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# Revisiting Hume's Sceptical Crisis: an Essay on the Imagination, Ideas and Belief in Hume's Treatise

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## ABSTRACT

Hume began his Treatise with the bold intention to turn philosophy into a 'science of man'. In the conclusion to Book One, however, Hume's confidence is replaced with intense despair over the unreliability of this human science. Rather quickly, however, Hume rejects this despair, accepting that such scepticism is unwarranted and can be cured by reference to our natural associative tendencies. Many have suggested that Hume emerged from this crisis because he changed his feelings about the matter, with little justification. In this thesis, by contrast, I argue that Hume's jump from pessimism to optimism relies upon his arguments about the 'empire of imagination' in the creation of our ideas and beliefs about the experienced world. The key, as I will show, is how one interprets the creative imagination, which Hume refers to as the fancy. My central hypothesis is that there are two distinct roles played by the fancy: the critical and the fictitious. The critical fancy mixes with natural causation to create ideas that represent the world as we experience it. The fictitious fancy creates ideas that do not represent the world as we experience it. In essence, my argument is that the dialectic between the two types of fancy allowed Hume to emerge from his sceptical crisis because our fundamental beliefs about the world have a basis in a particular natural function of the imagination that renders their formation possible. More specifically, the critical fancy serves to justify our beliefs about the world as we experience it.

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## Introduction

David Hume begins the *Treatise of Human Nature*<sup>1</sup> with the bold claim that because philosophy has become caught up in metaphysical speculation, the discovery of any truth about the nature of human understanding is unachievable. Hume then makes the equally bold claim that he will turn philosophy into a ‘science of man’.<sup>2</sup> This becomes Hume’s endeavour throughout the *Treatise*.

In so doing, Hume argues that the human mind plays an active role in the formation of beliefs, through the ‘empire of imagination’. In the conclusion to Book One, however, the gusto with which Hume began his project is replaced with intense despair over the unreliability of human mental processes. In Hume’s words:

‘Methinks I am like a man, who having struck on many shoals, and having narrowly escap’d ship-wreck in passing a small frith, has yet the temerity to put out to sea in the same leaky weather-beaten vessel, and even carries his ambition so far as to think of compassing the globe under these disadvantageous circumstances.’<sup>3</sup>

At this stage, Hume reflects upon his arguments about human cognition and finds that he has uncovered ‘[t]he wretched condition, weakness, and disorder of the faculties.’<sup>4</sup> This realisation leads him to declare that ‘amending or correcting these faculties, reduces me almost to despair, and makes me resolve to perish on the barren rock, on which I am at present.’<sup>5</sup>

Yet, mere sentences later Hume rejects this despair, accepting that such scepticism is unwarranted and cannot be sustained. Instead, he claims that ‘nature herself ...cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium.’<sup>6</sup> In consequence, Hume finds that he is ‘absolutely and necessarily determin’d to live, and talk...in the common affairs of life.’<sup>7</sup>

The question arises of how we are able to reconcile Hume’s despair with his seemingly casual acceptance of the irrelevance of these doubts for the ‘common affairs of life’. Many have suggested that Hume simply changed his feelings about the matter, with little justification. Fogelin, for instance, maintains that Hume ‘is not fully

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<sup>1</sup> All references to D. Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* refer to (ed.) L.A. Selby-Bigge and P. H. Nidditch, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Oxford:

<sup>2</sup> T.intro, SBN xv.

<sup>3</sup> T.1.4.7.1-2; SBN 263-4

<sup>4</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> T.1. 4.7.15; SBN 269

<sup>7</sup> T.1.4.7.16; SBN 269

content with this way out of his difficulties...[h]is...answer is that we should pursue philosophy in the same skeptical manner that, in daily life, we accept the deliverances of understanding, namely, *blindly*.<sup>8</sup> In this thesis, by contrast, I show that Hume's jump from pessimism to optimism relies upon his arguments about the positive role played by the 'empire of imagination',<sup>9</sup> in respect of its 'great authority over our ideas'<sup>10</sup> and beliefs. I argue that Hume emerges from doubts concerning his philosophical system out of the recognition that his account is a) internally consistent, and b) coheres with what his research has found regarding the nature of human experience. Moreover, I suggest that in the conclusion to Book One of the *Treatise*, it is *because* of these factors that Hume is able to generate any certainty about external world beliefs, which dispels his clouds of doubt.

The structure of my argument is as follows. In Chapter One, I outline Hume's overall project for the *Treatise*, focusing initially upon his distinction between 'true philosophy' and 'false philosophy'. In particular, I take the example of Hume's critique of material substance as a variety of false philosophy, and its discordance with our common beliefs about external objects. The latter, Hume claims, needs to be understood as part of the true philosophy and science of man.

In Chapter Two, I present an account of the Humean imagination. I argue that, for Hume, the imagination is an encompassing domain of the mind that a) is concerned with associations between ideas that convey the experienced world to us, b) is concerned with associations between ideas that do not represent the world as we experience it, and c) follows associations that *feel* as though they convey the experienced world, but which, however, are fictitious in origin. These distinctions ground my central hypothesis; namely, that there are two distinct roles played by what Hume indifferently refers to as the fanciful imagination, or fancy, which denotes the creativity of the imagination. Fancy, in its first role, works with natural causation to create ideas that represent the experienced world. This I refer to as *critical fancy*. In its other role, fancy creates fictional ideas not recognised by the mind as representing the experienced world. This I call *fictitious fancy*. When ideas of *fictitious fancy* are falsely pushed onto our picture of the experienced world, in that they are taken to

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<sup>8</sup> R. Fogelin, *Hume's Skeptical Crisis: A Textual Study*, Oxford Scholarship Online, 2009, p. 132 Available from University of Sydney Library (Accessed February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015)

<sup>9</sup> T. Abs.; SBN 662

<sup>10</sup> *ibid.*

represent real existences, there is a problem as far as Hume is concerned. This mistake constitutes the basis of false philosophical doctrines such as the belief in material substance.

Against this background, in Chapter Three, I discuss the relevance of the fancy in belief-formation. This sets the scene for my argument in Chapter Four. Namely, that Hume emerges from his sceptical crisis because our fundamental beliefs about the world have a basis in a particular natural function of the imagination that renders their formation possible. More specifically, the critical fancy serves to justify our beliefs about the persistent existence of external objects because it hides from us the interruption between our perceptions of them. This is not a form of justification via reason; rather, it is a form of justification via psychological necessity, and natural imagination. In essence, my argument is that Hume's inward turn from a science of external objects to a science of man does not lead to philosophical melancholy; rather, he rejects the grounds for a false object-based philosophy, and embraces a true human-based philosophy.

## Chapter One: Setting the Scene for a ‘True Philosophy’

### ***1.0 Introduction***

I begin this chapter by explaining key aspects of Hume’s philosophy of mind. With these clarifications in place, I examine Hume’s project to correct certain problems in philosophy throughout his *Treatise*. I do so through analysing a significant error identified by Hume in the philosophical discourse of his time. More specifically, I focus on his criticisms of doctrines that take material substance as a necessary substratum underlying our perceptions of external objects.<sup>11</sup> For Hume, the natural propensity to accept the persistent existence of external objects is misused by philosophers, and they attribute this propensity to the false belief in material substance. The error arises because such speculation fails to capture how the ‘vulgar’<sup>12</sup> (meaning common) person conceives of external objects. Having made this distinction, I show how Hume uses criticism of this kind to justify his inward turn from a ‘false philosophy’ about the status of external objects to a ‘true philosophy’ that examines human cognitive processes.

### ***1.1 Distinction between Impressions and Ideas***

First, some caveats are in order. In particular, we need to outline Hume’s distinction between the types of perceptions in the mind. For Hume, perceptions are divided into two kinds: impressions and ideas. Impressions are ‘[t]hose perceptions, which enter with most force and violence’<sup>13</sup> at the time that ‘they first make their appearance in the soul.’<sup>14</sup> Hume divides impressions, in turn, into two kinds: those of sensation and

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<sup>11</sup> It should be noted that Hume critiques philosophical doctrines regarding necessary connections between events, and immaterial substance in a similar way. With regards to the idea of necessary connections between events, Hume argues that although we may observe a connection between causes to effects, we cannot prove that this connection is *necessary*. Instead, Hume asserts that the way we interpret *constant conjunction of events* makes us aware that certain events have a *tendency* to attend to others (T.1.3.6.3; SBN 87). For Hume, there are no arguments, or forms of reason available to *prove* there are necessary connections between the constant conjunctions of experience. For more on this see: M. Bell, ‘Hume on Causation’, in (ed.) D. Fate Norton & J. Taylor, *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, pp. 154-165. Regarding the idea of a soul substance, Hume argues that we have no impression of a soul substance (T.1.4.5.3-5; SBN 232-3). As we have no such impression, this idea is fictitious in the same way as that of material substance. For more on this see: A. E. Pitson, *Hume’s Philosophy of the Self*, London, Routledge, 2002, in particular pp. 32-49. For how these issues tie up with Hume’s construction of the mind see: J. Biro, ‘Hume’s New Science of The Mind’, in (ed.) D. Fate Norton & J. Taylor, *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, especially pp. 56-66.

<sup>12</sup> This term first appears in T.intro; SBN xviii.

<sup>13</sup> T.1.1.1; SBN 1

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.*



of reflection.<sup>15</sup> Impressions of sensation arise from the senses. Impressions of reflection are emotions and passions, which arise secondary to an impression of sensation. For example, I may have an impression (of sensation) of the sweet taste of chocolate. From this experience, I may have a secondary impression: I may feel happy as a result of eating chocolate. Importantly, such reflective impressions arise from original impressions (or ideas) – not as a result of being affected by the world itself.

In addition, Hume considers impressions to have only a ‘fleeting’ and ‘perishing’ existence in the mind. For example, when I was eating chocolate, the impression of its sweetness struck with force upon my senses. However, after consumption, the lingering taste of chocolate is not as forceful as the impression I had when eating it. The afterimage of an impression is an idea, which Hume takes to be a ‘faint image’ of its original.<sup>16</sup> As with impressions, Hume divides ideas into two kinds: simple and complex. Simple ideas ‘admit of no distinction or separation.’<sup>17</sup> By this, Hume means that simple ideas cannot be divided into component parts.

Simple ideas are generally formed through Hume’s *Copy Principle*.<sup>18</sup> This principle refers to the fact that ideas have the same content as the impressions from which they have been derived; what distinguishes them from the original impressions is that they are less lively.<sup>19</sup> Thus Hume writes that ‘*all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv’d from simple impressions, which are exactly correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent.*’<sup>20</sup>

By contrast, Hume holds that complex ideas ‘may be distinguish’d into parts’,<sup>21</sup> with simple ideas forming their component parts. Hume explains: ‘Tho’ a particular colour,

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<sup>15</sup> Hume also refers to impressions of sensation as ‘original impressions’, and impressions of reflection as ‘secondary impressions’ (T.2.1.1.1; SBN 275)

<sup>16</sup> T.1.1.1.1; SBN 1

<sup>17</sup> T.1.1.1.2; SBN 2

<sup>18</sup> Hume suggests a ‘contradictory phenomenon’ to the Copy Principle. Hume wonders if a person who perceives a gap between two shades of blue, where a ‘missing shade is wanting’ can ‘from his own imagination, to supply this deficiency, and raise up to himself the idea of that particular shade, tho’ it had never been conveyed to him by the senses?’ (T.1.1.1.10; SBN 6) Hume writes: ‘I believe there are few but will be of opinion that he can; and this may serve as proof, that the simple ideas are not always derived from the correspondent impressions; tho’ the instance is so particular and singular, that ‘tis scarce worth our observing, and does not merit that for it alone we should alter our general maxim.’ (ibid.) R. Fogelin interprets this by suggesting that ‘each hue occupies a determinate location within a color space composed of distinct... hues. One such hue can be noticeably absent.’ (p.267) For Fogelin, it follows that in some cases we can form simple ideas concerning certain aspects of the external world without copying from impressions – provided that they fit into our general conception of that world, or in this case, our general conception of colour hues. See R. Fogelin, ‘Hume and the Missing Shade of Blue’, in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 45, No. 2, December, 1984, pp. 263-71. Available from University of Sydney Library (accessed April 1<sup>st</sup>, 2015)

<sup>19</sup> T.1.1.1.11; SBN 5

<sup>20</sup> T.1.1.1.10; SBN 4 (emphasis in original)

<sup>21</sup> T.1.1.1.2; SBN 2

taste, and smell are qualities all united together in this apple, 'tis easy to perceive they are not the same, but are at least distinguishable from each other.'<sup>22</sup> Thus he suggests that the mind can distinguish the taste of an apple from its colour, so on and so forth; when the mind proceeds in this way it divides a given complex idea into its simple component parts.

### ***1.2 The Principles of Association***

Hume consistently asserts that the formation of complex ideas and propositions involve the imagination, and the three principles of association that guide it: resemblance, contiguity, and causation. These principles are what Hume refers to as natural relations of human knowledge. By this, Hume means that they are relations that the mind forms without any necessary awareness of an association being made between ideas. In Hume's words these relations are those 'by which two ideas are connected together in the imagination, and the one naturally introduces the other.'<sup>23</sup>

The principle of resemblance links together similar ideas.<sup>24</sup> Contiguity is the principle by which we connect ideas of either a specific thing (or event) or a number of objects (or events), relative to a particular point in space and time. Hence, this principle allows the imagination to form successions of ideas or complex ideas in accordance with their spatio-temporal location.<sup>25</sup>

For Hume, these two principles also permit us to arrange ideas in an order different from how the original *impressions* first appeared to the senses. In the case of resemblance, this means that we can link together similar ideas, even if they were never experienced in this way. In the case of contiguity, it means that I can imagine objects or events in different spatio-temporal locations to the order that I experienced them. For example, I can think of the 'Eiffel Tower' being in 'Rome', even if experience indicates that the Eiffel Tower is in Paris, and not Rome. This kind of mental creation is possible because Hume maintains that the imagination, in conjunction with these principles of association, is 'not restrain'd to the...order and form with the original impressions.'<sup>26</sup> Rather, there is a '*liberty of the imagination to*

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<sup>22</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> T.1.1.5.1; SBN 13

<sup>24</sup> T.1.1.4.3; SBN 11

<sup>25</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> T.1.1.3.4-5; SBN 9-10

*transpose and change its ideas.*'<sup>27</sup> Hume further explains that: '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.'<sup>28</sup> In this way, the imagination takes hold of individualised ideas, and recombines them in ways that extend beyond (in some cases far beyond) that which has been experienced. This gives rise to new ideas without entailing that it is *necessary* to have a direct impression to which the new idea corresponds.

Causation is the principle by which the imagination links together events that appear in constant conjunction. Consider, for example, the causal association between fire and smoke. This association is come to through the repeated experience of fire with the occurrence of smoke. From the repetition of this constant conjunction we *infer* a connection between fire and the occurrence of smoke, hence linking events through causal association. Hume considers this principle the most important of the three, because it has a relationship with *experience* that resemblance and contiguity do not necessarily demand. As Hume puts it, causal relations are 'united to experience, and binds the objects in the closest and most intimate manner to each other, so as to make us imagine them to be absolutely inseparable.'<sup>29</sup> This is not to be taken to mean that resemblance and contiguity do not require sensory input to associate ideas, at all. Rather, it means that causation is special because the ideas associated through causal connections typically mirror the way they appeared in experience. For example, it is only possible to think of smoke as the effect of fire because fire and smoke have been repeatedly observed to follow one another in a specific order.

### ***1.3 Lively Ideas and Beliefs***

For Hume, constant conjunction plays an important role in facilitating the formation of a belief. Hume explains that a belief 'may be most accurately defin'd, [as] a lively idea related to or associated with a present impression.'<sup>30</sup> To explain, Hume aligns the generation of lively ideas with constant conjunction. Recall, that constant conjunction is anchored by the way in which the world presents itself to us, and the way in which we interpret our experiences of such a world. In consequence, Hume claims that the ideas that arise from this constant conjunction are repeated in our

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<sup>27</sup> T.1.1.3.5; SBN 10 (emphasis in original)

<sup>28</sup> T.1.3.7.18; SBN 92

<sup>29</sup> T.1.3.9.14; SBN 112

<sup>30</sup> T.1.3.7.7; SBN 96

experience. This repetition reinforces the causal association, which in turn causes the mind to make a ‘customary transition’ from the ‘present impression’ to the idea of its usual attendant, thereby forming a ‘lively’ idea. As Hume puts it: ‘once the mind is inliven’d by a present impression, it proceeds to form a more lively idea of the related objects, by a natural transition of the disposition from the one to the other.’<sup>31</sup> This liveliness gives the ideas ‘a superior force, or vivacity, or solidity, or firmness, or steadiness’<sup>32</sup>, which in turn, influences our interactions with the experienced world, and hence, translates to belief.

For example, consider the belief that *coffee will alleviate my tiredness*. In all past instances of coffee consumption, it has done exactly this – it is *repeated* in my perception, and my memory of this experience. From this repetition my idea that coffee will relieve tiredness becomes particularly ‘vivacious’ and hence lively. I come to *believe* that coffee consumption leads to the relief of tiredness, precisely because I have never experienced this connection differently. In consequence, this connection is impressed upon the mind with a feeling of necessity. In this way, my initial idea of a link between coffee consumption and the relief of tiredness becomes even stronger or livelier, through causal association.<sup>33</sup> To this end, Hume writes that it is through ‘custom operating upon the imagination, that we can draw any inference from the appearance of one to the existence of the other.’<sup>34</sup> Hence, a belief ‘renders realities more present to us than fictions, causes them to weigh more in the thought, and gives them a superior influence on the passions and imagination.’<sup>35</sup>

It should be noted that not all ideas possess the requisite ‘force’ or ‘steadiness’ to constitute belief. Some scholars have therefore introduced the following distinction: the lively ideas that lead to beliefs have a certain ‘steadiness’ within the mind itself. Loeb, for instance, argues that for Hume a belief is an idea that is repeated in our cognition and perception in a *steady way*, and is formed by natural causal association. Thus for Loeb, because constant conjunction is repeated within experience and

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<sup>31</sup> T.1.3.8.2; SBN 99

<sup>32</sup> T.App. 16; SBN 629

<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that constant conjunction does not guarantee that my belief is entirely justified. I discuss the relationship between justification and belief in Chapter Three.

<sup>34</sup> T.1.3.8.12; SBN 103

<sup>35</sup> *ibid.*

memorised as such, there arises a ‘steadiness’ of these ideas and, in turn, beliefs, as opposed to ideas that do not translate to belief.<sup>36</sup>

#### ***1.4 The Vulgar Belief in the Persistent Existence of External Objects.***

We can now consider the very important belief held by the vulgar in their understanding of the experienced world; specifically, the belief that external objects appear to have a ‘continu’d or...distinct existence.’<sup>37</sup> By the terms ‘continu’d’ and ‘distinct’, Hume intends to capture the belief that objects appear to exist as external to our bodies, and as persistent through time and space – even when unperceived. I term this the *belief in the persistent existence of external objects*.

Hume, however, recognises a problem here - we never have an *impression* of this persistence.<sup>38</sup> Rather, Hume claims, our perceptions of external objects are ‘interrupted’ appearances. Yet, despite this, ‘the resemblance of our broken and interrupted perceptions induces us to attribute an identity to them’<sup>39</sup> such that we assume external objects ‘continue to exist even when they no longer make their appearances to the senses.’<sup>40</sup>

To investigate the causes of such a belief, Hume asks two questions. He first asks ‘why we attribute a *continu’d* existence to objects, even when they are not present to the senses [?]’<sup>41</sup> Second he asks ‘why we suppose them to have an existence *distinct* from the mind and perception [?]’<sup>42</sup> To these propositions, Hume posits three explanations. First, he considers that the ideas of a continued and distinct existence could originate entirely from the senses. He finds that our senses cannot perform this feat ‘because they convey to us nothing but a single perception, and never give us the least intimation of anything beyond.’<sup>43</sup> Given this fact, Hume takes it that the senses can never convey the idea that external objects persist in their existence. Rather, it ‘is a contradiction in terms, and supposes that the senses continue to operate, even after they have ceas’d all manner of operation.’<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> L. Loeb, *Stability and Justification in Hume’s Treatise*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, pp.67-70.

<sup>37</sup> T.1.4.2.2; SBN 188

<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> T.1.4.2.26; SBN 200

<sup>40</sup> T.1.4.2.51; SBN 211

<sup>41</sup> T.1.4. 2.2; SBN 188

<sup>42</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> T.1.4.2.4; SBN 189

<sup>44</sup> T.1.4.2.3; SBN 188

Second, Hume considers that the belief in the persistent existence of external objects might arise exclusively from reason. He argues, however, ‘that we can attribute a distinct continu’d existence to objects without ever consulting reason, or weighing our opinions by any philosophical principles.’<sup>45</sup> This is because reflection exposes the fact that the perceptions upon which the belief is based are ‘interrupted, and dependent upon the mind.’<sup>46</sup> As such, the belief in the persistent existence of external objects ‘is entirely unreasonable’,<sup>47</sup> precisely because it cannot, and is not, formed through consulting principles of reason.

From this analysis, Hume concludes that the belief in the persistent existence of external objects ‘must be entirely owing to the imagination.’<sup>48</sup> To explain, Hume highlights an important feature of imagination: ‘when set into any train of thinking, [it] is apt to continue, even when its object fails it.’<sup>49</sup> With respect to the question of how we come to believe in the persistent external object, Hume observes that objects preserve a ‘coherence’ and ‘constancy’ in their appearance to the mind.<sup>50</sup> Our *repeated* exposure to these ‘characteristics of external objects’<sup>51</sup> leads to the observation of resemblance between the separate impressions of such objects. From this, we become accustomed to their preserving a ‘like appearance’, which in turn causes the imagination to employ ‘a kind of reasoning from causation.’<sup>52</sup> In this way the repetition of the resemblance between our separate impressions of external objects *causes* us to ascribe to them the idea of persistence. In this process the imagination ‘slides’ across interrupted, but resembling, perceptions of objects, ‘and like a galley put in motion by the oars, carries on its course without any new impulse.’<sup>53</sup> Thus, Hume takes it that ‘as the mind is once in the train of observing a uniformity among objects, it naturally continues, till it renders the uniformity as compleat as possible.’<sup>54</sup> As a result, we ‘*easily entertain this opinion of the continu’d existence of body.*’<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> T.1.4.2. 5; SBN 193

<sup>46</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> T.1.4.2.23; SBN 198

<sup>50</sup> T.1.4.2.19-20; SBN 194-5

<sup>51</sup> T.1.4.2.20; SBN 195

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>53</sup> T.1.4.2.23; SBN 198

<sup>54</sup> T.1.4.2.27; SBN 198

<sup>55</sup> T.1.4.2.23; SBN 198 (my emphasis)

### 1.5 The Falsity of Doctrines of Material Substance

Hume presents the above explanation (regarding how we form the belief that external objects persist) as an alternative to philosophical accounts that suppose that a material substance accounts for the interruption between perceptions, and the feeling of persistence. Philosophers arguing along these lines falsely think that there is some basis for the belief that external objects persist. They take it to be *caused* by something external to the mind, and make the unjustified claim that this external cause is a material substance.<sup>56</sup> Hume claims, however, that this is not how the vulgar think about external objects. Far simpler than that, the vulgar think that perceptions *are* external objects: ‘The vulgar confound perceptions and objects, and attribute a distinct continu’d existence to the *very things they feel or see*.’<sup>57</sup>

Philosophers distance themselves from this position by stating that for the idea of a persistent external object to emerge, it is necessary that a) we are presented with the existence of the perceived object in the mind, and b) that the object in question is a material substance in the world.<sup>58</sup> Hume points out, however, that it is impossible to experience substances. To this end he writes that it is ‘universally allow’d by philosophers...that nothing is ever really present with the mind but its perceptions or impressions and ideas, and that external objects become known to us only by those perceptions they occasion’.<sup>59</sup> Hume thus accuses the philosopher of falsely asserting that external objects have a ‘double existence’: one in the mind, and one in the world as material substance.

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<sup>56</sup> Hume refers to Spinoza’s substance monism at T.1.4.5.29-30; SBN 242-3. For more on Spinoza’s substance monism see: J. Bennett, ‘Spinoza’s Metaphysics’, (ed.) D. Garrett, *The Cambridge Companion to Spinoza*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1995, see especially pp. 64-9.

<sup>57</sup> T.1.4.2.15; SBN 193

<sup>58</sup> Fogelin observes that Hume ‘obviously associates’ this with Locke. See: ‘Hume’s Skepticism’, in (ed.) D. Fate Norton & J. Taylor, *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 228. The idea of a double existence is presented in Locke as a contrast between the ‘nominal’ and ‘real’ essences of external objects. The former is the idea of the object as it presents itself to the understanding. For Locke, the nominal essence consists in a collection of distinct qualities of objects – primary, secondary, and tertiary. Primary qualities are inseparable from the object (for example it’s solidity) (J. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, (ed.) J. W. Yolton, New York, Everyman’s Library, II, viii, 9); secondary qualities are those that we suppose an object to possess (for example colour; II, viii, 10.); and tertiary qualities refer to the ability of one body to manipulate another (II, viii, 10). The real essence of an object, is inaccessible by the senses and denotes the object as it exists in the world, independent from the understanding. This real essence consists in ‘corpuscles’ or material substance. For more on Locke’s corpuscular theory see J. Jan-Erik, “Locke on Real Essence”, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2014/entries/real-essence/>>. See also E. McCann, ‘Locke’s Philosophy of Body’, (ed.) V. Chappell, *The Cambridge Companion to Locke*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 1994, especially pp. 60-7.

<sup>59</sup> T.1.2.6.7; SBN 67

Quite the opposite, Hume contends that ‘children, peasants, and the greatest part of man kind’<sup>60</sup> do not describe external objects in terms of material substance, and do not need a theory of double existence to believe that external objects persist. Instead, for Hume, ‘[w]hatever convincing arguments philosophers may fancy they can produce to establish the belief of objects independent of the mind, ‘tis obvious these arguments are known but to very few.’<sup>61</sup> Hume therefore concludes that beliefs about material substance, and theories of double existence pertain *exclusively* to the philosopher, and bear no relevance to how the vulgar consider external objects. In Hume’s words:

‘[P]hilosophers may distinguish betwixt the objects and perceptions of the senses...yet this is a distinction, which is not comprehended by the generality of mankind, who as they perceive only one being, can never assent to the opinion of a double existence’.<sup>62</sup>

This being the case, Hume believes that he has identified an error in philosophical thought about external objects. More specifically, Hume identifies discordance between vulgar belief and philosophical theory about what we can conclude from our perceptions of external objects. Hume therefore states:

‘[P]hilosophers have so far run into this opinion, that they change their system, and distinguish...betwixt perceptions and objects, of which the former are suppos’d to be interrupted, and perishing, and different at every different return; the latter to be uninterrupted, and to preserve a continu’d existence and identity.’<sup>63</sup>

This kind of discordance Hume seeks to rectify and avoid in his own philosophy. As we shall see, Hume reconciles philosophy and vulgar belief through his characterisation of the empire of imagination.

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<sup>60</sup> T.1.4.2.15; SBN 193

<sup>61</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>62</sup> T.1.4.2.32; SBN 202

<sup>63</sup> T.1.4.2.48; SBN 211



## 1.6 Toward a True Philosophy

To be clear, the error that Hume identifies in philosophical thought does not entail doubt about the existence of the external world.<sup>64</sup> Rather, the focus of Hume's doubt is the way that philosophers pretend to know about external objects and their substantiality. In consequence, Hume asserts that there is a need for philosophy to shift its focus from claims about the ontology of the external world, to the psychological question of how the mind interprets perceptions of such a world.

Hume therefore argues that it is necessary to turn philosophy into a 'science of man'. By this, he means a study of the way the human mind interprets impressions, forms ideas and beliefs, and thereby interprets the world in which we reside. For Hume, this new method restores his 'hope for success in our philosophical researches'<sup>65</sup> and abandons the 'tedious lingering method.'<sup>66</sup> Hume proclaims:

'There is not question of importance, whose decision is not compriz'd in the science of man; and there is none, which can be decided with any certainty, before we become acquainted with that science... [T]o explain the principles of human nature, we in effect propose a compleat system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost entirely new.'<sup>67</sup>

Hume distinguishes this new approach, which is grounded in a quest 'to explain the principles of human nature', from others that speculate about the nature of the external world. The latter is a variety of false philosophy, for the reasons discussed above (§ 1.5). The former is the beginning of true philosophy, and a step towards the science of man. In proposing this new method, Hume endeavoured to understand why we have ideas and beliefs about the persistent existence of external objects. More precisely, *how* the operations of the mind (especially imagination) create ideas and beliefs regarding the world and objects therein. For Hume, therefore, it is very important for the philosopher to understand the imagination and the way in which it unifies our experience. I now turn to examine Hume's account of the imagination.

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<sup>64</sup> Hume claims that we must assume that the external world exists (T.1.4.2.1; SBN 187). For scholars who argue that Hume preserves a 'realist' approach to the presence of the external world see: P. Kail, *Projection and Realism in Hume's Philosophy*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2007. See especially pp. 14-17. See also: S. Buckle, 'Hume's Enlightenment Tract: The Unity and Purpose of An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding', Oxford, Oxford Scholarship Online, 2011. Available from University of Sydney Library (Accessed March 18<sup>th</sup>, 2015). See especially pp. 129-140.

<sup>65</sup> T.Intro; SBN xvi

<sup>66</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *ibid.*

## Chapter Two – The Empire of Imagination

### **2.0 Introduction**

My focus in this Chapter is Hume's account of how the imagination allows us to construct ideas about the world as we experience it. I argue that the imagination has a vitally important creative function, which Hume refers to as 'the fancy'. This allows for the creation of ideas that do not arise from *direct* experience, but are not necessarily fictitious. In so doing, I argue for an unconventional reading of the Copy Principle. This is because, for Hume, some ideas (such as that of the persistent external object) are not grounded in any directly experienced impressions. As discussed in Chapter One, Hume asserts that we never have an impression of an external object's persistence. Instead, we have separate impressions of it that we unite in our minds, through the fact of resemblance. However, Hume does not consider that the idea of the persistent external object is dispensable. It is necessary for our understanding of the experienced world, and an understanding of human action wherein. The task of this chapter is to unravel these complex aspects within Hume's construction of the mind, especially imagination. In Chapter Three, I use the distinctions made here to examine Hume's theory of belief.

### **2.1 Hume's Copy Principle**

As mentioned in § 1.1, Hume's Copy Principle specifies the way in which *simple* ideas come to fruition. It does not hold, however, as a means for assessing the validity of *all* ideas that arise in the mind.<sup>68</sup> However, the Copy Principle is useful in rejecting two types of ideas, which we might think convey an experienced world to us. The first type comprises ideas that represent purely fictitious entities, such as winged horses. The second are false philosophical ideas, for example those of substance. Hume maintains that both types of ideas are problematic, because we never actually perceive a substance or a winged horse. Hence, there are no sense impressions that

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<sup>68</sup> This is a point made by D. Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Treatise*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1997. For Garrett, Hume does not 'treat the Copy Principle as a priori or as necessary...but instead as an empirical generalisation' (p.55.). A. Baier, *Death and Character: Further Reflections on Hume*, Boston, Harvard University Press, 2008, pp. 138-46, A. Waldow, 'Triggers of Thought: Impressions within Hume's Theory of Mind', in *Logical Analysis and History of Philosophy, David Hume: Epistemology and Metaphysics*, ed. Helen Beebe, Markus Schrink, Germany, Mentis Paperborn, 2010, pp. 110-115, maintain a similar thesis. By contrast, Landy maintains that it is a mistake to see the Copy Principle as 'a mere empirical fact'. On Landy's account Hume's Copy Principle is significant because it allows us to distinguish between two kinds of mental perceptions: impressions and ideas. Thus, for Landy, the Copy Principle is highly important in Hume's arguments. See D. Landy, 'Hume's Impression/Idea Distinction', *Hume Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1, April 2006, pp. 119-39.

may occasion these ideas. For instance, Hume denies that we have the requisite impression to ascribe the idea of material substance to external objects:

‘The idea of substance must therefore be deriv’d from an impression of reflexion, if it really exist. But the impressions of reflexion resolve themselves into our passions and emotions; none of which can possibly represent a substance. We have therefore no idea of substance, distinct from that of a collection of particular qualities, nor have we any other meaning when we either talk or reason concerning it.’<sup>69</sup>

So far this account sounds unproblematic. However, there is a problem when we consider the vulgar idea of the persistent external object. As we have seen, Hume maintains that this idea is not based on any impression of experience. Nonetheless, he claims that this idea is of critical importance for understanding our experiences of the world. Hume represents the dilemma:

‘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.*’<sup>70</sup>

In this passage, Hume asserts that the idea of the persistent external object is viable, because it arises from a natural inclination to embrace the external world as ‘real and durable’. This dilemma, however, poses an interesting philosophical concern. Namely, how does Hume *justify* the necessity of the idea of the persistent existence of external objects, yet dismiss the idea of material substance entirely – when neither of these ideas arise from sense impressions?

## ***2.2 Hume’s Two Types of Reason and Natural Causation***

To answer this, I connect Hume’s characterisation of reason, which relates to philosophical relations, with a further examination of the natural causation. This analysis anticipates the distinction that I set up in § 2.3 between the different sets of ideas that we construct.

Hume distinguishes two kinds of reason: demonstrative and probable.<sup>71</sup> He does so by introducing seven philosophical relations relevant to the extension of human

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<sup>69</sup> T.1.1.6.1; SBN 16

<sup>70</sup> T.1.4.2.29; SBN 197 (my emphasis)

<sup>71</sup> D. Owen in ‘Hume’s Reason’, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, argues that Hume’s distinction between demonstrative and probable reason is similar to Locke’s, but also different in significant ways. Owen explains that for Locke, demonstrative

knowledge. Philosophical relations are those by which we analyse our ideas. These differ from the natural relations that refer to the unconscious connections that the imagination makes between ideas.<sup>72</sup> The philosophical relations are: ‘Resemblance, identity, relations of time and place, proportion in quantity or number, degrees in any quality, contrariety and causation.’<sup>73</sup>

Of these seven, four ‘depend entirely upon the ideas themselves’<sup>74</sup>, and relate to demonstrative reason.<sup>75</sup> These are: ‘resemblance, contrariety, degrees in quality, and proportions in quantity and number.’<sup>76</sup> For Hume, these relations allow the comparison of ideas in *intrinsic* terms relating to their meaning, rather than their objects. Take for example the concept ‘anger’. The idea of anger is *contrary* to the idea of calmness (*contrariety*). In this example, the mind is able to contrast and compare the meaning of ‘anger’ with the meaning of ‘calmness’, to make important conclusions about the differences between these ideas.

There is also an important role for demonstrative reason in what is referred to as Hume’s *Separability Principle*. Hume characterises this principle thus: ‘whatever objects are different are distinguishable, and that whatever objects are distinguishable are separable by thought and imagination.’<sup>77</sup> In this function, demonstrative reason acts to distinguish the different parts of a complex idea. It does so because the four philosophical relations of demonstrative reason are important in comparing ideas themselves. Consequently, demonstrative reason brings to consciousness the separation of one simple idea from another, united in a complex idea. Drawing once more on Hume’s example of the apple, the simple ideas of ‘the taste of an apple’ and ‘the colour of an apple’ are distinguishable in thought because the ideas of ‘taste’ and

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reasoning involves the perceiving of ‘an agreement or disagreement of two ideas, not directly but via one or more intermediate ideas’ (p. 33). As Owen points out, for Locke, probable reason is a form of reasoning that we use when assessing the possible validity of an intuited premise. Moreover, probable reason does not provide knowledge, but rather, ‘belief or opinion’ (p. 49). Owen argues that Hume accepts these definitions, but diverges from Locke in the instance of causal inference. This is because, in Hume, there are no ideas that could serve as the intermediary between a cause to its effects (p. 63). Although I cannot comment on Owen’s interpretation of Locke, I do not agree that Hume’s idea of ‘reason’ is the same as Locke’s in the way that Owen has claimed. Rather, in a very important footnote Hume explicitly denies that reasoning always involves intermediate ideas. Furthermore, if it were the case that reason always involved the use of intermediate ideas it would mean that causal inference is not a species of reason on Hume’s account. In Hume’s words: ‘we may exert our reason without employing more than two ideas, and without having recourse to a third to serve as a medium betwixt them...this inference is not only a true species of reasoning, but the strongest of all others’ T.1.3.7; SBN n96-7. D. Garrett (2001) also raises this point. See: D. Owen, ‘Reason and Commitment Cognition and Commitment in Hume’s Philosophy by Don Garrett’, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 62, No. 1, January 2001, pp. 191-96 Available from University of Sydney Library (accessed 11<sup>th</sup> July, 2014), and D. Garrett, ‘Replies Cognition and Commitment in Hume’s Philosophy’, op. cit., pp. 205-15.

<sup>72</sup> T.1.1.5.1; SBN 13

<sup>73</sup> T.1.3.1.1; SBN 69

<sup>74</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>75</sup> Referred to in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, as ‘Relations of ideas’ (EHU 4.1; SBN 25)

<sup>76</sup> T.1.3.1.3; SBN 70

<sup>77</sup> T.1.1.7.4; SBN 18 (my emphasis)

‘colour’ are themselves distinguishable. This is not to be taken as the claim that we always separate the constituent ideas involved in complex ideas and beliefs. Rather, it is the claim that we only do so when we are analysing a given concept through demonstrative reason.

Hume distinguishes this form of reason from probable reason, which involves the remaining three philosophical relations, and relates directly to the connections *between* objects or events in the experienced world.<sup>78</sup> These relations are ‘identity, the situations in time and place, and causation.’<sup>79</sup> Importantly, these latter relations do not pertain to the comparison of the ideas in intrinsic terms. Rather, they refer to qualities about external objects (or events) and seek to analyse the relations between them, such as constant conjunctions.<sup>80</sup>

It is important to note that causation, as a philosophical and natural relation, plays an important role in analysing and justifying our ideas and beliefs, albeit in different ways. Causation as a philosophical relation refers to *analysing* pairs of associated objects, for example through examining a set of constantly conjoined events. Through this relation, we can assess whether or not a proposition is justified. Causation as a natural relation, however, refers to our natural inclination to associate ideas that *feel* connected, and does not involve any rational assessment. In Hume’s words:

‘[T]ho’ causation be a philosophical relation, as implying contiguity, succession, and constant conjunction, yet ’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.’<sup>81</sup>

Hume phrases the importance of natural causation in terms of custom and proximal connection between previous associations. For Hume, the ‘idea of sinking is so closely connected with that of water, and the idea of suffocating with that of sinking that the mind makes the transition without the assistance of memory.’<sup>82</sup> Thus, ‘*custom operates before we have time for reflexion.*’<sup>83</sup> This alludes to the fact that, for Hume, there is a ‘felt determination’ that signifies to the mind that a causal relation exists between the objects, events or ideas. As such, the causal connection is impressed

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<sup>78</sup> T.1.3.1.1; SBN 69

<sup>79</sup> T.1.3.2.1; SBN 73

<sup>80</sup> Referred to in *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* as ‘Matters of Fact’ (EHU 4. 2; SBN 32)

<sup>81</sup> T.1.3.7.15; SBN 94

<sup>82</sup> T.1.3.8.19; SBN 104

<sup>83</sup> *ibid.* (my emphasis)

upon the mind without reflection because it directly relates to things that we take to represent the world as we experience it. Therefore it relates to how the mind actually makes associations on the basis of past experience, rather than any rational assessment.<sup>84</sup>

Hume introduces an additional explanation: ‘we must necessarily acknowledge, that experience may produce a belief and a judgement...by *a secret operation, and without being once thought of.*’<sup>85</sup> This reinforces Hume’s point that custom activates a response *before* we have time to rationally consider the fact of a causal connection. This relates to our becoming accustomed to constantly conjoined impressions that repeat in the same order. As we have seen, ideas that mirror this order are particularly ‘lively’ and lead to belief. The beliefs that arise from this process are also formed without conscious awareness, and it is here that the secret operation of the mind is most involved. In other words, the secret operation is part of the mental process that allows us to accumulate the instances of constant conjunction in such a way as to bring about the lively belief itself. In this way, Hume takes it that ‘the understanding or imagination can draw inferences from past experience, without reflecting on it; much more without forming any principle concerning it, or reasoning upon that principle.’<sup>86</sup>

### ***2.3 The fanciful imagination***

With these operations of the mind in place I now turn to explain the functions of the creative imagination, and how this helps to unravel Hume’s use of the Copy Principle. Hume refers to the creative imagination as the fancy. In Hume’s words:

‘Tis plain, that in the course of our thinking, and in the constant revolution of our ideas, our imagination runs easily from one idea to any other that resembles it, and *that this quality alone is to the fancy a sufficient bond and association.*’<sup>87</sup>

The fancy has a special character in the formation of many of our ideas. Hume characterises this role in two distinct ways. The first is closely aligned with natural associative tendencies, especially causation, and is integral to forming ideas about the world. This I call the *critical fancy*. The second is aligned with the creation of

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<sup>84</sup> For more on the distinction between natural and philosophical causation see: D. Owen, ‘Hume and the Mechanics of Mind: Impressions, Ideas and Association’ (ed.) D. Fate Norton & J. Taylor, *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009, pp. 70-104

<sup>85</sup> T.1.3.8.19; SBN 104 (emphasis in original)

<sup>86</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> T.1.1.4.1-2; SBN 10-11

fictitious ideas and beliefs that are unnecessary to ‘the conduct of life’. This I refer to as *fictitious fancy*.<sup>88</sup> Hume explains the difference:

‘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.’<sup>89</sup>

Hume connects these two functions with the creation of four types of ideas:

- (I) Purely fictional ideas that cannot be conceived as part of the observed world – such as ideas of winged horses. We consider this as a purely fictional combination of ideas, because we have never experienced the ideas in the imagined combination, while nothing in our actual experience leads us to believe that such experiences could ever be had.
- (II) Ideas that are mistakenly incorporated into our picture of what exists in the experienced world. This is where I believe that doctrines of false philosophy, such as those of material substance, reside.
- (III) Ideas that refer to specific items within the world, that we have not yet experienced but that we take as possible in our future experience. We consider these ideas as principally experience-able because this combination of simple ideas fits into the picture of the world that we have so far formed, on the basis of our actual experiences.
- (IV) Ideas that refer to foundational aspects of the experienced world in which we act, even though there may be no direct impression of that idea. This is where the idea of the persistent existence of external objects resides.

The first two types of ideas are products of *fictitious fancy*. The latter two types are products of *critical fancy*. In this critical function, fancy mixes with our probable reasoning to confirm or deny if an idea conforms to the overall concept of the experienced world, and what exists therein. However, the idea itself is formed through natural causal association.

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<sup>88</sup> A. Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments*, Boston, Harvard University Press, 1991, refers to this as ‘free imaginings’ (p.31) or ‘free fancy’ (p. 81). Instead, I have opted to use the term ‘fictitious fancy’ because this avoids the potentially misleading connotation that the creations of fictitious fancy are not tied to the original impressions in some way. Rather, the ingredient ideas are derived from original impressions, but the combination of these ingredients mean that the new idea is itself not revealed in experience.

<sup>89</sup> T.1.4.4.1; SBN 225

Before discussing the critical fancy further, it is necessary to discuss the nature of fictitious fancy. The fictitious fancy creates ideas that are very different from those of critical fancy, as far as Hume is concerned. Type (I) comprises purely fictional ideas, in the sense that they are produced by combining ideas in such a way that the new idea does not fit into the world as we have experienced it. These ideas are evident in Hume's mention of 'winged horses, fiery dragons and monstrous giants':

'The fables we meet with in poems and romances put this entirely out of question. Nature there is totally confounded. And nothing mentioned but winged horses, fiery dragons and monstrous giants. Nor will this *liberty of the fancy appear strange*, when we consider, that all our ideas are copy'd from our impressions, and that there are not any two impressions which are perfectly inseparable...Wherever the imagination perceives a difference among ideas, it can easily produce a separation. As all simple ideas may be separated by the imagination and *may be united again in what form it pleases*.<sup>90</sup>

In the case of the winged horse the imagination combines the distinct ideas (arising from sensory experience) of 'wings' and 'horses' to create a new idea that is not represented in our sensory experience – the idea of 'winged horses'. When compared to the experienced world we find that there are no conjunctions of ideas to which this particular combination correlates - it does not fit with how we have experienced 'horses' or 'things with wings' in the world. As such, this combination of simple ideas results in a complex idea that does not *cohere* with our picture of the experienced world, and the way in which it behaves. This is not to be taken as the claim that the existence of such an entity is *absolutely* impossible: it is the claim that we have no good reason to believe that it exists in the world as we experience it.<sup>91</sup> To this end, Hume claims that we dismiss this type of idea as trivial:

'Poets have form'd what they call a poetical system of things, *which tho' it be believ'd neither by themselves nor readers, is commonly esteem'd a sufficient foundation for any fiction*. We have been so much accusom'd to the names of Mars, Jupiter, Venus ... the constant repetition of these ideas makes them enter into the mind with facility, and prevail upon the fancy, without influencing the judgment.'<sup>92</sup>

Hume, however, indicates a problem here. More specifically, sometimes we incorrectly 'assent to...trivial suggestion[s] of the fancy.'<sup>93</sup> Where this happens, the fancy may 'lead us into such errors, absurdities, and obscurities, that we must at last

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<sup>90</sup> T.1.1.3.4; SBN 10 (my emphasis)

<sup>91</sup> T.1.2.2.8; SBN 32

<sup>92</sup> T.1.3.10.8; SBN 121 (my emphasis)

<sup>93</sup> T.1.4.7.9; SBN 267



become ashamed of our credulity.’<sup>94</sup> Crucially, he follows this with the assertion that ‘*nothing has been the occasion of more mistakes among philosophers.*’<sup>95</sup>

Here Hume refers to ideas of Type (II), which include the false philosophical doctrines of substance. To better understand how this type of idea is formed we need to tie this account with the principles of resemblance and contiguity. As already mentioned (§ 1.2), these principles allow the mind to act without the conception of the experienced world. Where this happens the idea created belongs to fictitious fancy. As indicated in the quotes above, however, this process runs into trouble when an idea of fictitious fancy *feels* as though it actually represents the world as we experience it. Thus the mistake arises because the idea is interpreted in a way that it projects the works of the fictitious fancy onto the conception of the experienced world.

In relying upon doctrines of material substance, Hume claims that the philosopher makes this error when he adds to the vulgar idea (that objects have a continued existence) the false fact that this is *caused* by an object’s substantiality. This is because the mind, through fictitious fancy, has combined ideas about continuity in perception and external objects, and *falsely* adds to this an idea of material substance. When, on reflection, Hume finds that we cannot have any idea of substance at all because there are no impressions to which it correlates. In Hume’s words, ‘the idea of a substance...is nothing but a collection of simple ideas, *that are united by the imagination.*’<sup>96</sup>

This is where Hume parallels the ‘trivial’ feature of fancy with mistakes among philosophers. More precisely, the idea of substance arises through combining ideas in fictitious fancy. Hume further claims that where an idea of fictitious fancy is taken to represent some *real* phenomena, we can use the Copy Principle to show that the ideas to which the concept relates do not correlate with experience in any meaningful way. If we can accept this then we can begin to make sense of Hume’s use of the Copy Principle as a fictitious idea detector against ideas generated in fictitious fancy.

In contrast to the function of fictitious fancy, the critical fancy deals with the other two types of ideas, (III) and (IV), as enumerated above. Turning to the first of these

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<sup>94</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>95</sup> *ibid.* (my emphasis)

<sup>96</sup> T.1.1.6.2; SBN 16 (my emphasis)

types, there are ideas of things that we can create and deem *empirically* possible, without having experienced the idea that arises from such a combination. We can do so because the kind of combination involved here closely resembles our experiences of items within the world, and the way in which they behave. Consider, for example, that I hold ideas of a particular shade of red, and of what it takes for something to be a pair of scissors. These are two entirely distinct ideas copied from my impressions of red things and scissors in the world. Assuming that I have never observed any such red scissors, if someone described to me a pair of scissors as being a particular shade of red, I may combine these distinct ideas in the imagination. In this case I *feel* that the red scissors *might exist* because from past experience I *know* that objects, like scissors (i.e. other items of stationary), can be produced in different colours. As this is so, the combination of ideas that results in the ‘red scissors’ coheres with, and resembles, other ideas about (and of) objects that I have encountered in the world, and how they have behaved. Notably, Hume confirms that in many cases ‘our complex ideas never had impressions, that corresponded to them, and that many of our complex impressions never are exactly copied in ideas.’<sup>97</sup>

The combination of ideas involved in the idea of the ‘red scissors’ differs from the combination involved in the ‘winged horse’. This is because, in the latter case, I do not have any experience that the winged horse might resemble, or cohere with in the world as I experience it. The red scissors, however, are deemed as empirically possible *precisely* because this combination coheres with other items in the world and the way in which they behave. To this end, Hume allows that we can generate empirically possible ideas, without entailing that we need to have had experience of what we imagine, providing that the combination coheres with other ideas concerning the experienced world.

Turning to Type (IV), it is here that we are able to generate the idea of the persistent external object. Recall, in § 1.3, my mentioning that Hume maintains that our impressions of external objects are ‘interrupted’ and ‘perishing’. Moreover, for Hume the impressions of external objects are not experienced as interconnected, or persisting. Nonetheless, the vulgar firmly believe that objects persist in their existence.

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<sup>97</sup> T.1.1.1.5; SBN 3

Hume considers that one function of the creative imagination is necessary to our ‘conduct in life’. This creative function relates to ideas that arise through the natural association, and which relay the experienced world to us. Hume refers to the felt naturalness of association between some ideas in the following way:

‘[N]othing wou’d be more unaccountable than the operations of that faculty, *were it not guided by some universal principles, which render it, in some measure, uniform with itself in all times and places.* Were ideas entirely loose and unconnected, chance alone wou’d join them; and ’tis impossible the same simple ideas should fall regularly into complex ones (as they commonly do) without some bond of union among them, some associating quality, by which one idea naturally introduces another.’<sup>98</sup>

Given that I have aligned this with the general role of the critical fancy, it follows that there is also generated the specific idea of the persistent external object – because this idea is vital to our understanding of the world (the ‘foundation of all our thoughts and actions’), and arises through the process of natural association. Here, we can see that the critical fancy allows a transition from the fact of resemblance between separate impressions of external objects, to the idea of such objects persisting. In Hume’s words:

‘Whoever wou’d explain the origin of the *common* opinion concerning the continu’d and distinct existence of body, must take the mind in its *common* situation, and must proceed upon the supposition, that our perceptions are our only objects, and continue to exist even when they are not perceiv’d. Tho’ this opinion be false, ’tis the most natural of any, and has alone any primary recommendation to the fancy.’<sup>99</sup>

Admittedly, Hume’s explanation complicates the story, because he speaks of false opinions. The central point, however, is that the Humean imagination distinguishes between legitimate ideas and purely fictitious ones by reference to natural association. This is because there is a major difference between the fictitious function and the critical function of the imagination, whereby the latter is associated with natural tendencies.

This approach is supported in the account given by Waldow when she argues that ‘the naturalness of the process underlying the formation of ideas [is what] matters for their discrimination’.<sup>100</sup> Waldow takes it that the naturalness of association allows for the mind to ‘form complex thoughts (about things that we may believe to exist) that are

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<sup>98</sup> T.1.1.4.1; SBN 10 (my emphasis)

<sup>99</sup> T.1.2.4.37; SBN 213 (emphasis in original)

<sup>100</sup> A. Waldow, 2010, op. cit., p117

stable enough to be repeated.’<sup>101</sup> In other words, there is a ‘secret tie’ that holds between ideas that we take to be representative of the experienced world; and thus take to be *real*. This is important because it explains that ideas that we believe correspond with the experienced world become associated in a *distinct manner*, precisely because they are in accordance with our habitual exposure to it and objects therein.

In line with this, Baier suggests that natural associative relations are key to understanding Hume’s arguments about how ideas from this process are different from ideas of ‘free fancy’, or what I have called fictitious fancy. Baier explains: ‘when we are subject to association by contiguity or by “free fancy” resemblance, or when we freely “make up our minds” are the influences on us, not what determines our mind. But in inference we *feel* that we are determined.’<sup>102</sup> On this account, naturally associated relations, take hold because they *are* closely related with experience, hence *feel* closely related to the conception of the external world. This is precisely because the mind feels a special force, which Hume has described as a ‘secret operation’ or ‘natural propensity’. Even in the case where the idea has not itself been experienced, for example the persistent external object, the ‘secret operation’ is also present in giving rise to the feeling that an idea created by critical fancy is *necessary* for us to hold when engaging with the world through experience. As we have already seen, this goes awry, when some philosophers go further and incorporate the fiction of material substance into the picture of the world.

From the above, it is evident that Hume’s empire of imagination performs two different functions in forming ideas: the fictitious and the critical. Under the fictitious fancy we have two types of ideas: those which are purely fictional, (in that they do not relate to the world as experienced), and those that are fictitious in origin but are falsely understood to pertain to the external world (such as the concept of material substance). In relation to the critical fancy, there are also two types of ideas. First, those that the imagination allows us to envision, and that we can potentially experience through impressions. Second, are ideas such as that of the persistent external object, which has no commensurate impression, but, nevertheless, is

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<sup>101</sup> *ibid.*, p.116

<sup>102</sup> A. Baier, 1991, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-2

necessary to our understanding of the experienced world. I now turn to consider these two functions of the fancy in the context of beliefs.

## Chapter Three: Hume on Belief and Justification

### **3.0 Introduction**

To begin this chapter we must first acknowledge that propositions that involve purely fictitious ideas do not, strictly speaking, constitute beliefs for Hume. As we have seen in the previous chapter (§ 2.3), propositions that refer to these kinds of ideas are not considered as an empirical possibility in the experienced world. Therefore, it is only the other three types of ideas; specifically, those that are taken to refer to the experienced world (§ 2.3) that Hume considers as the foundation of belief. Here Gaskin's observations are important. Gaskin remarks, that for Hume there are strictly speaking two kinds of beliefs: *reasonable beliefs* and *unreasonable beliefs*. Gaskin adds, however, that straddling the bridge between these distinct kinds are *natural beliefs*. As Gaskin puts it, 'neither the excessively sceptical philosopher, nor anyone else, can *act* in the world unless he has these beliefs of naive common sense.'<sup>103</sup>

I propose that *reasonable beliefs* are those propositions that (through the exercise of the critical fancy) purport to be about specific objects and situations in the experienced world. *Unreasonable beliefs*, also make a statement about the world. However, these beliefs are fictitious in origin and are based on ideas from the fictitious fancy. *Natural beliefs*, are a product of the critical fancy, but relate to ideas that we cannot experience. Nevertheless, these beliefs naturally follow from our experiences with the world, and in this sense are produced *with necessity* in the minds of all people. Here the manner of the production of ideas becomes a principle that can justify beliefs. The differences between these kinds of belief enable Hume to shed his philosophical melancholy at the end of Book One.

### **3.1 Reasonable beliefs**

I first consider the category of reasonable beliefs. As Loeb points out, these beliefs are recognised as relating to specific objects and events in the experienced world, and

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<sup>103</sup> J. C. A Gaskin, 'God, Hume and Natural Belief', in *Philosophy*, 49, 1974, p. 268. Available from University of Sydney Library (accessed June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014)

are such that they can be determined as justified or unjustified (or proved ‘true’ or ‘false’), through reason, aided by custom and habit.<sup>104</sup>

As indicated in § 1.2, Hume considers the quality of steadiness as distinctive of belief in general. Hume considers that the first stage in meeting the condition of steadiness in reasonable beliefs is the observation of *regularity* in sense impressions, and the subsequent feeling that a causal relation exists. In order to assess regularity we need to have had prior exposure to a certain event (or events) through experience.<sup>105</sup> If we have had prior experience, and have a further impression of a similar experience, we can *associate* the past experience with the present one because they resemble and are presented in a ‘regular order’. Where this happens we feel that such impressions and events are *constantly conjoined*. Thus our imagination naturally assents to the conclusion of a causal relation. This gives rise to the feeling that a belief is justified. Hume explains:

‘[F]rom the constant conjunction the objects acquire a union in the imagination. When the impression of one becomes present to us, we immediately form an idea of its usual attendant; and consequently we may establish this as one part of the definition of opinion or belief, that ‘tis *an idea related or associated with a present impression*.’<sup>106</sup>

Once this causal union is acquired in the imagination, Hume asserts that we ‘*may draw inferences from the coherence of our perceptions, whether they be true or false; whether they represent nature justly, or be mere illusions of the senses.*’<sup>107</sup>

Within the category of reasonable belief, we are able to reflect upon a specific belief and determine whether we are justified in holding it or not, even if it is anchored by the constant conjunctions. For example, the belief that *coffee alleviates tiredness* arises through a natural causal association between the experience of coffee consumption and the subsequent relief of tiredness. Once the belief is formed through the processes described above (§ 1.3) the belief can then be examined by probable reason to determine whether it is justified or not. The fact that the mind has naturally formed an association through the imagination does not mean that the belief itself

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<sup>104</sup> L. Loeb first suggests this in ‘Hume on Stability, Justification, and Unphilosophical Probability’ in *The Journal of the History of Philosophy*, vol. 33, is. 1, pp. 101-132, Available from University of Sydney Library (accessed April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2015). This argument also appears in *Stability and Justification in Hume’s Treatise*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2002, and L. Loeb, *Reflection and the Stability of Belief: Essays on Descartes, Hume, and Reid*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2010, see especially pp.143-165.

<sup>105</sup> T.1. 3. 6. 3; SBN 87

<sup>106</sup> T.1.3.6.21; SBN 93 (emphasis in original)

<sup>107</sup> T.1.3.5.2; SBN 84 (my emphasis)

*must* be a just representation of the world. It only means that the belief itself arose from the way we have interpreted our experience. This being the case, I may employ probable reasoning to determine if I am in fact justified in holding the belief that *coffee alleviates tiredness* as a causal proposition. Therefore, the role of probable reason here is to examine the beliefs and determine whether or not they are justified.

### ***3. 2 Distinguishing Unreasonable beliefs from Natural beliefs***

Unreasonable beliefs also purport to be about the external world, but their composition involves ideas which *themselves* have a fictional content that is not causally related to our experience in any relevant way. Therefore, these beliefs are entirely unjustified.

Hume considers philosophical doctrines concerning material substance to be of this ilk. As noted in Chapter One, Hume regards doctrines of material substance as unhelpful for philosophy, for reasons including that such doctrines are based on fictitious ideas about unperceived substance. Therefore, Hume concludes that such beliefs cannot be viably attributed to the world as we experience it, nor does our understanding of the world rely on such a belief.

However, an ambiguity becomes evident here. As raised in Chapter Two, Hume contrasts false philosophical doctrines of substance, with the *belief in the persistent existence of external objects*. As noted, these ideas are created by separate functions of fancy. As we have seen, when explaining the role of fancy in relation to the persistent external object Hume asserts that this idea arises from natural associative tendencies.<sup>108</sup> In contrast, when speaking of false philosophical doctrines, particularly of material substance, Hume argues that philosophers extend beyond their natural inclinations and are ‘guided by every trivial propensity of the imagination’.<sup>109</sup> Hume asserts that ‘[w]e must pardon ...poets, because they profess to follow implicitly the suggestions of their fancy: But what excuse shall we find to justify our philosophers in so signal a weakness?’<sup>110</sup> Following this passage, Hume introduces the clarification between his two senses of imagination:

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<sup>108</sup> T.1.4.2.35; SBN 204

<sup>109</sup> T.1.4.3.12-4; SBN 224-5

<sup>110</sup> *ibid.*



‘[T]he imagination, according to my own confession, being the ultimate judge of all systems of philosophy, I am unjust in blaming the antient philosophers for making use of that faculty, and allowing themselves to be entirely guided by it in their reasonings. In order to justify myself, I must distinguish in the imagination betwixt the principles which are permanent, irresistable, and universal... [a]nd the principles which are changeable, weak, and irregular’.<sup>111</sup>

It is important to understand the difference here. The philosophers claim that a material substance explains the feeling of a continued existence, extends beyond natural inclination, and follows the weak and changeable features of imagination. This, for Hume, is an error; in the sense that it does not follow that having the concept of the experienced world necessarily requires this idea. Yet, Hume does not come to the same conclusion regarding the belief in the persistent existence of external objects. Instead, he introduces a third category of beliefs, that he deems natural. These are necessary for any understanding of human action, and follow the ‘permanent’ and ‘universal’ features of imagination, and include beliefs about the persistence of external objects.

Some commentators, however, have argued that Hume doubts the veracity of natural beliefs to the extent that he deems them ultimately false. Mark Collier, for instance, points out that ‘on the one hand, the idea of continued existence must arise from the senses, yet on the other, the senses do not directly deliver this information.’<sup>112</sup> For Collier, the solution to this puzzle lies in establishing what function of the imagination is responsible in covering up the ‘gappiness’ in our perceptions. Collier draws on Hume’s arguments about how resembling perceptions provide a propensity to omit an interruption between impressions, which therefore adds continuity to them. For Collier, a similar exercise occurs when we assume that external objects persist. Where this happens, Collier asserts that there has been a *fallacy of substitution*: the continuity in impressions is taken as applying to continuity of external objects. As the imagination is responsible for this ‘error’, Collier maintains that Hume distrusts this faculty. Collier explains:

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<sup>111</sup> T.1.4.4.1; SBN 225

<sup>112</sup> M. Collier, ‘Filling in the Gaps: Hume and Connectionism on the Continued Existence of Unperceived Objects’, *Hume Studies*, vol. XXV, No. 1 and 2, April/November, 1999, p. 156. Available from University of Sydney Library (Accessed 30<sup>th</sup> July, 2014)

‘The reason why the faculty of imagination is unreliable, according to Hume, is that it causes us to make what we might call a ‘fallacy of substitution’...we have a propensity to substitute closely related ideas, without any conscious awareness that we have done so. The imagination is untrustworthy, in other words, because it not only associates ideas, but it also runs them together’.<sup>113</sup>

Collier’s *fallacy of substitution* arises because the Humean imagination glosses over the interruption between perceptions through a kind of ‘cognitive momentum’, inasmuch as it has a tendency to pursue a thought like ‘a galley set in motion’.<sup>114</sup> For Collier, the imagination thus *supplements* the gap by enacting the principles of association to infer constancy and coherence in objects of the experienced world. Thus, for Collier ‘[i]t is in this way that the imagination “seduces” us to attributing a continued existence to our perceptions. As Hume puts it, there is a “natural propensity of the imagination” to make this “error”.’<sup>115</sup> In this way, for Collier, the natural belief in the persistent existence of external objects is unjustified for the same reason as beliefs about material substance. This is precisely because, for Collier, in both cases the imagination gets the beliefs off the ground by adding an impression to the world that we have never actually experienced. With regards to the belief that external objects persist, the idea ‘supplemented’ by the imagination is that of persistence. In the case of material substance, it is this unperceived substance.

Although Collier’s account of substitution is useful in understanding what happens with Type II ideas (such as that of material substance), in my view it is mistaken to attribute the same problem to the idea of the persistent existence of external objects. While I agree that there *is* a function for the imagination in both cases, specifically of fancy, I do not agree with Collier’s assertion that this process leads systematically to ‘error’ in the case of natural beliefs. Nor do I accept his claim that this leads Hume to distrust the imagination. This is because at no point does Hume *doubt* the necessity of natural beliefs for the vulgar, even though he may indicate some doubt regarding the reliability of the process that gets us to such beliefs. To the contrary, Hume asserts that the belief in the persistent existence of external objects is *natural*:

‘An easy transition or passage of the imagination, along the ideas of these different and interrupted perceptions, is almost the same disposition of mind with that in which

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<sup>113</sup> M. Collier, ‘Two Puzzles in Hume’s Epistemology’ in *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 4, October, 2008, p. 303, Available from University of Sydney Library (Accessed 27<sup>th</sup> June, 2014). Although this quote comes from a later paper, Collier’s thesis regarding Hume’s *fallacy of substitution* remains consistent in both essays.

<sup>114</sup> M. Collier, 1999, op. cit., p. 159

<sup>115</sup> M. Collier, 2008, op. cit., p. 304

we consider one constant and uninterrupted perception. 'Tis therefore very natural for us to mistake one for the other.'<sup>116</sup>

Moreover, although Hume states that this is a 'mistake', he also claims that: 'The persons, who entertain this opinion concerning the identity of our resembling perceptions, are in general all the unthinking and unphilosophical part of mankind.'<sup>117</sup>

In both quotes, we have a reference to the fact that the process stems from the natural inclinations of human beings. This is because Hume claims that the inferences resulting from natural associative process are *justified* because they relate to how we *actually* perceive the external world, and relate to ideas about what exists, in the way discussed in § 2.3.

What Collier points out, however, is an alleged similarity in mental processes between the creation of fictional concepts and natural beliefs; namely, that both are created by fancy. However, Collier fails to distinguish between the two distinct functions of fancy. Beliefs about the existence of external objects, as distinct from philosophical fictions like the doctrine of material substance, are based upon a *just* enactment of the *critical* fancy, because of the relationship this form of fancy has with natural association.

In my view, Collier's analysis cannot be sustained. It is true that at some points in the *Treatise* Hume casts doubt upon those natural beliefs which concern the persistent existence of external objects through time, the external world, and the concept of space and time. For instance, Hume writes that '[t]he most vulgar philosophy informs us, that no external object can make itself known to the mind immediately, and without the interposition of an image or perception.'<sup>118</sup>

However, Hume is saying that we cannot prove through reason the validity of the idea of the persistent existence of external objects. This is different from his concurrent claim that we need for the imagination to connect the separate impressions of objects, so that we may construct a picture of the external world. This process is essential because it allows us to 'form a kind of system'<sup>119</sup> of past impressions and ideas in which 'every particular of that system join'd, to the present impressions, we are

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<sup>116</sup> T.1.4.2.50; SBN 204

<sup>117</sup> T.1.4.2.51; SBN 205

<sup>118</sup> T.1.4.5.18; SBN 239

<sup>119</sup> T.1.3.9.5; SBN 108

pleas'd to call a reality. <sup>120</sup> For Hume, this 'reality' is something that we need to take for granted in our cognition and experience.<sup>121</sup> This indicates that although Hume raises certain philosophical doubts regarding the extent to which we may justify the belief in the persistent existence of external objects through the use of reason (§ 1.3), he soon recognises that this doubt would leave us with an incoherent conception of the world as we experience it.

One way to address this issue is to assert that Hume's use of the term 'natural' in relation to belief refers to those that cannot be separated from human nature in any meaningful way. McCormick, for instance, suggests that for Hume 'the imagination causes us to attribute an external existence to these objects'<sup>122</sup> and determines us to believe that they persist, even though it is something that we cannot prove. This is because '[w]ithout such a propensity we would have no way to ascribe identity to any object. '<sup>123</sup>

If this is right, then when Hume describes natural beliefs as 'mistaken' or 'false', he is asserting that when the imagination glosses over the interruption of perceptions the resultant belief is *false* according to the standards of reason. Nonetheless, this falsity does not exhaust the possible field of justification. Although false, natural beliefs are not completely unjustified, because they arise from, and are thus *justified* by natural associative relations. This arises through the union acquired in the critical fancy; through the generation of ideas that we take as relating to real phenomena. If we understand this as a natural process, then we can see that there is no error in holding beliefs about the persistent external object.

This analysis introduces a contrast between different types of doubts that map onto different categories of belief. One form of doubt applies to false philosophical use of natural beliefs; we ought not to use beliefs about the persistent existence of external objects to speculate about the essential ontological nature of external objects themselves. The other doubt, which is only temporary, applies to the validity of natural belief. Ultimately, however, Hume claims that we cannot sustain *this* latter

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<sup>120</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> T.1.4.2.1; SBN 187

<sup>122</sup> M. McCormick, 'Hume on Natural Belief and Original Principles', in *Hume Studies*, Volume 19, Number 1, April 1993, p. 110. Available from University of Sydney Library (accessed June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014)

<sup>123</sup> *ibid.*

form of doubt because it results in an incoherent idea of how we could construct a picture of the experienced world. In Hume's words:

'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. Now there being here an opposition betwixt the notion of the identity of resembling perceptions, and the interruption of their appearance, the mind must be uneasy in that situation, and will naturally seek relief from the uneasiness...it must look for relief by sacrificing the one to the other. But as the smooth passage of our thought along our resembling perceptions makes us ascribe to them an identity, *we can never without reluctance yield up that opinion.*'<sup>124</sup>

As indicated, one cannot relinquish natural beliefs about the persistence of external objects without uneasy feelings about this exercise – there seems something quite unnatural about relinquishing such beliefs.

This point is supported in the account given by Garrett. For Garrett, although Hume argues that vulgar natural beliefs are not entirely provable, he consistently maintains that they are *necessary*. In Garrett's words:

'Hume does not argue or assert, that *most or all* of the beliefs produced by anyone of the mechanism are false...He also holds that the philosophical system like the vulgar one, arises *through* false suppositions, or illusions, concerning the numerical identity of resembling impressions. But at no point does he argue or assert that there are no continued and distinct bodies in existence.'<sup>125</sup>

My analysis is consistent with Garrett's comments. To reinforce this further I wish to draw attention to Hume's remark: 'Here then I find myself absolutely and necessarily determin'd to live, and talk, and act like other people in the common affairs of life.'<sup>126</sup>

Hume is, in my view, referring to the idea that his system is in line with this assumption of the continuity of the external world as *natural*. This is why he remarks at an earlier point in the *Treatise* that: 'the true philosophy approaches nearer to the sentiments of the vulgar, than to those of a mistaken knowledge.'<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> T.1.1.4.37; SBN 205-6

<sup>125</sup> D. Garrett, 1999, op. cit., p. 214

<sup>126</sup> T.1.4.7.16; SBN 269

<sup>127</sup> T.1.3.3.10-11; SBN 222-3

### 3.3 Unreasonable Beliefs

We are now in a position to further consider the nature of unreasonable belief. As we have observed (§ 2.3), Hume asserts that there is a difference in union and feeling between ideas that we take to represent the experienced world, and those that are united at random in fictitious fancy. If we did not have this unity, we would not be able to distinguish ideas that ought to become beliefs, from those purely fanciful ideas.

Concurrently, Hume maintains that although we hold a stable picture of the experienced world, the imagination can jump beyond that conception, so that we may envision whatever we please, through fictitious fancy. The problem with this ability of the fancy is that this process may also produce a special set of ideas that seem to fit into our picture of the world as we experience it, but are fictitious in origin.

As also discussed, the principles of contiguity and resemblance play an essential role in forming the fictitious ideas in this instance. However, what needs to be added is the role causation plays in forming unreasonable belief. As noted, natural causation applies only to those ideas that feel closely connected with our picture of the world – for instance, regarding the connection between fire and smoke, this association is only come to through the experience of such a connection. However, there are times when the category of causation is misused as a philosophical relation – especially when we create an idea in fictitious fancy using resemblance and contiguity. This happens because these principles of association ‘assist...cause and effect’<sup>128</sup> to ‘infix the related idea with more force in the imagination.’<sup>129</sup> Where an idea is ‘infix’d’ in this way, it becomes a belief.

In the case of material substance, philosophers form propositions through a false application of causation. Thus, for example, the philosopher falsely assumes that the persistent existence of external objects (which is justified) must have a further cause: namely, a material substance underlies our perceptions of external objects. For Hume, however, because this idea is purely fictional the resultant belief in material substance does not have the capacity to be *justified* at all. Hume thus concludes that the

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<sup>128</sup> T.1.3.9.7; SBN 109

<sup>129</sup> *ibid.*

‘unintelligible chimera of a substance... *is entirely incomprehensible, and yet is deriv'd from principles as natural as any of these above-explain'd.*’<sup>130</sup>

Hume asserts that philosophers have therefore failed to recognise that they have extended beyond natural tendency, and have instead imposed a fictitious idea onto perceptions of external objects. Subsequently, they have extended into the realm of fictitious fancy. This is precisely a move made by Hume in the following passage:

‘[P]hilosophers, instead of drawing a just inference from this observation, and concluding, that we have no idea of power or agency, separate from the mind, and belonging to causes; I say, instead of drawing this conclusion, they frequently search for the qualities, in which this agency consists, and are displeas'd with every system, which their reason suggests to them, in order to explain it.’<sup>131</sup>

In addition to drawing a ‘just inference’ like the vulgar, (i.e. that objects have a continued and distinct existence), the mistaken philosopher draws a further and false inference from this that cannot be confirmed by experience at all (i.e. that these perceptions are caused by an unperceived substance). This is how we get to the problem of metaphysical speculation, and how we see that the incorrect intermixing of the function of the fancy has clouded philosophical discourse, and thus prevented a true philosophy. I suggest that this is why, as pointed out earlier, Hume asserts that ‘nothing is more dangerous to reason than the flights of the imagination, and nothing has been the occasion of more mistakes among philosophers’.<sup>132</sup> Because, when philosophers accept ‘trivial suggestions’ of the *fictitious* fancy, they are lead into errors, as discussed in Chapter Two.

For Hume, there are different processes underlying the formation of reasonable, natural and unreasonable beliefs. In the next chapter I show how this discussion of belief is vitally important for understanding Hume’s sceptical crisis, especially the way in which Hume uses the critical and fictitious fancy to emerge from his doubts.

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<sup>130</sup> T.1.4.3.8-9; SBN 222 (my emphasis)

<sup>131</sup> T.1.4.3.11; SBN 223

<sup>132</sup> T.1.4.7.10; SBN 267

## Chapter Four – Revisiting the Conclusion to Book One

Many scholars have focused on Hume's sceptical remarks at the conclusion to Book One in order to highlight his disappointment regarding the frailty of human cognition, and hence his disappointment with his investigations. In so doing, these scholars have argued that Hume cannot trust the imagination as he has characterised it, and therefore proceeds with 'mitigated scepticism' because of this distrust. Hume's despair at the end of Book One is usually used as evidence of this position. Contrary to this interpretation, using the arguments made in this work, I claim that Hume's emergence from the brief doubts in the conclusion to Book One is not irrational or inconsistent. Rather, I argue that Hume emerges from these doubts because he realises that his system achieves what he had sought; in particular, he asserts that it does not lapse into the same mistakes made by philosophers before him.

In pursuing this interpretation, I argue against readings of Hume that assert that he continues with Book Two and Three purely out of philosophical interest, rather than because he has established a firm foundation at the end of Book One. Collier, for example, argues that at the end of Book One Hume finds that his arguments leave him in a position wherein the imagination has such propensity for error that Hume is prepared to throw 'his books and papers into the fire'.<sup>133</sup> In the end, however, Collier concludes that Hume resolved his crisis by accepting the 'errors' of the imagination and the consequences that follow from them. For Collier, Hume continued because he found that we have the capacity to correct errors to the best of our ability. Thus, for Collier, Hume continues with his philosophical pursuit purely to 'satisfy his curiosity about human nature'<sup>134</sup> and merely 'hopes for success',<sup>135</sup> rather than continuing because he believes that he has achieved a successful system.

Fogelin adopts a similar view towards Hume's crisis and conclusion. For Fogelin, Hume recognised the frailty of human cognition and: '[i]f that is the kind of mental machinery we have inherited, how then, Hume asks, can we pursue the science of

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<sup>133</sup> M. Collier, 2008, op. cit., p. 301

<sup>134</sup> *ibid.*, p. 311

<sup>135</sup> *ibid.*, p. 312



human nature with hope of success?’<sup>136</sup> Fogelin reads Hume’s resolution as a realization that the science of man is something that is what we *ought* to hope for, rather than something that Hume has achieved. Fogelin’s answer to Hume’s hope for philosophy is: ‘that we pursue it in a skeptical spirit, modestly, with circumscribed goals, and do so primarily for the pleasure it can bring.’<sup>137</sup> Notice, however, that both positions place Hume in a situation whereby he realises the alleged weakness of the science of man, and nevertheless pursues his goal in naïve hope. Those who wish to argue this position refer to the following comments by Hume: ‘I must yield to the current of nature, in submitting to my senses and understanding’<sup>138</sup>, which leads to a ‘blind submission I shew most perfectly my sceptical disposition and principles.’<sup>139</sup>

I do not think the assertion that Hume is here referring to a vain hope for his philosophical pursuit is accurate. Rather, as I read it, Hume expresses submission to the limits that philosophical enquiry has for understanding the ‘current of nature’. The distinction is subtle, but nevertheless present. Collier and Fogelin use the above statements to show that Hume thought his system, and faculty of imagination could only get him so far. In my reading, by contrast, Hume accepts the limits that reason has for understanding the source of certain key ideas which we need in order to have an overall conception of the external world. As we have seen in Chapter Two, Hume describes this factor as a secret action of the imagination. Hume has accepted this action of the imagination in generating the idea of the persistent existence of external objects because of the reasons given in Chapter Three; namely that it is necessary for us to understand our experiences of the world and completely in line with the natural inclinations of human beings.

With this in mind, I claim that we ought to read Hume’s crisis, and the subsequent rejuvenation of hope, as an affirmation that his system can resolve the sceptical issues he has raised at the Conclusion to Book One. This is precisely because although Hume finds that ‘reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds’<sup>140</sup> he has delivered, what he considers, as a true description of the science of man. Thus, he asserts that

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<sup>136</sup> R. Fogelin, ‘The Conclusion to Book One’, *Hume’s Skeptical Crisis: A Textual Study*, Oxford Scholarship Online, 2009, p. 1. Available from University of Sydney Library (Accessed February 20<sup>th</sup>, 2015).

<sup>137</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> T.1.4.7.16; SBN 269

<sup>139</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> T.1.4.7.9; SBN 269

‘*human nature herself suffices to that purpose*’<sup>141</sup> of curing ‘this philosophical melancholy.’<sup>142</sup>

The key to this interpretation, as I have shown, is how one interprets the complex role of the imagination – in particular, the dialectic between Hume’s two functions of fancy. Hume states in the conclusion that were it not for the fancy his system of philosophy would collapse:

‘We save ourselves from this total scepticism only by means of that singular and seemingly trivial property of the fancy, by which we enter with difficulty into remote views of things, and are not able to accompany them with so sensible an impression, as we do those, which are more easy and *natural*.’<sup>143</sup>

It is because of the distinction between the ‘trivial’ function of the fanciful imagination, what I have called fictitious fancy, combined with the role of fanciful imagination in providing us with an understanding of an external world, what I have called critical fancy, that Hume has been able to achieve this task.

These considerations enable us to assert that the fancy plays a very important negative role, and equally important positive role in Hume’s system. The fancy plays a negative role, inasmuch as its mischievous nature results in the creation of fictitious ideas, and thus, results in the creation of unreasonable beliefs (such as material substance).<sup>144</sup> This fictitious fancy, however, also creates ideas that we know are clearly fictitious, and thus are easily recognised as inapplicable to our concept of the world. Therefore, these ideas do not become beliefs. Nevertheless, for Hume it is important that the imagination has this capacity to create such fictional ideas. In so doing, we can contrast these ideas with others that *do* relate to the world as we experience it in sense perception. Hume justifies this account by reference to the natural associative mechanisms of the imagination, where causal relations that force the mind to construct the world in a specific way play an especially significant role.

As discussed extensively in Chapter Three, this contrasts Hume’s doubts concerning ‘chimerical systems’ of false philosophy which result from fictitious fancy. However, as we have seen, Hume’s doubts concerning such philosophy, relate to one specific type of idea, which is then used to form false ideas and beliefs about the world. These

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<sup>141</sup> T.1.4.7.9; SBN 269 (my emphasis)

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> T.1.4.7.12; SBN 268 (my emphasis)

<sup>144</sup> T.1.4.7.9; SBN 267

false ideas (types I and II) are very different from the beliefs that arise from natural inclinations (type IV). In the conclusion Hume reasserts this divide:

‘[B]y giving in some particulars a different turn to the speculations of philosophers, and pointing out to them more distinctly those subjects, where alone they can expect assurance and conviction. Human Nature is the only science of man; and yet has been hitherto the most neglected. ’Twill be sufficient for me, if I can bring it a little more into fashion; and the hope of this serves to compose my temper from that spleen, and invigorate it from that indolence.’<sup>145</sup>

The doubts that Hume raises concerning the persistent existence of external objects are of a different order and relate to another exercise. Even though both these types of doubt stem from aspects of Hume’s characterisation of the fanciful imagination, it is important to distinguish the differences between the actions of the imagination here. Specifically, in the former there is a major role for concepts born of fictitious fancy. In the latter, it is the roles of critical fancy together with the secret action of the imagination that is involved.

If this is right, we can see why Hume, in jumping from pessimism to optimism in the conclusion to this part of the *Treatise*, is not making some kind of irrational philosophical move. Rather, he was affirming the overall coherence of his thesis when understood in the way that I have characterised it. He has developed a complex and sophisticated theory of the mind (or understanding) - especially of the imagination and its functions, which he has linked to human nature and natural propensities.

#### ***4.1 Concluding Reflections***

This thesis has sought to examine the role Hume’s faculty of imagination plays in his philosophy, using his sceptical crisis as the key to revealing its importance. What has been found is that the Humean imagination consists in differing functions, which enable him to reveal much of the mystery of the human mind. Hume’s system is rich, complex, and ingenious all at once. In the end, we need our imagination to create ideas in the way that it does. Without the creative role of the imagination, we would not have beliefs about the external world that form a ‘foundation for all our thoughts and actions’. His sceptical crisis is overcome by his recognition that the role of the imagination, as he has characterised it, is a just representation of the natural knowledge of the common man. Hume’s crisis, and subsequent rejuvenation of hope,

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<sup>145</sup> T.1.4.7.15; SBN 273

therefore, is in line with his hope for the *Treatise* – the quest to turn philosophy into a science of man.

I want to respond, however, to some concerns that may be raised about my interpretation. It could be objected, for instance, that Hume does not reject that part of his scepticism concerning beliefs about external objects in the way that I have suggested. For example, in his conclusion Hume states: ‘[i]n all the incidents of life we ought still to preserve our scepticism. If we believe, that fire warms, or water refreshes, ’tis only because it costs us too much pains to think otherwise.’<sup>146</sup>

Hume emphasises the fact that ideas that represent the world as we experience it elicit a degree of liveliness that is transferred to belief. This feeling of liveliness is distinct from ideas of fictional representations that do not become belief. It is my view that we should interpret what he is saying here in *this* context. Hume is focusing upon the fact that when we go along with the critical fancy in supporting beliefs about the persistent existence of external objects, we have certain feelings that this represents our experience of the world. The passage quoted above continues:

‘Nay if we are philosophers, it ought only to be upon sceptical principles, and from an inclination, which we feel to the employing ourselves after that manner. *Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate upon us.*’<sup>147</sup>

In the first sentence, Hume affirms that the philosopher needs to proceed cautiously, and keep in mind the important distinctions concerning the experienced world and the way such a world affects the mind. In the second, he refers to the role of reason and asserts that the correct use of it must relate to ‘some propensity’, which is consistent with our conception of the experienced world. This relates to *critical fancy*. Conversely, where reason is faced with ideas that are contrary to this propensity, it must act to reject them. Garrett draws a similar conclusion to my own, in arguing that the above quotation signifies what he calls Hume’s ‘Title Principle’:

‘The Title Principle allows us to reject those trivial suggestions of the imagination...because reflective reasoning...undermines these suggestions. However, it allows us to accept those principles of the imagination that are “permanent,

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<sup>146</sup> T.1.4.7.11; SBN 270

<sup>147</sup> *ibid.* (my emphasis)

irresistible, and universal”...because...reason that mixes with our propensities cannot ultimately destroy their force.’<sup>148</sup>

While I agree with Garrett on this point, I wish to emphasize the importance of the functions of the fancy. In clarifying the duality of Hume’s usage, I believe to have added an important new dimension to understanding the role of the imagination as fancy in his theory of mind. It acts in accordance with natural associations to produce the natural concept of the persistent external object. In addition correct philosophical reasoning acts to further confirm the necessity of such beliefs in interpreting our experiences of the world. On the other hand, in the case of ideas such as material substance the true philosopher recognises that this idea is fictional and therefore cannot form the basis of a justified belief. At this point, the philosopher can pronounce these beliefs to be non-natural. This accounts for the following statement by Hume:

‘Nor is it only proper we shou’d in general indulge our inclination in the most elaborate philosophical researches, notwithstanding our sceptical principles, but also that 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. ’Tis easier to forbear all examination and enquiry, than to check ourselves in so natural a propensity, and guard against that assurance, which always arises from an exact and full survey of an object.’<sup>149</sup>

Whereas the imagination is important for both the vulgar and the philosopher, the true philosopher extends beyond vulgar thought and understands the functions of the fanciful imagination in constructing a picture of the experienced world.

If this is right, then Hume proceeds because his system works within the parameters he has set himself. I thus conclude, against the views of Fogelin and Collier, that Hume did not proceed because he had no other option, but rather because he had built an entire philosophical system upon a qualified sceptical approach to knowledge that focuses upon the internal workings of the mind. This is founded on a positive

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<sup>148</sup> D. Garrett, 1999, op. cit., p. 234. In a forthcoming paper Garrett maintains a similar thesis. See ‘Reason, Normativity and Hume’s Title Principle’ Available from:[http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/faculty/garrett/papers/Hume%20on%20Reason,%20Normativity,%20and%20the%20Title%20Principle%20FINAL%20DRAFT%2012\\_12.pdf](http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/philo/faculty/garrett/papers/Hume%20on%20Reason,%20Normativity,%20and%20the%20Title%20Principle%20FINAL%20DRAFT%2012_12.pdf) (accessed 1<sup>st</sup> March, 2015)

<sup>149</sup> T.1.4.7.16; SBN 273-4

appreciation of human nature, and a comprehensive analysis of the operations of the imagination. As Hume himself concludes:

‘On such an occasion we are apt not only to forget our scepticism, but even our modesty too; and make use of such terms as these, ’tis evident, ’tis certain, ’tis undeniable; which a due deference to the public ought, perhaps, to prevent. I may have fallen into this fault after the example of others; but I here enter a caveat against any objections, which may be offer’d on that head; and declare that such expressions were extorted from me by the present view of the object, and imply no dogmatical spirit, nor conceited idea of my own judgment, which are sentiments that I am sensible can become no body, and a sceptic still less than any other.’<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> T.1.4.7.16; SBN 274

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