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# Hume's Scottish Kantianism

*"Away with this passion for system building ! it is pedantry :*
*away with this lust of paradoxes ! it is presumption."*
James Beattie advertising Hume, 1770.[1]

## 1. Introduction

Apart from his moral philosophy, David Hume is most renowned for his empiricism in epistemology and philosophy of language. Seldom is his ontology stressed. However, both epistemology and philosophy of language have to presuppose that something exists. Therefore, the ontologically interesting question is whether Hume merely made some very simple and innocent ontological assumptions, or whether his three-book opus, *A Treatise of Human Nature*,[2] contains something like an ontological system, i.e., a list and taxonomy of basic concepts that denote presumed really existing entities, as well as some words about their relationships. In my opinion, the first book contains such a systematic ontology, if only an

[1] From Beattie's exposition (1770) of Hume's *Treatise* in *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth in opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism*; quoted from N. Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume*, Macmillan: London 1941, p. 7.

[2] All Hume quotations in this paper are taken from the latest edition of the book, i.e., D.F. Norton and J.F. Norton (eds.), *David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature*, Oxford University Press: Oxford 2000. For instance, a quotation from the first book, fourth part, and seventh section on p. 173 is referred to as *Treatise* 1.4.7. (Norton p. 173). If it is taken from the so-called *Abstract*, the reference can be *Abstract* (Norton p. 407); when it is a reference to the editor's introduction, then, as in the book itself, an 'I' is put before the page number; that is, p. 20 becomes p. I20.

ontology of the mind. However, this ontology ought to be better systematised. Some details in some taxonomies are a bit blurred, and parts of one and the same classification tree are sometimes only given a scattered presentation. Even more importantly, the basic taxonomies are never carefully related to each other.

Now and then, over the years, I have tried to remedy Hume's defects with respect to ontological systematics and then connect his ontology with his epistemology and philosophy of language. At first, I thought that this could be easily done. But I have discovered that this is not the case; at least not if the completed system should still deserve to be called empiricist. My attempts to improve Hume's systematics have made his philosophy remarkably similar to Immanuel Kant's transcendental philosophy.

(As I am using the term 'ontology', not only Hume but even Kant must be said to have a kind of ontology since the posited transcendental faculties have to be regarded as really existing.[3] Of course, Kant's philosophical system contains the epistemological position that human beings cannot possibly come to know all there is; the noumenal part of the world is unknowable. However, this epistemology does not turn his philosophical system into a complete non-ontology.)

According to Kant, the world of experience is due both to an unknowable cause, the thing in itself, that gives rise to a manifold of sensible intuitions in time and space, and to a faculty of understanding that structures these intuitions into our common world of experience. This faculty is in itself neither immanent in experience nor transcendent like the unknown thing in itself; it is said to be transcendental. Its structuring capability contains twelve different functions. In Kant's own terminology, it consists of twelve categories, two of them being substance and causality. Necessarily, when this faculty is working on sensible intuitions, the categories appear in the world of experience as well.

According to the standard interpretations of Hume, he claimed something very different. The Humean world of experience consists only of a manifold of mind atoms, called perceptions, that are held together by principles of association. In this world there are neither matter-substances nor mind-substances; nor are there any proper causal relations. The referents of all traditional philosophical concepts of substance and causality are by Hume dismissed as figments of the imagination. If Hume had lived after Kant, then he would in the same way have dismissed Kant's philosophical concepts of a thing in itself and of transcendental faculties.

[3] As I read Kant, the basic transcendental faculties are those of sensibility, imagination, understanding, judgement, and reason. The faculty of sensibility contains two forms of intuition; the faculty of the imagination consists of two subfaculties, reproductive and productive imagination; similarly, the faculty of judgement consists of two subfaculties, determinant and reflective judgement, respectively. In this paper, only parts of the faculty of the understanding are discussed.

I will show that this classical contrast between Hume and Kant, presented in numerous histories of philosophy, relies on a neglect of Hume's ontology. A neglect, however, that Hume himself is very much responsible for.

In that part of the vast literature on Hume that I have made acquaintance with, some commentators have noted the existence of some similarities between Hume and Kant,[4] and a few have even stressed that some such similarities are important, but none have made exactly the main claim that I will put forward. Those who come closest to my semi-Kantian picture of Hume are L.W. Beck and R.P. Wolff.[5] The title of this paper has, by the way, its origin in a paper by Beck called 'A Prussian Hume and a Scottish Kant'. Beck wrote:

> In a letter to Herder written in 1781, Hamann said of Kant: "He certainly deserves the title, 'a Prussian Hume.'" No one, so far as I know, has had the temerity to state explicitly that Hume deserves the title, "a Scottish Kant." But almost. One trend in contemporary Hume interpretation may finally lead someone to make this claim, or accusation.[6]

Beck's paper was published in 1978. In my opinion, Galen Strawson's *The Secret Connexion. Causation, Realism, and David Hume*, 1989, should be regarded as another step in the trend noted by Beck. Now, with a little help from Strawson, I will try to take the last step to the (bitter?) end. I will argue that, really, Hume deserves to be called a Scottish Kant.

Wolff, in a paper called 'Hume's Theory of Mental Activity', has also coined an expression that I would like to borrow: "What Hume says is not the same as what Hume says he says."[7] More elaborately:

> But I think the real reason for Hume's failure to get across his very novel suggestions is the fact that they carry him beyond the limits of his own system, so

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[4] See e.g. H.H. Price, *Hume's Theory of the External World*, Clarendon Press: Oxford 1940, pp. 8-9, 15, 221-222, and B. Stroud, *Hume*, Routledge & Kegan Paul: London 1977, p. 140.

[5] Number three on my list is W.H. Walsh, who ends a paper by saying: "Seen from close to, the Humean imagination is simply the Kantian understanding in disguise"; 'Hume's Concept of Truth', in Royal Institute of Philosophy Lectures, volume five, 1970-1971, *Reason and Reality*, Macmillan: London 1972, pp. 99-116 (quotation p. 116). Walsh, however, is focussing on an aspect of Hume's philosophy that I will not discuss. He accuses Hume for having failed to realise that the *Treatise* contains a specific inconsistency (p. 106). According to Walsh, Hume relies on a distinction between "authentic and inauthentic operations of the understanding" (p. 108) at the same time as he claims that the operations of the understanding are determined only by non-rational principles.

[6] L.W. Beck, *Essays on Kant and Hume*, Yale University Press: New Haven and London 1978, p. 111.

[7] R.P. Wolff, 'Hume's Theory of Mental Activity', *The Philosophical Review* vol. LXIX (1960); the quotation is from the reprint in V.C. Chappell (ed.), *Hume*, Macmillan: London 1968, p. 111.

that he is forced to express his best ideas in language totally unsuited to them. To put the point in a sentence, Hume began the *Treatise* with the assumption that empirical knowledge could be explained by reference to the contents of the mind alone, and then made the profound discovery that it was the activity of the mind, rather than the nature of its contents, which accounted for all the puzzling features of empirical knowledge.[8]

In section ten of this paper, I will distinguish between four more or less possible interpretations of Hume's *Treatise*: (1) Hume as a Heraclitean phenomenalist, (2) Hume as a Newton of the mind, (3) Hume as a proper Kantian, and (4) Hume as a Scottish Kantian. I will argue that the fourth position makes Hume's *Treatise* less incoherent and/or incredible than the other interpretations do.

## 2. Hume's Ontological System

After the first parts of his *Treatise* had been published, Hume soon discovered that, as he was to phrase it some months before his death, "It fell *dead-born from the press*".[9] Between the publications of the first two books ("Of the Understanding" and "Of the Passions") and the third book ("Of Morals"), he tried to change this state of affairs by doing something that, today, from a research-ethical point of view is regarded as unethical. He wrote a very positive review of his own book and had it published anonymously. Since scholars agree that this review, called the *Abstract*,[10] was really written by Hume, it can be used to show how Hume himself summarised his ontology. Here are some parts:

… the soul, as far as we can conceive it, is nothing but a system or train of different perceptions, … all united together, but without any perfect simplicity or identity. … And therefore it must be our several particular perceptions, that compose the mind. I say *compose* the mind, not *belong* to it. The mind is not a substance, in which the perceptions inhere. …

Our imagination has a great authority over our ideas; and there are no ideas that are different from each other, which it cannot separate, and join, and compose into all the varieties of fiction. But notwithstanding the empire of the imagination, there is a secret tie or union among particular ideas, which causes the mind to conjoin them more frequently together, … These principles of association are reduced to three, *viz. Resemblance*, … *Contiguity*… *Causation*; … they are really *to us* the

[8] R.P. Wolff, 'Hume's Theory of Mental Activity', ibid., pp. 99-100.
[9] Quoted from D.F. Norton (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, Cambridge University Press: Cambridge 1993, p. 352.
[10] Hume called his review "An abstract of a book lately published entitled 'A Treatise of Humean Nature, etc. ', wherein the chief argument of that book is farther illustrated and explained".

cement of the universe, and all the operations of the mind must, in a great measure, depend on them.[11]

As is quite clear from the first paragraph, Hume regards his ontology of the mind as containing a kind of mind atomism. All that exists on the mind-level are, at bottom, perceptual atoms, perceptions; "The mind is not a substance". However, these perceptions are not completely free-floating. They are bound together by a kind of natural laws called principles of association. Hume's picture of the mind is similar to Newton's mechanical picture of the world.[12] Instead of Newton's material atoms, the corpuscles, Hume invokes perceptions; and instead of Newton's three laws of motion, Hume appeals to three principles of association. Furthermore, Newton has the law of gravitation, and Hume has his so-called "first principle in the science of human nature",[13] i.e., the principle that simple ideas have to be copies of simple impressions. This similarity with respect to ontological structure should be kept distinct from the question whether there are similarities between Newton and Hume with respect to epistemology, too. The sub-title of the *Treatise* is *An attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects*. However, to begin with I will concentrate on ontology. In anticipation, note that Hume in the quotation above, apart from perceptions and principles of association, speaks of "the empire of the imagination" as well.

Let us now leave Hume's *Abstract* for part 1 of the first book of his *Treatise*. Here, at once, section by section, he presents the basic entities in his ontology of the mind. They are of four kinds:

A. Perceptions (sections 1 and 2)
B. Faculties (section 3)
C. Principles of associations (section 4)
D. Relations (section 5).

I will in my next four sections present Hume's views on these entities in more detail, but before embarking on the trip through his ontological system of the mind, I will very briefly explain why I have not listed the entities mentioned in the remaining two sections of part 1.

In section 6 Hume talks "Of modes and substances". I neglect these because I find it obvious that Hume regards modes and substances as non-basic entities. He says that "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".[14]

In section 7, "Of abstract ideas", Hume makes it clear that he is some kind of nominalist. Therefore, it might be argued that it is nonsensical to speak of general

[11] *Abstract* (Norton pp. 414-417).
[12] This has been said before. See e.g. N. Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume*, Macmillan: London 1941, pp. 71-72. However, Kemp Smith is not saying exactly what I am going to say.
[13] *Treatise* 1.1.1. (Norton p. 10).
[14] *Treatise* 1.1.6. (Norton p. 16).

ontological entities in Hume's philosophy the way I have started to do; and will continue to do. However, for my purposes it is enough (i) that Hume certainly needs the general terms used in the list above, and (ii) that he is not claiming that these general terms have no distinct referents at all. They are referring to real items in four different sets or aggregates.[15] All the items in each such set or aggregate are related by similarity relations. In this sense, the general terms in question are not mere terminological or conceptual constructions.[16]

## 3. Perceptions

The first thing now to be noted is that Hume is not in part 1 (book one) talking about any sensory faculty in which perceptions inhere. That would immediately destroy his mind atomism. Let me re-quote parts of his *Abstract*: "it must be our several particular perceptions, that compose the mind. I say *compose* the mind, not *belong* to it. The mind is not a substance, in which the perceptions inhere."

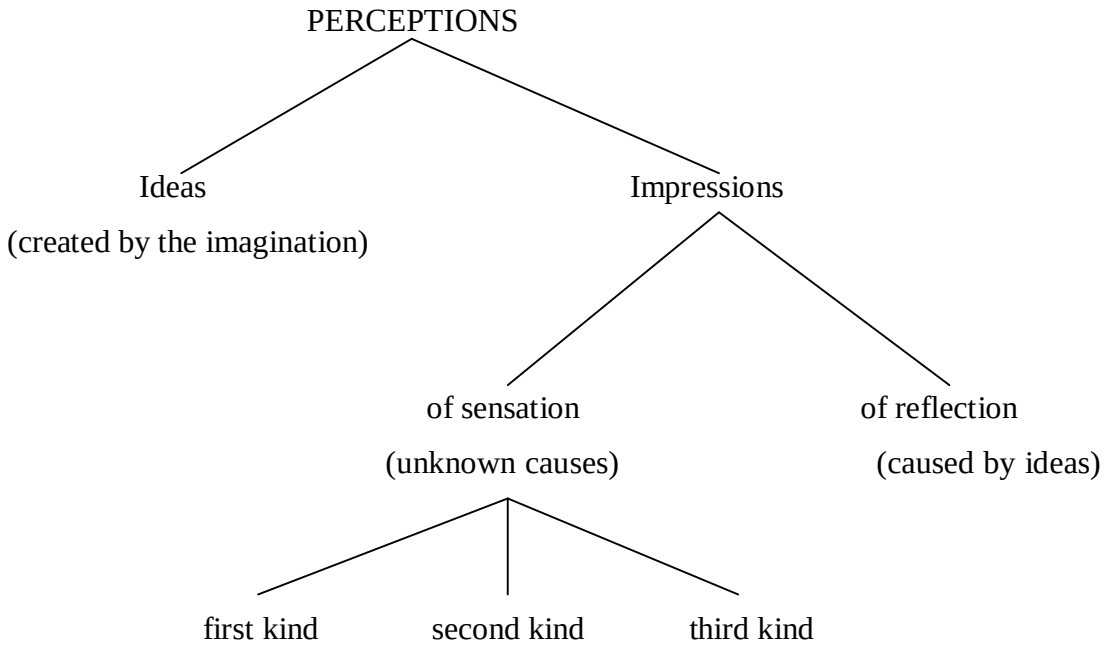
Next thing to be noted is that perceptions are not just one of a kind or one of two kinds. Hume classifies perceptions into both genera and species. The top of his taxonomy is easily conveyed; see Taxonomy A below:[17]

[15] As I am using the terms, a set is an abstract non-spatiotemporal entity, whereas an aggregate is a spatiotemporal entity

[16] To those familiar with D.M. Armstrong's terminology in *Nominalism and Realism*, Cambridge University Press: London 1978, and *Universals. An Opinionated Introduction*, Westview Press: Boulder 1989, one can say that Hume is definitely not a "predicate nominalist". He does not regard properties as "nothing but a shadow cast upon particulars by predicates" (*N&R*. p. 13). Nor is he, in my opinion, a concept nominalist. Armstrong says that "The 'British Empiricists', Locke, Berkeley and Hume, are often taken to be Concept Nominalists. It is not clear to what extent this is so. … I have the impression that they never got the ontological problem into clear focus" (ibid. p. 26). In my opinion, Hume is a resemblance nominalist. Hume writes: "all general ideas are nothing but particular ones, annex'd to a certain term, which gives them a more extensive signification, and makes them recal upon occasion other individuals, which are similar to them."; *Treatise* 1.1.7. (Norton p. 17).

[17] Cf. Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume*, p. 106.

Taxonomy A:




Impressions and ideas can be either simple or complex. Simple ideas are copies or images of simple impressions of sensation; also, impressions have a higher degree of "force and liveliness" than their copies. Ideas are in this sense dependent for their existence upon simple impressions of sensation. Complex ideas need not be copies of any corresponding complex impression; they can be created by a mere combination of simple ideas. Since impressions of reflection are dependent upon ideas that, in turn, are dependent upon impressions of sensation, at bottom, all perceptions are dependent upon impressions of sensation. Therefore, such impressions are the most basic perceptions of all, and they have unknown causes.[18] The last row of the taxonomy is of course reminiscent of Locke.[19]

According to the taxonomy, all perceptions are ultimately produced either by unknown causes or by the faculty of the imagination. And that remains true even if the second and third books of the *Treatise* are taken into account. When Hume discusses passions, desires, and emotions, he regards most of them of as subspecies of impressions of reflection, but some of them are claimed to have unknown causes. He says that some of them "arise from a natural impulse or instinct, which is perfectly

[18] He was not saying that impressions of sensation lack causes; that one knows for sure by a letter from Hume (to John Stewart 1754); see Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume*, pp. 408-09. With respect to the unknowability, he writes: "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."; *Treatise* 1.3.5. (Norton p. 59).

[19] It is put forward in *Treatise* 1.4.2. (Norton p. 128).

unaccountable"; and, "Of this kind is the desire of punishment to our enemies, and of happiness to friends; hunger, lust, and a few other bodily appetites."[20]

Let us now put the unknown causes aside and take a look at Hume's faculty concepts, in particular that of the faculty of the imagination and its workings. Hume regarded all ideas as imagination-dependent entities.

## 4. Faculties

In section 3 of the *Treatise,* Hume explicitly mentions and distinguishes between two faculties, those of memory and imagination. Later on, in a footnote, he writes that he employs 'imagination' in two senses:

> 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 reasoning. 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.[21]

Both memory and imagination (in the limited sense) create ideas, but the ideas of imagination are fainter; also, this faculty of imagination is freer than the faculty of memory is. In Taxonomy A above, 'imagination' refers to imagination in the limited sense, and memory is left out of account.

The two faculties mentioned in section 3 are by no means the only faculties referred to by Hume. Surely, he speaks of the sense faculties and a faculty of reason, too. One of his famous problems is "whether it be the *senses*, *reason*, or the *imagination*, that produces the opinion of a *continu'd* or of a *distinct* existence".[22] Even though the faculty of reason is not especially mentioned in any of the sections of part 1, it is just as much part of Hume's ontology of the mind as the faculty of the imagination is. The overarching message of the whole *Treatise* is that the capacity of reason has been radically exaggerated. It is, for instance, imagination that produces the belief in "continu'd existences".

In several places in the *Treatise*, there is talk about sense faculties. Hume speaks of a "passive admission of the impressions thro' the organs of sensation"[23] and that "there are three different kinds of impressions convey'd by the senses".[24]

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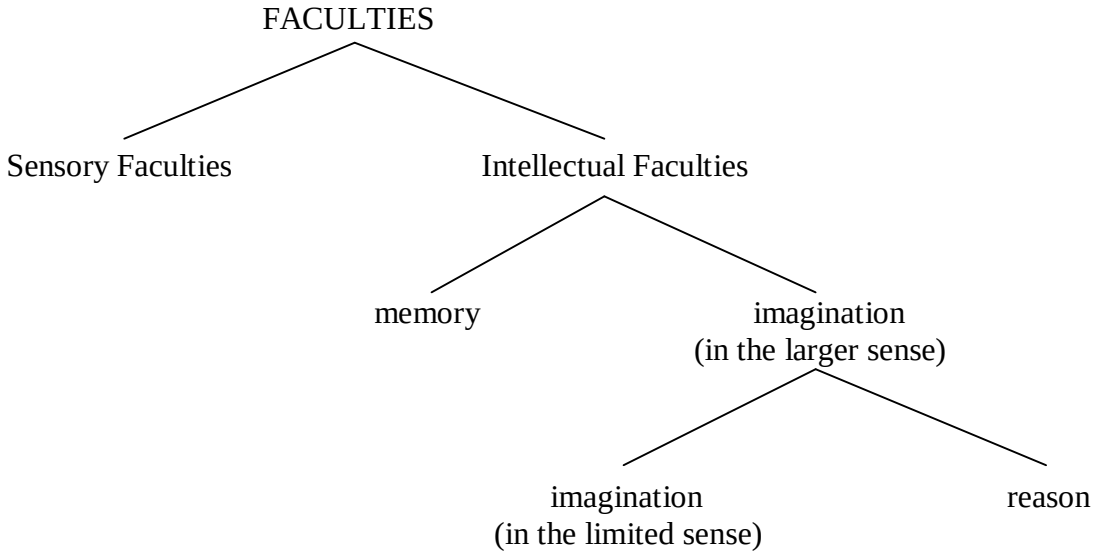
[20] *Treatise* 2.3.9. (Norton p. 281).
[21] *Treatise* 1.3.10. (Norton p. 81), footnote 22. These two different senses of 'imagination' is discussed in J. Wilbanks, *Hume's Theory of Imagination*, Martinus Nijhof: The Hague 1968, pp. 16-19.
[22] *Treatise* 1.4.2. (Norton p. 126).
[23] *Treatise* 1.3.2. (Norton p. 52).
[24] *Treatise* 1.4.2. (Norton p. 128).

This way of speaking is not immediately reconcilable with his view that impressions do not inhere in anything (see first paragraph of section three above). In order to get a consistent Humean view, one must really take Hume on his words when, in the last two quotations, he says that impressions come "thro'" and are "convey'd by" the sense organs. Impressions do not inhere in the sense organs that convey them. His talk of sense organs has to be regarded either as a way of speaking that is completely without ontological commitments, or as a way of referring to faculties that exist outside all mental contents. Be that, for the moment, as it may. No doubt, Hume is using some faculty concepts, and they can be classified as is done in Taxonomy B; even the term 'intellectual faculties' is Hume's own.[25]

Taxonomy B:




In what follows, I will not discuss memory (it is disregarded by Hume himself in the *Enquiry*), and the term 'imagination' will mean imagination in the limited sense.[26] Reason, it should be noted, cannot create ideas. It can only work with ideas

[25] *Treatise* 1.3.12. (Norton p. 95).

[26] This is what Wilbanks in *Hume's Theory of Imagination* calls "Hume's General Conception of Imagination", and which refers to "the faculty of forming, uniting, and separating ideas" (ibid. p. 72). Wilbanks claims to have found in the *Treatise* also another and more special usage of 'imagination' (ibid. pp. 80-84); that issue will be discussed in section seven below. According to this special usage, "imaginative activity is the activity of supposing things, where the things supposed are such that no idea of them (in Hume's sense of that term) is possible" (ibid. p. 170).

that are already created by the imagination.[27] All the different intellectual faculties create or work with the same general kind of content, ideas.[28]

Often, we make a contrast between our free and creative imagination and our sensory faculties that are passively stimulated or forced to receive what they meet. Hume uses this contrast, too. Furthermore, according to Hume, "nothing is more free than that faculty" of the imagination.[29] However, it is not absolutely free. I have already in relation to Hume's taxonomy of perceptions mentioned his "first principle in the science of human nature". He finds it evident that the faculty of the imagination, despite its freedom, cannot possibly create simple ideas out of nothing; simple ideas have to be copies of simple impressions. The principle in question puts down a restriction, which can be formulated as follows:

First restriction on the freedom of the imagination: (1) *The faculty of the imagination can only create simple ideas that are copies of already experienced impressions.*

This principle, however, admits of exceptions; a fact that is regarded as problematic by some commentators.[30] Hume claims that a man who has "become perfectly well acquainted with colours of all kinds, excepting one particular shade of blue" can nonetheless create the corresponding simple idea.[31] In my opinion, such exceptions can easily be taken care of by a reformulation of Hume's "first principle". Notwithstanding the fact that Hume himself says that "the instance is so particular and singular, that 'tis scarce worth our observing, and does not merit that for it alone we shou'd alter our general maxim".[32] The principle can be reformulated as follows:

First restriction on the freedom of the imagination, first amendment: (1) *The faculty of the imagination can only create simple ideas that are copies of, or (i) are extremely similar to, already experienced impressions.*

When it comes to complex ideas, imagination has a combinatorial capacity. It can in various ways combine and unite the simple ideas that it has created. However, not even this combinatorial activity is wholly free. But this is the topic of my next section.

## 5. Principles of Association

Hume's taxonomy of the principles of association is simple and not questioned by any commentator. It looks as in the third taxonomy below ('contiguity' means both spatial and temporal contiguity).

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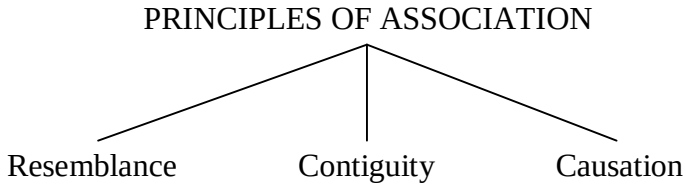
[27] See Wilbanks, *Hume's Theory of Imagination*, p. 74.
[28] See e.g. Wilbanks, *Hume's Theory of Imagination*, pp. 61-63.
[29] *Treatise* 1.1.4. (Norton p. 12).
[30] See e.g. B. Stroud, *Hume*, Routledge & Kegan Paul: London 1977, pp. 33-35.
[31] *Treatise* 1.1.1. (Norton p. 10).
[32] *Treatise* 1.1.1. (Norton p. 10).

Taxonomy C:




According to Hume, causality is both the strongest and the most extensive of the principles, which all of them are a kind of natural laws for the realm of mind. They are not, however, laws for the emergence of impressions of sensations, only for the emergence of ideas. But, consequently, they can indirectly be laws for the emergence of impressions of reflections, too. In other words, they are laws for the faculty of the imagination. We get:

Second restriction on the freedom of the imagination: (2) *The faculty of the imagination is ruled by three principles of association: resemblance, contiguity, and causation.*

These principles, although claimed to be universal, are not exactly like Newton's inexorable natural laws. Hume says that a "uniting principle among ideas is not to be consider'd as an inseparable connexion; for that has been already excluded from the imagination: … we are only to regard it as a gentle force".[33] He never takes pains to explain in what way a "gentle force" differs from an ordinary nomological force. In some way or other, however, the principles of association relate perceptions to each other and have to be some kind of "force" *relations*. This fact brings us to the last of the four enumerated basic entities of Hume's ontology.

## 6. Relations

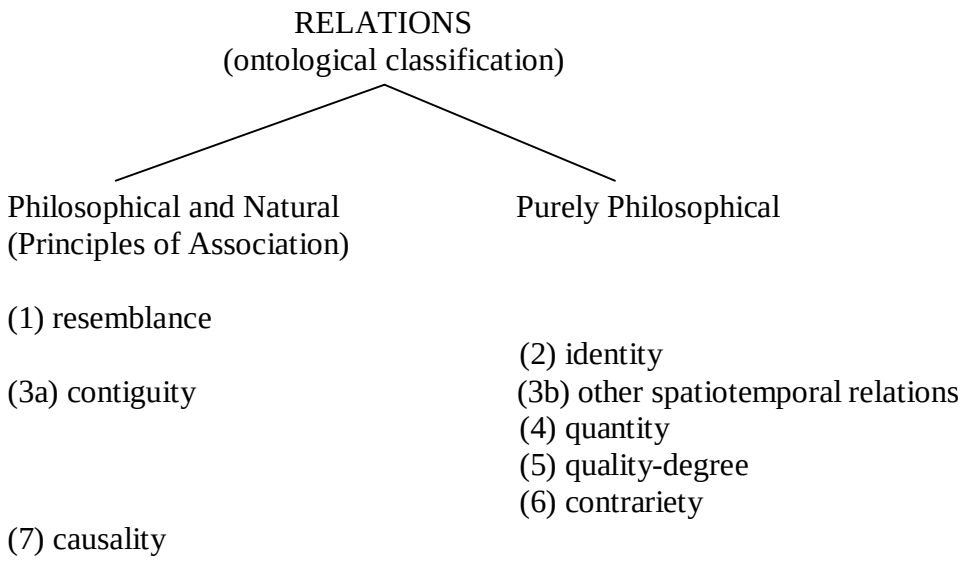
Every atomistic system has to postulate some kind of relations between the atoms, and so does Hume's. There are not only perceptions, there are relations between perceptions as well. Philosophers, Hume says, use 'relation' in a wider sense than the ordinary man. Philosophers call anything that is due to any kind of comparison a relation, whereas "in common language" only relations in which one of the relata "naturally introduces the other"[34] are so called. To be "naturally introduced" is to be related by means of the principles of association. Since, as far as I can see, Hume is of the opinion that every natural relation can also be found by a reflected

[33] *Treatise* 1.1.4. (Norton p. 12).
[34] *Treatise* 1.1.5. (Norton p. 14).

comparison, every natural relation has to be regarded as a philosophical relation, too.[35]

Hume lists and numbers seven kinds of philosophical relations. He even says "we shall find that without difficulty they may be compriz'd under seven general heads".[36] These relation-species are: (1) resemblance, (2) identity, (3) spatial and temporal relations, (4) quantity, (5) degree of quality, (6) contrariety, and (7) causality.[37] If his remark on natural relations is taken into account, too, then we get the taxonomical schema D1 below.

Taxonomy D1:




Hume ought to have told the reader whether or not there can be impressions of relations, but he never does. Once, though, he says the following:

All kinds of reasoning consist in nothing but a *comparison*, and a discovery of those relations, either constant or inconstant, which two or more objects bear to each other. This comparison we may make, either when both the objects are present to the senses, or when neither of them is present, or when only one. When both the

[35] In the introduction to his edition of the *Treatise*, D.F. Norton (see footnote 2 above) writes: "Note that the three relations, resemblance, contiguity, and causation, may be either natural (the result of the involuntary associating quality) or philosophical (the result of a voluntary act of the mind)."; see *Treatise*, p. I21, footnote. I think that instead of 'may *be* either natural … or philosophical', he should have written 'may *appear* either as natural … or as philosophical only'.

[36] *Treatise* 1.1.5. (Norton p. 15).

[37] Hume regards *difference* not as a relation but "rather as a negation of relation"; *Treatise* 1.1.5. (Norton p. 15).

objects are present to the senses *along with the relation* [italics added], we call *this* perception rather than reasoning;[38]

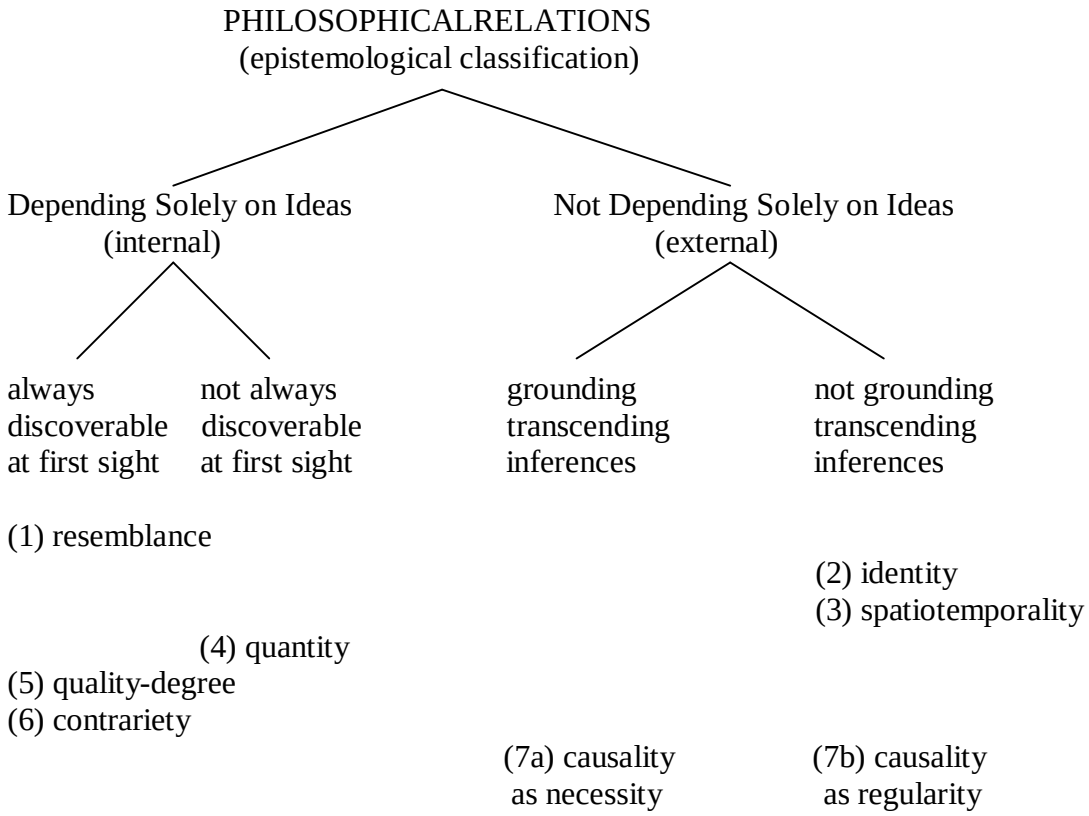
There is a problem here that Hume never notices. It can be stated as a trilemma. First horn, if Hume says that there are impressions of relations that connect properties of impressions, then he is contradicting his view that *all* impressions (i.e. even impressions of relations) are wholly distinct entities, i.e., entities that can be perceived independently of other entities.[39] Second horn, if Hume says that reason can *discover* non-perceivable relations between impressions, then he is contradicting both his nominalism and his empiricist epistemology.[40] Third horn, if Hume says that the faculty of imagination *creates* all ideas of relations,[41] then he is contradicting his view that imagination only can create ideas that are at bottom reducible to ideas that are copies of simple impressions. I think that Hume should be put in the third horn; I think he never observed that what an idea of a relation posits can never be wholly identified with the relata of the relation.[42] However, the contradiction he then falls prey to can be removed by adding a second amendment to his "first principle in the science of human nature". In what follows, I will take this amendment as being part of Hume's empiricism:

First restriction on the freedom of the imagination, second amendment: (1) *The faculty of the imagination can only create simple ideas that are copies of, or (ii) are positing relations that have as their relata, already experienced impressions.*

[38] *Treatise* 1.3.2. (Norton p. 52).
[39] This is not noted by e.g. Galen Strawson, who in his exposition of Hume's views on causality seems to take it for granted that there are impressions of sensation of contiguity and precedency; see *The Secret Connexion*, Clarendon Press: Oxford 1989, pp. 102-103.
[40] Adolf Reinach argues that Hume has this position, but he never puts his interpretation in relation to Hume's philosophy as a whole. See Reinach, 'Kants Auffassung des Humeschen Problems' (1911), in K. Schuhman and B. Smith (eds.), *Adolf Reinach. Sämtliche Werke. Band I*, Philosophia: München 1989, pp. 67-93; English translation by J. N. Mohanty as 'Kant's Interpretation of Hume's Problem', *Southwestern Journal of Philosophy*, 7 (1976), pp. 161-188. However, this paper makes some very good points about Hume's philosophy, too; see e.g. the text that gives rise to footnote 45.
[41] The term 'ideas of relations' must not be conflated with Hume's famous term 'relations of ideas'. The latter term is introduced in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (at the beginning of section IV), and should be contrasted with 'matters of fact'. The former term, that I have introduced, should be contrasted with 'ideas of properties'.
[42] Not even modern set theory can save Hume. In set theory, every two-term relation is identified with a set of ordered couples, and that order is something more than the aggregate of the relata.

The classification of relations first made by Hume is later on complemented by epistemological classifications.[43] I have assembled the latter in Taxonomy D2 below.

Taxonomy D2:




When Hume uses the expression 'depending solely on ideas', he means depending solely on ideas *about the relata of the relation*. What it then means for a relation to depend solely on ideas can be explained as follows. Think of two red impressions. You will then have two ideas, and, also, you can see that the impressions that they copy resemble each other. That is, you can find a relation between two red impressions merely by comparing the corresponding ideas. Similarly, in order to discover that there is a relation of contrariety, e.g. between a white impression and a black impression, one need not at the moment of discovery experience such impressions. It is enough to consider their ideas. Such is not the case, however, when it comes to identity (= identity over time) and spatial and temporal relations. For instance, by merely comparing the ideas of the Morning star and the Evening star, it is impossible to figure out that perceptions of the Morning star and the Even-

[43] In part 1, section 5, and in part 3, sections 1 and 2, respectively.

ing star, respectively, are perceptions of the same thing. Likewise, by a mere comparison between the ideas of two kinds of impressions, it is impossible to find out what spatial and temporal relations the corresponding impressions can bear to each other.

Hume's distinction between relations that do and do not depend solely on ideas is today often made in terms of internal and external relations, respectively.[44] It is often taken for granted that Hume regards all statements that describe relations that depend solely on ideas (among them mathematical truths) as analytic statements, but, like A. Reinach, I think this is a misinterpretation.[45]

A relation that depends solely on ideas can either be discoverable immediately or require elaborate reasoning in order to be found. Immediate discovery, Hume says, is a matter rather "of intuition than demonstration".[46] But he regards it nonetheless as being a kind of comparison. The term 'quantity' in the taxonomy is shorthand for 'proportions in quantity and number', and such proportions are of course not always "discoverable at first sight".

The expression 'grounding transcending inferences' is an invention of mine. It is meant to be shorthand for Hume's way of speaking about conclusions that take us "beyond the impressions of our senses", and conclusions that allow us to "inform us of existences and objects, which we do not see or feel".[47] According to Hume, it is only the idea of the causal relation that lays claim to refer to something that can ground transcending inferences. What then about the distinction between causality as necessity (necessity-causality) and causality as regularity (regularity-causality)?

According to the ordinary interpretation of Hume's analysis of causality, he claims that the *relational* content of the statement 'A causes B' is the content of the conjunction of the three relational statements (i) 'A and B are contiguous', (ii) 'A precedes B' (and 'B succeeds A'), and (iii) 'there is a constant conjunction between A and B'.[48] Since each of the statements (i) to (iii) contains an idea of a relation, one might just as well say that the idea of the causal relation consists of three other ideas of relations: the ideas of contiguity, precedency (or succession), and constant conjunction.

In order to understand how Hume looks upon the whole idea of causal necessity, one must also understand how he looks upon a perception of a causal relation-

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[44] See e.g. D.M. Armstrong, *A Theory of Universals*, Cambridge University Press: London 1978, chapter 19, section iv, and *Universals. An Opinionated Introduction*, pp. 43-44. It should be noted that this concept of internal relation is quite different from that used within nineteenth century British idealism; see I. Johansson, *Ontological Investigations*, Routledge: London 1989, chapter 8.

[45] Reinach, 'Kants Auffassung des Humeschen Problems'; cf. footnote 40.

[46] *Treatise* 1.3.1. (Norton p. 50).

[47] *Treatise* 1.3.2. (Norton p. 53).

[48] I will avoid the question what Hume's real views on the structure of beliefs and statements are. For a classic discussion, see Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume*.

ship.[49] Such a perception (that involves ordinary things and states of affairs) can be said to consist of three major perceptions. First, there is a complex perception dominated by impressions of sensations; this is the perception of the cause-event. Secondly, there is a complex idea that contains an idea of the effect-event combined with ideas of contiguity and succession. Thirdly, there is an impression of reflection (produced by the imagination) that confers its vividness to the idea of the expected effect. Thereby, the vividness constitutes a belief that the effect will necessarily occur. This impression of reflection comes into being because of an earlier constant conjunction between events of type A and B.

When, according to Hume, reason and imagination have isolated the idea of necessity from the complex idea of necessity-causality that it is part and parcel of, one realises that it only pictures an impression of reflection, not a relation. In Kemp Smith's words: "The 'impression', then, to which Hume thus traces the idea of necessity is, properly regarded, a feeling in the mind, not an apprehended relation between existents."[50] This feeling of anticipation is real, but the anticipated effect-event will not necessarily become real.

Since Hume regards the idea of a causal *necessity* not as a copy of a relation between impressions, but as a copy of an impression, he can of course not regard this idea as a proper part of the idea of the causal *relation*. Those who fall prey to the illusion that a cause necessarily produces its effect can on Hume's analysis be said to confuse a particular kind of event with a relation between events.

With these comments I end the presentation of Hume's ontology and turn to some of its "relation problems". I will highlight three difficulties that I have labelled 'The Problem of the Relation of Causality', 'The Problem of the Relation of Identity', and 'The Problem of the Relation to the External World', respectively. Afterwards, in section ten, I will evaluate the impact these problems have on Hume's philosophical system as a whole.

## 7. The Problem of the Relation of Causality

The problem of causality has to be described three times; first in relation to the ordinary view of Humean causality and then in relation to Kemp Smith's and G. Strawson's reinterpretations, respectively. All three interpretations, each in its own way, make Hume's philosophical system incoherent, if not plain inconsistent.

[49] Cf. Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume*, pp. 88-95 and 396-402, and G. Strawson, *The Secret Connexion*, chapter 10.

[50] Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume*, p. 93. Note that the account given is quite consistent with the view that there can be no impression of sensation of any relation.

Some commentators have found it problematic that Hume puts forward two definitions of the causal relation,[51] but on my view, according to which every natural relation is a philosophical relation, this is no problem. Hume says that his two definitions are only "presenting a different view of the same object, and making us consider it [causality] either as a *philosophical* or as a *natural* relation".[52] He could very well have produced two definitions of every natural relation. Each such relation can be considered either in its associative and determining capacity or in its appearance as a mere comparison product. For Hume, 'to determine' is the same as to cause; in what follows I will use the expressions 'determine' and 'cause' interchangeably.[53]

When Hume claims that a two-term relation is a natural relation, he claims that the idea or impression of the first relatum determines the imagination to form a more lively idea of the other relatum.[54] That is: resemblance (1) as a natural relation is resemblance as a comparison product *plus* a power to determine the imagination; contiguity (3a) as a natural relation is contiguity as a comparison product *plus* a power to determine the imagination; and causality (7) as a natural relation is causality as a comparison product *plus* a power to determine the imagination

Hume does not care much about the distinction between a relation and its relata, and that is a pity.[55] His natural relations (or principles of association) are like natural laws. Now, as has been made abundantly clear in modern philosophy of science, natural laws need initial conditions (= instantiations of relata) in order to be able to cause anything. For instance, Newton's law of gravitation relates in itself only kinds of entities to each other and cannot in itself cause anything. But as soon as there are initial conditions, a causal process is triggered.

Think now of the resemblance between two perceptions $a_1$ and $b_1$. It is only the appearance of a particular $a_1$ (first *relatum* and initial condition) *together* with the *relation* of resemblance between the two kinds of perceptions a and b that can cause the appearance of $b_1$ (second *relatum*). Put more generally, if N is a natural

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[51] See e.g. J.A. Robinson, 'Hume's Two Definitions of "Cause", T.J. Richards, 'Hume's Two Definitions of "Cause", and Robinson, 'Hume's Two Definitions of "Cause" Reconsidered', in V.C. Chappell (ed.), *Hume*, Macmillan: London 1968, pp. 129-168.

[52] *Treatise* 1.2.14. (Norton p. 114).

[53] Even though Hume, as explained in section five, does not regard his principles of association as absolutely nomological, but as containing a "gentle force", a "gentle force" is nonetheless a "gentle causality"; force and causality are for Hume one and the same thing. He writes: "I begin with observing that the terms of *efficacy*, *agency*, *power*, *force*, *energy*, *necessity*, *connexion*, and *productive quality*, are all nearly synonimous;"; *Treatise* 1.3.14. (Norton p. 106).

[54] *Treatise* 1.2.14. (Norton p. 114-115).

[55] Hume's carelessness with the distinction between relations and their relata is shown at once when he presents his two definitions of causality. First he says quite explicitly that there "may two definitions be given of this *relation*" (italics added), but then he says "We may define a CAUSE to be …"; *Treatise* 1.3.14. (Norton p. 114).

relation that relates perceptions of kind a to perceptions of kind b (= aNb), then nothing will happen until a is instantiated (= $a_1$). On the other hand, if $a_1$ obtains and there is no lawlike relation aNb that connects a with b, no $b_1$ will be caused by $a_1$.

But things are even more complicated on Hume's account. He is not from the perspective of modern philosophy of science implicitly saying that aNb and $a_1$ together cause $b_1$; he is implicitly saying that aNb and $a_1$ together cause *imagination* to create an *idea of* $b_1$. In fact, Hume regards the relation aNb as also being part of a *relatum* in another relation that has as *its* other relatum a kind of event in the faculty of imagination. This other relation I will symbolise by the expression '(aNb)C(I:idea-b)'; 'C' represents traditional causality, and 'I:idea-b' should be read 'the faculty of the imagination, I, has an of idea of b'. In order to be a natural relation, N has to be both a relation, as in 'aNb', and part of a relatum, as in '(aNb)C(I:idea-b)'. A natural relation is a relation between perceptions that is part of a relatum in a causal relation that can determine the imagination.

With respect to resemblance (R), the formula (aNb)C(I:idea-b) becomes (aRb)C(I:idea-b); and with respect to causality the formula becomes (aCb)C(I:idea-b). Note that 'C' appears twice in the causality formula.

Considered as ideas of purely philosophical relations, the idea of resemblance is in its generality[56] simple and that of causality is complex. Therefore, purely philosophical resemblance can only vacuously be defined as being resemblance, whereas purely philosophical causality can informatively be defined as being the conjunction of contiguity, precedency and constant conjunction (= aCCb). However, considered as ideas of *natural* relations, both of them can be given non-trivial definitions:

Perception a has a natural relation of resemblance to perception b (aRb) $=_{def.}$
aRb, and aRb can[57] cause imagination to create an idea of b;
i.e., aRb and (aRb)C(I:idea-b).

Perception a has a natural relation of causation to perception b (aCb) $=_{def.}$
aCCb, and aCCb can cause imagination to create an idea of b;
i.e., aCCb and (aCCb)C(I:idea-b).

In this definition of causality, 'CC' is shorthand for regularity-causality (contiguity, precedency and constant conjunction), but there is a problem. Since the term 'cause' appears both in the definiendum and in the definiens, its appearance in the definiens has to be replaced by some other term. For Hume, there are only two alternatives. 'Cause' has to be substituted either by 'necessity-causality' (NC) or by 'regularity-causality' (CC). Let us see what happens in each case. Since according to

[56] There is a problem here that I have consciously avoided by using the term 'being simple in its generality'. Seemingly, a nominalist like Hume cannot regard any general term as referring to a simple idea. But this prima facie truth may disappear if a distinction between "thin" and "thick" relations is introduced. For this distinction, see K. Mulligan, 'Relations – Through Thick and Thin', *Erkenntnis* 48 (1998), pp. 325-353. Perhaps resemblance can be regarded as a simple idea of a thin relation.

[57] The term 'can' is shorthand for 'can in the case of proper initial conditions'.

the ordinary interpretation of Hume, the idea of necessity-causality should everywhere be replaced by the idea of regularity-causality, I take the regularity option first. We then get:

Perception a has a natural relation of causation to perception b $=_{def.}$
there is a regularity-causality between a and b (aCCb), and this regularity-causality (aCCb) can *regularity-cause* (CC) imagination to create an idea of b;
i.e, aCCb and (aCCb)CC(I:idea-b).

Briefly, this means that there is a (second-order) constant conjunction between the (first-order) constant conjunction aCCb and events of the kind "the faculty of the imagination creates an idea of b". Formally, such a definition is quite acceptable, but materially it is too weak for Hume's enterprise. It turns the idea of a natural relation of causation and the ideas of principles of association into ideas of purely philosophical relations. Hume has then no longer recourse to a concept by means of which he can formulate his second restriction on the free play of the imagination. He can then not even explain why the subjective impression behind the idea of necessity arises. If 'causality' is substituted by 'regularity-causality' everywhere in the *Treatise*, then Hume's analysis of causality becomes self-refuting, i.e., it has to be modified in some way or other.

In short, the ordinary view of Hume on causality makes his philosophy inconsistent, if only implicitly. That is, explicitly Hume is postulating principles of association, but implicitly he is denying their existence. There is, however, a seemingly simple way to save Hume from this accusation, and that way has been trod by Kemp Smith. He claims that the standard view is false, and that Hume does not reject the existence of necessity-causality altogether, only as a connexion between objects within the world of perceptions:

> It will be observed that in defining causation as a natural relation Hume uses the term 'determination', and this in a dual capacity, as the determination of the mind to the forming of an idea and to the enlivening of that idea. Now, clearly 'determination' is here more or less synonymous with causation. His use of it in his definition of causation was, however, unavoidable. What he has set himself to give is a *causal* explanation of our belief in causation as holding between *objects*, by pointing to their connexion, *their causal connexion, in the imagination.* As has already been pointed out, the actual occurrence of causation, as a mode of union or connexion, is presupposed throughout.[58]

If Kemp Smith is right, Hume's definition of causation as a natural relation can be spelled out as follows:

Perception a has a natural relation of causation to perception b $=_{def.}$
there is a regularity-causality between a and b (aCCb), and this regularity-causality (aCCb) can *necessity-cause* (NC) imagination to create an idea of b;
i.e., aCCb and (aCCb)NC(I:idea-b).

This definition, however, gives rise to a new problem; a problem that Kemp

[58] Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume*, p. 401.

Smith never really faces. If our idea of necessity-causality is at bottom not an idea of two relata and a corresponding necessity-relation, but only an idea of an object ("a feeling in the mind"), how can we use such an idea to refer to a relation? Together, Hume's philosophy of language and his analysis of the idea of causality seem to make it impossible for the idea of necessity-causality to refer to any relation at all, not only to relations in the world of perceptions. If Kemp-Smith is right, then Hume's presumed "*causal* explanation of our belief in causation" seems to be in conflict with Hume's empiricist philosophy of language.[59] Kemp-Smith seems to save Hume from one inconsistency only to introduce another. This brings us to Galen Strawson.

So far, my presentation has mainly been concerned with Hume's ontology of the mind, and that is the main concern of this paper. However, some words about his views on the external world will be useful, too. No doubt, Hume mostly writes about the world in a very commonsensical fashion. How is this manner of writing to be related to his scepticism with respect to the "continued and distinct" existence of objects? That question has been the topic of many an interpretative dispute. Even though my central claims are independent of Hume's actual position in this respect, I do think, like G. Strawson, that Hume took it for granted that there is an external world that affects us.

Those who claim that Hume thought that he could consistently believe (not know) that there is a world outside mind seem to find it natural also to claim that Hume thought that regularity-causality is the only possible causality in the external world, too. Here, G. Strawson is of a different opinion. According to him, Hume thinks rightly that he can consistently believe that the idea of necessity-causality is applicable to relations between events in the external world. There is, G. Strawson says, a neglected distinction in the *Treatise* between *conceiving* ideas and *supposing* relative ideas:

> Nevertheless (Hume seems to be saying), even if we cannot form any idea of external objects that counts as positively contentful on the terms of the theory of ideas, we can still form a 'relative' idea of such objects. It is a merely relative idea because we cannot in any way conceive of or descriptively represent the nature of an external object as it is in itself (when it is supposed specifically different from perceptions); we can conceive it only indirectly. … But a merely relative idea of (or term for) something X is not no idea of (or term for) X at all.[60]

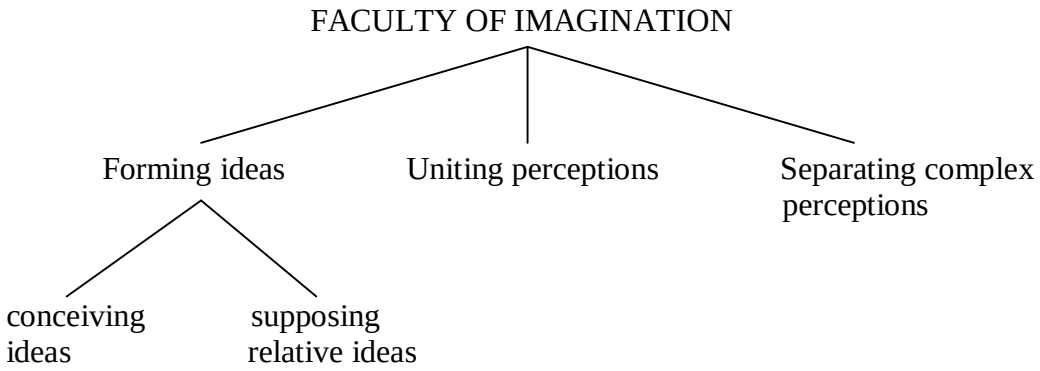
[59] This also answers Wilbanks rhetorical question: "Why is not possible to claim, without circularity, both that the causal principle is the ground of imaginative activity (or at least some of it) and also that the imagination is the sole faculty capable of giving rise to the *idea* of causation?"; *Hume's Theory of Imagination*, p. 19.

[60] G. Strawson, *The Secret Connexion*, p. 51; the distinction is expounded in chapters 6.5 and 12.

The distinction between what we can *content-fully conceive* (given the special theory-of-ideas-based account of contentfulness) and what we can *coherently suppose* must be added to Hume's overall theory of meaning or intelligibility.[61]

In a book specifically concerned with Hume's theory of imagination, Jan Wilbanks has, like (and before) G. Strawson, argued that Hume "in addition to *conceiving*, … recognizes a *supposing* activity of this faculty [of the imagination]."[62] They make a good case, although it implies that Hume, really, ought to be blamed for not having made the distinction more clear himself. However, such accusations apart, I think that Taxonomy B (section four) ought to be continued downwards as follows.[63]

Subtaxonomy B:




Relying on these distinctions, G. Strawson argues that Hume very well can talk of both external objects and relations of necessity-causality between them. Hume cannot, though, and he never does, claim that he can *conceive* such objects and relations. All that he can claim, and all that he does claim, is that he can *suppose* them with the help of relative ideas. In my opinion, G. Strawson has shown what he wanted to show: Hume talks about and believes in traditional causal relations between objects and events in the external world, and this is not in conflict with his philosophy of language rightly understood.

Let us now see what happens if we use the distinction between conceiving and supposing in relation to the problem that I claimed Kemp Smith's interpretation gives rise to. At first, things seem simple. We can even here claim that Hume says that we have a merely suppositional and relative idea of what it is to be a principle of association (necessity-causality) but a clearly and distinctively conceived idea of regularity-causality. However, more needs to be said.

[61] G. Strawson, *The Secret Connexion*, p. 58.
[62] J. Wilbanks, *Hume's Theory of Imagination*, p. 80.
[63] The capacity of forming beliefs belongs to the imagination, too; however, it has to be regarded as a mix of the other capacities.

Within Hume's system as now interpreted, the conceived idea of regularity-causality can be used when the relata are *knowable* contents of the mind, and the supposed relative idea of necessity-causality can be used when the relata are *unknowable* events in the external world. There is a link between Hume's epistemology and his distinction between conceived and supposed ideas. Statements that contain knowledge have to involve conceived ideas; supposed relative ideas cannot be bearers of knowledge. This link remains even if Hume claims that necessity-causality can be legitimately used in order to talk about the relation between mind and the external world, since this relation is unknowable, too. However, the link is cut if Hume claims that there is a relation of necessity-causality between the referents of '$a_1$ and aCCb' and 'I:idea-b'. This is due to the fact that he seems to lay claim to have *knowledge* about this relation since the idea of it is part and parcel of his theory of the mind. This means that if this relation is claimed to be a case of necessity-causality, then we should be able to conceive this relation, but the analysis of causality implies that we can only have a supposed relative idea of it. Therefore, the problem of causality that Kemp Smith's interpretation suffers from cannot be deleted by clicking on the conceiving-supposing distinction.

Let me restate the point. Even though Hume takes the existence of the external world for granted, he wants to produce a theory only of human nature, of the mind. In such an undertaking, Hume can rest content with suppositional relative ideas about both the ontology of the external world and the relation between this world and the mind. However, he cannot thus rest content when he talks about entities that are basic to his own ontology of the mind. That would make his philosophy unknowable.

If, in spite of all, we take Hume as implicitly saying that we have only a suppositional relative idea of the principles of association, another inconsistency can be ascribed to him. It arises as follows. In order to be a knowable theory of the mind, all the ideas of the basic kinds of entities in Hume's theory must be conceivable ideas, but since necessity-causality is not conceivable, Hume must be regarded as both endorsing and rejecting the claim that we can know that there are principles of association.

What I have called the problem of the relation of causality is in essence the problem of how to reconcile Hume's analysis of causality with his presumed discovery of principles of associations. With the presuppositions made in this section, Hume, as hitherto interpreted, seems inevitably to involve himself in one of three different incoherencies. First, if the *Treatise* maintains that there is only one kind of causality in the world, regularity-causality, then Hume's analysis of causality is self-refuting. Second, if 'causality' can mean necessity-causality when the denoted relation does not belong to the contents of the mind, then Hume's *Treatise* can no longer be ascribed a wholly empiricist philosophy of language. Third, if the causal relation between the principles of association and the faculty of the imagination is a case of necessity-causality referred to by means of a supposed relative idea, then we cannot know that this relation obtains. However, a final conclusion is not yet to be drawn. A

more presuppositionless look at the problem will be taken in section ten. Next, I will present an analogous problem in Hume's analysis of identity.

## 8. The Problem of the Relation of Identity

According to many textbook introductions to Hume, he rejects *tout court* the existence of pure and simple identity over time; be it in the form of material substances or in the form of strict personal identity. This is quite in conformity with the fact that Hume regards identity as a relation. On Hume's view, identity over time in the world of perceptions cannot be but a relation. In what follows, I will call pure identity through time endurance-identity, and I will rename Hume's relation of identity and call it perdurance-identity. In the last section I said that Hume, on one interpretation, seems both to reject and retain necessity-causality. Now I will claim that Hume, on the ordinary interpretation, seems both to reject and retain endurance-identity.

Several commentators, and even Hume himself,[64] have remarked that there is some kind of problem with his analysis of personal identity and/or the unity of the mind. Hume wants the principles of association to explain how bundles of different perceptions can be united into different persons or minds, for instance, myself as a specific person with a specific perdurance-identity. The problem is that in order for the principles to be able to perform this feat, the perceptions that make up myself seem already to have to belong to myself. Why? The reason is that the principles of association are regarded as being universal principles, which means that they "work" as much across minds as within minds.[65] If it is true that Hume wanted to picture his theory of the mind after Newton's theory of the material world, then he should perhaps have thought a bit more of the fact that Newton took it for granted that there is one and only one universe. Without such an assumption, Newton would have had a problem with the unity of the universe that is analogous to Hume's problem with the unity of the mind. If Newton's law of gravitation not only relates corpuscles in our universe to each other, but relates corpuscles in different universes to each other as well, are then the universes really numerically different?

Another problem with Hume's account of identity is the following. If every presumed endurance-identity is to be regarded as a figment of the imagination, then even the faculty of the imagination itself has only perdurance-identity, i.e., there are

[64] This is done in his *Appendix* to the third book of the *Treatise*. Hume is here even talking about an inconsistency of his (Norton p. 400), but he is not formulating this inconsistency correctly; see comment by J. Passmore, *Hume's Intentions*, Duckworth: London 1980 [1952], p. 83. I comment upon Hume's remark at the end of section ten below.

[65] The proposal that there is one and only one mind seems never to have been considered by Hume.

then only momentarily existing faculties of the imagination. However, since such faculties can have no memory they are not able to perform what Hume wants the faculty of the imagination to perform. They cannot take constant conjunctions into account. And, even worse, neither can they relate the creation of a simple idea to an earlier existing simple impression. A momentary faculty of the imagination cannot accommodate Hume's "first principle in the science of human nature".[66]

John Passmore thinks that Hume did not face the problem of personal identity because he confused the creating of a first person identity with the creating of third person identities: "Hume shifts to another question: are the perceptions of *other people* really united or do we unite them by a fiction?"[67] Passmore thinks, and so do I, that Hume has an insoluble problem: "For if all that happens is that a series of very similar (or causally linked) perceptions succeed one another, there is no possible way in which this series of itself could generate the fiction of personal identity."[68] Barry Stroud agrees, too: "He absolutely needs a prior notion of a self or mind within which the fundamental principles or dispositions of human nature 'operate'."[69]

Looked at from my ontological-systematic approach, Hume's problem of personal identity should be regarded, at bottom, not as a problem of personal identity, but as a problem of the identity of the faculty of the imagination. It is this faculty that is meant to be able to create the perdurance-identities both of ordinary perceivable things, other persons, and my own personal identity. This relationship between the continuants in the world of perceptions and the faculty of the imagination was noted long ago by H.H. Price.

> His [Hume's] account of the identity of continuants in general is not easily reconciled with his account of the identity of the self in particular. A continuant, he says, is a series of numerically and qualitatively diverse particulars along which the imagination makes a smooth transition. The identity of a continuant is therefore a 'fictitious', or as others might say, a 'constructed' identity. But if the imagination is to make this smooth transition from item to item, must not it itself have an identity which is *not* fictitious or constructed? If it is itself a series of particular imaginings, what can we mean by saying that it makes a smooth transition along some other series of particulars? Perhaps there is some way of answering these questions without reintroducing the Pure Ego which Hume has officially rejected. But it is clear that the theory needs pretty drastic reformulation if his fundamental contentions are to be preserved.[70]

[66] This point is also stressed by G. Strawson, *The Secret Connexion*, p. 130.
[67] J. Passmore, *Hume's Intentions*, p. 82.
[68] J. Passmore, *Hume's Intentions*, p. 82.
[69] B. Stroud, *Hume*, p. 135; chapter VI in the book is wholly devoted to 'The Idea of Personal Identity'.
[70] H.H. Price, *Hume's Theory of the External World*, p. 6.

Explicitly, Hume denies endurance-identity, but implicitly he presupposes that the faculty of the imagination has such an identity. What then about "pretty drastic reformulations"? Price also says:

> The word 'imagination' is the keyword of Hume's whole theory of knowledge. But he never quite succeeded in drawing the distinction which Kant drew later between the Transcendental Imagination and the Empirical Imagination.[71]

This was written long before Wilbanks and G. Strawson began to stress Hume's distinction between conceiving ideas and supposing relative ideas. With this distinction at hand, one might of course claim that Hume maintains that we have only a suppositional and relative idea of the endurance-identity of the faculty of the imagination, but that we can have clearly and distinctively conceived ideas of the perdurance-identities of the continuants in the world of perceptions. G. Strawson writes:

> … one might restate the point as follows: what Hume asserted was a bundle theory of the *self*, not of the *mind*. Thus the *mind*, considered as a whole, presumably (surely) has some unknown, ontologically perception-transcendent nature; but there is no such thing as the *self*, considered as something which features among the mental contents of the mind over and above all the perceptions that make up the mental contents of the mind: so far as the basic mental *contents* of the mind are concerned, all there are are perceptions.[72]

So far so good. But, as I remarked in relation to the problem of causality, even though Hume can rest content with suppositional relative ideas about the ontology of the external world, he cannot thus rest content when he talks about entities that are basic in his ontology of the mind. If Hume is interpreted as implicitly saying that we have a suppositional idea of the faculty of the imagination, a new inconsistency arises. Hume must then be taken both to endorse and to reject the claim that we can know that there is a faculty of the imagination. I will return to this issue in section ten, but first a brief remark on the third relation problem

## 9. The Problem of the Relation to the External World

If Hume's philosophical system should be regarded as being both consistent and containing a belief in the external world, there is, I think, no other option than to follow G. Strawson and regard Hume as having made a distinction between conceiving ideas and supposing relative ideas (as explained in section seven). But the introduction of that distinction has repercussions on other parts of the traditional picture of Hume.

G. Strawson's rescue operation affects the interpretation of how to look at the link between Hume's epistemology and his philosophy of language. On the Straw-

[71] H.H. Price, *Hume's Theory of the External World*, p. 15.
[72] G. Strawson, *The Secret Connexion*, p. 131.

sonian account, Hume can no longer be regarded as anticipating 20th century logical positivism, i.e., as saying that all talk about the unperceivable is meaningless. Hume states (see section three) that all simple impressions of sensations, as well as some passions, desires, and emotions, have unknown causes. Now we can see that Hume should, when stating this, be interpreted as referring by means of merely supposed relative ideas. Thereby, Hume seems to be pretty close to Kantian talk about unknowable things in themselves. This consequence of his reinterpretation is openly admitted by G. Strawson. He says:

> Kant's position on the question of our ability to grasp the thought of something 'specifically different from perceptions' is arguably essentially the same as Hume's, if one supposes this something to be the 'noumenal reality'; although he distinguishes between the *thinkable* and the *knowable* rather than between what we may (intelligibly) *suppose* and what we may (contentfully) *conceive*, and also appears to make certain ill-advisedly definite claims about the character (e.g. the non-spatial and non-temporal nature) of his (noumenal) External Object(s).[73]

Traditionally, Hume has been interpreted as rejecting all talk about unobservables. According to the new Strawsonian picture, with which I agree, this is false. Hume regarded unobservables as unknowable, he regarded ideas of unobservables as unconceivable, but nonetheless he regarded some ideas of unobservables as intelligible.

## 10. Possible Solutions to Hume's Problems

Early in this paper, I claimed that Hume's ontology of the mind, at least in appearance, contains concepts that denote four basic kinds of entities: (A) perceptions, (B) faculties, (C) principles of associations, and (D) relations. As far as I can see, it is absolutely impossible to take away from Hume's philosophy the concepts of perceptions and relations. That Hume takes it for granted that there are perceptions is beyond all doubt, but to take away all relations seems almost as incredible; at least resemblance has to remain. Hume himself says that resemblance "is a relation, without which no philosophical relation can exist".[74] And if there are no philosophical relations, then neither can Hume's philosophy exist. The search for a consistent Hume should be directed towards his conceptions of faculties and principles of association.

So far, I have taken it for granted that Hume posits the existence of both a faculty of the imagination and three principles of association. What happens if we interpret him as not really believing in such entities at all? Or, what happens if we interpret him as positing one of them but not the other? Stroud seems to suggest that the last move would help a lot. He writes:

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[73] G. Strawson, *The Secret Connexion*, p. 55 (footnote 35); see also pp. 54 and 125.
[74] *Treatise* 1.1.5. (Norton p. 15).

To explain the idea of causality, personal identity is appealed to; and to explain the idea of personal identity, causality is appealed to. So, it might then be argued, there is a kind of circularity in Hume's science of man. As long as we focus only on the explanation of the idea of causality, everything seems in order, but that is only because we are surreptitiously presupposing a prior notion of a single self or mind.[75]

Within the perspective now drawn, there are four main interpretative possibilities. One may claim (1) that Hume in fact denies the existence of both faculties and principles of association; (2) that he posits principles of association but denies the existence of faculties; (3) that, conversely, he posits at least the faculty of the imagination but denies the existence of any principles of association; and (4) that, in spite of all, he posits both a faculty of the imagination and the three principles of association. I will comment on these options one by one in the next four subsections.

### 10.1. *Hume as a Heraclitean phenomenalist*

Main thesis: Hume claims that, apart from perceptions and purely philosophical relations, mind contains nothing.

According to this interpretation, the faculty of the imagination and the principles of association are ladders that should be thrown away when the heights of the Humean insights have been reached. This may seem a good way to get rid of all the problems and incoherencies these entities give rise to. However, others crop up instead. If there are no principles of association and no faculty of the imagination, all that is left is a Heraclitean flow of perceptions. There is then no "cement of the universe" at all (see quotation from Hume's *Abstract* in section two above). Even Hume's statement that simple ideas have to be copies of simple impressions has on this interpretation to be looked upon as a ladder to be thrown away. Like G. Strawson, I find it "ludicrous"[76] to ascribe to Hume a view like this. Of course, it turns into nonsense the two books of the *Treatise* that are concerned with the passions and morals, too.

### 10.2. *Hume as a Newton of the mind*

Main thesis: Hume claims that mind contains perceptions, purely philosophical relations, and principles of association, but no faculty of the imagination.

According to this interpretation, the principles of association connect perceptions the way in which Newton's law of gravitation connects corpuscles. Three major problems accrue. First, there are on this interpretation necessary but unobservable relations between perceptions, and such relations are on Hume's epistemology

[75] B. Stroud, *Hume*, p. 135.
[76] G. Strawson, *The Secret Connexion*, p. 130.

unknowable (see section seven). Secondly (as explained in section eight), there seems to be no possibility of explaining the existence of numerically different minds. Thirdly, the principles of association are now regarded as being like Newton's laws, but this they cannot be on pain of acceptance of an extremely peculiar relationship. Newton's laws are laws that connect simultaneously existing corpuscles, but Hume's principles of association are laws that connect existing and earlier existing perceptions with not yet existing perceptions. When a faculty of the imagination is assumed, both existing perceptions and existing memories of earlier perceptions can intelligibly be said to cause this existing faculty to create, in the next moment, an idea; but on the interpretation now under discussion, such mediation is by definition ruled out. This interpretation makes Hume's philosophy both incoherent and incredible.

### 10.3. *Hume as a proper Kantian*

Main thesis: Hume claims that mind contains perceptions, purely philosophical relations, and (at least) the faculty of the imagination, but no imagination-external principles of association.

On this interpretation, the faculty of the imagination is assumed to have endurance-identity. The problems such an assumption brings with it will not now be discussed since this interpretation has even greater problems. Nor, for the same reason, will I discuss whether Hume is of the opinion that there is (in a Kantian fashion) only one such faculty or whether he thinks that there are (in a more commonsensical way) many of them; one for every person.

If this interpretation is the truth about Hume's *Treatise*, then all the often-presumed structural similarities with Newtonian physics vanish. Nonetheless, the concept of a principle of association need not be regarded as referring to nothing at all. One may try to interpret Hume as saying that such principles are creations *of* the faculty of the imagination itself, not external laws *for* it. If so, causality as a principle of association would be to Hume's faculty of the imagination what Kant's category of causality is to his faculty of the understanding. According to Kant, the faculty of the understanding cannot but create the categories. They are part and parcel of the way the understanding functions. That makes the categories external laws in relation to the manifold of intuitions (simple impressions?) that the sensibility contains, and which the understanding structures. But in relation to the understanding itself, the categories are both free creations and imposed laws. A Kantian transcendental faculty has the peculiar property of being a law to itself. Interpreted in this way, Hume's faculty of the imagination would be a faculty that both freely creates and freely subordinates itself to the principles of association.

As far as I can see, Hume is never near a notion like this.[77]

### 10.4. *Hume as a Scottish Kantian*

Main thesis: Hume claims that mind contains perceptions, (at least) the faculty of the imagination, principles of association, and purely philosophical relations.

We are now back where we started. There are four kinds of basic entities in Hume's ontology. All attempts to reduce their number lead to incredulities. And, by the way, there are no good indications that Hume wanted to use either 'faculty of the imagination' or 'principle of association' as a mere instrumental device in order to pave the way for more esoteric teachings. But we are back with a difference. Now we have recourse to the distinction between conceiving ideas and supposing relative ideas. Let us see what change that can make when we look upon Hume's ontology, epistemology, and philosophy of language as an interrelated whole.

If epistemology is abstracted away, we can now ascribe to Hume the following somewhat naturalist and partly commonsensical description of the world. Apart from the external material world with its objects, relations, and events, there are a lot of minds that endure for a while. Each mind contains four different kinds of basic entities: perceptions, faculties, principles of association, and relations. Normally, a mind contains a combination of several faculties, in particular, sense faculties, memory, imagination, and reason. The external world affects the minds via the sense faculties, and it creates within each mind a bundle of impressions of sensations. Mind can of itself, thanks to its faculty of the imagination, create ideas of such impressions. Within each mind there are weakly nomological psychological laws, principles of association, that restrict the freedom of the imagination. The contents of the mind are simple perceptions or aggregates of such perceptions; each particular simple perception is wholly distinct from all other simple perceptions. We can think about perceptions and relations between them with the help of conceived ideas, but we can think about faculties and principles of association only by means of supposed relative ideas. The external world can only be thought about by means of supposed relative ideas.

If epistemology is brought in, we can add that Hume claims we can have knowledge about existing contents of the mind and of internal relations, but only beliefs about the external world.

So far, Hume's system looks coherent. Now the problem. There is, as I have said, a link between Hume's epistemology and his distinction between conceived

[77] W.C. Gore, *The Imagination in Spinoza and Hume*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago 1902, seems to have discussed an interpretation like this and accused Hume for circular reasoning. This book, however, is not available in Scandinavia, and I have only read J. Wilbanks' exposition and (negative) evaluation of it; see *Hume's Theory of Imagination*, pp. 9-22.

and supposed ideas. Conceived ideas are necessary requirements for knowledge because supposed relative ideas are regarded as not being able to be bearers of knowledge. This means that Hume, on his own presuppositions, cannot claim that we know that the mind has all the structure that the *Treatise* tells us it has. In book one, part 1, sections 3 and 4 of the *Treatise*, Hume seems to say explicitly that we know that there is a faculty of the imagination and that there are principles of association, but his discussions later on in the book imply that we cannot know this. In this way, Hume both endorses and rejects the claim that we can know that there is a faculty of the imagination, and he both endorses and rejects the claim that we can know that there are principles of association. That is the post-Strawsonian Humean coherence problem. How should we handle it? Is there still a way out?

I think we have to admit that there is an epistemological incoherence in the midst of Hume's philosophy. It has been said many times that logical positivists suffer from an epistemological self-reflective inconsistency; that is, they cannot account for their own principle of verification. According to positivist epistemology, the principle of verification ought to be either an analytic and vacuously true statement or a synthetic and empirically testable statement. But it can be neither. In my opinion, Hume's philosophy suffers from an epistemological lacuna of a similar kind.

As I said in passing in section nine, Hume himself confesses doubts (if only in an appendix) about some parts of the *Treatise*; and the doubts concern his views on the unity of the flow of perceptions. He writes:

> Did our perceptions either inhere in something simple and individual, or did the mind perceive some real connexion among them, there wou'd be no difficulty in the case. For my part, I must plead the privilege of a sceptic, and confess, that this difficulty is too hard for my understanding. I pretend not, however, to pronounce it absolutely insuperable.[78]

Like Hume, I think that there may be a way out. But only if a clear-cut modification of his philosophy is allowed. I think that Hume's philosophy might become coherent if the described link between his epistemology and his distinction between conceived and supposed ideas is modified. If Hume would regard it as possible to get knowledge with the help of merely supposed relative ideas, then he could without inconsistency claim that in some way we know both that there is an enduring faculty of the imagination and that there are some necessity-causal principles of association. But, of course, we then have to ask "In what way?". Being consistent is merely a necessary requirement on substantial knowledge claims. I will now end with some somewhat Kantian reflections made in terms of Hume's conceiving-supposing distinction.

It seems odd to claim that one has knowledge about something that is only the object of a relative idea. But what if there is some kind of connection between this relative idea and some clear and distinct ideas about known states of affairs? Of

[78] *Appendix* (Norton p. 400).

course, such a connection cannot possibly be one of definition; a relative idea cannot be defined in terms of conceived ideas. Nor can the connection consist of an internal or an external relation; in such relations all the relata have to be denoted by conceived ideas. Possibly, though, there is a third kind of connection. Perhaps there is a special kind of inference relation whose premises would have to be stated in terms of conceived ideas, but whose conclusion nonetheless could be allowed essentially to contain a supposed relative idea. Let me speculate a little on that.

Taking-off questions for the kind of inference that I have in mind should have the classical Kantian form "We know that X, how is X possible?", where the idea of X should have to be one or several clearly conceivable ideas. If the answer is Y, and Y is another conceivable idea, then it ought to be the case that Y logically implies X, i.e., the relation between Y and X would be internal. But what about cases where the best possible answer is Z, and the idea of Z is a relative idea? Since a relative idea cannot logically imply a conceived idea, there must in such a case exist an epistemological relation of some rather unexplored kind.[79] Many philosophers are here prone to say simply "There are no such cases", but aren't there? Let us look at Hume's analysis of identity again.

Hume can very well be described as trying to answer the question "We know that there are entities that in appearance have endurance-identity, how is this kind of appearance possible?". Since, according to Hume, such appearances are not possible on any account that relies only on conceivable ideas, either we have to say that we cannot possibly know anything about how such appearances come about, or we have to try to frame an explanation in terms of supposed relative ideas. And at least to some extent that works. We can at least intelligibly *say* "the faculty of the imagination makes it possible". But I think there is more to it than that. The answer can be regarded as an "inference to the best presupposition". In this inference we have by mere philosophical reflection moved from something that we know is actual and denoted by conceivable ideas to something else that is actual, too, but that is denoted by a supposed relative idea. Let me use the old example with the eye and the visual field to cast light on my suggestion. Wittgenstein argues in the *Tractatus* as follows:

> Where *in* the world is a metaphysical subject to be found?
> You will say that this is exactly like the case of the eye and the visual field. But really you do *not* see the eye.
> And *nothing in the visual field* allows you to infer that it is seen by the eye.[80]

I would say that Wittgenstein is both right and wrong. Of course, my eye does not and cannot belong to my visual field; and in the strong sense of 'inferring' that is at stake, one cannot infer that oneself sees by means of an eye. However, is it not

[79] What I am going to say has affinities with Kant's concept of transcendental deduction, but the inference I will speculate about is not meant to be, so to speak, an inference away from the spatiotemporal world.

[80] L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Routledge & Kegan Paul: London 1961 [1922], § 5.633, p. 117.

possible to infer that the visual field is due to the existence of a *visual capability* of some sort? Put in Humean terms, we cannot from the existence of a visual field infer the existence of our eyes of which we have clearly conceived ideas, but can we not infer the existence of a visual faculty of which we have only a supposed relative idea?

The semantic-epistemological proposal just put forward mainly by means of rhetorical questions has consequences for Hume's ontology, too. It posits a faculty that seems to be neither inside nor outside the mind. The faculty of the imagination does not belong to the real contents of the mind, but since it creates a great part of this content and structures it all, it seems impossible to regard it as belonging wholly to the external world. This neither-inside-nor-outside-the-mind problem is in my view the source of Kant's postulation of a transcendental realm. However, in contradistinction to Kant, I think that the problem can be solved within a much more naturalist framework. In this, by all means, I am on Hume's side.

Nowadays, the Enlightenment is often regarded as having had one special form in each nation or culture where it made itself an intellectual movement. For instance, comparing the French and the Scottish Enlightenment, one might say that the former had a rationalist and the latter a naturalist bent. Hume was a prominent figure in the Scottish Enlightenment. If, firstly, one allows oneself to speak of Kantianism in a similar way, and, secondly, one thinks that the remarks made in this paper are not wide off the mark, then it makes good sense to call Hume a Scottish Kantian. His philosophy is Kantian in the way it ascribes the faculty of imagination a creative role in structuring our complex everyday perceptions, and it is naturalist in putting this faculty within the ordinary world and regarding it as being ruled by natural laws.

## 11. Kant's Relation to Hume

Famously, in the preface to his *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*, Kant wrote the following paragraph:

> I openly confess that my remembering David Hume was the very thing which many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave my investigations in the field of speculative philosophy a quite new direction. I was far from following him in the conclusions to which he arrived by considering, not the whole of his problem, but a part, which by itself can give us no information. If we start from a well-founded, but undeveloped, thought which another has bequeathed to us, we may well hope by continued reflection to advance further than the acute man to whom we owe the first spark of light.[81]

I have become inclined to think that Kant got more from his knowledge of Hume's philosophy than a mere sceptical-epistemological push away from dogmatic rationalism. Pedantic as Kant was, perhaps he got part of his transcendental philoso-

[81] I. Kant, *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*, Hackett: Indianapolis 1977, p. 5.

phy by merely trying to make the ontology of the less pedantic Hume more systematic. Kant might very well deserve the label a Prussian Hume.

The views I have put forward do not, of course, imply that Kant's transcendental philosophy contains a more consistent and reasonable philosophical system than Hume's attempted and unmodified empiricism does. Sometimes the secondary effects of a cure are just as bad as the disease that is stopped.