single impression (which the

relation of time requires).[28] The pursuit of faculty verification, to that end, ends up revealing an inconsistency in Hume's philosophy: either contiguity, space, and time are derived from the imagination *or* the senses.[29] The only apparent solution is to take Hume's position to be that both sense and the imagination are required to cause the relations of space and time.[30] Without the imagination, there are no relations of contiguity, space, or time.[31]

The final section of Part II is replete with thought experiments replying to potential objections to Hume's conclusions regarding space and time. For instance, he discusses the idea of a vacuum. Turning to the empirical verification method for support, Hume asks: where should the idea of a vacuum be derived? Does it arise from an impression of sensation or of reflection? Point it out distinctly to us, that we may know its nature and qualities. But if you cannot point out *any such impression*, you may be certain you are mistaken, when you imagine you have *any such idea* (T 1.2.5.28; SBN 65). The idea of a vacuum does not pass the empirical verification test, and therefore it is experimentally invalidated.

---

[28] Whether spatial relations can be discerned in any *single* impression or idea is a more controversial issue. We might say that reflection reveals spatial relations that are inherent in impressions or ideas, but that is to speculate about the nature of relations prior to perception. An example may help. Say there is a chair next to a table in a single impression. In order to say that 'nextness' is part of our single sensory impression, we must sense it. Yet, we do not touch, see, smell, taste, or hear 'nextness.' Now, if it is the case that we do not sense 'nextness,' we require a second-order reflection to discern the relation of 'nextness.' Once we enter into a second-order reflection, however, we are no longer dealing with a single sensory impression, and thus we cannot say with certainty that the relation of 'nextness' is *only* produced by the original, single sensory impression. Or consider the following question: suppose a child is born into existence and only lives for one exact instant. In this instant, the child perceives a *single* complex impression, which is copied into an idea. Does the child perceive any spatial relations in the single complex impression or idea?

[29] In Chapter 3, I attempt to reconstruct a consistent view of Hume's relations, which requires me to take substantial interpretive liberties. Nevertheless, what I will suggest is that the ontology of relations such as contiguity or space and time are best understood as beyond our ability to verify. In that way, they cannot be called ideas at all. Although Hume seems to make the inconsistent remark that relations are complex *ideas*, he also makes the more modest claim that the effects of his principle of association are all that we can know. If we take relations *as* effects only, then we need not search in vain for the causes (i.e., impressions) required for empirical, faculty, or property verification.

[30] For claims that suggest the senses and the imagination must both be involved in generating the relations of space and time, see T 1.2.1.5, T 1.2.4.7, T 1.2.4.29, T 1.2.4.31, T 1.2.4.32; SBN 28, 42, 51, 638, and 52.

[31] Jan Wilbanks notes that the analysis of space and time is where Hume's "first real discussion of *fictions* of the imagination occurs, and hence it marks the first full-fledged and explicitly drawn distinction between the conceiving and supposing activities of imagination" (*Hume's Theory of Imagination*, 118).

Hume ends his discussion of space and time with a short section on the ideas of existence and external existence. Similar to the ideas of space and time, there is no distinct idea of existence separate from perceptions. Indeed, our perceptions *are* existence: "The idea of existence, then, is the very same with the idea of what we conceive to be existent" (T 1.2.6.4; SBN 66). Impressions and ideas constitute Hume's ontological framework; thus, "nothing is ever really present with the mind but its perceptions or impressions and ideas" (T 1.2.6.7; SBN 67). The consequences of this position are more extreme than, I think, Hume realized, for it leaves the relations or connections *between* perceptions unperceived. In other words, any relation between atomistic perceptions must be mind-dependent because, by definition, relations cannot be internal to perceptions while, at the same time, connecting them externally. Again, it seems the only solution is that the faculty of imagination, when operating on sensory impressions, generates all known relations between them.

On the grounds of Hume's experimental method, Part II of Book I tells us that space and time are general terms representative of particular points or moments distributed in a particular manner. The ideas of space and time are not metaphysically distinct from extension or duration or impressions or ideas. Prior to Hume, Spinoza and Descartes suggested that time may be eternal and space infinite. However, Hume's experiments demonstrate that space and time are neither eternal nor infinite. The ideas of eternity and infinity imply that we may go beyond our impressions and ideas, which is plainly impossible unless we accept them as fictions. For Hume, "we never really advance a step beyond ourselves, nor can conceive any kind of existence, but those perceptions, which have appear'd in that narrow compass. This is the universe of the imagination, nor have we any idea but what is there produc'd" (T 1.2.6.8; SBN 67-8).

2.2. Book I, Part III: Causality

In Part III of Book I, Hume considers the idea of cause and effect. What is the origin and content of our idea of causality? Hume turns to his experimental method for guidance, and what he discovers is a devastating critique of the scientific method itself. In that way, Hume's examination of causality reflects on the validity of his own experimental method. Nevertheless, Hume does not discard the experimental method as useless once he discovers the true nature of causality; on the contrary, his critique of causality ends up supporting a more robust account of philosophical probability.

Hume opens his discussion by drawing attention to a difference between intuitive, deductive, and inductive relations:

(1) *Intuitive relations* are resemblance, contrariety, and degrees in quality. These relations are known immediately when they "first strike the eye, or rather the mind," a "decision we always pronounce at first sight, without any enquiry or reasoning" (T 1.3.1.2; SBN 70).

(2) *Deductive relations* are proportions of quantity or number. Therefore, algebra, arithmetic, and geometry depend on deductive relations, though the latter do not reach the certainty of the former. When proportions of quantity or number are small enough, we may comprehend them in "an instant" (T 1.3.1.3; SBN 70). Therefore, they may be construed as intuitive relations.

(3) *Inductive relations* are identity, contiguity, distance, and causation. These are relations "we receive…from experience, and not from any abstract reasoning or reflection" (T 1.3.1.1; SBN 69).

The first two relations "depend entirely on the ideas, which we compare together, and such as may be chang'd without any change in the ideas" (T 1.3.1.1; SBN 69). The third type of relation "may be chang'd merely by an alteration of their place, without any change on the objects

themselves or on their ideas; and the place depends on a hundred different accidents, which cannot be foreseen by the mind" (T 1.3.1.1; SBN 69).

The first book of the *Treatise* focuses on verifying relations of the latter sort. That is, Part II, III, and IV of Book I contain general accounts of the ideas of contiguity (space and time), causality (cause and effect), and identity, respectively. Therefore, we might see the first book of the *Treatise* as primarily concerned with verifying a specific class of ideas: *inductive relations*. How are inductive relations produced *as ideas* in human nature? At face value, the question appears facile—simply employ Hume's empirical method. From what impressions are inductive relations derived? The answer, though, is anything but facile; it ends up exposing the extent to which the imagination is necessarily responsible for the structure or form of human perception.

Consider once more. From what impression does the relation of contiguity derive? It does not appear that contiguity is copied from any single impression. Instead, contiguity seems to denote perceptions or qualities arranged or associated in a certain manner. Contiguity is the *form* of impressions; it is not part of the *content* of any impression or idea. In other words, contiguity, like necessity, appears to exist "in the mind, not in objects" (T 1.3.14.22; SBN 165).[32]

Hume begins Section II of Part III by suggesting that inductive relations—identity, situations in time and place, and causation—require further explanation, while the other four relations (which are clearly understood and make up the foundation of science) need no further explanation.[33] The explanation unfolds over Part II-IV, where space and time, causality, and identity are examined in great detail. With respect to causality, Hume says, "[w]e must consider

[32] I take the same reasoning to apply to the relations of space and time. In the next section, Hume even uses the phrase "the situations in time and place" interchangeably with contiguity (T 1.3.2.1; SBN 73).

[33] Hume's use of 'science' here is unusual. To claim that inductive relations do not contribute to the foundation of science does not fit with Hume's own experimental methodology. To that end, I suspect Hume means here by 'science' only those domains classified under mathematics, algebra, or geometry.

the idea of *causation*, and see from what origin it is deriv'd" (T 1.3.2.4; SBN 74). To do so, Hume first engages his *empirical verification* method, for, "'tis impossible perfectly to understand any idea, without tracing it up to its origin, and examining that primary impression, from which it arises" (T 1.3.2.4; SBN 74-5).

To that end, Hume concludes, "causation must be derived from some *relation* among objects" (T 1.3.2.6; SBN 75). However, from what relation must causation be derived? Wherever causation is discovered among objects, so too is the relation of contiguity. Therefore, contiguity is taken initially as the original relation that causes the idea of causation. Curiously, Hume refers to causation as an *idea* here rather than a relation (T 1.3.2.6; SBN 75). It is an idea for which there is no corresponding quality in any object, but that nevertheless still refers to qualities in objects. It is not clear whether Hume regards causation as an idea copied from a single impression of causation as he suggests at the beginning of Section II of Book III or whether causation is a complex idea that has no corresponding impression.[34]

Hume goes on to observe that contiguity is not the only relation from which causation is derived. A second relation, namely, priority, is also essential to cause the idea of causation. Note that Hume does not include *priority* as either a natural or philosophical relation, yet it appears to be a species of contiguity. Not only that, but there is also a third relation essential to causation:

---

[34] The matter is representative of a much broader interpretive problem concerning the ontology of Hume's relations. If relations are derivative of mental association, then they are not caused by impressions. They are simply combinations of various ideas already in the mind. Thus, if relations are "complex ideas [that] never had impressions, that corresponded to them," then there is no way to empirically verify them (T 1.1.1.4; SBN 3). The matter is even more hopeless, however. Instead of being like Paris where at least some of the complex idea resembles actual impressions (and is therefore partially verifiable), complex ideas of relations may not appeal to any corresponding simple impressions. There are no simple impressions that resemble relations in any way, because relations are formal associations of ideas. In that sense, it is more accurate to compare New Jerusalem with relations, for New Jerusalem is similarly a general term applied to a given combination of ideas. To the question of ontological validity, then, the only difference between the relation of causation and New Jerusalem seems to be that causation is irresistible and useful to the conduct of life whereas New Jerusalem is neither irresistible nor necessarily useful. Otherwise, they are both simply combinations of ideas without any further content to clearly differentiate them in terms of ontological validity.

that is, necessary connection. Indeed, Hume refers to necessary connection as a relation, but it is unclear why he has left out necessary connection from both his discussions on relations, specifically in 'Of knowledge' and 'Of relations.' Of course, the answer soon arrives when Hume's empirical verification method reveals that necessary connection is not a relation after all; in fact, the actual relation is constant conjunction. Still, constant conjunction is not included in any discussion of Hume's relations, either. Where would constant conjunction fit into Hume's theory of relations? It seems to be a combination of contiguity and resemblance. In other words, *constancy* implies resemblance, whereas *conjunction* implies contiguity. When two or more pairs of temporally contiguous ideas resemble each other, the relation of constant conjunction obtains. For instance, if a heating element and boiling water are temporally contiguous impressions, and the conjunction of both ideas resembles a further conjunction of the same ideas, then the relation of causation is generated. Therefore, causation is essentially a combination of the two (apparently more primary) natural relations: resemblance and contiguity. It might be worthwhile to remark that neither resemblance nor contiguity on their own is enough to "be trac'd beyond our senses" and inform "us of existences and objects," but when resemblance and contiguity act together to cause the relation of constant conjunction (in at least one *sense* of causality), they *are* able to be traced beyond our senses (T 1.3.2.3; SBN 74).

Constant conjunction is, on second consideration, always "an inference from one object to another," and Hume presumes that the idea of causality depends upon such an inference (T 1.3.6.3; SBN 88). Experience plays a key role in this, for it is our remembrance of past constant conjunctions that affords us the idea of causality. Hume returns to his method of *faculty verification* to decide "whether experience produces the idea 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" (T 1.3.6.4; SBN 88-9).[35] In other words, he asks whether the idea of causality is generated by reason or the imagination? While Hume previously said that "the ideas of cause and effect be deriv'd from the impressions of reflection as well as from those of sensation," it is still obscure where the ideas of cause and effect might be located *in* any impression (T 1.3.2.16; SBN 78).

At once, Hume denies the possibility that the idea of the inference is a matter of demonstrative reasoning. It is not a matter of knowledge or the comparison of ideas. The second option is that the inference arises from probable reasoning, but Hume remarks that "probability is founded on the presumption of a resemblance betwixt those objects, of which we have had experience, and those, of which we have had none; and therefore 'tis impossible this presumption can arise from probability" (T 1.3.6.7; SBN 90).

Indeed, "reason can never shew us the connexion of one object with another…When the mind, therefore, passes from the idea or impression of one object to the idea or belief of another, it is…by certain principles, which associate together the ideas of these objects, and unite them in the imagination" (T 1.3.6.12; SBN 92). By way of *faculty verification*, then, Hume's science of the mind attributes the inference involved in causal reasoning to the faculty of imagination.

Let us pause to notice an important synonymy between Hume's discussion of general terms and his discussion of causality. Both are derived from the same origin: the union of ideas in the imagination. Indeed, "[a] particular idea becomes general by being annex'd to a general term; that is, to a term, which from a customary conjunction has a relation to many other particular ideas, and readily recals them in the imagination" (T 1.1.7.10; SBN 22). In the same

[35] By 'reason' and the 'understanding,' I take Hume to mean the same faculty. I follow Peter Millican in this respect. Note that Hume introduces reason and the understanding *as separate faculties* at this point. In Part I and Part II of Book I of the *Treatise*, the faculty of reason and the understanding did not play any significant role, if at all. Indeed, it appears that this is the first passage where Hume opposes reason to the imagination. See T 1.3.9.19n22; SBN 117-8.

way that causality is defined in part by constant conjunction, general terms are equally defined by the relation of constant conjunction. What distinguishes between causal relations and the relations of general terms to which particular ideas are annexed? General terms are customary conjunctions of *terms* and ideas, whereas causality is constant conjunctions of two or more impressions or ideas.

Hume subsequently argues that the *natural* relation of causality—that is, the irresistible union of ideas by the imagination—is what enables the mind "to reason upon it, or draw any inference from it" (T 1.3.6.16; SBN 94). The philosophical relation of causality, on the other hand, does not play a role in the determination of the mind to expect an effect from a cause. Why? Hume is clear to separate the imagination from reason. The active, intentional comparison of ideas (philosophical relations) is a function of reason. The passive association of ideas (natural relations) is a function of the imagination. The passive association of ideas is *prior* to all philosophical relations. Hume's argument is transparent: without the priority of the natural relation of causality, we may not "reason *upon* [cause and effect], or draw any inference from it" (T 1.3.6.16; SBN 94, italics added).

A further discussion on the nature of belief explores the role of the imagination in inductive relations in more detail. Particularly, the fact that "objects have no discoverable connexion together; nor is it from any other principle but custom operating upon the imagination, that we can draw any inference from the appearance of one to the existence of another" (T 1.3.8.12; SBN 103). The inference from cause to effect is a result of two criteria: (1) custom and (2) force and vivacity. Belief, for Hume, is a *manner* of conceiving an idea. An idea that is conceived as real as opposed to fictitious is one that *feels* qualitatively distinct. Thus, "'tis not solely in poetry and music, we must follow our taste and sentiment, but likewise in

philosophy" (T 1.3.8.12; SBN 103). While intuitive and demonstrative reasoning produces true belief via a comparison of 'fixed' ideas, probable reasoning is believed to be true solely on the basis of custom and feeling.

On the whole, what Hume discovers via his experimental method with respect to the idea of cause and effect is the following:

Empirical verification: Causation is not any one impression; it is constant conjunction of two ideas or impressions. Constant conjunction, more specifically, is contiguity, priority, and necessary connection.

Faculty verification: Causation requires the faculty of imagination. The inference from cause to effect is a result of the imaginative union of ideas. Our belief in the inference is based on custom and past experience. Causation is therefore derivative of the senses. Similar to space and time, *both* the senses and imagination are necessary for generating causal relations; it is thus mind-dependent and mind-independent.

Property verification: Causation is a relation among two or more impressions or ideas. It is, therefore, a general term describing particular resembling inferences or constant conjunctions, depending on the sense of cause.

Before turning to the relation of identity, Hume applies his experimental method once more to the idea of necessity. In terms of *property verification*, necessity is defined as synonymous with efficacy, agency, power, force, energy, connexion, and productive quality (T 1.3.14.4; SBN 157). It is, therefore, impossible to use one of these terms to define the other, for that would be circular.

Next, Hume considers previous arguments in the history of philosophy. Since no philosopher has correctly defined necessity, Hume suggests that we seek the impression to which

necessity may be traced. However, "there is no impression convey'd by our senses, which can give rise to that idea" (T 1.3.14.22; SBN 165).

If necessity is not an external impression, it must be an internal impression or an impression of reflection. But Hume rejects this solution. There is no internal impression that gives rise to our idea of necessity. Instead, Hume describes necessity as "that propensity, which custom produces, to pass from an object to the idea of its usual attendant. This therefore is the essence of necessity" (T 1.3.14.22; SBN 165).

Necessity is an idea that is mind-dependent. The corollary is that necessity arises from the faculty of imagination. The senses and memory record external and internal impressions. But necessity is neither an external nor an internal impression. Thus, it cannot be ascribed to the senses or memory. Given that the faculty of reason intentionally or actively compares ideas (i.e., discovers philosophical relations), and the idea of necessity is not derived from philosophical comparisons, necessity cannot be an idea of reason either.

Hume posits necessity as "something, that exists in the mind, not in objects…necessity is nothing but that determination of the thought to pass from causes to effects and from effects to causes, according to their experienc'd union" (T 1.3.14.22; SBN 165-6). The determination of the mind to pass from cause and effect is, first and foremost, a natural process. It is, in other words, irresistible. We have no control over whether necessity obtains. As a consequence, it seems clear that necessity must be an idea derived from the faculty of imagination.

The implications of this fact are significant. Logic, mathematics, and deductive reasoning all require the idea of necessity to reach certainty. But if necessity is a mind-dependent idea generated by the human imagination, then all certainty is *only certain* so far as the human mind is concerned. Therefore, any contradictory statement may hold in a possible world where,

hypothetically, the human imagination does not produce the idea of necessity.[36] Hume's circumscription of necessity to the human mind anticipates his later skeptical remarks. If necessity only exists in the mind, then it seems to entail that anything is possible mind-independently.

2.3. Book I, Part IV: Identity

While Hume's scepticism in the *Treatise* gradually increases throughout Part II and III of Book I, it reaches a fever pitch in Part IV. If space and time are atomistic points or successive moments disposed in a certain manner, and causality is reduced to constant conjunction derivative of past experience, our knowledge about the world appears ever more limited. However, Hume's most significant critique of the limits of human knowledge is still to come. It is, on my view, Hume's examination of the idea of identity that ultimately motivates the sceptical crisis found in the conclusion of Book I.

Hume prefigures his discussion of identity by remarking that when he turns "the scrutiny against every successive estimation…of [his] faculties, *all the rules of logic* require a continual diminution, and at last a total extinction of belief and evidence" (T 1.4.1.6; SBN 183, italics added). Though Hume is referring here to the continual diminution of certainty that arises from having to reassess the fallibility of his faculties *ad infinitum*, his examination of the idea of identity will yield similarly devastating consequences for the validity of traditional logic.

---

[36] Of course, the natural objection is that *logical* necessity must be separated from *psychological* necessity. Hume is only referring to the latter in the preceding discussion. On my interpretation, however, I take the unpopular view that Hume is committed to a brand of psychologism, because it seems to me that since reason is a sub-faculty of the imagination it is predicated upon the more fundamental features of the imagination, namely, natural relations and determinations. Therefore, without psychological necessity there is no logical necessity. What, indeed, would logical necessity look like if there were no psychological necessity in the first place? To suppose that logical necessity exists outside of the human mind, in some Platonic realm, seems antithetical to Hume's entire project. For an account of Humean psychologism and its relationship to mathematics, see Waxman, "Psychologistic Foundations."

Indeed, given that the so-called *law* of identity requires an *idea* of identity—and that the law of contradiction is predicated on the law of identity—any critique of the *idea* of identity transitively implies a critique of the law of contradiction. In other words, Hume's application of his experimental method to the idea of identity seriously undermines any form of deductive or demonstrative reasoning that depends on the traditional laws of thought.[37] The sceptical implications of Hume's discussion regarding identity and its relation to the logical law of identity are often overlooked in the literature.[38] And yet, it provides a robust justification for reason being ultimately subordinate to our natural beliefs and passions, or why "*belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures*" (T 1.4.1.8; SBN 183).

In Section II, Hume announces that "the subject…of our present enquiry is concerning the *causes* which induce us to believe in the existence of body" (T 1.4.2.2; SBN 187-8). Upon closer review, Hume does not set out to verify the existence of body by examining its causes. Instead, he sets out to examine the attribution of "a continu'd existence to objects" and existence only in so far as it is "distinct from the mind and perception" (T 1.4.2.2; SBN 188). Hume's initial experimental method is *faculty verification*, namely, "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; SBN 188). In other words, what faculty causes the inductive relation of identity?

---

[37] Although there is a substantial amount of literature on what actually constitutes the traditional laws of thought, here I follow Bertrand Russell in so far as they may be reduced to three: (1) the law of identity, (2) the law of contradiction, and (3) the law of the excluded middle. I also take it that the latter two are predicated on the first (*The Problems of Philosophy*, 72).

[38] Or worse, it is dismissed as simply another instance of historical confusion by certain cavalier modern logicians. Take C. J. F. Williams, for instance, who criticizes Hume's theory of identity as a "non-starter. It is of interest only as evidence of the perennial perplexity which the paradox of identity has engendered amongst philosophers" (*What is Identity?*, 4). On the presuppositions of modern logicians, it is indeed difficult to see the import of Hume's theory of identity. If, however, we take Hume's foundational commitments seriously, in so far as we must begin with the science of man—that is, cognitive psychology—then his theory of identity is far more powerful. On the other hand, for F.H. Bradley, it is unfortunate that later empiricists (including the later Hume) did not take the theory of identity, as expressed in the *Treatise*, seriously: "Since Hume's bold speculations on the subject of identity were suppressed by himself, the English school has repeated a lesson by rote and flaunted a blind ancestral prejudice" (*Principles of Logic*, 267.

The senses are immediately dismissed as the faculty responsible for the notion of continued existence. Why? *Continued* existence cannot be sensed, for once the object no longer appears to the senses, it ceases to continue in existence. The senses are also not responsible for the notions of distinct, independent, or external bodies because "a single perception can never produce the idea of a double existence" (T 1.4.2.4; SBN 189).[39]

The faculty of reason is likewise not responsible for our idea of continued existence. Hume's argument is "that children, peasants, and the greatest part of mankind are induc'd to attribute objects to some impressions, and deny them to others," and yet they do not need to consult the esoteric arguments of philosophers to do so (T 1.4.2.14; SBN 193). Moreover, if we take perceptions and objects to be the same, then we can never infer, through reason, that one causes the other.

Thus, there is only one other faculty possible for the attribution of continued existence to objects: the *imagination*—the same faculty necessary for the prior inductive relations of causality and space and time. It is no wonder that Hume spends the majority of Book I of his *Treatise* on the examination of these three inductive relations—they are inextricably linked to what entitles him the glorious name of inventor: the principle of the association of ideas (AB 35; SBN 661).[40]

---

[39] We might ask a similar question regarding how a single perception can give rise to a relation as well. If only two or more sensory impressions or ideas give rise to relations, then they are not internal to any single impression or idea. Neither are they external to impressions or ideas because Hume only attributes possible existence to that which is derivable from impressions or ideas—but, if they are not *internal* to ideas and impressions, then they are not derivable from impressions or ideas. Hence, the paradox that Hume's relations are not derivable from anything within his admitted ontological framework.

[40] A controversial argument I will propose in my interpretation is that resemblance and identity amount to the same relation—all that may be distinguished between the two relations is whether resemblance/identity is actively or passively related, that is, a natural or philosophical relation. Therefore, I come to the conclusion that Hume's discussion of identity may be transitively applied to the relation of resemblance. In the same way that causality contains a natural and philosophical distinction, resemblance is the natural aspect of the philosophical relation of identity. Book I, in essence, is an analysis of the three natural relations composing Hume's greatest invention. In Chapter 3, I present the complete argument regarding resemblance and identity.

These three natural relations, generated by the imagination, are the "cement of the universe," the "secret tie or union among particular ideas," and "the only links that bind the parts of the universe together, or connect us with any person or object exterior to ourselves" (AB 35; SBN 662). In other words, they are the *laws of thought*—that is, the logical ground of the human mind. Only through Hume's empirical method for verifying ideas was it possible to make this discovery.

After Hume rejects vulgar notions of why we attribute continued existence to objects, he realizes that one peculiar property of continued existence is *constancy* (T 1.4.2.18; SBN 194). Constancy seems to be as important to continued existence as it is for causality in so far as it is a necessary property of the relation.[41] The type of constancy it shares with causation is also similar in that it admits of "very considerable exceptions" (T 1.4.2.19; SBN 195).[42] The secondary property of continued existence is *coherence*. Coherence is difficult to interpret clearly, but as Hume remarks, it is founded on a particular type of causal reasoning. The coherence of an object is relative to how changes in a given object *depend* on each other. For instance, a fire that burns over time will turn to ash. The causal relation between the fire and the ash generates a coherence over interrupted, successive perceptions of the fire burning. Hume's *property verification*, therefore, yields two conclusions: coherence and constancy are both necessary properties of continued existence.

---

[41] I take constancy as a species of the resemblance/identity relation. When we evaluate the definition of constancy, we find that what makes something constant is that there is some form of resemblance/identity over a given set of perceptions. For instance, if 'A' is featured over a given set of five perceptions 'A A A A A,' we say that 'A' is constant. This does not imply anything further than the relation of resemblance/identity across the five 'A's.' It might be 'AB AC AD' or 'A B A C A D,' such that the 'A's' are not contiguous or causal, and yet the relation of constancy still obtains.

[42] Why do I claim the constancy of causality admits exceptions? Consider a heating element (cause) that boils water (effect). The heating element may exist in a variety of different stoves, and the time it takes to boil the water may vary, but the causal explanation remains the same.

In a subsequent passage, Hume qualifies his earlier statement regarding coherence as a "kind of reasoning from causation" (T 1.4.2.19; SBN 195). On the contrary, he suggests that the coherence of continued existence is considerably different than reasoning from causation. While causation is based on custom and regulated by past experience, the coherence of continued existence "can never be the direct and natural effect of the constant repetition and connexion" (T 1.4.2.21; SBN 198).

In that case, how might coherence go beyond repeated instances of the past? Hume offers an account where the faculty of imagination, once set into a train of thinking as "a galley put in motion by the oars," "carries on its course without any new impulse" (T 1.4.2.22; SBN 198). This special feature of the mind to carry its thoughts beyond past instances generates the idea of continued existence. Surprisingly, this ability appears synonymous with the determination of the mind to expect an effect from a particular cause. The inference the imagination makes with regard to causation goes beyond the past instances of cause and effect to expect future identical causes and effects. However, Hume does not identify any such similarity between the mind-dependent inference of continued existence and the mind-dependent inference of cause and effect.

Moreover, Hume is not consistent with respect to the mental faculty responsible for coherence. While he claims that the imagination is accountable, he suggests in other places that the inference of coherence "arises from the understanding" (T 1.4.2.21; SBN 197). In another instance, Hume appears to argue that the imagination's propensity to continue its train of thinking is the same "assign'd [to] reason," and "why, after considering several loose standards of equality, and correcting them by each other, we proceed to imagine so correct and exact a standard of that relation" (T 1.4.2.22; SBN 198). In the latter example, I interpret Hume to

mean that we may reason upon imperfect standards of equality, but the fiction of perfect equality is ultimately an imagination construction. When it comes to the question of coherence, I interpret Hume similarly in so far as we may reason upon an imperfect coherence between ideas, but any perfect or actual coherence is generated by imaginative propensities. The imagination thus seems responsible for giving "us a notion of a much greater regularity among objects, than what they have when we look no farther than our senses" (T 1.4.2.22; SBN 198).

Once the *faculty verification* of coherence is complete, Hume moves on to examine the nature and origin of constancy. Constancy seems to involve a similar inference of the mind as coherence, namely, that "this inference from the constancy of our perceptions, like the precedent from their coherence, gives rise to the opinion of the *continu'd* existence of body, which is prior to that of its *distinct* existence" (T 1.4.2.23; SBN 199). In an attempt to further understand the nature of our idea of continued existence, Hume sets out to further verify the properties of constancy. To accomplish this, Hume proposes to examine four things: (1) the principle of identity, (2) the relationship between resemblance and identity attribution, (3) the propensity to attribute continued existence to interrupted perceptions, and (4) the force and vivacity of the belief in continued existence.

First, the analysis of the principle of identity has broad implications not only for complex issues like personal identity but for basic linguistic, logical, and mathematical uses of identity relations. While Hume's challenges toward the validity of causality have become famous in the philosophical tradition, I submit that Hume's challenges toward the validity of identity are far more disruptive to the possibility of certain knowledge. In fact, on my interpretation, the three parts following Part I of Book I of the *Treatise* constitute a sustained siege on the foundations of

religion, science, philosophy, and, more generally, the authority of both reason and the senses in equal measure. Consider:

(1) Space and time are nothing more than points or perceptions disposed in a certain manner. There is no absolute or infinite space or time.

(2) Causality is merely constant conjunction of past experiences mixed with the determination of the mind to expect like effects from like causes. Causation cannot be proven beyond human experience.

(3) Identity is a propensity of the mind to unite mutually contradictory ideas, i.e., unity and number. Identity is thus a contradictory relation and possibly unintelligible.[43]

If these claims are valid, what are the entailments? First, the identity of terms, numbers, and objects are all derived from human psychology alone.[44] Second, causation is likewise mind-

---

[43] In this, I find Hume to anticipate both Hegel and Bradley's arguments against identity.

[44] In subsequent chapters, I attempt to support this controversial claim. Again, I argue that Hume's philosophy entails the currently unpopular position of psychologism. On my view, psychologism need not be controversial. Indeed, if one begins with first principles derived from psychological research, it seems only natural that all theorems derived from those first principles must be traced back to that origin. As John Passmore writes: "Logic and psychology have the same ingredients; Hume's distinction between impressions and ideas can therefore serve as the foundation both of his logic and of his psychology…Then it will follow that logic, in its entirety, forms part of the science of human nature" (*Hume's Intentions*, 18). More importantly, Passmore continues: "The revolutionary character of Hume's logic consists in his rejection of this contrast [between normative and descriptive logic]; logic, he wishes to argue, is simply a branch of the descriptive science of psychology" (Ibid., 18-9).

I also draw a distinction between the unintelligibility, inconceivability, absurdity, obscurity, or meaninglessness *of* an idea and our ability to understand an idea *as* unintelligible, inconceivable, absurd, obscure, or meaningless. For instance, simply because a 'mountain without a valley' may be inconceivable does not imply that we do not understand its inconceivability. In that way, there is a paradox at the core of Hume's Conceivability Principle: in order to understand that an idea is inconceivable, one must *know* inconceivability, but how can we know inconceivability if it is inconceivable to *know* or *experience* inconceivability? I suggest that many natural fictions share this paradoxical characteristic—they are inconceivable in so far as they are self-contradictory but we nevertheless *understand* what it is to call something self-contradictory. Of course, for some sceptical realists, like John P. Wright, inconceivability does not preclude possibility, thus rendering my distinction unnecessary.

The sceptical realist position may be, in some ways, regarded as the inverse of my interpretive position: naturalist fictionalism. That is, where, say, Strawson's 'relative idea' transcends the limits of the copy principle and yet still fits into a realist framework, I see relative ideas as natural fictions (or hypotheses) that likewise transcend the limits of the copy principle. In terms of objective causal power, for instance, I take Hume to believe in it on the grounds of his naturalism while recognizing it to be fictional via his scepticism. Thus, I am equally agnostic regarding the existence of objective causal powers as the sceptical realists, though I extend my view to all other fictions and relations (in so far as it concerns existence claims). I discuss these arguments further in Chapters 3-6. For an interesting discussion of the Conceivability Principle, see Lightner, "Hume on Conceivability and Inconceivability."

dependent, generated by a propensity of the mind to infer future causal sequences from past causal sequences. Third, the nature of space and time are devoid of substantiality. They are simply mind-dependent species (philosophical counterparts) of the natural relation of contiguity.

Hume's tripartite subversion of reason and the senses supports two of his broader philosophical positions: naturalism and mitigated scepticism. On the naturalistic side, no matter how many arguments undermine causal, spatial, temporal, or identity relations, we continue to believe in these relations and their corresponding fictions. On the sceptical side, we ought to continue to doubt the inventory of our beliefs, even those as entrenched in our intellectual culture as the law of identity and '1 + 1 = 2.' That particular practice will allow us to avoid succumbing to any form of dogma.

With respect to the relation of identity, Hume goes on to ask why we consider interrupted perceptions as the same (T 1.4.2.24; SBN 199). The interruption of the perceptions mixed with their perfect identity creates a contradiction that we must disguise "in order to free ourselves from this difficulty" (T 1.4.2.24; SBN 199). Hume claims that identity cannot arise from a single perception; identity is always relational. This is why identity is treated earlier as an inductive relation. Identity is not in any single perception, nor is it found in any single object: "One single object conveys the idea of unity, not that of identity" (T 1.4.2.26; SBN 200).

And yet, at the same time, identity is not conveyed by the multiplicity of objects either. Therefore, if number (multiplicity) and unity are both incompatible with the relation of identity, then what exactly is involved in the relation? Hume relies on his earlier discussion of fictitious duration to ostensibly clear up the matter. When duration is applied to an unchangeable object, it is only via a fiction of imagination that we believe the object participates in the "changes of the co-existent objects" (T 1.4.2.29; SBN 201).

In other words, when the multiplicity of duration (successive moments) is applied to the unity of an unchangeable object, a fictitious kind of duration is produced. That is, the combination of contradictory ideas (duration and unity) forms a new fiction that contains them both. That Hume explains identity by appealing to his discussion of fictitious duration poses a problem: are we to take the relation of identity as a fiction as well? If identity involves fictitious duration, does it thereby contain a fiction? On my view, I take it that Hume's discussion of fictitious duration and identity refer to the same phenomenon in human nature. When an object (unity) is combined with succession (multiplicity) to form a single relation, it may be described as an instance of fictitious duration or identity. Otherwise, what exactly are the relevant differences between Hume's discussion of fictitious duration and identity that designate one as fictitious and the other as non-fictitious?

Presumably, Hume calls fictitious duration a *fiction* because a single object (unity) cannot, in principle, possess duration (multiplicity). It is an imaginative union of two disparate ideas that cannot be traced to any single impression of sense or reflection. Hume must therefore refer to the imaginative union in a way that it differentiates it from ordinary empirical perceptions. To do so, he refers to this species of duration as a fiction. In the case of identity, the same union of duration and unity is constitutive of the relation, and thus, I submit, the label of 'fiction' seems legitimately applicable.

Nevertheless, while Hume relies on the fiction of duration to explain identity, the explanation does not resolve the apparent contradiction of how a single fiction or relation can involve at the same time and in the same respect both duration and unity. What he does say is that we come to understand the contradictory nature of the idea through a kind of philosophical perspectivism. Hume gestures at this type of philosophical perspectivism in various places in the

Treatise, but the position is most clearly expressed in his discussion of identity. For instance, "when we consider any two points of…time, we may place them in different lights: We may either survey them at the very same instant; in which case they give us the idea of number" (T 1.4.2.29; SBN 201). Or, on the other hand, "we may trace the succession of time by a like succession of ideas, and conceiving first one moment, along with the object then existent, imagine afterwards a change in the time without any *variation* or *interruption* in the object; in which case it gives us the idea of unity" (T 1.4.2.29; SBN 201).

Identity then is "a medium betwixt unity and number; or more properly speaking, *is either of them*, according to the view, in which we take it" (T 1.4.2.29; SBN 201, italics added). Although 'unity' and 'number' are binary opposites, and neither may be true of the same object at the same time, the law of contradiction does not seem to hold in this case. Hume's resolution to the paradox is rather to claim that the human mind may perceive one thing in two different (even contradictory) lights. Alternatively, the paradox might be described as a hypothesis or supposition. Identity is "nothing but the *invariableness* and *uninterruptedness* of any object, thro' a suppos'd variation of time" (T 1.4.2.30; SBN 201). The term 'suppos'd' is operative in this passage, for variation cannot occur at the same time as invariableness, and yet it does occur via a supposition. Of course, we may question the possibility of perceiving ideas while simultaneously entertaining a parallel supposition *about* the ideas we are perceiving—for that implies we can perceive impressions and ideas, or think and feel, at the same time and in the same respect.

Second, Hume applies his experimental method to examine why the relation of resemblance across interrupted perceptions induces us to attribute the relation of perfect identity. To begin, Hume points out that identity is derived from an "error and deception" (T 1.4.2.32; SBN 202). The source of the error is the relation of resemblance. Since resemblance between

varying perceptions facilitates an easy transition between them, we are apt to mistake the resembling perceptions as the same (i.e., perfectly or numerically identical). Psychologically, we do not notice any interruption across perfectly resembling perceptions, and thus "thought slides along the succession with equal facility, as if it consider'd only one object; and therefore confounds the succession with the identity" (T 1.4.2.34; SBN 204).

Hume notes throughout his philosophy that we will "see many instances of this tendency of relation to make us ascribe an *identity* to *different* objects" (T 1.4.2.35; SBN 204). And, indeed, it seems that this tendency of the *natural relation of resemblance* has immense psychological effects, many of which Hume does not fully explore. In Chapter 4, I argue that this tendency of resemblance cannot only obtain in the case of *objects*; the same process is clearly evident in generating general terms (linguistics), numbers (mathematics), symbols (logic), and objects (science). Hume's analysis ought to transitively apply in all relevant cases. The fiction of identity, on this view, grounds all of these domains.

The subordination of the philosophical to the vulgar is a natural entailment of Hume's reasoning regarding identity. While Hume classifies identity as a philosophical relation which requires that we *think proper* to attribute an identity to an object, there is a natural counterpart to identity that is ubiquitous in the vulgar mind. In Hume's words: "The persons, who entertain this opinion concerning the identity of our resembling perceptions, 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; SBN 205). Therefore, we may call identity a natural fiction in so far as it is naturally occurring in human nature, but fictional in so far as it is self-contradictory or hypothetical.

Third, Hume attempts to explain the idea of continued existence. Continued existence is a manifestation of the paradox of identity with respect to objects. Not only do we attribute

succession to unchangeable objects, but we also attribute unchangeableness to successive objects. Particularly, we attribute unchangeableness to objects across perceptions even when we are not there to perceive the objects in question. The contradictory nature involved in identity, to that end, carries over to the idea of continued existence. In this light, the contradiction looks to be even more pervasive in human life than originally thought.

Curiously, rather than resolving the contradiction via his psychological descriptivism or perspectivism, Hume relies on his hypothetical or suppositional solution. Take the story of the porter and the letter, where Hume must *suppose* that his porter used the door to enter his chamber even though he does not see it. It would be contradictory if the porter were to enter by a door that does not exist; therefore, a hypothesis is naturally generated by the imagination in which the door is *supposed* to exist despite it not being perceived.

> And this supposition, which was at first entirely arbitrary and hypothetical, acquires a force and evidence by its being the only one, upon which I can reconcile these contradictions. There is scarce a moment of my life, wherein there is not a similar instance presented to me, and I have not occasion to suppose the continu'd existence of objects, in order to connect their past and present appearances, and give them such an union with each other, as I have found by experience to be suitable to their particular natures and circumstances. Here then I am naturally led to regard the world, as something real and durable, and as preserving its existence, even when it is no longer present to my perception. (T 1.4.2.20; SBN 197)

In this global supposition, Hume remarks that "the continu'd existence of sensible objects or perceptions involves no contradiction" (T 1.4.2.40; SBN 208). Human nature removes the contradiction by positing a hypothetical account of the continued existence of objects. Nevertheless, at the core of it, the hypothesis is just as self-contradictory as the relation of identity. This is why Hume classifies the continued existence of objects as a fiction. While nature supposedly makes us believe in the world as something real and durable beyond our perceptions, it is still an illusion.

A reason the mind develops the fiction in the first place is the possibility of psychological discomfort. Hume appeals to his approach of psychological descriptivism to suggest that the "opposition betwixt the notion of the identity of resembling perceptions, and the interruption of their appearance" makes the mind uneasy and naturally seek relief (T 1.4.2.37; SBN 206). Natural fictions then are not simply epistemological tools for various domains of intellectual inquiry, but psychological tools for achieving stability of belief. Notice that the aims of epistemology and psychology are correspondent in this respect: in both, we aim to reach coherence and consistency. If that means fictions are required to satisfy that aim, then so be it. It is only those with a prejudice against fiction, namely, philosophers, who will find the situation repugnant. The vulgar will not think twice about it.

In the main, Hume's experimental verification of identity and continued existence yields great dividends. We are taught the following:

(1) The principle of identity is defined by two contrary ideas: unity and number (*property verification*).

(2) The imagination 'imagines' resembling perceptions as the same because of the smooth passage between them (*faculty verification*).

(3) In the popular or vulgar system, the imagination feigns an external existence to resolve the contradiction where objects exist when not perceived (*empirical verification*).

Hume's fourth move is to examine the nature of our belief in the continued existence of objects. A true belief in a world existing independently of our mind must be attended by force and

vivacity.[45] Yet, there does not seem to be any one impression that is attended by such force and vivacity. Instead, the feeling is derived from "a vast number of instances of perceptions perfectly resembling each other" in our memory (T 1.4.2.42; SBN 208). To "avoid the contradiction, in which the interrupted appearance of these perceptions seems necessarily to involve us," the imagination has a "propension to connect them by a continu'd existence" (T 1.4.2.42; SBN 208-9).

Come what may, "we have a propensity to feign the continu'd existence of *all sensible objects*" (T 1.4.2.42; SBN 209, italics added). External existence then becomes a general term to describe all of these particular instances. The way we perceive the world is shaped by the natural fiction to hypothesize that objects continue to exist beyond our perceptions of them.

Hume reiterates that this vulgar opinion "can never arise from reason, but must arise from the imagination" (T 1.4.2.43; SBN 209). The imagination is responsible for both the mental propensity and the resulting fiction. However, it is not only the idea of continued existence that is involved in this process. The relation of identity is just as necessary, more primary even. As Hume remarks: "This propension to bestow an identity on our resembling perceptions, produces the fiction of a continu'd existence; since that fiction, as well as the identity, is really false" (T 1.4.2.43; SBN 209). What does Hume mean by false here? It is not falsehood from lack of force and vivacity. This has been proven already. It is not falsehood by virtue of a disagreement in the real relations of ideas. Identity is singular relation in this context, and thus is not being related to

[45] Hume's account of truth as feeling or sense is another approach we may take to accept fictions as true. If, for instance, a fiction feels the same as an impression with respect to force and vivacity, then it may be classified as a true belief. Unfortunately, Hume uses the term 'fiction' to oppose 'truth' in several passages, and thus makes his position needlessly confusing. On one hand, Hume clearly says that some fictions, like the continued existence of objects, are true in terms of force and vivacity; on the other, he claims that fictions never feel the same as strong conceptions associated with true belief.

other relations.[46] The most plausible answer is that Hume means falsehood in the sense of a disagreement with real existences or matters of fact. Fictions may not be traced to real impressions, but we suppose them to be real existences. The contradiction of treating '~A' (fictions) as 'A' (real existences) causes the disagreement. Now, if we take this as Hume's answer, then the problem of the ontology of relations resurfaces. How can we treat resemblance or contiguity as really existing relations when relations seem to have no ontological substantiality (external/internal existence)? The problem is most salient when considering successive temporal impressions. For, in that case, there must be a *really existing relation* of contiguity that is at the same time *unperceived* (since it is *between* our impressions), which contradicts Hume's basic metaphysical picture.

Leaving the matter up to interpretation, Hume subsequently examines the idea of *distinct* or *independent* existence. The idea that an object independently exists is intimately connected to the idea of its *continued* existence. The logic is this: if an object has a *continued* existence, then it *necessarily* has an independent existence. Despite its apparent formal truth, Hume still attempts to experimentally verify it. Hume's experimental method, however, discovers that no objects possess such an independent existence. Specifically, he relies on *empirical verification* to suggest that all of our perceptions are of one kind—the conclusion being that "our perceptions have no more a continu'd than an independent existence" (T 1.4.2.46; SBN 211).

Nevertheless, philosophers—who do not empirically verify the idea—tend to construct systems to explain the dual-nature of perceptions and objects. These logical systems are built on a

[46] The relation of identity, however, may be taken as a relational term. That is, we can potentially relate identity to other relations. For instance, 'identity equals resemblance.' Here, we have a *relation* of relations. Three separate relations are involved in the proposition, but the two relations flanking equality are being treated *as* terms.

foundation of imaginative fictions; and thus, the philosophers are ultimately led to fantastical doctrines, such as "the double existence of perceptions and objects" (T 1.4.2.46; SBN 211).

Hume seeks recourse in *faculty verification* to illustrate why the double existence of perceptions and objects "*has no primary recommendation, either to reason or the imagination*" (T 1.4.2.46; SBN 212). First, it is argued that only perceptions exist. Therefore, there is no difference between objects and perceptions. Second, the only way we may infer the existence of one to the other is through the relation of cause and effect. Cause and effect are, as we have learned, the constant conjunction of perceptions. Third, we must conclude that existence, derived from cause and effect, can never be *between* perceptions and objects. Why? Because perceptions are the only existing ontological category on Hume's view. In conclusion, the faculty of reason, predicated on causal relations, cannot accept the doctrine of double existence. Neither can the imagination—for there is no reason why it would proceed from broken perceptions to another existence where the same perceptions are identical and uninterrupted.

The philosophical system of the double existence of objects and perceptions acquires all its force on the imagination from the vulgar system. The irony is those philosophers who espouse the system of double existence believe it to be distinct and superior to that of the common man. While "there is a great difference betwixt such opinions as we form after a calm and profound reflection, and such as we embrace by a kind of instinct or natural impulse," the former are often dependent upon the latter (T 1.4.2.51; SBN 214).

Even worse, "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" (T 1.4.2.52; SBN 215). The opinion of the imagination is that our resembling perceptions are the same (identical), while the opinion of reason is that our

resembling perceptions are different (distinct). All of this trouble seems to flow from the original paradox of identity, which produces three species of fiction all under the same category. Schematically, it may be rendered as:

(1) *Identity* is a fiction that eludes the contradictory properties of being both the same and different (unity v. number).

(2) *Continued existence* is a fiction that eludes the contradictory properties of being both the same and different (resemblance v. interruption).

(3) *The double existence of perceptions and objects* is a fiction that eludes the contradictory properties of being both the same and different (identical v. distinct).

The foundational contradiction between unity and number—eluded by the fiction of identity—may not be removed from human nature. It is constitutive of the human condition. Reason believes that each perception is distinct, whereas the imagination believes that some perceptions are perfectly identical. Neither faculty is incorrect. It is simply two perspectives on the same matter. But because we are not able "to reconcile these two enemies, we endeavour to set ourselves at ease as much as possible, by successively granting to each whatever it demands" (T 1.4.2.52; SBN 215). Hence, the fictional edifice erected on the ground of identity is all the result of a futile peacekeeping effort.[47]

In the end, Hume realizes that all rational systems are based on imaginative fictions. Any rational system, in other words, that presupposes objects or subjects is dependent upon the relation of identity. The situation is lamentable: "I cannot conceive how such trivial qualities of the fancy, conducted by such false suppositions, can ever lead to any solid and rational system" (T

[47] Compare the war between the imagination and reason here with Pascal's earlier remarks regarding the war between the senses and reason. Of course, in this case, it seems that the senses and reason are ganging up on the imagination. The senses deliver distinct perceptions, and thus the senses take the side of reason over the imagination.

1.4.2.56; SBN 217). It is a gross and natural illusion that leads us to the opinion that we ought to reject the illusion which gave rise to the opinion that we ought to reject it. It is a puzzling example of self-reference.[48]

Hume's experimental verification system ultimately reaches conclusions that undermine reason and the senses (and even perhaps the *Treatise* itself). The only recourse we have is to "carelessness and in-attention" (T 1.4.2.57; SBN 218). If we simply do not pay attention to the contradictions at the core of human nature, then impulse and instinct carry the day as they did before. Our imagination will continue to generate the fictional belief that objects—including ourselves—embody an identity across time. And our only choice is to face our situation head on: the truth is not stranger than fiction, it is fiction.

3. Natural Moral Relations

3.1. Book II, Part III: Liberty

Hume principally applies his empirical method in Book I to the three inductive relations: space and time, causality, and identity. From his analysis, it seems that the inductive relations are *natural* in the sense that our vulgar perception of the world *irresistibly* involves these relations, but they are

[48] In this, I see Hume as reaching the limit of his own philosophy, in so far as he confronts the paradox of self-reference. For more, see Graham Priest's analysis of the history of philosophy and the paradox of self-reference, particularly with respect to Kant, Hegel, Wittgenstein, and Derrida in "Derrida and Self-Reference." Also see his *Beyond the Limits of Thought*. Wayne Waxman interprets Hume's self-referential paradox in this way: "Hume's intention, in my view, was to conclude his analysis of human understanding by declaring his own theory of ideas—employed throughout the *Treatise* I to explicate relation, abstraction, space and time, necessary connection, and identity—to be itself a mere fiction of associative 'imagination, or the vivacity of our ideas' (*T*265). When the dragon thus swallows itself up from the tail, the stage is finally set for the skeptical denouement of *Treatise* I/iv/§7" (*Hume's theory of consciousness*, 202). James Harris, on the other hand, construes T.H. Green's reception of the self-referential quality like this: "Throughout the [*Treatise*] Hume has relied on there being a subject of thought, able to convert the data of sensory experience into the world of knowledge; but at the very end it appears that the identity of the thinking subject is as much a fiction as every other relation in the Humean system" ("The Reception of Hume in Nineteenth-Century British Philosophy," 322). Notice that Harris suggests Green interprets all Humean *relations* as fictions.

fictional in the sense that the faculty of imagination plays a foundational role in generating these relations.

In Books II and III, Hume changes course, setting out to examine the passions and morals. While the passions are broadly verifiable in so far as they are clearly traceable to impressions of sensation and reflection, the discussion on morals and politics presents similar difficulties to those found in Book I. There is, in this sense, a symmetry between Book I and Book III.

As discovered with the relations of space and time, causality, and identity, Hume's experiments reveal that the ideas of (1) liberty, (2) justice, and (3) God are likewise natural in one sense, but artificial in another. An important note: while *fiction* is used to describe the natural epistemic relations, I will use *artificial* to describe the natural moral relations. That said, there is no difference, on my interpretation, between what fiction and artificial mean in the special sense that I employ them. Thus, in some cases, I use these terms interchangeably. The same meaning applies in all cases.

On the whole, Book III culminates in similarly surprising conclusions. The artificial components discovered in the ideas of liberty, justice, and God undermine historically dogmatic claims supporting moral realism. That does not imply that I take Hume to be an advocate of moral anti-realism. It only means that moral realism is deflated to the extent that it is predicated on artifice. I address this further in Chapter 5.

Now, in Book II, Part III, Hume pursues an examination of the ideas of liberty and necessity. In contemporary terms, we might refer to these ideas as free will and determinism. To begin his analysis, Hume focuses upon the idea of the will, which is "*the internal impression we feel*

and are conscious of, when we knowingly give rise to any new motion of our body, or new perception of our mind" (T 2.3.1.2; SBN 399).

The internal impression of the will is distinct from the operations of external bodies in so far as external bodies do not seem to possess a will. In fact, there does not appear to be any trace of indifference or liberty in external bodies at all. Thus, we infer that the behaviour of external bodies is necessarily determined. And yet, as Hume already discovered in Book I, necessity may not be found in any particular objects. Neither the senses nor reason may "penetrate so far into the essence and construction of bodies, as to perceive the principle, on which their mutual influence depends" (T 2.3.1.4; SBN 400). While external bodies may seem to operate according to necessity, it is rather that we have become so accustomed to perceiving constantly conjoined objects that we infer a principle of ultimate connection. Two particulars are essential to the idea of necessity: (1) union and (2) the inference of the mind. Therefore, necessity is mind-dependent, by definition, for it relies on human inference and an imaginative union to obtain.

Next, Hume makes an important move in his reasoning, where he broadly connects Book I to Book III. In the following passage, morals and politics are linked to epistemology and ontology via natural principles of human nature. Hume argues that "the cohesion of the parts of matter arises from natural and necessary principles…And for a like reason…human society is founded on like principles…because we not only observe, that men *always* seek society, but can also explain the principles, on which this universal propensity is founded" (T 2.3.1.8; SBN 401-2). What this claim entails is that the respective discoveries of Book I and Book III may reflect on each other and tie together the *Treatise* as a unified philosophical text.

Additionally, Hume announces that the same experimental methods must be employed to explain both natural and social phenomena. For instance, "in judging of the actions of men we

must proceed upon the same maxims, as when we reason concerning external objects" (T 2.3.1.12; SBN 403). As a result, I contend Book III follows the same experimental verification processes outlined in the elements of Hume's philosophy. Social structures, governments, and the actions of men therefore ought to be verified in the same way as our foundational epistemic ideas of space and time, causality, and identity. The probability arising from such experiments will guide our general understanding of human nature.

Returning to the idea of liberty, Hume points out that madmen are usually understood to have no liberty. Even today, we do not blame insane criminals in the same way as sane criminals, for we tend to think insanity prevents the operation of free will and therefore limits responsibility. However, this position is inconsistent. If sane persons appear to have more regularity or consistency in their actions, and insane persons act more randomly or chaotically, then the former are simply closer to our idea of necessity. Therein lies the contradiction: sane persons are thought to have more liberty at the same very time their actions are thought to be more necessary (or regular).

Hume's resolution to this problem is to suggest that the terms used in the debate over liberty and necessity are hopelessly confused. To be sure, our idea of necessity, as revealed in Part III of Book I, is not how the vulgar or the philosophers understand it, since, for Hume, "there is no absolute nor metaphysical necessity" (T 1.3.14.35; SBN 172). Necessity is based on constant conjunction, or a union of ideas mixed with an inference of the mind to assume like effect from like cause. We expect that future constant conjunction will occur on the basis of past constant conjunction. All we have is uniform resemblance (constancy) and contiguity (conjunction) to judge the nature of our perceptions.

With respect to liberty, Hume intends to discover the origin and nature of our idea of liberty, so that we may clarify the "confus'd ideas and undefin'd terms" of the debate (T 2.3.1.13; SBN 404). What is the empirical basis of liberty? What is the faculty from which it derives? And what are the properties of the idea?

The first step in the argument is for Hume to show that the union between motives and actions is the same as any natural operation. There is nothing more peculiar about the will operating on the human body than objects operating on other objects. In that way, we cannot attribute liberty to human motives and deprive objects of the same kind of liberty. The idea of liberty must emerge from somewhere else.

Hume's response is that liberty arises from our idea of necessity, which seems paradoxical on the face of it. How can liberty possibly originate from its apparent opposite? The argument may only be understood if we discard our prejudiced definition of liberty. In fact, the idea of liberty is entirely different from what the vulgar or the philosophers have thought. It is rather an idea that arises from what Hume calls *moral evidence*. Specifically, "moral evidence is nothing but a conclusion concerning the actions of men, deriv'd from the consideration of their motives, temper and situation" (T 2.3.1.15; SBN 404). The same constancy that gives rise to the union and inference of the mind regarding the cause and effect of objects gives rise to moral evidence.

In another instance where Hume implicitly connects Book I to Book III, he argues that given "how aptly *natural* and *moral* evidence cement together, and form only one chain of argument betwixt them, we shall…allow, that they are of the same nature, and deriv'd from the same principles" (T 2.3.1.17; SBN 406). Liberty therefore is not the opposite of necessity. There is, in fact, no debate between free will and determinism on such an account, for both ideas derive from the same natural principles generative of necessity.

If one were to remove the idea of necessity from liberty, that would likewise remove the idea of causation—and if there is no necessity or causation in the idea of liberty, liberty is reduced to mere chance or randomness. If that is the case, then liberty contains the same contradiction as chance. The contradiction is that if there is no cause for a chance event, then it occurs outside of a causal series, but if it is not defined in opposition to a causal series, then there is no reason to call is chance in the first place.

Hume's method of *property verification* concludes that the idea of liberty arises from the custom of moral evidence. A moral agent acting in the world upon internal motives provides the union of ideas and the basis for the inference to expect that agents will act in like manner. The idea of necessity is not opposed to liberty; it is, in fact, the same as liberty in so far as it informs both the actions of objects (physical necessity) and the actions of men (liberty).

Furthermore, Hume notices that there are actually two senses in which we use the word liberty. He denominates these as *liberty of spontaneity* and *liberty of indifference*. The first type of liberty is what we generally refer to as liberty. It is the type of liberty that describes freedom from force or coercion. For instance, if one is locked inside a prison cell, then they do not have the liberty of spontaneity to escape the jail.

The other type of liberty is that of indifference. This type of liberty is one that is free from causation. But liberty free from causation, as we have learned, is absurd. Liberty of indifference is the type of liberty that is *fantastical*, whereas liberty of spontaneity is genuine. Nevertheless, Hume argues that the former type of liberty is "universally confounded" with the other (T 2.3.2.1; SBN 408). Not only that, but liberty of indifference is accompanied by a "*false sensation or experience*" (T 2.3.2.2; SBN 408). Curiously, a *false* sensation or experience appears contradictory to Hume's basic ontology—so what can he mean by this? He means that when we

are in the midst of performing an action, we often feel a type of looseness or indifference contrary to the feeling of necessity. Even though on reflection, the indifference is seldom still felt, we "imagine we feel a liberty within ourselves" (T 2.3.2.2; SBN 408). On the basis of resembling false sensations, we reach a proof for human liberty via demonstrative or even intuitive means.

There is still a further reason why we take liberty of indifference as having real existence, and that is its constant reification in the domain of religion. Religions have been "unnecessarily interested" in the liberty of indifference (T 2.3.2.3; SBN 409). The perpetuation of the real existence of liberty within individuals contributes to the universal confusion around the idea. That said, Hume clearly allows for a type of liberty of spontaneity required for both morality and religion. The necessity derived from the "*internal impression we feel…when we knowingly give rise to any new motion of our body, or new perception of our mind*" is still a genuine idea (T 2.3.1.2; SBN 399). If this type of liberty—derived from the idea of necessity—is abandoned, then it entails the absolute subversion of both morality and religion.

On the other hand, as Hume rightly points out, if it were liberty of indifference that religion and morality required, then no one would be responsible for anything. Liberty of indifference implies that "a man is as pure and untainted, after having committed the most horrid crimes…since they are not deriv'd from it, and the wickedness of the one can never be us'd as a proof of the depravity of the other" (T 2.3.2.6; SBN 411).

Therefore, the idea of liberty of indifference is a natural artifice that arises from a union of ideas and a feeling of the mind. In that way, it shares those features with other natural artifices. Although Hume does not verify the idea of liberty in terms of faculty verification, we can safely assume that the imagination is responsible for generating the idea in the first place. Indeed, Hume describes the "system of liberty" as "fantastical" (T 2.3.1.15; SBN 404), and the

only other time Hume uses the word *fantastic* in the *Treatise* is to describe the sect of *total* sceptics, whom he does not believe even exist (T 1.4.1.8; SBN 183). In that sense, the idea of liberty seems to possess some fantastical or artificial element, and I suspect, if it does, that it must be derived from the imagination.

Following the method of empirical verification, we learned that the idea of liberty of indifference arises from a *false sensation or experience*. But there is no sensation or experience that is genuinely false, since "every thing that enters the mind, being in *reality* a perception, 'tis impossible any thing shou'd to *feeling* appear different" (T 1.4.2.7; SBN 190). Instead, the falsehood is generated by a similar mental operation found in the relation of identity. Specifically, the resemblance and smooth passage that the mind feels in the looseness or indifference of an action generates the idea of liberty. Similar to identity, the examination of liberty concludes that the idea must be artificial.

The parallel between liberty and identity is clear. While identity is fictional because it eludes the contradiction between unity and number, liberty is artificial because it eludes the contradiction of chance. Recall that liberty of indifference is "the very same thing with chance" given that, "by removing necessity," causality is also removed (T 2.3.1.18; SBN 407). And yet, "chance is commonly thought to imply a contradiction, and is at least directly contrary to experience" (T 2.3.1.18; SBN 407). Thus, liberty of indifference, in so far as it is synonymous with chance, eludes a contradiction in the same way as identity.

3.2. Book III, Part II: Justice

It is in Hume's examination of the idea of justice that we find the fullest expression of his philosophical perspectivism. More precisely, Hume argues that an idea may be both natural and

artificial, depending on the light under which it is observed—and justice is one such idea. The essence of the claim is this: "there are some virtues, that produce pleasure and approbation by means of an artifice or contrivance, which arises from the circumstances and necessities of mankind" (T 3.2.1.1; SBN 477). In other words, there are *natural* circumstances which necessitate the production of *artifices*. The artifices are therefore natural in the sense that they arise due to natural circumstances, but they are artificial in the sense that they are generated by the human mind. Hume clarifies what he means in the following:

> To avoid giving offence, I must here observe, that when I deny justice to be a natural virtue, I make use of the word, *natural*, only as oppos'd to *artificial*. In another sense of the word; as no principle of the human mind is more natural than a sense of virtue; so no virtue is more natural than justice. Mankind is an inventive species; and where an invention is obvious and absolutely necessary, it may as properly be said to be natural as any thing that proceeds immediately from original principles, without the intervention of thought or reflection. Tho' the rules of justice be *artificial*, they are not *arbitrary*. Nor is the expression improper to call them *Laws of Nature*; if by natural we understand what is common to any species, or even if we confine it to mean what is inseparable from the species. (T 3.2.1.19; SBN 484)

The perspectivism with respect to justice is unequivocal: it is both artificial *and* natural. It is natural because it is invented by the human mind to satisfy biological or physiological demands. And yet it is artificial because, without the human mind, there would be no idea of justice at all. In that way, it is mind-dependent but arises necessarily from natural exigencies of human nature. On my interpretation, the passage above is not only vital to understanding the idea of justice, but also vital to understanding Hume's philosophical project.

In Book III, the elements of Hume's philosophy still function centrally in the determination of the origin and content of the idea of justice. First, Hume analyzes justice in terms of *empirical verification*. In other words: where does the idea of justice originate? Is it an impression of reflection or sensation? Through a series of thought experiments, Hume verifies that the origin of justice is not derived from human action but human motive. Given that moral

qualities are internal, they may not be identified by other individuals. As such, we look for external signs that act as evidence of internal motives.

The morality of any action turns on the motive of the action. It is not merely the action itself. For instance, if a person accidentally commits a crime, blame is not accorded in the same way as when there is intent. As a result, due process in law involves an examination of both *actus reus* (the guilty act) and *mens rea* (the guilty mind). Hume claims that part of the origin of justice has to do with particular motives for human action.

A maxim follows this reasoning "that no action can be virtuous, or morally good, unless there be in human nature some motive to produce it, distinct from the sense of its morality" (T 3.2.1.7; SBN 479). In other words, justice cannot arise from the action itself, for that would be to reason circularly—an act is not just because it conforms to a just act. On the contrary, a just act is one that follows from our passions and motives. So, the question is: from what motive is justice produced?

Hume argues that, since "we have naturally no real or universal motive for observing the laws of equity…and as no action can be equitable or meritorious, where it cannot arise from some separate motive," justice must be produced by another means (T 3.2.1.17; SBN 483). The only means available is that of human convention. Justice therefore "arises artificially, tho' necessarily from education, and human conventions" (T 3.2.1.17; SBN 483).

Still, the origin of justice needs further explanation. Why does the artifice of justice emerge out of natural necessity? What characteristics of the natural world are responsible for our need of justice? A significant part of Hume's account of justice is to delineate such circumstances of human nature. To set the stage for his argument, Hume paints a grim picture of humanity in

so far as our biological constitution, by itself, seems inadequately matched to the environment. All other animals appear to be self-sustaining with advantageous biological adaptations.

The only way for man to live successfully, on the other hand, is for society "to supply his defects, and raise himself up to an equality with his fellow-creatures, and even acquire a superiority above them" (T 3.2.2.3; SBN 485). Man is, following Aristotle, a social animal, and necessarily so. Society is able to provide (1) force, (2) ability, and (3) security in order to aid humans in their effort to thrive.

If a human lived alone from birth, the advantages of society would never be known. Instead, it is not enough that society is advantageous, but that humans are sensible to its advantages. Hume describes the condition of birth and childhood as a means for inculcating the advantages of society. Children, via the affection and care of their parents, come to recognize the benefits they may reap from human association. The upbringing within a family unit acts as the "original principle of human society" (T 3.2.2.4; SBN 486).

The situation of society is complicated however by both the *natural temper* of humans and *outward circumstances*. With respect to the former, humans are selfish. It is an undeniable fact. Yet, Hume does not follow Hobbes to the extent that he belabours the point or overestimates the presence of selfishness in human nature. Hume fully recognizes that humans are both selfish *and* benevolent. The example given is that a rich man often bestows his riches on his family instead of keeping it all for himself.

Writ large, the propensity to be generous is not sustainable, for humans prioritize their families over the rest of the society. Therefore, it seems as if there is an opposition of actions—while we are generous to a small society like our family, we are not usually generous to a large society. The reason is that there are outward circumstances to take into account as well, namely,

three species of goods: (1) the internal satisfaction of our mind, (2) the external advantages of our body, and (3) the enjoyment of possessions we have acquired by industry and good fortune. Only the third is relevant to the artifice of justice. The first cannot be taken away by society, whereas the second may be taken away but others cannot gain anything from it. It is only possessions that may provoke others to do violence to us, in so far as others can gain from depriving us of our possessions.

The chief advantage of society, for Hume, is to ameliorate "the *instability* of…possession, along with…*scarcity*" (T 3.2.2.7; SBN 488). Scarcity is important here, for if the supply of possessions exceeded the demand, then there would be no instability of possession in the first place. Given that we have scarce resources, social arrangements are constituted to address the problem of resource distribution.

In a state of nature, there is no justice. It does not exist because it is not a natural principle. In fact, the partiality humans have toward their own family or tribe, while in a state of nature, reinforces what Hume calls "uncultivated ideas of morality" (T 3.2.2.8; SBN 489).

The solution to the dilemma is to develop an artifice of justice that mediates between unrelated individuals in society. Although the artifice of justice entails that some individuals—say, tyrants or war lords—will receive less than they did prior to the artifice, for most individuals it provides "infinite advantages" (T 3.2.2.9; SBN 489). The largest difficulty in society is that external goods may be stolen or taken from us by stronger forces. Thus, we need a remedy that will allow us to protect our possessions and property. The result is a human "convention enter'd into by all the members of the society to bestow stability on the possession of those external goods, and leave every one in the peaceable enjoyment of what he may acquire by his fortune and industry" (T 3.2.2.9; SBN 489).

The motive for the artifice of justice then is a common interest in the stability of possession. That common interest generates social rules that regulate the conduct of all people in a given society. But the rules, laws, contracts, etc., are all forms of human artifice. In other words, no law is natural or divine. It is simply a fiction to which we all subscribe because of its ability to engender broader social cooperation.

Hume clarifies that even though "the rule concerning the stability of possession" arises gradually over time—perhaps over centuries or millennia—that does not imply that it is *natural* (T 3.2.2.10; SBN 490). Instead, the long period of time generates more and more resembling instances demonstrating the infinite benefits of the artifice of justice. The compounding of like causes and like effects strengthens our expectation that the benefits will continue in the future. Two other examples of human artifice that gradually develop over time are given in support of his account: human languages and symbolic currency. In both instances, it is a human artifice that regulates our behaviour; in the former case, it is symbolic words or terms that regulate communication, whereas in the latter case, it is symbolic pieces of metal that regulate economic transactions.[49]

Once conventions of justice are established, such as the protection of possessions, the ideas of justice and injustice *arise immediately* (T 3.2.2.10; SBN 490). The origin of the ideas of justice and injustice can be traced directly to such conventions. Just as ideas may be traced to impressions, justice may be traced to socially negotiated rules of conduct. What follows the establishment of basic conventions of stability of possession are further sub-conventions: private

[49] Hume anticipates here modern discussions of the fictional structure of human civilization. Most notably, see Chapter 3 of Yuval Noah Harari's *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*. Hume also argues that "justice is a moral virtue, merely because it has that tendency to the good of mankind; and, indeed, is nothing but an artificial invention to that purpose. The same may be said of allegiance, of the laws of nations, of modesty, and of good-manners. All these are mere human contrivances for the interest of society. The inventors of them had chiefly in view their own interest" (T 3.3.1.9; SBN 577).

property, rights, and obligations (T 3.2.2.11; SBN 491). We may not understand the idea of private property or the obligation of a citizen without understanding the artifice of justice first. Hume remarks that this is a "gross fallacy" which some philosophers commit, believing they can explain the origin of human rights, for instance, without first acknowledging the true artificial origin of justice.

Unlike natural epistemic relations, justice is a *moral* relation. Thus, "a man's property is some object related to him. This relation is not natural, but moral, and founded on justice" (T 3.2.2.11; SBN 491). Property cannot be explained without showing that justice has its origin in the artifice of men. It is this original artifice that gives rise to *both* justice and our idea of property.

Hume claims that the convention of property and stability of possession are so important that they are *necessary* to the establishment of human society (T 3.2.2.12; SBN 491). When conventions are ignored by individuals, human society becomes less established and peaceful. Indeed, there is nothing more to be done to create perfect harmony and concord than for individuals to abide these natural human conventions. Other passions, like vanity, that hold the potential to be indulged for the worse, are usefully restrained by laws and rules such that they create "a bond of union among men" (T 3.2.2.12; SBN 491).[50]

Passions alone are not sufficient, however, to explain the origin of justice. Benevolence is too weak, while others work against the equitable distribution of resources. Paradoxically, it is 'self-interest' alone which is capable of controlling itself (T 3.2.2.13; SBN 492). When individual self-interest is confronted with a community of other self-interests, a deal must be struck to maximize the self-interest of all. Self-interest, as a passion, is therefore morally inert on Hume's account—"for whether the passion of self-interest be esteemed vicious or virtuous, 'tis all a case;

[50] Recall that Hume uses the same phrase "bond of union" to describe the association of ideas (T 1.1.4.1; SBN 10).

since itself alone restrains it: So that if it be virtuous, men become social by their virtue; if vicious, their vice has the same effect" (T 3.2.2.13; SBN 492).

When it comes to Hume's *property verification* of justice, we notice that the idea is more complicated than other ideas in so far as it contains a multitude of characteristics. Particularly, justice proceeds "from the concurrence of certain *qualities* of the human mind with the *situation* of external objects. The qualities of the mind are *selfishness* and *limited generosity:* And the situation of external objects is their *easy change*, join'd to their *scarcity* in comparison of the wants and desires of men" (T 3.2.2.16; SBN 494). The idea of justice then is composed of distinct qualities and conditions, in much the same way as the ideas of epistemic relations.

The question of faculty verification poses a far more challenging inquiry. While we can safely say that the idea of justice does not arise from the senses or memory, Hume seems to suggest that the understanding rather than the imagination is responsible for the artifice or convention. But by 'understanding,' Hume cannot mean to say the faculty of reason. It is clear that justice does not derive from reason—as Hume argues, "the sense of justice is not founded on reason, or on the discovery of certain connexions and relations of ideas, which are eternal, immutable, and universally obligatory…nothing can be more certain, than that it is not any relation of ideas, which gives us this concern, but our impressions and sentiments" (T 3.2.2.20; SBN 496).

Justice is therefore based on our impressions, but those impressions are derived from human convention. More precisely, if an individual transgresses a rule or convention in society, we experience an impression or sentiment: a *sense* of justice. This sense of justice is "*not natural to the mind of man, but arise[s] from artifice and human conventions*" (T 3.2.2.21; SBN 496). While the impressions are not artifices in and of themselves, they only arise *after* the artifice of laws and

rules are in place. Indeed, if human nature was naturally benevolent or concerned with the public interest, Hume argues there would not be a need for law or rules. In that way, it is clear that the sense of justice is derived from artifice.

Still, the question persists regarding the faculty responsible for the artifice of justice. On one hand, Hume says that human nature is "compos'd of two principal parts…the affections and understanding" and "'tis certain, that the blind motions of the former, without the direction of the latter, incapacitate men for society" (T 3.2.2.14; SBN 493). Does this imply that it is the *understanding* or *judgment* that capacitates men for society?

On the other hand, it stands to reason that human *artifice* is produced by the faculty of imagination. The imagination is generally responsible for fictions, illusions, inventions, and so on. So, why does Hume not mention the imagination with respect to justice?

While the experimental method of *faculty verification* is usually performed to discover the origin of ideas, it is conspicuously absent here. Justice seems to be associated with several faculties of the mind. But which one? By examining various claims that Hume makes regarding justice, we may narrow down the possibilities.

First, with respect to reason, Hume declares that "the rules of morality, therefore, are not conclusions of our reason" (T 3.1.1.6; SBN 457). More to the point, Hume definitively states that "justice is not founded on reason, or on the discovery of certain connexions and relations of ideas, which are eternal, immutable, and universally obligatory" (T 3.2.2.20; SBN 496). Therefore, it is safe to say that the faculty of reason is not responsible for the artificial virtue of justice.

Second, with respect to the faculty of sense or memory, there is evidence that justice is derived from our senses. For instance, "the *sense* of justice and injustice is not deriv'd from nature,

but arises artificially, tho' necessarily from education, and human conventions" (T 3.2.1.17; SBN 483, italics added). What is the sense of justice? The sense of justice appears to be the impression derived from the general rules that pertain to society as a whole. If an individual breaks a rule or law of justice, it may be *sensed* by others as unjust. Hume notes that there is "a general sense of common interest; which sense all the members of the society express to one another, and which induces them to regulate their conduct by certain rules" (T 3.2.2.10; SBN 490). The concern for public interest, as well as ourselves, is not founded on a relation of ideas. Hume is clear about this. Instead, the concern is born from impressions and sentiments: "the sense of justice, therefore, is not founded on our ideas, but on our impressions" (T 3.2.2.20; SBN 496).

Still, the sense of justice is not derived from nature, but from human artifice. In other words, "*those impressions, which give rise to this sense of justice, are not natural to the mind of man, but arise from artifice and human conventions*" (T 3.2.2.21; SBN 496). Thus, while justice necessarily depends on the faculty of sense or memory, it requires a further faculty, one capable of inventing the artifice from which the sense of justice arises.

The two possibilities left are the imagination *or* judgment and the understanding. Since the faculty of imagination is not mentioned whatsoever in Hume's discussion of justice, we may assume that it plays no role. Indeed, there is one important piece of evidence that clearly suggest that judgment and the understanding are the faculties from which justice derives: "the remedy [of justice] is not deriv'd from nature, but from *artifice*; or more properly speaking, nature provides a remedy in the *judgment and understanding*" (T 3.2.2.9; SBN 489, italics added).

Are judgment and understanding therefore capable of generating artifice? The answer warrants a larger discussion of what exactly Hume means by the *understanding*. In Book I, Hume indicates an error that has been made by the Scholastics and, later, the logicians of his time:

namely, that they divide the understanding into (1) conception, (2) judgment, and (3) reasoning. The primary reason why this division is incorrect is that it always assumes two or more ideas are required for an act of understanding. Hume denies this claim, proposing instead that a single idea may be reasoned upon.[51] On a positive account, what we can say about the understanding is that the species of reasoning and judgment "all resolve themselves" into the understanding (T 1.3.7.5n20; SBN 97). The real division, in other words, is merely different ways of conceiving of an idea.

In Section VI of Part III of Book I, Hume clarifies that all causal reasoning in the understanding is based on a prior association of the ideas in the imagination. That is to say, "tho' causation be a *philosophical* relation…'tis only so far as it is a *natural* relation, and produces an union among our ideas, that we are able to reason upon it, or draw any inference from it" (T 1.3.6.16; SBN 94). Natural relations are generated by the imagination. Any causal reasoning of the understanding or judgment is predicated on the faculty of imagination providing natural relations first.[52]

Now, the understanding may influence the imagination to produce a particular way of conceiving a perception. For instance, in one case, "'the understanding corrects the appearances of the senses, and makes us imagine, that an object at twenty foot distance seems even to the eye as large as one of the same dimensions at ten" (T 1.3.10.12; SBN 632). The understanding may

---

[51] Presumably, this is done by a distinction of reason, which allows us to view single ideas in different lights. The implications of this commitment are extensive with respect to the relationship between Hume's philosophy and his view of logic. If we can reason about a single idea, it seems that Hume believes we need not always appeal to term, predicate, or propositional logic to reason correctly. In this, I find Hume to be launching yet another attack against any sort of philosophical servitude to logic and mathematics.

[52] Hume says in another passage that "what has been already prov'd at large [is] that the understanding never observes any real connexion among objects, and that even the union of cause and effect, when strictly examin'd, resolves itself into a customary association of ideas" (T 1.4.6.16; SBN 259-260). More significantly, Hume announces at the end of Book I: "The memory, senses, and understanding are, therefore, all of them founded on the imagination, or the vivacity of our ideas" (T 1.4.7.3; SBN 265).

then mediate between the senses and the imagination by interposing general rules that correct our conceptions based on prior experience.

On the other hand, we might see the understanding as a more stable aspect of the imagination. In the following passage, Hume seems to suggest as much: "the consideration… makes us…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*" (T 1.4.7.7; SBN 267, italics added). A discussion of general rules in epistemology will help to elaborate the view. There appear to be two types of general rules: (1) rules of the imagination and (2) rules of the understanding. The former are formed by unphilosophical probabilities, whereas the latter are formed by philosophical probabilities. General rules are significant not only to epistemic concerns, but moral concerns as well. That is to say, general rules are an essential feature of both Hume's account of justice *and* causal reasoning.

To understand general rules of justice, we may look to Hume's discussion of general rules of cause and effect. What we find is that there are "some general rules, by which we ought to regulate our judgment concerning causes and effects; and these rules are form'd on the nature of our understanding, and on our experience of its operations in the judgments we form concerning objects" (T 1.3.13.11; SBN 149). General rules, as a mechanism for regulating judgments of causality, are formed by a similar process to the general rules of justice. The purpose of the general rules of justice is to regulate conduct in society—"government is a mere human invention for the interest of society," and general rules are "for the regulation of our conduct" (T 3.2.9.4; SBN 552-3).

At the same time, general rules are not always true or valid. In fact, they are apt to cause error in the regulation of both moral and epistemic judgments. These *erroneous* general rules

Hume names as the fourth species of unphilosophical probability, and "[h]uman nature is very subject to errors of this kind" (T 1.3.13.7; SBN 147). Valid general rules are formed by the faculty of the understanding, while the erroneous general rules are formed by the faculty of imagination.

The source of error with respect to the general rules of the imagination appear to be of two kinds: (1) rules that we "rashly form to ourselves" called prejudice and (2)

> When an object is found by experience to be always accompany'd with another…tho' chang'd in very material circumstances; we naturally fly to the conception of the second, and form an idea of it in as lively and strong a manner, as if we had infer'd its existence by the justest and most authentic conclusion of our understanding. Nothing can undeceive us, not even our senses, which, instead of correcting this false judgment, are often perverted by it, and seem to authorize its errors. (T 2.2.8.5; SBN 362)

Hume provides an example where an individual blushes upon observing someone else act foolishly (T 2.2.7.5; SBN 371). The imagination is affected by a general rule—i.e., foolish acts are to be ridiculed—and, as a consequence, the individual conceives of the lively passion of embarrassment even when they are not actuated by it. In this case, the passion of embarrassment that we sense is authorized by our imagination's tendency to pass readily from one object or passion to another.

That said, a strict separation between the general rules of the imagination and the understanding is not immediately clear. One reason is that, as Hume earnestly admits, his system argues that "all reasonings are nothing but the effects of custom; and custom has no influence, but by inlivening the imagination, and giving us a strong conception of any object" (T 1.3.13.11; SBN 149). Therefore, the understanding and the imagination should never be contrary, since they are founded on the exact same grounds, namely, custom.

Hume nevertheless holds that general rules of the understanding are "more extensive and constant" while the general rules of the imagination are "more capricious and uncertain" (T

1.3.13.11; SBN 149). In that way, what seems to separate the two types of general rules is a certain corrective reflection. The rules of the imagination are either rash or based on relations not actually present. The rules of the understanding, on the other hand, are based on reflections that effectively "distinguish the accidental circumstances from the efficacious causes" (T 1.3.13.11; SBN 149). Even though general rules are sourced from the same operations of the mind, the understanding is able to reason upon them. The imagination acts too quickly or enlivens erroneous ideas.

In a subsequent passage, it appears that there is a priority to the general rules as well. The imagination always provides "the first influence of general rules," but when we "take a review of this act of mind, and compare it with the more general and authentic operations of the understanding, we find…a second influence of general rules" which imply a "condemnation of the former" (T 1.3.13.12; SBN 150). The general rules of the imagination and understanding alternatively prevail; the vulgar are generally guided by the imagination, while the wise are generally guided by the second. Human nature always follows the first influence of the general rules of the imagination, and it is "only by following them that we can correct this, and all other unphilosophical probabilities" (T 1.3.13.12; SBN 150). The general rules of the understanding are thus predicated on the rules of the imagination. In other words, the former are simply the same rules corrected by experience and judgment.

In epistemic matters, we find that the inductive relations are based on general rules of the imagination. In Book I, Hume's experiments act as a corrective measure to reveal the errors of the imagination. That said, human nature *still* often follows the vulgar perspective—we still continue to believe in the erroneous rules of the imagination no matter what reasoning undermines it. Specifically:

(1) Space and time — The general rules of the imagination produce fictions of distance and duration. The general rules of the understanding correct them as atomic units of space and successive perceptions of time, respectively.

(2) Causality — The general rules of the imagination produce the fictions of objective necessity and absolute necessity. The general rules of the understanding correct them both as constant conjunction.

(3) Identity — The general rules of the imagination produce the fictions of identity, continued existence, and double existence. The general rules of the understanding reveal them all to contain contradictions.

In all three cases, there appears to be an "opposition of these two principles" or general rules which produce "a contrariety in our thoughts, and causes us to ascribe the one inference to our judgment, and the other to our imagination" (T 1.3.13.11; SBN 149). The philosophical reasoning we pursue—Hume's *Treatise* included—undermines the unphilosophical reasoning of the vulgar. And yet, the opposing imaginative general rules will not quit the field. We then alternate between them, but neither wins in the end. In that way, Hume recommends a true scepticism—a position that, on my interpretation, accepts this contradictory predicament between (1) the natural and the philosophical, (2) the vulgar and the philosophical, and (3) the imagination and reason.

Turning back to the general rules of justice, we must now discover whether they are affected by the same reasoning as the epistemic general rules. At face value, it seems that the *general rules of society* feature a similar characteristic to the *general rules of mind* in so far as the rules give rise to negative and positive results.[53] That is to say, the general rules of the mind produce

[53] I call the rules of justice the *general rules of society* and the rules of causality the *general rules of the mind*.

both prejudicial and legitimate reasoning. The former is negative: rash reasoning based on the rules of the mind. The latter is positive: careful examinations of past experience separating real causes from accidental.

The general rules of society—rules supposedly cultivated and enshrined to satisfy mutual self-interest—also appear to have both positive and negative aspects.[54] We do not have to look far to find bad laws written in the name of social well-being. Indeed, historical laws in various nations have often featured unabashed prejudice. At the same time, there continue to be laws—such as due process—that are a positive consequence of the same basic motive to benefit common self-interest via social negotiation.

A second consideration is that general rules of mind and general rules of society feature a *universality* or *inflexibility* not ostensibly found in nature.[55] On my interpretation, the universality of any *belief* or *law* is, in fact, an indication of its artifice or fictionality.[56] For instance, "on some occasions we extend our motives beyond those very circumstances…and form something like *general rules*…these rules are not perfectly inflexible, but allow of many exceptions" (T 3.2.6.9; SBN 531). General rules, in this case, are probabilistic, where past experience makes us expect like effects from like causes. On the other hand, "the laws of justice, being *universal and perfectly inflexible*, can never be deriv'd from nature" (T 3.2.6.9; SBN 532, italics added).

---

[54] So far as self-interest goes "justice establishes itself by a kind of convention or agreement; that is, by a sense of interest, suppos'd to be common to all, and where every single act is perform'd in expectation that others are to perform the like" (T 3.2.2.22; SBN 498).

[55] Of course, we might say that certain laws of nature hold with the same universality. From an empirical point of view, however, no matter how much custom causes us to believe in absolute or objective necessity, there is no matter of fact that is not open to change. The same is true of mathematics and logic (much more controversially) because again, from an empirical point of view, the presupposition is that everything, even *relations* themselves, are derived from an empirical ground.

[56] In terms of Hume's moral theory, J.L. Mackie thinks Hume may be read as a kind of error theorist, such that when we regard moral laws "as authoritative for conduct" we implicitly engage in a "process of objectification" (*Hume's Moral Theory*, 72; 150). That objectivity, however, is merely fictional. The same process seems true of causal necessity.

In the first case, probabilistic general rules are derived from nature since they are flexible; they "accommodate themselves to circumstances, and have no stated *invariable method of operation*" (T 3.2.6.9; SBN 533, italics added). The general rules of society, however, "are artificially invented for a certain purpose…contrary to the common principles of human nature," and feature *invariable* methods of operation (T 3.2.6.9; SBN 532-3).

A central trait in fashioning general rules is the mind's ability to go beyond our past experience. In other words, all general rules—both of mind and society—are based on custom, which then extends to judgments regarding the future. "Custom readily carries us beyond the just bounds in our passions, as well as in our reasonings" (T 2.1.6.8; SBN 293). In matters of justice, "the *general rule* reaches beyond those instances, from which it arose" (T 3.2.2.24; SBN 499). In general, therefore, it is a salient characteristic of human nature that "men are mightily addicted to *general rules*, and that we often carry our maxims beyond those reasons, which first induc'd us to establish them" (T 3.2.9.3; SBN 551).

Probabilistic inferences about issues of morality and epistemology are not, however, artificial. What transforms these inferences into artifice is when the human mind or society fixes them as *universal*, *invariable*, *inflexible*, or *necessary*.[57] All of these categorical terms not only go beyond past experience but go beyond human understanding. Instead of causality being mere constant conjunction and subject to change, we fix causality to be *necessary* and pretend we have discovered an "*ultimate connexion* of causes and effects" even though it lies "beyond the reach of our discovery" (T 1.3.6.11; SBN 91-2).

An important difference between justice and causality is that the laws of justice require universal formulation so that social rights and responsibilities extend to all those involved in the

[57] Notice that I will use the verb 'fix' or 'fixing' as a sign of fiction or artifice, following my interpretation of Hume's usage.

society. Citizens submit to laws of justice because they are reciprocal. If laws of justice were arbitrarily applied to particular situations and persons, then no citizen would abide them. On the other hand, causal laws need not be formulated in a universal manner. We might say that gravitational laws, for instance, are provisional. There is no reason to say anything more than that unless we want to pursue demonstrative or deductive reasoning. Any type of deductive reasoning requires certainty among terms and propositions to reach a conclusion. That is to say, for any relations of ideas, there is a universality necessary that is not discovered in matters of fact. Even still, we might ask where *relations themselves* derive such certainty, if they are not derived from empirical impressions or ideas.

But if there is no universality in matters of fact, and all of our impressions and ideas are derived from matters of fact, then where would universality come from? From an empirical point of view, it seems any claim of universality must be an invention of the imagination, for the simple reason that nowhere in our impressions or ideas do we find the idea or impression of universality. Thus, categorical propositions deny the limits of human understanding in so far as they feign knowledge of the unperceived. What Hume might say is: if *universality* is a valid idea, point to the impression or idea from which it is derived in the senses or memory.

Another characteristic of artifice is that it may be modified. For example, the rule of the stability of possession is a general rule that may be modified to "fit it to the common use and practice of the world" (T 3.2.3.1; SBN 502). General rules of society are such that, although they are invariable in application, they are modifiable in case different circumstances arise. Therefore, if we notice a general rule of the mind is open to modification, then it may indicate its fictionality. The law of gravity only holds so long as new evidence does not disprove it. However,

if new evidence does disprove it, then the law may be modified to fit the 'common use and practice of science.'

Probabilities are not able to be modified in the same way. The predictive power of probability is based strictly upon past experience. It is not a law, but a strict one-to-one inference. A particular past experience that occurs ninety percent of the time directly translates to a ninety percent chance it will happen in the future. It is not a law; it is a quantitative inference. A law, on the other hand, assumes a generality that goes beyond human experience. In that sense, it is artificial. Its generality implies that it assumes more than a mere probabilistic inference. Laws are modified to fit new data, and because of their ability to be modified, we can say that they are inventions of the human mind.

In the end, general rules of society and the mind must initially be derived from the faculty of imagination because they both go beyond the senses and memory. While the understanding corrects general rules and judges some to be more effective or philosophical or reasonable than others, it is the imagination that allows the mind to go beyond our experience and fix our ideas first.[58] Indeed, that is why drunk bachelors can carry general rules beyond the principles from which they arise (T 3.2.12.7; SBN 572). The vulgar follow general rules of the imagination, but it is only after those imaginative rules are in place that they may be corrected by the wise.

It seems safe now to say that the idea of justice requires both the imagination in a productive capacity and the understanding in a corrective capacity. For Hume, "*general rules* create a species of probability, which sometimes influences the judgment, and *always the imagination*" (T 3.3.1.20; SBN 585, italics added). While general rules are always associated with the imagination,

[58] In Chapter 6, I argue that the imagination fixes our ideas in both epistemic and moral matters because of human nature's need for stability. In other words, we need stability in our epistemic beliefs *and* stability in our social organization.

only some general rules are associated with the understanding. Just rules are those born of the understanding and judgment operating on the general rules of the vulgar. Unjust rules are those of the vulgar which the understanding has determined to be unphilosophical.

3.3. Dialogues & Natural History of Religion: God

Thus far, the preceding analysis has focused on the *Treatise* because it would not be fair to apply Hume's *experimental method* beyond its specified scope. That said, there is a particular interpretive puzzle that has caused a great deal of controversy among commentators. The puzzle is whether or not Hume published all of what he intended for his *Treatise*. The evidence for this claim is found in Hume's letters—in an effort to win the approval of Bishop Joseph Butler, he wrote that he "castrated" the manuscript before taking it to the press (HL 6.2). But what did Hume excise exactly from his original draft? From his letters, it appears that he removed his discussion on miracles among some other "nobler parts" (HL 6.2).

The majority of Hume scholars seem to accept what has come to be called the "castration hypothesis."[59] In fact, even lay readers will notice the conspicuous absence of religious discussion in the text. It stands to reason that religion is a likely topic to be discussed in a book examining human nature, so why would Hume remove it, if he did at all? One plausible account is that Hume feared being identified as an atheist. If that is true, then his attempt to circumnavigate attacks of impiety failed. All his life Hume was castigated as an atheist and sceptic in numerous pamphlets. His alleged atheism even prevented him from procuring an academic position. A defense of his philosophical position as being neither irreligious nor a skeptic is found in his *A Letter from a Gentleman to His Friend in Edinburgh*.

[59] Prominent outliers claim that the hypothesis is an unverified myth. See Paul Russell's *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise*.

Still, even while Hume did not use his experimental method to directly examine our idea of God, I submit that we may refer to passages in the *Treatise* for guidance on the matter. Likewise, his later *Natural History of Religion* and *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* both provide a basis on which to understand Hume's view of the idea of God. What will be demonstrated is that whether or not God is plural (polytheistic) or singular (monotheistic), our idea of God is a natural artifice in much the same way as justice or necessity. In other words, the faculty of imagination generates the idea of God necessarily as a result of our natural circumstances.

The first question we must ask is what properties are involved in the idea of God? To discover the answer, we must employ Hume's method of *property verification*. What does the *Treatise* tell us about the features of the idea of God? There is little to no mention of God, however, in the entire book. In fact, 'God' is only mentioned three times.

In those rare instances where Hume does refer to the idea of God, he uses it as an example of a philosophical mistake—i.e., for philosophers who have affirmed a *distinct existence* where there is none. As Kant later reiterates, Hume claims "in that proposition, *God is*, or indeed any other, which regards existence, the idea of existence is no distinct idea, which we unite with that of the object, and which is capable of forming a compound idea by the union" (T 1.3.7.5n20; SBN 96). Another way to phrase the argument is that *existence* cannot act as a predicate, for existence does not add anything to any given idea. Indeed, Hume rejects all ideas of *external* existence. Ideas are derived from impressions, and thus "the idea of existence…is the very same with the idea of what we conceive to be existent" (T 1.2.6.4; SBN 66). From that, it follows the idea of God does not imply any existence other than the fact that we can conceive God, that is, have an idea of God.

Of course, the type of reasoning Hume engages in here implicitly undermines a prominent formulation of the ontological argument for the existence of God, namely, the first ontological argument given by Saint Anselm, where 'mind' and 'reality' are divided into two separate entities. For Hume, his ontology does not separate the two—his is reduced to impressions and ideas, both of which are classified as *perceptions*. Therefore, Anselm's argument loses its force entirely. If there is no external reality, then God may only be construed as a perception—nothing more.

While Hume does not say much about God directly in the *Treatise*, he ends up invalidating notable features of the historical idea of God, namely, omnipotence, omnipresence, omnibenevolence, omniscience, necessity, infinity, and eternity. With respect to God being necessarily existent, Hume argues that there is no such idea of necessity. Necessity is simply constant conjunction based on prior experience. If the modal category of necessity is reduced to psychological habit, then far-reaching consequences follow. Not only is the necessary existence of God delegitimized, but so is the necessity and impossibility involved in logic and mathematics. It is no wonder Hume laments: "I have expos'd myself to the enmity of all metaphysicians, logicians, mathematicians, and even theologians…I have declar'd my disapprobation of their systems…" (T 1.4.7.2; SBN 264).

In Part II of Book I, Hume subverts features of God relating to eternity, infinity, and omnipresence. Infinity and eternity are not verifiable, nor even intelligible, as ideas in themselves. Space and time are not infinite because they represent specific units of human perception; we cannot go beyond our limited human understanding. That is why the idea of God must be understood as an artifice. The idea of infinity and eternity appear to be derived from the imaginative habit of going beyond the particulars of experience. The propensity to carry on our

train of thinking beyond past perceptions occurs as much in mathematics as it does religion: "I have already observ'd, in examining the foundation of mathematics, that the imagination, when set into any train of thinking, is apt to continue, even when its object fails it, and like a galley put in motion by the oars, carries on its course without any new impulse" (T 1.4.2.22; SBN 198). Therefore, we may imagine that the units of space and time extend beyond what we perceive, even to arrive at an idea of absolute space or eternity. Any idea that extends beyond actual perceptions, however, must be understood as fiction or artifice on Hume's metaphysical picture. The propensity to go beyond experience is a function of the imagination; it is not associated with the faculty of reason or senses.

The same argument may be used against the idea of omnipresence. Omnipresence suggests that God is everywhere, even beyond our immediate impressions and memories. Hume may accept this idea as an imaginative possibility, but nothing more. We cannot know if there is a being, let alone an idea, that represents *everywhere*. Moreover, Hume argues that "if a point be not consider'd as colour'd or tangible, it can convey to us no idea; and consequently the idea of extension, which is compos'd of the ideas of these points, can never possibly exist…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; SBN 39). For our idea of time, the same reasoning holds: "the indivisible moments of time must be fill'd with some real object or existence, whose succession forms the duration, and makes it be conceivable by the mind" (T 1.2.3.17; SBN 39). Thus, omnipresence is not verifiable.

The argument against omnibenevolence is more difficult to discern in the *Treatise* in so far as it is embedded in a broader refutation of rationalist conceptions of morality. Even still, on the face of it, Hume's theory of moral sentiments does not agree with an all-encompassing or

universal idea of benevolence. If good or bad is *felt* instead of deduced, then it is circumstantial and subjective. In other words, moral feeling is derived from particular perceptions of a given individual; it cannot be generalized to imply everywhere at all times.

Hume expands his argument by noting that "all beings in the universe…appear entirely loose and independent of each other. 'Tis only by experience we learn their influence and connexion; and this influence we ought never to extend beyond experience" (T 3.1.1.22; SBN 466). Again, take notice of the precautionary formulation of this passage; since we have the propensity to go beyond experience, Hume warns that, in the case of moral good and evil, there is a tendency to universalize—namely, "according to…those who maintain an abstract rational difference betwixt moral good and evil…'tis not only suppos'd, that these relations, being eternal and immutable, are the same…but their *effects* are also suppos'd to be necessarily the same" (T 3.1.1.22; SBN 465).

For Hume, it is impossible to have eternal measures of right and wrong in the same way it is impossible to prove *a priori* that moral relations, "if they really existed and were perceiv'd, wou'd be universally forcible and obligatory" (T 3.1.1.23; SBN 466). Omnibenevolence is an idea born of an error of the imagination and our susceptibility to chase our imaginative fancies "to the heavens, or to the utmost limits of the universe" (T 1.2.6.8; SBN 67). Hume's philosophy advises that we cannot reach any further than our own perceptions. We must remain humble in light of the limitations of human understanding.

Another feature of the classical idea of God is omniscience. In so far as the idea of omniscience is impossible under Hume's experimental criteria, I suspect the preceding sections on epistemic relations will provide adequate support. Consider that Hume only allows for certainty or knowledge to be obtained in relations of ideas. Yet, to conceive God as *all-knowing*

would imply that we know, with certainty, matters of fact as well—unless the idea of God is purely formal.

Finally, we arrive at the last feature of the historical idea of God: omnipotence. To the extent that Hume discusses the nature of God in the *Treatise*, he does so primarily in relation to the idea of omnipotence. Indeed, in his discussion on causality, he remarks that "the terms of *efficacy*, *agency*, *power*, *force*, *energy*, *necessity*, *connexion*, and *productive quality*, are all nearly synonimous" (T 1.3.14.4; SBN 157). In that way, many of the terms associated with omnipotence fall under the same scrutiny as the idea of necessity. What we discover is that the idea of power—and *a fortiori* an all-powerful being—must be derived from simple impressions.

But, as Hume subsequently argues, "if every idea be deriv'd from an impression, the idea of a deity proceeds from the same origin; and if no impression, either of sensation or reflection, implies any force or efficacy, 'tis equally impossible to discover or even imagine any such active principle in the deity" (T 1.3.14.10; SBN 160). It is clear from this passage that Hume indirectly proves that omnipotence is impossible, at least so far as it is empirically unverifiable.

The argument does not mean however that we must abandon religion or morality. While Hume says that "we never have any impression…that contains any power or efficacy [and] never therefore have any idea of power" (T 1.3.14.11; SBN 161), he qualifies his statement by saying that the idea of power is not necessary to religion. In a passage that prefigures his later arguments in the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, Hume writes: "The same imperfection attends our ideas of the Deity; but this can have no effect either on religion or morals. The *order of the universe proves an omnipotent mind*" (T 1.3.14.12n30; SBN 633, italics added).

It appears that our impressions and ideas point to an *order* in the universe. This order implies the existence of an omnipotent mind, that is, "a mind whose will is *constantly attended* with

the obedience of every creature and being" (T 1.3.14.12n30; SBN 633). All that is required for religion is an imperfect idea of this omnipotent mind. Hume argues that we do not need a distinct idea of the force or power of the supreme Being in order to ground the articles of religion.

What Hume means by this suggestion is not exactly clear. In Chapter 5, I argue the correct interpretation is that religion is grounded by natural belief.[60] The order discovered in the universe over successive perceptions leads the imagination to generate an idea of omnipotence and a supreme Being. Similar to the previous discussion of justice, the natural conditions of human life inevitably give rise to mind-dependent artifices. The natural condition of the world being ordered generates the artifice of our idea of God.

In Book III, Hume explains in detail the distinct ways in which the terms 'natural' and 'artificial' may be used. What is particularly interesting is that in his *A Letter from a Gentleman to His Friend in Edinburgh*, Hume decries his critics for ignoring his discussion of the natural/artificial distinction. Simply because justice is classified as artificial does not entail that it is not natural. The point is delicate, and it must be treated with care. The same attention is required for the specific way that the phrase *natural artifice* or *natural fiction* is being used here. To say that our idea of God is a natural artifice may appear objectionable at first, but a full discussion of the matter will follow in subsequent chapters.

Even though Hume indicates that the order of the universe implies omnipotence, in certain places of the *Treatise* he seems to maintain that we have no idea of omnipotence. For instance, if we assert that nothing can be the cause of another, other than where the mind

---

[60] That God may be conceived as a natural belief is an argument I borrow from R.J. Butler, Stanley Tweyman, and Beryl Logan. See Butler, "Natural Belief and the Enigma of Hume"; Tweyman, *Essays on the Philosophy of David Hume: Natural Religion, Natural Belief, and Ontology*; Logan, *Religion Without Talking*.

perceives a connection, we "in reality affirm, that there is no such thing in the universe as a cause or productive principle, not even the deity himself; since our idea of that supreme Being is deriv'd from particular impressions, none of which…have *any* connexion with *any* other existence" (T 1.4.5.31; SBN 248).

It seems clear from this passage that, though the order of the universe may prove omnipotence on some grounds, there is no way to prove it on *empirical* grounds. Hume's experimental method proves that the idea of omnipotence is not derived from our impressions or ideas. The entailment is that the idea of omnipotence cannot arise from the faculties of sense or memory. The idea of omnipotence must be generated by the imagination or discovered by reason through a comparison of ideas.

To decide the matter, we may look to Hume's discussion of the idea of equality and perfect geometrical figures. Recall that our idea of the deity is imperfect, even though its imperfection does not have any bearing on religion or morality (T 1.3.14.12n30; SBN 633). The same seems to be true of geometry, specifically with respect to equality and inequality. Hume says that "it appears…the ideas which are most essential to geometry, *viz.* those of equality and inequality…are far from being exact and determinate…" (T 1.2.4.29; SBN 50-1). Since Hume believes that geometry fails to be perfectly determinate, he does not grant it the same certainty as arithmetic or algebra. Geometry only reaches the level of proof. Part of the reason why is that our standards of equality require constant correction: "Not only we are incapable of telling… when such particular figures are equal…but we can form no idea of that proportion…which is firm and invariable. Our appeal is still to the weak and fallible judgment, which we make from the appearance of the objects, and correct by a compass or common measure" (T 1.2.4.29; SBN 51). The common measure is dependent on human convention. There is no way to go beyond

our common measure to reach perfection. Of course, we see here remnants of the ancient discussion of whether a perfect circle may be discovered in nature.

For Hume, perfection or perfect equality is beyond human perception. In fact, any ideas that feature the quality of perfection ought to tell us that we are dealing with an idea not derived from sense impressions. Similar to the term 'fixed,' I submit that perfection often denotes that our imagination has carried us beyond the imperfections of sense. Indeed, when it comes to correcting the measurements of geometrical figures, "if we join the supposition of any farther correction, 'tis of such-a-one as is either useless or imaginary" (T 1.2.4.29; SBN 51). Therefore, to say that our idea of God is perfect with respect to any particular feature is to chase the imagination into the heavens.

Moreover, Hume seems to make a further connection between perfect geometry and God by arguing:

> In vain shou'd we…employ the supposition of a deity, whose omnipotence may enable him to form a perfect geometrical figure…As the ultimate standard of these figures is deriv'd from nothing but the senses and imagination, 'tis absurd to talk of any perfection beyond what these faculties can judge of; since the true perfection of any thing consists in its conformity to its standard. (T 1.2.4.29; SBN 51)

In *An Abstract of a Book Lately Published*, Hume summarizes his work in the *Treatise*. What we find there is that—even a year after the *Treatise's* publication—Hume continues to claim that the idea of omnipotence is unverifiable. After his discussion on the nature of causal relations, he considers its implications with respect to the idea of God. Consider, he says, the synonymous terms "… *power*, or *force*, or *energy*. The question is, what idea is annex'd to these terms? If all our ideas or thoughts be derived from our impressions, this power must either discover itself to our senses, or to our internal feeling" (AB 26; SBN 656). When we attempt to trace our idea of power to its original impression, we find that there is none, neither in sensation nor reflection.

If there is no impression of energy, then matter is deprived of it, leaving "all its operations" to be "perform'd merely by the energy of the supreme Being" (AB 26; SBN 656). Yet, to say that energy or power is in the idea of a supreme Being does not solve the problem: "the question still recurs, *What idea have we of energy or power even in the supreme Being?* All our idea of a Deity (according to those who deny innate ideas) is nothing but a composition of those ideas, which we acquire from reflecting on the operations of our own minds" (AB 26; SBN 656). There is no idea of energy or force, Hume argues, even in our own minds. Therefore, the terms power, force, and energy refer to either (1) nothing at all or (2) describe a determination of the mind to pass from a cause to its usual effect. In either case, the idea of omnipotence is null or mind-dependent, and therefore we must continue to search for its origin.

In the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, Hume pursues a deeper analysis of the idea of God. Indeed, as mentioned earlier, there is a particular footnote in the *Treatise* that prefigures a central argument in the *Dialogues*. The footnote reads:

> The same imperfection attends our ideas of the Deity; but this can have no effect either on religion or morals. The order of the universe proves an omnipotent mind; that is, a mind whose will is *constantly attended* with the obedience of every creature and being. Nothing more is requisite to give a foundation to all the articles of religion, nor is it necessary we shou'd form a distinct idea of the force and energy of the supreme Being. (T 1.3.14.12n30; SBN 633)

First, what does Hume mean by the imperfection of our *ideas* of the Deity? By imperfection, Hume is saying there are no impressions either in our minds or in matter to verify the ideas (T 1.3.14.12; SBN 632-3). Philo's argument in Part 2 of the *Dialogues* revives the same argument by claiming that "we have no experience of divine attributes and operations" (D 2.4). And if "our ideas reach no farther than our experience," then it stands to reason that we have no impressions of divine attributes or operations (D 2.4). Therefore, the ideas of God do not derive from experience.

In that case, where do our ideas of God come from? There must be some perceptions associated with our idea of God. While Hume remarks that the "order of the universe proves an omnipotent mind," the *Dialogues* provide a much more comprehensive picture of what he means. In particular, let us consider Philo's argument in Part 12. He argues that, through experience, we observe means to ends relations and a coherence of parts in the universe. These observations cause us to believe in an intelligent designer and a purposive design.

Moreover, Cleanthes adds that "the comparison of the universe to a machine of human contrivance is so obvious and natural, and is justified by so many instances of order and design in Nature, that it must immediately strike all unprejudiced apprehensions, and procure universal approbation" (D 12.5). Our analogical reasoning presents a likeness between human contrivance and natural contrivance such that it confirms a natural belief in an intelligent designer. Everywhere humans observe nature, we see design: "a purpose, an intention, a design strikes every where the most careless, the most stupid thinker; and no man can be so hardened in absurd systems, as at all times to reject it" (D 12.2). In so far as *property verification* may be applied to the *Dialogues,* then, it is clear that our ideas of God are generated on the basis of associated perceptions—the same as our ideas of identity and causal necessity.

How does our idea of an intelligent designer arise from these associated perceptions? The idea is a generated by going beyond our perceptions and imagining a designer of the universe. Since all of our perceptions appear to be ordered by a purposive design, our imagination runs past experience and generates the idea of the supreme Being, the supposed cause of the design. The propensity of the mind to determine like cause from like effect—in this case, that a designer is the cause of the design in the universe—is based upon custom. Even though we do not experience an actual intelligent designer, the idea of the designer is inferred.

For Stanley Tweyman, it is our observation of certain associated perceptions that leads to an idea of an intelligent designer. In particular, "the observation of means to end relations and coherence of parts throughout nature is followed by an anthropomorphic conception of God as the cause of design, and it is this anthropomorphic conception of God which explains why the world is believed to be purposively designed."[61] Therefore, in order to have a natural *belief* in an intelligent designer, we must have an *idea* of an intelligent designer. The idea is conceived by the imagination via analogical reasoning, anthropomorphically ascribing the design of the world to a designer. Even without evidence of an intelligent designer, we still inevitably believe in an intelligent designer as a result of natural circumstances.[62] In this way, the anthropomorphic idea of God is a natural artifice, one that, as Tweyman claims, "supports a belief in intelligent contrivance."[63] Indeed, there is an important distinction between *idea* and *belief* in Hume's writing. Belief is a feeling of force and vivacity, but belief attends an idea or impression. There can be no belief without a corresponding idea or impression. Therefore, the *idea* of God is a natural artifice, whereas the *belief* in an intelligent designer is a natural belief.

From the *Dialogues*, it seems clear that the idea of God shares many similar features with the other moral relations and natural relations. In terms of *faculty verification*, the imagination plays a necessary role in the production of the idea of God. In terms of *property verification*, the idea of God is an anthropomorphic adaptation of means to ends relations observed in the world. And in

---

[61] *Essays on the Philosophy of David Hume: Natural Religion, Natural Belief, and Ontology*, 84.

[62] Tweyman clarifies that it is only those who experience the relevant perceptions that acquire the natural belief in an intelligent designer: "once the adaptation of means to ends has been observed, the belief will occur" (Ibid., 89). This is what I intend by using the phrase "natural circumstances." The circumstances are such that, once an individual experiences the relevant perceptions, the idea of God and the belief in God naturally follow.

[63] Ibid., 84.

terms of *empirical verification*, there is no evidence—either from the senses or through reason—to verify our idea of an intelligent designer.

Cleanthes' arguments, at some points, even appear to allude to a major theme in the *Treatise*, specifically the effect of scepticism on our beliefs. In fact, scepticism ought to confirm our natural belief in an intelligent designer, in the same way that scepticism confirms our natural belief in identity and causality—"instead of being weakened by that scepticism, [the argument] rather acquires force from it" (D 3.7). Hume claims, through the voice of Cleanthes, that Natural Religion adheres "to common sense and the plain instincts of nature" and not "without the greatest violence" can we prevent it (D 3.7).

The idea of God and our natural belief may even defy logic, and yet it may not be rejected because nature is too strong for us to do so. Cleanthes suggests that theism shares this feature with poetic writing. The effect it has on us animates our imagination to such an extent that it may oppose all rules and established principles. Therefore, even if "Theism be… contradictory to the principles of logic; its universal, its irresistible influence proves…Whatever cavils may be urged; an orderly world, as well as a coherent, articulate speech, will still be received as an incontestable proof of design and intention" (D 3.8). The belief in an intelligent designer is not up to human choice; it is an irresistible belief in an artifice that is naturally generated by the faculty of imagination under certain natural circumstances.

When it comes to *The Natural History of Religion*, Hume asks two related questions. What is the foundation of religion in reason? And what is the origin of religion in human nature? The answer to the latter question is most relevant to our current discussion. Indeed, the origin of our ideas of religion is a question that might as well be taken right out of the *Treatise*.

Regarding the former question, Hume believes there is a clear solution to it, one that seamlessly ties together to what he argued in the *Dialogues*—that is, "the whole frame of nature bespeaks an intelligent author; and no rational enquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine Theism and Religion" (N 0.1). Reason makes an analogical inference based on the original, imaginative propensities of the mind to suppose a single intelligent designer of the universe.

For Hume, because religious principles have so many varying, often opposing manifestations, "the first religious principles must be secondary" and not from an "original instinct" or "primary impression" (N 0.1). Instead, for men's attention to "lead them into any inference concerning invisible intelligent power, they must be actuated by some passion" (N 2.5). Passions thus motivate all religious ideas in the first place. What passions exactly? Our hopes and fears of the future along with the anxiety created by the unceasing vicissitudes of life.

Polytheism is humanity's first answer to mollify these unsettling passions. Polytheism is purely imaginative, arising from the natural conditions of life and the passions associated with these conditions. It does not yet adhere to the counsel of reason; on the contrary, polytheism anthropomorphizes the sun into the idea of a sun god and rain into an idea of a rain god—"each element is subjected to its invisible power or agent" (N 2.3). The imagination is responsible for inventing these anthropomorphic ideas, but they arise from the natural exigencies of life. In that sense, polytheistic ideas are natural artifices, too. But with the help of reason, natural artifices like polytheism are corrected and updated to provide a better explanatory model of nature.

Thus, the birth of monotheism out of polytheism is a result of reason enabling us to apprehend an invisible, intelligent designer "by a contemplation of the works of nature" (N 2.2). The origin of religious ideas follows a process: uncertain passions lead to imaginative,

explanatory suppositions that are corrected by reason upon closer analyses of nature. In all cases, religious ideas are caused by natural conditions (passions) and formed (via the imagination) by going beyond our experienced events and *supposing* a cause for them.

Our suppositions often feature the tendency of our imagination to anthropomorphize nature. Particularly, humans tend to "conceive all beings like themselves, and to transfer to every object, those qualities, with which they are familiarly acquainted, and of which they are intimately conscious" (N 3.2). We speak of faces in the moon and raging rivers, but even though these are generally only taken as poetic fictions they nevertheless demonstrate a tendency of the imagination to anthropomorphize nature.

What is the purpose of anthropomorphizing God in human nature? Hume suggests that *unknown causes* motivate the imagination to "to form some particular and distinct idea of them" (N 3.1). In other words, unknown causes are a "constant object of our hope and fear" and therefore cause a great deal of anxiety over the uncertainty of future events (N 3.1). To assuage our anxiety, the imagination is employed to form ideas of those powers or unknown causes. Thus, the gods of polytheism and the idea of God in monotheism are *formed* by the imagination—i.e., they are natural artifices to remedy the psychological unease associated with living "in this world…a great theatre, where the true springs and causes of every event are entirely concealed from us" (N 3.1). Monotheism is predicated on the same imaginative tendency as polytheism. The salient difference is that monotheism is a more precise doctrine in so far as it follows the dictates of reason (specifically, analogical reasoning).

Indeed, the transition from polytheism to monotheism indicates a completion of the means to end analogy in nature. In other words, polytheism or "the conception of different authors" of the universe still causes a "perplexity to the imagination, without bestowing any

satisfaction on the understanding" (N 2.2). On the other hand, monotheism—the idea of God or a single intelligent designer of the universe—fully satisfies the imagination and understanding. Why? Because "every thing is adjusted to every thing. One design prevails throughout the whole. And this uniformity leads the mind to acknowledge one author" (N 2.2). In the same way that we presume the design of a single sculpture or artwork to be the craftsmanship of one artist, we are led to infer that the universe's design is the work of one designer. The universe contains a uniformity and order that signifies the existence of a single designer as opposed to multiple designers. Or so reason tells us.

While the imagination anthropomorphizes all of nature for the polytheist, the faculty of reason infers "so sublime a principle as its supreme Creator" (N 15.6).[64] The imagination therefore appears to give rise to many of our religious ideas, but monotheism is a tenet "so conformable to sound reason that philosophy is apt to incorporate itself with such a system of theology" (N 11.3). Reason confirms monotheism as the best explanation for the unknown cause of the universe. The analogy is completed by the inference of like cause to like effect (via reason) to suppose (via the imagination) the idea of a single intelligent designer, namely, God.

That said, the imagination also supposes dangerous ideas from the same natural tendencies of the mind. The idea of an intelligent designer "springs from the essential and universal properties of human nature," but so do "the artifices of men" that "aggravate our natural infirmities and follies" (N 14.8). When our anxious terrors intensify, human inventions like superstition, omens, and prophecies multiply to satisfy our passions (N 14.7). In that way, the tendency of the imagination to anthropomorphize nature may have positive or negative effects. Reason helps to correct the excesses of the imagination, but human passions, such as fear and

[64] For the polytheist and monotheist alike, "the only point of theology, in which we shall find a consent of mankind almost universal, is, that there is invisible, intelligent power in the world" (N 4.1).

terror, induce the imagination to generate harmful artifices. Thus, while "the comfortable views, exhibited by the belief of futurity, are ravishing and delightful…how quickly [they] vanish on the appearance of its terrors" (N 15.12).

Harmful or useless artifices emerging out of more primary natural artifices are therefore not always beneficial, either to the vulgar or the philosophers. For instance, philosophers get tangled up in the doctrine of double existence which initially emerged out of the useful fiction of identity. The vulgar become superstitious and enthusiastic on the basis of a useful imaginative propensity to ease anxieties of the mind by positing various causal ideas. Fictions and artifices must therefore be analyzed under different lights. On one hand, there are natural artifices and fictions which are natural, non-arbitrary, and irresistible. On the other, there are useless fictions and artifices that are often arbitrary and resistible. The difference is crucial to understanding Hume's philosophy of fiction. In Chapter 4, I provide a typology to classify these fictions and artifices.

4. Conclusion

Hume's experimental method involves three types of verification: *property* verification, *faculty* verification, and *empirical* verification. Although *relational* verification is included in the elements of his philosophy in the *Treatise*, Hume's experiments end up focusing primarily in Book I and III on relations specifically, namely, *natural* relations and *moral* relations, respectively.

The natural (inconstant) relations examined are:

(1) *Contiguity* (space and time)

(2) *Causality* (necessity)

(3) *Identity* (continued existence, double existence).

The moral relations examined are:

(1) *Liberty* (and necessity)

(2) *Justice* (property, promises, government)

(3) *God* (intelligent designer)

The three types of verification correspond to a triad of major epistemic positions developed in the Scientific Revolution: nominalism, empiricism, and scepticism. Beginning with William of Ockham, Francis Bacon, and Michel de Montaigne, philosophers in the early modern period situated epistemic concerns at the centre of their investigations. Hume's *Treatise* is a continuation of this project—its aim being to mobilize the scientific method to analyze ideas of the mind.

While Francis Bacon advocated the use of the experimental method in the natural world, Hume believed that first we must use the experimental method on our own minds. To be sure, Bacon's Idols of the Mind demonstrated a similar concern, but Hume carried the idea to its natural end. The *Treatise* analyzes deeply entrenched ideas of human nature to discover that much of what we think we know is mere hubris; an act all too familiar in the historical record. We go beyond our experience and *suppose* we know far more than we can, in fact, verify or prove. In all six of the moral and natural relations above, Hume exposes aspects of unverifiability and fiction. While the natural and moral relations are derived from associated perceptions, there is a natural necessity in both the vulgar and philosophical mind to misrepresent experience, fill in the gaps, tie ideas together, complete the union, and completely invent ideas. The propensity to do so is often not arbitrary nor conscious; instead, it is natural, irresistible, and instrumental to operating in the world. Indeed, many of our naturally invented ideas are "an affair of too great importance" (T 1.4.2.1; SBN 187).

The faculty of imagination is therefore an essential mechanism of human nature. It is not surprising why Hume makes a point of saying that the "empire of the imagination" "has a great authority over our ideas" (AB 35; SBN 662). What Hume's experimental method proves in the end is the extent to which human nature is dependent upon the faculty of imagination. It is responsible for the principle of association: resemblance, contiguity, and causality—all of them being "connected together in the imagination" (T 1.1.5.1; SBN 13). In that way, the imagination acts as the "the cement of the universe" (AB 35; SBN 662).

As I will argue in the following chapters, without the imagination, there is no language (general terms), objects and subjects (identity), logic and mathematics (equality/identity), science (general rules), justice (promises, property, and government), or religion (God). The empire of the imagination is truly what fashions the universe we perceive, and it is—on my interpretation of Hume's philosophy—the wellspring of our cognitive activity.

CHAPTER TWO: IMAGINATION

1. The Empire of the Imagination

Hume's theory of imagination is fundamental to his early philosophical project. While his reverence for the imagination seems to fade in subsequent works, the *Treatise* contains several pronouncements on the essential role of the imagination in human nature. Consider the statement that "men are mightily govern'd by the imagination" (T 3.2.7.2; SBN 534) or that "our imagination has a great authority over our ideas" (AB 35; SBN 662). The mighty authority of the *empire of the imagination* is vast and absolute. If its power and influence were to suddenly disappear, what would be left? A perceptual stream of unconnected temporal and spatial simples.

Despite its prominence, the exact nature and function of the imagination poses various interpretive puzzles across Hume's early work. One reason for this is the range of tasks the imagination is assigned. Hume appeals to the faculty of imagination to explain his principles of association, his theory of general terms, his theory of natural relations, his theory of moral relations, and various fictions. And that's an abbreviated list. How then can one single mental faculty have such a breadth of ability? It is not clear on first blush, for Hume never explains the precise mechanics of the imagination. Some features of the imagination even appear to be contradictory or, at least, incompatible.[65] What the following discussion will attempt to accomplish is an inferential account of Hume's theory of imagination. That is to say, what can we infer from the little he says about the range of imaginative functions?

Most significant to the present examination is the view that the imagination fashions or forms the *manner* in which impressions and ideas are perceived. The atoms of perception must be

[65] The most striking is the opposition between reason and the imagination. Reasoning seems to be a sub-operation of the imagination, and yet it leads to judgments that contradict ideas generated by the broader faculty of imagination.

tied together in some particular way to make the world cognizable. The imagination is the faculty which performs this function—or, as Hume would say, it binds or cements the universe together (AB 35; SBN 662). In that way, every complex perception must contain a formal (imaginatively generated) structure to it. Atoms of impressions, however, do not contain any formal aspect, since they are single, irreducible units of perception. There is no form or structure to any atomic perception; it is only when two or more atomic perceptions are tied together in the mind that a *form* or *manner* of ideas emerges.[66]

To put it another way, the imagination stitches together our impressions and ideas via the principle of association. For instance, any single unit of perception requires only the senses and memory to exist. A single shade of blue may be perceived simply as such. However, when it comes to complex perceptions, the mind must arrange the constituents of the complex perception together via the imagination. Without imaginative processes, the units of perceptions would have no relationship or unified form.

---

[66] There are two relevant questions here: (1) Is a complex impression simple in so far as it presents a *single* perception? For instance, is the single impression of a starry sky perceived as a simple or complex impression? On one view, the starry sky may be seen as a complex impression *prior to* the imagination naturally relating its simple constituents. On another view, the starry sky must be regarded as a simple impression until it is related by the imagination. Once it is related by the imagination, it becomes a complex impression. The imagination is, on that view, necessary for complex impressions or ideas. On my interpretation, I take the latter view. All complex impressions are perceived as simple impressions, until the imagination is able to separate, distinguish, and *cognize* them as complex ideas. While sensory impressions may be complex (the fact is unknowable), we cannot *cognize* the complexity of any idea until the principle of association has related simple impressions into a complex one. To say otherwise is to claim that we know something about the world *prior to* the principle of association, which, I think, is impossible on Hume's account. (2) Are necessarily connected ideas like figure and the body figur'd separate simple ideas or two aspects of one simple idea? On this matter, I take the former view. For, to say they are two *aspects* of one simple idea would be to claim that there are atoms of spatial or temporal perception which include *more than* the individual atom itself. Hume suggests "that we accompany our ideas with a kind of reflection, of which custom renders us, in a great measure, insensible" (T 1.1.7.18; SBN 25). In this respect, custom often renders us insensible to the complexity of many of our ideas; this is why we might initially take the body and body figur'd as two *aspects* of one idea. It is only upon reflection that we see this is not the case; they are, in fact, two simple ideas: (a) the simple idea of some body and (b) the simple idea of that body figur'd.

1.1. Two Senses of Imagination

A crucial distinction Hume unfortunately glosses over in the *Treatise* is that between what Jonathan Cottrell calls (1) the inclusive imagination and (2) the exclusive imagination.[67] In a footnote, Hume describes the distinction in the following way:

> 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. When I oppose it to neither, 'tis indifferent whether it be taken in the larger or more limited sense, or at least the context will sufficiently explain the meaning. (T 1.3.9.19n22; SBN 117-8)

The limited sense is therefore the *exclusive* imagination; the broader sense is the *inclusive* imagination. The former is generally concerned with feigning or make-believe, while the latter is the same faculty including demonstrative and probable reasoning. Norman Kemp Smith interpreted Hume's distinction here to mean two separate mental faculties—where (a) reason understands the nature of the world and (b) the limited imagination is merely responsible for fabrication.[68]

Kemp Smith's interpretation has been questioned in recent decades for the reason that Hume clearly states in two distinct passages that he means "the same faculty" (T 1.3.9.19n22; T 2.2.7.6n; SBN 117-8; 371).[69] Further proof is found in the elements of Hume's philosophy. If there were a third faculty, namely, reason, then it seems either intentional or an overt mistake to leave it out of his discussion in Part I, Book I. Taking Hume at his word, then, it seems we must say there are only two mental faculties; the imagination is a faculty which *includes* reason or the understanding as a sub-faculty.

---

[67] See Cottrell, "Hume, Imagination."

[68] *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of Its Origins and Central Doctrines*, 459.

[69] Cottrell, "Hume, Imagination."

In the inclusive sense, the imagination oversees all of our impressions and ideas not stored in the memory. It can feign ideas, pursue probabilistic reasoning and deduction, and identify distinctions of reason, among other activities. In the exclusive sense, the imagination is responsible for all non-rational thinking. It is treated as trivial and capricious, for it creates all of our poetic whimsies and prejudices. As Jonathan Cottrell argues, while Hume claims that the exclusive imagination functions in a capricious manner, he also seems to suggest that it produces beliefs or ideas that are permanent and irresistible.[70] That objects continue to exist, for instance, is a belief we hold on the basis of the exclusive imagination. The same may be said for the initial general rules we derive from custom. As a consequence, how can we reconcile these two incompatible features of the exclusive imagination?

1.2. Active v. Passive Imagination

To answer that question, we must undertake an inferential account of Hume's theory of the exclusive imagination. What can we infer based on other sections of the *Treatise*? I submit first that there is one vital distinction to be made with respect to the *exclusive* imagination. Specifically, it may be divided into two separate sub-faculties:

(1) Active, Exclusive Imagination

(2) Passive, Exclusive Imagination

The active imagination implies a *conscious or intentional* use of the faculty, whereas the passive imagination implies an *unconscious or unintentional* use of the faculty. Therefore, the active imagination is neither natural nor irresistible; the passive imagination is natural and irresistible. For Timothy Costelloe:

[70] Ibid.

> Hume's language is haunted by the ghost of Locke's famous images in the *Essay* of the mind as both passive and active…the imagination is passive insofar as it is guided, conveyed, seduced, placed, runs easily, displays propensities and tendencies, and takes objects 'as they lie'…and active in that it confuses, confounds, supposes, attributes, associates, bestows, justifies, avoids, and seeks relief.[71]

Whether Hume is haunted by Locke or implicitly using the distinction because it follows his empirical research is an open question. What is important for this discussion is that he does, indeed, seem to suggest that the exclusive imagination is both active and passive. Consider that the imagination is supposedly assigned two epistemically opposite functions. On one hand, the imagination is where "two ideas are connected together…and the one naturally introduces the other" (T 1.1.5.1; SBN 13). On the other hand, there are no ideas that the imagination "cannot separate, and join, and compose into all the varieties of fiction" (AB 35; SBN 662). How can the imagination be the faculty accountable for our steady association of ideas—the "only links that bind the parts of the universe together"—at the same time it constructs a whole host of fictions, chimeras, and errors (AB 35; SBN 662)?

An active versus passive distinction, I suggest, alleviates the problem.[72] The active sub-faculty is what generates unnatural fictions and chimeras, whereas the passive sub-faculty generates natural relations, natural fictions, and natural artifices. Unnatural fictions, on this account, are consciously constructed ideas that are not the result of probable or demonstrative reasoning. For instance, unnatural fictions would account for poetry, nonsense, and make-believe.

---

[71] *The Imagination in Hume's Philosophy*, 18.

[72] What I call active v. passive is analogous to what Wilbanks calls "the determined *vs*. the free imagination" (*Hume's Theory of Imagination*, 158). It also bears resemblance to Malebranche's distinction between the active and passive imagination, where the former "is the action and the command of the will" and the latter "is the obedience rendered to it by the animal spirits that trace these images, and by the brain fibers on which they must be imprinted" (*The Search after Truth*, 88). Charles W. Hendel, however, interprets Hume—in light of the Malebranchian distinction—such that the "Imagination is active in certain determinate ways which we can formulate in the three principles of contiguity, resemblance, and causality" (*Studies in the Philosophy of David Hume*, 99). In my view, the natural association of ideas is instead a *passive* function of the exclusive imagination.

Natural relations and natural fictions and artifices, on the other hand, are passively generated ideas.[73]

What I call the *passive, exclusive imagination* is therefore responsible for empirically unverifiable ideas that are, at the same time, permanent, irresistible, and universal. The *active, exclusive imagination*, on the other hand, accounts for empirically unverifiable ideas that are impermanent, resistible, and contingent.

As mentioned, the present investigation is primarily concerned with what I have referred to as a special class of ideas, namely, natural fictions and artifices—and now we may understand these ideas to be a result of the passive, exclusive imagination. Natural fictions and artifices are empirically unverifiable exactly because they are mind-dependent and generated by the imagination.[74] In other words, they may not, even upon reflection, be traced back to either simple or complex impressions or ideas. Nevertheless, they are psychologically irresistible. Although natural fictions are born of certain propensities of the imagination to complete the union of relations, they are themselves distinct *from* natural relations. Natural fictions go beyond natural relations to reify unions of ideas that are both self-contradictory and hypothetical. I discuss this point further in Chapter 4 & 5.

Natural fictions are especially significant to the history of philosophy with respect to Hume's empiricist successors. The logical positivists of the Vienna Circle, by assuming Hume's Fork, developed verification criteria whereby propositions are either empirically verifiable or

---

[73] Saul Traiger points to a similar distinction in the imagination: "[Natural] Fictions are not products of the imagination, when imagination is construed narrowly as the faculty which merely generates, by concatenation, complex ideas for which there may be no resembling antecedent complex impressions. Hume's conception of imagination, however, is much broader. Understood in the wider sense, the imagination is where fiction generation occurs" ("Impressions, Ideas, and Fictions," 384-5).

[74] Annette Baier says that in calling "assumptions 'fictions,' Hume is saying not that they are false, but rather that they are unverifiable, and so unverified" (*Progress*, 103).

logical truths (tautologies). The project of logical positivism soon fell into difficulties once philosophers like A.J. Ayer, Rudolf Carnap, and Otto Neurath realized that the verifiability criterion itself was not verifiable.[75]

Hume's fork—that knowledge is either derived from matters of facts or relations of ideas—clearly does not account for natural fictions. Therefore, I consider Hume's Fork the result of a circumscribed reading of Hume, one that prioritizes the *First Enquiry* and neglects the entire theory of fiction in the *Treatise*. In fact, on my reading, Hume's analysis in Book I and Book III of the *Treatise* is largely concerned with discovering natural fictions and artifices.[76] In that sense, it seems reasonable for Hume's epistemology to accommodate the very ideas that he has revealed to be both naturally irresistible and yet logically and empirically unverifiable. One commentator who recognizes this fact is Saul Traiger, making the bold claim that "what is commonly called Hume's theory of impressions and ideas ought to be called the theory of impressions, ideas, and

[75] Ayer, Carnap, and Neurath proposed different solutions to amend the project, such as Ayer's strong versus weak verificationism. No conclusive solution, to my knowledge, has been accepted.

[76] Frederick Whelan argues that Hume's "mental fictions [e.g., external and continuous existence, personal identity, etc.] are thus in a sense analogous in the cognitive realm to the artifices by which order is created among our feelings and actions in the moral and social realms" (*Order and Artifice*, 58). He also claims that "[n]ature and artifice (or convention) appear frequently in the history of Western philosophy as antithetical concepts, sometimes connoting two different, even antagonistic, sorts of norms for the guidance of human life" (Ibid., 24). In Chapter 6, I show that the antithetical—what I call contradictory—nature of 'natural fictions' and 'natural artifices' is deliberate in Hume's philosophy of human nature.

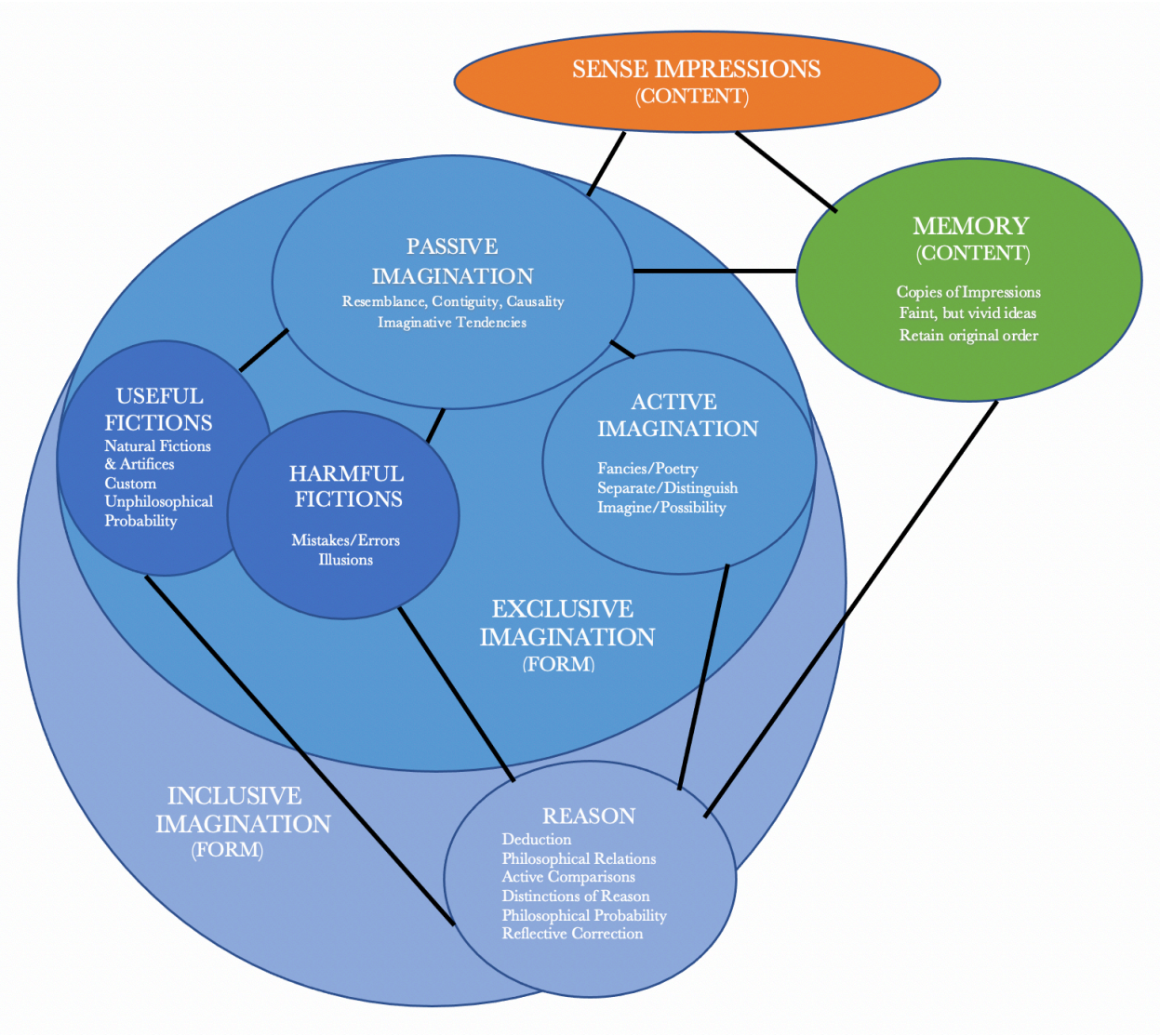
fictions."[77] Indeed, I follow Traiger's view here in accepting fictions as a third category in Hume's epistemological and metaphysical picture.[78]

[77] "Impressions, Ideas, and Fictions," 381.

[78] I am not claiming that fictions are ontological in nature. As Traiger remarks, "Hume has a core notion of fiction which is fundamentally epistemological rather than ontological" (Ibid., 382). Hume does not think fictions are *ontologically* the same as impressions or ideas, for they are neither empirically verifiable or justified by reason. That said, simply because they fail empirical experiments and are unavailable for rational comparison does not mean they do not exist in some sense. They are instead structural or epistemic. The same difficulty is found with respect to natural relations, for they are not sensed in any ordinary way, nor can they be proven by reason given that it would be circular to do so. My interpretation faces the dilemma of what to call fictions and relations, if they cannot properly be called impressions or ideas. In most cases, I have attempted to keep them as separate epistemological categories, but for lack of a better term, I sometimes resort to calling them fictional *ideas*—again, they cannot properly be called *ideas* in any ontological sense. In the visual representation of Hume's faculty psychology presented in this chapter, notice that I have divided the *formal* aspect of Hume's philosophy from the *content* aspect (i.e., form and matter in the Aristotelian sense). The imagination's natural relations, natural fictions, and even deductive relations of ideas are all formal, structural, or epistemological aspects of Hume's metaphysics.

Hume's Faculty Psychology:

A Visual Rendering of The Empire of the Imagination



1.3. Passive, Exclusive Imagination

What I have called the passive, exclusive imagination is a sub-faculty within the exclusive imagination. The exclusive imagination is, on the other hand, a sub-faculty within the larger inclusive imagination. While Hume clearly distinguishes between the inclusive and exclusive imagination, he does not make a further distinction between active and passive sub-faculties in the exclusive imagination. The *Treatise*, on my view, however, suggests such a distinction.

More importantly, it is necessary to provide an account for why the exclusive imagination is described in an apparently contradictory manner. The distinction between active and passive functions resolves the issue by separating the exclusive imagination into two smaller sub-faculties, both of which fulfill opposite functions. This explains how the exclusive imagination may be both capricious and contingent while, at the same time, universal, uniform, and irresistible.

The *active* imagination, on the other hand, need not entail further discussion here because it does not pose any serious difficulties for my account. Broadly, the active imagination is employed in the case of speculation, considering possibilities, rearranging ideas in various combinations (e.g., Pegasus), and all types of artistic or creative productions—literature, painting, music, etc. The products of the active imagination are capricious, contingent, and resistible.

The passive imagination, on the contrary, is a far more mysterious faculty in the *Treatise*. For example, Hume's entitlement "to so glorious a name as that of an *inventor*" is his rendering of the principle of association, which must be a feature of the exclusive imagination (AB 35; SBN 661). Consider the question: where are ideas associated in the mind? Not via the senses, memory, reason, or the active imagination. It is the exclusive, passive imagination that holds this distinction.

To reiterate, Hume opposes the exclusive imagination to the inclusive imagination, where the latter includes reason (both probable and deductive/intuitive), and the former does not. The exclusive imagination functions in two ways: (1) "all simple ideas may be separated by the imagination, and may be united again in what form it pleases" and (2) it is "guided by some universal principles, which render it, in some measure, uniform with itself in all times and places" (T 1.1.4.1; SBN 10). As mentioned, there appears to be a contradiction between (a) the freedom of the imagination to join ideas at will and (b) being constrained by an associative principle. Hume attempts to reconcile the contradiction by saying that the associative principle does not imply any *inseparable* connection between ideas, but that it provides a gentle force which commonly prevails over the imagination (T 1.1.4.1; SBN 10). The imagination may, in other words, resist the gentle force of association and combine or unite ideas that would not otherwise be united. Still, reducing the associative principle to a gentle force does not remove the contradiction. Is the imagination free or constrained?

The *same* faculty cannot act in opposing ways *at the same time*. Analogously, it would be odd to say that a natural physical force like gravity can be free to combine physical particles in any way, while also adhering to its own gravitational principle. The exclusive imagination is either a natural force that we *cannot* control, or it is a mental ability that we *can* control. Hume seems to want it both ways.

On my view, the only way to accept Hume's theory of imagination is to cleave it as two, opposing sides. The first is the *active* side where we have freedom to combine and transpose our faint ideas in any way we desire. The second is the *passive* side where there is no freedom over the principle of association and our natural imaginative tendencies.

For Hume, the imagination is pivotal—so much so that he declares: "*the imagination, according to my own confession, [is] the ultimate judge of all systems of philosophy*" (T 1.4.4.1; SBN 225). Presumably, he is speaking here of only the faculty of judgment, namely, probable and deductive reason, but recall that the faculty of judgment or the understanding is a sub-faculty within the inclusive imagination, and therefore, *a fortiori*, it is ultimately the faculty of imagination that oversees any and all judgment or reasoning.

Still, Hume is concerned that his theory of imagination does not account for the error of past philosophers. He wonders whether he is "unjust in blaming the antient philosophers for makeing use of [the imagination], and allowing themselves to be entirely guided by it in their reasonings" (T 1.4.4.1; SBN 225). To resolve the matter, Hume again attempts to establish a division in the imagination between "principles which are permanent, irresistable, 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; SBN 225). While Hume does not make an official division between the two sets of principles, the active/passive distinction is an interpretive inference as to what that division might look like.

Elsewhere in the *Treatise*, Hume likewise suggests that the mind may work actively as opposed to passively. In one instance, referring to the minds of animals, Hume argues that "their thoughts are not so active as to trace relations, except in very obvious instances" (T 2.2.12.4; SBN 397). Indeed, while animals—especially mammals—appear to rely on the same associational

principles in the passive imagination, it seems they have little access to the higher cognitive faculties, namely, active reason and active imagination.[79]

In the section 'Of relations,' Hume makes the important distinction between *natural relations* where "the one naturally introduces the other" and *philosophical relations* where we "think proper to compare" two relata (T 1.1.5.1; SBN 13). I take this as a further indication of the passive/active division in the imagination; the former is natural and unavoidable (passive) and the latter is conscious and avoidable (active). The former is the sub-faculty of natural unions of ideas and imaginative propensities, while the latter sub-faculty accounts for reasoning (probable/ deductive) and various arts or flights of fancy.

Consider the subsequent passage: "when…objects are present to the senses along with the relation, we call *this* perception rather than reasoning; nor is there in this case *any exercise of the thought, or any action*, properly speaking, but *a mere passive* admission of the impressions thro' the organs of sensation" (T 1.3.2.2; SBN 73, italics added). In this, it seems that perceptions that involve natural relations and impressions are indeed passive. Reasoning, which involves causality, on the other hand, is active; it requires an exercise of thought.

Now, on my interpretation, the passive part of the imagination accounts for "the foundation of all our thoughts and actions, so that upon their removal human nature must immediately perish and go to ruin" (T 1.4.4.1; SBN 225). Causality, resemblance, and contiguity are relations that, along with other imaginative propensities, produce various sorts of ideas and

[79] An objection may be raised here by citing the proposition: "an active principle can never be founded on an inactive" (T 3.1.1.7; SBN 457). Hume also claims that "reason is wholly inactive, and can never be the source of so active a principle as conscience, or a sense of morals" (T 3.1.1.10; SBN 458). In these examples, the term 'active' is employed in an alternative sense, that of being 'productive'. When I use the term 'active' it implies a conscious or intentional action. The principle of association and the imaginative propensities are those which are passive in so far as we do not have any conscious or intentional control over them.

fictions that are vital to human nature—yet the same natural relations and imaginative tendencies produce all sorts of avoidable and unnecessary errors and illusions as well.

For instance, the idea of equality is useful for many purposes in so far as it is based on "looser or stricter methods of comparison" (T 1.2.4.24; SBN 48). That said, the passive, exclusive imagination goes beyond human understanding to produce the idea of an "imaginary standard of equality," which is "useless as well as incomprehensible" (T 1.2.4.24; SBN 48). The passive, exclusive imagination is then responsible for both the useful idea of equality and the useless idea of equality. Even though the latter is "only imaginary, the fiction however is very natural; nor is any thing more usual, than for the mind to proceed after this manner with any action, even after the reason has ceas'd, which first determin'd it to begin" (T 1.2.4.24; SBN 48). Thus, the fiction of equality takes an originally useful idea and—via an imaginative tendency—completes the union to the degree that we *suppose* there is a perfect standard of equality.

The obscure and implicit idea of perfect and entire equality therefore requires correction by way of reflective activity. While it is as natural and unavoidable as the useful idea of equality, "it must be in the same sense, that a malady is said to be natural; as arising from natural causes, tho' it be contrary to health, the most agreeable and most natural situation of man" (T 1.4.4.1; SBN 226).[80] The passive, exclusive imagination therefore features principles that are permanent, irresistible, and universal, and yet these principles do not always produce beneficial fictions. A further analysis is required to determine what ideas are healthy as opposed to natural maladies

[80] As I argue in Chapter 4, I do not take Hume at his word here. The imaginary standard of equality is foundational to mathematics, and mathematics is useful to the conduct of life. While Hume is referring to geometry specifically, it seems that his analysis must likewise apply to mathematical equality. Numbers, in terms of ontology, must be derived from impressions or ideas—relations do not account for the *content* of numbers. Thus, the perfect equality between numbers ought to fail for the same reason as geometry. Hume nevertheless attempts to claim that arithmetic and algebra are perfect, but, given his empirical commitments, it does not seem plausible. On my interpretation, an account of natural fictions enables the *fixing* of ideas such they may be regarded as perfect for demonstrative and deductive reasoning, as well as for geometry and general terms.

(i.e., harmful fictions). To do so, I provide an exhaustive inventory of fictions and artifices of human nature in Chapter 4 & 5.

2. The Propensities of the Passive, Exclusive Imagination

In the following sections, I outline the general natural propensities of the passive, exclusive imagination:

2.1. The Principle of the Association of Ideas

The principle of association of ideas is the foundational feature of the passive, exclusive imagination. We have no control over whether ideas are associated in the mind via the gentle force of resemblance, contiguity, and causality. Come what may, our ideas are tied together on the basis of these three natural relations. Therefore, the association of ideas is not an active or conscious action of the mind. It is a passive and unconscious process. In that respect, we may call the association of ideas *natural* in so far as it is psychologically irresistible. Still, it is also a process that is mind-dependent due to its relationship with the imagination. In that respect, we may call the associated ideas *fictional* or *artificial* in so far as they are united by the mind. The union of simple ideas is an imaginative fashioning or forming of two or more ideas, subsequent to impressions making their first appearance in the soul. The terms *artificial* and *fiction* are being used here in an especially broad sense to imply any thing that is generated, wholly or in part, by the human imagination.[81]

[81] Indeed, we might even conceive of the association of ideas itself as a fiction. Dabney Townsend makes the suggestion that, because Hume is unconcerned with explaining the inner workings and mechanisms of the association of ideas, "one might suspect that the association of ideas was little more than a fiction itself…the association of ideas is not itself an idea or impression, and according to Hume's system, we have no proper idea of association as such. It is the way that ideas and impressions form relations that give order and regularity to the mind. But if it gives rise to no impression of its own, one might reasonably ask how association is known at all. It approaches a conventional fiction on the order of Maxwell's demon" (*Hume's Aesthetic Theory: Taste and Sentiment*, 116).

That said, we might read Hume another way in which the principle of association is caused by something beyond our understanding (other than the imagination). If the imagination does not play a *causal* role, what role does it play? Similar to physical laws, like gravity, the principle of association is a force of the mental world, the causes of which "must be resolv'd into *original* qualities of human nature" (T 1.1.4.6; SBN 12-3). In that sense, there are grounds to suggest that the imagination is not generative of relations, or, at least, that we cannot know either way. Indeed, Hume is clear that the causes of relations are "mostly unknown," and he does not pretend to speculate as to how they originate.

If that is the case, and Hume does not know the cause of the principle of association, then why does he consistently attribute it to the faculty of imagination? More importantly, how would Hume know that the principle of association is a force of the mental world and not the natural world if he does not pretend to know its cause? If we cannot discern the cause of either the law of gravity or the uniting principle of the mind, then both the law and the principle could be as much mental as they are physical—there would be no way to verify the matter. For instance, why is the law of gravity not merely another principle of association that specifically obtains between certain ideas of extension?

I suspect Hume would want to retain not only his elementary distinction between mental faculties (memory v. imagination), but also his distinction between the natural and moral philosopher. To be sure, if he cannot justify attributing his greatest invention—the principle of association—to the moral subject, then he may be no different from Isaac Newton or any other natural philosopher. Of course, if we read Hume as a phenomenalist, then there actually *is* no clear distinction between the natural and moral philosopher.

On my view, I take Hume to be proposing a view that, in some ways, prefigures Kant's division between intuitions—through which we receive sensible objects—and concepts, through which we think objects in the understanding. For Hume, we have (1) sense impressions that give us atoms of perceptual experience and (2) the principle of association that unites sense impressions together in the mind. In other words, there is a *formal* aspect to our perceptions (principle of the association of ideas) and the *content* or material aspect of our perceptions (sense impressions). The crucial difference between Hume and Kant is that Kant takes his categories or pure conceptions of the understanding as universal and necessary forms of sense. Hume, on the other hand, clearly states his "uniting principle among ideas is not to be consider'd as an inseparable connexion" (T 1.1.4.1; SBN 10).[82] Hume therefore remains consistent in both his empirical commitments and his probabilistic commitments to knowledge claims. Whereas for Kant, he takes his categories as necessary and universal conditions of possible experience. Kant rejects Hume's scepticism toward certain knowledge, especially his claim that all knowledge resolves into probability.[83]

Hume's principle of the association of ideas is, by that comparison, clearly a function of the passive, exclusive imagination. All natural relations are imaginatively generated such that, without the human imagination, ideas would not be united via resemblance, contiguity, or causality. A considerable objection may be raised, however, by drawing attention to a peculiar passage in Book II, where Hume argues that it is "evident, then, there is an attraction or

---

[82] "The principles of union among ideas…I allow to be neither the *infallible* nor the *sole* causes of an union among ideas. They are not the infallible causes. For one may fix his attention during some time on any one object without looking farther. They are not the sole causes. For the thought has evidently a very irregular motion in running along its objects, and may leap from the heavens to the earth, from one end of the creation to the other, without any certain method or order. But tho' I allow this weakness in these three relations, and this irregularity in the imagination; yet I assert that the only *general* principles, which associate ideas, are resemblance, contiguity and causation" (T 1.3.6.13; SBN 92-3).

[83] Don Ross similarly interprets Hume's position as "not unlike that of Kant, though shorn of Kant's anti-psychologism" (Hume, Resemblance and the Foundations of Psychology," 355).

association among impressions, as well as among ideas; *tho' with this remarkable difference*, that ideas are associated by resemblance, contiguity, and causation; and impressions only by resemblance" (T 2.1.4.3; SBN 283, italics added). In this particular instance, it appears that Hume is separating the natural relations into primary and secondary classes. The primary class which operates on sense impressions alone includes one relation, namely, resemblance. The secondary class operates on ideas, and it features all three natural relations: resemblance, contiguity, and causality. It is indeed a *remarkable* difference, as Hume admits. For instance, how might impressions *not* be related by contiguity? It does not seem possible. Or how might one simple impression be related by resemblance? In simplicity, where might we find the complexity required for a relation of resemblance to obtain? Again, it does not seem possible given Hume's related commitments.

I suspect this passage in the *Treatise* is a direct result of what Stuart Hampshire calls a "mistake" in Hume's theory of relations.[84] The error runs like this: the relation of resemblance is meaningless in and of itself, for it does not specify any particular relation. Hampshire says that "Hume's mistake was to regard the words "similarity" or "resemblance" as names of relations in the sense in which, for instance, "contiguous in time" or "contiguous in space" or "to the left of" or "after" are names of relations…[but] to say of something that it resembles something else is to state nothing."[85]

Resemblance only obtains as a valid relation if two relata resemble in a certain respect. That 'certain respect' in which the two relata resemble is, in fact, the actual relation—not the resemblance in and of itself. In other words, no two impressions may simply resemble, they must

---

[84] "Scepticism and Meaning," 238.

[85] Ibid., 237-8.

resemble *in some particular way*. The way in which they resemble *is* the relation. To say of two ideas or impressions that they resemble or that they are similar, without any further information, is to say something meaningless. I discuss Hampshire's view further in Chapter 3.

Given that mistake, a charitable reading of Hume suggests that, while relations might obtain in impressions (we cannot know or speculate), the relations we are familiar with are those that the imagination is responsible for associating. Therefore, the imagination plays some kind of causal role in generating relations, but it is unclear how much of a role it plays. On the basis of that reasoning, I suggest that any analysis of the exact nature of relations, whether natural or artificial, be left to the natural philosopher. For the moral philosopher, we ought to remain agnostic as to the ontology of relations.

2.2. The Union of Contradictory Ideas

Over and above the principle of association are two imaginative propensities relevant to understanding natural fictions. The first is the propensity to unite incompatible ideas. Robert McRae describes it as "a particular kind of 'mistake', 'confusion', 'deception', or 'illusion', consisting in the misapplication of an idea derived from some original impression to something other than its proper objects."[86] At the core of this imaginative propensity is a two-step process:

Step 1: Uniting Incompatible Ideas (Mental spreading, Application, Substitution)

Step 2: Reifying Self-Contradictory Ideas

[86] "The Import of Hume's Theory of Time," 124.

With respect to Step 1, McRae is correct in that Hume sometimes refers to the propensity as a mistake, confusion, substitution, or conversion, among other things. The most famous example concerns the second definition of causality:

> '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, and which always make their appearance at the same time that these objects discover themselves to the senses. Thus as certain sounds and smells are always found to attend certain visible objects, we naturally imagine a conjunction, even in place, betwixt the objects and qualities, tho' the qualities be of such a nature as to admit of no such conjunction, and really exist no where…Mean while 'tis sufficient to observe, that the same propensity is the reason, why we suppose necessity and power to lie in the objects we consider, not in our mind, that considers them; notwithstanding it is not possible for us to form the most distant idea of that quality, when it is not taken for the determination of the mind, to pass from the idea of an object to that of its usual attendant. (T 1.3.14.25; SBN 167)

The mind unites the internal impression of the determination of mind with mind-independent objects. In other words, our imaginative propensity unites an internal impression with external impressions, thus creating a self-contradictory idea—namely, the idea of objective necessity that is both subjective and objective or internal and external.

A second example is what McRae specifically refers to as a *misapplication* of the idea of duration to an unchangeable object. Hume describes the propensity as follows:

> Since the idea of duration cannot be deriv'd from such an object, it can never in any propriety or exactness be apply'd to it, nor can any thing unchangeable be ever said to have duration. Ideas always represent the objects or impressions, from which they are deriv'd, and can never without a fiction represent or be apply'd to any other. By what fiction we apply the idea of time, even to what is unchangeable, and suppose, as is common, that duration is a measure of rest as well as of motion, we shall consider afterwards. (T 1.2.3.11; SBN 37)

According to Hume, "'tis evident, that time or duration consists of different parts…that are not co-existent; an unchangeable object…produces none that can give us the idea of time" (T 1.2.3.8; SBN 35-6). And yet, there is an imaginative propensity that gives rise in both the vulgar and philosophical mind to pretend that "the idea of duration is applicable in a proper sense to

objects, which are perfectly unchangeable" (T 1.2.3.11; SBN 37). One idea is combined with another such that it creates a fiction in which both ideas are somehow united. The fiction in this case is, of course, related to the self-contradictory principle of identity, which contains both unity and number (T 1.4.2.28; SBN 200).

Now, Hume does not necessarily say that the direction of the application must run from the idea of duration to an unchangeable object. The idea of an unchangeable object may as well be applied to the idea of duration. It is not a *unidirectional* application or misapplication. It is a combination of two incompatible ideas. Hence the reason why I call this imaginative propensity the *uniting* of incompatible ideas rather than an application.

McRae, on my view, incorrectly interprets Hume by referring to this propensity as a *mis*application.[87] The prefix in 'misapplication' implies wrongdoing or a failure of a certain kind. Given the importance of the self-contradictory idea of identity (in so far as it grounds all other types of identity relations), it is likely that the negative attitude toward this propensity is a result of philosophical bias rather than an accurate descriptive reading of human nature. Indeed, fictions and contradictions might be exactly how human nature works; a true philosopher of human nature would not seek to impose the authority of reason by denying contradictions if those contradictions were the result of valid experimentation. Indeed, we ought to remember that Hume never uses the words 'misapplication' or 'misapply' in the *Treatise*.

Saul Traiger, on the other hand, rightly argues that "there is nothing intrinsically wrong with such ideas, although philosophers get into trouble with them when they make metaphysical

[87] Timothy Costelloe also classifies several fictions in Hume's philosophy as 'Fictions of Misapplication.' See Chapter 2 in *The Imagination in Hume's Philosophy*. For Falkenstein, "a fiction is a complex idea that does not correspond to any complex impression. But in a special, technical sense a fiction is an incoherent idea that we manage to think by confusing two importantly distinct though closely related ideas, and that we are tempted to think and even believe by some natural impulse of the imagination" ("Space and Time," 65). As I will argue, I do not interpret fictions as complex ideas, incoherent ideas, or misapplications, but as paradoxical unions of incompatible ideas.

claims based on the (usually implicit) supposition that the idea is derived from such objects."[88] Unlike McRae, Traiger notes that "Hume has no objection" to applying the idea of duration to unchangeable objects.[89] The application of some ideas to other incompatible ideas is a useful feature of the imagination, not a bug.

The combination of incompatible ideas is likewise an unavoidable propensity of the passive, exclusive imagination. It is found to occur almost universally among the vulgar. Therefore, it is not derived from a comparison of philosophical reason or a creation of the active imagination. The union of contradictory ideas is a natural and useful propensity of human nature, despite the repugnance philosophers may have toward self-contradiction or fiction. In that way, to interpret the *Treatise* accurately requires that the interpreter relinquish his or her commitments to logical dogmas.

One difficulty in interpreting Hume is that he himself is not immune to philosophical bias and logical dogmas. In many cases, he reacts to fictions and contradictions in a negative manner instead of accepting the results of his investigations.[90] It is not surprising then that McRae interprets Hume to mean that the uniting of incompatible ideas is some kind of error. But there needs to be a careful separation between useful fictions and harmful fictions. To properly interpret Hume's fictions, we must cleave the occasionally negative way in which they are portrayed in the *Treatise* from the actual work they do in human nature. Many fictions are rightly characterized as potentially harmful—namely, several ancient and modern philosophical fictions

---

[88] "Impressions, Ideas, and Fictions," 386.

[89] Ibid., 386.

[90] For instance, Hume seems to negatively refer to the imaginative propensity to join incompatible ideas by calling it a confusion: "whatever confus'd notions we may form of an union in place betwixt an extended body, as a fig, and its particular taste, 'tis certain that upon reflection we must observe in this union something altogether unintelligible and contradictory" (T 1.4.5.13; SBN 238).

—but some fictions are unavoidable and useful in human nature. We cannot by any means call these fictions—even if contradictory and unintelligible—errors or mistakes from the point of view of Hume's naturalism.

Traiger argues "that all fictions are ideas applied to something from which the idea is not derived, and that this is the central feature which fictions have in common."[91] In this respect, he disagrees with both McRae and Cottrell who divide Hume's fictions into what Cottrell, following McRae, calls: (1) application fictions and (2) concealment fictions.[92] Concealment fictions are "a *pure invention of the imagination* designed to resolve a contradiction - a contradiction to which the first type of fiction gives rise."[93]

I reject both of these accounts for several reasons. First, viewing fictions as the 'application' of certain ideas to other ideas is not accurate. Because we cannot prove the direction of any particular application, it is more accurate to say that two incompatible ideas are 'united' instead of 'applied.' Second, there is more going on than merely concealing a contradiction. It is the *reification* of a self-contradictory fiction. The first step is the union; the second step is the generation of the self-contradictory fiction. For instance, if unity and number are merely combined that does not in itself generate a fiction. It is the reification of the *idea of identity* as a

---

[91] "Impressions, Ideas, and Fictions," 394. Underline in original.

[92] Cottrell specifically classifies fictions into these two groups: "Some fictions consist in, or are produced by, applying an idea or term improperly and inexactly. The fictions that we have considered so far are of this sort; let us call them *application fictions*. Other fictions are '*means* by which we endeavour to conceal' application fictions (*T* 1.4.3.2; SBN 219; italics in original). For example, after we apply the idea of unity or simplicity to an aggregate of sensible qualities (an application fiction), we try to 'conceal' this fiction from ourselves by 'feign[ing]'—that is, producing the fiction of—a unitary substance, underlying these sensible qualities (*T* 1.4.3.5; SBN 221); let us call this a *concealment fiction*" ("A Puzzle about Fictions in the *Treatise*," 61).

[93] McRae, "The Import of Hume's Theory of Time," 124, italics added.

fictional ontological category.[94] Initially, there is the imaginative propensity to unite two contradictory ideas; then, we take the union as ontologically real and, ironically, generate a fiction by doing so.[95]

Below are examples of unavoidable, useful fictions that arise from this imaginative propensity. As we will see at the close of Chapter 4, there are many more variations of this imaginative tendency than listed here.

(1) *Fictitious Duration or Principle of Identity* (Discussed above).

(2) *Objective Necessity* (Discussed above).

(3) *Fictitious Distance* — "we substitute the idea of a distance, which is not consider'd either as visible or tangible, in the room of extension, which is nothing but a composition of visible or tangible points dispos'd in a certain order" (T 1.2.5.21; SBN 62). It is not simply a 'substitution,' it is a combination of two incompatible ideas: negation and extension.

(4) *Fictitious Unity* — the "term of unity is merely a fictitious denomination, which the mind may apply to any quantity of objects it collects together" (T 1.2.2.3; SBN 30). In this case, it is a combination of the idea of a collection of objects and the idea of unity—two contradictory ideas.

---

[94] Hume also refers to the self-contradictory fiction of identity as a mistake, confusion, or *substitution*: "The relation 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. This resemblance is the cause of the confusion and mistake, and makes us substitute the notion of identity, instead of that of related objects" (T 1.4.6.6; SBN 254). Hume also says of fictitious distance that "we substitute the idea of a distance, which is not consider'd either as visible or tangible, in the room of extension" (T 1.2.5.21; SBN 62). By 'substitution,' I understand the process to be a kind of union or association of ideas—'union' or 'association' being a description more consistent with Hume's overall theory of relations.

[95] In Susan Manning's account, the reification of the union of ideas occurs outside of the introspective or reflective state: "'Union', that is, in this context is an imaginary principle, a fiction—but it is also (once the philosopher steps, as he must, outside the circle of empirical introspection) a 'fact' established by custom and habit, and what stabilizes our sense of identity. Union, identity, integrity are the imagined products of aggregated fragmentary observations; our world 'is the universe of the imagination, nor have we any idea but what is there produc'd'" ("Hume's Fragments," 251). The 'fact' established is the reification of the fiction.

(5) *Liberty of Indifference* — "Our way of thinking in this particular is, therefore, absolutely inconsistent; but is a natural consequence of these confus'd ideas and undefin'd terms" (T 2.3.1.13; SBN 404). Thus, it is a contradictory combination of the idea of absolute necessity with the idea of freedom from causes.[96]

2.3. The Reification of Hypothetical Ideas

The second unavoidable imaginative propensity is to go beyond our ideas to suppose the existence of non-referring ideas. At the core of this imaginative propensity is a three-step process:

Step 1: Easy Transition or Train of Ideas

Step 2: Carrying or Going Beyond Experience

Step 3: Completing the Union and Fixing Ideas

Let us suppose that the imagination operates almost like an arrangement of sprockets in a machine. One main feature of the machine is that *related* ideas spin the sprockets faster than unrelated ideas. In other words, a series of related ideas connect together like a train or, as Hume famously puts it, "like a galley put in motion by the oars" (T 1.4.2.22; SBN 198). For instance, if

[96] For Michael Costa, there is a type of fiction that is more problematic than the fictions of poetry or fantasy, and that is the kind of fiction which is "a confused general idea. A genuine general idea is the capacity to bring appropriate instances of a concept to mind to make judgments, involving that concept. A confused general idea is a tendency to combine in a single judgment, about an object instances of incompatible concepts (ones that cannot be combined in a judgment,). Other examples are: applying an idea of extension and an idea of empty distance to the same object (the fiction of a vacuum), applying an idea of determination of thought to an idea of an object (the fiction of causal power), applying an idea of an unchanging object to resembling and closely related perceptions (the fiction of body and the fiction of self), and applying an idea of slightly different objects to an idea of apparently equal objects (the fiction of perfect equality). The tendency to combine ideas in judgments, that cannot be combined in ideas (judgments,) occurs typically when the ideas (and the mental actions of forming them) resemble one another (the ideas of vacuum, body, and mind) or when the ideas regularly occur at the same time (the ideas of identity, causal power, and perfect equality" ("Hume on the Very Idea of a Relation," 85). On my view, Costa is incorrect that it pertains to judgments; it is the *category* itself—for instance, the relation of identity—that combines incompatible ideas.

one sits in a room and does not move, each successive perception will exactly resemble the previous perception. The imagination will easily transition from one perception to the next because of the close relation between them—"the imagination naturally runs on in this train of thinking" (T 1.4.2.50; SBN 213). On the other hand, if we have an idea of a shoelace and then an idea of a volcano, the lack of resemblance between the two ideas will lead to an irregular transition in the imagination; the sprockets, we might say, grind against each other. Step 1 therefore involves closely related ideas spinning along easily in the mind like greased wheels.

The second operation of the imagination in this particular process is carrying or going beyond our past and present perceptions.[97] As Hume remarks, "custom readily carries us beyond the just bounds in our passions, as well as in our reasonings" (T 2.1.6.8; SBN 293). The first definition of causality, for instance, depends upon custom. If we go beyond custom or our past perceptions, we risk reifying the idea of objective or absolute necessity.[98] In his discussion of the first definition of causality, Hume warns that his analysis implies that "there is no absolute nor metaphysical necessity" (T 1.3.14.35; SBN 172). Thus, absolute or metaphysical necessity seems to be derived from going beyond the just bounds of causal reasoning.

Similarly, general rules—which figure in both epistemic and moral domains—require us to go beyond our past or present circumstances. A proposition Hume repeats in several instances is that "general rules commonly extend beyond the principles, on which they are founded" (T

---

[97] This operation aligns with the second feature of natural beliefs, as defined by Stanley Tweyman; that is, a natural belief goes beyond the data of experience. Tweyman connects the act of "substitution involved in natural belief" with "the mind as 'feigning,' and…the resultant awareness which is the fiction" (*Scepticism and belief*, 15). Although the account of natural belief roughly maps onto the process I describe here, I do not see it as 'substitution' or 'awareness' but a union of relations and reification.

[98] Hume describes an analogous process in the following: "the efficacy or energy of causes is neither plac'd in the causes themselves, nor in the deity, nor in the concurrence of these two principles; but belongs entirely to the soul, which considers the union of two or more objects in all past instances. 'Tis here that the real power of causes is plac'd, along with their connexion and necessity" (T 1.3.14.23; SBN 166). I suggest that the process of reification of hypotheses is synonymous with this supposed power of the soul.

3.2.9.3; SBN 551). Going beyond or being carried beyond past perceptions is linked to the easy transition of ideas. When ideas easily connect in the mind, there is a natural propensity for the imagination to continue the train of thinking beyond the ideas at hand. What this, in fact, refers to is a kind of temporal extension; the imagination supposes resembling ideas to continue on into the future. The future supposition initiates the third step in the process, that is, the reification of the future supposition or hypothesis into an independently existing and ontologically real idea.[99]

The third operation to reify hypothetical ideas is explained in several passages as either the act of 'completing the union' or 'fixing ideas.'[100] While these phrases are not univocal and are used for various purposes in the *Treatise*, I want to isolate and point out the particular places that suggest a kind of imaginative reification essential to the generation of natural fictions. In precise terms, the reification is the invention of a non-referring idea based on prior custom or resemblance and the imagination's propensity to go beyond it.[101] Suppose, for instance, an individual perceives the following impressions: 'A1 A2 A3 A4 A5.' The exact resemblance across perceptions leads the imagination to reify the relation of 'A' as an independently existing idea. Not only that, but it also completes the union of 'A's' by extending the relation beyond the five

---

[99] Tweyman's fourth feature of natural beliefs describes believing in something that may, in fact, not *be*: "Because we have no direct experience of what we believe naturally, and cannot prove the existence of what we believe naturally, those matters which fall under 'natural belief' may not *be* at all" (*Scepticism and belief*, 15). What I call natural fictions would all fall under Tweyman's definition of natural beliefs.

[100] Henry Allison calls the uniting principle "that ubiquitous inflationary propensity of the imagination" or "inflationary unification," where relations may be extended so as to complete the union (*Custom and Reason*, 287).

[101] Allison refers to the desire for completeness of ideas as "the Sisyphean quest for closure" (Ibid., 282). Recall that I am not using 'idea' in the legitimate sense here. Natural fictions are simply *fictions* and nothing more—neither ideas nor impressions. In reality, as T. H. Green argues, fictions are: "'Ideas that we *have not*;' for no one of the fictions by which we elude the contradictions, nor indeed any one of the contradictory judgments themselves, can be taken to represent an 'idea' according to Hume's account of ideas" (*Hume and Locke*, 262)

instances of 'A' into the future. 'A' thus becomes an independent object or idea that retains its relational identity indefinitely into the hypothetical future.[102]

Hume argues with respect to object identity that when "the mind is once in the train of observing an uniformity among objects, it naturally continues, till it renders the uniformity as compleat as possible" (T 1.4.2.22; SBN 198). What does Hume mean by the term 'compleat'? In my view, the completion must mean a form of abstraction or reification, such that the uniformity itself becomes an independent fiction *treated as* an idea.[103] For example, constant and coherent perceptions of a chair lead the imagination to a distinct and independent idea of the chair. That the chair possesses any such independent and distinct existence remains hypothetical, however, for there is no way to verify whether the perceptions are united beyond our past perceptions or whether the chair will continue existing in the future.

The reification process is thus twofold: (1) it combines distinct ideas into one idea and (2) it takes that one idea as existing into the future beyond what the human mind has experienced. Hume explains the process as follows:

> Any degree, therefore, of regularity in our perceptions, can never be a foundation for us to infer a greater degree of regularity in some objects, which are not perceiv'd; since this supposes a contradiction, *viz.* a habit acquir'd by what was never present to the mind. But 'tis evident, that whenever we infer the continu'd existence of the objects of sense from their coherence, and the frequency of their union, 'tis in order to bestow on

---

[102] In Peter Thielke's illuminating account, he calls certain antinomies in Hume's *Treatise* 'natural illusions.' The identity of objects is one such natural illusion, and it includes the idea of completion—"The drive for completeness…guides the imagination in seeking a complete uniformity of the 'conditioned' perceptions—the unconditioned then would stand as a wholly independent object. As Hume recognizes, however, this complete uniformity is an illusion" ("Hume, Kant, and the Sea of Illusion," 78).

[103] I do not mean abstraction here in a sense that violates Hume's theory of abstract ideas. Rather, given that fictions are not fully analyzable into Hume's ontology of impressions and ideas, they must be referred to in some way that denotes their mind-dependent union. In other words, natural fictions are unions of legitimate ideas, but the unions themselves are fictional. John P. Wright claims that it is important "to recognise that [fiction] was a technical term in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophy, closely tied up with abstraction. For example, in the reply to the fourth set of objections to his *Meditations* Descartes spoke of 'a fiction or intellectual abstraction' [i.e.,] '*fictionem, vel abstractionem intellectûs*'…Malebranche says that 'the power attributed to created beings' is 'a fiction of the mind of which we naturally have no idea'" (*The sceptical realism of David Hume*, 177). In my view, Hume employs the concept of fiction in a particularly novel way, distinct from the tradition Wright is referring to here.

> the objects a greater regularity than what is observ'd in our mere perceptions. (T 1.4.2.21; SBN 197)

The attribution of greater regularity to objects than past perceptions actually yield is not exclusive to the continued existence of objects. It is a propensity generative of many types of Humean fictions. Indeed, how is it that we can bestow greater regularity on objects? The answer is that the mind unites unperceived future regularities to certain ideas. The future regularity is a hypothesis which—once united to a supposed idea—reifies the hypothesis and thus creates a fiction. An example of the process is further observed in the idea of physical necessity:

> Here is a connected chain of natural causes and voluntary actions; but the mind feels no difference betwixt them in passing from one link to another; *nor is less certain of the future event than if it were connected with the present impressions of the memory and senses* by a train of causes cemented together by what we are pleas'd to call a *physical necessity*. The same experienc'd union has the same effect on the mind, whether the united objects be motives, volitions and actions; or figure and motion. (T 2.3.1.17; SBN 406-7, italics added)

The certainty of the future *as if* it were connected with perceptions of the memory and senses is an imaginative process that takes a hypothetical as real.[104] Part of this process of reification is the feeling that supports the belief in the hypothetical idea. In other words:

> The vividness of the first conception diffuses itself along the relations, and is convey'd, as by so many pipes or canals, to every idea that has any communication with the primary one. This, indeed, can never amount to a perfect assurance; and that because the union among the ideas is, in a manner, accidental: But still it approaches so near, in its influence, as may convince us, that they are deriv'd from the same origin. (T 1.3.10.7; SBN 122)

---

[104] An objection might be that hypotheses, for Hume, are entirely based on prior perceptions. David Novitz rejects this possibility, for, in that case, "it is arguable that we are no longer talking about hypotheses at all, but about recalled knowledge" ("Of Fact and Fancy," 148). Novitz argues: "It is true that successful hypotheses are not mere fantasies. They are…a product both of fancy and experience. It is true, too, that we tend to regard hypotheses as less than fanciful—indeed, as factual—if they achieve explanatory success. However, it is difficult to see why the contingent success of a conjecture or hypothesis should be taken to establish that it was framed independently of the fanciful imagination" (Ibid.).

The vividness of related ideas across perceptions produces almost perfect assurance that the union of ideas is as real as the primary ideas from which the union derives. The unified idea is then taken as independent and distinct such that it is supposed to continue into the future.

While the propensity of the imagination to complete the union is evidenced in generating both self-contradictory fictions and hypothetical reification, the latter process seems to involve a kind of fixing or standard.[105] In his discussion of perfect equality, Hume gives several disparate examples of the same propensity:

> …with regard to time…we have no exact method of determining the proportions of parts, not even so exact as in extension, yet the various corrections of our measures, and their different degrees of exactness, have given us an obscure and implicit notion of a perfect and entire equality. The case is the same in many other subjects. A musician finding his ear become every day more delicate, and correcting himself by reflection and attention, proceeds with the same act of the mind, even when the subject fails him, and entertains a notion of a compleat *tierce* or *octave*, without being able to tell whence he derives his standard. A painter forms the same fiction with regard to colours. A mechanic with regard to motion. To the one *light* and *shade*; to the other *swift* and *slow* are imagin'd to be capable of an exact comparison and equality beyond the judgments of the senses. (T 1.2.4.24; SBN 48-9)

What is a complete octave or a complete colour? A 'complete' colour, for instance, may not be verified by the senses. The imagination generates the fiction of an obscure and implicit notion of a complete or perfect idea in several areas of human life, and it seems that the same process is at work when the imagination hypothesizes complete or perfect ideas—e.g., God, object identity, justice, etc. There are no complete or perfect ideas in sensory impressions, but the imagination completes the union of relations by fixing ideas such that they become inflexible and stable.

At first, it might seem odd to connect measurements with God, or with object identity for that matter. But consider, for instance, the synonymy between equality and object identity. In

[105] Completing the union is observed when the imagination combines contradictory ideas, such as combining an internal impression with an external impression: "All this absurdity proceeds from our endeavouring to bestow a place on what is utterly incapable of it; and that endeavour again arises from our inclination to compleat an union, which is founded on causation, and a contiguity of time, by attributing to the objects a conjunction in place" (T 1.4.5.14; SBN 238-9).

both cases, a number of resembling perceptions from the senses are taken as one complete idea. A chair experienced over several distinct perceptions is taken as *one* single chair. A mechanic, on the other hand, might experience 70mph at one time and then 40mph at another to derive the complete idea of a 'mile per hour.' A mile per hour, in the same way as the identity of the chair, is a heuristic fiction—a hypothetical idea reified as an ontologically real idea. The ideas are not real in either case. A chair cannot be the *same* chair across instances and miles per hour can never be exactly measured (because there are no perfect standards in nature). Thus, both ideas are treated as perfect and full, even though they remain obscure and implicit.

The same analysis applies to general rules in which ideas are imagined as fixed or perfect. Rules *as ideas* are not derived from the senses or memory. In fact, rules are imaginatively generated ideas based on resembling past instances. There are no fixed rules in reality, for to be fixed means to transcend possible change. On Hume's account, to take rules or laws *as real* must imply reification of the hypothetical. Indeed, part of Hume's attack in his discussion of morality is against those who take laws of justice as natural instead of artificial. What is the reason for his attack? When laws or rules are reified, it may cause harmful political effects. For example, if justice is natural, it suggests that all laws are immutable—even bad laws like the divine right of kings. If laws are artificial, it implies that society may modify them to suit changing interests. In the latter respect, Hume recognizes the social utility in understanding the laws of nature *as* artificial.

All of the concomitant ideas of justice require a similar process of deriving fixed rules from flexible rules of the imagination. For instance, "property must be stable, and must be fix'd by general rules" (T 3.2.2.22; SBN 497). The fixing of ideas is akin to the process of abstraction. With respect to general terms, Hume argues "that we may fix the meaning of the word, figure,

we may revolve in our mind the ideas of circles, squares, parallelograms, triangles of different sizes and proportions, and may not rest on one image or idea" (T 1.1.7.10; SBN 22). In the case of general terms and laws of nature, a fixed rule or term applies to various distinct particular ideas or to various particular social circumstances. The general term and the law of nature are both paradoxical in so far as a single fixed rule or idea is united to many social contexts or particular ideas. In both cases, a resemblance relation between particular ideas or social contexts causes the imagination to run easily between resembling instances and carry the term or rule into the future. The same is true when we take resembling objects existing across perceptions as the same—that is, we imagine a fixed and perfect (but fictional) object identity. When we take constant (i.e., resembling) conjunctions as the same, we imagine a fixed and perfect (but fictional) necessity.

The cause of the imaginative propensity to complete the union or fix ideas appears to be a kind of psychological discomfort. It seems the human mind feels unease at the prospect of change or probability. Indeed, in the search for *the* truth (whether epistemological or moral) humans ostensibly desire something stable, consistent, and universal. Hume explains the phenomenon in the following way:

> As the vivacity of the idea gives pleasure, so its certainty prevents uneasiness, by fixing one particular idea in the mind, and keeping it from wavering in the choice of its objects. 'Tis a quality of human nature, which is conspicuous on many occasions, and is common both to the mind and body, that too sudden and violent a change is unpleasant to us, and that however any objects may in themselves be indifferent, yet their alteration gives uneasiness. (T 2.3.10.12; SBN 453)

The regularity or uniformity between ideas makes for an easy transition in the imagination which leads us to go beyond the perceived uniformity and suppose a complete idea, one that is fixed and persists unchanged into the future. The uniformity of past instances provides the vivacity and force required for us to take the complete idea as real, even though its reification is fictional.

Nevertheless, the fiction is useful in as much as it provides psychological relief. The certainty of a fixed idea, though fictional, still eases the mind. The stability is important in both social and epistemic contexts—we want the laws of nature to remain fixed to maintain social order just as we want the general rules of the imagination to remain fixed to maintain stable belief systems. Both types of stability are extremely vital to human nature. I return to the issue of psychological stability in Chapter 6.

In a final, more complicated example, I turn to the idea of an intelligent designer. Stanley Tweyman draws attention to the imaginative propensity to misrepresent experience in his discussion regarding the natural belief in an intelligent designer. He claims that, in both the case of causality and natural theology, "we, in a sense, misrepresent the data of experience, and go beyond it—the misrepresentation in natural theology arise[s] through the fact that we have no evidence that the world was intelligently designed, and yet the anthropomorphic conception of God supports a belief in intelligent contrivance."[106]

The misrepresentation, in other words, is based on our actual impressions of means to ends relations and coherence of parts. We misrepresent the data by applying the idea of a purposive design (i.e., means to end, coherence of parts) to the world as a whole—even though the world as a whole has not provided any evidence to justify such an application. But the imagination does not stop there: as Tweyman notes, it goes "beyond it" by supposing the idea of an anthropomorphic intelligent designer.

Similar to my discussion of McRae, I take issue with the terminology of 'misrepresentation,' since it seems to imply error or a negative connotation. Hume does not say that the application of purposive design to the world is necessarily an error. It may as well be a

---

[106] *Essays on the Philosophy of David Hume: Natural Religion, Natural Belief, and Ontology*, 84.

useful propensity of the imagination born of natural circumstance. I propose to construe the actions of the human mind then in neutral and naturalistic terms, even though Hume is apt to lapse into his own form of philosophical prejudice.

In any case, the analysis appears to point to a similar propensity of the imagination. First, there is a resemblance between ideas that creates an easy transition in the imagination. We experience means to ends relations and coherence of parts, recognizing those perceptions to resemble different parts of nature. Second, we go beyond those resemblances to suppose that there is an analogous intelligent designer of the world. Third, we reify the hypothetical idea of an intelligent designer, taking it as ontologically real even when it is obscure and implicit—thus, originating a fiction. It is reminiscent of the process that generates the idea of perfect equality. Several instances of apparently equal measurements propel us go beyond those instances to imagine a perfect equality. In the case of an intelligent designer, several instances of apparent means to ends relations and coherence of parts in nature propel us to go beyond those instances to imagine the idea of a perfect designer of the universe.

Below are examples of unavoidable, useful fictions that arise from this imaginative propensity. Again, as we will see at the close of Chapter 4 & 5, there are many more variations of this imaginative tendency than listed here.

(1) *Intelligent Designer* (Discussed above).

(2) *Perfect Equality* — After we consider "several loose standards of equality…correcting them by each other, we proceed to imagine so correct and exact a standard of that relation, as is not liable to the least error or variation" (T 1.4.2.22; SBN 198).

(3) *Object identity, personal identity, general terms* — "Identity is nothing really belonging to these different perceptions, and uniting them together; but is merely a quality, which we attribute to them because of the union of their ideas in the imagination;" "we *suppose* the whole train of perceptions to be united by identity" via an "easy transition of the imagination from one to another" (T 1.4.6.7; SBN 255, italics added).

(4) *Absolute Necessity, General Rules* — Once the mind is "in the train of observing an uniformity among objects, it naturally continues, till it renders the uniformity as compleat as possible" (T 1.4.2.22; SBN 198).

(5) *Laws of Nature (justice, promises, property, and government)* — "The mind has a natural propensity to join relations, especially resembling ones, and finds a kind of fitness and uniformity in such an union. From this propensity are deriv'd these laws of nature" (T 3.2.3.10n75; SBN 509).

CHAPTER THREE: RELATIONS

1. The Origin and Content of Hume's Relations

To examine Hume's fictions, it is important to first understand his theory of relations. Hume divides relations into two types: natural and philosophical. Natural relations arise when "two ideas are connected together in the imagination, and the one naturally introduces the other, after the manner above-explained" (T 1.1.5.1; SBN 13). By 'the manner above explained,' Hume means the associational principle of the imagination. Philosophical relations, on the other hand, arise upon "the arbitrary union of two ideas in the fancy [when] we may think proper to compare them" (T 1.1.5.1; SBN 13).

My discussion will refer primarily to natural relations, for it is natural relations that give rise to natural fictions. It is also because I interpret Hume's natural relations as genera, under

which philosophical relations are species.[107] In Chapter 1, I attempted to demonstrate how Hume's main concern in Book I is to analyze the metaphysical problems associated with his three natural relations: resemblance (as identity) in Part IV, contiguity (as space and time) in Part II, and causality in Part III. All of these were shown to be associations of the imagination and thus, at least in a minimal sense, mind-dependent. That said, are relations only mind-dependent? In this chapter, I pursue an investigation of Hume's relations that ultimately reveals the need for a reconstruction of his theory.

---

[107] On this point, I follow Wayne Waxman: "philosophical relations are parasitic on the belief-engendering power of natural relations; and because belief in the reality of an idea is itself nothing more than a feeling in imagination, no relation can be accorded reality except in and for idea-enlivening imagination" (*Hume's theory of consciousness*, 12-3). In other words, philosophical relations "can only be explained by their being parasitic on relations of resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect" (Ibid.).

By taking this position, I reject Alan Hausman's interpretation of Hume's theory of relations, where philosophical relations are treated as a separate and distinct category from natural relations—the former being an *ontological* category, the latter being a *psychological* category. For Hausman, "Hume often fails to distinguish matters of psychology from matters of philosophy. Perhaps he doesn't see the difference, *or, even worse*, doesn't believe there is any" ("Hume's Theory of Relations," 255, italics added). The philosophical bias is clear: Hausman is committed to a separation between philosophy and psychology *prior* to his analysis of Hume's text; in that way, I suggest his analysis is more illustrative of his own philosophical position than Hume's. Waxman points out a similar tendency among contemporary interpreters to criticize Hume's theory of space and time on the grounds of advances in mathematical logic. To interpret Hume correctly, the psychologistic basis of his theory of relations (including space and time) must be addressed. As Waxman says: "A challenge to Hume's views regarding space and time must therefore rely less on contemporary advances in mathematical logic (or non-philosophical psychology) than on well-informed, effective arguments against the psychologistic doctrines of T I i. Otherwise, Hume's conclusion must be allowed to stand" ("Psychologistic Foundations," 151-2).

P. J. E. Kail, like Hausman, thinks that "the discovery of relations is factive: reason is such that it does not simply suppose or conjecture relations, but perceives or discovers those relations" (*Projection and Realism in Hume's Philosophy*, 39). I do not see how the 'discovery,' 'acquisition,' or 'perception' of relations entails a realist position. We might discover or perceive illusions just as well, taking them to be real when they are in fact not. More to the point, simply because relations are *discovered* does not prove that they are objective or mind-independent facts, especially when tracing relations *themselves* to impressions does not seem to yield any determinate results.

My interpretation also rejects hybrid accounts of Hume's theory of relations such as Walter Ott's 'conceptual foundationalist' or 'psychological foundationalist' view. For Ott, relations are found *in* the relata in the case of constant relations, but in other cases relations are merely the *manner* in which perceptions are introduced to the mind. Indeed, I find it implausible that relations are of two distinct ontological natures. See Ott, *Causation and Laws of Nature.*

My treatment of Humean relations is akin to an analysis of categories. Hume's principle of association is generative of all perceptual categories.[108] For instance, the natural relation of resemblance is generative of categories such as abstract ideas and object identity. Whereas Aristotle posits ten categories and Kant posits twelve, I take Hume to posit two ontological categories (impressions and ideas) that are structured by three epistemological categories (resemblance, contiguity, and causality). I focus my discussion on the epistemological categories, all of which Hume names 'relations.' I do so because relations do not fit squarely into the impression/idea ontological dichotomy and end up generating a special class of natural fictions.[109] Indeed, when epistemological categories or related associations of the mind are reified into ontological terms *as* ideas or impressions, it creates this class of fictions.[110] With respect to

---

[108] Passmore argues that Hume accepted Locke's view that positive knowledge requires relations between ideas, but he "was not satisfied with Locke's list of 'agreements' and transforms it into something like a theory of categories, in Kant's sense of the word" (*Hume's Intentions*, 23). The relationship between Locke's theory of relations and Hume's is significant. For both Hume and Locke, the mind *makes* relations in some sense. However, the difference is that Lockean relations are *consciously* made by the mind via comparisons and combinations. In Hendel's view, Hume diverges from Locke in so far as certain relations are made by the mind 'naturally'—"If the human imagination is determined by 'nature' to connect ideas with each other in certain determinate ways, then the relations, of which we cannot but be sensible in our perceiving those ideas together, are themselves 'natural.' They owe nothing to human artifice" (*Studies in the Philosophy of David Hume*, 121). Of course, to say that Humean relations are not in any sense artificial is perplexing. Dreams, for instance, are 'natural' in the way that Hendel construes Humean relations, but they are nevertheless clearly artificial. The claim of being 'naturally' or 'unconsciously' made is not sufficient to establish that Humean relations are not in any sense artificial.

The way that Rocknak sees it, "for Hume, a relation could never be construed as being in any sense connected to a real property, or predicate of a subject; it is *imagined*, a construction of the mind. Further, a relation for Hume could never be construed as *relative* in the sense that some thing a with a property x *infers*, much less *guarantees* that there are also be some b with a concomitant property y" ("The Synthetic Relation in Hume," 163). Don Ross, in a complementary way, notes the possibility of the mental construction of relations in his functional account of Humean relations ("Hume, Resemblance and the Foundations of Psychology").

[109] Consider Achille Varzi's interpretation of what he calls Humean fictionalism, where fiction "lies, not in the prima facie ontological make-up of reality, but in the laws—of unity, identity, causation—in terms of which we attribute a structure to that reality. It's the structure of the ontological inventory, not the content of the inventory, that turns out to be fictitious" ("Fictionalism in Ontology," 142).

[110] On Hume's atomistic picture, relations become essential. All individuated atoms of experience are non-relational, but any complex impressions or ideas seem to involve relations. If they do, it entails whenever any combination or association of ideas is taken as ontologically real, the internal relations are also taken as ontologically real. Relations, however, resist ontological verification, thus creating confusion as to how exactly we ought to ontologically refer to complex ideas and impressions.

terminology, I will use the term 'relations' in the rest of this chapter as opposed to epistemological categories—in either case, I mean the same.

The central question of this opening section is: what is the ontology of relations? In other words, can relations be defined in terms of either impressions or ideas? The answer I will defend is that, on Hume's account, they cannot. We must remain agnostic regarding the ontology of relations because it is beyond human understanding to prove that relations are either derived from impressions or ideas or solely derived from the imagination.

Recall that natural relations are the *effects* of the principle of association. The cause of the principle of association must be resolved into unknown original qualities of human nature. Since we do not know the *cause* of the principle of association, we cannot prove that the principle is derived from either impressions or ideas. *A fortiori*, if natural relations are the *effects* of the principle of association, then we cannot prove they are derived from impressions or ideas. The causal chain is clear:

(1) Unknown Original Qualities —> (2) Principle of association —> (3) Natural relations —> (4) Natural fictions, Philosophical relations, Arbitrary or Poetic relations, etc.

The ontology of ideas—as opposed to relations—is explained by a process of copying from impressions to ideas. Similar to the principle of association, the *cause* of impressions is unknown and, for Hume, only relevant to the domain of natural philosophy and anatomy. Still, impressions provide some kind of ontological foundation for ideas, whereas, in the case of relations, there is only a single associational principle from which all relations seem to be derived. How then are we to understand the ontology of the associational *principle*? On my interpretation, we must take it as

an epistemic or structural *form*. Therefore, it is incorrect to say that natural relations, philosophical relations, and fictions are *ideas* in the sense given in the elements of Hume's philosophy.

The entailment of my view is that any account explaining relations or fictions by an appeal to Hume's theory of ideas, or his theory of abstract ideas must be mistaken. Relations cannot be traced to particular impressions or ideas, and therefore they cannot be represented by any general term. The reason that relations cannot be traced to impressions is that Hume's atomism requires each impression to be individuated. Even in the case of complex ideas, the complexity is derived from an aggregate of simple perceptual atoms. All ideas and impressions are reducible to their atomic constituents. Relations, however, cannot be reduced to simple atoms. Relations require relata to obtain, which means they cannot be merely simple. If relations are taken as simple, that would imply they are empty (relations without relata). Conversely, if relations are taken as complex, then they are not reducible to Hume's atomistic theory of ideas. On the basis of that disjunct, it seems relations cannot be traced to sensory impressions or impressions of reflection.

One commentator who attempts to explain Humean relations in terms of his theory of ideas is Michael Costa. On his view:

> A particular idea of a relation is always a complex idea consisting of component ideas that stand in that relation. Thus, an idea of a relation will resemble that relation in being an instance of it. An abstract idea of a relation is a particular idea of a relation connected with an associative disposition to bring to mind other particular ideas of that relation.[111]

What is the problem here? The opening premise is vacuous: it relies on circular reasoning in so far as it assumes what it attempts to explain, namely, the *idea* of a relation. Costa might reply that he is defining a relation by its relata. But in order for a relation to be defined, it cannot be done

[111] "Hume on the Very Idea of a Relation," 91.

by simply referring to its relata. The relata are two singular ideas. These singular ideas *in themselves* do not account for the relation. The relation, to be distinct, must lie in something *external* to the relata, something that connects them together.

The only alternative is that a relation is *internal* to its relata.[112] In that case, it is even more implausible, for the simple idea (standing in relation to another simple idea) must then *contain* a relation.[113] How can a simple idea which is unary contain a relation which, by definition, is not unary? The alternative does not seem intelligible.[114]

---

[112] Hausman follows Ralph W. Church, for instance, in thinking that resemblance is an *internal* relation. Church considers resemblance the primary relation grounding all philosophical relations; thus, all philosophical relations are internal. See Hausman, "Hume's Theory of Relations"; Church, "Hume's Theory of Philosophical Relations." Ross similarly takes resemblance as the most crucial concept in Hume's associationism, but seems to argue against taking resemblance as internal or external, for "Nothing could be more un-Humean than to suppose that there exists, as a third member of the empirical field, an abstract 'relation' over and above the two relata" ("Hume, Resemblance and the Foundations of Psychology," 350). Louis Loeb, on the other hand, takes resemblance as an intrinsic relation and causation as an extrinsic relation. It is not clear why Loeb seems to think causation can be *purely extrinsic* when causation *depends* on the *intrinsic* relation of resemblance to obtain. It does not appear that Loeb countenances the paradoxes that arise when rigidly classifying relations as either intrinsic or extrinsic. See Loeb, "Causation, Extrinsic Relations."

[113] Yumiko Inukai construes the problem as one between what she calls Real Relations and Imagined Relations. Hume is committed to both views in the *Treatise*, creating an interpretive challenge. Did Hume think that relations are real such that they are presupposed in impressions? Or did Hume think that relations are produced in the imagination, and that we only feel a connection between them? Inukai argues that Hume recognized the problem but failed to account for it in a satisfactory manner. See Inukai, "Hume on Relations: Are They Real?" On Donald Gotterbarn's view, Hume's statements regarding our knowledge of relations are not consistent. Thus, Hume's epistemology is incomplete or inconsistent, since it cannot account for the nature of relations. See Gotterbarn, "Hume's Troublesome Relations." In a more condemnatory account, M. R. Annand argues that Hume "hits upon the essential weakness of the view of experience which he had himself propounded…He had tried to look upon what is known as consisting merely of disconnected particulars, connected only by external relations. And in the long run he has to admit that experience so conceived turns out to be as a rope of sand, that no ingenuity would avail to introduce coherence into elements defined from the outset as incoherents, or to bring into relation elements that had all along been regarded as relationless" ("An Examination of Hume's Theory of Relations," 596).

[114] Paul Bains says that: "For Deleuze, one of Hume's originalities lies in the realization that relations are external to their terms and that this can only be understood in opposition to the 'rationalist' philosophies that deny the 'paradox' of relations" (*Primacy of Semiosis*, 25). I disagree with Deleuze's reading for the reason that he interprets Hume's theory of relations as clearly *externalist*. Hume is inconsistent with respect to whether relations are external or internal. Nonetheless, Martin Bell confirms Bains's reading, stating that, for Deleuze, external relations are the "mark of empiricism in Hume...Because Hume does not explain association as a product of the nature of the terms, the qualities of the ideas themselves, but as the effect of the principles of human nature, relations between perceptions are external to their terms" ("Transcendental Empiricism," 99). For a comprehensive account of Deleuze's reading of Hume, see Jeffrey A. Bell's *Deleuze's Hume*. However, a proper refutation of Deleuze's conclusion is beyond the scope of this dissertation. It must also be said that, even if relations are treated as external, it does not solve the paradox of relations. F. H. Bradley famously explains the paradox in Chapter 3 of *Appearance and Reality*. Ralph Church appeals to Bradley's paradox in his under-utilized analysis of Hume's relations. The paradox may be stated as such: if A relates to B by quality C, then either C is *internal* to A and B (which changes their nature such that they are no longer simply A and B) or C is *external* to A and B (which means that A and B do not possess the related quality). See Church, *Hume's Theory of the Understanding* (especially the Appendix).

Let us return to the first option: a relation is defined as something external to the relata. In that case, why not call this something an *idea*? The difficulty is that ideas need to be traced to impressions or other ideas. For instance, relations cannot be considered *secondary* ideas because secondary ideas are derived from primary perceptions, and perceptions can only ever be either impressions or ideas.[115] Even if relations were, in a sense, second-order ideas predicated on first-order ideas, it still does not tell us anything about their ontological status. It simply moves the problem from a first-order problem to a second-order one.

A second option may be found in Hume's apparent reference to relations as *qualities* of the mind. But this claim is not supported for three reasons. On one hand, relations cannot be considered *qualities* because Hume refers to quality *as a relation* itself in 'Of relations.' How could the relation of causality, for instance, at the same time be classified as a relation of quality? If, on the other hand, we take 'quality' in some special sense, we are still left with having to explain how a singular term (quality) contains two relata or no relata at all, depending on whether the relata are internal or external to the relation. Third, with respect to the particular passage at issue, Hume says that the principles of union or cohesion must be resolved into "*original* qualities of human nature" (T 1.1.4.6; SBN 13). As a consequence, if we take relations as original qualities, then the philosopher ought to remain agnostic anyway regarding their ontology since it is matter for the natural philosopher or anatomist. In that sense, the term 'quality' is arbitrary.

Another approach might be to understand relations as internal impressions. For instance, we might use the single page where Hume calls necessity an internal impression as support for this claim (T 1.3.14.20; SBN 165). To accept this position, though, seems to require a change in

[115] I came to see the interpretive import of Hume's reference to *secondary* ideas through the work of Donald Ainslie; see his "Hume's Reflections on the Identity and Simplicity of Mind." The relevant passage in the *Treatise* is the following: "Ideas produce the images of themselves in new ideas; but as the first ideas are supposed to be derived from impressions, it still remains true, that all our simple ideas proceed either mediately or immediately, from their correspondent impressions" (T 1.1.1.11; SBN 6-7).

the definition of impression. That is to say, impressions are *single* perceptions, either simple or complex. An impression is never defined as *two or more* perceptions at the same time—at least as far as I can tell. Necessity, however, must pertain to *two or more* perceptions; it cannot mean one perception alone. It is a causal, and therefore relational, term. Hume recognizes this fact because, in the next paragraph, he retreats from calling necessity an impression by virtue of the following reasoning:

> The idea of necessity arises from some impression. There is no impression convey'd by our senses, which can give rise to that idea. It must, therefore, be deriv'd from some internal impression, or impression of reflection. There is no internal impression, which has any relation to the present business, but that propensity, which custom produces, to pass from an object to the idea of its usual attendant. This therefore is the essence of necessity. Upon the whole, necessity is something, that exists in the mind, not in objects; nor is it possible for us ever to form the most distant idea of it, consider'd as a quality in bodies. 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 experienc'd union. (T 1.3.14.22; SBN 165)

Necessity, therefore, is not an internal impression but derived from an imaginative propensity of association. It is based on a function of the mind to go beyond past perceptions. There is no ontological status accorded to necessity other than it being an operation of the imagination. That leaves us in the same position as when we started: what is the ontology of relations if they are derived from the mind, that is, from imaginative propensities or principles?

A final resolution might appeal to Hume's theory of complex ideas. Indeed, Hume describes relations *as* complex ideas (T 1.1.4.6; SBN 13). Why not follow the clear textual support? First, recall that, while many complex ideas do reflect complex impressions, not all of them do: "many of our complex ideas never had impressions, that corresponded to them, and that many of our complex impressions never are exactly copied in ideas" (T 1.1.1.4; SBN 3). On one hand, Hume says that Paris is a complex idea that does not exactly represent its complex impression. Paris is the proper name given to a collection of simple impressions. Therefore, Paris

is not much different from the other example Hume provides, namely, New Jerusalem. While Paris is presumably a real designator used in the world to describe a geographical territory, New Jerusalem is a fictional designator used to describe a geographical territory. In either case, the ideas of Paris and New Jerusalem are not individuated as complex or simple impressions. They must be taken, on my view, then as "merely a fictitious denomination, which the mind may apply to any quantity of objects it collects together" (T 1.2.2.3; SBN 30).[116] More to the point, the clearly fictional New Jerusalem is used by Hume as the example for a complex *idea* not derived from impressions, whereas Paris is used as the example for a complex *impression* not copied by an exact idea. If relations are to be classified *as* complex ideas in one of these two ways, it is far more plausible that they be understood in the former (fictional) sense.[117]

A more pressing difficulty for the view though is that it still does not tell us about the ontological nature of relations. Suppose that we perceive the complex idea of an apple. The apple is red, soft, and sweet. And we apply the designation 'complex idea' to the combination. Now, where is the 'complex idea' to be found? What ties the apple together as an individuated apple? Inside the complex idea of an apple does not seem to be any evidence of the 'complex idea' that unifies the apple as an individuated ontological entity.

---

[116] Kemp Smith says that "Ideas of relations…not being due to a process of compounding, are not properly describable as complex (or compound) ideas, and are not therefore explicable merely by means of the mechanism of association" (*The Philosophy of David Hume*, 251). Of course, on my view, the reason why they are not explicable is exactly because of the improper use of 'idea' to describe 'relations' in the first place.

[117] Consider additionally that substances and modes cannot account for relations either: "The idea of a substance as well as that of a mode, is nothing but a collection of simple ideas, that are united by the imagination, and have a particular name assigned them, by which we are able to recal, either to ourselves or others, that collection" (T 1.1.6.2; SBN 16). Substance is regarded as a fiction, while a mode can either be (1) a quality distributed in different subjects or (2) a complex idea where the uniting principle is not the foundation of the idea. To the first, a relation dispersed in different subjects gives rise to the paradox of internal relations already mentioned. To the second, a relation seems to be exactly the uniting principle that associates ideas in the first place. If not, and relations are more like general terms in so far as they do not unite particulars, then such an account may not be accepted for other reasons. I discuss these below.

Let us consider a relation as a complex idea instead. Suppose we perceive a resemblance relation between three shades of red as a complex idea. There is crimson, scarlet, and maroon. The relation is therefore a complex idea which is related or united in virtue of colour similarity. Now, search the complex idea of the relation for the idea of 'redness.' Where is the individuated relation or complex idea of 'redness' apart from the simple ideas of crimson, scarlet, and maroon? If the three simple ideas do not contain any relation or distinct idea of redness—since they are simple—it would seem the relation of redness does not exist.[118]

Consider an additional example. The resemblance relation between a white cube and white globe contains two relata: two instances of white. The two instances of white are the relata, not the relation. The relation stands between the two instances of white. Let 'aRb' stand for the relation such that 'a' and 'b' are two instances of white and 'R' the relation. If 'R' is considered a 'complex idea,' then it "may be distinguished into parts" (T 1.1.1.2; SBN 2). The parts of 'R' are 'a' and 'b'. If the parts are 'a' and 'b,' then 'aRb' is reducible to 'ab.' Thus, the idea of the relation cannot be accounted for in either sensory impressions or impressions of reflection. There are two consequences that may be drawn from this: (1) relations are mind-dependent and not empirically derived, and (2) understanding relations *as* complex ideas does not tell us anything further about the ontology of relations other than they are mind-dependent associations of simple ideas. In other words: "The principle of union being regarded as the chief part of the complex idea" cannot be ontologically explained by an appeal to the simple ideas that constitute the complex idea (T 1.1.6.2; SBN 16).

Similar concerns are relevant to an appeal to abstract ideas or general terms. That is, the same inability to ontologically verify relations obtains when appealing to general terms. Hume

[118] Construing redness as a property rather than a relation does not solve the problem. All properties are simple, particular ideas in Hume's ontology, and thus there is no property of redness or simple idea of a universal 'red.'

wants to claim that ideas can be particular and yet general in their representation at the same time and in the same respect, yet he does not confront the manifest contradiction involved in this statement (T 1.1.7.10; SBN 22). Consider it this way: are general ideas *external* to the particular ideas they represent or are they *internal* to the ideas they represent? In either case, the paradox of relations obtains.

And if general terms are neither internal nor external to particular ideas, then what is their ontological status? How do we account for general terms if they are essentially relations themselves? Indeed, a single idea or impression cannot give rise to a general term because then the word 'general' would be meaningless or redundant. The meaning of 'general' as opposed to 'particular' is predicated on some measure or quantity. 'General' applies to *more than one* idea, whereas 'particular' applies to one, individuated idea. Therefore, if 'general' is taken to apply to more than one particular idea, how exactly is it derived from a *set* of ideas? General terms, in that sense, share the relational paradox. Abstractly, one thing is derived from two things, but when we search those two things for the ontological derivation of the one thing, we find there is nothing to verify the derivation. That is, when we search the relata, or the revival set of any general term, we find no ontological reason that supports a distinction between the *general* and the *particular*. On

the whole, appealing to abstract ideas to account for relations is equivalent to moving the problem around instead of solving it.[119]

The ontology of relations then, on my interpretation, is a matter that ought to necessitate an attitude of agnosticism.[120] We cannot say whether relations are impressions or ideas, or whether they are ontologically distinct in some unknown way. It is, I think, requisite of the true philosopher to restrain the desire for searching into the ontology of relations. When we take

---

[119] John Passmore notes that, on Hume's account, simple ideas cannot resemble one another because "two ideas can resemble one another only if they are already complex, being distinguishable but at the same time having points of resemblance" (*Hume's Intentions*, 108). R.J. Hawkins attempts to refute Passmore by classifying resemblance relations between simple ideas as *simple relations*—if "Hume regarded resemblance as a simple relation, he could have insisted that different kinds of resemblance are merely different kinds of simple relations" ("Simplicity, Resemblance and Contrariety," 33). Hawkins view, however, seems implausible for the fact that simple relations would seemingly represent *nothing* if the relata are not internal to the simple relation.

Similarly, if relations are construed as 'impressions of reflection' or 'feelings' or 'determinations' or 'acts of the mind,' then we must ask (1) if the internal impressions of relations are singular—and do not include the relata (which are sensory)—then what exactly is contained in these impressions? Otherwise, (2) if the internal impressions of relations *contain* the relata, then how are particular sensory relata—which are external—somehow contained in impressions that are internal? For views that seem to suggest that relations may be understood as feelings or impressions of reflection, see Logan, *Religion Without Talking* and Waxman, "Hume's Theory of Ideas." Indeed, in Waxman's account, relations may be stronger or weaker depending on the feeling involved: "Because facility is the essence of relation, this means that the *stronger this feeling* is in any transition of thought, the *stronger the relation* it produces between the perceptions to and from which the transition is made" ("Hume's Theory of Ideas," 152).

[120] In Waxman's earlier view, "Hume was for all intents and purposes agnostic about the consciousness-transcending reality of 'non-sensational factors.' He had no need to commit himself, since the question has nothing to do with his real concern: the nature and workings of human understanding…even if there were a sense in which relations might be said to exist independently of imagination, they could have no role in the explanation of human understanding, and so are of no interest to the philosopher of human nature" (*Hume's theory of consciousness*, 11-2).

In my view, relations may equally be *created* by the mind, *discovered* in the work of the author of our being, or internal to objects themselves; we simply do not know. The same is true of impressions: "As to those *impressions*, which arise from the *senses*, their ultimate cause is, in my opinion, perfectly inexplicable by human reason, and 'twill always be impossible to decide with certainty, whether they arise immediately from the object, or are produc'd by the creative power of the mind, or are deriv'd from the author of our being (T 1.3.5.2; SBN 84).

relations as ontologically real—that is, understood in terms of impressions or idea—we generate fictions.[121]

In the broader scope of the history of philosophy, I take Hume's agnosticism toward the ontology of relations as both novel and representative of his philosophical humility. As Hume writes:

> …the principles of union or cohesion among our simple ideas, and in the imagination supply the place of that inseparable connexion, by which they are united in our memory. Here is a kind of Attraction, which in the mental world will be found to have as extraordinary effects as in the natural, and to shew itself in as many and as various forms. Its effects are every where conspicuous; but as to its causes, they are mostly unknown, and must be resolv'd into *original* qualities of human nature, which I pretend not to explain. (T 1.1.4.6; SBN 12-3)

In their attempt to go beyond human limitation, philosophers are tempted into obscure and uncertain speculation. For instance, Plato speculated that relations exist in an empirically unverifiable world of Forms. Kant, on the other hand, recognized the formal nature of relations, but he speculated that they were constitutive of human nature; in that way, he went beyond observed effects to posit original qualities or causes of human perception. Hume avoids the

---

[121] A further objection might be that we may interpret Humean relations as 'relative ideas' or 'inadequate ideas.' But, in my view, an appeal to relative or inadequate ideas does not explain the *ontology* of relations. For instance, Daniel Flage thinks that the missing shade of blue and the thousandth part of a grain of sand may be explained by appealing to Hume's supposed account of relative ideas ("Hume's Relative Ideas"). By providing definite descriptions of relative ideas, we are able to talk about them without having impressions of the ideas. That is, relative ideas may be admitted in Hume's ontology as *ideas* even though they are not positive ideas. Flage's account, however, cannot supply an answer regarding the nature of relations because relative ideas are dependent upon relations to obtain. In other words, the explanation would be circular: an account of relations cannot depend on relations to explain relations. Moreover, as Max Thomas argues, Flage "realizes that no such theory of relative ideas can be used to justify ontological claims of the unperceivable objects" ("Relative Ideas Rejected," 150). See also "Relative Ideas Revisited: A Reply to Thomas."

Others, like Hendel, take relations purely as "*habits of the mind* itself, operative in its thinking about particular things. Relations are real factors in our knowledge of the world and they represent something very real in nature" (*Studies in the Philosophy of David Hume*, 112). I am doubtful whether relations are in fact *representative*; if so, Hendel must explain what *exactly* they represent. That said, I agree that relations may be understood as 'habits,' 'determinations,' 'acts of the mind,' and so forth. The ontology of 'acts of the mind' is still however either unknown or a category mistake. More precisely, if we understand relations as epistemological categories, then there is no ontological weight to them. It is akin to the relationship between a verb and a noun. There is no ontological existent in, say, the verb 'running.' A man who runs is performing an action, but that action does not *exist* in and of itself. If relations do not exist *apart* from ideas and impressions, nor exist *within* ideas and impressions, the matter must be left open regarding their ontology.

intemperance of these philosophers by remaining agnostic: the ontology of relations is unknown such that any speculation regarding their existence or cause must be regarded as fiction. For Hume, the principle of association is an effect in the world that is neither necessary, nor universal; it is a gentle force giving shape to the mental world—a shape that escapes metaphysical analysis.

2. Resemblance is Synonymous with Relation

As previously discussed, Stuart Hampshire's 1950 paper, "Scepticism and Meaning," pointed out a fundamental flaw in empiricist theories. Hampshire specifically took aim at the kind of empiricism espoused in the *Treatise*. The flaw is simply stated: the relation of resemblance is meaningless. Why? Resemblance is synonymous with the term 'relation.' That is to say, it is a distinction without difference. If we say, 'one idea relates to another' or 'one idea resembles another,' we are asserting the same propositional content—worse, we are saying nothing at all.[122]

Suppose we say 'A resembles B' or 'A relates to B.' In both cases, we have said nothing without specifying in what way the relata 'relate' or 'resemble'. In concrete terms, suppose 'an apple resembles an orange' or 'an apple relates to an orange.' (1) How are these propositions different? (2) What do these propositions mean?

The answer to the first question is that nothing differentiates the two propositions. A 'resemblance relation' may imply any relation whatsoever, which is to say that every relation is, in some respect, a resemblance relation. If two relata relate on the basis of quantity, quality, or contiguity, etc., it is because they *resemble* each other in that *respect*. An apple both resembles and relates to an orange, say, in so far as it is spherical. It does not matter whether we call it a

[122] See "Scepticism and Meaning."

'resemblance relation' or simply a 'relation,' the proposition contains the same meaning: that some aspect is being related.

To the second question, the propositions are both incomplete and therefore meaningless. It is not until 'A relates to B' *in some respect* or 'A resembles B' *in some respect* that any sort of meaning obtains. For instance, 'an orange resembles an apple' means nothing, unless some kind of resemblance is *specified*. For instance, does the proposition mean that an orange resembles an apple in terms of sweetness, firmness, or texture? It could mean any of those things if no aspect of resemblance is specified. There is no propositional content until a *specific* relation obtains. Once again, whether we call it a 'resemblance relation' or a 'relation,' the same analysis applies.

One difficulty in understanding Hampshire's criticism, as he points out, is that we usually associate 'resemblance' with 'visual similarity'. And yet, 'resemblance' is not restricted to the relation of visual similarity. A resemblance might obtain with respect to quantity, number, spatial contiguity, temporal succession, and even contrariety. Therefore, to think of resemblance as a *distinct* relation is, in fact, unintelligible.

2.1. Resemblance is Synonymous with Identity

Hampshire's criticism informs my interpretation of Hume's *Treatise*. By 'resemblance,' I take Hume to mean 'similarity.'[123] What this entails is that the relation of identity is synonymous with resemblance. The reason is that both instantiate a *similarity* relation. They are one and the same

[123] 'Similarity' likewise is synonymous with 'relation,' which clears up passages where Hume seems to mean the same thing by both 'resemblance' and 'relation'; e.g., "even in this simplicity there might be contain'd many different resemblances and relations (T 1.1.7.18; SBN 25). If he didn't mean the same thing here, then that would imply there are some relations *without* resemblance, a position Hume rejects in 'Of relations'.

relation. Until a 'resemblance relation' or an 'identity relation' is made complete by reference to a specific similarity, the relation remains meaningless.[124]

What is the interpretive upshot of collapsing these two relations into one? First, it explains why Hume uses 'resemblance' and 'identity' interchangeably in some instances (e.g., see T 1.4.6.13; SBN 258). Second, it explains why a 'difference of number' is opposed to identity, while a 'difference of kind' is opposed to resemblance in 'Of relations,' where it appears that Hume is differentiating between numerical identity and qualitative identity (T 1.1.5.10; SBN 15).[125] Third, it explains why an "exact resemblance of our perceptions" would make "us ascribe to them an identity" (T 1.4.2.40; SBN 208). Fourth, it might explain why resemblance and identity share a salient quality, namely, that both are *almost universal relations*: resemblance is a relation "without which no philosophical relation can exist," while identity is "the most universal…common to every being, whose existence has any duration" (T 1.1.5.4; SBN 14).[126] Indeed, if identity and resemblance are general terms for all relations, and require an additional species of relation to be rendered meaningful, it makes perfect sense why they would both be understood as universal relations.

---

[124] For instance, if we say 'the man at t1 is the same at t2,' we are saying nothing until we specify that 'the man at t1 is the same at t2 *in the respect* of physical composition' or some other specified relation. Usually, the specified relation is obvious from context or common linguistic use, which makes it, again, difficult to register the import of Hampshire's critique.

[125] We could just as well say 'quantitative resemblance' and 'qualitative resemblance,' respectively. Given Hume's atomism with respect to time, all identity (resemblance) relations across any two or more perceptions are numerical. Equally, given Hume's atomism regarding space, all identity (resemblance) relations across two or more units of extension are numerical. And given that each atomic perception, whether spatial or temporal, must be qualitative (sensory) in some respect, there is no clear separation between numerical versus qualitative identity (resemblance). All qualitative identity (resemblance) relations are numerical and vice-versa. Conversely, all 'differences in kind' imply 'differences in number' and vice-versa.

[126] 'Being' must be resolved into Hume's ontology of impressions or ideas. Thus, identity is more properly construed as "the most universal…common to every [impression or idea] whose existence has any duration" (T 1.1.5.4; SBN 14).

In the reverse, collapsing the relations into one explains why what Hume says of resemblance seems true of identity; e.g., "when any objects resemble each other, the resemblance will at first strike the eye, or rather the mind; and seldom requires a second examination" (T 1.3.1.2; SBN 70). For any identity relation, whether it be personal identity, object identity, or the identity of a general term, the relation is generally immediate and clear. We need not examine our personal identity through philosophical comparison to feel that we possess an identity. Identity, in many respects, seems as intuitive as any resemblance relation. For example, it seems we discover object identity almost always "at first strike" (T 1.3.1.2; SBN 70). If not, when would the attribution of the continued existence to objects *not* occur intuitively and at first sight?

Finally, the interpretive collapse helps to explain what I take to be one of Hume's major inconsistencies in the *Treatise*. That is, resemblance and identity are almost universal relations, and yet in 'Of knowledge,' they are treated as qualitatively distinct from the other philosophical relations. For instance, take the inconsistency of resemblance being considered a *constant* relation in Section I of Part III, when resemblance is necessarily involved in any *inconstant* or philosophical relation (T 1.1.5.3; SBN 14). Consider: how can resemblance be both intuitive and inconstant at the same time it is *not* intuitive and inconstant when it is necessarily involved in any identity relation?

The asymmetry between Hume's treatment of relations in 'Of relations' and 'Of knowledge' is, in fact, striking.[127] What is the relationship between the natural relations in the elements of Hume's philosophy and the list of philosophical relations delineated in 'Of knowledge'? Precisely, why are the natural relations split up into both constant and inconstant

[127] Taking into account that Hume is following the accepted knowledge of his contemporaries in 'Of knowledge,' while offering a novel account in 'Of relations' (in so far as his theory of natural relations is concerned), I follow the latter as more representative of his philosophical position.

relations in the latter case? It seems odd that the three natural relations are not all understood as inconstant relations—indeed, if only identity and resemblance changed positions, then that *would* be the case.[128] And how can there even be the possibility of *constant* relations if the gentle force of mental attraction does not create an *inseparable* connection between ideas (T 1.1.4.1; SBN 10)?[129]

On the whole, the equivocation between 'resemblance' and 'identity' should be cause for concern in any interpretation of the *Treatise*. Take a final example where Hume says that identity is a relation that may be changed if there is an alteration in place, without any change in the object or idea. Yet how does he *define* the identity of relation subsequently? He says: "Two objects, tho' *perfectly resembling* each other, may be numerically different" (T 1.3.1.1; SBN 69, italics added).[130] Why would the phrase 'perfectly resembling' define an identity relation if resemblance and identity are *distinct* relations? There is clearly a need for an interpretive position that makes sense of these inconsistencies. Collapsing identity and resemblance into one species of relation, I

---

[128] On my view, if we treat the resemblance/identity relation as having both a natural and philosophical aspect, it resolves some of the disagreement between these two formulations of Hume's theory of relations. In that way, the resemblance/identity relation would be similar to (1) causality which features a natural and philosophical side and (2) contiguity which features spatial and temporal relations as its philosophical counterparts.

[129] Hume's distinction between constant and inconstant relations seems unintelligible, in fact, if the ontology of relations is not clear. If relations are derived from impressions and ideas, then there is always the possibility of relational claims turning out to be inconstant no matter how constant they might appear. On the other hand, if relations are associated by mind-dependent faculties, i.e., fixed by the imagination or reason, then there is no method to discern whether the relations are constant or inconstant. Take, for instance, '5 + 7 = 12' and '1 + 4 = 5'. Are the relations '=' and '+' constant or inconstant across these two instances? I cannot see any method to determine whether we can properly call the *relations* in Hume's 'relations of ideas' either constant or inconstant without appealing to some sort of ontology of relations.

[130] Hume may be following Locke in attempting to construe identity purely in terms of numerical identity, but it must be remembered that, on an atomistic account, numerical and qualitative identity are indistinguishable. We might think that the quality 'green' in a particular apple cannot be subject to an identity relation either because we do not take it to be a 'being' in the ordinary sense or because we take it as simply a quality. If, however, simple or complex impressions and ideas are all that exist, then qualities, like green, have the same 'being' as any animal or human. Qualities, such as properties, in the form of general terms do not escape numerical identity, for general terms only ever refer to particular ideas—and those particular ideas have the same numerical being as any other idea.

submit, helps toward doing so.[131] Of course, if my proposal is doubted, we may always rely on Hume's trusted argumentative tactic: if there is any instance where 'identity' or 'resemblance' is used in the *Treatise* to describe *something other* than a qualitative or quantitative similarity, then I readily concede.

2.2. Personal Identity: A Relational Case Study

Before I continue to expand on my reconstruction of Hume's theory of relations, I pause to consider how the first three sections bear on the issue of personal identity. Personal identity presents a core dilemma to Hume's atomism; atomic perceptions must be connected, and yet the connections themselves do not seem to be accounted for by a theory of atomic perceptions. How can this be?

Upon reflection in the appendix to his *Treatise*, Hume decides to plead the privilege of the sceptic regarding this question. He cannot see a way out of the dilemma. What he cannot ultimately reconcile is a contradiction, namely, "*that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and that the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences*" (AP 20; SBN 636). Of course, these two propositions do not actually form a contradiction. To make sense of what Hume means, I follow Jonathan Cottrell's reconstruction of the contradiction: "when the perceptions in question are all of those belonging to a given mind, there cannot be a further perception in that mind. So, it cannot supply a connection among them. So, they do not compose a whole. It follows that a mind is not a composite thing, whose parts are all its perceptions."[132] In other

---

[131] F. H. Bradley seems to suggest a similar view in so far as he, in one instance, reduces the "Laws which rule the void and which move ideas…[into] the law of Contiguity, and the law of Similarity or Agreement" (*Principles of Logic*, 277).

[132] "Minds, Composition, and Hume's Skepticism in the Appendix," 535.

words, the mind is composed of various perceptions, but there is no perception among them that represents the composition.

It is not my intention to solve the dilemma, but merely to indicate that its solution may be grounded in the same type of contradiction found in identity and resemblance relations.[133] The contradiction may be formulated in the following manner: *two or more* relata are the *same* at the same time and in the same respect. Two perceptions of green are taken as the same colour. Two perceptions of a cat are taken as the same cat. One person is said of two perceptions. The contradiction manifests itself when a relational similarity is reified as an independent perception. Consider the relation 'aRb,' where R denotes the relation between 'a' and 'b.' If we take 'R' as an ontologically valid perception, a contradiction arises. 'R' does not obtain as an individual perception in either 'a' or 'b', but we say that 'R' *is* a perception either (1) *in* 'a' or 'b' or (2) externally connecting 'a' and 'b'. 'R' cannot, however, be discerned in either 'a' or 'b,' nor is there any evidence supporting its external existence. Thus, we assert 'R's' existence without proof of its existence.

The contradiction, in fact, is unavoidable in any reification of relational resemblances or identities. Let us turn to an example relevant to personal identity: suppose that some mind—in its entirety—is made up of only five distinct perceptions: 'A B C D E.' If each distinct perception constitutes the mind (number), then where does the mind (unity) exist? It must be a *further perception* that unites all five perceptions. But Hume cannot reconcile that the mind is made up of

[133] Consider how much 'resemblance' and 'identity' feature in Hume's description of personal identity: "…must not the frequent placing of these *resembling* perceptions in the chain of thought, convey the imagination more easily from one link to another, and make the whole seem like the continuance of one object? In this particular, then, the memory not only discovers the *identity*, but also contributes to its production, by producing the relation of *resemblance* among the perceptions. The case is the same whether we consider ourselves or others" (T 1.4.6.18; SBN 260-1, italics added).

distinct perceptions and yet united by a further perception that is not part of the original set of distinct perceptions.

The dilemma might be solved if Hume did not suppose the composition of the mind to be a *perception*. Because Hume takes it to be a perception, he must search for it among his other perceptions. Alas, no perception of the composite mind may be found. If Hume, however, took the composition of mind as a relation—one whose ontology necessitates an attitude of agnosticism—then he need not search for any particular perception that contains the composition of mind as a unity. Instead, the composition of mind must be resolved into original qualities. To search for the ontology of the composition itself would be to go beyond the task of the philosopher.

On the other hand, when Hume supposes the composition of mind to be an ontologically real perception (instead of a mere relation), he finds the contradiction between unity and number in the appendix. That is, one mind is supposed to be many perceptions at the same time as it is one. The contradiction seems to account for at least one reason why Hume refers to personal identity as a fiction. By going beyond the effects of the natural relations and supposing an ontological basis *for* the effects, we hypothesize the existence of something unperceived.

Cottrell treats Hume's dilemma in the Appendix of the *Treatise* as two separate arguments: a metaphysical claim and a psychological claim. The former is that our minds are perceptions; the latter is that the mind is a composite. These two claims are what Hume cannot reconcile. I think he is correct in his assessment, but what I would add is that the mixture of the psychological (imaginatively-associated relations or epistemological categories) and the metaphysical (sensory impressions or ideas) is a defining feature of Hume's philosophy. Whenever psychological categories (and their effects) are taken as metaphysical impressions or ideas, self-

contradictory fictions arise. The imagination's propensity to complete the union by uniting the psychological (mind-dependent) with the metaphysical (mind-independent) naturally generates many of these fictions—indeed, the propensity carries over into the domain of social artifices, where justice, for instance, is both natural and artificial.

It is the inherent incompatibility between the 'relations of the imagination' and the 'atomic units of perception of the senses' that causes many interpretive issues in Hume's philosophy. On one hand, natural relations connect ideas, and yet all ideas are individuated and distinct. When the mind unifies—via identity, contiguity, or causality—the metaphysical multiplicity, there are apparently two contradictory features at work. By reifying psychological forces (associational principles) as metaphysical atoms of reality (perceptions), or by reifying metaphysical atoms of reality as psychological forces, contradictions are created.

In the first case, when we take identity as metaphysically real, we face a contradiction because we assume the identity (number) is a single perception (unity). In the second case, when we take a metaphysical idea as possessing the relation of identity, we face a contradiction because we assume the metaphysical idea (unity) is relational (number). As Robert Sokolowski puts it, "the contradictions that arise in our knowledge of nature come about because we naturally combine ideas that belong to the mind with ideas that come from objects."[134] Sokolowski's claim is trenchant, barring one exception. The ideas belonging to the mind cannot properly be called *ideas* if they are not properly derived from sensory impressions. We must remain agnostic as to the ontology of relations to which no correspondent impression may be discovered. In that sense, we ought to refer to relations as relations and fictions as fictions—and neither as impressions nor ideas. Still, there does not seem to be any solution for those complex ideas that feature both

[134] "Fiction and Illusion in David Hume's Philosophy," 204.

relations *and* perceptions. In Chapter 6, I show how Hume's philosophical perspectivism may help resolve this issue.

All told, the reification of the combination of the metaphysical with the psychological, the mind-dependent with the mind-independent, and the senses with the imagination presents us with an array of contradictions. Once a particular relation is reified, and we treat it as metaphysically real, the contradiction persists in any subsequent reasoning. The contradiction of identity persists in the idea of continued existence of objects. The contradiction of spatial aggregates persists in the idea of substance. The contradiction of supposing an external causality persists in the idea of objective or absolute necessity.[135]

An important caveat here is that the type of contradiction to which I am referring is not a *logical* contradiction, but a psychological or ideational contradiction. Two incompatible ideas are combined in the mind as *one*, thus producing a self-contradictory fiction. In Chapter 6, I discuss the varieties of contradiction in the *Treatise*.

3. A Simplified Theory of Hume's Relations

In an attempt to render Hume's theory of relations more consistent, I now return to my brief speculative reconstruction. First, I want to suggest that the natural and philosophical division between relations is not a division between relations themselves, but a division between which

---

[135] Vijay Mascarenhas notices a further self-contradiction concerning personal identity, namely, that relations themselves presuppose uniting principles: "Hume denied the existence of 'real' relations by resolving them into 'ideal' relations: there is no real necessary connection, for example, between the impressions of cause and effect, only an 'ideal' or associative one between the ideas of those impressions…When it comes to the belief in personal identity, however, Hume reaches a dead end in the labyrinth, for his explanatory apparatus wraps around itself: the ideal relations into which real relations are resolved themselves rely on something that not only explains the formation of the belief in personal identity, but would amount to, if not a constant and invariable self, then at least some kind of unity of consciousness. In other words, 'ideal' relations, while not bearing the same characteristics as 'real' relations do (or, would, if they existed), still presuppose 'uniting principles' that allow perceptions to be associated in the first place. Association and easy transition can occur, for example, only between ideas that belong to the same mind" ("Hume's Recantation Revisited," 295). For a similar construal of Hume's self-referential 'vicious regress,' see Michael Jacovides, "Hume's Vicious Regress."

part of the imagination forms the relation.[136] In other words, the entire list of relations—seven in total—may be understood as either natural or philosophical depending on the operation of imagination. In Chapter 2, I distinguished between the active/intentional and non-active/ unintentional sides of the exclusive imagination, and it is this distinction that, I think, captures the divide between natural and philosophical relations.

On such an account, the active imagination may think proper to compare any of the seven relations, while the passive imagination, which naturally unites ideas, may associate ideas by virtue of any of the seven relations. The natural association of ideas then unites ideas on the basis of relations such as quality, quantity, space, and time; they do not obtain exclusively by way of philosophical comparison.

Therefore, let us imagine that the three natural relations are *genera*, under which the seven philosophical relations are *species*.[137] All seven philosophical relations resolve themselves into the three natural relations, and there is no actual division between them *as* relations. Below I provide an interpretive model of how this simplified theory might look.

---

[136] Kemp Smith says that "Not only does Hume not mention the distinction between natural and philosophical relations in the *Enquiries*, he also gives no list of the relations that 'rest on comparisons'" (*The Philosophy of David Hume*, 250). Kemp Smith subsequently argues that the two chief defects in 'Of relations' is Hume's "enumeration of relations of time and space among the relations declared to be obtained by comparison, and his failure to recognize that like the relations of identity and causation they do *not* hold between 'ideas' (Ibid.).

Kemp Smith also points out Hume's mistake in not simplifying his theory of relations further: "As in the view, now so generally held, that there is but one law of association, describable (cf. F.H. Bradley, *The Principles of Logic*, 1st ed., p. 278) as the law of redintegration: 'Any part of a single state of mind tends, if reproduced, to re-instate the remainder; or Any element tends to reproduce those elements with which it has formed one state of mind.' This covers all forms of contiguity and all modes of causal constancy; and if resemblance be viewed as partial identity, will also cover so-called association by resemblance" (Ibid.). Notice that Kemp Smith recognizes the possibility of resemblance being understood as partial identity.

[137] By understanding relations in this sense, it counters Kail's claim that it "is not at all persuasive…to see how the relevant relations in demonstration could be related to the three associative relations, namely contiguity, resemblance and cause and effect. Certainly Hume drastically circumscribes the role of demonstration as opposed to association, but he does not assimilate demonstration to association" (*Projection and Realism in Hume's Philosophy*, 39). Thus, my view instead follows Loeb's in so far as he reduces demonstrative inference to associational inference, namely, that Hume is committed "to applying an associationist model to all belief-forming mechanisms" (*Stability and Justification in Hume's Treatise*, 245).

Identity

Sub-Relations: Relation of quality or quantity. Differs in quality (kind) or quantity (number).

Contiguity

Sub-Relations: Relation of time and space. Differs in distance and supposed time-lapse.

Causality

Sub-Relations: Relation of causality. Differs by an absence of causal relation.

On this account, every identity/resemblance relation—whether object identity or general term—will be a relation of quantity or quality. Every contiguous relation will be temporal or spatial. Every causal relation will be a constant conjunction of perceptions and/or a determination of mind. Note that the only relation left out is contrariety, which is represented in all forms of difference.[138]

Relation	**Related by**	**Differs by**
Identity	Quality or Quantity	Kind (Quality) or Number (Quantity)
Contiguity	Time (Succession) or Space (Extension)	Time-Lapse (Time) or Distance (Space)
Causality	Constant Conjunction/Determination	Absence of Constant Conjunction/ Determination

[138] Benjamin Cohen argues that contrariety (other than logical contrariety involving negation) must be understood as *empirical* contrariety, which ultimately reduces "to causality" ("Contrariety and Causality in Hume," 35). In other words, empirical contrariety is "contrary causation," which is "to be able to make valid inferences from the existence of one event to the non-existence of another causally contrary to it." Catherine Kemp, on the other hand, splits up contrariety into two different kinds, namely, "a contrariety between a conception of an object and a conception of another, different object…[and] contrariety between a conception of the first object and a recognition that the conception of the different object is not a conception, or is a non-conception, of the first" ("Contrariety in Hume," 60). While I do not adopt either view, I similarly amend contrariety into three related kinds: 'contrary causation,' 'contrary identity,' and 'contrary contiguity'—all of which signify a lack of relation or *difference*. I discuss contrariety in more detail in Chapter 6.

3.1. Natural Fictions and Natural Relations

Each natural relation involves a foundational imaginative propensity and a set of associated natural fictions.

Identity

The natural relation of identity unites (1) the quality of sameness across number or (2) the quantity of number across sameness. Out of this relation arise several types of *identity fictions*: the continued existence of objects, personal identity, plant and animal identity, and general terms.[139]

Contiguity

The natural relation of contiguity unites (1) successive perceptions (even in the case of interposed perceptions) or (2) contiguous parts of extension (even in the case of interposed parts). Out of this relation arises several types of *contiguity fictions*: fictitious duration, fictitious distance, fictitious unity, and fictitious equality.

Causality

The natural relation of causality unites either constant conjunctions or determinations of mind with mind-independent objects. Out of these relations arise several types of *causality fictions*: causal necessity, objective necessity, absolute necessity, general rules.

---

[139] Waxman argues that no other interpreter before him, to his knowledge, recognized "that personal identity, though the subject of *Treatise* I/iv/§6, is nevertheless premised in the account of the identity of bodies in iv/§2 and substances in iv/§§3-5" (*Hume's theory of consciousness*, 201). My interpretation follows Waxman in this respect, especially in so far as *perfect identity* (what I call the principle of identity) is "the archetype of all identities" and "the phenomenological engine driving identity relation[s]" (Ibid., 209).

Natural Relation	Foundational Principle	Set of Related Fictions
Identity	Principle of Identity	Object Identity (Continued Existence), General Terms, Personal Identity, Animal and Plant Identity
Contiguity	Principle of Unity	Duration, Distance, Unity, Equality
Causality	Principle of Necessity	Causal Necessity, Objective Necessity, Absolute Necessity, General Rules

3.2. Identity and Contiguity as Primary Relations

Identity and contiguity share the imaginative process of uniting two or more relata into one relation. These two relations are easily confused because they refer to the same objects. For instance, there are no empty parts of space or empty parts of time. Likewise, there are no qualitative or quantitative identities that are not disposed in the manner of spatial extension and temporal succession. Thus, whenever one natural fiction is reified in one primary relational sense, it is reified in the other.

Identity and contiguity are treated here as primary because all causal relations are dependent upon them. Causality is defined as either (1) constant (i.e., identity) conjunction (i.e., contiguity) or it is defined as (2) a determination of the mind to expect like (i.e., identity) effect from like (i.e., identity) cause, where cause and effect are understood to be contiguous in some

respect. Therefore, causality may be seen as the combination of the more primary relations of identity and contiguity.[140] If there is any doubt about this, consider the following experiments:

(a) Define constancy without referring to resemblance, identity, similarity, sameness, or any cognate term.

(b) Define conjunction without referring to contiguity.

In either case, I believe it is impossible. Therefore, the nature of causality is, on my view, the combination of identity and contiguity relations. In one passage, Hume even calls the determination of the mind involved in necessity a 'resembling conjunction.' What this seems to imply is that resemblance and contiguity are primary relations that, when combined, produce the third relation of causality. Consider how Hume describes causal determinations:

> For after we have observ'd the *resemblance* in a sufficient number of instances, we immediately feel a determination of the mind to pass from one object to its usual attendant, and to conceive it in a stronger light upon account of that *relation*. This determination is the only effect of the *resemblance*; and therefore must be the same with power or efficacy, whose idea is deriv'd from the *resemblance*. The several instances of *resembling conjunctions* lead us into the notion of power and necessity. These instances are in themselves totally distinct from each other, and have no union but in the mind, which observes them, and collects their ideas. Necessity, then, is the effect of this observation, and is nothing but an internal impression of the mind, or a determination to carry our thoughts from one object to another. Without considering it in this view, we can never arrive at the most distant notion of it, or be able to attribute it either to external or internal objects, to spirit or body, to causes or effects. (T 1.3.14.20; SBN 165, italics added)

---

[140] Waxman espouses a similarly reductionistic view, but, I suspect, would not accept the claim that resemblance and identity ought to be regarded as the same relation. Specifically, he argues that "relations of constant conjunction… are merely an amalgam of natural resemblance and contiguity relations" (*Hume's theory of consciousness*, 12). Annette Baier concurs: "Causal association always depends on the force of association of resembling *sequences* of events—the constancy of a conjunction is a matter of the resemblance between a given conjunction and the other past conjoinings of objects resembling the first conjunct, with objects resembling the second. Causal association is always a special case of association by resemblance, and also of association by contiguity" (*Progress*, 75). Don Ross likewise notices that, "[h]owever *powerful* causation might be in its effects and importance, the operation of this principle, along with that of contiguity, is *logically* dependent upon the association of resemblances. To put this in counterfactual terms, the existence of a mind which associates resembling perceptions but not causally related ones is *physically* impossible (because the world would surprise it to death), but not logically so, whereas the reverse case is inconceivable" ("Hume, Resemblance and the Foundations of Psychology," 347).

4. Hume's Theory of Relations and Natural Fictions

In my reconstruction of Hume's theory of relations, all three natural relations—identity, contiguity, and causality—involve a fundamental principle. The principle may be considered a law or a rule that Hume says, "is a kind of Attraction, which in the mental world will be found to have as extraordinary effects as in the natural, and to shew itself in as many and as various forms" (T 1.1.4.6; SBN 12-3). We might think of these epistemic laws in the same way as natural laws like gravity or laws of motion. When we attempt to assert an ontological basis for the laws of motion, we find we cannot. Instead, what we can do is observe its effects in the world, and therefore infer its existence. The law of gravity suffers from the same dilemma as the paradox of relations. That is, does gravity exist as an internal feature of objects or does it exist as an individuated and external thing in the world, even though it seems to occupy no space and is found in no elementary particles? Recourse to the idea of mass does not explain the paradox away, for the same question applies to mass. Is mass internal to any one particle or is it external? Or if it is a combination of particles, where in the combination of particles should we say mass resides? Of course, the dilemma is not just found in science, but in mathematics as well. Consider the famous dilemma found in set theory: does the set of constituents reside in itself or is it external to itself?

The fundamental principle of each natural relation in the mind causes various combinatory effects in the world. This sense-making ability of the imagination to connect our impressions and ideas together does not come without complication. In fact, the very process of uniting ideas embeds a dilemma in the way we perceive the world, namely, the problem of unity and number. That is to say, every united idea must be regarded as *one* and *many* at the same time and in the same respect. Once connected ideas are reified as either one *or* many, a contradiction

is produced. Yet, it is only upon philosophical reflection that we notice any contradiction. For the vulgar mind, the paradox of identity, unity, and necessity remains hidden.

In sum, the imagination connects incompatible ideas in its operation of tying together atomic units of perception. The process, however, is not to be regarded in a negative light. Indeed, a number of self-contradictory fictions produced by this process are necessary and useful for the conduct of life. In the next section, I offer a schema of natural epistemic fictions. For each, there are two separate imaginative propensities and two corresponding natural fictions, one self-contradictory and one hypothetical. In Chapter 5, I turn my attention to the natural moral artifices.

CHAPTER FOUR: NATURAL EPISTEMIC FICTIONS

1. A Typology of Natural Fictions and Artifices

While my interpretation concerns a special class of fiction in the *Treatise*, Hume exploits the concept for various other purposes in his philosophy. How might we interpret Hume's conceptual ambiguity with respect to 'fiction' and its cognates? In this chapter, I provide a classification system to account for his expansive use of fiction. Subsequently, I present an exhaustive schematic typology to account for the special class of fiction.

There are two main divisions in the proposed classification system such that four major categories of Humean fictions obtain. The first division reflects the earlier distinction made between the active, exclusive imagination and the passive, exclusive imagination. Fictions may either be:

(1) Unavoidable (generated by the passive imagination)

(2) Avoidable (generated by the active imagination)

There is no determinate separation between these two classes of fictions. It is instead a matter of degree. Unavoidable and avoidable fictions—to use Hume's terminology—"run insensibly into each other." I see the distinction therefore between unavoidable and avoidable fictions as a way to resolve a certain problem in the *Treatise*, namely:

> I must distinguish in the imagination betwixt the principles which are permanent, irresistable, 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… 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 custom and reasoning, may easily be subverted by a due contrast and opposition. (T 1.4.4.1; SBN 225)

While the principle of the association of ideas is the most permanent, unavoidable, and irresistible principle of the imagination, there are several other principles of the imagination to consider. I discussed many of these principles in Chapter 2.[141] Rather than calling them principles or qualities of the imagination, I will refer to them here as imaginative *propensities* for the sake of consistency.[142] Imaginative propensities—including the principle of association of ideas—are the original source of Hume's natural fictions and artifices.

The unavoidable/avoidable distinction attempts to cleave those universal and irresistible principles from those which are irregular and weak. An example will help demonstrate the point. There are two separate fictions children come to believe in the first few years of life. The first is the "very remarkable inclination in human nature, to bestow on external objects the same emotions, which it observes in itself" such as we see "in children, by their desire of beating the stones, which hurt them" (T 1.4.3.11; SBN 224). The imaginative propensity of children to bestow human emotion on inanimate matter is natural, but it may also be "suppress'd by a little reflection" (T 1.4.3.11; SBN 224). Similar to polytheism's attribution of human qualities to the natural world, this particular propensity is available to rational correction. In that way, it is avoidable.

On the other hand, children yield to a further natural "propension to bestow an identity on our resembling perceptions" (T 1.4.2.43; SBN 209). For Hume, this propensity "produces the fiction of a continu'd existence; since that fiction, as well as the identity, is really false, as is acknowledg'd by all philosophers, and has no other effect than to remedy the interruption of our

---

[141] Even though the principle of association is permanent and unavoidable, it is still not entirely *universal*. Instead, it is a general principle: "But tho' I allow this weakness in these three relations, and this irregularity in the imagination; yet I assert that the only *general* principles, which associate ideas, are resemblance, contiguity and causation" (T 1.3.6.13; SBN 92-3).

[142] Hume uses several nouns to describe imaginative principles: propensities, operations, methods, biases, qualities, and tendencies.

perceptions, which is the only circumstance that is contrary to their identity" (T 1.4.2.43; SBN 209). Yet how do contemporary psychologists now refer to this propensity? It is called object permanence, and it is one of the foundational elements of human cognition. In that way, it is unavoidable. No amount of reasoning may suppress it.

Children are then affected by varying imaginative propensities; some are open to rational correction while others are essential and unavoidable in the conduct of life.[143] The fiction of continued existence, for instance, is a natural belief—no matter what reflective reasoning may tell us about its falsehood we will continue to believe it. Whether a belief is true or false (in terms of correspondence) is not a reliable guide to assess the lawfulness or legitimacy of an idea, relation, or fiction. As a consequence, it is not only Hume's appeal to naturalism that justifies his approval of certain beliefs, but his pragmatism and attention to utility. Saul Traiger reworks Hume's worry in the passage above by claiming that:

> In order to assess what Hume felt was problematic with fictions, we must appreciate that fictions appear in two distinct contexts. First, there are the naturally occurring fictions of the vulgar; the fiction of duration and the fiction of continued existence are among these. Some fictions are inescapable; we all have them. Others can be avoided, such as occult properties and the philosopher's fiction of double existence. These are fictions which philosophers are prone to have, usually when trying to reconcile obviously incompatible but undeniable facts.[144]

To understand the real worry concerning imaginative principles in the *Treatise*, we must look to Hume's specific wording: those ideas and fictions arising from the weak propensities of the imagination "are neither unavoidable to mankind, nor necessary, *or so much as useful in the conduct of life*" (T 1.4.4.1; SBN 225, italics added). In this, I take Hume to be adding a further pragmatic qualification to his broader distinction between imaginative propensities. To properly assess ideas

---

[143] Of course, this feature of human nature is open to change given an alternate set of natural circumstances or given certain evolutionary pressures. Hume's probabilism always grounds his (even apparently categorical) assertions.

[144] "Impressions, Ideas, and Fictions," 395.

and fictions of the imagination, it is not enough to simply evaluate them by virtue of irresistibility or natural belief—we must assess whether fictions are either:

(1) Useful

(2) Useless

The twofold division between useful fictions and useless fictions, on my view, gets at the genuine root of Hume's uncertainty regarding the imagination. Recall the claim that "most people… readily allow, that the useful qualities of the mind are virtuous, because of their utility" (T 3.3.6.2; SBN 618). Simply because certain principles of the mind *are* weak and irregular does not imply that they are useless. Indeed, 'eureka moments' touted by creative geniuses in art, science and mathematics are often irregular, and yet, at the same time, highly useful and necessary to human advancement.

In Chapter 1, I explained how Hume's experimental method revealed that several foundational relations of human nature are not justifiable by reason or verifiable by the senses—they are instead natural relations generated by the imagination. The imaginative propensities responsible for natural relations *are the same* as those responsible for useless fictions and errors. Thus, while we ought to distinguish between active and passive fictions of the imagination, it stands to reason that we ought to distinguish between useful and useless fictions as well.[145] In so doing, the naturalistic approach is appropriately qualified to account for unhealthy (useless) versus healthy (useful) ideas and fictions.

Below is a classificatory rendering of the four categories:

---

[145] John Biro puts the concern like this: "While Hume sometimes uses the term *fiction* to label a fundamental natural belief produced by this property of the mind, we must be careful not to be misled into thinking of such a belief as somehow fanciful and arbitrary. Fictions of this sort are not optional: they are forced on us by our nature. Distinguishing such fictions from those resulting from philosophical speculation floating free of common sense is a large, indeed, arguably the central, part of the overall aim of Hume's philosophy" ("Hume's New Science of the Mind," 42). These non-optional fictions Biro calls "natural fictions."

(1) Avoidable, Useless Fictions

Soul, Substance, Accident, Substantial Forms, Occult Qualities, Double Existence Doctrine, Polytheism, Transubstantiation, Holy Orders, Certain Philosophical Fictions, Ancient Fictions and Artifices, Lying and Deceit, etc.

(2) Avoidable, Useful Fictions

Perfect Equality,[146] Poetical Artifices,[147] Poetical Fictions,[148] Certain Philosophical Fictions,[149] Legal Fictions,[150] Artificial Experiments,[151] Political Rhetoric as Artifice,[152] Mathematical Artifice,[153] Public Education,[154] Social Conventions,[155] Emotional Fictions,[156] etc.

(3) Unavoidable, Useless Fictions

Dream Fictions,[157] Miracles,[158] Optical Illusions,[159] etc.

(4) Unavoidable, Useful Fictions

---

[146] See T 1.2.4.18-T 1.2.4.30; SBN 45-51.

[147] See T 1.3.10.7; SBN 122.

[148] See T 1.3.10.6; SBN 121.

[149] See T 3.2.2.14; SBN 493.

[150] See T 3.2.6.7; SBN 529.

[151] See T 1.3.8.14; SBN 104-5

[152] See T 3.3.1.11; SBN 578.

[153] See T 1.4.1.3; SBN 181.

[154] See T 3.2.6.11, SBN 533-4.

[155] See T 3.2.2.10; SBN 490.

[156] See T 2.2.7.3; SBN 369.

[157] See T 1.4.3.1; SBN 219. Whether or not Hume believes dreams are useless or useful is not clear. The classification herein should not be taken as definitive of Hume's views, but rather as an interpretive heuristic.

[158] See T 3.1.2.10; SBN 475.

[159] See T 1.3.9.11; SBN 112.

This final category of unavoidable, useful fictions is what I have called the 'special class' of fictions in the *Treatise*.[160] This class of fictions is divided into natural epistemic fictions and natural moral artifices. In this chapter, I discuss the natural epistemic fictions. In Chapter 5, I discuss the natural moral artifices.

Natural epistemic fictions resolve into (1) contiguity fictions, (2) causality fictions, and (3) identity fictions. Each fiction involves a primary principle of the imagination. The primary principle is generative of human perception; it is, in effect, what constitutes each natural relation.[161] The principle of unity accounts for the natural relation of contiguity. The principle of necessity accounts for the natural relation of causality. The principle of identity accounts for the natural relation of identity/resemblance.

Natural fictions are produced by each principle's interaction with two further imaginative propensities: (a) uniting incompatible ideas and (b) reifying hypothetical relations. Although these imaginative propensities are generative of useless fictions, they are central to the natural fictions and moral artifices categorized here as *unavoidable, useful* fictions.

Features of Unavoidable, Useful Fictions

There are several criteria in the proposed typology for unavoidable, useful fictions. Each natural fiction will be analyzed via the following:

---

[160] It is worth noting that 'unavoidability' ought to be taken in a general sense. For instance, the natural fiction of the continued existence of objects may be avoided via intense sceptical doubt. 'Unavoidability,' in this case, merely means that the sceptical doubt may not be maintained; the fiction must return. Other natural fictions are more avoidable, such as the belief in fictitious equality and absolute necessity. Although we may doubt these natural fictions for longer periods, given the proper circumstances all humans will come to believe them. Therefore, I do not take natural fictions as a categorical class: the two variables—unavoidability and usefulness—are on a sliding scale of imaginative illusion. In Galen Strawson's words: "Some fictions are better and more useful than others" (*Secret Connexion*, 50).

[161] The uniting principles are the formal aspect of Hume's ontology: "Now the only qualities, which can give ideas an union in the imagination, are these three relations above-mention'd. These are the uniting principles in the ideal world, and without them every distinct object is separable by the mind, and may be separately consider'd, and appears not to have any more connexion with any other object, than if disjoin'd by the greatest difference and remoteness" (T 1.4.6.16; SBN 260).

(1) Requisite Impressions: What impressions or ideas are involved in generating the fiction?

(2) Imaginative Propensity of Uniting Incompatible Ideas: What incompatible ideas are united?

(3) Imaginative Propensity of Hypothesizing: What fictions are hypothesized?

(4) Generated Fiction: What is the name of the unavoidable, useful fiction?

(5) Related Useful Fictions: Are there other useful fictions that share a family resemblance?

(6) Related Useless Fictions: Are there useless fictions that share a family resemblance?

(7) Self-Contradiction: What is the contradiction involved in the fiction?

(8) Reified Hypothesis: What hypothetical fiction is reified by way of completing the union?

(9) Discussion: How is the fiction discussed in the *Treatise*?

Unavoidable, Useful Fictions: An Overview

Natural Epistemic Relations

(a) Contiguity Fictions (Principle of Unity) — Fictitious Unity, Fictitious Duration, Fictitious Distance, Fictitious Equality

(b) Causality Fictions (Principle of Necessity) — Objective Necessity, Absolute Necessity, General Rules of the Imagination

(c) Identity Fictions (Principle of Identity) — Fictitious Identity, Continued Existence of Objects or Object Identity, Personal Identity, Verbal Identity & General Terms

Natural Moral Relations

(a) Artifice of Liberty — Liberty of Indifference

(b) Artifices of Justice — Property, Promises, Government

(c) Artifice of God — Intelligent Designer

Unavoidable, Useful Fictions: A Typology

2. Contiguity Fictions

2.1. Principle of Unity

The principle of unity is the primary operation of the natural relation of contiguity. Essentially, it acts to unite distinct, atomic spatial and temporal ideas. When incompatible ideas are united, a self-contradictory fiction is produced. Likewise, when the principle unites ideas beyond past or present perceptions, the fiction of a reified hypothesis is created. First, I discuss the general principle of fictitious unity. Second, I provide a set of related fictions derived from the principle.

2.2. Fictitious Unity

Requisite Impressions: Any simple idea or impression—"existence in itself belongs only to unity"—where the quality of simplicity is united with complex impressions or ideas (T 1.2.2.3; SBN 30).

Imaginative Propensity of Uniting Incompatible Ideas: Uniting the idea of unity derived from simple impressions or ideas with complex impressions or ideas or vice-versa.

Imaginative Propensity of Hypothesizing: Completing the union such that atomic spatial and temporal ideas are thought to form a universal substance, space, or time.

Generated Fiction: "That term of unity is merely a fictitious denomination, which the mind may apply to any quantity of objects it collects together; nor can such an unity any more exist alone than number can, as being in reality a true number" (T 1.2.2.3; SBN 30-1).

Related Useful Fictions:

(1) Any supposed unity such as twenty men, a globe, or the universe

(2) Extension as a unity

(3) Number as being in reality a true number[162]

(4) Mind (T 1.4.2.39; SBN 207)

Related Useless Fictions: Soul, Substance, Accident, Substantial Forms, Occult Qualities, and Transubstantiation

Self-Contradiction: Unity ≠ Number

Reified Hypothesis: Perfect Numerical or Qualitative Unity or Simplicity

Discussion: Hume's discussion of fictitious unity grounds his broader philosophy of mathematics. Indeed, if we take Hume's discussion of fictitious unity seriously, it seems that he must be taken as a type of mathematical anti-realist.[163] For instance, he says "'tis…absurd to suppose any number to exist, and yet deny the existence of unites" (T 1.2.2.3; SBN 30). All numbers are comprised of unities, but only unities are real because "existence in itself belongs only to unity" (T 1.2.2.3; SBN 30). Thus, any number—while existentially valid in so far as it is an aggregate of unities—is fictitious if reified as a collection in itself. In other words, the number two is real if it is understood as a collection two unities, but if the number two is considered *as* a single entity, then it is only by the attribution of a fictitious unity that we understand it as such.[164]

Hume notes a similarity between his discussion of identity and simplicity/unity. In fact, fictitious unity and fictitious identity share the same imaginative propensity:

> What I have said concerning the first origin and uncertainty of our notion of identity, as apply'd to the human mind, may be extended with little or no variation to that

---

[162] Waxman argues that "from Hume's perspective, all such numbers (including any non-denumerable infinites) are quantities of fictitious units, with no reality of any kind outside associative imagination or linguistic convention" ("Psychologistic Foundations," 145).

[163] Hume's discussion of mathematical equality, infinity, etc., seems to indicate a general attack on mathematical realism.

[164] Hume's argument perhaps anticipates the later movement of logical atomism in this respect. Particularly relevant here is Bertrand Russell's theory of 'logical fictions' or 'logical constructions,' where numbers do not occupy a special ontological class. As Russell argues: "There are particulars, but when one comes on to classes, and classes of classes, and classes of classes of classes, one is talking of logical fictions" (*The Philosophy of Logical Atomism*, 105).

> of *simplicity*. An object, whose different co-existent parts are bound together by a close relation, operates upon the imagination after much the same manner as one perfectly simple and indivisible, and requires not a much greater stretch of thought in order to its conception. From this similarity of operation we attribute a simplicity to it, and feign a principle of union as the support of this simplicity, and the center of all the different parts and qualities of the object. (T 1.4.6.22; SBN 263)

The propensity of the imagination to unite incompatible ideas, namely, simplicity/unity with complex impressions or ideas, results in a self-contradictory fiction. We take a collection or number of distinct unities as one single unity.[165] Of course, the connection seems most apparent in relation to Hume's discussion of the self and personal identity. A collection or heap of ideas—while numerically and perceptually distinct—is taken as both identical and unified. Either collection, however, is only a fiction of the imagination. The implications of fictitious unity are, on my view, far more extensive than Hume seems to suggest. For instance, the account of general terms, which represent a collection of particular ideas, appears to involve the principle of unity or identity. I discuss this point in section 4.5.

2.3. Fictitious Duration

Requisite Impressions: "The idea of duration is always deriv'd from a succession of changeable objects" (T 1.2.3.11; SBN 37).

Imaginative Propensity of Uniting Incompatible Ideas: Uniting the idea of duration with an unchangeable object. Specifically, "ideas always represent the objects or impressions, from which they are deriv'd, and can never without a fiction represent or be apply'd to any other. By what

[165] Waxman suggests that "When supplemented by the illusion whereby the objects of the senses besides vision and touch are regarded as conjoined in the same places their common objects are, the fiction [of a sense-divide transcending object] is expanded to incorporate all the senses into what is, for all intents and purposes, a single, integrated *external sense* with its own simple and individual sense-divide transcending objects. And the collective result of positing such objects must inevitably be the conflating of visible and tangible extension themselves in the fiction of a single, individual space, common to all our senses, with a single, sense-divide transcending ordered manifold of positions (points)" ("Hume and the Origin of Our Ideas of Space and Time," 87).

fiction we apply the idea of time, even to what is unchangeable, and suppose, as is common, that duration is a measure of rest as well as of motion" (T 1.2.3.11; SBN 37). In other words, the self-contradictory fiction of unchangeable time.

Imaginative Propensity of Hypothesizing: Completing the union by supposing time itself to be unchanging.

Generated Fiction: Fictitious Duration. An unchangeable object participating in successive perceptions.

Related Useful Fictions: Principle of Identity

Related Useless Fictions: Time without succession

Self-Contradiction: Duration ≠ Unchangeable

Reified Hypothesis: Absolute Time (Eternity)

Discussion: "The idea of time or duration…implies succession, and that when we apply its idea to any unchangeable object, 'tis only by a fiction of the imagination, by which the unchangeable object is suppos'd to participate of the changes of the co-existent objects, and in particular of that of our perceptions. This fiction of the imagination almost universally takes place" (T 1.4.2.29; SBN 200-1). Fictitious duration therefore is an idea in the vulgar mind that serves as a foundational way in which humans perceive the world. It almost universally takes place in human nature such that it cannot be regarded as irregular or weak, even though it appears to be caused by trivial propensities of the imagination.

A concern not addressed by Hume is his unidirectional approach to identifying the misapplication of the idea of duration. It seems to me the process is symmetrical (rather than unidirectional) in so far as the idea of duration may be equally applied to an unchangeable object *just the same as* the idea of an unchangeable object may be applied to duration. It is impossible to

decide in what direction the application runs. Unity and number are both foundational to any identity attribution. Indeed, there is no identity relation without both. In that case, it is a type of causality dilemma. What came first: the application of duration to an unchangeable object or the application of an unchangeable object to duration? It is a matter that, I presume, Hume would say is beyond our understanding, and thus we ought to reject any presumed answer as presumptuous and chimerical. For that reason, let us take the process as a *union* of two incompatible ideas instead of an application.[166]

2.4. Fictitious Distance

Requisite Impressions: "We acquire an idea of it by the comparing of objects" (T 1.1.5.1; SBN 14). Specifically, distance obtains between things which we conceive as having *less* relation. Resembling sensations or acts of mind—wherein distant objects and contiguous objects *feel* the same—is the *cause* of why we convert distance to extension.

Imaginative Propensity of Uniting Incompatible Ideas: The idea of distance (not visible or tangible) is united with extension (composition of visible and tangible points) (T 1.2.5.21; SBN 62). In other words, "we imagine we have an idea of extension without the idea of any object either of the sight or feeling" for three reasons: (1) "The distant objects affect the senses in the same manner, whether separated by the one distance or the other," (2) "the second species of distance is found capable of receiving the first," and (3) "they both equally diminish the force of every quality" (T 1.2.5.18; SBN 59).

---

[166] The language of 'application' may even echo a sort of subject-predicate or substance-accident dichotomy. For Locke and Hume—who both subscribed to theories of *ideas*—there is no possibility of such logical or relational dichotomies. What is possible instead are symmetrical relations. Simple or complex ideas are thus united symmetrically rather than applied from one to the other. Passmore argues that in terms of "Locke's logic there can be no distinction, for 'agreeing' is a symmetrical relation, and it holds between ideas which are all of the same ontological status" (*Hume's Intentions*, 24). The same is true for Hume, even though his use of the term 'apply'd' seems to muddle the fact.

Imaginative Propensity of Hypothesizing: Completing the union by supposing the idea of absolute space.

Generated Fiction: Fictitious Distance. "Imaginary distance or interval interpos'd betwixt tangible or solid objects" (T 1.2.5.13; SBN 58).

Related Useful Fictions: Absolute space, Spatial difference

Related Useless Fictions: Vacuum—"This invisible and intangible distance is also found *by experience* to contain a capacity of receiving body, or of becoming visible and tangible" (T 1.2.5.25; SBN 63).

Self-Contradiction: Distance ≠ Extension

Reified Hypothesis: Absolute Space and the Vacuum

Discussion: Hume prefigures Hans Vaihinger (whom I discuss in Chapter 6) by suggesting that this particular fiction is caused by treating perceptions "*as if* the distance betwixt them were fill'd with visible objects, that give us a true idea of extension" (T 1.2.5.15; SBN 58-9, italics added). *As if* is a revealing phrase suggesting that we accept a belief or idea as true even when it may be unverifiable, feigned, or false. Hume tends to use the word *suppos'd* more often than *as if*, but each term describes a similar phenomenon in human nature.

Moreover, Hume specifically connects the 'as if' statement with fiction in the following passage: "When every thing is annihilated in the chamber…the chamber must be conceiv'd much in the same manner as at present, when the air that fills it, is not an object of the senses. This annihilation leaves to the *eye*, that *fictitious distance*" (T 1.2.5.23; SBN 62, italics added).

Though outside the scope of this dissertation, I see the empirical status of 'negation' in the *Treatise* to be a fruitful area for further research. Is, for instance, negation (or difference) to be treated as fictional for the reason that it is not only unverifiable but an existential impossibility

within Hume's ontological picture? Hume claims that difference and negation are the same in so far as they imply the absence of anything real or positive (T 1.1.5.10; SBN 15). How might an impression or idea contain something that is, at the same time, nothing? Is fictitious unity generative of the idea of fictitious negation? Hume's discussion of distance provides further insight into a possible connection:

> Any great *difference* in the degrees of any quality is call'd a *distance* by a common metaphor, which, however trivial it may appear, is founded on natural principles of the imagination. A great difference inclines us to produce a distance. The ideas of distance and difference are, therefore, connected together. Connected ideas are readily taken for each other; and this is in general the source of the metaphor. (T 2.2.10.10; SBN 393)

Is Hume correct in describing distance and difference as separate terms? On the face of it, it seems that distance and difference are synonymous, where distance is a species of spatial difference under the genus of 'difference.' Indeed, Hume's analysis of fictitious distance is one potential way to understand the ontology of negation/difference in his philosophy.

2.5. Fictitious Equality

Requisite Impressions: When "the eye, or rather the mind is…able at one view to determine the proportions of bodies, and pronounce them equal to, or greater or less than each other, without examining or comparing the number of their minute parts" (T 1.2.4.22; SBN 47; 637).

Imaginative Propensity of Uniting Incompatible Ideas: Uniting inaccurate measurements with an imaginary standard. After we consider "several loose standards of equality…correcting them by each other, we proceed to imagine so correct and exact a standard of that relation, as is not liable to the least error or variation" (T 1.4.2.22; SBN 198).

Imaginative Propensity of Hypothesizing: The imagination goes beyond fictitiously equal measurements and completes the union by supposing a perfect standard of equality.

Generated Fiction: Fictitiously or Perfectly Equal Measurements

Related Useful Fictions: The Principle of Identity

Related Useless Fictions: Perfect Extensional Equality

Self-Contradiction: Same ≠ Different

Reified Hypothesis: The Standard of Perfect Equality

Discussion: Hume considers fictitious equality at length in the following passage:

> …we therefore suppose some imaginary standard of equality, by which the appearances and measuring are exactly corrected, and the figures reduc'd entirely to that proportion. This standard is plainly imaginary. For as the very idea of equality is that of such a particular appearance corrected by juxta-position or a common measure, the notion of any correction beyond what we have instruments and art to make, is a mere fiction of the mind, and useless as well as incomprehensible. But tho' this standard be only imaginary, the fiction however is very natural; nor is any thing more usual, than for the mind to proceed after this manner with any action, even after the reason has ceas'd, which first determin'd it to begin. This appears very conspicuously with regard to time; where tho' 'tis evident we have no exact method of determining the proportions of parts, not even so exact as in extension, yet the various corrections of our measures, and their different degrees of exactness, have given us an obscure and implicit notion of a perfect and entire equality. (T 1.2.4.24; SBN 48)

It is clear in this passage that Hume believes there are *natural fictions*. These particular fictions are generated by the imagination going beyond the initial reason which first determined it to proceed in a certain manner.[167] The propensity of the imagination to go beyond experience and imagine the perfect form or standard of a relation is fundamental to many of the fictions in the present typology.[168]

The idea of perfect equality is an unavoidable fiction because, as Hume argues, it is very natural. Indeed, nothing is "more usual, than for the mind" to proceed in such a manner (T

---

[167] Even though Hume uses the term 'reason'—"nor is any thing more usual, than for the mind to proceed after this manner with any action, even after the reason has ceas'd"—it seems that the term 'relation' might be more accurate (T 1.2.4.24; SBN 48).

[168] John Yolton specifically labels the imaginary standard of equality a "*natural* fiction" (*Perceptual Acquaintance from Descartes to Reid*, 168).

1.2.4.24; SBN 48). If the vulgar mind juxtaposes common measures, it is unavoidable that those imperfect measures will lead to the idea of a perfect measure of equality, given the natural propensity of the imagination to go beyond present impressions.

That said, is the fiction of perfect equality useful or useless? Hume seems to think that perfect equality is "useless as well as incomprehensible" (T 1.2.4.24; SBN 48). To the latter claim, perfect equality is incomprehensible because there is no corresponding idea or impression. When we conceive of perfect equality, we do not think of any idea in particular. It appears that the idea of infinity shares a relationship with perfect equality in this respect—we have an idea of infinite divisibility, for instance, but it is not derived from experience.[169] Therefore, in both cases, it must be a fiction of the imagination—reason and the senses cannot produce ideas of perfect equality or infinity.[170] As Hume argues:

> The greatest part of philosophers, when ask'd what they mean by equality, say, that the word admits of no definition, and that it is sufficient to place before us two equal bodies, such as two diameters of a circle, to make us understand that term. Now this is taking the *general appearance* of the objects for the standard of that proportion, and renders our imagination and senses the ultimate judges of it. But such a standard admits of no exactness, and can never afford any conclusion contrary to the imagination and senses. (AB 29; SBN 659)

---

[169] Fred Wilson makes a similar case by relating perfect equality to infinity. Particularly, he appeals to Locke's meaning of incomprehensibility: "Incomprehensibility is linked to the concept of infinity and is contrasted to positive ideas that are comprehensible" (*The External World*, 296). For Hume, Wilson draws the same conclusion with respect to the incomprehensibility of perfect equality. Contra Antony Flew, who takes perfect equality to be meaningless since it is not empirically derived, Wilson argues that perfect equality *is* empirically derived. It is, however, an *ideal form* of empirically-derived imperfect ideas. Therefore, it is meaningful even while incomprehensible. Wilson warns that, in the case of fictions, "we must remember that the use of this term does not necessarily imply for the eighteenth century as it does for us the notion of falsehood. It has the implication, rather, of 'being made': to say that an idea is a fiction is to say that it is made by us. Again, the point is to contrast Hume's position with that of his Cartesian and Platonist opponents. For the latter, ideas of ideal forms are innate, not made by us, but deriving from an external and superior spiritual source. For Hume, in contrast, these ideas of ideal forms are made by us, they are human products of a human mind" (Ibid., 299).

[170] Following Aristotle, infinity may be differentiated into two sorts: (1) potential infinity and (2) actual infinity. The latter, on Aristotle's account, is hypothetical and possible, while the former is impossible and incomprehensible. In the present typology, the sort of infinity to which I am referring is potential infinity. In other words, the idea that it is, in principle, possible for cardinal numbers to be counted indefinitely. Actual infinity, on the other hand, is a self-contradictory fiction because it supposes the infinite and the finite in the same concept. Hume indirectly explores the contradiction of infinity at T 1.2.2.1; SBN 29.

Perfect equality and infinite divisibility mistake the general appearance of equal bodies and divisible extension, respectively, for *actual* ideas.[171] Instead, there are no impressions or ideas from which perfect equality or infinity derive. They are unverifiable hypotheses generated by the propensity of the imagination to go beyond its principles of association and complete the union. In other words, both are natural fictions that arise in the vulgar mind upon measuring or division.

Of course, infinity and equality are central to the domain of mathematics. How can Hume suggest that equality is *useless* when basic equations such as '1+1=2' rely on it? In Hume's discussions on the passions, he suggests that "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; SBN 414). It is only in this sense that perfect equality and infinity are useful. Thus, contrary to what Hume previously said about perfect equality, he subsequently argues that:

> Mathematics…are useful in all mechanical operations, and arithmetic in almost every art and profession: But 'tis not of themselves they have any influence. Mechanics are the art of regulating the motions of bodies *to some design'd end or purpose*; and the reason why we employ arithmetic in fixing the proportions of numbers, is only that we may discover the proportions of their influence and operation. (T 2.3.3.2; SBN 413-4)[172]

Fictitious equality is unavoidable and natural in the vulgar mind, but its use only becomes apparent in mechanical operations and in its relationship to the direction of judgment. More importantly, fictitious equality is foundational to mathematics. In another passage, Hume illustrates the relationship between the fictitious identity involved in the continued existence of

---

[171] Indeed, the word 'general' signals, in many cases, a 'convention' of some sort—whether that be general terms, general rules, or general appearances. In all of these cases, I suggest there is a human-made or fictional element involved. Concerning geometry, instead of using the word 'hypothesis' or 'completion of the union,' Waxman, like Wilson, calls it an ideal—"The ideal of a true standard must therefore be renounced, and geometers, like the rest of us, must learn to make do with arbitrary standards of equality, fixed by convention (inches, feet, yards, etc.)" (*Hume's theory of consciousness*, 120).

[172] The phrase 'fixing the proportions of numbers' is an essential act of the imagination in fiction-generation.

objects and fictitious equality. In fact, each fiction is generated by the same imaginative propensity—"*I have already observ'd, in examining the foundation of mathematics*, that the imagination, when set into any train of thinking, is apt to continue, even when its object fails it, and like a galley put in motion by the oars, carries on its course without any new impulse" (T 1.4.2.22; SBN 198, italics added). For identity and equality, the imagination's "train of observing an uniformity among objects…naturally continues, till it renders the uniformity as compleat as possible" (T 1.4.2.22; SBN 198). Thus, the imagination's propensity to complete the union of relations is necessary to the foundation of science (external world) and mathematics (perfect unity/numbers and equality).[173]

3. Causality Fictions

3.1. Principle of Necessity

The principle of necessity is the primary operation of the natural relation of causality. Essentially, it acts to unite distinct sets of resembling conjunctions. When incompatible ideas are united in this process, a self-contradictory fiction is produced. Likewise, when the principle unites ideas beyond past or present perceptions, the fiction of a reified hypothesis is created.

[173] In Frederick Whelan's interpretation: "Science itself, however, though an expression of human nature, lacks a purely rational foundation, and awareness of its status should properly induce caution in its pursuit. The notions of objectivity and causality on which science is based are 'fictions' of the imagination, albeit compelling ones and ones that are more useful than other fictions; thus science as a whole for Hume is a kind of mental artifice. Like the conventions of the moral world, its function is to control or discipline the irregular impulses of feeling and the imagination, and to legitimate and encourage particular sorts of reasoning and judgments, with the end of advancing basic human interests…We adopt this artifice, and determine to conduct our reasoning in accordance with its logical standards, because we find that it suits our purposes to do so: it brings order to our cognitive life and permits the sort of control over our environment that we find conducive to our well-being" (*Order and Artifice*, 308). In a similar vein, he remarks: "Causality, it must be remembered, is in the end an imaginative fiction for Hume (a word that of course is not equivalent to falsehood), and thus the logical structure of scientific reasoning is itself a mental artifice" (Ibid., 17-8).

3.2. Objective Necessity

Requisite Impressions: "Necessity, then, is the effect of this observation, and is nothing but an internal impression of the mind, or a determination to carry our thoughts from one object to another" (T 1.3.14.20; SBN 165). That is, Hume's second definition of cause.

Imaginative Propensity of Uniting Incompatible Ideas: To unite the *determination* of the mind to pass from one object to its usual attendant with external objects. In other words, given that "the mind has a great propensity to spread itself on external objects, and to conjoin with them any internal impressions," we unite the internal impression of mind with the external or objectively real (T 1.3.14.25; SBN 167).

Imaginative Propensity of Hypothesizing: See next section.

Generated Fiction: Objective Necessity

Related Useful Fictions: Objective Customs or Laws

Related Useless Fictions: Power, Agency, Force, Efficacy, Energy, Connexion, Productive Quality

Self-Contradiction: Internal Determination ≠ External Determination

Reified Hypothesis: See next section.

Discussion: Admittedly, Hume never says that objective necessity is a *fiction*. Given the entailments of his broader empirical commitments, however, I submit that it is appropriate to do so.[174] While we may take the internal determination of causality as empirically verifiable, its unification with

[174] Barry Stroud also seems to think that, for Hume, causal necessity is a fiction: "It is this attribution of 'fictions' to all human beings that I think gives Hume's version of naturalism its peculiar character and its distinctly provocative air…The 'fictional' or purely subjectively-generated character of human belief is said to extend to *all* beliefs in *any* enduring bodies or in *any* active, thinking subjects or in *any* causal connections between things or in *any* moral qualities of any actions at all. The whole conception from one end to the other is seen to be an elaborate put-up job that the human mind cannot help indulging in as long as it receives the kinds of impressions that set its 'principles of the imagination' in action" ("The Constraints of Hume's Naturalism," 348). Of course, Stroud wonders whether Hume's naturalism reaches its limits here by virtue of self-reference, namely, if all of our beliefs are discovered to be fictions, then what grounds the truth of that discovery? Hans Vaihinger faced similar criticism after the publication of *The Philosophy of As If*. Like Stroud, Harold W. Noonan argues that "our mistaken belief that causes and effects are necessarily connected is a 'fiction of the imagination', which results from the mind's 'propensity to spread itself on external objects'" (*Hume: On Knowledge*, 11).

external objects must be viewed as a self-contradictory fiction. In other words, a cause cannot be both internal and external or subjective and objective. When we take causal relations to exist in objects, the combination is impossible, and yet we still have such an idea. Hence, the fiction of objective necessity.[175]

The imaginative propensity to unite internal impressions with external objects is not exclusive to objective necessity. For Hume, "as certain sounds and smells are always found to attend certain visible objects, we *naturally imagine* a conjunction, even in place, betwixt the objects and qualities, tho' the qualities be of such a nature as to admit of no such conjunction, and really exist no where" (T 1.3.14.25; SBN 167, italics added). The fiction arises from the combination of two incompatible ideas; any such compound idea is by nature unverifiable, self-contradictory, and impossible. Indeed, "the same propensity is…why we suppose necessity and power to lie in the objects we consider, not in our mind, that considers them" (T 1.3.14.25; SBN 167).

3.3. Absolute Necessity

Requisite Impressions: Two contiguous impressions followed by two resembling contiguous impressions. That is, Hume's first definition of cause.

Imaginative Propensity of Uniting Incompatible Ideas: See above section.

Imaginative Propensity of Hypothesizing: To suppose that the *custom* or *inference* to pass from one object to its usual attendant goes beyond past and present impressions. The idea of absolute necessity is

[175] Bernard Freydberg argues that the imagination is "the preeminent faculty or function: it generates fictions that can become beliefs…[it is] the sole basis of that fiction-become-belief that we call cause and effect. One could say with justification that it was Hume's analysis of the concept of cause and effect, treating it as is [sic] fundamentally fiction [sic] that jolted Kant awake" (*David Hume: Platonic Philosopher, Continental Ancestor*, 3). Freydberg criticizes Hume scholarship, especially in the analytic tradition, for not recognizing the full import of the imagination's productive capacity and its tie to Hume's theoretical and practical thought. Indeed, he holds that Hume's imagination and associated fictions are central to the development of continental philosophy.

derived from the hypothesis that causal relations exist universally, and past experience is uniform. In other words, it is the reification of a hypothetical idea. First, "custom readily carries us beyond the just bounds in our passions, as well as in our reasonings" (T 2.1.6.8; SBN 293). Second, once the mind is "in the train of observing an uniformity among objects, it naturally continues, till it renders the uniformity as compleat as possible" (T 1.4.2.22; SBN 198). The first propensity provides the uniformity, while the second is the process of reification such that the uniformity is reified to exist perfectly across time. The hypothesis of any given causal relation remains probable, but the reification of the hypothesis leads to the fiction of absolute necessity.

Generated Fiction: Absolute Necessity

Related Useful Fictions: Absolute Customs of Laws

Related Useless Fictions: Power, Agency, Force, Efficacy, Energy, Connexion, Productive Quality

Self-Contradiction: See above section.

Reified Hypothesis: Absolute Necessity

Discussion: The fiction of absolute necessity is a result of a propensity Hume warns against in his introduction:

> And tho' we must endeavour to render all our principles as universal as possible, by tracing up our experiments to the utmost, and explaining all effects from the simplest and fewest causes, 'tis still certain we cannot go beyond experience; and any hypothesis, that pretends to discover the ultimate original qualities of human nature, ought at first to be rejected as presumptuous and chimerical. (T 0.8; SBN xvii)

We imagine an idea that goes beyond experience, namely, the idea of absolute necessity obtains universally across time. And yet, this is impossible, for the future may always be different from the past with respect to matters of fact. Therefore, any claims of necessity that go beyond past experience are purely hypothetical, and the reification of the hypothesis leads to a fiction of the imagination. Hume discusses our propensity to reify future contingents in the following:

> Thus not only our reason fails us in the discovery of the *ultimate connexion* of causes and effects, but even after experience has inform'd us of their *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. We suppose, but are never able to prove, that there must be a resemblance betwixt those objects, of which we have had experience, and those which lie beyond the reach of our discovery. (T 1.3.6.11; SBN 91-2)

Ultimate connection is synonymous with the fiction of absolute necessity or universal necessity. Given human limitations, we may only *suppose* what may happen in the future.[176] Any idea of absolute necessity therefore must be fictitious.

The imaginative propensity is the same that gives rise to suppositions of perfect equality or infinity. While it is hypothetically plausible that certain ideas are necessarily connected, we can never, in fact, go beyond our experience to confirm it. Without complete experience of the future, all categorical terms—necessity, universality, impossibility—must remain hypothetical. If these terms are taken as ontologically real, it is only by way of a fiction of the imagination.[177]

The imaginative propensity is the same as that which generates object identity, where our train of thought unavoidably supposes an independently existing identity across time.[178] Similarly, the resembling instances of any causal relation will always fail to go beyond mere hypothesis and produce an independently existing idea of absolute necessity. As "uniformity forms the very essence of necessity," uniformity (understood as constancy and coherence) forms the very essence of object identity (T 2.3.1.10; SBN 403). Uniformity, however, *always* refers to past experience; it

---

[176] It is plausible that Hume was influenced by Hobbes in this respect: "The *present* only has a being in nature; things *past* have a being in the memory only; but things *to come* have no being at all, the *future* being but a fiction of the mind" (*Leviathan*, 14).

[177] For an interesting discussion of the relationship between probability, hypothesis, and fiction, see Newsom, *A Likely Story: Probability and Play in Fiction*.

[178] Hume remarks that "the same custom *goes beyond* the instances, from which it is deriv'd…imagination *runs away* with its object" (T 1.3.13.10; SBN 148, italics added).

can never go beyond it. Any idea that pretends to refer to unexperienced uniformity remains a hypothetical fiction.

3.4. General Rules of the Imagination

Requisite Impressions: Custom based on constant conjunction.

Imaginative Propensity of Uniting Incompatible Ideas: Uniting custom and the flexibility of matters of fact with fixed rules or laws. In that sense, it is similar to perfect equality in so far as it takes imperfect experience and unites it with a fixed standard.

Imaginative Propensity of Hypothesizing: The human mind supposes causal epistemic rules and artificial rules of justice as ontologically real or empirically verifiable. While general rules are grounded in either resembling and contiguous perceptions (in epistemology) or natural external circumstances (in morality), the rules themselves are not perceptions or *in* external circumstances. Instead, general rules are generated by the imaginative propensity to go beyond experience and fix or invent rules to guide future behavior, reasoning, or conduct.

The imaginative propensity to *fix* ideas is crucial to several unavoidable, useful fictions. For instance, the imagination relies on fixing proportions in geometry, fixing numbers, fixing the meaning of words to create general terms, and fixing general rules in both causal belief and laws of nature (justice). In terms of causal belief, "since…'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; SBN 173). Whereas in matters of justice, society "must be stable, and must be fix'd by general rules" (T 3.2.2.22; SBN 497).

I consider the imaginative propensity to *fix* ideas to be a form of invention or fictionalizing. Indeed, Hume remarks on several occasions that the rules of justice are invented (T

3.2.1.19; SBN 484). For justice, "the *general rule* reaches beyond those instances, from which it arose" (T 3.2.2.24; SBN 499). The rules of causal belief, on the other hand, are of two sorts: the vulgar and the philosophical. The vulgar general rules are most relevant here because they are unavoidable and useful in so far as they may be corrected. Vulgar general rules are derived from the imagination naturally carrying us from one lively conception to another. The imagination fixes general rules initially which are unavoidable but capricious. Thus, for instance, prejudices are unavoidably invented by the imagination. They may be fixed by the imagination such that we expect certain behavior as a result of prejudice, and it is only by way of reflection that we may correct unphilosophical or useless general rules of the imagination. In this, it is clear that useful fictions run insensibly into useless fictions—for where along the line do stereotypes or prejudices meet valid instances of inductive reasoning?

Generated Fiction: General Rules in Epistemology and Morality

Related Useful Fictions: Objective Causality, Justice, Promises, Property, Government, Mathematical Numbers, Geometrical Proportions, General Terms

Related Useless Fictions: Unphilosophical Probability, Prejudice, Morally-Repugnant Laws of Nature

Self-Contradiction: Fixed ≠ Changeable

Reified Hypothesis: General rules reify the hypothetical existence of a rule or law.

Discussion: See Chapter 1 (Section 3.3.) for more on general rules.

4. Identity Fictions

4.1. Principle of Identity

The principle of identity is the primary operation of the natural relation of identity/ resemblance. Essentially, it acts to unite distinct, atomic spatial and temporal ideas by virtue of similarity. When incompatible ideas are united, a self-contradictory fiction is produced. Likewise, when the principle unites ideas beyond past or present perceptions, the fiction of a reified hypothesis is created. First, I discuss the general principle of fictitious identity. Second, I provide a set of related fictions derived from the principle.

4.2. Fictitious Identity

Requisite Impressions: The idea of duration united with the idea of an unchangeable object. Or "the *invariableness* and *uninterruptedness* of any object, thro' a suppos'd variation of time" (T 1.4.2.30; SBN 201).

Imaginative Propensity of Uniting Incompatible Ideas: Uniting the idea of duration with an unchangeable object.

Imaginative Propensity of Hypothesizing: See all sections below

Generated Fiction: Invariable and Uninterrupted Object Through Time (i.e., successive perceptions)

Related Useful Fictions: Fictitious Unity, Object Identity, Personal Identity, General Terms

Related Useless Fictions: Soul, Substance, Accident, Substantial Forms, Occult Qualities, Double Existence Doctrine

Self-Contradiction: Unity ≠ Number

Reified Hypothesis: See all sections below

Discussion: See discussion on Fictitious Duration. The general idea of identity describes two contradictory ideas, namely, unity and number.[179] In that sense, it seems unintelligible, considering that—via the law of contradiction—no two contradictory terms may exist at the same time in the same respect. Yet, this is not an instance of logical contradiction since we are dealing with ideas of the mind. In Hume's cognitive psychology, incompatible ideas may be united to form self-contradictory fictions.

---

[179] Costa agrees: "There is no genuine instance of an idea of identity. Therefore, there is no genuine general idea of identity, since a general idea requires genuine instances of that idea" ("Hume on the Very Idea of a Relation," 83). For Jonathan Bennett, the "choice between number and unity, and our ability to toggle between them, lets us approximate to the unachievable ideal of asserting a true, *a posteriori* identity statement" (*Learning from Six Philosophers*, 298). On my account, the same is true for *a priori* identity statements given that all ideas in any *a priori* analysis are reducible to *a posteriori* impressions—unless it involves a relation or fiction itself, in which case the *a priori* analysis is circular.

More importantly, I believe that my account addresses what Donald Baxter calls 'Hume's Difficulty Concerning Identity,' namely, for "Hume's makeshift idea of identity even to simulate a solution…it would have to be a genuine solution. The idea would have to represent there as being the same thing whether viewed as one single thing or viewed as many distinct things. The idea would have to represent a single thing as a single thing and then switch to representing it as the same 'it' and yet as distinct things. But as we have seen, it could do this only if it could represent there as being something distinct from itself" ("Hume on Abstraction and Identity," 303-4). What Baxter is attempting to do is solve the difficulty, *as if* it is a difficulty that requires solving. Indeed, under the influence of philosophical reason, it looks like we require a *genuine* solution. On my reading, however, Hume is not interested in satiating the inordinate demands of reason; instead, he is attempting to explain the principles of human nature. These principles may very well *be* paradoxical, contradictory, and ultimately irresolvable. In that way, I see the paradoxes of identity and abstraction (which Baxter claims, correctly, stand or fall together in Hume's account) as related and born of the same imaginative propensities to unite incompatible ideas—qualitative and numerical alike.

I also take issue with Baxter's characterization of identity *as an idea*. Why does Baxter see the problem in so far as it pertains to identity and abstraction, but not as it pertains to Hume's broader theory of relations? The same paradox is discovered, for instance, in contiguity relations. Take 'nextness' between 'A' and 'B'. If we treat the contiguity relation of 'nextness' *as an idea* (as Baxter does with identity), then the idea represents 'A' standing in relation to 'B' at the same time that it represents the *distinct* and *singular* idea of 'nextness.'

Baxter similarly suggests that Hume's so-called 'Empiricist program' is undermined by the contradiction involved in the differential resemblance underlying his account of distinctions of reason. Again, I take this as Baxter imposing a particular notion of contradiction onto Hume's philosophy. In Chapter 6, I show that Hume's understanding of contradiction is highly ambiguous; before an interpreter criticizes Hume on the grounds of *logical* inconsistency, it must be demonstrated that Hume is committed to *logical* consistency in the first place. Baxter even suggests that there might be a number of ways to 'save' Hume from the alleged contradiction, as if Hume is in need of rescue. I suspect Hume might see this as the embodiment of the faculty of reason attempting to save the vulgar mind from its natural illusions—only to end up creating more illusions by doing so. See Baxter, "Hume, Distinctions of Reason, and Differential Resemblance."

Broadly, on my view, the fiction of identity—as well as other relational fictions—are fictions exactly because they are self-contradictory and not properly analyzable into impressions or ideas. The epistemic natural fictions are akin to Kant's antinomies or Russell's Paradox. In Quine's terms, they are neither veridical or falsidical, but antinomical paradoxes. Instead of Hume revealing paradoxes in (formal) logic, he is revealing antinomical paradoxes in our cognitive psychology (specifically, the reasoning faculty's dependence on the principle of association and natural relations). Contra Baxter, these antinomies do not need to be *solved*, for the reasoning by which Hume reveals them to be paradoxical is (what I take to be) sound. Of course, Hume would understand Baxter's motivation after all, for "the heart of man is made to reconcile contradictions" (PGB 10). The question, then, is whether Hume follows the *heart* of man or the *science* of man?

4.3. Continued Existence of Objects or Object Identity

Requisite Impressions: "Resembling perceptions makes us ascribe…perfect identity. The interrupted manner…makes us consider them…distinct beings" (T 1.4.2.36; SBN 205).

Imaginative Propensity of Uniting Incompatible Ideas: See section above.

Imaginative Propensity of Hypothesizing: Hume's discussion regarding the continued existence of objects is broad and complex. It features two central parts relevant to this discussion: (1) the imaginative propensity to carry on a train of thinking and (2) the propensity to feign or invent (i.e., reify) an idea to complete the train of thinking—or what Hume calls 'complete the union'. What Hume means by 'completing the union' is not entirely clear, but I want to suggest that, in this and many other cases, it means carrying our thinking to a *terminal point*.[180]

Recall that the same type of imaginative propensity gives rise to our idea of perfect equality, infinity, absolute necessity, and others. What occurs in all of these examples—including object identity—is that the mind perceives a number of perceptions and supposes a terminal idea to exist that has never been experienced. In the case of infinity, we experience a set of perceptions and *suppose* that there is, for instance, a 'set of all sets' or an infinite class of numbers

---

[180] Peter Jones eloquently connects terminal concepts with Humean fictions in the following: "Precisely the excellence of the concept of gravity, an hypothetical concept Hume and his contemporaries admired for its yield, is that one can infer other effects from it although, as Newton continuously stressed, it is not itself observable. There are, of course, many concepts in common use whose analysis eludes us, but which function within limits. Hume includes different kinds within his own class of so-called 'fictions': concepts like 'chimera', which are conscious products of imagination; concepts like 'substance' which are also constructs, but often unconscious; and a group of concepts containing such members as 'matter, cause and effect, extension, space, time, motion' (D.131). These last characteristically appear at the terminal points in our analyses; like 'our vulgar methods of reasoning', 'we cannot account for them', 'even in common life and in that province which is peculiarly appropriated to them' (D.135; cp. 178). Terminal concepts mark problems for subsequent analysis, and reflect our present state of knowledge and methodology; they must not be confused with the 'ultimate principles' sought by rationalists, and constantly repudiated by Hume (see e.g. T.xxi, xxii, 91, 159, 267; A. 183). It is quite contingent which concepts function terminally, but necessary that some do; the important point is that all terminal concepts are in principle supersedable, and open to progressive improvement or rejection, as happened with the notion of the aether. They are coherence-enabling constructs, temporarily resistant to analysis, casting light elsewhere but themselves shrouded in gloom" (*Hume's Sentiments: Their Ciceronian and French Context*, 69).

though we have not experienced it. In the case of perfect equality, we experience approximately equal measurements and *suppose* that there is an idea of perfect equality though we have not experienced it. In the case of absolute necessity, we experience several resembling conjunctions and *suppose* an idea of necessity where, in all possible futures, past custom obtains though we have not experienced it. In the case of object identity, we experience constant and coherent perceptions of an object and *suppose* that there is an object with its own individuated identity across distinct numerical instances, though we have never experienced it.

Hume's discussion in this respect seems to anticipate Kant's Ideas of Reason which transcend possible experience.[181] But it also operates as a criticism of all pure (or perfect) ideas, such as Plato's Forms or Descartes' Innate Ideas. If our ideas are always constrained by past experience—and can never go beyond that experience—then no categorical terms or pure ideas are possible unless by virtue of a fiction. Indeed, it seems to me that this is part of the reason why Hume claims: "There is no foundation for any conclusion *a priori*, either concerning the operations or duration of any object, of which 'tis possible for the human mind to form a conception" (T 1.4.5.35; SBN 250).

Hume demonstrates that our imagination not only supposes and reifies perfect ideas such as equality, absolute necessity, and object identity, but that it *unavoidably* does so. It is inherent to human nature. Instead of pure ideas existing in a world of forms or in an innate part of the mind, Hume naturalizes these ideas as fictions and artifices; they are formed by natural imaginative propensities over which we have no control.

---

[181] Henry Allison argues that "fictions [in the technical sense as opposed to just acting in opposition to belief] are ideas or judgments formed by the imagination for which there is no sufficient evidentiary basis…they are literally made up or 'feigned' by the imagination, using materials provided by sense, since these are the source of the content of all our ideas (save those of reflection)…but to which no sensory content could correspond" (*Custom and Reason*, 281). From a particular point of view, Allison claims: "Such fictions might be said in a strange Humean sense to be 'transcendent'" (Ibid., 281).

Let us now consider the first part of the imaginative process that generates the continued existence of objects, namely, the ability for the imagination to carry on a train of thinking. The train of thinking is unavoidable, since it seems to operate via mental inertia, where resembling perceptions grease the wheels of the imagination—once it gets going, it can't stop itself at past and present experience; it runs on into the future. That is to say, the more ideas resemble each other, the easier it is for the imagination to pass from one idea to the next. In Hume's words, "the passage betwixt related ideas is…so smooth and easy, that it produces little alteration on the mind, and seems like the continuation of the same action…the thought slides along the succession with equal facility" (T 1.4.2.34; SBN 204). Thus, if there is any relation between ideas, the imagination runs over them with more ease. Exactly resembling ideas or relations are apt to such a smooth transition that the imagination will continue on from past experience to the future.

The second part of the imaginative process is more complicated. After the imagination carries us beyond past perceptions, it continues on to complete the union by positing a *perfect* idea. As Hume says, when "the mind is once in the train of observing an uniformity among objects, it naturally continues, till it renders the uniformity as compleat as possible" (T 1.4.2.22; SBN 198). The completion of the uniformity is a process of feigning further relations than are actually observed. In the case of the continued existence of objects, an unperceived existence is feigned to complete the union between resembling ideas of a particular object. Consider the following:

Actual Perceptions: A C A F A

Feigned Uniformity: A A A A A

Our imagination fills in the gaps with what H.H. Price called *unsensed sensibilia*.[182] It is a supposition or hypothetical fiction that an object continues to exist when it is not perceived. That said, it is not *merely* a supposition or hypothesis. That is only the first step. In the second step, we take the object as perfectly identical—that is, as the *same* object. When we believe an object is the *same* across interrupted perceptions, we reify the hypothesis that an unperceived existence actually exists. Finally, to complete the uniformity of relations, the imagination takes this reified hypothesis to its terminal point. The object therefore is not only taken to continue to exist over interrupted perceptions of the *past*, but we believe that the object will continue to exist, as a perfect identity, into the *future*. In other words, we believe that the *same* object existed in the past even when we did not perceive it, and we also believe that the *same* object will exist in the future when we have not perceived it.

An interpretive puzzle, however, arises with the case of object identity because of the following passage in the *Treatise*:

> The supposition of the continu'd existence of sensible objects or perceptions involves no contradiction. We may easily indulge our inclination to that supposition. When the exact resemblance of our perceptions makes us ascribe to them an identity, we may remove the seeming interruption by feigning a continu'd being, which may fill those intervals, and preserve a perfect and entire identity to our perceptions. (T 1.4.2.40; SBN 208)

How can the continued existence of sensible objects not involve a contradiction when it involves the idea of identity? Remember that the contradiction between unity and number within the fiction of identity is never resolved by Hume. Instead, he seeks recourse by turning to an earlier passage regarding fictitious duration to "remove this difficulty" (T 1.4.2.29; SBN 200). And yet, if we look at that passage, his analysis of fictitious duration clearly does not remove any

[182] See Price's extensive analysis in his *Hume's Theory of the External World*. Though beyond the limits of this discussion, there is a clear connection between Price's 'As-if Theory' (see Chapter V) and the interpretation of fiction offered here.

contradiction or difficulty. In fact, Hume only provides a genetic account of how the fancy *does* conceive of contradictory ideas by uniting two incompatible ideas in the imagination. It is thus a psychological explanation of the contradiction, but certainly not a resolution.

Indeed, Hume initially claims that it is "impossible to shew the impression, from which the idea of time without a changeable existence is deriv'd" (T 1.2.5.29; SBN 65). He then calls it a fiction. Second, Hume says that:

> …when we consider a stedfast object at five-a-clock, and regard the same at six; we are apt to apply to it that idea in the same manner as if every moment were distinguish'd by a different position, or an alteration of the object. The first and second appearances of the object, being compar'd with the succession of our perceptions, seem equally remov'd *as if* the object had really chang'd. (T 1.2.5.29; SBN 65, italics added)

An object, in this case, is treated *as if* it changes when no change is perceived. In that way, we unite the idea of an unchangeable object with the idea of change to form a self-contradictory fiction. And, thus, the contradiction is not resolved; it is embedded in the very idea of fictitious duration.

The same is true of the idea of identity: the contradiction is not resolved by Hume's appeal to the passage describing fictitious duration. It simply explains the imaginative process of uniting contradictory ideas. Hume's considered definition of the fiction of identity is "an idea, which is a medium betwixt unity and number; or more properly speaking, is either of them, according to the view, in which we take it" (T 1.4.2.29; SBN 201). How might one fiction feature two contradictory simple ideas?

We might, following Jonathan Cottrell, take the idea of identity to be an abstract idea, which includes heterogenous ideas that produce similar effects in the mind. On his account, both perfectly identical objects and "qualitatively diverse successions" would be included in "our

revival set for the term 'identity.'"[183] The difficulty, however, with Cottrell's account is that it treats identity as involving at least two particular and distinct abstract ideas which are acquired over a set of perceptions. Hume seems to say, to the contrary though, that identity is a unitary relation. At once, it is *either* unity or number. It is not that we collect related, but distinct ideas to form an abstract idea of identity—identity is itself a *relation*—not an idea. Thus, we perceive identity as *one* singular relation, where two relata are taken as the same—to be sure, Hume uses the phrase "two ideas" to describe both natural relations and philosophical relations (T 1.1.5.1; SBN 13). On Cottrell's account, what is required for the abstract idea of identity is *more than one* relation of identity to be perceived—and so his account cannot properly explain how we might generate the singular and original relation of identity. In Chapter 7, I discuss Cottrell's account in further detail.

On my interpretation, the singular relation of identity is accepted, without reservation, as a self-contradictory fiction. What does this mean for the continued existence of objects? How does the continued existence of objects not feature a contradiction if it involves the fiction of identity? My reply is that the continued existence of objects takes the fiction of identity as already *given*. The fiction of the continued existence of objects is, on that view, derived from a prior fiction, namely, the fiction of identity. In other words, once an object is treated *as if* it possesses an identity, then resembling second-order identity relations may be supposed to continue to exist. Nevertheless, the first-order contradiction remains.[184]

---

[183] *Hume on Fiction*, 152.

[184] T. H. Green seems to interpret it in the same way: "The continuous survey of this table, or this chair, then, involves the notion of its remaining the same with itself throughout the succession of different perceptions—i.e. the full-grown fiction of identity—just as much as does the supposition that the table I see now is identical with the one I saw before" (*Hume and Locke*, 257-8). In other words, the same contradiction involved in the 'full-grown fiction of identity' is same as in the fiction of continued existence.

Let me put it another way: an object must possess an identity before it can be supposed to possess that same identity across several *interrupted* perceptions. First, the singular relation of identity must obtain. For example, we take two relata as one and the same chair. Once the identity relation of the chair obtains, we may move to a second-order supposition that the chair exists across interrupted perceptions. In that sense, we take the self-contradictory fiction of identity as a singular object or idea (even though it is a self-contradictory relation). From there, we suppose the singular object or idea to continue through interrupted perceptions, thus creating a second-order fiction. The continued existence of objects is therefore predicated on fictitious identity and the original contradiction involved in it.

Generated Fiction: Continued and Interrupted Object or Object Identity

Related Useful Fictions: Personal Identity and Fictitious Unity

Related Useless Fictions: Double Existence, Soul, Substance

Self-Contradiction: Continuous ≠ Interrupted

Reified Hypothesis: The reification of the terminal fiction, namely, the continued existence of objects, which contains the more primary self-contradictory fiction of identity.

Discussion: See above

4.4. Personal Identity

Requisite Impressions: Resembling and causal perceptions.

Imaginative Propensity of Uniting Incompatible Ideas: Successive perceptions of the mind are united with the idea of a composite.

Imaginative Propensity of Hypothesizing: For the fiction of personal identity to obtain, there first needs to be a series of resembling perceptions. That is, "it can only be from the resemblance, which this

act of the mind bears to that, by which we contemplate one continu'd object" (T 1.4.6.7; SBN 255). The resemblance also produces an ease and smoothness in carrying on the train of thinking. Particularly, "the passage of the thought from the object before the change to the object after it, is so smooth and easy, that we scarce perceive the transition, and are apt to imagine, that 'tis nothing but a continu'd survey of the same object" (T 1.4.6.8; SBN 255).

Second, there needs to be a series of causal perceptions. More precisely, "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, and mutually produce, destroy, influence, and modify each other" (T 1.4.6.19; SBN 261). Cause and effect links successive perceptions of our mind, which means that memory is vital in this process. For Hume, the "memory does not so much *produce* as *discover* personal identity, by shewing us the relation of cause and effect among our different perceptions" (T 1.4.6.20; SBN 262).[185]

Contra Locke, the role of the imagination in generating the idea of personal identity is clear in both respects. The imaginative propensity to carry on our train of thinking does not only complete the union regarding future instances, but past ones too. Specifically, "we can extend the same chain of causes, and consequently the identity of our persons beyond our memory, and can comprehend times, and circumstances, and actions, which we have entirely forgot, but suppose in general to have existed" (T 1.4.6.20; SBN 262). The imaginative propensity to spread itself onto the external world and carry itself beyond remembered experience enables us to fill in any gaps.

[185] Hume similarly argues that "the memory not only discovers the identity, but also contributes to its production, by producing the relation of resemblance among the perceptions" (T 1.4.6.18; SBN 261).

We are able to complete the union of our personal identity—and presumably any other identity relation—into the past *as well as* the future.[186]

Generated Fiction: Personal Identity, Self, Mind

Related Useful Fictions: Fictitious Unity, Identity, Fictitious Duration, Object Identity, Common end or purpose, Plant and Animal Identity

Related Useless Fictions: Soul and Substance

Self-Contradiction: Simplicity ≠ Diversity

Reified Hypothesis: A composite mind containing successive, distinct perceptions.

Discussion: Hume makes a puzzling distinction in 'Of personal identity' where he separates "specific identity or resemblance" from numerical identity. This happens to be the only paragraph where such a distinction is made, and therefore it is difficult to understand its importance to Hume's overall view of identity. He says that sometimes "numerical and specific identity" are confounded "and in our thinking and reasoning employ the one for the other" (T 1.4.6.13; SBN 257-8). Numerical identity is the type of identity that we have been discussing, namely, 'A1=A2.' Specific identity seems to be something different, however. Hume defines it as an instance where "there is nothing numerically the same, but the cause, which produc'd them" (T 1.4.6.13; SBN 258). He gives two examples: (1) a noise that is frequently interrupted and yet still called the same noise and (2) a church that has been demolished and rebuilt and still called the same church. In both cases, presumably the cause is the same: either (1) the knocker or (2) the church builder.

[186] The completion of the union is always predicated on one of the three natural relations. When the completion of the union concerns space or time, it entails the involvement of a contiguity fiction. In this case, the imaginative propensity to complete the union (of relations) connects all possible temporal relations with personal identity.

It seems that the key to understanding this distinction is in the expression "specific identity *or* resemblance" (T 1.4.6.13; SBN 258, italics added). That is to say, an identity attribution may obtain in instances where there is not an exact numerical resemblance. In some cases, like the knock or the church, even possessing the same cause may give rise to an identity attribution. The identity relation, however, is generated by the same imaginative propensities as other identity relations. That is, one cause (unity) is united with duration (multiplicity) such that the imagination generates the 'fictitious' relation of identity. In one place, Hume says that "identity is nothing really belonging to these different perceptions, and uniting them together; but is merely a quality, which we attribute to them" (T 1.4.6.16; SBN 260). The 'quality' is, I suggest, the *fictitious* identity relation.

As observed in other variations of identity fictions, the initial imaginative propensity necessary to produce the idea of personal identity is an "easy transition of the imagination from one to another" (T 1.4.6.7; SBN 255). The same as object identity "we *suppose* the whole train of perceptions to be united by identity" (T 1.4.6.16; SBN 259, italics added). The supposition is crucial to the process of identity attribution. A supposition is required in so far as there must be *something* to reify. In the case of identity, the supposition of a uniting cause (or, more accurately, uniting composition) is what is reified. Hume is unambiguous about the fact that "our notions of personal identity, proceed entirely from the smooth and uninterrupted progress of the thought along a train of connected ideas," but he neglects to mention the second part of the process, namely, the reification required to produce the fiction (T 1.4.6.16; SBN 260).

To be perfectly clear, reification is not a process that Hume mentions in the *Treatise*. And therefore, it is an interpretive liberty I take based on what I believe may be inferred from the text. In this respect, I follow Timothy Costelloe's interpretation of Humean fictions. Costelloe claims

that reification is an imaginative propensity involved in several areas of Hume's philosophy. For example, "the philosophical doctrine of materialism arises because proponents are tempted by the imagination to 'conjoin all thought with extension' (T. 1.4.5.15/SBN 239). We can think of this as a species of reification, the fallacy of misplaced concreteness, where, due to the imagination, we take certain qualities, such as taste and smell, and produce a 'new relation' that confers spatial location."[187] Reification is a natural process of the imagination seeking to complete the union. With respect to personal identity, the unity of perceptions is taken to be a spatial or objective composition. Still, the relation between perceptions is *not* a material object, and the whole or aggregate does not exist in reality even though the imagination connects varying and interrupted perceptions by virtue of the principle of association.

Hume alludes to the process of reification as part of our familiar way of thinking (i.e., the vulgar mind): "we use in our most familiar way of thinking, that scholastic principle, which, when crudely propos'd, appears so shocking…that a thing is in a certain place, and yet is not there" (T 1.4.5.13; SBN 238). We *suppose* personal identity to be in a certain place, and yet, upon reflection, it is not there. All we have are the parts or the individual perceptions; the whole is a fiction. It is not only the propensity of the imagination to go beyond our impressions via an easy transition of ideas, but the propensity to complete the union and produce a new relation(s) that confers existence on its completion.

Finally, a related concern might be why the *Treatise* discusses so many apparent variations on identity fictions instead of reducing it to the same phenomenon. Hume indicates that there is a symmetry that obtains in as much as "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

---

[187] *The Imagination in Hume's Philosophy*, 92-3.

1.4.6.15; SBN 259). However, what distinguishes vegetables and animal bodies from objects? It seems that the identity we attribute to an object (like a chair) and a vegetable (like a head of lettuce) is the same type of identity attribution as that found in personal identity. To my mind, Hume did not pursue the full entailments of his theory of identity. The attribution of identity is ubiquitous in human nature. We attribute identity to objects, ourselves, animals, plants, general terms (see next section), and even our basic mathematical, metaphysical and logical categories. Thus, it is plausible that Hume's account of fictitious identity applies in all cases.[188]

4.5. Verbal Identity & General Terms

Requisite Impressions: Particular, resembling ideas.

Imaginative Propensity of Uniting Incompatible Ideas: Similar to causal necessity, Hume never refers to general terms as fictions. Although some commentators, like Donald Ainslie, have argued that general terms may be understood as fictions in a qualified sense, other commentators, like Timothy Costelloe, have disputed the claim.[189] In light of the present analysis, I take the former view. General terms are fictions in the sense that the imagination must invent any kind of taxonomical structure. While the propensity of the imagination to recall particular ideas based on

---

[188] If we take the principle of identity and the principle of unity as two sides of the same coin—describing qualitative or quantitative unities writ large—then both principles are involved in all cases. Indeed, on one view, we might take identity and unity as the same process. For D. G. C. MacNabb, "the fundamental idea of identity is simply that of the unity of an aggregate. How the members of the aggregate must be related to one another in order to form one aggregate depends on the sort of aggregate in question" (*David Hume: His Theory of Knowledge and Morality*, 147). Thus, the principle of unity and the principle of identity reduce to one principle.

[189] Ainslie claims that although Hume "does not himself apply the label 'fiction' in his account of general ideas, they do satisfy the definition, in that an idea of a particular is used not to represent the content of the impression from which it is derived, but rather to represent a class. Hume, I take it, does not mean this label to import an epistemic assessment of the idea, as if fictions always involve falsehood (though sometimes they do). Instead, he means only to draw on the sense of 'fiction' found in its Latin root, *fingere*, so that a fiction is an 'act of fashioning,' in that the imaginative response to the proximate content constitutes or fashions the intended object" (*Hume's True Scepticism*, 66-7). I discuss Costelloe's views in Chapter 7.

a general term is relatively unproblematic, the general *term* itself does not seem to fit Hume's ontological framework, unless it is construed as a fiction.[190]

Consider: where are general terms to be found in Hume's ontology? General terms are neither impressions nor ideas. They are not derived from reason either. Hume criticizes mathematicians for believing "those ideas, which are their objects, are of so refin'd and spiritual a nature, that they fall not under the conception of the fancy, but must be comprehended by a pure and intellectual view" (T 1.3.1.7; SBN 72). On the contrary, "'tis certain *that we form the idea of individuals*, whenever we use any general term" (T 1.1.7.10; SBN 22, italics added). The imagination *forms* general terms in some manner—which is to say that when it comes to general terms, there is something more going on than just a revival set or a mental disposition.

Similar to the fictions discussed above, general terms rely on certain imaginative propensities. It appears that the process is akin to identity relations in so far as resembling particulars are collected together to form a kind of identity attribution. The difference is that general terms seem to cover *verbal* or *linguistic* identities.[191] Recall that the same paradox (or self-contradictory nature) seems to occur in general terms as it does with other identity fictions.

---

[190] In this, I follow Baier as well: "In Book Three, Hume gives natural language as an example of a set of conventions, or human agreements (T. 490). Linguistic conventions, once accepted and established, become linguistic norms…Hume follow[s] Berkeley in claiming that the fixity of our general abstract ideas depends upon their being 'annex'd to' a given general term (T. 22). Without language, then, there would be no generality, no abstraction, no ideas of the sort that have *a priori* knowable 'relations.' When Hume discusses our idea of space, he makes it clear that he believes that our linguistic conventions, such as our use of the term 'circle,' are natural fictions in the sense that the ideas annexed to even our most abstract general terms are suggested by the sorts of qualities and complexes of which we have impressions. Our idea of a perfect circle is reached by idealization from a series of progressively less imperfect circles (T. 48-49). Experience, idealization and convention combine to give us the ideas of whose relations we can be certain by demonstration. Thus, the determination of the mind that is projected into the subject matter of a demonstrative inference (T. 166) is collective self-determination. Hume has the makings of a conventionalist account of mathematical and logical necessity. Our norms, our linguistic self-imposed (but nature-suggested) necessities, are what get 'spread . . . on' (T. 167) the mind's objects, in mathematical reasoning. Thus, Hume really does have reason to claim both that 'there is but one kind of *necessity'* (T. 171) and that it 'belongs entirely to the soul' (T. 166). All necessity derives from normative necessity, and all the norms available to us are our human norms, the products of our reflection" (*Progress*, 100).

[191] "When we have found a resemblance among several objects, that often occur to us, *we apply the same name to all of them*" (T 1.1.7.7; SBN 20, italics added).

Indeed, Hume's discussion of general terms is an account of "the foregoing paradox, that some ideas are particular in their nature, but general in their representation" (T 1.1.7.10; SBN 22). The same as any identity relation, *one* general term refers to a *multiplicity* of distinct particular ideas. In other words, general terms involve the same contradiction between unity and number as identity.

There seems to be two steps to the imaginative process of forming general terms—and the symmetry between this process and other identity relations is astonishing. First, the mind runs over resembling particulars: "Before those habits have become entirely perfect…the mind…may run over several, in order to make itself comprehend its own meaning, and the compass of that collection, which it intends to express by the general term" (T 1.1.7.10; SBN 22). The collection concerns resembling particulars composing a general class. The natural relation of resemblance then is central in the process of uniting distinct ideas into one identity class, or as Hume describes it: "the individuals are collected together, and plac'd under a general term with a view to that resemblance, which they bear to each other, this relation must facilitate their entrance in the imagination" (T 1.1.7.15; SBN 23).

The second part of the process is fixing a term to stand for the collection of particular ideas. The term is fictitious in the sense that, if it were reified, it would not refer to any particular ideas or impressions (because it, by definition, refers to more than one particular). Hume says, "that we may fix the meaning of the word, figure" such that "we may revolve in our mind the ideas of circles, squares, parallelograms, triangles of different sizes and proportions, and may not rest on one image or idea" (T 1.1.7.10; SBN 22). What does this process of fixing actually mean? It seems to have to do with forming perfect or abstract ideas, that is, a sort of conceptual taxonomy. The habit of collecting resembling particulars in order to comprehend the collection's

meaning comes prior to its abstraction or perfection (T 1.1.7.10; SBN 22). Perfection appears to mean that a general term is fixed in such a way that it transcends possible experience. For instance, the general term 'feline' is fixed to catch all resembling instances of 'felineness.' Still, it is not fixed to the extent that there is no room for conceptual change. Where additional resembling particulars expand or narrow the fixed meaning, the general term changes. I take it that general terms are, in this respect, like general rules of the imagination. We fix meanings or rules for a certain period because of the utility involved, but those meanings and rules may change depending on context or desire.[192] The laws of justice are fixed, for instance, but they are likewise changeable in so far as they may be updated according to moral progress. Since the fixed meanings of general terms are generated by the imagination, there is a sense in which they are fictional at the same time they are natural.[193] The process of acquiring stable or fixed linguistic meaning is vital to any form of communication. If general terms did not have a fixed meaning—and any given term might change its meaning from day to day—our linguistic ability would be severely curtailed. A general term needs to be fixed, on an individual level and a social level, in order to be useful.[194]

Imaginative Propensity of Hypothesizing: When general terms are taken *as* composites in any process of reasoning, we are hypostasizing the existence of such a composite. In other words, if 'feline' is

---

[192] Recall that Hume says: "A general idea, tho' it be nothing but a particular one consider'd in a certain view, is commonly more obscure; and that because no particular idea, by which we represent a general one, is ever fix'd or determinate, but may easily be chang'd for other particular ones, which will serve equally in the representation" (T 2.3.6.2; SBN 425). If *no particular idea is ever fixed or determinate*, then it seems when we *do* "fix the meaning of a word" or general term we must appeal to something beyond particular ideas or impressions to explain it (T 1.1.7.10; SBN 22).

[193] Hendel remarks: "What deceives us…is the artificial fixity of the words we employ to designate these imaginative unities, for we apply the same word to every individual of a kind and we come to treat the universal itself as an independent, unalterable, and absolute reality in its own right" (*Studies in the Philosophy of David Hume*, 125).

[194] Hume argues that languages are "gradually establish'd by *human conventions*" (T 3.2.1.17; SBN 490, italics added). It seems that not only are social conventions necessary to establish language, but that individual, imaginative propensities and corresponding conventions are what give rise to language in the first place.

used in the proposition 'all felines have four legs,' then the general term is reified in as much as it is quantified over. There are no objects we may properly refer to as 'felines;' and thus, if we reify a general term as a composite of *more than one particular idea*, we produce a fiction.

Generated Fiction: General Terms

Related Useful Fictions: Fictitious Unity, Identity, Object Identity, Personal Identity

Related Useless Fictions: Unphilosophical Linguistic Categories

Self-Contradiction: Particular ≠ General

Reified Hypothesis: General terms taken as ontologically real composites.

Discussion: At the end of Book I, Hume hints at a deeper relationship between general terms and identity relations in several places. Yet, he did not retroactively apply his analysis of identity to his analysis of general terms. If he had done so, it may have further clarified the general function of the imagination. On one occasion, Hume says that "the controversy concerning identity is not merely a dispute of words" (T 1.4.6.7; SBN 255). In that sense, the controversy surrounding identity is at some level a dispute regarding words. But are general terms considered 'words'? It has already been proved that general terms are not abstract ideas—"abstract ideas are…in themselves individual, however they may become general in their representation" (T 1.1.7.6; SBN 20). General terms are therefore *representations* of individual ideas. What type of representation could Hume mean here? It is plausible that Hume is referring to *linguistic* representation. If this is the case, then that might suggest the controversy concerning identity involves (1) identity relations and (2) general terms construed as linguistic representations.

Hume makes a further connection between identity and general terms in his claim that "all the disputes concerning the identity of connected objects are merely verbal, except so far as the relation of parts gives rise to some fiction or imaginary principle of union" (T 1.4.6.21; SBN

262). We might take this as a clear argument *against* the view that general terms are fictions. That said, why are verbal disputes concerning identity exempt from the "relation of parts" giving "rise to some fiction or imaginary principle of union"? General terms are, in fact, imaginatively generated in so far as they unite particular, resembling ideas. If there were no principle of union in general terms, then there would be no reason to distinguish between general representations and particular ideas in the first place—they would refer to the same individual idea. There needs to be some explanatory reason why general terms are differentiated over and above particular ideas. If it is simply an imaginative disposition to recall a revival set, then it *still* requires a principle of union—otherwise, what is the connecting principle of the revival set? Using the term 'set' would serve no import in that case; worse, it would be unintelligible.

While Hume rejects verbal identities as fictions, the symmetry between general terms and other types of identity relations remains. Recall that Hume uses 'representation' to describe general terms and 'form' to describe the imaginative process of generating them. Therefore, if general terms are not fictions, then a surprising contradiction obtains: some particular ideas are both an "exact *representation*" of an impression *at the same time* that they are a general *representation*. In other words, some particular ideas possess opposite types of representational content (particular and general) at the same time and in the same respect. Hume attempts to resolve the contradiction by claiming that general representation is achieved by the introduction of 'general terms' (T 1.1.7.10; SBN 22). The general term itself, though, cannot be an impression or idea, otherwise the contradiction persists. Thus, I submit that understanding general terms *as* fictions makes more sense of the contradiction between the particular and the general than the alternative, which is to see general terms *as* impressions or ideas.

In another instance, Hume connects personal identity to grammar: "all the nice and subtile questions concerning personal identity can never possibly be decided, and are to be regarded rather as grammatical than as philosophical difficulties" (T 1.4.6.21; SBN 262). In this particular case, Hume seems to reject the philosophy of language as an important domain of inquiry. If, however, he had applied his own discussion of identity to his analysis of general terms, it might have prompted greater attention toward matters of language. The paradox of identity—taken as either a verbal, logical, or ontological problem—is deeply embedded in human nature.[195]

Finally, general terms may be conceived as useful fictions in the conduct of life. Hume admits that the "application of ideas beyond their nature proceeds from our collecting all their possible degrees of quantity and quality in such an imperfect manner as may serve the purposes of life" (T 1.1.7.7; SBN 20). In this passage, we see that the imaginative propensity to *go beyond* is referenced. Going beyond experience is often a tell-tale sign of the existence of a fiction. If general terms are generated by the imagination going beyond the natures of particular ideas, then the process is conspicuously similar to that found in other fictions.

Moreover, Hume is clear that the collection of particulars need only reach an imperfect manner to serve the conduct of life. In that sense, a general term need not reach an *exact* or *perfect* meaning to be useful. Broadly speaking, while we might see the fixed meanings found in dictionaries as most useful to human practice, imperfect meanings found in regional dialects or

---

[195] Paradoxes, I contend, are likewise deeply embedded in moral fictions. With respect to artificial virtues in particular, Rachel Cohon says: "Each artificial virtue bears marks of its synthetic origin in the form of paradoxes about motivation and obligation which Hume investigates. The existence of these paradoxes gives Hume his primary evidence that the virtues in question are man-made and are not virtues in the ordinary sense" (*Hume's Morality: Feeling and Fabrication*, 3). Moreover, she claims that "in each case where Hume finds a paradox in our commonsense thought about a trait, he sees it as the consequence of thinking the trait natural when it is not" (Ibid., 164). Equally, in my interpretation, paradoxes arise when we treat the relation of identity—in whatever circumstance it emerges—as natural or metaphysically real.

fashionable idioms may also serve human life. Either way, as Hume argues, "nothing is more admirable, than the readiness, with which the imagination suggests its ideas, and presents them at the very instant, in which *they become necessary or useful*" (T 1.1.7.15; SBN 24, italics added). In other words, the ability to create taxonomical structures of general terms as a way to suggest particular ideas to the imagination is essential to communication in both social and epistemic contexts.

CHAPTER FIVE: NATURAL MORAL ARTIFICES

1. Artifice of Liberty

1.1. Liberty of Indifference

Requisite Impressions: Freedom from constraint and constant conjunction (valid liberty of spontaneity) is united with (1) non-uniform impressions and ideas, (2) the lack of a determination of mind (the second definition of causality), or (3) the looseness we feel passing from one idea to the next.

Imaginative Propensity of Uniting Incompatible Ideas: Uniting freedom from constraint with ideas not derived from freedom from constraint. Timothy Costelloe describes the imaginative propensity as "a trick of the fancy that leads us to take what resembles an impression of absolute freedom as the thing itself."[196] As observed in other cases of fiction, the relation of resemblance causes the mind to unite one incompatible idea with another. In particular, Hume argues that the union in human nature in which "all related or resembling objects are *readily taken for each other*…has been employ'd as a demonstrative or even an intuitive proof of human liberty" (T 2.3.2.2; SBN 408, italics added). Note the similarity with identity fictions in Chapter 4.

Imaginative Propensity of Hypothesizing: First, there must be a strong resemblance between ideas such that it causes the imagination to unite one idea with the other.[197] Second, the imagination generates the artifice of absolute freedom to ease the mind from confronting the contradiction

---

[196] *The Imagination in Hume's Philosophy*, 71.

[197] While Hume himself and commentators both refer to the union as a 'mistake,' I refrain from attributing any sort of normative language to what ought to be a descriptive account. In the spirit of Hume's experimental science, I believe removing any such normative talk is not only appropriate but necessary to a neutral account of human nature—at least as much as that ideal is feasible.

that arises between two incompatible ideas, namely, (1) the idea of a causal series and (2) the idea of freedom of spontaneity occurring at the same time and in the same respect.

Liberty of indifference is (much like the principle of identity) an artifice that disguises its contradictory nature: in one light, it describes the freedom of spontaneity; in another light, it describes the succession of impressions or ideas united by the relation of cause and effect. Neither one of these ideas may occur at the same time and in the same respect (without violating the law of contradiction), but—under a psychological as opposed to logical analysis—the idea of absolute freedom contains both.

Absolute freedom is the reified hypothetical artifice arising from the liberty of indifference. When we imagine that liberty of indifference applies in all other instances, we reify the absolute version of the artifice. In that sense, we take the original artifice and carry it to its terminal end.

Generated Artifice: Liberty of indifference (i.e., freedom from causes)

Related Useful Artifices: Absolute Necessity

Related Useless Artifices: Fantastical system of liberty.[198]

Self-Contradiction: Freedom ≠ Causal series

Reified Hypothesis: Absolute Freedom

Discussion: Liberty of indifference, liberty from causes—"a negation of necessity and causes" (T 2.3.2.1; SBN 407)—or the fantastical system of liberty "is…absolutely inconsistent; but is a natural consequence of these confus'd ideas and undefin'd terms, which we so commonly make use of in our reasonings, especially on the present subject" (T 2.3.1.13; SBN 404). In this

[198] See T 2.3.1.15, SBN 404-5.

description, Hume uses the word 'inconsistent,' but I suggest the inconsistency is, in fact, referring to the psychological union of two incompatible ideas.

In another place, Hume argues that "there is a *false sensation or experience* even of the liberty of indifference; which is regarded as an argument for its real existence" (T 2.3.2.2; SBN 408). A 'false sensation' is somewhat misleading, for the reason that there cannot be false sensations in Hume's ontology.[199] What Hume seems to mean is that there is a *falsehood or artifice* that arises from the union of the feeling of the will (freedom of spontaneity) with other ideas that lack uniformity. Specifically:

> We feel that our actions are subject to our will on most occasions, and *imagine we feel that the will itself is subject to nothing*; because when by a denial of it we are provok'd to try, we feel that it moves easily every way, and produces an image of itself even on that side, on which it did not settle. This image or faint motion, we perswade ourselves, cou'd have been compleated into the thing itself. (T 2.3.2.2; SBN 408, italics added)

In other words, because we feel our will to be the cause of completing certain actions, we unite that feeling with actions that were not completed. For instance, after selecting one prong in a fork in the road, we imagine that we could have taken the road we did not. The imaginative process of uniting the feeling of freedom of spontaneity (taking the road we did) with actions that are not part of a causal series (the road we did not take) generates the artifice of liberty of indifference. Hume speaks to the contradictory nature of the artifice of the liberty of indifference in the following passage:

> We may *imagine we feel a liberty within ourselves*; but 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

[199] "For since all actions and sensations of the mind are known to us by consciousness, they must necessarily appear in every particular what they are, and be what they appear. Every thing that enters the mind, being in *reality* a perception, 'tis impossible any thing shou'd to *feeling* appear different. This were to suppose, that even where we are most intimately conscious, we might be mistaken" (T 1.4.2.7; SBN 190).

> this is the very essence of necessity, according to the foregoing doctrine. (T 2.3.2.2; SBN 408-9, italics added)

Even though we imagine we are free inside, to outside observers our actions are simply part of a causal sequence. The causal sequence—which is the essence of necessity—is, as we have seen, subject to its own fiction when taken to the extreme, that is, when we conceive of an *absolute* necessity. The same is the case with the artifice of *absolute* freedom of indifference.

2. Artifice of Justice

Requisite Impressions: Selfishness and limited generosity (Internal) and the easy change of the situation of external objects and scarcity (External). Additionally, Hume explains, that "*self-interest is the original motive to the* establishment *of justice: but a* sympathy *with public interest is the source of the* moral approbation" (T 3.2.2.24; SBN 499-500).

Imaginative Propensity of Uniting Incompatible Ideas: See General Rules of the Imagination.

Imaginative Propensity of Hypothesizing: The rules of justice are born out of natural necessity and the imaginative propensity to invent (i.e., fix) general rules at a social level. The laws of nature are constantly corrected by philosophical reasoning causing shifts in social organization. General rules of epistemology share elementary features with the general rules of society, namely, that (1) natural circumstances necessitate imaginative invention, (2) the inventions are used almost universally by the vulgar, and (3) there are unphilosophical general rules of the mind *and* unreasonable laws of society that are gradually corrected by experience and reflective reasoning.

Generated Artifice: Laws of Nature or Rules of Justice

Related Useful Artifices: Property, Promises, Government

Related Useless Artifices: Outdated, corrupt, or immoral laws of society.

Self-Contradiction: See General Rules of the Imagination in Chapter 4.[200]

Reified Hypothesis: See General Rules of the Imagination in Chapter 4.

Discussion: See section on Justice in Chapter 1.

2.1. Artifice of Property

Requisite Impressions: Resemblance and contiguity between person and object cause the imagination to complete the union to form the artifice of constant possession.

Imaginative Propensity of Uniting Incompatible Ideas: Property is not a natural relation like identity or causation; it is a moral relation. As Hume says, "a man's property is some object related to him. This relation is not natural, but moral, and founded on justice" (T 3.2.2.11; SBN 491). In the same way that the principle of identity is foundational to all other types of identity, the laws of justice are foundational to property, promises, and government—"the origin of justice explains that of property. The same artifice gives rise to both" (T 3.2.2.11; SBN 491).

The specific relation involved in property may be clarified further. Hume argues that "we are said to be in possession of any thing, not only when we immediately touch it, but also when we are so situated with respect to it, as to have it in our power to use it; and may move, alter, or destroy it, according to our present pleasure or advantage. This relation, then, is a species of cause and effect" (T 3.2.3.7; SBN 506). Thus, cause and effect are essential to generating the idea of property—"as property is nothing but a stable possession, deriv'd from the rules of justice, or

[200] Duncan Forbes decries that Hume's "experimental method proper thus seems to lead to a theory of justice which is deadlocked in hopeless self-contradiction" (*Hume's Philosophical Politics*, 89). Indeed, Forbes' recognition of two incompatible senses of interest in Hume's theory of justice seem to map onto the self-contradiction I posited earlier between 'fixedness' and 'change.' See Chapter 1 & 4. In my view, the charge of self-contradiction is only a threat if an interpreter is committed to certain logical axioms over and above Hume's commitments. For his charge to be valid against Hume, it is not enough to presuppose that self-contradiction is epistemically verboten. Rather, an interpreter first must demonstrate where Hume is committed to logical consistency with respect to a particular issue (e.g., his theory of justice), and *then* point out where he violates his own commitments.

the conventions of men, 'tis to be consider'd as the same species of relation" (T 3.2.3.7; SBN 506). For Costelloe, "the 'species of causal power' in question is not…the genuine idea arising from the power of memory…but its fictional counterpart, an invention of the imagination… when a quality of the mind is transferred to and taken to inhere in external objects," that is, a "propensity of the imagination to 'spread itself on external objects.'"[201] In that way, we see again the propensity to unite incompatible ideas; this time it is a person's causal power united with external objects.

Imaginative Propensity of Hypothesizing: The rules of property are derived in a similar manner to the General Rules of the Imagination and the Rules of Justice. First, there is our natural circumstance, where the avidity "of acquiring goods and possessions for ourselves and our nearest friends, is insatiable, perpetual, universal, and directly destructive of society" (T 3.2.2.12; SBN 491-2). Given our destructive tendencies, the imagination invents an artifice or convention by which society negotiates competing interests. In other words, "property must be *stable*, and must be *fix'd* by general rules" (T 3.2.2.22; SBN 497, italics added). Property is therefore natural and artificial in so far as our natural condition necessitates the invention of an artifice to mediate our destructive tendencies. On this account, "every one, who has any regard to his character, or who intends to live on good terms with mankind, must *fix* an inviolable law to himself, never, by any temptation, to be induc'd to violate those principles" (T 3.2.2.27; SBN 501, italics added).[202] The laws of nature therefore operate on an individual level to effect change on a social level.

Similar to other fictions and artifices, Hume suggests that the imagination must 'fix' and 'stabilize' the laws of property—"there are, no doubt, motives of public interest for most of the

---

[201] *The Imagination in Hume's Philosophy*, 129.

[202] Of course, the idea of *fixing* one's own moral laws seems to anticipate Kantian ethics.

rules, which determine property; but still I suspect, that these rules are principally fix'd by the imagination" (T 3.2.3.4n71; SBN 504). Given that the *imagination* fixes property, it ends up causing much dispute. The reason is that "in the imagination, 'tis evident, that the qualities, which operate upon that faculty, run so insensibly and gradually into each other, that 'tis impossible to give them any precise bounds or termination" (T 3.2.3.7n73; SBN 506). For instance, Hume offers an example of territorial borders. There is no way to empirically decide on the borders of a territory because "the whole question hangs upon the fancy" (T 3.2.3.7n73; SBN 508). That is, the rules of property are not derived from sensory impressions or empirical evidence. Instead, territorial borders are generated by the imagination, operating as useful artifices for social cohesion.

Let us examine a further artifice that follows from the artifice of property, namely, *accession*. Accession is a clear example in which we find the same imaginative propensities at work in other natural artifices. First, "where objects are connected together in the imagination, they are apt to be put on the same footing, and are commonly suppos'd to be endow'd with the same qualities. We readily pass from one to the other, and make no difference in our judgments concerning them" (T 3.2.3.10; SBN 509). The imagination connects resembling ideas to generate the artifice of property. Specifically, as Costelloe argues, the artifice arises from the ability of "the imagination to make as easy a transition as possible among its ideas, and its power to invent a vulgar fiction that inspires a first-order natural belief."[203]

After the smooth transition between resembling ideas, the imagination completes the union—"there is first a *natural* union betwixt the idea of the person and that of the object, and afterwards a new and *moral* union produc'd by that right or property, which we ascribe to the

[203] *The Imagination in Hume's Philosophy*, 109.

person" (T 3.2.3.10n75; SBN 510). The new and moral union is imaginatively generated, and thus artificial. Costelloe sees it as the imagination creating "a new relation that resembles those that already exist."[204] On my view, it is not just a new relation, but it is a new and *fixed* relation that holds across perceptions indefinitely. It is not simply a relation between two things; it is a relation that is *perfect*. It therefore goes beyond experience and reifies the terminal artifice of property.[205]

There are two imaginative propensities involved in generating the idea of property by accession, and perhaps all other ideas of property as well: (1) an easy transition between ideas and (2) an invented relation to complete the union.[206] In other words, "the imagination feigns a relation from its propensity to seek the path of least resistance and…invents the idea of a relation where none previously existed; the rules of property are artifices, ideas not traceable to

---

[204] Ibid., 109.

[205] While inventions and artifices remain fixed (i.e., the same or constant) for a certain period, they all have the capacity to change given new circumstances. Hume, however, argues that natural circumstances which give rise to artifices are unlikely to change: "Most of the inventions of men are subject to change. They depend upon humour and caprice. They have a vogue for a time, and then sink into oblivion. It may, perhaps, be apprehended, that if justice were allow'd to be a human invention, it must be plac'd on the same footing. But the cases are widely different. The interest, on which justice is founded, is the greatest imaginable, and extends to all times and places. It cannot possibly be serv'd by any other invention. It is obvious, and discovers itself on the very first formation of society. All these causes render the rules of justice stedfast and immutable; *at least, as immutable as human nature*. And if they were founded on original instincts, cou'd they have any greater stability?" (T 3.3.6.5; SBN 620, italics added). For an interesting discussion on whether Hume was right to assume fixedness implies artificiality, see Harrison, *Hume's Theory of Justice*, 161-3.

Compare David Owen's discussion on Hume's use of artifice in reasoning: "'Artificial', like 'oblique' and 'indirect', is sometimes a hint that Hume is about to talk of reasoning. See T 104 and T 197. It seems 'artificial manner' here means something more like 'an artful manner', as in 'the art of reasoning', rather than 'a fake or non-genuine manner'. One is reminded of the story of what Queen Anne said in 1710 upon seeing Wren's cathedral of St Paul's: it was 'awful, artificial, and amusing'. She meant, of course, 'aweinspiring, artistic and amazing'. The Concise Oxford Dictionary lists 'real, but made by art' as the third meaning of 'artificial'. And the OED lists as the first meaning of artificial 'real, but not natural'. There are two sub-categories here: artificial in result as well as in process, and natural products or results artificially produced. The OED quotes 'Harrison's machine for the production of artificial ice' as an example; there is nothing in the nature of the ice produced that makes it artificial (it is made of water, not fish oil); strictly speaking it is the production that is artificial, not the water. Hume's distinction between the natural and artificial virtues is very likely using 'artificial' in this sense; there is nothing artificial about a virtue except the story about how it comes to be one" (*Hume's Reason*, 95).

[206] Hume notes that this "principle…in some measure, is the source of those laws of nature, that ascribe property to occupation, prescription and accession" (T 3.2.3.10n75; SBN 510).

experience and matter of fact."[207] For that reason, Costelloe calls the relation of property "an invisible relation."[208] On my interpretation, the new and invisible relation ought to be understood as artificial exactly because it unites two incompatible ideas: "betwixt the idea of the person and that of the object" (T 3.2.3.10n75; SBN 510).

Hume remarks that "the mind has a natural propensity to join relations, especially resembling ones, and finds a kind of fitness and uniformity in such an union" (T 3.2.3.10n75; SBN 509). The act of 'completing of the union,' as it has been demonstrated, is the cause of many useful artifices in the conduct of human life. While the origin of property may be traced to the imagination and not to sensory impressions or reason, we find that the "*first invention* and *moral obligation*" of property rights "are contriv'd to remedy like inconveniences, and acquire their moral sanction in the same manner, from their remedying those inconveniences" (T 3.2.8.4; SBN 543). Therefore, the natural circumstances and inconveniences of human nature cause the faculty of imagination to unavoidably generate fictions and artifices to remedy such inconveniences. We see that this kind of process occurs in both the moral domain and the epistemic.

Generated Artifice: Property

Related Useful Artifices: General Rules, Right, Obligation, Accession, Justice, Promises, and Government.

Related Useless Artifices: Divine Right of Kings

Self-Contradiction: Internal Causal Power ≠ External Objects.

Reified Hypothesis: Constant Possession or Absolute Possession.

---

[207] *The Imagination in Hume's Philosophy*, 130.

[208] Ibid., 109.

Discussion: While property is an unavoidable, useful artifice, it is secondary or parasitic on the passions. That is to say, if the passions of human nature were different, then the artifice of property may not have arisen. Hume proposes a similar argument with respect to justice and the laws of nature. In effect, if justice were natural to human nature, then we would not need laws or human conventions. Laws are imaginatively generated to usefully mediate between conflicting human passions. The fixed right of property is an artifice constructed for the purpose of restraining the passions. Hume argues that since

> our first and most natural sentiment of morals is founded on the nature of our passions, and gives the preference to ourselves and friends, above strangers; 'tis impossible there can be naturally any such thing as a fix'd right or property, while the opposite passions of men impel them in contrary directions, and are not restrain'd by any convention or agreement. (T 3.2.2.11; SBN 491)

In addition to the passions is a natural scarcity of resources. To remedy the situation by putting goods on the same footing, a convention is "enter'd into by all the members of the society…" (T 3.2.2.9; SBN 489). The convention does not exist in our impressions or our understanding but must be generated in the same way as other general rules. Once generated, property laws may be adjusted by reason to maximize their effect. But the laws of nature themselves cannot be generated by reason. The only faculty by which human nature can generate novel artifices is the imagination.

Hume's argument that justice and property are artifices is central to his moral theory. In the same way as philosophers attempt to make use of the words *object*, *cause*, *space*, or *time* prior to understanding their origin, "those…who make use of the words *property*, or *right*, or *obligation*, before they have explain'd the origin of justice, or even make use of them in that explication, are guilty of a very gross fallacy, and can never reason upon any solid foundation" (T 3.2.2.11; SBN

491). More broadly, Hume's project reveals the role that humans (and specifically the imagination) play in generating many of our most deeply entrenched beliefs and laws.

2.2. Artifice of Promises

Requisite Impressions: See Justice above.

Imaginative Propensity of Uniting Incompatible Ideas: The union of a 'form of words' with the idea of an action.

Imaginative Propensity of Hypothesizing: See above. In the same manner as the artifice of justice, "promises are human inventions, founded on the necessities and interests of society" (T 3.2.5.7; SBN 519). For Hume, "there is a *certain form of words* invented…by which we bind ourselves to the performance of any action. This form of words constitutes what we call a *promise*, which is the sanction of the interested commerce of mankind" (T 3.2.5.8; SBN 522). The imagination thus arranges words in a certain way in order to produce a certain action. It is not only the form of words we invent, but we also "*feign* a new act of the mind, which we call the *willing* an obligation; and on this we suppose the morality to depend. But we have prov'd already, that there is no such act of the mind, and consequently that promises impose no natural obligation" (T 3.2.5.12; SBN 523). Indeed, in the previous section on the liberty of indifference, it was shown to be an artifice. This is what Hume means by promises imposing no natural obligation. While promises, like justice and property, arise out of natural circumstance, it is only *after* we invent artifices that corresponding obligations emerge.

Generated Artifice: Promises and Obligations

Related Useful Artifices: Justice, Government, Property

Related Useless Artifices: Transubstantiation, Holy orders, Lying, Deceit

Self-Contradiction: Words ≠ Action[209]

Reified Hypothesis: Promises

Discussion: Given the symmetry between the accounts of justice, property, promises, and government, much of the same analysis applies in all cases. For Hume:

> As the obligation of promises is an invention for the interest of society, 'tis warp'd into as many different forms as that interest requires, and even runs into direct contradictions, rather than lose sight of its object. But as those other monstrous doctrines [transubstantiation and holy orders] are mere priestly inventions, and have no public interest in view, they are less disturb'd in their progress by new obstacles. (T 3.2.5.14; SBN 524)

Hume indicates that priestly inventions (like holy orders) and social artifices (like promises) may be traced to the same origin. The difference is that the former are avoidable and useless while the latter are unavoidable and useful. With respect to promises, humans are "an inventive species; and where an invention is obvious and absolutely necessary, it may as properly be said to be natural as any thing that proceeds immediately from original principles" (T 3.2.1.19; SBN 484). While "promises have no natural obligation, and are mere artificial contrivances for the convenience and advantage of society," they still seem to be necessary for the conduct of life (T 3.2.5.15; SBN 525). Where we run into trouble is in the reification of promises. Understanding the artificiality of promises is essential to explaining their origin—"if the obligation of promises be merely a human invention for the convenience of society" it can easily be accounted for, but it "will never be explain'd, if it be [reified as] something *real* and *natural*, arising from any action of the mind or body" (T 3.2.5.13; SBN 524).

---

[209] Rachel Cohon puts the contradiction this way: "We pretend that the obligation of a promise is created by a peculiar act of the mind, the willing of an obligation, and that *that* is the approved motive of promise-keeping" (*Hume's Morality: Feeling and Fabrication*, 209). Further, she claims: "We do this by accepting a fiction and not noticing the contradictions to which it gives rise" (Ibid.). I suggest in Chapter 6 that it is not that we do not *notice* the contradiction, but that the contradiction is irrelevant to the vulgar. It is only philosophers—who are dogmatically committed to the law of contradiction and metaphysical realism—who view fictions and contradictions as *problems* in need of philosophical rescue.

2.3. Artifice of Government

Requisite Impressions: We are "naturally carried to commit acts of injustice" and "not only is this very dangerous to society, but…incapable of any remedy" (T 3.2.7.4; SBN 535). For Hume, "such a remedy can never be effectual without correcting this propensity; and as 'tis impossible to change or correct any thing material in our nature, the utmost we can do is to change our circumstances and situation, and render the observance of the laws of justice our nearest interest, and their violation our most remote" (T 3.2.7.6; SBN 537).

There are "three fundamental laws concerning the stability of possession, its translation by consent, and the performance of promises. These are…antecedent to government…[that is] government, *upon its first establishment*, wou'd naturally be suppos'd to derive its obligation from those laws of nature, and, in particular, from that concerning the performance of promises" (T 3.2.8.3; SBN 541). Therefore, government emerges out of the more fundamental laws of nature discussed in prior sections.

Imaginative Propensity of Uniting Incompatible Ideas: The union between the composition of society and its individual members.

Imaginative Propensity of Hypothesizing: The imaginative propensities that give rise to the artifice of justice are the same as those that give rise to government, since it is the former upon which government is predicated. For Hume, "government, which, tho' compos'd of men subject to all human infirmities, becomes, by *one of the finest and most subtle inventions imaginable*, a composition, that is, in some measure, exempted from all these infirmities" (T 3.2.7.8; SBN 539, italics added). It is important to note that government is less unavoidable than the original artifice of justice. As Hume says, "government be an invention very advantageous, and even in some

circumstances absolutely necessary to mankind; it is not necessary in all circumstances, nor is it impossible for men to preserve society for some time, without having recourse to such an invention" (T 3.2.8.1; SBN 539). As mentioned, we ought to see artifices and fictions on a spectrum of unavoidability, where some artifices are more unavoidable than others. A second-order or third-order artifice like government, for instance, will be more avoidable than a first-order artifice such as justice.

Generated Artifice: Government

Related Useful Artifices: Justice, Promises, Property, Common end or purpose, Principle of Unity, Principle of Identity

Related Useless Artifices: Corrupt Governments or Nations

Self-Contradiction: Social Composite ≠ Individual Members

Reified Hypothesis: Nations or Cultures

Discussion: The government shares features with the human soul in so far as it is a unity among number. In particular, Hume writes: "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" (T 1.4.6.19; SBN 261). What unites the government or republic? It is plausible to see a symmetry here between Hume's account of identity and unity with his account of justice. The laws of nature bind together society writ large in the form of a government. Analogously, the natural relations and imaginative propensities bind together the soul or, in more accurate terms, the fiction of personal identity. The human mind is connected by various fictions in the same way that society is connected by various artifices.

3. Artifice of God

3.1. Artifice of an Intelligent Designer

Requisite Impressions: Our "observation of means to ends relations and coherence of parts" make us "come to believe that the whole world is like a machine."[210]

Imaginative Propensity of Uniting Incompatible Ideas: The incompatible union of the design found in human contrivance and the design found in nature.[211]

Imaginative Propensity of Hypothesizing: First, we experience an easy transition of ideas. Second, we "misrepresent the data of experience, and go beyond it."[212] And, finally, the completion of the union reifies the design hypothesis as ontologically real.

Generated Artifice: Anthropomorphic conception of God or an intelligent designer.

Related Useful Artifices: Common end or purpose, sympathy of parts, and the identity of animals and vegetables, "where not only the several parts have a reference to some general purpose, but also a mutual dependance on, and connexion with each other" (T 1.4.6.12; SBN 257).

Related Useless Artifices: Polytheism, Holy Orders, Transubstantiation

Self-Contradiction: Non-Human Contrivance ≠ Human Contrivance

Reified Hypothesis: Design Hypothesis[213]

---

[210] Tweyman, *Essays on the Philosophy of David Hume: Natural Religion, Natural Belief, and Ontology*, 84.

[211] Specifically, "however strong men's propensity to believe invisible, intelligent power in nature, their propensity is equally strong to rest their attention on sensible, visible objects; and in order to reconcile these opposite inclinations, they are led to unite the invisible power with some visible object" (N 5.2).

[212] Tweyman, *Essays on the Philosophy of David Hume: Natural Religion, Natural Belief, and Ontology*, 84.

[213] Ibid., 91.

Discussion: Timothy Costelloe argues that "the ideas of popular theism…are better understood as a species of vulgar fiction that inspires natural belief."[214] He draws on R. J. Butler and Stanley Tweyman to develop his account. In the *Dialogues*, Hume says:

> The curious adapting of means to ends, throughout all nature, resembles exactly, though it much exceeds, the productions of human contrivance; of human design, thought, wisdom, and intelligence. Since therefore the effects resemble each other, we are led to infer, by all the rules of analogy, that the causes also resemble; and that the Author of Nature is somewhat similar to the mind of man; though possessed of much larger faculties, proportioned to the grandeur of the work, which he has executed (D 2.5).

It is through analogical rules that we infer the resemblance between the Author of Nature and the mind of man. Yet, it is not an inference of reason. Rather, it is an inference produced by the imaginative propensity to go beyond itself to complete the union of relations.[215] In this case, the relation is the resemblance between the design found in human contrivance and the design found in nature. The completion of the union confers existence on the idea of an intelligent designer, causing a natural belief in it.[216]

The inference cannot be philosophical or based on reason because of its universality in the vulgar mind. Indeed, as Hume remarks, "a purpose, an intention, a design strikes every where the most careless, the most stupid thinker; and no man can be so hardened in absurd systems, as at all times to reject it…all the sciences almost lead us insensibly to acknowledge a first

---

[214] *The Imagination in Hume's Philosophy*, 226.

[215] In this, I see the intelligent designer meeting the criteria of Beryl Logan's approach to characterizing Humean natural beliefs. On her view: "The idea of an intelligent designer is like the 'fictions'" of other natural beliefs including the self and the external world (*Religion Without Talking*, 133). Similarly, for Stanley Tweyman: "When speaking of the substitution involved in natural belief, Hume speaks of the activity of the mind as 'feigning,' and it is the resultant awareness which is the fiction" (*Scepticism and belief*, 15).

[216] P. J. E. Kail argues that "Hume holds that we engage in a projection of this false assumption to provide a conception of natural causation…religious belief emerges because our failure to understand the natural causal nexus triggers a disposition to anthropomorphize nature that offers a doubly false model of nature governed by the active will of invisible intelligent power. This same projective disposition, according to Hume, is behind the fiction of substantial form and substance favored in Aristotelian philosophy. For Hume this 'fiction' is a psychological reaction to our failure to grasp genuine efficacy, breeding anthropomorphic notions like 'sympathies, antipathies and horrors of a vacuum'" ("Nietzsche and Hume: Naturalism and Explanation," 14).

intelligent Author" (D 12.2). Why is the belief in an intelligent designer a natural belief? The imaginative propensity to complete the union is a natural and irresistible process of the vulgar mind. It is therefore classified as an unavoidable artifice.[217]

Is the belief in an intelligent designer also useful to the conduct of life? If we follow Cleanthes' argument, he goes on to say that "the proper office of religion is to regulate the heart of men, humanize their conduct, infuse the spirit of temperance, order, and obedience" (D. 12.12). While Hume does not specifically argue that the idea of an intelligent designer is unavoidable or an artifice, it seems to me that Cleanthes argument in the *Dialogues* supports both readings. In fact, if we take Hume to mean that the idea of an intelligent designer is a useful artifice of the vulgar mind, then he anticipates Kant's Ideas of Reason, namely, the idea of God and its pragmatic function in regulating human behavior.

4. A Case Study in an Avoidable, Useless Fiction

In cases where humans do not examine the origin of their ideas, there is a tendency to build upon errors, artifices, fictions, and hypotheses. In Hume's words, "to establish one hypothesis upon another is building entirely in the air; and the utmost we ever attain, by these conjectures and fictions, is to ascertain the bare possibility of our opinion; but never can we, upon such

---

[217] An objection to this claim is raised by Frederick Whelan. He questions "why the basic elements of religious faith—the existence of God, the world as a purposive creation, the experiences of sin and grace, hope of an afterlife—may not be accepted as (at least) a kind of salutary fiction or artifice of the imagination?" (*Order and Artifice*, 308). Ultimately, his response is that "Hume believes that he can persuade people to accept and adhere to scientific reasoning, and to moral practices such as justice, *as* artifices, on the ground that they are useful for human purposes. Recognition of their artificial status does not especially weaken them or undermine the convictions that attend them. Religious faith, by contrast, is presumably incompatible with its acknowledgment as a fiction or artifice. Artifices are either human contrivances (like government) or expressions of human nature, refined by the discipline of reason (like rules of inference). Religion can be interpreted along these lines, but not by its genuine adherents" (Ibid., 309).

My interpretation disagrees with Whelan's contention here. If Hume had included a discussion of religion in the *Treatise* specifically, I suspect 'the basic elements of religious faith' *would be* considered fiction or artifice. Since the majority of Hume's work on religion occurred *after* the *Treatise*—and thus *after* the abandonment of his theory of fiction and artifice—it is clear why there is no mention of fiction and artifice in his later work on religion.

terms, establish its reality" (D 10.30). One major discovery in Hume's *Treatise* is that the history of ideas is riddled with this tendency. Mathematicians, logicians, metaphysicians, and philosophers of natural religion have routinely succumbed to building ideational castles in the sky. Why? Because they did not properly examine the origin and content of the foundational ideas with which they worked.

Hume believes that "there might be several useful discoveries made from a criticism of 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; SBN 219). Similarly, the entire *Treatise* operates on the same belief—not only concerning modern philosophy—but concerning the fundamental fictions found in science, mathematics, logic, morality, and religion. The criticism of fictions and artifices in all of these domains reveals that, while some are "unreasonable and capricious," many of them are entirely reasonable, natural, and unavoidable in human nature. Indeed, fictions share a profound relationship with the principles of human nature—we are *Homo fingens*.[218]

A problem, however, is that humans, especially intellectuals, do not want to accept the fictional nature of their most prized ideas. Where would that leave intellectuals if their pursuits were reduced to the same level as artists? In an effort to distinguish the legitimacy of intellectual life, philosophers, scientists, and mathematicians (ironically and illegitimately) reify their ideas. If innate ideas, causality, and numbers are taken *as* real, it entails a kind of weight to the subject matter. But, for Hume, reification only tangles the knot further. Instead of accepting the truth of

[218] For Sokolowski: "Hume considers man as an artificer not only in technological and political matters but even in contemplation, since the objects that are known by man turn out to be fictions contrived by his imagination. Thus contemplation, which in the classical view was contrasted to acting and making, becomes a species of production. Philosophy, instead of revealing the fundamental truth of being, is the narration of what man makes. In this Hume anticipates the constructivist epistemology of Kant and the 'constitutive' phenomenology of Husserl" ("Fiction and Illusion in David Hume's Philosophy," 225).

fiction, intellectuals build stories atop of stories and create vast philosophical edifices of the imagination.[219] I now turn to one example where philosophers have demonstrated said artistic license.

4.1. Philosophical Double Existence of Perceptions and Objects

Requisite Impressions and Fictions: Interrupted Perceptions and Fictitious Object Identity.

Imaginative Propensity of Uniting Incompatible Ideas: The union of one relation and one fiction, namely, that "our perceptions and objects are different, and that our objects alone preserve a continu'd existence" (T 1.4.2.46; SBN 211).

Imaginative Propensity of Hypothesizing: Hume provides the following explanation.

> 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, nor can we arrive at it but by passing thro' the common hypothesis of the identity and continuance of our interrupted perceptions. Were we not first perswaded, that our perceptions are our only objects, and continue to exist even when they no longer make their appearance to the senses, we shou'd never be led to think, that our perceptions and objects are different, and that our objects alone preserve a continu'd existence. 'The latter hypothesis has no primary recommendation either to reason or the imagination, but acquires all its influence on the imagination from the former.' (T 1.4.2.46; SBN 211)

The doctrine of double existence must be taken as an *avoidable* fiction because "all the unthinking and unphilosophical part of mankind…never think of a double existence" (T 1.4.2.36; SBN 205). It is only philosophers that hypothesize the double existence of perceptions and objects. Therefore, if philosophers examined the origin and content of their ideas, they might easily avoid subscribing to the fiction of double existence.

---

[219] On Baier's view: "Fictions are plausible stories we tell ourselves to organize our experience…Fictions structure our version of ourselves and our environment, making both us and it 'real and durable'…Like the poets Hume discusses…we start from what is familiar to us, our perceptions, and build from that a 'system' that goes beyond what we strictly know to be true" (*Progress*, 103-4).

Moreover, it is not a *useful* fiction either because it only obfuscates the truth about human nature. The principles of the imagination generate the continued existence of objects. The doctrine of double existence takes the continued existence of objects as empirical fact or ontologically real rather than as a natural fiction. The purpose of the philosophical doctrine of double existence is explanatory; it is supposed to tell us about the nature of the world. But, instead, it builds on unexamined assumptions and draws philosophers far from the course of truth. Ironically, as Hume realizes, the vulgar end up being closer to the truth than these philosophers who pretend to explain the universe. In that sense, Hume might be seen as a true populist philosopher, exposing the pretense of philosophers (and many other types of intellectuals) as emperors with no clothes.

Generated Fiction: Double Existence of Perceptions and Objects

Related Useful Fictions: Continued Existence of Objects, Personal Identity, Principle of Identity

Related Useless Fictions: Soul and Substance

Self-Contradiction: Identical ≠ Distinct

> This philosophical system, therefore, 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. The imagination tells us, that our resembling perceptions have a continu'd and uninterrupted existence, and are not annihilated by their absence. Reflection tells us, that even our resembling perceptions are interrupted in their existence, and different from each other. The contradiction betwixt these opinions we elude by a new fiction, which is conformable to the hypotheses both of reflection and fancy. (T 1.4.2.52; SBN 215)

Reified Hypothesis: "In order to set ourselves at ease in this particular, we contrive a new hypothesis, which seems to comprehend both these principles of reason and imagination. This hypothesis is the philosophical one of the double existence of perceptions and objects" (T 1.4.2.52; SBN 215).

Discussion: Robert McRae argues that fictitious duration has extensive implications in the *Treatise*, namely, that "out of this fiction are generated in a logically ordered series the basic metaphysical

categories in terms of which the mind thinks, and all of them are fictitious."[220] If we take McRae as correct in his interpretation, it is not surprising that metaphysicians fall into the error of double existence. That is, if the metaphysical categories are mind-dependent and fictitious, there is, in effect, nothing for the metaphysician to do. Either the metaphysician acknowledges the fictional nature of the categories, or the metaphysician seeks an alternative explanation. Any explanation, however, will fall into the same error for the reason that, if the categories *in which we think* are actually fictitious, then we always start our investigation on fictional grounds.[221]

In that sense, Hume's *Treatise* is far more dangerous to metaphysicians than Kant's *Critique*. At least, Kant's categories were universal and necessary such that the human mind must conceive the world in a such a way. For Hume, the categories themselves are general (as opposed to universal), fallible (as opposed to necessary) and fictitious (in so far as they generated by the human imagination)—Hume's categories are thus contingent, probable, and anti-dogmatic.

The self-contradictory nature of the doctrine of double existence is a consequence of being predicated on self-contradictory first-order fictions. Again, Hume never resolves the contradiction embedded in the fiction of identity (between unity and number) or in the fiction of unity (between simplicity and complexity). The contradictions are at the core of human nature, and they are seemingly irresolvable. When we attempt to elude the contradictions to satisfy the mind, we only generate second-order fictions which contain first-order fictions. Double existence is an attempt to elude "the contradiction betwixt…opinions" with a new fiction (T 1.4.2.52; SBN 215). But, as we have seen, double existence does not clear up the contradiction, it only conceals it with a "pretext to justify our receiving" the contradiction (T 1.4.2.52; SBN 216).

---

[220] "The Import of Hume's Theory of Time," 124.

[221] John Passmore's view is close to that of McRae: "By the application of the same methods we gradually construct an entire system of fictions…The system rests on nothing more solid than 'trivial propensities of the imagination': our tendency to 'overcome' contradictions by constructing imaginary entities" (*Hume's Intentions*, 71).

In "not being able to reconcile these two enemies, we endeavour to set ourselves at ease as much as possible, by successively granting to each whatever it demands…where each may find something, that has all the conditions it desires" (T 1.4.2.52; SBN 215). Hume does not propose a solution to the contradiction; in fact, he embraces it as a vital component of human nature. If we turn the empirical method on the moral subject to examine the origin and content of our ideas, what do we find? At the foundation of human nature are elemental contradictions that we can only elude by successive fictions. Philosophers simply build out that fictional infrastructure to absurd lengths. To become a true sceptic then, on my interpretation, is to recognize the necessary existence of unavoidable, useful fictions, and to separate them from the useless and harmful fictions that capture the minds of philosophers and vulgar alike. As Hume says of his own project:

> Moral philosophy is in the same condition as natural, with regard to astronomy before the time of *Copernicus*. The antients, tho' sensible of that maxim, *that nature does nothing in vain*, contriv'd such intricate systems of the heavens, as seem'd inconsistent with true philosophy, and gave place at last to something more simple and natural. To invent without scruple a new principle to every new phænomenon, instead of adapting it to the old; to overload our hypotheses with a variety of this kind; are certain proofs, that none of these principles is the just one, and that we only desire, by a number of falshoods, to cover our ignorance of the truth. (T 2.1.3.7; SBN 282)

CHAPTER SIX: HUME'S FICTIONALISM

1. Hans Vaihinger and Hume's Philosophy of As If

In 1911, Hans Vaihinger published his *The Philosophy of As If*. Based on his 1877 dissertation, the systematic work presents a general theory of fiction. Several contemporary strands of—what is now known as—philosophical *fictionalism* may be traced to Vaihinger's seminal work. Scientific fictionalism, religious fictionalism, moral fictionalism, mathematical fictionalism, metaphysical fictionalism are all forms of this broad philosophical movement.

In the Preface to the English Edition of *The Philosophy of As If*, Vaihinger surveys a list of philosophers and movements he believes to be his forerunners. First, he draws attention to the movement of English Nominalism, which, he says, represents an initial understanding of fictions. Specifically, he mentions the sceptical philosophical approach of John Duns Scotus, followed by the theory of *ficta* proposed by William of Occam. For Vaihinger, Occam offers the first "clear and definite treatment of the fictional nature of general ideas, developed in a manner which is still a model for to-day."[222] Occam's account introduces the thesis that *ficta* ought to be regarded as practically necessary ideas despite their theoretical non-existence.

Second, while Vaihinger acknowledges George Berkeley to have had a minimal understanding of fictions, it is Hobbes, he argues, who demonstrated "considerable knowledge both of Fictions themselves and of the theory of their use. Empty space, the idea of a *bellum omnium contra omens*, and of an 'original contract' are for Hobbes conscious Fictions."[223] Vaihinger also names Jeremy Bentham and Adam Smith as noteworthy predecessors.

---

[222] *The Philosophy of As If*, vii.

[223] Ibid.

The main source of inspiration for Vaihinger is, not surprisingly, Immanuel Kant. Vaihinger is well-known as an important figure in the Neo-Kantian tradition—he founded the academic journals, *Kant-Studien* and *Kant Gesellschaft* in 1896 and 1901, respectively. Vaihinger maintains that Kant devoted "100 pages" of his work to outlining a theory of fiction in which he proved "a large number of ideas, not only in metaphysics but also in mathematics, physics and jurisprudence, were Fictions."[224]

The only additional English philosophers that Vaihinger mentions in his Preface are David Hume and Francis Bacon. He claims that both Bacon and Hume failed to understand Fictions. Despite that, Vaihinger later admits that his first major influence was, in fact, Hume: "it was David Hume and still more J.S. Mill whose influence on my thought was paramount." He then reiterates that his "private studies were devoted mostly to David Hume and John Stuart Mill, whose exact knowledge was decisive for [his] philosophic attitude."[225] Given that Hume specifically refers to 'fiction' on fifty separate occasions in the *Treatise*, it is curious why Vaihinger does not credit him with even a minimal understanding of fiction.

It seems that Vaihinger may have gleaned more from Hume regarding the nature of fictions than he readily admits in the preface to his book. At the very least, it is clear that Vaihinger's claim about Hume's understanding of fiction is mistaken. In fact, on my view, Hume's broad exploration of fictions—though largely obscure and unsystematic—is comprehensive, and often reaches similar conclusions to Vaihinger's.

It is still more curious why Vaihinger singled out Hobbes for praise and not Hume considering Hobbes' plausible influence on Hume. Paul Russell has drawn attention to

---

[224] Ibid., vii.

[225] Ibid., xxxvii.

"significant affinities between" Hume's theory of spatial representation and Hobbes'.[226] Jonathan Cottrell suggests that when "Hobbes claims that the 'place' (*locus*) of a body is 'feigned' (*ficta*)…he seems to mean that being located involves a relation between a body and our minds…[that] a body has 'feigned' location means that it is related to our minds in a certain way: namely, that it produces a certain effect in our imagination."[227] And, for Cottrell, Hobbes' treatment of feigned location shares important similarities with Hume's fictitious duration and distance. In addition, there seems to be a further point of contact between Hobbes' rendering of the state of nature and Hume's recognition of it as a philosophical *fiction*.

In view of these salient connections between Hobbes and Hume, it is perplexing why Vaihinger—who studied Hume with such interest—did not notice them, especially when Vaihinger specifically cites Hobbes' empty space, the war of all against all, and the original contract *as* fictions. It is even more curious that when Vaihinger *does* reference Hume, he denies him a charitable reading. For instance, Vaihinger argues that "when Hume called the categories fictions, he was right *in fact*, though his idea of a fiction was very different from ours. His idea of the 'fiction of thought' was that of a merely subjective fancy, while ours (borrowed from the usage of mathematics and jurisprudence) includes the idea of utility. This is really the kernel of our position, which distinguishes it fundamentally from previous views."[228] Vaihinger is, on my view, incorrect here, for while Hume does believe some fictions are subjective fancies, he believes

---

[226] Russell specifically writes: "Hobbes and Spinoza are rarely, if ever, associated with Hume's position on space—which is especially surprising in the case of Hobbes, as there are significant affinities between their views" (*The Riddle of Hume's Treatise*, 110).

[227] "A Puzzle about Fictions in the *Treatise*," 69-70.

[228] *The Philosophy of As If*, 99.

that other fictions are naturally constitutive of human nature, and that they are necessarily tied to the idea of utility.[229]

Contra Vaihinger, Traiger argues Hume's understanding of fictions may have indeed been influenced by the notion of a legal fiction. Because Hume had studied law, he was "well versed in legal fictions. He explicitly refers to and describes legal fictions in *The History of England*…The notion of legal fiction in Hume's time was, and remains today, a fundamental concept in the law. Its application to Hume's metaphysics and epistemology is natural and fitting, and the former can be further applied to making sense of the latter."[230]

Hume was also explicitly influenced by George Berkeley, and while it is unclear to what extent Hume was influenced by Berkeley's criticisms of mathematics specifically, it is at least plausible that Hume's mathematical views were minimally informed by his controversial critique.[231] Vaihinger says of Berkeley that he "proved, quite correctly and with wonderful insight, that practically all the fundamental principles of mathematics were contradictory. From this he drew the conclusion that the mathematicians had no right whatsoever to scoff at the incomprehensible elements and mysteries of Christianity, since their own subject had the same defects."[232] Hume equally reveals the contradictory nature of important mathematical concepts, namely, equality, infinite divisibility, and identity. As a consequence, Berkeley's *The Analyst*, published only five years before the *Treatise*, might have been a source of influence for Hume's approach to fiction.

---

[229] Vaihinger subsequently seems to contradict himself when he makes the claim: "it is the particular merit of Kant to have shown that most ideational constructs are purely subjective. That they are fictions in our sense, i.e. fictions as a means for attaining certain purposes, he no more realised than Hume" (*The Philosophy of As If*, 107).

[230] "Experience and Testimony in Hume's Philosophy," 52-3.

[231] Charles McCracken notes that Berkeley viewed the forces of Newtonian mechanics "as useful but fictitious 'mathematical hypotheses'" ("George Berkeley," 450).

[232] *The Philosophy of As If*, 117.

1.1. Hypothetical v. Self-Contradictory Fictions

On my interpretation, Hume's philosophy of fiction anticipates several of Vaihinger's arguments in *The Philosophy of As If*. Although Hume does not classify or define his use of fiction in any systematic or technical sense, a careful reading suggests that Humean fictions share important elements with Vaihingerian fictions. In this section, I begin by highlighting the main features of Vaihinger's theory of fiction, and then I discuss how Hume's fictions may be understood in light of Vaihinger's twofold distinction. That is, Vaihinger divides his theory of fictions into two major types:

(1) Real Fictions (Self-Contradictory)

(2) Semi-Fictions (Hypothetical)

Real Fictions are fictions identified by internal contradictions. They serve the mind in so far as they act as expedients for the operation of thought. Once their service is complete, they drop out like middle terms of a syllogism. As Vaihinger argues, "the discarding of true fictions in the course of a given mental operation follows necessarily from their contradictory character—for, after all, our aim is to obtain non-contradictory results"[233]

Real fictions are essentially artificial. They blend the given with the unthinkable. That is to say, they assume the impossible and make reality incomprehensible, in order to make it comprehensible. While that may seem paradoxical, real fictions behave in contradiction of the facts and interpolate impossible elements for reality such that they, in fact, make it more complicated than it appears to be.

[233] Ibid., 98.

Some examples may serve to illustrate the thought. For Vaihinger, the Absolute and the Infinite are both examples of real fictions. Following his Neo-Kantian approach, he argues that "self-contradiction discloses itself particularly in the antinomies to which they give rise (cf. Kant's antinomies of the infinite, by means of which he proved that the idea of infinite space was subjective, or, in our terminology, fictional).[234] Real fictions, in other words, are most easily recognized by internal contradictions and antinomies within a particular idea.

Semi-Fictions, on the other hand, are a second type of fiction in Vaihinger's philosophy. These kinds of fictions are historically provisional and disappear in the course of time. Instead of assuming the impossible, these fictions assume the unreal. In other words, they are hypotheses. In attempting to discover the truth, they deviate or falsify reality as simpler than reality appears to be. Semi-fictions establish natural laws, while real fictions act as scaffolding to be demolished after their intended use: "to the *verification* of the hypothesis corresponds the *justification* of the fiction."[235]

Vaihinger, quoting Hermann Lotze, argues that "every hypothesis claims to be not only a figure of thought, or a means of making thought concrete, but a statement of fact."[236] Along the same lines, he claims that "everyone who sets up a hypothesis believes that he has extended the series of real facts by a happy divination of facts not less real though falling outside the range of his observation."[237] Thus, hypotheses seem to reify future contingents by virtue of the force and

---

[234] Ibid., 97

[235] Ibid., 88-89.

[236] Ibid., 90.

[237] Ibid., 90.

vivacity involved.[238] Let us now consider both types of fiction in, what I believe to be, their Humean manifestations.

1.2. Hume's Real Fictions

In the *Treatise*, Hume did not classify his use of fiction in any technical manner. The lack of conceptual clarity poses the interpretive difficulty: are there different *types* of Humean fictions? In this section, I suggest a typological resemblance between the two imaginative propensities I discussed in Chapter 2 (namely, reifying hypotheses and uniting incompatible ideas) and Vaihinger's twofold distinction between real fictions and semi-fictions. Indeed, Vaihinger's distinction appears to roughly conform to Hume's unavoidable, useful fictions. To develop the comparison further, I turn to Hume's self-contradictory fictions—that is, fictions produced by the propensity of the imagination to unite contradictory ideas. Norman Kemp Smith acknowledges the self-contradictory nature of such fictions in the following passage:

> Hume is…insistent that the idea of identity, on examination, turns out to be a fiction, and so, like all fictions, to be due to the imagination. In employing this idea we profess to be travelling upon a path between unity and number, as impossible a path as any between existence and non-existence. We both do and do not assert unity; that is to say, we refuse to go to the length of number or diversity, and yet restrain ourselves from asserting a strict and absolute unity. Every alleged instance of such identity is an illustration of this self-contradictory procedure; a body is, we believe, both diverse and a unity, a self we believe to be individual and yet also complex, the same with itself and yet in never-ceasing change. For imagination, and therefore belief, there is no difficulty. Nature, in and through our natural beliefs, imposes the fiction upon us; and this notwithstanding its having no sanction in the data of sense, and though the problems which it raises are irresolvable for the understanding and reason.[239]

---

[238] In other words, "when we turn our thought to a future object, our fancy flows along the stream of time, and arrives at the object by an order, which seems most natural, passing always from one point of time to that which is immediately posterior to it. This *easy* progression of ideas favours the imagination, and makes it conceive its object in a stronger and fuller light" (T 2.3.7.8; SBN 430-1). The stronger and fuller light, I submit, produces a stronger belief in the hypothesis such that it reifies it.

[239] *The Philosophy of David Hume*, 475-6.

Now, let us consider Hume's view of fictitious unity. In this particular fiction, the imagination unites the idea of unity with the idea of number. For example, "twenty men *may be consider'd as an unite*. The whole globe of the earth, nay the whole universe *may be consider'd as an unite*. That term of unity is merely a fictitious denomination, which the mind may apply to any quantity of objects it collects together" (T 1.2.2.3; SBN 30). When the mind unites the idea of unity with any collection, it creates a self-contradictory fiction. Unity and number cannot exist at the same time and in the same respect. And yet, when we call twenty men a *single* unit, we seem to engage in such a contradiction. Keep in mind that I am specifically referring to a psychological contradiction, not a logical contradiction consisting of terms or propositions. Natural fictions are contradictory in so far as a single fiction is the unification of incompatible ideas.

Can we say then that fictitious unity is a 'real fiction' in Vaihinger's sense? First, the internal contradiction seems clear, that the fiction contains both unity and number. Additionally, to say that fictitious unity serves as an expedient for the operation of thought ought to be granted. It is useful to think in aggregates, even though a given aggregate may be associated by the imagination, mind-dependent, and ultimately unverifiable. The fact that nations or sports teams are fictional need not affect their utility. And, finally, when we think in aggregates, the contradictory nature of the aggregate drops out of our reasoning. If we take the idea of 'Scotland,' for instance, we may use it in our reasoning without acknowledging—or even being aware of—its self-contradictory nature. Somehow, despite their logical incomprehensibility, self-contradictory fictions perform an essential role in the operation of thought.

Fictitious unities, for Vaihinger, blend the unthinkable with the given. The contradictory character of the aggregate is *unthinkable*, but the constituents of the aggregate are *given* in our experience in the form of simple or complex ideas. It is thus an act of assuming the impossible (a

contradiction) in order to make reality comprehensible, since, in these particular cases, comprehension is dependent upon grouping together particulars for various reasons. For instance, we make *sense* of a basket of fruit—as a monadic collection—by collecting together various fruit in the basket and applying the fictitious denomination 'fruit' to them. Notice here the similarity between fictitious unity and general terms. The same argument, I submit, extends to general terms.

In light of these similarities, I suggest there are plausible grounds for thinking Hume's fictitious unity fits the criteria of Vaihinger's real fictions. Fictitious unity, by interpolating impossible elements (contradictory unities) for reality, makes reality more complicated than it is. If, for Hume, all that we perceive are simple and complex impressions and ideas, then when we apply the idea of unity to any collection of complex or simple ideas via an imaginative operation, we complicate the data we originally perceive.

An objection to this account might seek recourse in Hume's rejection of contradictions, namely, "'tis in vain to search for a contradiction in any thing that is distinctly conceiv'd by the mind. Did it imply any contradiction, 'tis impossible it cou'd ever be conceiv'd" (T 1.2.4.11; SBN 43). But, of course, fictitious unities *are* conceivable by the mind. Even children can understand the family unit or the unity of building blocks. It must therefore be a different type of contradiction. Hume describes identity in the same way—as a self-contradictory fiction—but it, too, is conceivable, as children can tell us relatively soon into their cognitive development.

One solution is to treat identity and unity as fictions that may be viewed under different, incompatible lights. I return to this solution later in the chapter. A second solution, on the other hand, might be to understand self-contradictory fictions as confused notions. Take the confused notion of uniting "an extended body, as a fig, and its particular taste" (T 1.4.5.13; SBN 238). In

this case, "'tis certain that upon reflection we must observe in this union something altogether unintelligible and contradictory" (T 1.4.5.13; SBN 238). The confused notion is generated by the passive, exclusive imagination uniting sensory multiplicities. The extended fig and its taste are two distinct sensory impressions that are united by the imagination into one incompatible fiction.

Upon reflection, the *post hoc* judgment of the sub-faculty of reason informs the philosopher that the incompatible union is unintelligible and obscure. The fiction is therefore only confused so far as the *philosopher* is concerned. For the vulgar, it is neither clear nor obscure; it is simply a useful tool, the existence of which generally goes unnoticed. But the philosopher does not stop there. The authority of reason motivates the philosopher to root out all self-contradictory fictions wherever he or she might find them—but to no avail: the priorities of consistency and clarity are subordinate to human nature's pragmatic concerns. Thus, it does not matter whether contradictions are rejected as confused or unintelligible by the vassals serving the kingdom of reason: human nature always wins out in the end. The negative interpretation of self-contradictory fictions as confused notions might satisfy the biases of philosophers, but it does not add much in the way of explanatory power. Self-contradictory fictions instead ought to be understood as psychological phenomena which involve the union of incompatible ideas. The same is true of Vaihinger's conception of fictions: "The fictive activity of the mind is an expression of the fundamental psychical forces; *fictions* are *mental structures*. The psyche weaves this aid to thought out of itself; for the mind is inventive; under the compulsion of necessity, stimulated by the outer world, it discovers the store of contrivances that lie hidden within itself."[240]

[240] *The Philosophy of As If*, 12.

1.3. Hume's Semi-Fictions

The second type of Humean fiction is what I have called the reified hypothesis. These correspond to Vaihinger's semi-fictions. For Vaihinger, hypotheses are imperative to scientific inquiry, especially theoretical science. In the course of science, we must treat hypotheses *as if* they are true in order to develop theoretical systems. For Hume, hypotheses are foundational to human understanding. We have to believe that our world is stable and real, even though the future may, at any time, introduce data that contradict everything we believe to be true.

Hypotheses, by definition, are not real. They are predictive or suppositional statements or beliefs. Thus, if a prediction is confirmed, it does not make the prediction itself true. Truth and reality, for Hume, only pertain to what we have already experienced, that is, impressions or ideas. Hypotheses, however, are not traceable to any prior impressions or ideas. Indeed, it is contradictory to say that hypotheses, which include statements or beliefs about the future, are derived from *past* impressions and ideas. Consider Hume's admonition:

> We must endeavour to render all our principles as universal as possible, by tracing up our experiments to the utmost, and explaining all effects from the simplest and fewest causes, 'tis still certain we cannot go beyond experience; and any hypothesis, that pretends to discover the ultimate original qualities of human nature, ought at first to be rejected as presumptuous and chimerical. (T 0.8; SBN xvii)

The difficulty in interpreting this passage is that a hypothesis *by definition* goes beyond experience. Therefore, if we cannot go beyond experience, does that mean whenever we *do* go beyond experience, we are trading in fictions? A reasonable reading of Hume, on my view, is that *universal or perfect hypotheses* are to be taken as fictions, while statements of probability or causal inferences do not necessarily go beyond experience. The reason is that probable claims do not pretend to be ontologically verified. We might say that there is a seventy-percent probability of rain tomorrow. This claim is clearly conditional. It does not go beyond past experience. On the other hand, if we

take the law of gravity as constitutive of a larger theoretical claim, then it ought to be treated as fictional. It is fictional because it is being taken *as if* it were ontologically real for the purposes of grounding or supporting a theory.

Let us consider the fiction of absolute necessity. Absolute necessity arises from the propensity to render our principles as universal and complete as possible. But once a universal statement regarding a matter of fact is asserted, it is, in part, a fiction (or, in Vaihinger's terms, a 'semi-fiction'). If "*whatever we can imagine, is possible*," then any future matter of fact is possible (T 1.4.5.35; SBN 250). Therefore, any universal statement claiming that something *must* happen in the future contradicts the Humean Conceivability Principle. When we do so, we generate a fiction in so far as we attribute a fictive modal property (necessity or impossibility) to a matter of fact. And yet, it seems that categorical commitments are necessary to theoretical science just as axioms are necessary to pure mathematics.

In the case of absolute necessity, we *assume the unreal* in so far as we take it *as if* it were fact. Though some scientific laws reach the level of proof—such that in every relevant instance the law obtains—the problem of future contingents remains unresolved. There is always a possibility that even our most proven hypotheses may turn out to be false. Any claim of absolute necessity, therefore, which reifies necessity in all future instances, ought to be construed as a hypothetical fiction. While it might *possibly* be true, any reification of future experience is nevertheless a form of fictionalizing.

Furthermore, as Vaihinger mentions, hypothetical fictions often falsify or simplify reality in order to discover truth. For example, scientists may isolate a given area of study—say, biology—to understand the world, even though biological organisms supervene on the laws of chemistry and physics. Any biological explanation is therefore a simplification of reality to the extent that it

does not include all causal information relevant to a given phenomenon. Any isolation or simplification of reality within a scientific theory is a type of fictionalizing in as much as it acts as a heuristic or partial representation.[241] In the example of absolute necessity, it seems to simplify causality into a single chain of cause and effect. But, to the contrary, there appear to be an infinite number of causes and effects at any given moment—all of them interconnected. To properly chart a causal series, then, one would have to account for the entire network of interconnections, which seems impossible for any individual to accomplish. Not only that: there may be unobservable causes that cannot even be accounted for in the hypothesis of absolute necessity.

Broadly, like real fictions, semi-fictions (or hypothetical) fictions blend the real with the fictional. Neither type of fiction denies or rejects reality. Instead, real fictions unite contradictory but *real* ideas derived from impressions, whereas semi-fictions take past experience and project it into the future. Both acts of fictionalizing are extraordinarily useful to the conduct of life, as well as foundational to many domains of inquiry.

---

[241] Compare Descartes' view of imagined causes: "This will indeed be sufficient for application in ordinary life, since medicine and mechanics, and all of the other arts which can be fully developed with the help of physics, are directed only towards items that can be perceived by the sense and are therefore to be counted among the phenomena of nature. [Footnote: …are directed simply towards applying certain observable bodies to each other in such a way that certain observable effects are produced as a result of natural causes. And *by imagining what the various causes are, and considering their results, we shall achieve our aim irrespective of whether these imagined causes are true or false, since the result is taken to be no different*, as far as the observable effects are concerned (French version)." In the original French, the relevant claim reads: "ce que nous ferons tout aussi bien, en considérant la suite de quelques causes ainsi imaginées, bien que fausses, que si elles étaient les vraies, puisque cette suite est supposée semblable, en ce qui regarde les effets sensibles" (*Selected Philosophical Writings*, 210, italics added) I am indebted to Georges Moyal for bringing this passage to my attention.

2. Hume as a Proto-Fictionalist

One aim of my dissertation is to redress Hume's absence from the history of fictionalism, as recapitulated by Vaihinger among others.[242] In particular, Hume ought to be recognized for proposing an inchoate theory of fiction unique to the history of fictionalism, namely, *epistemological fictionalism*. Saul Traiger argues that Hume's understanding of fiction "is fundamentally epistemological rather than ontological."[243] That, in my view, seems correct in so far as it pertains to Hume's unavoidable, useful fictions—the special class of fictions derived from natural and moral relations. In Achille Varzi's view, what distinguishes Humean fictionalism as specifically epistemological-semantic rather than ontological is "our impulse to always provide the complex system of concepts and principles through which we represent the world of experience with an objective foundation in the nature of things—over and above any specific view concerning what those things might actually be."[244]

There are several reasons why Hume ought to be seen as a forerunner of epistemological fictionalism. First, he elevates the imagination as the supreme faculty over which all sensory content is modified into cognizable forms. Without the association of ideas, atomic units of experience could not be synthesized into objects, terms, or causal sequences that ground human

---

[242] For contemporary accounts of the historical roots of fictionalism, see Gideon Rosen's "Problems in the History of Fictionalism." Also see Chapter 7 in Sainsbury, *Fiction and Fictionalism*. For a rare account that includes Hume as a possible precursor to fictionalism, see Varzi, "Fictionalism in Ontology." Donald Livingston disagrees, claiming "Hume's position is not a form of fictionalism, a view held by some contemporary empiricists" (*Common Life*, 153-4). It seems, though, that a more comprehensive view of fictionalism as a philosophical position may accommodate Livingston's concerns. For a brief account of interpreting Hume, in certain moods, as a religious fictionalist, see Demeter, "Natural Theology as Superstition: David Hume and the Changing Ideology of Natural Inquiry," 196-9.

[243] "Impressions, Ideas, and Fictions," 382.

[244] "Fictionalism in Ontology," 143.

understanding. Our mind then is constitutive of reality-making. How we get to know the world is paved by imaginative cement.[245]

To the extent that my interpretation remains agnostic toward the ontology of Hume's relations, I do not read Hume as fully committed to a strong version of epistemological fictionalism. The view that natural relations *are* fictions, however, would entail such a commitment. Though it seems Hume does not go that far, some have interpreted him to say as much.[246] Indeed, a surprising admission from Vaihinger, as quoted earlier, is that he regards Hume as having "called the categories fictions."[247] Given his neo-Kantianism, I take Vaihinger to mean by categories something approximating Kant's table of categories.

If that is the correct way to see it, Hume's fictional categories would likely include all three natural relations: contiguity (unity), resemblance (identity), and causality (necessity). Natural relations qua fictional categories would not be the conditions of the possibility of objects, but rather the forces of attraction operating in the mental world. The basic laws structuring our experience are fictional in the sense that the imagination unites atoms of perception to form objects, general terms, causal sequences, and so on. We comprehend the world through the

---

[245] On Jeffrey Bell's reading of Deleuze's interpretation of Hume, "What is so crucial for Deleuze about the necessity of fiction – why 'fiction' itself becomes…'a principle of human nature' – is that 'for a system to exist, it is not enough to have ideas associated in the mind; it is also necessary that perceptions be regarded as separate from the mind, and that impressions be in some manner torn from the senses' (ES 80). In other words, for a multiplicity of impressions and ideas to become an identifiable system that can then be an object of knowledge and belief, an identity that is irreducible to the impressions must be forged" (*Deleuze's Hume*, 27).

[246] Achille Varzi's view might be read in this way. Likewise, in a comparison of Hume and Nietzsche, Kail suggests: "All creatures occupy a 'perspective' on reality that falsifies and, like Hume, Nietzsche held that central categories like identity, substance, and the like are creative fictions that organize the chaos of experience" ("Hume and Nietzsche," 759). Compare Tom Seppalainen and Angela Coventry's interpretation of Hume, where "ideas traffic in 'fictitious' categories based in the philosophical relation of *identity*. Extra-sensory, intramental processes 'reify' their intentional objects in terms of identity, whose effects are not felt in the senses – as each of us can verify by attending carefully to the perpetual change of sensory objects" ("Hume's Empiricist Inner Epistemology," 49).

[247] *The Philosophy of As If*, 99.

principle of association, a mind-dependent *form* that cannot be empirically verified within any individual perception.

While Vaihinger's interpretation is, I think, defensible, I take Hume's early philosophy to be committed to a weaker form of epistemological fictionalism. In this version, certain foundational connections between ideas are taken as fictions: (a) spatial and temporal unities, over and above what we immediately perceive, (b) causal claims that assume either external or universal necessities, and (c) identity relations that assume two objects or terms or ideas to be the same (that is, one or simple). The consequences of this version of fictionalism are still quite extensive. It is almost as if to say, as Traiger formulates it: "fictions are so important [to Hume's philosophy] that what is commonly called Hume's theory of impressions and ideas ought to be called Hume's theory of impressions, ideas, and fictions."[248] To that end, he wonders why Hume scholarship has remained relatively silent on the question of fiction.

I am agreement with Traiger, but I would push the thought even further by putting it side-by-side with Vaihinger: "taking fiction in its broadest sense of *fictive activity*, we place it on an equal footing with deduction and induction as a third member in the system of logical science."[249] Similarly, Hume's fictions sit in the middle of sensory impressions and the sub-faculty of reason. On one hand, all inductive reasoning based on sensory impressions requires an imaginative unification of resembling conjunctions to reach general principles. And general principles are fictions in so far as they are taken as ontologically real. On the other hand, all deductive reasoning requires general principles and terms to reach certain truth. For instance, any idea involved in a deductive proof must remain constant over the course of the proof—but,

---

[248] "Impressions, Ideas, and Fictions," 381. Underline in original.

[249] *The Philosophy of As If*, 79.

on Hume's atomistic view, no idea does remain constant. Constancy implies a resemblance/ identity relation, and thus all deductive reasoning requiring an idea to hold constant is based on the imaginative fiction of identity. Fictions are therefore necessary to any type of human reasoning.

Now, whether Hume is committed to the strong or weak version of fictionalism or none at all, the fictionalist perspective may nevertheless provide a unique approach to understanding the *Treatise*. Consider Hume's criticism of ancient and modern philosophers. What these philosophers seem to do is mistake epistemological fictions as real, and then attempt to develop theories to explain them as if they *are* real. Vaihinger similarly exposes intellectual history to be full of examples like this. Instead of negatively critiquing them, however, Vaihinger responds more positively, stating: "The epistemological fiction of the categories is, however, of particular value, because their unjustified transference to the world as a whole leads to all those philosophically important ideas, such as world-substance, cosmic energy, cosmic causes, which are a necessary logical illusion. The existence of an unavoidable logical illusion was asserted before Kant, but it was he who first discovered it completely."[250] Hume does not believe that all of these logical illusions are philosophically important, but he does recognize the unavoidability and utility of certain natural psycho(logical) illusions.

Contrary to what I have argued so far, R. M. Sainsbury believes that Hume should *not* be classified as a fictionalist because "a fictionalist refrains from believing the distinctive claims of the relevant subject matter, but Hume is clear that this is not how he sees things."[251] Hume argues that we cannot help but believe in fictions. Moreover, "a fictionalist regards acceptance as

---

[250] Ibid., 107.

[251] *Fiction and Fictionalism*, 157.

an attitude that does not require belief, but which can be stably combined with true beliefs about the same general subject matter."[252] Whereas, for Hume, there is no possibility of acceptance without an attendant belief or feeling.

What Sainsbury neglects in his brief discussion of Hume is the inability of modern fictionalism—which seems fixated on language and logic—to account for versions of fictionalism that do not abide contemporary predilections. Indeed, it is doubtful whether Vaihinger's theory would even be considered a form of fictionalism on Sainsbury's view, despite the fact that he is regularly cited as one of the main originators of the philosophical position. Sainsbury only mentions Vaihinger once in his book, to be sure, and it is buried deep in a field of footnotes. Therefore, modern fictionalism—whether linguistic or ontological, hermeneutic or revolutionary—does not currently have the breadth of view to capture its own methodological history.

Of course, a reply to this might be that fictionalism is a neologism that applies to the contemporary period of thought only. In that way, it is not supposed to be anachronistically applied to early modern philosophers. To answer that, let us turn to the words of Edmund Husserl, who, in translation, specifically refers to Hume *as a* fictionalist: "It was easy to carry the 'idealistic' naturalism of the immanent philosophy of those successors of Locke over into the dualistic psychology. The epistemological difficulties made so noticeable by Hume's fictionalism were overcome—precisely through 'epistemology.'"[253] The doctrine of fictionalism as a way to describe various kinds of philosophy has evidently been around for some time, and it seems only appropriate for modern fictionalists to maintain a theoretical platform broad enough to

---

[252] Ibid., 157.

[253] *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, 232. For other accounts that speak to Husserl's interpretation of Hume as a fictionalist, see: Cimino, "Husserl's Project, Critique, and Idea of Reason," 192; Kinkaid, "Phenomenology, idealism, and the legacy of Kant," 604; Janoušek & Zahavi, "Husserl on Hume," 626; 632.

accommodate this rich history. Until then, Hume's omission from the fictionalist canon is likely to persist.

Bradley Armour-Garb and James Woodbridge, on the other hand, are much less narrow in their construal of fictionalism. For them, an account must meet an "intuitive minimal requirement…in order to count as a case of fictionalism: It must make some appeal to the notion of fiction."[254] Hume's use of the term 'fiction' in his discussion of epistemology, morality, and metaphysics certainly meets this requirement, and yet Hume's fictionalism is unlike modern fictionalism in that it does not refer to possible worlds or regions of discourse or propositional acceptance. It is unclear whether Hume would even consider such topics properly philosophical. Nevertheless, for him, fictions have to do with the moral subject and human nature. With respect to the vulgar mind, the term 'fiction' describes an imaginative formation of certain unities of ideas. The mind actively generates these fictions, such that they provide structure and content to our natural beliefs. While philosophical reason might see these fictions as false in the sense that they are empirically unverifiable, self-contradictory, or purely hypothetical, the judgments of reason always, and ironically, involve vulgar fictions to begin with. The truth and falsehood of natural fictions is therefore beside the point. What is important is whether the fiction is naturally irresistible and useful to the conduct of life. Consequently, Hume's brand of fictionalism might best be described as *naturalistic*. The same interpretation, I believe, applies to Vaihinger.

2.1. Fiction as Psychological Salve

A further point of comparison between Vaihinger and Hume is that they both point to a psychological reason behind the mind's generation of fiction. While Vaihinger does not mention

[254] *Pretense and Pathology*, 1.

Hume's appeal to psychological stability, he makes some strikingly complementary remarks. For instance, he argues that "an idea that has once been accepted as objective has a stable equilibrium, the hypothesis an unstable one. The psyche tends to make every psychical content more stable and to extend this stability. The condition of unstable equilibrium is as uncomfortable psychically as it is physically."[255] The idea that the mind is more comfortable when its ideas are stable is a recurring theme in Hume's philosophy.[256] The imagination in particular appears to be manifestly hedonistic; it acts according to ease and pleasure.[257] Ideas that resemble each other make transitions *easier* and *smoother*, while completing unions of relations produces mental *pleasure*.

> Nothing is more certain from experience, than that any contradiction either to the sentiments or passions gives a sensible uneasiness, whether it proceeds from without or from within; from the opposition of external objects, or from the combat of internal principles. On the contrary, whatever strikes in with the natural propensities, and either externally forwards their satisfaction, or internally concurs with their movements, is sure to give a sensible pleasure. (T 1.4.2.37; SBN 205-6)

The imagination naturally attempts to resolve uncertainty and instability among its ideas. To do so, it creates hypothetical and self-contradictory fictions. These solutions, however, turn out to be mere placebos—or, in Fogelin's words, "an empty placeholder for a solution to a problem masquerading as a solution."[258] Instead of fictions resolving contradictions and uncertainties

---

[255] *The Philosophy of As If*, 125.

[256] See Loeb's *Stability and Justification* for a detailed account of the relevance of stability in Hume's philosophy.

[257] I follow Timothy Costelloe's phrase here: "Hume identifies a hedonistic tendency that inclines the imagination always to seek and make an easy and smooth transition among ideas in order to form a union or complete a whole, from which it derives pleasure" (*The Imagination in Hume's Philosophy*, 1). Jonathan Cottrell finds Costelloe's claim unconvincing. For Cottrell, to say the imagination is hedonistic is to face a dilemma: either the description is explaining the imagination (1) teleologically, which violates Hume's rejection of final causes, or (2) as if the imagination has desires, which violates Hume's rejection of reifying mental faculties. See Cottrell, "The Imagination Review." In my view, Costelloe is not reifying the imagination, but integrating the faculty within Hume's more general account of the human mind as susceptible to pain and pleasure—"There is implanted in the human mind a perception of pain and pleasure, as the chief spring and moving principle of all its actions" (T 1.3.10.2; SBN 118).

[258] *Hume's Skeptical Crisis*, 89.

inherent in human nature, they disguise our cognitive infirmities. Thus, when philosophers open the hood to examine the mechanics of our mind, what do they see? Contradictions built atop contradictions; hypotheses built atop hypotheses. Some philosophers take this as incentive to construct even more fictions to escape the contradictions and unjustified suppositions they discover. But, for Hume, these fictions and contradictions are constitutive of how the mind operates. The task of the true sceptic is to accept the mind as it is—flaws and all—and humbly acknowledge our limitations.[259]

In *The Philosophy of As If*, the human mind designs fictions expressly for resolving psychical tension. Contradictions and unproven hypotheses are both unsatisfactory and destabilizing to the mind. Fictions then become the solution, acting as a salve. In that sense, it is reminiscent of the *Treatise* in so far as fictions "prevent those continual *contradictions*, and arrive at a more *stable* judgment of things" (T 3.3.1.15; SBN 581). Neither Vaihinger nor Hume reject the contradictions they find at the core of our psychology—although, Hume is admittedly more melancholy about it. Rather, these two philosophers embrace their findings as lynchpins in their naturalistic description of human cognition. While the dogmatic philosopher's awareness of the

[259] Dorothy Coleman makes the argument that: "True philosophy is sceptical concerning the natural illusions of the imagination just because it properly recognizes their illusory character. However, since detecting an illusion does not destroy it, even the experience of true philosophers continues to be shaped by the illusion. Consequently, true philosophers continue to experience a psychological opposition between natural beliefs about perceptions, even after the epistemic status of these beliefs has been determined. True philosophers free themselves from the psychological opposition between natural beliefs by mitigating their scepticism when engaged in practical activity" ("Hume's 'Dialectic,'" 150, underline in original).

contradictions might prove uncomfortable for *him or her*, for the vulgar, fictions perform their role seamlessly by hiding in the wings—never once appearing on stage.[260]

3. Varieties of Contradiction in Hume's Philosophy

> Let us duly consider its uncertainty and endless contrarieties, even in subjects of common life and practice: Let the errors and deceits of our very senses be set before us; the insuperable difficulties, which attend first principles in all systems; *the contradictions which adhere to the very ideas of matter, cause and effect, extension, space, time, motion; and in a word, quantity of all kinds*, the object of the only science, that can fairly pretend to any certainty or evidence (D 1.3, italics added).

There is no single definition of contradiction accepted in contemporary philosophy. In fact, contradictions come in many forms.[261] Patrick Grim classifies four main kinds:

(1) *Semantic* (appealing to truth or falsehood) — e.g., DeMorgan: "Contradictories, or propositions one which must be true and the other false."[262]

(2) *Syntactic* (appealing to negation) — e.g., Haack: "the form 'A & ~A'; statement of the form 'A and not A'."[263]

(3) *Pragmatic* (appealing to assertion and denial) — e.g., Brody: "the joint assertion of a proposition and its denial."[264]

---

[260] An area for further research may be the connection between the discomfort of contradictions driving the generation of fictions in Hume's *Treatise* and Hegel's dialectic as a process in search of relief. As W.J. Mander argues: "For Hegel the engine which drives the dialectical process was the tendency to contradiction which besets thought and keeps pushing it on to higher and higher stages in search of relief" (*British Idealism: A History*, 49). The thought reminds us of McRae's interpretation of Hume, where the discomfort of contradiction is what generates contradiction-concealing fictions, and these fictions end up logically-ordering our metaphysical categories. Indeed, for Amelie Oksenberg Rorty, "the plot of the *Treatise* is an elegant, British proto-version of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*" ("From Passions to Sentiments," 169). For a detailed discussion of the relationship between Hume and Hegel, see Westphal, "Hegel and Hume on Perception and Concept-Empiricism." Also see Berry, *Hume, Hegel and Human Nature*.

[261] For a comprehensive list of dozens of distinct formulations, see Grim, "What is Contradiction?"

[262] As quoted in Grim, "What is Contradiction?" 51.

[263] Ibid., 51.

[264] Ibid., 52.

(4) *Ontological* (appealing to states of affairs) — e.g., Routley and Routley: "A contradictory situation is one where both B and ~B (it is not the case that B) hold for some B."[265]

In Hume's *Treatise*, it seems we find all four varieties expressed in similar ways:

(1) *Semantic*: A contradiction of truth and reason is "the disagreement of ideas, consider'd as copies, with those objects, which they represent" (T 2.3.3.5; SBN 415). Or: "What is demonstratively false implies a contradiction; and what implies a contradiction cannot be conceived" (AB 18; SBN 653).

(2) *Syntactic*: "a contradiction in terms…implies the flattest of all contradictions, *viz.* that 'tis possible for the same thing both to be and not to be" (T 1.1.7.4; SBN 19).

(3) *Pragmatic*: "But this reasoning is plainly unconclusive; because it supposes, that in our denial of a cause we still grant what we expressly deny, *viz.* that there must be a cause; which therefore is taken to be the object itself; and *that*, no doubt, is an evident contradiction" (T 1.3.3.5; SBN 80-1).

(4) *Ontological*: "the present phænomenon is a contradiction to all past experience" (T 1.4.2.20; SBN 196).

We might also add a fifth:

(5) *Conceivable (or Formal)*: "'Tis in vain to search for a contradiction in any thing that is distinctly conceiv'd by the mind. Did it imply any contradiction, 'tis impossible it cou'd ever be conceiv'd (T 1.2.4.11; SBN 43).

[265] Ibid., 52.

In all five varieties of contradiction available, I submit that none captures exactly the contradictory nature of Hume's natural fictions.

(1) In the semantic case, truth and falsehood cannot apply to fictions. Fictions are derived from natural relations, which is to say that we cannot trace them to impressions or ideas; their ontological nature is unknown. There is nothing for fictions to represent because they are not properly "ideas" in Hume's sense. Moreover, demonstrations consisting of relations of ideas (proving truth or falsehood) cannot be employed, for fictions themselves are 'relations of ideas'—the demonstration of a 'relation of relations,' in other words, would be circular and illegitimate. Relations themselves cannot validate the truth and falsehood of relations.

(2) In the syntactic case, the only contradiction involving negation is that between existence and non-existence. More precisely, Hume calls this an instance of contrariety. There do not seem to be instances of contradictions involving pure negation because, for Hume, negation implies a total absence of relation—and even in the case of existence and non-existence, there is still a *minimal* relation. Therefore, a minimal relation obtains among *all* ideas; Hume is explicit about this in 'Of Relations.' As a consequence, ideas of 'zero' or 'nothingness' are not possible given Hume's ontological commitments. While natural fictions do not involve negation, they do involve empirical contrariety, which is a matter of degree rather than binary opposition.[266]

(3) In the pragmatic case, the contradiction concerns affirmation and denial. As far as it is a verbal, propositional, or linguistic matter, I presume Hume would direct the question to a grammarian. As far as it concerns propositions or general terms, it is a matter of particular ideas,

---

[266] As mentioned in Chapter 3, Benjamin Cohen believes Hume is operating with two notions of contrariety: (a) empirical contrariety and (b) logical contrariety ("Contrariety and Causality in Hume"). The latter is reduced to contradiction (via negation) because it must appear in the form 'A and ~A'. Whereas, empirical contrariety denotes the relation of *distinct* elements such that '~(A and B)'. On my interpretation, I reject the legitimacy of logical contrariety, unless negation is construed as a Humean fiction in the same way as empty space or empty time. I discuss contrariety in section 3.2 below.

and therefore a matter of contrary degrees of relation. In that sense, it is isomorphic with the syntactic case.

(4) In the ontological case, we find a type of contradiction that seems more applicable to natural fictions. For instance, even though object identity may be contradictory in its perceptual union, an individual might never notice it. It is only upon rational reflection that we discover its contradictory nature. This leads to a new contradiction between the vulgar perspective (past experience) and the philosophical perspective (new data) within the same individual.

(5) In the conceivability case, the contradiction seems to obtain in confused and obscure ideas. If natural fictions are regarded as confused ideas, then it is possible a conceivability contradiction applies. With respect to hypothetical fictions, this type of contradiction does seem to apply, given that we *cannot* conceive of the idea (e.g., absolute necessity or infinity). Self-contradictory fictions, on the other hand, are conceivable in so far as they are unions of incompatible ideas—though, if we attempt to unify the ideas into a *single* fiction, then it is not conceivable.

3.1. Psychological Contradiction

There are three further classes in which we might understand Humean contradictions. All of these contradictions ought to be classified as *psychological* contradictions, for the reason that they do not concern propositions, terms, truth and falsehood, or affirmation and denial. Psychological contradictions are those that are discovered in an empirical account of human nature, one that is descriptive and naturalistic.

First, there are contradictions between mental faculties in terms of principles or propensities. Second, there are self-contradictions, such that the imagination unites incompatible

ideas. Third, there are hypothetical contradictions, such that the imagination generates a fictional existent that it has not perceived (reification).

Faculty Contradiction

The first type of psychological contradiction concerns an incompatibility between mental faculties. Let us call these faculty contradictions. Faculty contradictions form the background to all other psychological contradictions. The principles of the imagination and the senses conflict with each other, even though they jointly provide the form and content to our ideas—the imagination provides the tie or union among perceptions, whereas the senses provide the atomic perceptions. These faculties contradict each other in particular cases where two distinct sensory perceptions are united by the imagination as one since there cannot be *two* at the same time and in the same respect as there is *one*.

Natural fictions are generally formed by the union of the imagination and the senses. The 'contradictory nature' of the union is then discovered by reason. Reason judges the contradiction negatively, as an error or mistake or confusion. But the imagination and senses, being the stronger faculties, do not abide reason's judgment. Indeed, the faculty of reason finds it has no influence in correcting these irresistible contradictions. The senses and imagination continue to operate despite the discovery of incompatible principles. As Hume says: "Reflection tells us, that even our resembling perceptions are interrupted in their existence, and different from each other. The contradiction betwixt these opinions" of reason and the imagination are irreconcilable (T 1.4.2.52; SBN 215). Each faculty, in essence, is committed to its own principles and operations, undeterred by any apparent contradiction between them.

In so far as Hume acknowledges the faculty of reason to be a sub-faculty of the imagination, there appears to be an even stronger form of psychological contradiction. In this

case, it is that the *same* principle of association gives rise to contradictory perspectives; thus, the principle "makes us reason from causes and effects; and 'tis the same principle, which convinces us of the continu'd existence of external objects, when absent from the senses. But tho' these two operations be equally natural and necessary in the human mind, yet in some circumstances they are directly contrary" (T 1.4.7.4; SBN 266). The principle of association, operative in both the faculty of reason and the imagination, is responsible for generating two contrary perspectives in the human mind.

A final form of faculty contradiction is that between the imagination and the passions. For instance, "the contradiction betwixt the propensities of the imagination and passion displays itself" when the mind passes from the small to the great (T 2.2.2.24; SBN 344-5). The passions, being the stronger faculty, find it more difficult to pass from the small to great and draw the mind to their side. Hume almost seems to personify the mental faculties: some are stronger than others; some contradict each other; and some are either prescriptive, passive, or generative. On the whole, while our mental faculties work harmoniously together in some instances, in others they seem to be in contradictory tension with each other.

Self-Contradiction

There are several passages that, on my view, address the nature of self-contradictory fictions in the *Treatise*. The first captures the almost universal imaginative propensity to (1) attribute identity to objects and terms and (2) to unite distinct ideas. Essentially, it forms the foundation of both the principle of unity and the principle of identity. In that sense, I take it as one of the most important passages in Hume's early philosophy:

> …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, and which we find to have a constant union with each other. But however these qualities may in themselves be entirely distinct, 'tis certain we commonly regard the compound, which they form,

> as One thing, and as continuing the Same under very considerable alterations. The acknowledg'd composition is evidently contrary to this suppos'd *simplicity*, and the variation to the *identity*. (T 1.4.3.2; SBN 219)

Hume argues that we "almost universally fall into such evident contradictions…[and] endeavour to conceal them" (T 1.4.3.2; SBN 219). Therefore, it seems that in every single identity or unity fiction there is a contradiction involved. The contradiction is either that (1) a compound (number) is considered simple (unity) or (2) that distinct perceptions (number) are considered the same (unity). The contradiction is a *self*-contradiction because, in either case, a *single fiction* contains both unity and number at the same time and in the same respect.

In referring to natural self-contradictory fictions, we are referring to the vulgar way of thinking. Whether or not philosophical reasoning may isolate conjuncts or aspects of a fiction such that the contradiction is resolved is irrelevant here. The passive, exclusive imagination unites ideas in the form of self-contradictory fictions regardless of reason's judgment. Consider the following: "…we use in our most familiar way of thinking, that scholastic principle, which, when crudely propos'd, appears so shocking, of *totum in toto & totum in qualibet parte:* Which is much the same, as if we shou'd say, that a thing is in a certain place, and yet is not there" (T 1.4.5.13; SBN 238). Reason "shows us the impossibility of such an union," but the imagination unifies the incompatible ideas nonetheless (T 1.4.5.13; SBN 238). The naturalistic description of human nature witnesses the contradiction without judgment; it is only when we reason upon our findings that "we must observe in this union something altogether unintelligible and contradictory" (T 1.4.5.13; SBN 238). Unintelligibility and contradiction, then, regardless of their repugnance to philosophers, are perfectly compatible with a purely naturalistic study of man.

Contradictions are part of human nature, and there is no need for philosophers to search endlessly for resolutions. Indeed, as Hume warns us: "The essence and composition of external

bodies are so obscure, that we must necessarily, in our reasonings, or rather conjectures concerning them, involve ourselves in contradictions and absurdities" (T 2.2.6.2; SBN 366). The only place bereft of contradiction is the bare and simple atomic perception—and yet, even the analysis required to distinguish between simple and complex perceptions involves us in a kind of faculty contradiction. Thus, when we attempt to explain *any* composition in our perceptual experience, it seems we must equally embrace contradiction in our explanation.

Hypothetical Contradiction

The third and final category I call hypothetical contradiction. It shares notable features with the self-contradictory fiction. In this kind of contradiction, however, there is an unperceived hypothesis that is reified *as* perceived.

In one sense, hypothetical contradictions involve going beyond past regularity. Hume puts it like this: "regularity in our perceptions, can never be a foundation for us to infer a greater degree of regularity in some objects, which are not perceiv'd; since this *supposes a contradiction* (T 1.4.2.21; SBN 197, italics added). As a consequence, when we do suppose a greater regularity in our perceptions than we have actually perceived we are engaged in a contradiction. More precisely, we believe that some object has been perceived when it, in fact, has not been perceived. Absolute necessity, infinity, or any categorical statement that supposes future matters of fact *as fact* are therefore hypothetical contradictions.

In another sense, the hypothetical contradiction ascribes existence to unperceived perceptions. Hume specifically calls this tendency contradictory: "as the *appearance* of a perception in the mind and its *existence* seem at first sight entirely the same, it may be doubted, whether we can ever assent to so palpable a contradiction, and suppose a perception to exist without being present to the mind" (T 1.4.2.37; SBN 206). In the case of perfect equality, we

come to believe there is a perception of perfect equality when we have not perceived it, thus creating a contradictory fiction in the process. Or take the fiction of perfect identity—that is, the ascription of *sameness* to interrupted objects—where "we find ourselves somewhat at a loss, and… involv'd in a kind of contradiction" (T 1.4.2.24; SBN 199). Of course, the same reasoning must hold with respect to ideas and general terms alike: any ascription of sameness supposes a continuity of perceptions among *unperceived perceptions* (a palpable contradiction).

A helpful way to characterize psychological contradictions is to regard them as inventions of the mind. And that, I believe, is what Hume is up to when he calls psychological contradictions 'fictions.' The fictional nomenclature enables us to make sense of what the human mind is doing when it unites ideas in various contradictory ways. Hume's account of promises provides one way to look at it: "All these contradictions are easily accounted for, if the obligation of promises be merely a human invention for the convenience of society; but will never be explain'd, if it be something *real* and *natural*, arising from any action of the mind or body" (T 3.2.5.13; SBN 524). Now, while natural epistemic fictions are undoubtedly real and generated by the mind, if we interpret fictions *as inventions* for the convenience of our psychological stability and pleasure, it places the issue in a wider context. By doing so, psychological contradictions need not be seen negatively or as a sign of bad reasoning; instead, contradictions are constitutive of various imaginative inventions.

3.2. Contrariety, Opposition, and Contradiction

To understand the nature of Hume's contradictions, a further passage may help by virtue of a particularly interesting analogy:

> Upon the whole, [1] contrary passions succeed each other alternately, when they arise from different objects: [2] They mutually destroy each other, when they proceed from

> different parts of the same: And [3] they subsist both of them, and mingle together, when they are deriv'd from the contrary and incompatible chances or possibilities, on which any one object depends. The influence of the relations of ideas is plainly seen in this whole affair. If [1] the objects of the contrary passions be totally different, the passions are like two opposite liquors in different bottles, which have no influence on each other. If [2] the objects be intimately connected, the passions are like an *alcali* and an *acid*, which, being mingled, destroy each other. If [3] the relation be more imperfect, and consist in the contradictory views of the same object, the passions are like oil and vinegar, which, however mingled, never perfectly unite and incorporate. (T 2.3.9.17; SBN 443, numbers added)

In this, the principle of association is painted in more detail. Not only are ideas associated, but some ideas actually go together more than others. In that way, ideas are like chemicals that either mix or destroy each other. There appear to be three different types of combination:

[1] *Opposites*: Distinct qualities such as taste and colour. They do not influence each other at all.

[2] *Contraries*: The same qualities such as two colours or two tastes. They destroy each other when mingled. Red and yellow, for instance, destroy each other in the process of creating green.

[3] *Contradictories*: Identity/Resemblance, Contiguity, Cause and Effect. When these relations unite ideas over and above immediate perceptions, the ideas mix but never perfectly unite or incorporate.

In the first class, the ideas must be connected by a relation such that the relation grounds the alteration (destruction) of the original ideas. For instance, two colours destroy each other when mixed. Two tastes are destroyed if they are mixed. Two numbers are destroyed when they are mixed. Note that this does not apply to identity relations. If '1x1' is mixed, it equals '1,' and thus does not destroy itself. It is only when quantitatively or qualitatively distinct ideas are mixed (in terms of that respective quality or quantity) that they destroy each other.

In the second class, contrary ideas may be united, but they do not affect one another. For instance, if the idea of green is mixed with the idea of a sweet smell, neither idea influences the other. They may be united in a compound idea, but they are like two liquors in separate bottles.

In the third class, let us take the example of identity again: "Betwixt unity and number there can be no medium; no more than betwixt existence and non-existence. After one object is suppos'd to exist, we must either suppose another also to exist; in which case we have the idea of number: Or we must suppose it not to exist; in which case the first object remains at unity" (T 1.4.2.28; SBN 200).[267] Just as oil and vinegar may be mingled but never truly united, so it is with natural fictions. Natural fictions unite contradictory ideas, but the ideas are never actually blended. The contradictory ideas affect each other in so far as their union gives rise to a natural fiction; this is what makes them different from mere contraries. But they do not affect each other beyond the fact that their union produces a fiction.[268] Distinct from contraries, contradictions may be regarded as such: "where principles are…contrary in their operation, they do not always destroy each other; but the one or the other may predominate on any particular occasion, according as circumstances are more or less favourable to it" (PD 19).

3.3. Hume's Philosophical Perspectivism

There is yet another way in which we might approach contradictory fictions in Hume's philosophy. First, I want to show how Hume's distinctions of reason authorize the possibility of

[267] Notice that, in some cases, like existence and non-existence, Hume is not entirely clear about the class. On one hand, existence and non-existence are said to have no medium between them. On the other hand, "[n]o one can once doubt but existence and non-existence destroy each other, and are perfectly incompatible and contrary" (T 1.3.1.2; SBN 70). The question then is: does existence and non-existence destroy each other when united like the first class? Or are they in the third class—similar to unity and number—in so far as they can be united, but never actually incorporated? Given my interpretation of the impossibility of negation in Hume's ontology, I see existence and non-existence as opposites which destroy each other when mingled, rather than ideas that may be united but not incorporated. In that sense, existence and non-existence are best described as contraries, that is, the first class.

[268] We might see the process of uniting contrary ideas as similar to the union contrary passions. That is, "contrary passions will both of them be present at once in the soul, and instead of destroying and tempering each other, will subsist together, and produce a third impression or affection by their union" (T 2.3.9.16; SBN 442). Whereas the third passion produced is called an *impression*, the union of ideas produces a *fiction*—because while two contrary passions produce other *passions*, two contrary ideas produce something qualitatively different from an idea; instead, it is a non-sensory, imaginatively-generated fiction.

self-contradictory ideas. Second, I examine several passages where Hume seems to suggest that contradictory ideas may be understood through a kind of philosophical perspectivism.

At the close of Part I, Book I, Hume's briefly discusses the possibility of a distinction of reason. Part of the motivation for this discussion is that, in a prior section, Hume proposed the maxim that "*all ideas, which are different, are separable*" (T 1.1.7.17; SBN 24). That is, the imagination may separate any ideas in which a difference is found. However, Hume wants to qualify this maxim. He does not mean simply that because a body is distinguishable from its figure that the two may be separated. Figure and body are inseparable, even though they may still be distinguished. How, Hume asks, is this possible?

The answer he provides is when "we accompany our ideas with a kind of reflection, of which custom renders us, in a great measure, insensible," we are able to "view them in different aspects, according to the resemblances, of which they are susceptible" (T 1.1.7.18; SBN 25). Thus, after examining certain ideas next to other related ideas, we may identify different aspects contained in what appears to be a single idea. Though the aspects of a single idea cannot be, in reality, separated, we may distinguish them by way of a *distinction of reason*.

Hume's distinctions of reason help us to understand how unity and number might be "the same and undistinguishable" in the idea of identity, but also "distinguishable…according to the resemblances, of which they are susceptible" (T 1.1.7.17; SBN 25). As a result, we may distinguish between unity and number in the *same relation* of identity. The process unfolds like this:

> …when we consider any two points of this time, *we may place them in different lights*: We may either survey them at the very same instant; in which case they give us the idea of number, both by themselves and by the object; which must be multiply'd, in order to be conceiv'd at once, as existent in these two different points of time: Or on the other hand, we may trace the succession of time by a like succession of ideas, and conceiving first one moment, along with the object then existent, imagine afterwards a change in the time without any *variation* or *interruption* in the object; in which case it gives us the idea of unity. (T 1.4.2.29; SBN 201, italics added)

I submit that this process of reflection is, in effect, a discovery of a distinction of reason. More importantly, it is a distinction of reason that reveals how a *single* relation, idea, or fiction may contain two contradictory features. Unlike commentators who attempt to explain fictions by appealing to Hume's theory of abstract ideas, a distinction of reason solves the problem of how a *single* or *particular* relation or fiction contains multiple inseparably connected, but contradictory attributes. Take, for instance, the fiction of identity. It is a *single* fiction that is defined by its contradictory features of unity and number. While it is impossible to consider identity without either number or unity, we may keep our eye on one or the other via a process of reflective comparison.

On a broader level, Hume's distinctions of reason ought to be regarded as part of a more comprehensive philosophical perspectivism. Following Robert Fogelin, I take Hume's true scepticism to allow for different, even contradictory, points of view of the same object, idea, or principle. In our philosophical research "we shou'd yield to that propensity, which inclines us to be positive and certain in *particular points*, according to the light, in which we survey them in any *particular instant*" (T 1.4.7.15; SBN 273). Therefore, if we remain open to pursuing different points of view over the course of our research, it is entirely possible to find human nature to be contradictory.

In another case, Hume says "there arises a kind of contrariety in our method of thinking, from the different points of view, in which we survey the object, and from the nearness or remoteness of those instants of time, which we compare together" (T 1.4.3.4; SBN 220). An object from one point of view may be entirely different from another point of view. And, as we find with identity, even when there is no medium between unity and number, we have the ability to view *one* identity relation under different lights so as to discover its contradictory nature. But

the contradiction in identity is not the only example. It is the same with the principle of unity, too. Take the real peach below:

> Hence the colour, taste, figure, solidity, and other qualities, combin'd in a peach or melon, are conceiv'd to form *one thing*; and that on account of their close relation, which makes them affect the thought in the same manner, as if perfectly uncompounded. But the mind rests not here. Whenever it views the object in another light, it finds that all these qualities are different, and distinguishable, and separable from each other. (T 1.4.3.5; SBN 221)

The idea of a peach is contradictory in so far as it is a *single* idea conceived as *one* thing and *many* things. Similar to body and figure being inseparably connected, the contradictory nature of the peach is inseparably connected. What makes a peach a peach is exactly its composition (unity) of parts (number). Therefore, if it appears contradictory, then it must really be contradictory.

The vulgar generally do not consider the contradictory nature of the principle of identity or unity because whatever feature in a given idea is useful for a particular human activity will seize the light. For instance, if we are required to return a library book, the light under which we view the book will be identical, such that we return the *same* book we originally borrowed. There is no reason in that case to view the library book under its contradictory light. Consider: if we viewed the book as a *different* book because it persisted through varying and interrupted perceptions, we would never actually find the book we borrowed! Hume recognizes that, while reason discovers contradictions between the imagination and senses, most people (non-philosophers) never have any need to consider such peculiarities of human nature. For Hume:

> …men are mightily govern'd by the imagination, and proportion their affections more to the light, under which any object appears to them, than to its real and intrinsic value. What strikes upon them with a strong and lively idea commonly prevails above what lies in a more obscure light; and it must be a great superiority of value, that is able to compensate this advantage. (T 3.2.7.2; SBN 534-5)

Like the library book, the contradictory aspect of a given fiction may languish in darkness, since there is often no utility in viewing it under an opposing light. And this ignorance is to our

advantage. If we only ever view the conjunct 'A' in the conjunction 'A and ~A', then we will never notice the contradiction. Consistency then, in the case of self-contradictory fictions, is an illusion, because the vulgar simply do not notice other possible lights. If we, as philosophers, move the light around in our research to discover contradictions in our ideas and objects, it is to our own detriment. Indeed, to uncover contradictions at the foundation of human nature induces great confusion and paralysis. Hume's melancholy and delirium upon facing such manifest contradictions in his philosophical research is a plain example of his teaching. Reason must be careful what it wishes for.[269]

3.4. The Significance of Contradiction in Hume and Vaihinger

To complete our discussion regarding contradiction, let us look at a final point of comparison between Hume and Vaihinger. For Vaihinger, the *main result* of his investigation "is that *contradiction* is the driving force of thought and that without it thought could not attain its goal at all; that it is immanent in discursive thought and is one of its constituent elements."[270] Hume's fictions, I argue, reveal a similar conclusion, namely, self-contradictory fictions are generative of human thought.

Consider that Hume never ends up resolving many of the contradictions he discovers in human nature, let alone the manifest contradiction between causal reasoning and the continued existence of objects. Instead, he despairs, deciding to relax his bent of mind and engage in some

---

[269] As a consequence, Dorothy Coleman says, "Hume's recommendation of carelessness and inattention, therefore, is a recommendation to use these distinctions only when it is appropriate" ("Hume's 'Dialectic,'" 151). In the case of identity, it is rarely useful to distinguish between its contradictory elements, namely, unity and number. For Donald Ainslie, the correct way to read the Conclusion to Book I is that, "for Hume, philosophy is optional, appropriate only for those who are so inclined. When we do pursue it, it turns out that we are unable to answer some of its core questions because of reflective interference" (*Hume's True Scepticism*, 219).

[270] *The Philosophy of As If*, 108.

amusing activity. Vaihinger, on the other hand, takes the cause of Hume's despair and revels in it, extolling it as the main discovery of his investigation. The contradictory nature of real fictions is the foundation of all discursive thought for Vaihinger, whether that be logic, science, mathematics, or religion. Contradictory fictions are natural to the way human thinking operates. In that sense, there is no reason to despair, for there is nothing inherently wrong with contradiction—it is just the way we are.

In academic circles, Hume and Vaihinger received similar attacks by interpreters who mistook them for extreme sceptics—though neither philosopher accepted the criticism as valid. On one hand, Hume's contemporaneous critics took his philosophy to be primarily sceptical and self-defeating. T.H. Green, for instance, claimed that Hume's "method, which began with professing to explain knowledge, showed knowledge to be impossible. Hume himself was perfectly cognisant of this result…"[271] Hume, however, made no such claim. To the contrary, he offered a view of human nature that was probabilistic. While Hume did show the untenability of universal and necessary empirical claims, he teaches that probabilistic knowledge based on causal rules is vital to correct our prejudiced and unphilosophical judgments. Moreover, the primary benefit of mitigated scepticism—where probable knowledge is constantly corrected and refined—is that it prevents dogma and superstition. Indeed, accepting that our knowledge is predicated on various fictions is likely to induce a kind of epistemic humility, a position Hume encourages: "a true sceptic will be diffident of his philosophical doubts, as well as of his philosophical conviction" (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 273).

Vaihinger's critics attacked him on similar grounds. Morris R. Cohen bemoaned the fact that "since the publication of Vaihinger's *Philosophie des Als Ob*, there has been an increased

[271] *Collected Works of T.H. Green*, vii.

general recognition of the importance of fiction as construction in science. But the subject has been beclouded by the monistic mania. By trying to show that everything is a mental construction, the distinction between fact and fiction is really obliterated."[272] Vaihinger, however, does not subscribe to such a view, since he announces that his investigation aims to introduce fiction as a third member in a system of logical science, alongside induction and deduction. According to Vaihinger:

> Thought conducts us automatically to certain illusory concepts just as in vision there are certain unavoidable optical errors. If we recognise this logical illusion as necessary, if we accept the fictions established thereby with a full realisation of their significance and, at the same time, see through them (e.g. God, liberty, etc.) then we can cope with the logical resultant contradictions as necessary products of our thinking, by recognising that they are the inevitable consequences of the inner mechanism of thought itself.[273]

Contradiction therefore need not be seen as destructive to belief; it may be constitutive of various beliefs in common life. On such an account, ancient and modern philosophers—whose theories attempt to escape contradiction—are pursuing the impossible. It is only when we accept contradiction as part of human nature that we may formulate a proper science of man.[274] Thus:

> The true philosophy approaches nearer to the sentiments of the vulgar, than to those of a mistaken knowledge. 'Tis natural for men, in their common and careless way of thinking, to imagine they perceive a connexion betwixt such objects as they have constantly found united together…But philosophers…have sufficient force of genius to free them from the vulgar error…but not sufficient to keep them from ever seeking for this connexion in matter, or causes. Had they fallen upon the just conclusion, they wou'd have return'd back to the situation of the vulgar, and wou'd have regarded all these disquisitions with indolence and indifference. At present they seem to be in a very

---

[272] "On the Logic of Fiction," 484.

[273] *The Philosophy of As If*, 134.

[274] Manfred Kuehn's approach to Humean contradictions is influential here. Particularly, he argues that "Hume believed that he had, by means of what he called the 'experimental method of reasoning,' manifest contradictions that are symptomatic of conflicting principles of the mind. The contradictions should, therefore, not be excused or explained away, but they should be fully acknowledged. Hume needs no defense here. For he might actually have considered this discovery of the antinomical character of the human mind one of his most important achievements. In any case, I believe that Hume's metaphysics can be understood correctly only if we take into account very carefully all the consequences of the antinomical dimension of his thought" ("Hume's Antinomies," 36-7). On my interpretation, I resist using Kantian language, and instead use Hume's preferred term: contradiction.

lamentable condition, and such as the poets have given us but a faint notion of in their descriptions of the punishment of *Sisyphus* and *Tantalus*. For what can be imagin'd more tormenting, than to seek with eagerness, what for ever flies us; and seek for it in a place, where 'tis impossible it can ever exist? (T 1.4.3.9; SBN 222-3)

CHAPTER SEVEN: SCHOLARSHIP ON HUME'S FICTIONS

1. Timothy Costelloe

In *The Imagination in Hume's Philosophy*, Timothy Costelloe provides a classificatory system to interpret Humean fictions. On his account, Hume's fictions are extensive and range across metaphysics, politics, history, and aesthetics. By covering the entirety of Hume's writing, Costelloe delivers a comprehensive treatment of the concept.

His classification system is first divided by two functions of the imagination. That is, the imagination may operate either (a) mimetically or (b) productively. The mimetic imagination represents original sensory impressions. The productive function combines ideas in new forms; it is creative and features the principle of easy transition. Each function of the imagination is associated with a distinct set of fictions. Costelloe's second move is to add three further variables: (1) what type of error is involved in the fiction? (2) what kind of belief-like state attends the fiction? (3) Is the fiction correctable by reason?[275]

Three classes of fiction follow from these variables: (1) Mistakes, (2) Artificial Fictions, and (3) Vulgar Fictions. The first type of fiction is the only one associated with the mimetic imagination. Mistaken fictions produce false belief-like states, and they are correctable by reason. The second type of fiction is the Artificial Fiction. In this case, we have poetic, religious (polytheistic), and philosophical fictions. We are merely persuaded by these fictions, but they do not produce belief-like states. Consequently, whether they are correctable is inapplicable.

The third and last type of fiction is arguably the most important, namely, Vulgar Fictions. In this class, there are first-order and second-order natural belief-like states involved. First-order

[275] For a helpful table, see *The Imagination in Hume's Philosophy*, 26.

vulgar fictions are Metaphysical Fictions and Rules or Property.[276] Neither of these are correctable by reason; they are natural beliefs which "are obstinate, intractable and unavoidable."[277] The second-order vulgar fiction is represented by Popular Theism. Popular Theism is a second-order natural belief because it is natural, but, like "a malady, these second-order natural beliefs can and should be corrected."[278]

On the whole, Costelloe's classification of Humean fictions is broad and explanatory, and my interpretation has been informed by much of its extensive analysis. That said, I have focused my investigation primarily on vulgar fictions as portrayed in the *Treatise*. My interpretation seeks to extend the catalogue of fictions described by Costelloe. Moreover, I attempt to provide a more symmetrical system of classification with respect to natural relations. I agree with Costelloe's statement that vulgar fictions have "their origin in natural relations, [such that] we can call the beliefs that vulgar fictions inspire 'natural.'"[279] My aim has been to develop this connection between natural relations and natural fictions further.

One disagreement is that my interpretation rejects any disjunction between 'misapplication fictions' and 'invented fictions.' As the subsequent literature review illustrates, the division between 'misapplication fictions' and 'invented fictions' dates back to Robert McRae's article, "The Import of Hume's Theory of Time." Saul Traiger and Jonathan Cottrell also follow versions of McRae's original division. My rejection of this distinction is based on what I take to be a misreading of Hume's discussion of fictitious duration. While Hume employs the phrase

---

[276] For Costelloe, Metaphysical Fictions consist of: (1) Fictions of Misapplication: a vacuum and time without change, liberty and necessity, general rules of the imagination, and (2) Fictions of Invention: continued and distinct existence, substance as a substratum, objective causal power, primary and secondary qualities, personal identity or self.

[277] Ibid., 35.

[278] Ibid., 35.

[279] Ibid., 34.

'apply'd,' there is no reason to believe that the application only runs one way—that is, unidirectionally. In light of Hume's commitment to the union of ideas, as generated by the natural relations, it seems to me that instead of 'application,' what is actually occurring in the case of fictitious duration is a 'union' of incompatible ideas.

2. Jonathan Cottrell

(a) Truth-Denial Account / Realism-Compatible Account

In his dissertation, Jonathan Cottrell provides a novel distinction in the way commentators have approached Humean fictions. He divides them into two sorts: Truth-Denying interpretations and Realism-Compatible interpretations. In the former class, commentators argue that "it is not true that objects Hume calls fictions exist."[280] In the latter class, commentators argue "that, for Hume, calling something a fiction, or a product of fiction, does not imply that it is false, non-existent or that its essence or nature depends on its relation to perceptions."[281]

Donald Baxter, Jonathan Berry, Robert Fogelin and Barry Stroud all seem to hold that, at least, some fictions are false, while T.H. Green holds that fictions are not false, but illusions of certain ideas.[282] Henry Allison, Saul Traiger, John P. Wright hold that fictions are feigned by the imagination using materials provided by sense.[283] Annette Baier, whom I reference in Chapter 2, takes fictions to be unverifiable assumptions.[284] Galen Strawson understands some fictions as

---

[280] *Hume on Fiction*, 33.

[281] Ibid., 34.

[282] Ibid., 34.

[283] Ibid., 34.

[284] Dabney Townsend agrees with Baier: "Fictions are not simply falsehoods or lies…They are mental constructs of the imagination that stand in the place of impressions of sense. Fictions play a positive and valuable role in human nature. Without them, we would be unable to refer to what the imagination does for us with original impressions" (*Hume's Aesthetic Theory: Taste and Sentiment*, 231).

"mental elements that operate in us, in our mental economies, in our thinking, in just the same way as mental elements that qualify as ideas given the normative sense of 'idea.'"[285]

Cottrell notes that each interpretation presents certain difficulties, and ideally "we would like an interpretation of Hume's concept of fiction that explains both Hume's hostility to fictions like that of a substance, and his comparative friendliness to the fiction of objects' existing unperceived."[286] The Truth-Deniers explain Hume's hostility; the Realism-Compatibilists explain Hume's friendliness.

Now, as I have attempted to demonstrate, I largely reject this debate between realism-compatibilists and truth-deniers because, I think, it is grounded in a meaningless question. In other words, the ontology of fictions is unverifiable—the same as relations—and any attempt to say whether they are true or false or real or otherwise is purely speculative. That fictions originate in relations entails that no deductive reasoning (relations of ideas) may prove the truth or falsity of fictions, since relations themselves are unverifiable. If fictions are true or false according to a matter of fact, the question remains meaningless. Consider the truth or falsehood of a chair. The chair is made by humans but constructed using natural materials. It is a hybrid item. The same applies to Humean fictions: they are hybrids in so far as they are associated by the imagination *and* constructed out of ideas and impressions. Nevertheless, with respect to unverifiability, I agree with Baier; and with respect to the hybridity of fictions, I agree with Allison, Traiger, and Wright. My view then has more in common with the Realism-Compatible interpretations.

Cottrell raises an important point regarding Hume's changing attitude toward fiction in the *Treatise*. On my interpretation, I see Hume as vacillating between different points of view

---

[285] *The Evident Connexion*, 157.

[286] *Hume on Fiction*, 36.

throughout his writing, implicitly demonstrating the perspectives of (1) the philosopher (rationalist), (2) the sceptic, (3) the descriptive natural scientist, and (4) the true philosopher. When Hume writes as a philosopher or a sceptic, he attacks fiction and mirrors his predecessors (e.g., Locke, Spinoza, Descartes). When Hume writes as a descriptive natural scientist or true philosopher, he remains neutral toward the concept of fiction. In this respect, Wolfgang Iser finds that

> David Hume brought about a kind of truce in the war against fiction, because he came to regard laws of causality and principles of cognition—especially those that Locke had still taken for granted—and indeed all epistemological premises as 'fictions of the mind.' By this, however, he did not mean the usual denunciation of fiction; he took these premises, rather, to be forms of cognition that could plausibly be postulated but not satisfactorily proven. As terms to be used in describing experience, they need not be jettisoned, as we can see from Hume's description of the causality principle; indeed, 'fictions of the mind' became an essential critical concept in his downgrading of what he had come to consider epistemological postulates. Instead of criticising fiction, he used it as an instrument of criticism, and he turned the traditional negative view of it against the supposed laws of cognition. This signals a new use of fiction, even if once more it exploits the negativity of past uses, and it shows a marked change in the direction of consciousness as well as the extent to which fiction is related to consciousness. Bacon and Locke had unmasked fiction as deceit, self-deception, and madness, though they did not claim that idols or fantastical ideas were deliberate lies or perverse insanity. Their criticism was meant to create awareness of how fictions came about, and even if at times it seemed to be attacking hidden preconceptions, this was not because fictions were lies or perversities, but because their effects were to be countered by simply excluding them from the realm of reason and sanity. Just as Bacon and Locke had tried and condemned fiction in the name of ethics or reason, Hume used the tarnished concept of fiction to undermine the premises of empirical epistemology. The recurring need for this condemnation indicates the abiding power of fiction.[287]

Kemp Smith, too, recognizes that the type of belief involved in natural fictions is exploited for polemical use by both sceptics and rationalists:

> It is a natural, not a rational belief; it rests neither on insight nor on evidence. It operates in and through the imagination, and so by way of 'fictions', which are the instruments appropriate to the imagination. If taken as 'theory' or 'philosophy', as the dogmatic philosophies have so universally assumed, these fictions fall easy prey to the sceptic. But the sceptics, no less than the dogmatists, are assuming that these fictions fall

[287] *The Fictive and the Imaginary*, 111-2.

> to be tried at the bar of reason, and so condemn them merely on the ground of their being what they are, fictitious (i.e. factitious) in character. Both have failed to appreciate the true nature of belief and the part which it is called upon to play in determining our opinions.[288]

The sceptic and the rationalist alike are hostile toward fictions because of their respective prejudices against the doctrine of natural belief. And it is, on my view, plausible that the type of hostility Hume exhibits toward fictions is motivated by lapses into sceptical or rationalist modes of thinking. Otherwise, it is motivated by a kind of pragmatism or true scepticism, which leads him to judge some fictions as either useless or dangerous. When Hume examines fictions in the light of descriptive naturalism, he adopts a decidedly positive or neutral attitude. Therefore, while Hume might be regarded as a transition point in the history of philosophy so far as his recognition of the importance of fiction goes, he does not seem to fully embrace the position. Instead, his alternating philosophical attitudes show various ways we might evaluate the nature of fiction.

(b) First-Stage Fictions and Second-Stage Fictions

In addition to his assessment of prior commentators, Cottrell outlines an original approach to understanding Hume's fictions. He divides fictions into two kinds: first-stage fictions and second-stage fictions. First-stage fictions describe a process by which the mind forms an abstract idea of a mind-dependent and fictitious category. Specifically:

> [T]he mental act or process by which we form an abstract idea of a mind-dependent category is a fiction (in the 'process' sense); the abstract idea that we arrive at by means of this act or process is a fiction (in the 'product' sense); and the mind-dependent category that this abstract idea represents—the intentional object of the abstract idea—is also a fiction (again, in the 'product' sense); alternatively, this category is 'fictitious.'

[288] *The Philosophy of David Hume*, 485-6.

> Let us adopt the term 'first-stage fiction' to denote any of these aspects of the first stage in our psychological process.[289]

First-stage fictions therefore describe one process (i.e., mental acts) and two products (i.e., abstract ideas and mind-dependent categories). Second-stage fictions, on the other hand, denote the process of invention or supposition in order to conceal the mind-dependent character of first-stage fictions. In neither first-stage or second-stage fictions is the fiction necessarily false. It is true, for instance, that fictitious categories include particular objects. Second-stage fictions, to the contrary, are unintelligible or fail to have certain properties; thus, they are not properly true or false. Consider Cottrell's example:

> Hume posits two kinds of fiction, in his discussion of distance and duration. He posits first-stage fictions: the mind-dependent categories of distant objects and enduring objects (or, in Hume's related uses of 'fiction,' our abstract ideas of these categories, or, again, the mental acts by which we form our abstract ideas of these categories). And he posits second-stage fictions: reflective reactions to first-stage fictions, in which we augment those first-stage fictions with the unintelligible supposition of a mind-independent feature common to all members of a mind-dependent category. The supposition of an absolute space in which all distant objects are related is an example.[290]

There is much to appreciate here in Cottrell's interpretive framework, and my interpretation is consistent with many of his central claims. But there are a few points of disagreement between our interpretations. Let me discuss three: (1) his appeal to abstract ideas, (2) the absence of an account of relations, and (3) his unspecified reference to a mind-dependent *similarity*.

(1) Cottrell hopes to introduce a novel term into Hume scholarship to account for a general term that represents an abstract idea. He follows contemporary cognitive psychology by calling the term a *category*. Thus, Fido is *particular* dog in the revival set of the *abstract idea* of 'dog,' and that abstract idea of 'dog' represents the *category* of dogs. Cottrell is careful to distinguish his

---

[289] *Hume on Fiction*, 22.

[290] Ibid., 93-4.

notion from the Aristotelian sense, whereby category means the highest genera of things. Moreover, his idea of category should not be mistaken for a universal, either, because Hume's ontology is limited to particulars.

The motivation for appealing to categories and abstract ideas is to account for a particular set of fictions, namely, distance, duration, unity, and identity. As Cottrell notes, these are all relations or properties. Given Hume's ontological commitments, abstract ideas must refer to a set of particular ideas included in a revival set. Therefore, what particular ideas account for the revival set of distance, duration, unity, and identity?

Let us turn to one case Cottrell examines: fictitious duration. Enduring objects are abstract ideas that represent mind-dependent categories. The abstract idea of duration eventually comes to include 'unchanging objects' and 'changeable objects' by virtue of their similar effects in the mind. The similar mind-dependent effects then constitute the *category* of duration. Put in different terms: it is not the mind-independent abstract ideas that constitute the category, for they are heterogenous; it is instead only the abstract ideas' mind-dependent effects that do so.

What is crucial on Cottrell's account is that a developmental progression occurs to form the fiction, where a 'Members-Only' mind-independent category partakes of conceptual change such that it begins to incorporate 'Non-Members' by virtue of a mind-dependent similarity. Originally, the category of duration is formed by the mind-independent 'Members' of the category. That is, 'changeable objects' are the only abstract ideas (or Members) in the category of duration. Over time, 'unchangeable objects' start to be included in the category of duration by virtue of the similar effect they have on the mind to 'changeable objects.' The category then *conceptually changes* to include both Non-Members (unchangeable objects) and Members

(changeable objects)—given that the price of admission for being in the category is that the abstract idea have a *similar effect* in the mind.

Now, for this account of fictions to be successful, it needs to explain why any particular instance of fictional duration is *fictional* at all. Cottrell would likely respond that it is fictional for the reason that 'mind-dependent members' are included in a 'mind-independent' revival set. That, indeed, provides some explanation as to why we ought to take the category as fictional. But it does not explain why any particular abstract idea is fictional. Presumably, the abstract idea would have to include a mind-dependent and a mind-independent effect, too. Let us say, then, that a changeable object produces an unchangeable effect in the mind. What exactly does this mean? Is the enduring object changing outside of the mind at the same time it is unchanging in the mind? It seems odd that a *single and particular* instance of an abstract idea is, at the same time and in the same respect, both changing and unchanging. Indeed, such a dilemma prefigures Hume's discussion of the principle of identity, a relation explained by fictitious duration.

For an account of abstract ideas to explain fictitious ideas, it must explain why *forming* a category with members and non-members has the ability to generate a further abstract idea, namely, the idea of fictitious duration which simultaneously involves a changing and unchanging object. Otherwise, if the category does not have the ability to generate a new idea, then it must explain why the idea of fictitious duration—including contradictory, yet simultaneously mind-dependent and mind-independent effects—does not form its own category of unique Members.

Against what Cottrell claims, the process is not akin to Locke's primary and secondary quality distinction, because, on that account, primary qualities are entirely *unlike* secondary qualities. The colour of yellow is entirely different from, say, the gold particles that produce it. In the case of fictitious duration, though, the quality that is mind-dependent and mind-independent

is the *same*. In other words, the *same abstract idea* is both producing the quality of unchangeable and changeableness at the same time and in the same respect. Therefore, Cottrell's account seems to imply that a single abstract idea could somehow produce contradictory qualities; for instance, a bar of gold could produce both the mind-independent abstract idea of yellow and the mind-dependent abstract idea of non-yellow.

At some point in the *forming* process of the abstract idea of duration, the Member ideas (changeable) and non-member ideas (unchangeable) must unite to produce a single product: the fictitious idea of duration (which includes them both). Are there any passages to suggest that Hume's account of abstract ideas might support such a view? That the process of forming abstract ideas or categories has the ability to produce *new* ideas seems to violate Hume's principle that all abstract ideas are general representations of particular ideas.[291] It is not merely a *conceptual change* that needs to be explained, but an entirely new idea which is qualitatively distinct in as much as it stops being ontologically real.

Cottrell, presumably influenced by Traiger and McRae on this point, appeals to the process of *application* to defend how the new idea is created. While he rejects the view that

---

[291] Michael Costa's account of Hume's 'idea' of strict identity makes a similar move. Costa is convinced that space, time, identity, and the vacuum must all be 'complex ideas' in order to fit Hume's ontological picture. As I have argued in Chapter 3, I reject Costa's view of Hume's theory of relations and, in this case, his view of strict identity, for the reason that it is a category mistake to account for epistemological categories or the *structure* of ideas by understanding the structure itself *as* an idea. It is akin to understanding the ontology of the *shape* of a sculpture *as* clay. Describing the ontology of the shape of a sculpture *as* clay seems to miss the point entirely, because the shape is the formal aspect of the clay, not the clay itself. Likewise, Hume's natural relations, which give rise to fictions, are the formal aspect of the content of ideas. Surprisingly, Costa appeals to structural terminology to describe identity in his account, but fails to properly explain it. He says, for example: "Instances of space and time are literally complex in consisting of arrays of other ideas" ("Hume, Strict Identity, and Time's Vacuum," 12). What exactly does he mean by 'arrays'? 'Array' is a structural term, and it is the 'array' itself that requires explanation. Earlier, Costa says that Kemp Smith's 'mistaken' interpretation of space and time as *manners of appearance* is resolved by his view that space and time are an idea of "the manner only insofar as it is an idea that consists of points related in that manner" ("Hume, Strict Identity, and Time's Vacuum," 4). What can Costa mean here? Similar to his account of relations, Costa, once again, appeals to the very thing that needs to be explained, namely, 'manners' in his *definition* of space and time. What I see as Costa's mistake is his assumption that space and time and identity need to accommodate Hume's theory of abstract ideas. On my interpretation, Hume's philosophy is much more consistent if we remain agnostic and temperate regarding the ontological question of relations and fictions.

fictitious duration could be a pictorial application of one idea to another, he proposes "a *predicative* conception of applying an idea to an object."[292] By forming subject-predicate propositions, whereby the subject of duration is applied to the predicate of unchanging objects, the category of duration undergoes a conceptual change. Unchanging objects come to be included in the revival set of duration, and, eventually, after a certain amount of predication (the exact amount is left unspecified), it is no longer false but true when the new category (now including both duration and unchanging objects) is applied to those objects.

I argue in the next section that the process of *application*, though based on textual support, does not sufficiently explain fictitious distance. It does not explain why the process could not run both ways. Why is it not that duration is included in the revival set of unchanging objects? It is not just that a steadfast object is thought to participate in a continual succession of perceptions, but also that we can form "the idea of time without changeable existence" (T 1.2.5.28; SBN 65). In the latter sense, it is thought that an unchanging existence can participate in the idea of time. Thus, on my interpretation, the process is best described as a *union* of self-contradictory ideas rather than a unidirectional application from one idea to another.

Second, Cottrell's developmental predicative interpretation is susceptible to Annemarie Butler's criticism that any interpretation of natural fictions must account for how they occur in animals and children.[293] If animals do not think via subjects and predicates, then how does his interpretation explain, for instance, Fido's recognition of enduring objects?

Third, the predicative interpretation does not explain the contradictory nature of the 'idea' of fictitious duration. Cottrell seems to believe that fictitious duration only occurs at the

---

[292] *Hume on Fiction*, 83.

[293] See "Hume on Believing the Vulgar Fiction of Continued Existence."

abstract idea or category level, which means there are no *particular* ideas of fictitious duration. Consider an analogy: let us suppose that another category undergoes a similar conceptual change such that the category 'man' starts to include 'dogs' due to some kind of mind-dependent similarity. Even if the category of 'man' (including both men and dogs) is applied to a single dog, that does not mean there is any particular idea of a dog-man. Therefore, by way of analogy, we are led to believe that there is likewise no *particular idea* of fictitious duration; it is only ever a conceptual abstraction or abstract object. To say that there is no particular idea of fictitious duration seems to be in direct violation of Hume's nominalism. If Cottrell appeals to the theory of abstract ideas to explain fictitious duration, he needs to explain the *particular idea* of fictitious duration—for that is what causes the dilemma in the first place.

Moreover, while an appeal to abstract ideas raises the question of just how much fictitious duration is a linguistic construction, it does not seem to square with Hume's discussion of identity in any case. Fictitious duration and identity share an unclear symmetry given that the former is used to explain the latter. In the case of identity, it is at least clear that the fiction is *both* unity and number at the same time depending on the light under which it is considered. Cottrell's interpretation does not seem to explain how such a contradiction might occur.

Indeed, on his account, fictitious duration is never experienced or perceived, it is only a way in which we represent the world. The application of duration to unchangeable objects suggests that the mind is actively applying the category of duration almost universally to objects *after* we perceive those objects. Thus, how is representation and application regarded as the same process?[294] In other words, it appears that fictitious duration is both (a) the *representation* of a given object and (b) an *application* of a category to an object. Where is the *application* of the category of

[294] Costelloe's distinction between the mimetic imagination and productive imagination might be useful here to describe, what I see as, the confounding of representational (mimetic) and applicative (productive) functions.

duration to an unchangeable object in Cottrell's explanation of a first-stage fiction? For him, a first-stage fiction describes three things: the process of forming an abstract idea of a mind-dependent category, the abstract idea, and the mind-dependent category. The *application process* does not seem to be involved in any one of these three processes/products.

Additionally, Cottrell posits that Hume recognizes the cognitive goal of representing the world via a classificatory scheme. Part of Hume's criticism of fictions, then, is that they need to be reformed in order to achieve this goal. Again, what this interpretation implies is that Hume's recognition of fictions only has to do with the way we *classify* the world, and not the way we perceive the world. The fiction of identity, it seems, for Cottrell, merely needs to be reformed for us to be able to accurately represent the world. And yet, if this were true, what is left of human experience? What exactly is this more truthful human experience that does not involve fictitious identity and unity? By transporting the problem of fictions to the classificatory level, fictions are no longer a part of the human experience. In that way, Cottrell's interpretation presumes some perfectly consistent mind-independent world, one in which, if we just corrected our fictional categories, would be possible to grasp. The only problem is that this supposed consistent world requires fictions to even be described. While Hume might recognize the goal of classificatory correspondence, I suspect he would say that *that* particular goal is one for the grammarian—not the philosopher or the scientist of man.

On my interpretation, the more plausible story is that fictitious duration is an imaginative union of incompatible sensory ideas. It is part of the very way we perceive the world, and it is only through reason that we are able to see the union's contradictory and fictional nature. There is nothing inherently wrong with it being classified as fiction or contradictory, and thus there is no need for it to be corrected given its importance in human understanding. Natural fictions are not

like an optical illusion where a bent stick (fiction) in water is actually straight (truth); natural fictions are optical illusions like the rabbit-duck illusion. Both the rabbit and the duck are present at the same time and in the same respect. Though, we cannot see both at the same time due to the limits of our perceptual system, we may still discern two distinct images *as the same* by way of analysis. We need not appeal to abstract ideas to explain the paradox; it is explained by an appeal to perspectivism, indeed, the same type of perspectivism that Hume appeals to at the conclusion of Book I, wherein he directly discusses fictitious unity, identity, and causality.

(2) Next, let us recall that duration, unity, identity, and distance are *all* relations. That is, for each relation, there are at least *two* relata. For Cottrell's account to be successful, it must explain where the relata are located in the category representing the abstract idea of duration. If they are part of the abstract idea, then it is not a singular abstract idea; it is an abstract idea with a subset of ideas, namely, the relata. Otherwise, the abstract idea of duration is a relation without relata.

Consequently, we would like an account that appeals to abstract ideas or categories to explain how an unchangeable object (a non-relational idea or unity) is included in a relational category (duration or number). On top of that, how might the category which includes a relation and a non-relational idea be applied to a non-relational object? Is the relata of duration equally applied to the unchangeable object?

An essential aspect of Cottrell's account is that "[o]ur ordinary ideas of spatial distance, temporal duration, unity and identity represent objects in a *mind-dependent* way.[295] However, again, we must remember these so-called 'ideas' are all *relations*. Therefore, they do not *represent* objects, they *connect* objects or perceptions. Temporal duration does not represent anything—whether

[295] *Hume on Fiction*, 9.

mind-dependent or mind-independent—for it is merely a *succession* of perceptions. Likewise, spatial distance does not represent objects: "distance will be allowed by philosophers to be a true relation, because we acquire an idea of it by the comparing of objects" (T 1.1.5.1; SBN 14). Relations are not representative in any way. What relations describe is how impressions and ideas are united or associated or structured.

As I have mentioned, Michael Costa seems to believe that, even though space and time are the distribution of points or successive perceptions in a certain manner, relations and fictions are still able to represent *that* manner. It is true that, with respect to ideas, Hume thinks that we cannot conceive of extension without something tangible or visible. But Hume clearly says that relations are not tangible, nor visible; in fact, they are non-representational:

> …the understanding never observes any real connexion among objects, and that even the union of cause and effect, when strictly examin'd, resolves itself into a customary association of ideas…it evidently follows, that identity is *nothing really belonging to these different perceptions*, and uniting them together; but is *merely a quality, which we attribute to them*, because of the union of their ideas in the imagination. (T 1.4.6.16; SBN 259-60)

What might the *manner* of spatial and temporal relations mean? On my view, it must mean the structure or union of ideas in the imagination. It is not something that belongs to any perception, and therefore it is neither tangible nor visible. Our 'ideas' of spatial distance and temporal duration, then, do not represent *objects* in a mind-dependent way; rather they are representative of the mind-dependent way of representation itself.

(3) Finally, and most importantly, Cottrell's interpretation must explain what exactly is *similar* about the mind-dependent effects he says obtain with respect to changeable objects and unchangeable objects. 'Similarity' is meaningless as a relational term unless the similarity is specified in some respect. If I say that a cat is similar to a dog, then the proposition is meaningless unless I specify in what respect the similarity obtains. Usually, we make enthymematic inferences

based on what we know already—e.g., cats and dogs are similar in that they are both mammals. However, the inference required in the case of the similarity between mind-dependent effects is not obvious. It is incumbent upon the interpretation to provide that inference for the reader. What exactly is the mind-dependent similarity between unchanging objects and changing objects?

For instance, in the case of yellowness—an example given by Cottrell to illustrate his point—there is, at least, a mind-independent agreement among observers who can point to similar colours in the world, even while the colour might be mind-dependent. With the mind-dependent similarity of changeable and unchangeable objects, how would observers come to agree upon the relevant similarity? Is there anything they can point to in the world? If not, how is it possible to determine that the similarity is, in fact, a *similarity* and not a difference? There does not seem to be anything actually similar about the mind-dependent effects. On one hand, the changeable object appears as a succession; on the other, an unchangeable object appears as a unity. Either the mind-dependent effect is a succession *or* a unity. What exactly then is similar between these effects, especially in light of their *contradictory causes*? Indeed, contradictories are not only dissimilar, but completely opposite and orthogonal to each other.

(c) Application Fictions and Concealment Fictions

A few years after the publication of his dissertation, Cottrell revised his view of fictions, or, at least, adopted an alternative classification of Humean fictions in his "The Puzzle of Fiction in Hume's *Treatise*." In this article, explicitly following Robert McRae, Cottrell divides fictions up into (a) application fictions and (b) concealment fictions: "for example, after we apply the idea of unity or simplicity to an aggregate of sensible qualities (an application fiction), we try to 'conceal'

this fiction from ourselves by 'feign[ing]'—that is, producing the fiction of—a unitary substance, underlying these sensible qualities…let us call this a *concealment fiction*." Given that the next section evaluates McRae's interpretation specifically, I discuss application and concealment fictions in due course.

3. Robert McRae

Robert McRae's article primarily concerns the implications of fictitious duration in the *Treatise*. It represents one of the first commentaries to fully recognize the importance of fiction as a *concept* in Hume's early philosophy, and the influence of McRae is clear in the work of Traiger, Cottrell, and Costelloe. McRae, however, sets out to prove an ambitious thesis: that is, fictitious duration is the fundamental fiction of human nature, and "out of this fiction are generated in a logically ordered series the basic metaphysical categories in terms of which the mind thinks, and all of them are fictitious."[296] It is to McRae's credit for making the connection between metaphysical categories of thought and Hume's fictions. I take his view as essentially correct in this respect, and, indeed, I hope to have shown that Hans Vaihinger interpreted Hume in a complementary way. Nevertheless, I take issue with how McRae classifies Humean fictions.

There are two types of fiction in Hume's *Treatise* according to McRae: (1) application fictions and (2) concealment fictions.[297] The first type involves a misapplication of one idea to another. When the application creates a contradiction between the two ideas, the imagination invents a secondary fiction to conceal it and ease the mind.

---

[296] "The Import of Hume's Theory of Time," 124.

[297] I follow Jonathan Cottrell's distinction based upon McRae's two types of fiction here. See Cottrell, "A Puzzle about Fictions in the *Treatise*."

The textual support for application fictions is drawn primarily from Hume's discussion of space and time, specifically what he calls fictitious duration. McRae argues that the first type of fiction "is a particular kind of 'mistake', 'confusion', 'deception', or 'illusion', consisting in the misapplication of an idea derived from some original impression to something other than its proper object."[298] In Hume's words: "Ideas always represent the objects or impressions, from which they are deriv'd, and can never without a fiction represent or be apply'd to any other" (T 1.2.3.11; SBN 37).

McRae takes Hume at his word on this, adopting the terminology of 'application' to create an entire class of fictions. As I have noted, I suggest this move is misguided. Instead, we must make a further inference in this instance. It is not merely an application, but a union. In other words, the text seems to suggest that fictitious duration only applies one way, from the idea of duration to the idea of an unchangeable object. There is no justification, however, why the application only runs one way. Is it not the case that we equally apply the idea of an unchangeable object to duration? Given Hume's commitments regarding natural relations, interpreting it as a union rather than an application seems to make more sense of the process involved. It is not only that the unchangeable object is supposed to be participating in succession, but that succession is participating in an unchanging object. That further inference is necessary: it is not an application of one idea to another—it is the union of two contradictory ideas.

The distinction is significant because McRae, and other commentators like Cottrell and Traiger, see this *application* process as intrinsic to certain fictions. But the terminology of 'application' is misleading. It does not capture the symmetrical union of ideas that occurs. It is therefore not a confusion or mistake in application; it is a union of two ideas that are

[298] "The Import of Hume's Theory of Time," 124.

contradictory. While reason may judge that the resulting contradiction implies an error or deception, it is only an error from a logical point of view—a point of view ironically dependent on fictitious identity in the first place. In that sense, we must not confuse the philosopher's attitude toward contradiction with the vulgar's natural and necessary use of it. If the union of contradictory ideas is natural to vulgar mind, it is justified by its usefulness in the conduct of life. Whether the process defies logical sense or betrays the authority of reason is of no concern: reason is subordinate to our natural beliefs and fictions.

It is important, I think, that we separate Hume's philosophical biases from his descriptive investigation of the moral subject. There is, indeed, a tension between the two. For instance, McRae supports his argument by pointing to Hume's maxim: "that whatever ideas place the mind in the same disposition or in similar ones, are very apt to be confounded" (T 1.4.2.32; SBN 202-3). Because the mind 'mistakes' one idea for another, McRae is led to believe that fictitious duration (or identity) is a mistaken application. Hume's description of the process as a 'mistake' or 'confusion' might, however, be motivated by a rationalist or sceptical attitude to resolve or distrust contradictions.

On my interpretation, the process of generating fictitious duration makes more sense by thinking of it in terms of Hume's naturalistic account of relations. That is, "'tis a quality, which I shall often have occasion to remark in human nature…that when objects are united by any relation, we have a strong propensity to add some new relation to them, in order to compleat the union" (T 1.4.5.12; SBN 237-8). On this view, fictitious duration and identity do not arise from a misapplication, but from a natural propensity to unite related objects—even if contradictory—by further imagined relations. The unchangeable object and succession, by virtue of contiguity, are

connected by resemblance and causal relations such that we bestow existence on that imagined union.

Now, the second type of fiction, in McRae's view, is the *concealment fiction*. It "is not derived from some original impression, nor is it a mistake, it is a pure invention of the imagination designed to resolve a contradiction—a contradiction to which the first type of fiction gives rise."[299] Hence, the idea of identity, which is both unity (unchangeable object) and number (duration). Identity differs from fictitious duration because it does not involve a misapplication. It is, for McRae, a pure product of the imagination designed to mediate the contradiction between unity and number.

What then is the difference between fictitious duration and identity? Do these terms describe distinct processes, or do they refer to the same process? McRae's argument rests upon there being a clear distinction between application fictions and concealment fictions, but in the case that he specifically examines—namely, that between fictitious duration and identity—there does not seem to be any difference. Identity is the union of an unchangeable idea of an object and a succession of perceptions—but so too is the idea of fictitious duration.

I take it that there is, in fact, no difference between fictitious duration and identity, apart from a difference in emphasis. In the case of fictitious duration, the emphasis is on time, where one object or idea is *supposed* to persist through time. In the case of identity, the emphasis is on the unchangeable object, where a number of perceptions are *supposed* to feature the same object or idea. There is no misapplication, nor is there an act of concealment, despite the textual support. As a consequence, I do not take Hume at his word on this point. Instead of focusing on the *terminology* Hume uses, my approach is to focus on the *process* he describes in generating both

[299] Ibid.

identity and fictitious duration. The process seems to be, in both instances, that the mind unites contradictory ideas via the interplay between the imagination and the senses. On one hand, there are distinct, successive perceptions. On the other, there is unification. That contradictory blend of succession and union is a process that occurs at the core of human cognition.

Nevertheless, McRae, in a sense, reads Hume as subscribing to a strong form of epistemological fictionalism, where "out of [fictitious duration] are generated in a logically ordered series the *basic metaphysical categories* in terms of which the mind thinks, and *all of them are fictitious*."[300] Vaihinger also thought Hume called the categories fictions. Instead of singling out fictitious duration as the cause of all our categories, I suggest there is a more general process occurring, one that produces fictitious identity and fictitious unity in the same way. The process is based on the principle of association, which unites ideas in the mind and strives to complete the union of relations beyond what we immediately perceive.

McRae interprets the process as the unfolding of an alternating series of misapplication fictions and invented (or concealment) fictions such that it constructs our metaphysical categories. That is, the process goes like this: first, a misapplication occurs; second, an idea is invented to conceal the resulting contradiction; third, the invented idea is then misapplied to another idea; fourth, a second idea is invented to conceal the new contradiction. And so on the process continues—eventually forming the structure of our thought.

I agree with the idea that some fictions are more primary than others, but I disagree that the so-called 'misapplication' of duration is *the* fundamental principle of this logically ordered series. It seems to me that the principle of association—which includes the principle of unity, identity, and necessity—is what generates the structure of thought. When we reflect

[300] Ibid. Italics added.

philosophically on these metaphysical categories, we call them fictions in so far as they involve contradictions or hypotheses. And yet, the term 'fiction' is misleading here because it might suggest they are false (if judged by logical consistency or empirical verification). Natural fictions are not false, to be clear, because logical consistency and verification presuppose the metaphysical categories. Fictions are instead simply ontologically unknown (or it is a category mistake). They are combinations or formations of ideas—and whether those combinations *exist* in any metaphysically robust sense is beyond our understanding.

4. Saul Traiger

In 1987, Saul Traiger published "Impressions, Ideas, and Fictions" in *Hume Studies*. His central aim in the article is to "lay a groundwork for a complete study of Hume's fictions."[301] Building on the work of Robert McRae, Traiger offers a novel interpretation of fiction, namely, that "Hume has a core notion of fiction which is fundamentally epistemological rather than ontological."[302]

I follow Traiger in thinking that Hume's natural fictions ought to be construed as epistemological; indeed, this insight has been foundational to the preceding interpretation. However, one difficulty in Traiger's view is that he classifies fictions *as* ideas. How can we call fictions *ideas* if we do not know their origin or cause beyond the principle of association? Traiger's conclusion that "all fictions are ideas applied to something from which the idea is not derived, and that this is the central feature which fictions have in common" seems therefore to contradict his premise regarding their epistemic nature.[303] If fictions are *not* ontological, why call them *ideas*?

---

[301] "Impressions, Ideas, and Fictions," 381.

[302] Ibid., 382.

[303] Ibid., 394.

Reference to the *existence* of fictions *as something or other* is an illegitimate reification that leads to confusion about what they are. It is akin to conceiving gravity as a subject capable of predication; for instance, 'gravity is heavy' or 'gravity has length or depth.' These propositions confuse the nature of gravity, taking it for an ontological existent when it is instead a law *of* ontological existents. Fictions, I suggest, ought to be conceived in a similar way: they are arrangements of incompatible ideas or hypotheses of potential arrangements of ideas.

That said, Traiger's interpretation trenchantly speaks to the unavoidability of natural fictions. He says that there are "naturally occurring fictions of the vulgar; the fiction of duration and the fiction of continued existence are among these. Some fictions are inescapable; we all have them. Others can be avoided, such as occult properties and the philosopher's fiction of double existence."[304] Additionally, he claims that "it is not Hume's main concern to correct the fictions of the vulgar…however…when misused by philosophers or other theorists, fictions are false. By calling them false, Hume means that there is no evidence for believing in them."[305] Empirical verification of fictions and natural relations, as Hume's project demonstrates, is unavailable to us. All we have to judge are effects observed in the mental world; their causes, however, are resolved into original qualities of human nature. The vulgar do not question natural fictions; philosophers, on the other hand, take them to be false because they cannot be validated either inductively or deductively.

In an article published several years later, Traiger returns to the topic of the concept of fiction in Hume's philosophy. In that instance, he posits a connection between the fiction of continued existence and legal fictions. Hume's legal background would likely have apprised him

---

[304] Ibid., 395.

[305] Ibid., 397.

of the idea of legal fictions, whereby a convention is adopted to ignore certain differences (e.g., treating a corporation *as if* it is a person). Traiger believes that "legal fictions provide a model for the mechanism of the imagination," and that they may be understood as strategies of imaginative "reconciliation to make sense of our experience. Without such vulgar fictions we would not experience the constant conjunctions on which our beliefs are founded."[306]

Notably, Traiger, in his revised approach, considers the objection of calling fictions *ideas*, since they are not derived from impressions. His response is that Hume allows for ideas which are not traceable to prior impressions; these ideas are fiction-generated and distinguished from ordinary ideas. While Traiger is certainly correct, the objection is, in fact, stronger than he makes it out to be. For one, it seems that fictions are *relations*—e.g., continued existence and the idea of the self refer to *two or more* perceptions *over time*. Therefore, neither may be referred to as a single "idea." Fictions are composites, not singular. Traiger might reply that fictions are not single ideas, but actually complex ideas. In that case, what exactly constitutes the complex idea of a vulgar fiction? For fantastical fictions like New Jerusalem or complex ideas without corresponding impressions like Paris, there are *actual* constituents to which the complex ideas refer. The complex idea of Paris may contain the Eiffel Tower and Rue Des Barres. But what about the fiction of identity? If it is a complex idea, what *in fact* constitutes the idea?

Let us suppose that we perceive two identical complex ideas of Paris such that the complex fictitious idea of identity obtains. We might write it such that 'A1=A2', where 'A1' is the original complex idea of Paris and 'A2' is the subsequent identical complex idea of Paris. Now, if the claim is that fictitious identity is a *complex idea* distinct from our ordinary ideas, then where in

---

[306] "Experience and Testimony in Hume's Philosophy," 53. For a complementary discussion of Hobbes's application of legal fictions to natural philosophy and politics, see Foisneau, "Elements of Fiction in Hobbes's System of Philosophy."

'A1=A2' do we find the complex idea denoting fictitious identity? To what does fictitious identity refer? If we say it refers to '=', then it no longer seems like a complex idea, since it only contains a simple or single relation. On the other hand, if we say it refers to 'A1=A2' as a whole, then there are three complex ideas involved: two complex ideas of Paris and one complex idea of fictitious identity. Yet, fictitious identity, as a complex idea, does *not* refer to the *combination* of three distinct ideas—namely, 'A1', '=', and 'A2'. Fictitious identity is supposed to specifically describe the *relation between* A1 and A2. To say that the complex idea of fictitious identity involves a further relation that *combines* an equality relation with two complex ideas only makes matter more unintelligible. Indeed, Hume remarks in numerous passages that relations and fictions are 'betwixt' ideas and impressions. If we say that the relation *between* ideas is another relational *idea*, then Bradley's regress obtains.[307] Thus, in order to interpret vulgar fictions *as* complex ideas, we would ideally like an explanation of why a further relation that connects the complex idea itself is not required.

5. Annemarie Butler

In Annemarie Butler's article, "Hume on Believing the Vulgar Fiction of Continued Existence," she claims that any interpretation of the fiction of continued existence must account for how the fiction occurs in children and animals. On that basis, she is led to reject all interpretations that attempt to explain away the fiction by appealing to Hume's account of general ideas or inadequate ideas, or something more Kantian. In so far as the fiction of continued existence is predicated on the "animal imagination," I agree with Butler's opening gambit.[308]

---

[307] See Chapter 3 of F. H. Bradley's *Appearance and Reality*.

[308] "Hume on Believing the Vulgar Fiction of Continued Existence," 249.

That said, Butler subsequently suggests that the fiction of continued existence is false. And it is at that point where my view goes in a different direction. Indeed, as I have argued, I reject that fictions are available to ontological verification, and therefore they are not empirically truth-apt. Since my interpretation additionally understands contradiction to be a fundamental part of all natural fictions, they are not logically truth-apt, either.

Butler, arguing against Costelloe and Sokolowski, claims that "Hume thinks the vulgar belief [of continued existence] is false and erroneous, but not self-contradictory."[309] To make her case, she draws attention to the passage where Hume specifically says that the fiction involves no contradiction (T 1.4.2.40; SBN 208). While Costelloe and Sokolowski seem to think that a logical contradiction *is* involved in the fiction, Butler argues that Hume is not speaking of an *a priori* truth but a matter of fact. In other words, that perceptions cannot exist apart from being perceived is an *a posteriori* truth. Thus, the fiction is not logically contradictory, but rather it is merely false and erroneous.

On my view, her claim is incorrect because the perceptions at issue—fictional posits of continued existence—are *feigned* by the mind. Therefore, categorizing them *as* perceptions (impressions or ideas) goes beyond what we can validly say about them: that is, we do not know their origin or ontological nature. We do not know if they *are* perceptions in the way that Hume uses the term. And we cannot with any propriety say that the fiction is an error or a falsehood because what are fictions misrepresenting *a posteriori* exactly? The fiction of continued existence is a supposition of the imagination. It is only when the hypothesis is reified as ontologically real that it becomes false. But Butler indirectly reifies the fiction by calling it false in the first place. If the

[309] "Hume on Believing the Vulgar Fiction of Continued Existence," 244.

fiction is not treated as ontologically real, it is neither true nor false—it is simply empirically unverifiable.

6. Robert Sokolowski

A comprehensive, underutilized, and early account of Humean fictions is developed by Robert Sokolowski in his paper, "Fiction and Illusion in David Hume's Philosophy." On his account, Hume's fictions—what he calls "speculative illusions"—are divided into three separate categories:

(1) *Objective Illusions* (permanent physical substances, necessary causal relations, powers, qualities attributed to things, and fictional relationships the mind constructs for objects).

(2) *Subjective Illusions* (personal identity or the self).

(3) *Fictions* (ancient philosophical fictions, superstition, education, and poetry).

The first two categories are, as Sokolowski remarks, "natural and necessary for human existence and action, but except for poetry the fictions in the third group are unnatural and often malevolent."[310] With respect to objective illusions, there is a common feature among them, namely, the imagination simplifies a multiplicity of impressions by attributing to them the quality of sameness. The quality of sameness, however, is not present in the multiplicity; rather, the mind imposes it. Examples of this process are found in our ideas of the continued existence of objects and causal necessity, where there is a misplacement of subjective or internal impressions to the external world. The reason for these kinds of illusions is the imaginative propensity to join extra relations to our related ideas in order "to round out and simplify sense experience by postulating

[310] "Fiction and Illusion in David Hume's Philosophy," 197.

a relationship or endurance" that is not really there.[311] As far as this analysis is concerned, Sokolowski's influence on my interpretation is critical.

Second, the subjective illusion of personal identity operates in a similar manner, though with one important difference: there is no contradiction involved in personal identity. Sokolowski takes Hume at his word in this respect, for in the world of perceptions there may be no contradictions—it is a homogenous domain. On this point, my interpretation diverges. While on a vulgar level, all of our perceptions appear as one continuous, homogenous stream of impressions and ideas, when we discern interruptions between our perceptions (which we *do*) the same contradiction arises between unity and number. Reflection enables us to discover the contradiction, even though it is still perceived by the vulgar as a homogenous domain. If Hume treated personal identity as involving the same contradiction as the principle of identity, I suspect his worries regarding personal identity in the Appendix might have been somewhat ameliorated.

Sokolowski's third category, Fictions, arise from philosophers attempting to avoid the contradictions that are generated by our mind. For instance, philosophers attempt to reconcile the contradiction between sameness and diversity with the fiction of substance. Sokolowski argues that "natural fictions are necessary to human existence and are based on irresistible and universal principles of the mind. Without them human action is impossible. But philosophical fictions are trivial, coming from changeable, weak, irregular, and useless principles, with no real effect on human actions."[312]

A minor quibble on this final point is that, I think, Sokolowski is incorrect in attributing philosophical fictions to different imaginative principles. The same imaginative principles are

---

[311] Ibid., 199.

[312] Ibid., 209.

generative of natural *and* philosophical fictions. The ancient fiction of substance is derived from the imaginative propensity to unite all matter into one category, and it is the same propensity that leads to uniting distinct but resembling ideas. What distinguishes philosophical fictions from natural fictions is whether they are generated by the active or passive imagination. The former is responsible for philosophical fictions, while the latter is responsible for vulgar fictions.

7. Robert Hollinger

In Hollinger's account, an initial distinction between two types of fictionalism is proposed: (1) regulative fictionalism and (2) constitutive fictionalism. The former he associates with Hume, the latter with Kant. Roughly, the constitutive fictionalist views rules or conventions as constituting a given practice. The rules of Monopoly, for instance, are what constitute the game of Monopoly. The regulative fictionalist views rules or conventions as codifying or regulating behavior that exists independent of the rules or conventions. In other words, regulative fictions codify empirical data that exists prior to the regulative function of the fictions.

The parallel to Hume is clear: perceptual data is prior to the association of ideas, and ideas are regulated by those relations. Hollinger claims that "the whole point behind…regulative fictions is to render any inference to nonobservables both impossible and unnecessary."[313] There is no need to justify our causal reasoning by unobservable necessary connections (i.e., brute facts), for causal reasoning is justified by its use or regulative function. In that way:

> The regulative fictionalist is a sceptic about all claims except those referring to the brute sensory data of experience. Any experience or any statement, which cannot be reduced to atomistic data must therefore be construed as either meaningless or as fictitious, i.e., as arbitrary projections onto experience for which there can be psychological or sociological explanations, but never any rational justification. To the extent that such fictions are pragmatically useful, or promote survival, etc., they may be perfectly all

[313] "Two Kinds of Fictionalism," 556.

> right and even unavoidable, but never justifiable in any epistemic sense. At best, they are associated with what Hume would call 'natural beliefs.'[314]

Whereas Kant's Copernican Revolution reified the mind's categories such that it constituted the very nature of rationality, Hume's Copernican Revolution treats the categories (i.e., natural relations) as codifying and structuring our perceptual data. Hume's categories are what he called the principles of attraction in the mental world. The principles of attraction are, for Hume, *constitutive* of our perception. Fictions, on the other hand, are *regulative* in so far as they are natural and useful to the conduct of life. The paradoxical feature of fictions is that, in order to be regulative, we must act *as if* they are constitutive of our perception. For instance, while the continued existence of objects serves a regulative function in human life, it is only by treating objects as if they *really do exist* independently of us that the fiction becomes useful.

On the whole, Hollinger is right that Hume may be classified as a regulative fictionalist in the philosopher's sense, but wrong in the vulgar sense. The vulgar operate as constitutive fictionalists such that fictions are taken as ontologically real. Philosophers, on the other hand, by recognizing fictions *as* fictions, are no longer constitutive fictionalists since the validity of natural beliefs is put into question. Only if the philosopher modifies their view to accept natural fictions and beliefs as useful do they become regulative fictionalists.

8. Achille Varzi

In another rare account treating Hume as a fictionalist, Achille Varzi interprets the *Treatise* as emphasizing "the 'confusions and mistakes' that drive our structuring activity."[315] Cognitive errors and illusions reveal our natural impulse "to represent the world of experience with an

---

[314] Ibid., 556.

[315] "Fictionalism in Ontology," 11.

objective foundation in the nature of things—over and above any specific view concerning what those things might actually be."[316] Varzi develops his view by considering diachronic identity and unity. Diachronic identity—i.e., object identity or the continued existence of objects—demonstrates Hume's explicit use of the concept of fiction to account for how we conceive numerically identical objects. In the case of unity, "our propensity to say more" by uniting unity with multiplicity leads us to a "mental construction, a pretense, a fiction."[317]

Varzi's thesis essentially argues that Hume reveals the propensity in human nature to structure our world via epistemic laws—unity, identity, and causation. In this respect, Hume may be regarded as fictionalist:

> [O]n Hume's original view, much of the structure that we tend to attribute to the world out there is a fiction. But this is not to say that it is a bad fiction, or merely a fiction erroneously supposed to do no harm. On the contrary, in each case one might very well think that the fiction is to be taken seriously, for it is the best fiction we could think of. We would not be able to plan our lives and to carry on with our everyday commerce with the world, let alone to pursue progress in science, if we didn't pretend that the fiction were true. It would be irrational not to pretend that it is true…Still, a pretense it is, and as philosophers we have to keep that in mind. This is why the view in question is a genuine brand of fictionalism.[318]

Similar to Hollinger's account, there is a necessary distinction to make between the philosopher's view of fiction and the vulgar view. From the vulgar point of view, it does not seem accurate to say Hume's fictions constitute a form of fictionalism. If the vulgar do not recognize that fictions *are* fictions, then they are simply operating via an illusory type of realism. Whereas, when philosophers discover the illusory nature of fictions, and recognize the importance of such fictions on a pragmatic or naturalistic account of human nature, it seems that that ought to qualify as a form of fictionalism.

---

[316] Ibid., 11.

[317] Ibid., 10.

[318] Ibid., 12-3.

CHAPTER EIGHT: HUME'S PHILOSOPHY OF FICTION

1. The Origin and Foundation of All Knowledge

Hume's *Treatise* is an attempt to revolutionize the way we understand the world. Prior to its publication, the sacred domains of mathematics, logic, natural philosophy, theology, and metaphysics occupied the center of our system of knowledge. Hume sought to overturn the entire model by offering a new system, one that situated the moral subject at the center.

Thus, philosophers who insist upon interpreting the *Treatise* through the eyes of old systems will never understand the science of man. If we presuppose the validity of mathematics, logic, theology, natural philosophy, or metaphysics while listening to Hume's teaching, we will never truly hear what he has to say. More importantly, if we read the *Treatise* through the eyes of the later Hume of the *Enquiries*, I submit the same result follows.

Indeed, as I suggest in this chapter, Hume's science of man all but disappears in the *Enquiries*, along with his full-scale attack on the legitimacy of mathematics, logic, theology, natural philosophy, and metaphysics. Even the phrase 'science of man' is not to be found anywhere in Hume's later work, whereas in the *Treatise* it is displayed prominently in the Introduction, touted as the only solid foundation on which to ground all other sciences. Not only that, Hume's theory of natural relations and fictions is entirely abandoned in Hume's later epistemology.

We might understand the *Enquiries* as Hume's considered and corrected view, the wisdom of age cleaving youthful imprudence from genuine mature insight. But I think taking Hume at his word in his renunciation of the *Treatise* is ill-advised. Thinking himself rebuffed by his contemporaries, the public silent toward his literary efforts, Hume never received the approbation he desired with the *Treatise*. Or so he thought. Indeed, Hume never did learn how

important his early work would be to the development of philosophical history. It is not surprising that a philosopher, so forthright in his appetite for fame, distanced himself from the brash and revolutionary spirit that pervaded his early intellectual life by recasting his arguments in a shorter and more subdued form. And yet, despite the vagaries of philosophical fashion, it is safe to say that the early Hume was right to be so cavalier. History has not regarded the *Treatise* as an inferior work to the *Enquiries*. The *Treatise*, and Hume's science of man, continues to stand as a monumental achievement.

The early Hume was, on my reading, a true radical; the later Hume far more modest and reserved. Still seeking the plaudits of his peers, Hume's *Enquiries* represent his attempt to satisfy that long held aim. But what might Hume remove from the *Treatise* to make it more palatable to his readers? Of course: temper the offensive position he took toward all those sciences he claimed were secondary to his.

Let us consider the matter more fully. What was Hume well aware of while completing Book I of the *Treatise*? Although eager for praise, Hume simultaneously knew that his project was subversive and assuredly divisive. That paradoxical trait of craving acceptance in a community while attempting to rebel against it is, to be sure, the burden of any incipient genius. And Hume was no exception. He acknowledges that

> I have expos'd myself to the enmity of all metaphysicians, logicians, mathematicians, and even theologians; and can I wonder at the insults I must suffer? I have declar'd my disapprobation of their systems; and can I be surpriz'd, if they shou'd express a hatred of mine and of my person? (T 1.4.7.2; SBN 264)

Hume clearly understands that it is not only metaphysicians he has undermined in Book I, but mathematicians, logicians, and theologians. None of these domains have anything to stand on unless they first agree with his conclusions: "The science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences, so the only solid foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on

experience and observation" (T 0.7; SBN xvi). Any science pretending to go beyond experience and observation is destined to fail; "the first principles are founded on the imagination and senses: The conclusion, therefore, can never go beyond, much less contradict these faculties" (T 1.2.4.31; SBN 638). And this conclusion may entail repugnant consequences to those committed to the dictates of reason. If, for instance, we discover the imagination to be responsible for producing perfect ideas and relations necessary for the operations of mathematics and logic, then mathematics and logic are imagination-dependent. So much for the purity of mathematics, especially in contrast to those lowly poets and dramatists. A Platonic nightmare, indeed.

Undoubtedly, the faculty of imagination for the early Hume functions as the director of our mental stage: "the memory, senses, and understanding are…founded on the imagination, or the vivacity of our ideas" (T 1.2.4.31; SBN 265). It is our epistemic *sense* that facilitates belief; thus, if a fiction is vivacious and lively while a mathematical proof is weak and inert, human nature attends to the fiction by generating a natural belief in it, whereas the proof has no influence on our actions.

Hume's subversion of logic and mathematics is an inevitable by-product of his fundamental commitment to grounding knowledge in human nature. Human nature begins with experience; it does not begin with terms, numbers, or relations that transcend the modality of possibility. If everything begins in the domain of possibility, then all of our reasonings can be traced back to it. Thus, Hume makes startling proclamations about the prospects of certain knowledge:

> When I reflect on the natural fallibility of my judgment, I have less confidence in my opinions, than when I only consider the objects concerning which I reason; and when I proceed still farther, to turn the scrutiny against every successive estimation I make of my faculties, *all the rules of logic* require a continual diminution, and at last a total extinction of belief and evidence. (T 1.4.1.6; SBN 183, italics added)

The faculty of judgment or reason is a sub-faculty of human nature. It cannot go beyond its limitations, despite its claims to authority. Since all of our knowledge is originally derived from experience, logic must also be derived from experience. Recall that general terms used in logical propositions and deductions are those annexed to particular ideas, ideas that are necessarily open to the possibility of change. Consider the syllogism:

P1: All men are mortal

P2: Socrates is a man

C: Socrates is mortal

While this might be regarded as certain knowledge by the logician, for the Humean empiricist it is fallible. Why? Because 'man' and 'mortal' are general terms to which particular ideas are attached. Therefore, it is actually impossible on Hume's account to even think of 'man' or 'mortal' in abstraction—and yet, a demonstration *depends* on abstraction. Whatever particular ideas of 'man' or 'mortal' an individual brings to bear on the general terms will affect the syllogism. No two people will see the same syllogism above; the subjectivity of our particular ideas necessarily affects the way we reason.

There are additionally no categorical terms on Hume's account. For how could we know that 'all' men are mortal. That would require we have complete knowledge of all men that have ever existed: past and future. To say something categorical is to, by definition, go beyond experience. Therefore, syllogistic logic, along with universal quantification of contemporary mathematical logic, is fallible, even absurd, given Hume's commitments.[319]

Finally, all the rules of logic eventually reduce to probability because the method of evaluating proofs entails an infinite regress. That is, the method employed to ensure a particular

[319] John Passmore interprets Hume's intent to be that of "destroying all *formal* logic" (*Hume's Intentions*, 26).

proof is valid requires a further method to ensure that *that* method of evaluation is valid. And *that* method requires a further method. And so on. There is, as a consequence, no way to reach certain knowledge in the domain of mathematics and logic for Hume. The conclusion is undeniably objectionable to philosophers and logicians whose belief systems are so heavily invested in certainty. Hume is well aware of what these arguments in the *Treatise* imply, and how they undercut the dignity of the supposed infallible domains of knowledge. Yet, as expected, his attacks against mathematics and logic entirely vanish from the *Enquiries*. In a conspicuous retreat from his earlier position, Hume's fork is asserted in its place, and thus the *First Enquiry* reaffirms the intuitive and demonstrative certainty of the relations of ideas involved in Geometry, Algebra, and Arithmetic (E 4.1).

In the *Treatise*, an extensive part of Hume's naturalistic discoveries emerges in the wake of his scepticism against the certainty of reason and the senses. Simply because Hume reveals the imaginative and fictional features of mathematics and logic does not entail that they are either useless or avoidable. Rejecting certainty does not leave us in a state of Pyrrhonian scepticism. To the contrary, rejecting certainty reveals exactly what in human nature *is* unavoidable. For instance, while claims of absolute truth and logical validity are open to sceptical challenge, probable inferences from past experience are not—for we rely on those kinds of inferences come what may. Probability, in fact, is a vulgar method of acquiring knowledge that mathematicians and logicians ultimately depend on.

> There is no Algebraist nor Mathematician so expert in his science, as to place entire confidence in any truth immediately upon his discovery of it, or regard it as any thing, but a mere probability. Every time he runs over his proofs, his confidence encreases; but still more by the approbation of his friends; and is rais'd to its utmost perfection by the universal assent and applauses of the learned world. Now 'tis evident, that this gradual encrease of assurance is nothing but the addition of new probabilities, and is deriv'd from the constant union of causes and effects, according to past experience and observation. (T 1.4.1.2; SBN 180-1)

Probability is a reliable guide to acting effectively in the world, and thus it is essential to human nature. Consider:

> The celebrated *Monsieur Leibnitz* has observed it to be a defect in the common systems of logic, that they are very copious when they explain the operations of the understanding in the forming of demonstrations, but are too concise when they treat of *probabilities, and those other measures of evidence on which life and action entirely depend*, and which are our guides even in most of our philosophical speculations. (AB 4; SBN 646-7, italics added)

Philosophers and mathematicians who proclaim that they have discovered absolute or universal truths are therefore to be regarded with suspicion. When experience and observation is always changing, so too is our knowledge about the world. While mathematics and logic pretend to constancy on the grounds of relations of ideas, where do relations originally come from? Relations themselves are derived from phenomenal experience and observed through the resemblances of our perceptions. Relations are fundamentally no more constant than our impressions and ideas. For this reason, Hume is antithetical to Kant's universal and necessary dogma regarding the forms and categories of our intuition and cognition. Instead, our experience involves persistent patterns in the way our perceptions "successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations" (T 1.4.6.4; SBN 253). We may make probabilistic inferences based on these patterns, but nothing more than that. Even though we are able to fix our ideas and relations to pursue various kinds of demonstrative reasoning, the ability to 'fix' ideas across sequences of reasoning requires human invention. No perceptions involve perfectly identical or equal features—thus, all sameness or unity over two or more perceptions involves some kind of fiction.

If commentators intend on preserving the sanctity of logic in an interpretation of the *Treatise*, Hume does not make it an easy task. Let us consider what is said about logic specifically:

> …it may be safely affirmed, that almost all the sciences are comprehended in the science of human nature, and are dependent on it. *The sole end of* logic *is to explain the principles and operations of our reasoning faculty, and the nature of our ideas*; morals *and* criticism *regard our tastes and sentiments; and* politics *consider men as united in society, and dependent on each other.* This treatise therefore of human nature seems intended for a system of the sciences. The author has finished what regards logic, and has laid the foundations of the other parts in his account of the passions. (AB 3; SBN 646)

Book I is thus Hume's *entire account of logic* in the *Treatise*. Evidently, it is not the logic of Scholasticism or Aristotle—or even the logic of deduction or relations of ideas. Its positive program is extremely brief, in as much as it fixes some general rules in order to determine philosophical from unphilosophical probability. Its negative program, on the other hand, is broad and extensive, and its aim is to deflate the pretensions of philosophers and logicians who treat knowledge as pure or otherworldly or certain. More importantly, Hume's logic illustrates how much human nature is involved in the production of so-called certain *truth*—natural beliefs, natural fictions, and the empire of the imagination are given central roles in explaining the principles and operations of our reasoning faculty. For Hume, the natural principles of our imagination may be all the logic we require for the conduct of life:

> Here is all the Logic I think proper to employ in my reasoning; and perhaps even this was not very necessary, but might have been supply'd by the natural principles of our understanding. Our scholastic head-pieces and logicians shew no such superiority above the mere vulgar in their reason and ability, as to give us any inclination to imitate them in delivering a long system of rules and precepts to direct our judgment, in philosophy. (T 1.3.15.11; SBN 175)

Logicians show no superiority over the vulgar in their reason! It is exactly these kinds of grand and rebellious pronouncements that disappear from Hume's *Enquiries*. And with their disappearance, the heroic tenor of the early Hume obscures into staid reflections of a mature mind. An analogy might help paint the picture: the youthful Hume leans toward a sort of epistemic socialism, where knowledge equalizes across the vulgar—the vulgar being *everyone*. All of us are full of contradictions, fictions, and illusions. Feeling is synonymous with belief.

Experience, the ground of knowledge, is accessible by *anyone* who desires to experiment upon it. The true task of the philosopher, then, is to recognize these characteristics of human nature, fall back to earth among the vulgar, and renounce the intellectual superiority that so often afflicts those in ivory towers. A populist philosophy, I do say.

Faint echoes of this juvenile optimism redound in Hume's later philosophy, where, for instance, he reminds philosophers to still be human amidst their philosophy. But the impetus which gave rise to Hume's humility, I think, is found in the *Treatise*, where intellectual life is put on par with the lives of everyone around the academy. Epistemic socialism is, of course, anathema to the ruling class—logicians, mathematicians, philosophers, and theologians cannot accept Hume's philosophy without surrendering intellectual capital. Thus, it is not difficult to see why Hume believes he will face scorn from all those lords of certainty and absolutism.

Following the typical development of a socialist who softens over time, Hume retreats from his initial radical position in his later philosophical work. Instead of full-scale epistemic revolution, Hume merely commits all those metaphysical and theological texts that do not involve matters of fact or abstract reasoning concerning quantity to the flames. The logicians and mathematicians are safe, and the castles they've built remain in the hands of their descendants. Hume no longer wants to be exposed to the enmity of his contemporaries, at least not all of them. And his later philosophy, moderated by the conservatism of maturation, protects him from criticism, and helps him to achieve the approbation he seeks.

Independently of whether this particular analogy holds, the early Hume, I suggest, is unambiguously critical of mathematicians and logicians who feign authority on unjustified grounds. Instead of recognizing that mathematics and logic are predicated on natural fictions and imaginative propensities:

> 'Tis usual with mathematicians, to pretend, that those ideas, which are their objects, are of so refin'd and spiritual a nature, that they fall not under the conception of the fancy, but must be comprehended by a pure and intellectual view, of which the superior faculties of the soul are alone capable. The same notion runs thro' most parts of philosophy, and is principally made use of to explain our abstract ideas…'Tis easy to see, why philosophers are so fond of this notion of some spiritual and refin'd perceptions; since by that means they cover many of their absurdities. (T 1.3.1.7; SBN 72)

The objection is not only limited to the prevailing attitudes of mathematicians and logicians. Scientists and theologians are taken to task as well. Whether it is an interpreter of a religious text or an experimental scientist, all inquirers are subject to the limitations of human nature. Every domain of knowledge relies on *ideas* as the medium between 'reality and human' or 'God and human.' If we do not have an understanding of the derivation and association of our ideas, then we will be misguided in our research into God or nature.

> Even *Mathematics*, *Natural Philosophy*, *and Natural Religion*, are in some measure dependent on the science of Man; since they lie under the cognizance of men, and are judged of by their powers and faculties. 'Tis impossible to tell what changes and improvements we might make in these sciences were we thoroughly acquainted with the extent and force of human understanding, and cou'd explain the nature of the ideas we employ, and of the operations we perform in our reasonings…If therefore the sciences of Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Natural Religion, have such a dependence on the knowledge of man, what may be expected in the other sciences, whose connexion with human nature is more close and intimate? (T 0.5; SBN xv)

Moreover, our pursuit of knowledge needs to be tied to some kind of utility or importance. If the domain of inquiry shares no relationship with human conduct, then it is useless. We might, for instance, discover hundreds of agreements and disagreements between ideas, but unless it affects our lives in some meaningful way, then it is of no value. In that sense, fictions may be far more useful than truths, if they are found to be of importance to human nature.

> The truth we discover must also be of some importance. 'Tis easy to multiply algebraical problems to infinity, nor is there any end in the discovery of the proportions of conic sections; tho' few mathematicians take any pleasure in these researches, but turn their thoughts to what is more useful and important. (T 2.3.10.4; SBN 449-450)

To that end, Hume's science of man is revolutionary because it places the human at the center of descriptive epistemology *and* normative epistemology. That is, our description of what we can know about the world first requires an understanding of the moral subject, since knowledge is founded upon the moral subject. Second, our knowledge is justified by its practice and utility in human conduct. In this, we find that the early Hume anticipates modern psychology and philosophical pragmatism. Indeed, Hume's hope for the future of his philosophy is humble and measured exactly because of his radical conclusions: all he wants is "to establish a system or set of opinions, which if not true (*for that, perhaps, is too much to be hop'd for*) might at least be satisfactory to the human mind" (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 272, italics added). The sentiment ought to remind us of later pragmatists, especially C.S. Pierce's theory of truth and the end of inquiry.[320]

The origin and foundation of knowledge then, above all, is us. It is not outside of us in some external world, nor is it in some pure heaven of theoretical reason. Our minds are constitutive of the way we see the world, and natural fictions and beliefs are an essential part of that picture. Human nature is exactly what it is, and is what it appears to be. The project of the scientist of man is to describe our situation, however that portrayal might look. It may not be ideal. It may reveal a deep connection with other animals. And it may reflect our infirmities and illusions— but this is our condition, and face it we must.

2. Why Hume Abandoned His Theory of Natural Fictions & Artifices

In the *Treatise*, the concept of 'fiction' appears on fifty separate occasions. In the *Enquiries*, it appears eleven times. In those eleven instances, the concept of fiction specifically refers to philosophical fictions, poetic fictions, and as an antonym of true belief. Hume's doctrine of

[320] See, for instance, Misak, *Truth and the End of Inquiry: A Piercean Account of Truth*.

natural and unavoidable fictions is all but gone. No trace of it anywhere. Similarly, in the *Treatise*, the concept of 'artifice' appears on forty-two occasions. In the *Enquiries*, it appears thirteen times. In those thirteen instances, artifice specifically refers to political stagecraft, poetry, ancient lives and manners, disguise, and, once, as an antonym of natural and usual. Hume's doctrine of natural and unavoidable artifices is all but gone. No trace of it anywhere.

Hume's theory of fiction and artifice is therefore effaced in the recasting of his philosophy. How could such a prominent part of the *Treatise* be excised from its later manifestation? If my dissertation is correct in its analysis of the connection between natural relations and natural fictions, then Hume's attitude toward his principle of association might provide one reason. Kemp Smith observes that Hume's insistence and hopefulness regarding his associationism had "markedly cooled" by the time he wrote the first *Enquiry*.[321] In the *Treatise*, the principles of association were conceived as mental laws governing the ideational world; and upon them, Hume sought to ground his new science of man. If anything were to entitle Hume with "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…they are really *to us* the cement of the universe, and all the operations of the mind must, in a great measure, depend on them" (AB 35; SBN 661-2).

Hume is clear: the associational principles enter into *most* of his philosophy. And yet, in the *First Enquiry*, the principles are reduced to a minor role. They are no longer trumpeted as an invention, but are rather hedged as a careful supposition. Along with downplaying the principles, Hume removes an important element of his early philosophy, namely, the distinction between natural and philosophical relations. Much of the *Enquiry*, indeed, seems to be a retreat in *matter*

---

[321] *The Philosophy of David Hume*, 533.

rather than *manner*, despite Hume's autobiographical reflection to the contrary. In fact, there is not even *one* mention of the relation 'identity' in the *Enquiry*, which, I think, demonstrates Hume's attitude changed dramatically. In Book I of the *Treatise*, identity is mentioned on over fifty occasions. The same occurs with the relation of resemblance: there are one-hundred and sixteen instances of its use, while in the *Enquiry* the number falls to only twenty-three. Of course, the *Enquiry's* shorter length is responsible for some of these statistics, but not enough to neglect an evident trend—a trend that indicates Hume actively abandoned his more controversial positions.

Without identity as a philosophical concept of interest in the *Enquiry*, corresponding discussions of fictitious identity, the continued existence of objects, fictitious personal identity, and animal and vegetable identities are excluded. Likewise, the only discussion featuring resemblance as a concept of interest is a small passage on the nature of general terms. And, tellingly, Hume's account of abstract ideas makes no reference to any supposed *paradox* that some ideas are particular in nature at the same time they are general in representation.

Hume's discussion of space and time is also conspicuously missing from the *First Enquiry*, meaning that fictitious unity, fictitious duration, fictitious distance, and fictitious equality have all vanished. While excising his analysis of identity restores Hume's relationship with the logicians and philosophers, excising his analysis of unity restores his relationship with the mathematicians.

That is to say, the fundamental concepts of identity, equality, and unity are left mostly untouched in Hume's later philosophy, and so too are the domains of mathematics, logic, and philosophy.[322]

Likewise, in the *Second Enquiry*, Hume remarkably excises the term 'artificial' from his analysis. The consequences of this omission are that justice, property, promises, and government are no longer clearly described as human inventions. Annette Baier notices that "earlier proud claims about artifice are prudently somewhat muffled, and the word 'artificial,' with its Hobbesian associations, is avoided except in one footnote."[323] In light of this revised approach, Hume's relationship with natural law philosophers and theologians is, to some extent, restored.

Now, it seems explicit that a pattern is emerging: an enthusiasm and pride of youth transforms into mature silence and retraction.[324] That said, there are two doctrines Hume

---

[322] Jonathan Cottrell does not fully agree with this sentiment: "While Hume may have abandoned his theories of fictitious distance, duration and identity in the years after publishing the *Treatise*…he seems to have adhered to the essence of his theory of fictitious unity—his view that the unity of a whole is mind-dependent—throughout his philosophical career" (*Hume on Fiction*, 123). In my view, Hume only abandoned his radical positions as a pragmatic move to garner wider acceptance of his philosophy. In his later writing, his controversial positions are still evident, but they are concealed, for instance, in the voice of Philo: "Let us become thoroughly sensible of the weakness, blindness, and narrow limits of human reason: Let us duly consider its uncertainty and endless contrarieties, even in subjects of common life and practice: Let the errors and deceits of our very senses be set before us; the insuperable difficulties, which attend first principles in all systems; the contradictions, which adhere to the very ideas of matter, cause and effect, extension, space, time, motion; and in a word, quantity of all kinds, the object of the only science, that can fairly pretend to any certainty or evidence. When these topics are displayed in their full light, as they are by some philosophers and almost all divines; who can retain such confidence in this frail faculty of reason as to pay any regard to its determinations in points so sublime, so abstruse, so remote from common life and experience? When the coherence of the parts of a stone, or even that composition of parts, which renders it extended; when these familiar objects, I say, are so inexplicable, and contain circumstances so repugnant and contradictory; with what assurance can we decide concerning the origin of worlds, or trace their history from eternity to eternity?" (D 1.3). In the *First Enquiry*, on the other hand, his radical views are concealed as an excessive form of scepticism, which ought to be corrected by common sense and reflection: "…nothing can be more sceptical, or more full of doubt and hesitation, than this scepticism itself, which arises from some of the paradoxical conclusions of geometry or the science of quantity" (E 12.20).

[323] "Hume's Account of Social Artifice—Its Origins and Originality," 760.

[324] Peter Thielke believes that Hume abandoned his theory of 'natural illusion' because of its philosophical problems; specifically, "the reason has more to do with the intractable problems illusion seems to raise than with a recognition that the argument (rather than the presentation) of the *Treatise* was faulty…the topic of illusion simply posed too many problems for a work intended as the popularized version of the *Treatise*. In fact, in my view the *Enquiry* suffers because it does not address illusion: it is something Hume ignores rather than solves in his later work" ("Hume, Kant, and the Sea of Illusion," 88). Again, like Donald Baxter, it curious why Thielke does not see Hume's project as descriptive rather than prescriptive in this respect. There is no need to *solve* the problems of human nature; the task of the science of man is merely to reveal them. Hume's closing remarks in Book I alternates between a philosophical reaction and a vulgar one. Whereas 'Hume the philosopher' desperately wants to solve the problem, 'the vulgar Hume' returns to common life.

specifically chooses to reinstate in the *Enquiries*: necessary connection and liberty. Hume maintains the idea of a "false sensation…of liberty or indifference" (E 8.22). He also maintains that "necessity and causation arises entirely from the uniformity, observable in the operations of nature; where similar objects are constantly conjoined together, and the mind is determined by custom to infer the one from the appearance of the other" (E 8.5). Coincidentally, then, the two discussions that specifically *do not mention* the concept of fiction or artifice in the *Treatise* are recapitulated in Hume's later philosophy. Still, it is not as simple as that, for there are relevant parts missing from the *Enquiry*, namely, those concerning general rules—either of the imagination or the understanding—and absolute necessity.

All in all, Hume abandons almost every important claim regarding fiction and artifice in the *Enquiries*. The real reason for this deliberate move will never be known, but I speculate it has to do with Hume's perceived lack of success. The theory of fictions is unapologetically tied to his earlier revolutionary spirit, a spirit that alienated the very people he was attempting to impress. Indeed, the Advertisement to the *Enquiries* reveals a deep disappointment with the reception to his early work:

> A work which the Author had projected before he left College, and which he wrote and published not long after. But not finding it successful, he was sensible of his error in going to the press too early, and he cast the whole anew in the following pieces, where some negligences in his former reasoning and more in the expression, are, he hopes, corrected. Yet several writers, who have honoured the Author's Philosophy with answers, have taken care to direct all their batteries against that juvenile work, which the Author never acknowledged, and have affected to triumph in any advantages, which, they imagined, they had obtained over it: A practice very contrary to all rules of candour and fair-dealing, and a strong instance of those polemical artifices, which a bigotted zeal thinks itself authorised to employ. Henceforth, the Author desires, that the following Pieces may alone be regarded as containing his philosophical sentiments and principles (AD 1).

Hume, in effect, disowns the *Treatise* in the midst of advertising his revised edition—he simply cannot bear the shame his first literary offspring brought to his name. And that strength of

feeling must have shaped the way he amended his later philosophy. As a consequence, Hume's *Enquiries* act as a testament to what he believed was the cause of his failure. By retreating to a more moderate position, a position carefully designed to generate positive response, Hume would not have to suffer from looking abroad and seeing only "dispute, contradiction, anger, calumny and detraction" from every side (T 1.4.7.2; SBN 264). This time: Hume's desire for fame would be met, but only at the expense of forsaking many of the radical elements of his revolutionary contribution to the philosophical canon.

BIBLIOGRAPHY AND ABBREVIATIONS

Ainslie, Donald. "Hume's Reflections on the Identity and Simplicity of Mind," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62 (2001): 557-578.

————. *Hume's True Scepticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.

Allison, Henry E. *Custom and Reason in Hume: A Kantian Reading of the First Book of the Treatise*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2008. [*Custom and Reason*]

Annand, M. R. "An Examination of Hume's Theory of Relations." *The Monist* 40 (1930): 581-597.

Armour-Garb, Bradley and Woodbridge, James. *Pretense and Pathology: Philosophical Fictionalism and its Applications*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. [*Pretense and Pathology*]

Bacon, Francis. [1620] *Novum Organum or True Suggestions for the Interpretation of Nature*. Edited by Joseph Devey, M.A. New York: P.F. Collier & Son, 1902 [Ebook, 2014]. [*Novum Organum*]

Baier, Annette C. "Hume's Account of Social Artifice—Its Origins and Originality" *Ethics* 98 (1988): 757-778.

————. *A Progress of Sentiments: Reflections on Hume's* Treatise. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991. [*Progress*]

Bains, Paul. *The Primacy of Semiosis: An Ontology of Relations*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006. [*Primacy of Semiosis*]

Bayle, Pierre. [1697] *Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections*. Translated by Richard H. Popkin. Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1965.

Baxter, Donald L. M. "Hume, Distinctions of Reason, and Differential Resemblance." *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 82 (2011):156-182.

————. "Hume on Abstraction and Identity." In *The Problem of Universals in Early Modern Philosophy*. Edited by Stefano Di Bella and Tad M. Schmaltz. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.

Bell, Jeffrey A. *Deleuze's Hume: Philosophy, Culture and the Scottish Enlightenment*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009. [*Deleuze's Hume*]

Bell, Martin. "Transcendental Empiricism? Deleuze's Reading of Hume." In *Impressions of Hume*. Edited by Marina Frasca-Spada and P. J. E. Kail. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005. ["Transcendental Empiricism"]

Bennett, Jonathan. *Learning from Six Philosophers: Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001. [*Learning from Six Philosophers*]

Berkeley, George. [1710] *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*. Edited by Jonathan Dancy. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998.

————. [1734] *The Analyst*. Edited by David R. Wilkins, 2002. https://www.maths.tcd.ie/pub/HistMath/People/Berkeley/Analyst/Analyst.pdf (Accessed January 6, 2021).

Berry, Christopher J. *Hume, Hegel and Human Nature*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1982.

Biro, John. "Hume's New Science of the Mind." In *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*. Edited by David Fate Norton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

Bradley, F. H. [1883] *Principles of Logic*. New York: G. E. Stechert & Co., 1912.

————. [1893] *Appearance and Reality*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1897.

Butler, Annemarie. "Hume on Believing the Vulgar Fiction of Continued Existence." *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 27 (2010): 237-254.

Church, Ralph W. *Hume's Theory of Understanding*. London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1935.

————. "Hume's Theory of Philosophical Relations." *The Philosophical Review* 50 (1941): 353-367.

Cimino, Andrea. "Husserl's Project, Critique, and Idea of Reason" *Journal of Transcendental Philosophy* 1 (2020): 183-217.

Cohen, Benjamin. "Contrariety and Causality in Hume." *Hume Studies* 4 (1978): 29-39.

Cohen, Morris R. "On the Logic of Fiction" *The Journal of Philosophy* 20 (1923): 477-488.

Cohon, Rachel. *Hume's Morality: Feeling and Fabrication*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

Coleman, Dorothy P. "Hume's 'Dialectic.'" *Hume Studies* 10 (1984): 139-155.

Costa, Michael J. "Hume, Strict Identity, and Time's Vacuum." *Hume Studies* 16 (1990): 1-16.

————. "Hume on the Very Idea of a Relation." *Hume Studies* 24 (1998): 71-94

Costelloe, Timothy M. *The Imagination in Hume's Philosophy: The Canvas of the Mind*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018. [*The Imagination in Hume's Philosophy*]

Cottrell, Jonathan. *Hume on Fiction: Space, Time, Number, and the Mind*, Ph.D. diss. New York University, 2012. [*Hume on Fiction*]

————. "Minds, Composition, and Hume's Skepticism in the Appendix." *Philosophical Review* 124 (2015): 533-569.

————. "A Puzzle about Fictions in the *Treatise*." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 54 (2016): 47-73.

————. "*The Imagination in Hume's Philosophy: The Canvas of the Mind* by Timothy M. Costelloe (review)" *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 57 (2019): 559-560. ["The Imagination Review"]

————. "Hume, Imagination." *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. https://iep.utm.edu/hume-ima/ (Accessed January 11, 2021).

Demeter, Tamás. "Natural Theology as Superstition: David Hume and the Changing Ideology of Natural Inquiry." In *Conflicting Values of Inquiry: Ideologies of Epistemology in Early Modern Europe*. Edited by Tamás Demeter, Kathryn Murphy and Claus Zittel. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2015.

Descartes, René. *Selected Philosophical Writings*. Translated by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff & Dugald Murdoch. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Falkenstein, Lorne. "Space and Time." In *The Blackwell Guide to Hume's* Treatise. Edited by Saul Traiger. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006.

Flage, Daniel E. "Hume's Relative Ideas." *Hume Studies* 7 (1981): 55-73.

————. "Relative Ideas Revisited: A Reply to Thomas." *Hume Studies* 8 (1982): 158-171.

Fogelin, Robert J. "Garrett on the Consistency of Hume's Philosophy." *Hume Studies* 24 (1998): 161-169. ["Consistency of Hume's Philosophy"]

————. *Hume's Skeptical Crisis: A Textual Study*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. [*Hume's Skeptical Crisis*]

Foisneau, Luc. "Elements of Fiction in Hobbes's System of Philosophy." In *Fiction and the Frontiers of Knowledge in Europe, 1500-1800*. Edited by Richard Scholar and Alexis Tadié. Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010.

Forbes, Duncan. *Hume's Philosophical Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975.

Freydberg, Bernard. *David Hume: Platonic Philosopher, Continental Ancestor*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2012.

Garrett, Don. *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Gotterbarn, Donald. "Hume's Troublesome Relations." *The Southwestern Journal of Philosophy* 4 (1973): 119-124.

Green, Thomas Hill. *Collected Works of T.H. Green*. Edited by Peter P. Nicholson. London: Thoemmes Continuum, 1997.

————. *Hume and Locke*. Edited by Ramon M. Lemos. New York: Crowell, 1968.

Grim, Patrick. "What is Contradiction?" In *The Law of Non-Contradiction: New Philosophical Essays*. Edited by Graham Priest, JC Beall, and Bradley Armour-Garb. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004.

Hampshire, Stuart. "Scepticism and Meaning." *Philosophy* 94 (1950): 246-253.

Harari, Yuval N. *Sapiens: a Brief History of Humankind*. Toronto: Signal, McClelland & Stewart, 2016.

Harris, James A. "The Reception of Hume in Nineteenth-Century British Philosophy." In *The Reception of David Hume in Europe*. Edited by Peter Jones. London: Thoemmes Continuum, 2005.

Harrison, Jonathan. *Hume's Theory of Justice*. Clarendon: Oxford University Press, 1981.

Hausman, Alan. "Hume's Theory of Relations." *Noûs* 1 (1967): 255-282

Hawkins, R. J. "Simplicity, Resemblance and Contrariety in Hume's *Treatise*." *The Philosophical Quarterly* 26 (1976): 24-38. ["Simplicity, Resemblance and Contrariety"]

Hendel, Charles W. *Studies in the Philosophy of David Hume*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1925.

Hobbes, Thomas. [1651] *Leviathan*. Edited by Edwin Curley. Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1994.

Hollinger, Robert. "Two Kinds of Fictionalism." *The Monist* 60 (1977): 556-567.

Hume, David. [1739-40] *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge. 2nd ed. by P. H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978.

————. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Edited by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000. [T]

————. [1748] *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by Peter Millican. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007. [E]

————. [1751] *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*. Edited by Tom L. Beauchamp. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. [M]

————. [1757] "The Natural History of Religion." In *A Dissertation on the Passions, The Natural History of Religion: A Critical Edition*. Edited by T.L. Beauchamp. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007.

————. [1779] *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion and Other Writings*. Edited by Dorothy Coleman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. [D]

————. *The Letters of David Hume*. Edited by J.Y.T. Greig. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932.

————. *Essays: Moral, Political, Literary*. Edited by Eugene F. Miller. Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985.

Husserl, Edmund. *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*. Translated by D. Carr. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970.

Inukai, Yumiko, "Hume on Relations: Are They Real?" *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 40 (2010): 185-210.

Iser, Wolfgang. *The Fictive and the Imaginary*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993.

Jacovides, Michael. "Hume's Vicious Regress." In *Oxford Studies in Early Modern Philosophy: Volume V*. Edited by Daniel Garber and Steven Nadler. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Janoušek, Hynek & Zahavi, Dan. "Husserl on Hume." *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 28 (2020): 615–635.

Jones, Peter. *Hume's Sentiments: Their Ciceronian and French Context*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1982.

Kail, P. J. E. *Projection and Realism in Hume's Philosophy.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

————. "Nietzsche and Hume: Naturalism and Explanation." *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 37 (2009): 5-22.

————. "Hume and Nietzsche." In *The Oxford Handbook of Hume*. Edited by Paul Russell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Kemp, Catherine. "Contrariety in Hume." *Rivista di Storia della Filosofia* 62 (2007): 55-64.

Kemp Smith, Norman. *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of Its Origins and Central Doctrines*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1941. [*The Philosophy of David Hume*]

Kinkaid, James. "Phenomenology, idealism, and the legacy of Kant" *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 27 (2019) 593-614.

Kuehn, Manfred. "Hume's Antinomies." *Hume Studies* 9 (1983): 25-45.

Livingston, Donald. *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984. [*Common Life*]

Locke, John. [1690] *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. Edited by P. H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975 [Reprinted 2011]. [*Locke's Essay*]

Loeb, Louis. "Causation, Extrinsic Relations, and Hume's Second Thoughts about Personal Identity." *Hume Studies* 18 (1992): 219-231. ["Causation, Extrinsic Relations"]

————. *Stability and Justification in Hume's Treatise*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Logan, Beryl. *A Religion Without Talking: Religious Belief and Natural Belief in Hume's Philosophy of Religion*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1993. [*Religion Without Talking*]

Mackie, J.L. *Hume's Moral Theory*. London: Routledge, 1980.

MacNabb, D. G. C. *David Hume: His Theory of Knowledge and Morality*. Hamden: Archon Books, 1951.

Mander, W. J. *British Idealism: A History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Malebranche, Nicolas. [1674-5] *The Search after Truth*. Translated and Edited by Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Manning, Susan. "Hume's Fragments of Union and the Fiction of the Scottish Enlightenment." In *Impressions of Hume*. Edited by Marina Frasca-Spada and P. J. E. Kail. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005. ["Hume's Fragments"]

Mascarenhas, Vijay. "Hume's Recantation Revisited." *Hume Studies* 27 (2001): 279-300.

McCracken, Charles. "George Berkeley." In *A Companion to Early Modern Philosophy*. Edited by Steven Nadler. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2002.

McRae, Robert. "The Import of Hume's Theory of Time." *Hume Studies* 6 (1980): 119-132.

Misak, C. J. *Truth and the End of Inquiry: A Piercean Account of Truth*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Montaigne, Michel de. [1580] *An Apology for Raymond Sebond*. Translated and edited by M. A. Screech. New York: Penguin Books, 1987.

————. [1580] *Essays of Montaigne*. Translated by Charles Cotton. With some account of the life of Montaigne, notes and a translation of all the letters known to be extant. Edited by W. Carew Hazlitt. London: Reeves and Turner, 1877.

Newsom, Robert. *A Likely Story: Probability and Play in Fiction*. New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 1988.

Noonan, Harold W. *Hume: On Knowledge*. London: Routledge, 1999.

Novitz, David. "Of Fact and Fancy." *American Philosophical Quarterly* 17 (1980): 143-149.

Ott, Walter. *Causation and Laws of Nature in Early Modern Philosophy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. [*Causation and Laws of Nature*]

Owen, David. *Hume's Reason*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Pascal, Blaise. [1670] *Pensées*. Translated by A. J. Krailsheimer. New York: Penguin Books, 1966.

Passmore, John. [1952] *Hume's Intentions*. London: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1968.

Popkin, Richard. *The History of Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Price, H. H. *Hume's Theory of the External World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940.

Priest, Graham. "Derrida and Self-Reference." *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 72 (1994): 103-111.

————. *Beyond the Limits of Thought*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Rocknak, Stefanie. "The Synthetic Relation in Hume." In *The Dialectic of the Universal and the Particular*. Edited by Jonathan Hanen. *Institüt für die Wissenshaften vom Menschen; Junior Fellows Conferences* 4 (1999): 121-165.

Rorty, Amelie Oksenberg. "From Passions to Sentiments: The Structure of Hume's 'Treatise.'" *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 10 (1993): 165-179. ["From Passions to Sentiments"]

Rosen, Gideon. "Problems in the History of Fictionalism." In *Fictionalism in Metaphysics*. Edited by Mark Eli Kalderon. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Ross, Don. "Hume, Resemblance and the Foundations of Psychology." *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 8 (1991): 343-356.

Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy* [1912]. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

————. *The Philosophy of Logical Atomism* [1918]. New York: Routledge, 2010.

Russell, Paul. *The Riddle of Hume's Treatise Skepticism, Naturalism, and Irreligion*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. [*The Riddle of Hume's Treatise*]

Sainsbury, R. M. *Fiction and Fictionalism*. London: Routledge, 2010.

Seppalainen, Tom & Coventry, Angela. "Hume's Empiricist Inner Epistemology: A Reassessment of the Copy Principle. In *The Continuum Companion to Hume*. Edited by Alan Bailey and Dan O'Brien. London & New York: Continuum, 2012. ["Hume's Empiricist Inner Epistemology"]

Sokolowski, Robert. "Fiction and Illusion in David Hume's Philosophy." *The Modern Schoolmen* XLV (1968): 189-225.

Strawson, Galen. [1989] *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014. [*Secret Connexion*]

————. *The Evident Connexion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2011.

Stroud, Barry. "The Constraints of Hume's Naturalism." *Synthese* 152 (2006): 339-51.

Thielke, Peter. "Hume, Kant, and the Sea of Illusion." *Hume Studies* 29 (2003): 63-88.

Thomas, Max M. "Relative Ideas Rejected." *Hume Studies* 8 (1982): 149-157.

Townsend, Dabney. *Hume's Aesthetic Theory: Taste and Sentiment*. London: Routledge, 2001.

Traiger, Saul. "Impressions, Ideas, and Fictions." *Hume Studies* 13 (1987): 381-99.

————. "Experience and Testimony in Hume's Philosophy." *Episteme* 7 (2010): 42-57.

Tweyman, Stanley. "Hume on Separating the Inseparable." In *Hume and the Enlightenment: Essays Presented to Ernest Campbell Mossner*. Edited by William B. Todd. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1974.

————. *Scepticism and belief in Hume's Dialogues concerning natural religion*. Dordecht; Boston: Martinus Nijhoff, 1986. [*Scepticism and belief]*

————. *Essays on the Philosophy of David Hume: Natural Religion, Natural Belief, and Ontology*. Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1996.

Vaihinger, Hans. *The Philosophy of As If*. Trans. C.K. Ogden, London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1911 [First Version, 1877].

Van Leeuwen, Henry G. *The Problem of Certainty in English Thought, 1630-1690*. The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1963.

Varzi, Achille. "Fictionalism in Ontology." In *From Fictionalism to Realism*. Edited by C. Barbero, M. Ferraris and A. Voltolini. Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013.

Waxman, Wayne. *Hume's theory of consciousness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

————. "The Psychologistic Foundations of Hume's Critique of Mathematical Philosophy." *Hume Studies* 22 (1996): 123-167. ["Psychologistic Foundations"]

————. "Hume and the Origin of Our Ideas of Space and Time." In *A Companion to Hume*. Edited by Elizabeth S. Radcliffe. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2008.

————. "Hume's Theory of Ideas." In *The Oxford Handbook of Hume*. Edited by Paul Russell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016.

Westphal, Kenneth R. "Hegel and Hume on Perception and Concept-Empiricism." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 36 (1998): 99-123.

Whelan, Frederick G. *Order and Artifice in Hume's Political Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985. [*Order and Artifice*]

Wilbanks, Jan. *Hume's Theory of Imagination*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968.

Williams, C. J. F. *What is Identity?* Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989.

Wilson, Fred. *The External World and Our Knowledge of It: Hume's Critical Realism, an Exposition and a Defence*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008. [*The External World*]

Wright, John P. *The sceptical realism of David Hume*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983.

Yolton, John W. *Perceptual Acquaintance from Descartes to Reid*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984.