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HUME'S THEORY OF IMAGINATION.

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HUME'S THEORY OF IMAGINATION

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate
School of The Ohio State University

By

Jan Joseph Wilbanks, B.Sc. in Pharm.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University
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INTRODUCTION

The present work is, as its title indicates, a study of Hume's theory of imagination. Naturally, it is a study of a particular sort. It has a certain scope and limitations, takes a certain line of approach, exhibits certain emphases, has certain ends-in-view, etc. As an initial step in specifying the nature of this study, I shall indicate its central problem, i.e., that problem to the solution of which the solutions of the various other problems with which it is concerned are merely means. The central problem of this study is that of determining how Hume's theory of imagination is related to, or involved in, the generic features and main lines of argument of his philosophy of the human understanding.

The expression "philosophy of the human understanding" is obviously intended to allude to a restriction on the scope of this investigation. Actually, it is a title suggested to me by two of Hume's philosophical writings; and to anyone who is even modestly acquainted with these writings, its reference should be no mystery. Hume published the first two so-called "Books" of his A Treatise of Human Nature in 1739. The first of these two Books was entitled "Of the Human Understanding." Nine years later, he published a work under the title, An Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding. It is these two works, then, which pre-eminently contain what I have

referred to as his philosophy of the human understanding. This is not to say, however, that these two works contain the only statements of that philosophy; although I am sure that it would be agreed that they are the only comprehensive and systematic statements of it. At that, these two statements are different in certain apparent respects, and, at the very least, the Enquiry¹ is a considerably less comprehensive statement of it than is the Treatise.² Indeed, the exact relation between these two works is a matter of dispute among Humeian scholars; and to the extent that this issue is vitally related to the nature of Hume's theory of imagination in these two, it will have to be addressed in the present investigation---particularly in the light of what I announced as its central problem.

Although it would seem entirely appropriate to do so, I see no need, at this point, to go much beyond this rather superficial linking of my title with two of Hume's major philosophical writings and characterize the somewhat restricted domain of my concern in regard to Hume's theory of imagination. Nevertheless, it may perhaps be

¹In all of my subsequent references to An Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding, I shall use the abbreviation "Enquiry I." This will clearly distinguish it from Hume's An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals, which I shall abbreviate as "Enquiry II." I shall be utilizing the Selby-Bigge edition of these two works, i.e., Hume's Enquiries, ed. by L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford, 1902).

²In all of my subsequent references to A Treatise of Human Nature, I shall use the abbreviation "Treatise," except in those circumstances in which I shall be referring specifically to either Book I, Book II, or Book III of that work. In these cases, I shall make use of the abbreviations "Treatise I," "Treatise II," and "Treatise III," respectively. I shall be utilizing the Selby-Bigge edition of this work, i.e., Hume's Treatise, ed. by L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford, 1888).

worth mentioning here that I do feel that in the two works referred to above, Hume is expounding and defending his philosophy of the human understanding. That is, I maintain that the title, "philosophy of the human understanding," is entirely appropriate and is preferable to, and (in a sense) more accurate than, the title, "psychology of the human understanding." This is not to say, though, that these two works have nothing to do with Hume's psychology of the human understanding. In Hume, the connection between philosophy and psychology is an especially intimate one.³ Yet I do think that it can be shown that Hume's basic aim in Treatise I and Enquiry I is to present and defend his philosophy of the human understanding. It will be one of the things I shall be attempting to show in what follows.

Another thing I shall be trying to show in the course of this investigation is that Hume does in fact have a theory of imagination---something which was tacitly assumed in the very statement of the central problem thereof. Although this assumption may appear to be a rather innocuous one, in a sense it is not. At the beginning

³Indeed, a rather commonplace criticism of Hume (even by sympathetic commentators) is that he positively confused the two at times. See, for instance, N. K. Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume (London, 1941), pp. 560-61; D. G. C. MacNabb, David Hume: His Theory of Knowledge and Morality (London, 1951), p. 157; H. H. Price, Hume's Theory of the External World (London, 1940), p. 17. However, Hume is not totally without defenders of him against it; see J. A. Robinson, "Hume's Two Definitions of Cause," Philosophical Quarterly, 1962 (12), pp. 162-71, for a somewhat qualified defense.

of the "Introduction" to his edition of Hume's Enquiries, L. A. Selby-Bigge remarks, of Hume, that

his pages, especially those of the Treatise, are so full of matter, he says so many different things in so many different ways and different connexions, and with so much indifference to what he has said before, that it is very hard to say positively that he taught, or did not teach, this or that particular doctrine. He applies the same principles to such a great variety of subjects that it is not surprising that many verbal, and some real inconsistencies can be found in his statements. He is ambitious rather than shy of saying the same thing in different ways, and at the same time he is often slovenly and indifferent about his words and formulae. This makes it easy to find all philosophies in Hume, or, by setting up one statement against another, none at all.⁴

Without necessarily concurring with everything Selby-Bigge says here, enough of it seems to me to be true and applicable to Hume's pronouncements concerning imagination to make at least plausible the charge that he either has several different theories of imagination in his philosophy of the human understanding or, by setting up one statement about imagination against another, none at all.⁵ In view of what I have committed myself to, it is obvious that I shall not, in what follows, be trying to sustain the claim that such a charge

⁴L. A. Selby-Bigge, "Introduction," Hume's Enquiries (London, 1902), p. vii.

⁵For instance, there is every appearance of an inconsistency when we find Hume saying, early in Treatise I, that the imagination is the faculty by which we form our fainter ideas (see Treatise I, pp. 8-9, 85), and later telling us, in so many words, that imagination is to be identified with "the vivacity of our ideas" (ibid., p. 265). Again, very early in Treatise I we find Hume asserting that "nothing is more free" than the faculty of imagination (ibid., p. 10); yet he later insists over and over that the imagination is determined to make the inference from cause to effect and vice versa (see ibid., pp. 104, 110, 128, 133, 147, 156, 170, 265).

is really warranted. I mention this point at the start of my study in the hope of forestalling a certain line of criticism which might be raised against my efforts and approach. I fully admit that I have not managed to render every single pronouncement Hume makes about imagination coherent with every other. The best I have to offer in some instances is what appears to me to be a prima facie plausible suggestion as to Hume's real meaning. A. H. Basson, talking about Hume's philosophy in general, says that "what we need, with Hume perhaps above all others, is some sort of clue which will guide us through his works, and enable us to extract some sort of pattern."⁶ In a sense, this is precisely what I have tried to do with regard to Hume's statements about the imagination. I have tried to look beyond his actual words to see whether there is some sort of pattern or thread which holds together at least a sizeable portion of his pronouncements concerning the imagination; and I claim that I have found it in what I usually refer to as his general conception of imagination. If the reader will admit that I have satisfactorily defended this claim in the following pages, then he has admitted all that I deem necessary for justifiably maintaining that Hume actually does have a theory of imagination.

Another assumption involved in the very statement of my central problem is that Hume's theory of imagination is in fact related to, or involved in, the generic features and main lines of argument of his philosophy of the human understanding---indeed, related to it in

⁶A. H. Basson, David Hume (Baltimore, 1958), p. 26.

some significant or vital way. Naturally, the main burden of my discussion of his theory will be to bring out this relation and the significance of it. The most that needs to be done here is to point out some prima facie evidence of the importance of imagination in that philosophy.⁷

There can be no denying the fact that we find imagination appearing in practically every special topic-area of Treatise I. Let us look briefly at these areas: causation, body, and mind.

In his examination of causation, Hume is led to consider the nature of causal inference and he comes to the conclusion that it is by experience alone that we make such inferences.⁸ Having shown "that the transition from an impression present to the memory or senses to the idea of an object, which we call cause or effect, is founded on past experience, and on our remembrance of their constant conjunction,"⁹ he next raises the question,

whether experience produces the idea by means of the understanding or of the imagination; whether we are determin'd by reason to make the transition, or by a certain association and relation of perceptions.¹⁰

His conclusion, as is well-known, is that

reason can never shew us the connexion of one object with

⁷In the next chapter, I shall examine the views of a prominent Humian interpreter who (if I understand him correctly) believes that Hume's theory of imagination is not of any great importance to his philosophy. See my discussion of N. K. Smith's views on Hume's theory of imagination, Chapter I, p. 35ff.

⁸Treatise I, p. 87.

⁹Ibid., p. 88.

¹⁰Ibid.; underline mine.

another, tho' aided by experience, and the observation of their constant conjunction in all past instances. When the mind, therefore, passes from the idea or impression of one object to the idea or belief of another, it is not determin'd by reason, but by certain principles, which associate together the ideas of these objects, and unite them in the imagination.¹¹

With regard to the question, what causes induce us to believe in the existence of an external material world,¹² it is significant that, for Hume, this problem takes the following form: "whether it be the senses, reason, or the imagination, that produces the opinion of a continu'd or of a distinct existence."¹³ As in the case of causal inference, the answer is that "the opinion must be entirely owing to the imagination."¹⁴

And after telling us that it is "the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind,"¹⁵ Hume raises the following question:

What then gives us so great a propensity to ascribe an identity to these successive perceptions, and to suppose ourselves possess of an invariable and uninterrupted existence thro' the whole course of our lives?¹⁶

His answer is as follows:

For as such a succession answers evidently to our notion of diversity, it can be only by mistake we ascribe to it an identity; and as the relation of parts, which leads us into this mistake, is really nothing but a quality, which produces an association of ideas, and an easy transition of the imagination from one to another, it can only be from

¹¹Ibid., p. 92; underline mine. See also pp. 97 and 103.

¹²See ibid., p. 187.

¹³Ibid., p. 188.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 193.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 253.

¹⁶Ibid.

the resemblance, which this act of the mind bears to that, by which we contemplate one continu'd object, that the error arises.¹⁷

In addition to the above-mentioned remarks, there are two passages from Part IV of Treatise I which very succinctly, but quite dramatically, point up the supreme importance which Hume seems to attach to imagination in cognition. In Section iv, he announces that "the imagination, according to my own confession, [is] the ultimate judge of all systems of philosophy."¹⁸ What, specifically, he has in mind is those "principles" in (or of) the imagination "which are permanent, irresistible, and universal; such as the customary transition from causes to effects, and from effects to causes."¹⁹ These principles he holds to be "the foundation of all our thoughts and actions, so that upon their removal human nature must immediately perish and go to ruin."²⁰ And in Section vii, he goes so far as to say that "the memory, senses, and understanding . . . all of them founded on the imagination, or the vivacity of our ideas."²¹

To substantiate my claim that imagination is an important topic in Hume's philosophy of the human understanding, I shall make reference next to a few of the many people who have made a special effort to elucidate and interpret Hume's thought. To H. H. Price, "the word 'imagination' is the keyword of Hume's whole theory of knowledge."²²

¹⁷Ibid., p. 255; underline mine.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 225.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid.

²¹Ibid., p. 265.

²²H. H. Price, Hume's Theory of the External World (London, 1940), p. 15.

He also says that "the imagination is even more fundamental in Hume's theory of knowledge than he himself admits."²³ W. C. Gore thinks that Hume, in asserting that the imagination is the ultimate judge of all systems of philosophy, is elevating the imagination "to the rank of a supreme epistemological principle."²⁴ In C. W. Hendel's opinion, it was suggested to Hume (by his acquaintance with the views of Montaigne, Hobbes, and Malebranche) "that a certain body of common imaginings exists, distinct at once from strictly rational conceptions and from mere accidents of thought, or conventions, and therefore original in Human Nature," and this became "the developing theme of his own new philosophy."²⁵ Hendel even characterizes Treatise I as "a study of imagination as it is involved in our knowledge and intellectual beliefs."²⁶ According to B. M. Laing, "the burden of Hume's theory of knowledge falls upon his doctrine of the imagination and natural relations."²⁷ And Harold Taylor, following what he takes to be N. K.

²³Ibid., p. 8.

²⁴W. C. Gore, The Imagination in Spinoza and Hume (Chicago, 1902), p. 32.

²⁵C. W. Hendel, Jr., Studies in the Philosophy of David Hume (Princeton, 1925), p. 91.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 116-17.

²⁷B. M. Laing, David Hume (London, 1932), p. 132.

Smith's general interpretation of Hume's philosophy,²⁸ holds the opinion that "the key to Hume's naturalism lies in his theory of the imagination."²⁹

I regard the preceding remarks as providing sufficient prima facie evidence of the importance of the topic of imagination in Hume's philosophy of the human understanding. But, of course, it is one thing to exhibit the importance of a notion or topic in a given philosopher's thought and quite another to justify a special inquiry concerning it. The former does not entail the latter. I have suggested that there is some question, in the first place, as to whether Hume does in fact have a theory of imagination, and in the second, as to whether that theory (supposing he has one) bears a significant relation to his philosophy of the human understanding as a whole. Yet this could scarcely count, by itself, as a sufficient justification for such an investigation. If nothing else, there is the possible fact that someone else has already explored my central problem sufficiently and adequately. Now, I obviously do not think that such a thing is the case and it is partly because I think that this needs to be shown that I shall be presenting, in the up-coming chapter, a kind

²⁸Taylor's reference is to Smith's two articles entitled "The Naturalism of Hume (I.)," Mind (N.S.), 1905 (14), pp. 149-73, and "The Naturalism of Hume (II.)," Mind (N.S.), 1905 (14), pp. 335-47.

²⁹H. Taylor, "Hume's Theory of Imagination," University of Toronto Quarterly, 1943 (12), p. 180.

of critical review of what I consider to be the most significant work which has been done on the problem to date.³⁰

These remarks about the contents of Chapter I naturally bring up the question of the basic methodological pattern of this inquiry. Apart from the chapter on other Humian interpreters, the plan of procedure is dictated by the nature and presuppositions of the problem itself. After exhibiting, in Chapter II, the various elements which comprise Hume's theory of imagination, I shall move to a consideration, first, of the generic features and basic argument-structure of Hume's philosophy of the human understanding (Chapter III)³¹ and, second, of the role of his theory of imagination in the main lines of argument of that philosophy (Chapters IV and V). In Chapter VI, I shall offer a brief summary and conclusion.

³⁰My other main reason for engaging in such a review will be offered at the beginning of that chapter, i.e., Chapter I.

³¹My use of the expression "generic features" is somewhat loose, but I ordinarily include in it a reference to primary aims as well as to the basic principles employed in an attempt to achieve them.

CHAPTER I

SOME CONTEMPORARY INTERPRETATIONS OF HUME'S THEORY OF IMAGINATION

In the present chapter, I shall be offering a detailed exposition, analysis and criticism of four recent interpretations of Hume's theory of imagination. These interpretations are recent in the sense that none of them were published prior to 1900. The authors of them are:¹ W. C. Gore, Norman Kemp Smith, E. J. Furlong, and Harold Taylor. Although these men are certainly not the only persons who have had something significant to say about Hume's theory, they do seem to me to have covered (at least, collectively speaking) a fairly wide range of issues in regard to it. Moreover, each of them has proceeded reasonably systematically in the consideration of Hume's views and has a rather distinctive thesis (or set of theses) to offer. In the course of subsequent chapters, I shall be presenting the views of other Humian commentators; but these four appear to me the only ones

¹I have given their names in the order in which I shall discuss their views. It should be added that this order is not a strictly chronological one.

whose views merit consideration by themselves and as a unit, as it were.²

At the close of the Introduction, I indicated one of my purposes in dealing with the views of my predecessors in the enterprise of interpreting Hume's theory. I also have a kind of Aristotelian end-in-view in considering them. It will be recalled that Aristotle said (fairly near the beginning of his study of the soul) that

it is necessary, while formulating the problems of which in our further advance we are to find the solutions, to call into council the views of those of our predecessors who have declared any opinion on this subject, in order that we may profit by whatever is sound in their suggestions and avoid their errors.³

I hold an analogous view with regard to my study of Hume's theory of imagination. Indeed, I believe that one may legitimately look upon my interpretation of his theory, and its relation to his philosophy of the human understanding, as a kind of reaction to and development from the interpretations of those of my predecessors whom I have chosen to consider.⁴

²Indeed, in regard to Smith's view in particular, I shall be making repeated reference to his more general views on Hume in the later chapters---since they frequently clash with my own.

³Aristotle, De Anima, Ch. II, 403 b 20-23.

⁴Of course, this does not commit me to saying that a consideration of these interpretations accurately represents the psychological genesis of my interpretation.

W. C. Gore's Interpretation

Exposition

W. C. Gore's discussion of Hume's theory of imagination is strictly limited to the Treatise. He has nothing whatever to say about Hume's views on imagination in Enquiry I.

Gore divides his discussion into the following sections (given in the order they are presented): The Nature of Hume's Problem; Senses in Which Hume Uses the Word 'Imagination'; The Function of the Imagination in Hume's Theory of Knowledge; Criticism, and Summary Comparison of Spinoza and Hume.⁵ Although a few of the things said in the last two sections are worthy of mention in this context, the bulk of attention will quite naturally be directed toward the first three sections.

"The problem with which Hume came to be concerned," according to Gore, "was not so much how philosophy may be founded on experience as how experience itself is constituted."⁶

In shearing away all the inconsistent and metaphysical assumptions of his predecessors, Hume reduced sensationalism to sensations. The problem was how to build up out of these sensations the coherent and rational wholes of experience. It was in a way Kant's problem that Hume had to struggle with---the problem of how an individual experience is constituted, of how intrinsic relations are to be discovered and maintained, in place of the extrinsic metaphysical entities that had been begged or assumed in sensationalism up to that time.⁷

⁵For an understanding of this reference to Spinoza, see my footnote 24 on p. 9.

⁶Gore, op. cit., p. 33.

⁷Ibid.

Gore brings the imagination into the picture by claiming that "Hume, in the straits of his problem, finally resorted to the imagination as the sole instrument capable of meeting the demand for a coherent and forward-moving individual experience."⁸ Later in his discussion he makes it apparent that he thinks that Hume himself felt that the imagination was inadequate to this task--- and, consequently, that he was aware that he had not satisfactorily solved his problem.⁹

Having stated what he takes to be Hume's problem and the role of the imagination therein, Gore proceeds to discuss what he obviously regards as Hume's theory of imagination, viz., the senses in which Hume uses the word 'imagination' and the function of the imagination in his theory of knowledge.

In Gore's view, Hume acknowledges and employs (in the Treatise) at least three different senses of the term 'imagination': (1) when opposed to memory; (2) when opposed to reason; and (3) when opposed to neither memory nor reason.¹⁰ He discusses each of these three senses in turn.

It seems to me that in his consideration of the first of these three senses Gore makes three main points. First of all, he claims that according to Hume, "imagination and memory are alike in that they are both repetitions of impressions, reproductions of past perceptions."¹¹ Second, he claims that according to Hume, imagination and memory differ in two respects. On the one hand, the ideas of

⁸Ibid.⁹Ibid., p. 45.¹⁰Ibid., p. 33.¹¹Ibid.

memory have more force, vivacity, liveliness, etc., than those of imagination. On the other hand, the imagination has a freedom which the memory does not have, inasmuch as the memory is compelled to reproduce the arrangement of the original perceptions, whereas the imagination is free to recombine them. Third, he claims that Hume does not allow either of these two distinctions between memory and imagination "to stand as hard and fast realities"; that, "in fact, he practically abandons both of them when he comes to the discussion of belief."¹²

Gore's discussion of the second sense of 'imagination' is not at all parallel to that of the first. His main point seems to be this: that although relatively early in Treatise I Hume tries to show "how harmoniously imagination and reason may work together,"¹³ as this work proceeds it turns out that the distinction between the two "grows sharper and deeper."¹⁴ However, Gore does seem to want to make it clear that "the growing distinction and conflict between the two" is not a straight-line development; for, with regard to it, he speaks of "turnings and windings of [Hume's] thought in and out and back and forth."¹⁵ Indeed, he points out that some "statements make it clear that Hume identifies reason and imagination to some extent."¹⁶

Gore's consideration of the third sense of 'imagination' is of

¹²Ibid., p. 34.

¹³Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 35.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 36.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 35.

the most abbreviated sort, and actually occurs within the context of his discussion of the second sense. It consists essentially of the presentation of a passage from Treatise I, which allegedly exhibits this use of the term, and of a succinct comment thereupon. In Gore's view, this use of 'imagination', as opposed to neither memory nor reason, is entirely different from the second usage (as opposed to reason) and amounts to its use "in the sense of mere fancy and caprice."¹⁷

In addition to his consideration of these alleged three senses of 'imagination', Gore presents (in this same context) a short account of what he maintains to be Hume's view of the relations between imagination and habit, association, and emotion. Only the first two of these need be mentioned here. Regarding the relation between imagination and habit (or custom), Gore's contention is simply that it is an "extremely intimate" one.¹⁸ As he puts it, "imagination is clay in the hands of the potter, custom."¹⁹ Gore then goes on to assert that in Hume's view, "custom lies at the bottom of both imagination and reason, in a way that recalls the schematism of Kant."²⁰ This is not to imply, however, that reason and imagination are by any means identical or always in agreement.

The imagination is, so to speak, the more plastic element, the more sensitive, fluent, impulsive element; whereas the reason is more staid and sober and responds only to general rules, to acknowledged and conservative principles.²¹

¹⁷Ibid., p. 36. ¹⁸Ibid., p. 37. ¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid. ²¹Ibid., pp. 37-38.

Regarding the relation between imagination and the principles of the association of ideas, Gore claims that it

is similar to the relation between the imagination and custom. Without these principles of association, chance alone, as Hume says, would join the ideas of the imagination.²²

Anticipating a point he makes later, Gore adds that Hume is guilty of circular reasoning, inasmuch as he holds both that the principle of cause and effect---the most important principle of the association of ideas---is one of the guiding principles of the imagination and also that the only faculty that makes possible the idea of cause and effect is the imagination. Here, as well, Gore brings out what he takes to be another significant Humian distinction between imagination and reason, saying that "reason is totally inadequate to afford any basis for the principles of association"; "only the imagination can do this."²³

Gore completes this part of his account of Hume's theory with a short summary/conclusion. Since it is rather unusual and arresting, I shall quote it in its entirety.

To conclude this portion of the subject. One thing is so evident, I believe, as not to need emphasis or further discussion---the fact that Hume wavers between a structural and a functional statement of the categories of the mind; between an attempt to set up distinctions and determine boundary lines, on the one hand, and a candid recognition of the active, living, functioning character of the elements singled out by and for critical analysis, on

²²Ibid., p. 38.

²³Ibid.

the other. On the side of description, of structural distinctions, are (1) sense-perception, (2) memory, (3) imagination, (4) reason, (5) habit, (6) principles of association, (7) emotions. They can be made to hold still, as it were, long enough to have their pictures taken. But on the side of explanation, of functional interpretation, note the interplay, the protean shifting of character, the cinematographic display of activity. Sense-perceptions become either memory or imagination. Memory fades into imagination. Imagination wakes into memory---or more, imagination, after transforming and recombining the material given by sense-perceptions and memory, wakes into a new memory, or to an illusion that is taken for a memory. Reason and imagination are as one, like man and wife; and then they fall out, and quarrel with one another till they find out that another element, custom or habit, has made them what they are, and till they learn that one of them is simply a deeper, more permanent crystallization of the other. But reason has lost its plasticity, its progressive quality; with the help of imagination it can give us the old world, the old Rome, but not the new; it is a hopeless Tory. Therefore it is denied all participation in the principles of association. Imagination, however, can give us a new world, growing out of the old; it is more like a Liberal Unionist. And finally we have the whole circuit of activity. Sense-perception reacts into conflicting habits; ideas of memory and of imagination are brought into play; these ideas excite [sic] the emotions; the emotions in turn reinforce the sense-perceptions and react upon the imagination and "enliven" the idea, thereby making it more believable; and so on, causing "the whole to have a very great influence" on the man.²⁴

If this passage leaves any doubt in the reader's mind which side of Hume, the structural or the functional, Gore prefers, such doubt is quickly dispelled when we find him saying (of the latter) that it provides "a basis for a fine scepticism of rigid class distinctions, and for a faith in onward movement."²⁵

The heart of Gore's account of Hume's theory seems to be his

²⁴Ibid., p. 40.

²⁵Ibid.

discussion of the function of that faculty in his theory of knowledge.

Nevertheless, he starts out by asserting that

the function of imagination in Hume's theory of knowledge can be stated in a few words. It is the faculty which makes it possible for us to have the conception of causation and the conception of objectivity. Hume's expression for objectivity is the continued and distinct, or independent, existence of objects.²⁶

Before making his appeal to the text of Treatise I in order to elaborate and sustain this contention, Gore issues forth an interpretive comment which is of considerable importance in terms of his over-all approach to Hume. In fact, it tends to supplement his earlier claim about Hume's problem. He says:

Hume never doubts the reality of causation or of objectivity, as I understand him, but is concerned solely in accounting for the way in which we come to have believable ideas of such realities. "We may begin by observing that the difficulty in the present case is not concerning the matter of fact, or whether the mind forms such a conclusion concerning the continued existence of its perceptions, but only concerning the manner in which the conclusion is formed, and the principles from which it is derived" (p. 206). The same would be true of causation. Hume becomes a skeptic with reference to all existing explanations of the way in which we come to form ideas of such realities, as I shall attempt to bring out in the course of this discussion, rather than a skeptic with reference to the existence of these realities themselves. In short, his interest seems to be psychological, rather than metaphysical or epistemological.²⁷

It would seem to follow logically from this that when Gore speaks of the function of imagination in Hume's theory of knowledge he has in

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid., p. 41.

mind the function of that faculty in Hume's psychology. Likewise, it would seem to follow from this that Gore looks upon what he takes to be the Humian problem---how experience is constituted---as essentially psychological in nature.

It will not be necessary to consider in detail Gore's paraphrase and condensation of Hume's discussion either of causation or objectivity. What he tries to show is that according to Hume, the imagination not only makes the ideas of causation and of objectivity possible, but also that it is the only faculty that makes them possible.²⁸ What will suffice for our purpose is his answer to the question: how (in Hume's view) does the imagination make these two ideas possible? Gore claims that what Hume thinks is needed to make the idea of causation possible (something that neither the senses nor the memory nor the reason can provide) is

a faculty sufficiently plastic and coherent to carry the mind beyond the present object or idea to an idea not present, but resembling the usual attendant of the present object or idea. This is exactly what imagination seems to be capable of doing, for "the imagination when set into any train of thinking, is apt to continue, even when its object fails it, and like a galley put in motion by the oars, carries on its course without any new impulse" (p. 198). The imagination is all the more inclined to do this, if the contiguous and successive objects have been repeated. The more frequent the repetition of any given contiguous and successive objects has been, the more readily the imagination passes from the given present object to an idea resembling its absent attendant; that is, from the experienced

²⁸See ibid., p. 45. It seems to be correct to say that when Gore asserts that the imagination makes these two ideas possible what he means is that the imagination is the source of them (see ibid., p. 41).

to the not-experienced. In other words, constant conjunction, operating upon the imagination by means of the principles of the association of ideas, makes possible what neither sense nor reason could give, namely, ideas which are not given in and through the present experience, but which resemble the impressions usually had in conjunction with this object which is now the sole content of sense-experience. When the mind in and through the carrying or propensive quality of the imagination passes from a present object to an absent attendant, it reasons from cause to effect, or from effect to cause.²⁹

As far as the question of the origin of the idea of objectivity is concerned, Gore claims that

the course of reasoning is much the same as that involved in showing how we arrive at the idea of causation. The imagination, in virtue of its propensive quality, already referred to so often, is able to bridge over the gaps between interrupted sense-perceptions, and produce the opinion of continued existence of body.³⁰

Undoubtedly, one of the prime reasons Gore claims that Hume does not think that imagination is adequate to the task of "constituting" experience (i.e., of building up out of sensations the coherent and rational wholes of experience) is that he is fully aware of the fact that Hume, in his discussion of objectivity, comes up with an unusual and disturbing conflict between reason and imagination. As Gore puts it,

it is in the discussion of objectivity that reason and imagination come to blows again. And the idea of causation has a falling out with the idea of objectivity.³¹

That is,

imagination makes possible both the idea of causation

²⁹Ibid., pp. 42-43.

³⁰Ibid., p. 44.

³¹Ibid.

and the idea of continued and independent existence. But when reason employs the former idea, it contradicts the latter.³²

The incompatibility between these two ideas leads Gore to suggest that perhaps it is "possible that a deep-seated conflict lurks within the very imagination itself."³³

Gore devotes the bulk of the section entitled "Criticism" to briefly listing "some of the difficulties and contradictions involved in the Treatise."³⁴ Since he interprets these "difficulties and contradictions" as "self-involved criticism," it is apparent that his aim in exhibiting them is to support his contention that Hume had not satisfactorily solved his problem---and that he was well aware of the fact.

Perhaps the best way to conclude this exposition of Gore's views on Hume is to quote from his "Summary Comparison of Spinoza and Hume." For it is here that he presents his clearest brief statement of what he understands to be Hume's view of the nature of imagination and its function in his theory of knowledge. He says:

The imagination is a unifying activity. It possesses the power of rearranging, of recombining, the particulars of sense-experience which are given to it. The imagination is a plastic, unifying, propensive element in whose flow particulars are held and carried along; transcending the present, it gives us the idea of cause and effect, and of the distinct and continued existence of the objective world.³⁵

³²Ibid., p. 45.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., p. 47.

Evaluation

In the light of the fact that I shall not be finding very much in Gore's interpretation with which I can agree, perhaps it would be best to begin my evaluation by stating that one of my main reasons for discussing his views is that he does manage to introduce, and provide at least some sort of examination of, most of the concepts which are bound up in one way or another with the concept of imagination in Hume's philosophy of the human understanding.

In what immediately follows, I shall follow quite closely the topical order of exposition---which, of course, was Gore's own.

On Hume's problem.---I observed that Gore understands Hume's problem to be that of showing how the coherent and rational wholes of experience are built up out of its given elements (viz., sensations), and that he contends that Hume calls upon imagination to effect this building process---indeed, as the only faculty capable (in principle) of performing this task. Now, while I do not deny that it is possible to find an answer (whether satisfactory or not) to this problem in Hume, I most certainly deny that this was Hume's problem, in the sense of its being the real and primary concern of his philosophy of the human understanding. As a consequence of this, I do not find Hume explicitly calling on imagination to perform this constructive function.

Evidently linked with Gore's conception of Hume's problem is his claim that Hume's interest is psychological, rather than either metaphysical or epistemological---since he supposedly never doubts the

reality of causation or objectivity but is solely concerned in accounting for the way in which we come to have believable ideas of these realities. In a word, the only sense in which Hume is sceptical in regard to these realities is with reference to all existing explanations of the way we come to form ideas of them. Later in my investigation I shall be arguing, in effect, against this kind of interpretation of Hume's philosophic enterprise. For I shall be maintaining that, even though Hume has a psychological interest, this is definitely subordinate to his epistemological concern. Moreover, I do not believe that it will be especially hard to show that Hume does, in a sense, doubt the reality of causation and objectivity and, hence, is not sceptical merely in regard to all existing explanations of the way we come to have believable ideas of these "realities." And since, more generally speaking, I interpret Hume's enterprise in Treatise I as having a sceptical goal, I refuse (for the most part) to go along with Gore's labelling of the so-called contradictions and absurdities of that work as self-criticism.

On Hume's different senses of 'imagination'.---But apart from my objections to Gore's general interpretation of Hume, I find that his discussion of Hume's different senses of 'imagination' is grossly defective. First of all, it seems to me that his evidence for the alleged third sense of the term is quite insufficient. The passage from Treatise I, part of which Gore quotes in evidence for his

contention that Hume acknowledges at least three senses of the term, is the following one:

It appears that the word, imagination, is commonly us'd in two different senses; and tho' nothing be more contrary to true philosophy, than this inaccuracy, yet in the following reasonings I have often been oblig'd to fall into it. When I oppose the imagination to the memory, I mean the faculty, by which we form our fainter ideas. When I oppose it to reason, I mean the same faculty, excluding only our demonstrative and probable reasonings. When I oppose it to neither, 'tis indifferent whether it be taken in the larger or more limited sense, or at least the context will sufficiently explain the meaning.³⁶

From this passage, there can be no doubt that Hume is acknowledging his having used 'imagination' in at least two different senses: the sense involved when he opposes it to memory and the sense involved when he opposes it to reason. What is extremely doubtful, in my opinion, is Hume's acknowledgment here of his use of the term in any third sense, i.e., in a sense distinct from the other two. Gore claims that he is here acknowledging its use in a sense opposed to neither memory nor reason; but this appears to be an unwarranted inference from what Hume actually says. Hume's expression, "when I oppose it to neither," is not strictly analogous in meaning to his expressions, "when I oppose it to the memory," and "when I oppose it to reason," and hence does not warrant the inference that Hume is acknowledging a sense in which imagination is opposed to neither of these other two faculties. What Hume is claiming here is that the sense involved when he opposes imagination to neither of these

³⁶Treatise I, p. 117 (note).

faculties is identical with one of the other two senses and that it is usually a matter of indifference which of these we select. Nevertheless, this is not Gore's last word on the matter; since he also claims to have found Hume actually using 'imagination' in this sense opposed to neither memory nor reason. His evidence for this contention is the following passage from Treatise I:

I form an idea of Rome, which I neither see nor remember; but which is connected with such impressions as I remember to have received from the conversation and books of travelers and historians. The idea of Rome I place in a certain situation on the idea of an object, which I call the globe. I join to it the conception of a particular government, and religion, and manners. I look backward and consider its first foundation; its several revolutions, successes, and misfortunes. All this, and everything else, which I believe, are nothing but ideas; tho' by their force and settled order, arising from custom and the relation of cause and effect, they distinguish themselves from the other ideas, which are merely the offspring of the imagination.³⁷

I confess that I do not find this use of 'imagination' to be distinct from the use Hume (and Gore following him) has in mind when he speaks of the sense involved when imagination is opposed to the memory. This becomes a virtual certainty if we take note of Hume's identification (in the passage previously quoted) of the sense of 'imagination' as opposed to the memory with the faculty of our fainter ideas, and his obvious contrast (in this passage) of the mere offspring of the imagination with ideas having considerable force and settled order.

Second, turning to his discussion of the two senses of 'imagination' which Hume explicitly recognizes, it is apparent---assuming

³⁷Ibid., p. 108; underline mine.

that my exposition is faithful to his text---that Gore's discussion of the "anti-memory" sense is greatly superior to his discussion of the "anti-reason" sense. Even so, I think that both are subject to criticism. As far as the latter discussion is concerned, Gore never succeeds in pointing out wherein imagination and reason differ---something he surely must do if he is to properly elucidate the opposition between the two. Indeed, in his abbreviated discussion he speaks at one time of the co-operation of the two faculties; at another, of their conflict. Presumably, both sorts of talk are supposed to reflect one and the same sense of 'imagination', viz., as opposed to reason. Yet how can this be? Actually, Gore says very little about the meanings of the terms 'imagination' and 'reason' in his discussion. As far as the former discussion is concerned, although I agree with Gore that the faint-lively and free-determined distinctions between imagination and memory are not taken by Hume to be "hard and fast realities" and are virtually abandoned by him when he comes to his discussion of matter-of-fact belief, I am not at all certain that Gore's seeming way of conceiving the different senses of 'imagination' enables him to consistently sustain the point. For apparently Gore feels that each of Hume's three senses of 'imagination' are entirely different from one another.³⁸ But would not Gore be obliged to hold that when Hume comes to his discussion of

³⁸Otherwise, why would he claim that when Hume says (in the passage I quoted on p. 26) that it is the same faculty that he opposes to memory and to reason, he is obviously using the expression, "the same faculty," ambiguously (see Gore, op. cit., p. 35)?

matter-of-fact belief, wherein he seems to identify imagination with our more lively ideas and speaks of imagination as being determined to form these lively ideas, he is really not so much abandoning the distinctions between memory and imagination as simply ceasing to use 'imagination' in the sense opposed to memory and is using it in the sense opposed to reason? Be this as it may, I think that we may say with justice that, at the very least, Gore has failed to be crystal clear about the relation between these two senses of 'imagination'. This point should take on more importance later than it may seem to have at present.

My third criticism of Gore's discussion of Hume's alleged three senses of 'imagination' has to do with his summary/conclusion, which I quoted in full. My reaction to this fanciful piece of writing is almost entirely negative. If the so-called "functional" approach to mental categories alone merits the title of "explanation," then I must say that much recent psychology is on the wrong track. In fact, I am inclined to think that Hume himself would say that such "explanations" should be left "to the embellishment of poets and orators or to the arts of priests and politicians."³⁹ For the sort of anthropomorphism which rises fully to the surface of Gore's discussion at this point can surely do nothing to clarify Hume's true position in regard to the imagination. I shall admit that Hume himself is, at times, guilty of a similar---if, indeed, it is not

³⁹Enquiry I, p. 162.

basically the same---intellectual sin in his habit of speaking as if the "little prime movers" theory of the mental faculties were true.⁴⁰ However, this is not something to be adhered to, or even worse, to be supplemented; rather, it is something to be overcome and corrected. As I see it, it should be treated as something contrary to the spirit, if not to the letter, of Hume's general philosophical outlook.

Though it is not an issue directly involved in his discussion of the Humian senses of 'imagination', Gore's charge of circular reasoning against Hume does arise in the context of that discussion. Accordingly, my fourth and final criticism of this segment of Gore's work amounts to an attempt to exonerate Hume from this charge. It will be recalled that Gore maintains that Hume holds both that the causal principle of association is one of the guiding principles of the imagination and also that the only faculty that makes possible the idea of causation is the imagination. Granting, for the sake of argument, that it is true that the imagination is the only faculty

⁴⁰By the "little prime movers" theory of the mental faculties or powers, I mean the view of them that Locke inveighed against in his Essay. It is the view which regards these faculties as "real beings in the soul," i.e., as "so many distinct agents in us, which have their several provinces and authorities, and do command, obey, and perform several actions, as so many distinct beings" (John Locke, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, ed. by A. C. Fraser [London: 1894], Vol. I, pp. 314, 315). Locke quite rightly pointed out that "it is not one power that operates on another: but it is the mind that operates, and exerts these powers; it is the man that does the action; it is the agent that has power, or is able to do. For powers are relations, not agents: and that which has the power or not the power to operate, is that alone which is or is not free, and not the power itself. For freedom, or not freedom, can belong to nothing but what has or has not a power to act" (ibid., pp. 322-23).

that makes possible the idea of causation, I think that there are at least two ways of coming to Hume's rescue. On the one hand, one could call attention to the fact that, strictly speaking, there is really no circle, inasmuch as in the one case, the reference is to the causal principle of association, whereas in the other, the reference is merely to the idea of causation. Why is it not possible to claim, without circularity, both that the causal principle is the ground of imaginative activity (or at least some of it) and also that the imagination is the sole faculty capable of giving rise to the idea of causation? Are not the principle and the idea distinct from one another and logically independent of one another? On the other hand and aside from the preceding point, one could try to show that this charge rests on a confusion between two senses of causation in Hume: cause as a natural relation (which involves the relation of necessary connexion) and cause as a philosophical relation (which is reducible to the relation of constant conjunction).⁴¹ It could be granted that imagination is, in some sense, responsible for the causal principle, as well as the idea; yet it would be pointed out that it is only responsible for this principle as a natural relation and not as a philosophical relation. What guides it, then, would be the principle of causation as a philosophical relation.⁴²

⁴¹See Treatise I, pp. 15, 94, 170, 172.

⁴²This solution has a difficulty, though. For it seems to be Hume's view that the principles of association are identified with the natural relations, not the philosophical (ibid., pp. 10-13). Nonetheless, I do not think that this difficulty is as insurmountable as it seems to be. But it is not a task to engage in here.

On the function of imagination in Hume.---It seems to me that Gore's account of the function of imagination in Hume's theory of knowledge is not only incomplete in that it is limited to a consideration of Treatise I; even within this limitation, it would appear to be incomplete. We might say that, according to Gore, there are two parts to the function of imagination in Hume. One is that it makes the idea (or conception) of causation possible; the other is that it makes the idea of objectivity possible. Now, granted Gore's type of approach, should he not be claiming that imagination makes the ideas of space and time possible---and perhaps even that it makes the idea of personal identity possible? He would appear to have almost as much evidence in Hume for these claims as he does for the ones he actually makes about causation and objectivity.

Apart from the issue of completeness, there are also some questions to be raised in regard to the accuracy with which Gore has expressed what he does maintain concerning the function of imagination in Hume. He is not claiming merely that, according to Hume, imagination is a faculty which makes possible our ideas of causation and objectivity; he is claiming that Hume maintains that it is the only faculty which does so. In fact, his true position, fully stated, seems to be this: imagination, in Hume's view, is the only faculty which makes possible believable ideas of causation and objectivity. In the light of Hume's doctrine of belief, it would seem that what this amounts to saying is that this faculty is the only one which enables us to attain belief in these two things. What primarily

concerns me here is whether or not Gore means by this that imagination alone makes these beliefs (or believable ideas) possible.⁴³ Does he mean that imagination, all by itself (i.e., without extraneous aid), generates belief in these things, or is it just one among several "principles" involved in the process?⁴⁴ Does he mean that imagination is the necessary and sufficient condition of the possibility of them, or is he maintaining that it is only a necessary condition? I do not find Gore's way of stating Hume's position precise enough to answer these questions of considerable importance to the understanding of Hume's theory of imagination.

Another point on this issue of accuracy is whether or not it is correct, strictly speaking, to maintain that Hume held that imagination makes possible our ideas of causation and objectivity. This presupposes that Hume felt that we can have ideas of them (in his sense of 'idea', as a kind of mental picture or image). Everything depends upon what Hume means by causation and objectivity. Later in my investigation, I shall try to show that in the crucial senses of

⁴³This does not seem to me to follow logically from what Gore says, because it is possible that somethings other than faculties could be involved. If so, then it would be logically consistent to affirm that imagination was the only faculty that made these beliefs possible and yet deny that imagination alone made them so.

⁴⁴I am indebted to E. J. Furlong for this way of putting the issue. Partly because I shall be considering Furlong's own views later in this chapter, I am leaving these questions unanswered at this juncture.

these terms Hume seems to maintain that we really do not have (Humian) ideas of either of these two things.⁴⁵

My final criticism actually has to do with the relation between Gore's discussion of the function of imagination and his discussion of the different senses of that term; and it bears a rather close relation to a point I made earlier. Indeed, it might legitimately be considered as a kind of extension of the latter. What troubles me here is that Gore never makes clear exactly what is the relation between these two discussions. To be more specific, he never explicitly indicates which of the alleged three senses of the term 'imagination' he thinks is involved when he comes to consider Hume's alleged view of the function of that faculty in his theory of knowledge. In the light of his discussion of these senses, it seems evident that it must be one of them and could not be more than one of them. Combined senses would appear to be out of the question. My first inclination is to say that Gore would maintain that it is the second ("anti-reason") sense which he---and Hume---has in mind. The unfortunate thing here is that it is about this sense which Gore is least illuminating. Perhaps a clue to Gore's position on the issue is provided by his brief summarizing, which I quoted at the close of my exposition of his views. The trouble here is that the part about rearranging, recombining, etc., seems clearly to be a reference to the first sense; whereas the part about plasticity, unification, etc., seems

⁴⁵See Chapter IV, pp. 225-26, and Chapter V, pp. 259-60.

not to be---is it a reference to the second sense? Is Gore admitting here a combined sense malgre lui?

A closing comment may be in order. If it is true, as Gore suggests, that Hume did use 'imagination' in more than one entirely different sense (i.e., in two or more senses having nothing relevant in common with each other), and if it could be shown that the sense of the term which he makes use of in attributing certain significant cognitive functions to imagination is a sense peculiar to his philosophy, then this would seem to impugn the validity of any claim he might make (or which might be made in his behalf) about having assigned unprecedented cognitive functions to imagination. A contention not unlike this seems to be made by the next Humian interpreter I shall consider.

N. K. Smith's Interpretation

Exposition

Despite the fact that at one point in his book on Hume's philosophy he finds the occasion to assert that "one of Hume's central doctrines [in the Treatise] is that mental processes which have hitherto been credited to reason and understanding are due to a quite different type of faculty, the imagination,"⁴⁶ Norman Kemp Smith's considered view (in this same work) is "that Hume's ascription of primacy to the imagination has no greater importance in the philosophy of the

⁴⁶N. K. Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume (London, 1941), p.453.

Treatise than that of being merely a corollary to his early doctrine of belief.^{#47} At any rate, the latter is explicitly proclaimed to be the conclusion justified by his consideration of "Hume's Teaching in Regard to the Imagination."^{#48}

Since this conclusion very definitely represents a kind of devaluation of the role of imagination in the Treatise, the argument which is presented for it merits our careful attention---especially since it comes from a generally acknowledged authority on Hume's philosophy.

I must confess at the start to having had considerable difficulty in coming to an understanding of Smith's argument. Thus, what follows is what appears to me at present to represent most accurately Smith's reasoning. I shall endeavor to render explicit his grounds for his conclusion by presenting (usually in words almost identical with his) a series of six points, followed by what I consider to be his more or less summarizing remark on some (and perhaps all) of these points, and finishing with the conclusion itself---indicating at that point what I take to be the connection between his summarizing remark and his conclusion. Also included will be a brief elucidation of that summarizing remark, which (even given a clear statement of the preceding six points) is not exactly

⁴⁷Ibid., pp. 462-63.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 462. The quotation marks enclose the title of what Smith refers to as the "Appendix to Chapter XXI."

self-illuminating. The six points which seem to me to form Smith's argument are as follows:⁴⁹

First of all, in the Treatise Hume employs the term 'imagination' in a very confusing, double-sense, a sense to which he himself draws explicit attention. We may refer to this double---or, better, to these two senses---of 'imagination' as the ordinary or common sense and the special sense; and the meaning of each of these two senses may be expressed as follows: (1) In the ordinary sense, 'imagination' signifies the faculty which deals with those perceptions which may be distinguished from impressions, and which in proportion as they become perfect ideas can be freely conjoined or separated.⁵⁰ It is by means of this situation that the imagination is made capable of feigning, and this feigning-capability, as it were, sets the imagination in contrast alike to sense-perception, to judgment, and to memory. In sum, 'imagination' (in the ordinary sense) is fancy, i.e., a faculty of feigning.⁵¹ (2) In the special sense, 'imagination'

⁴⁹In regard to these six points, the reader should be informed that they are to be found, for the most part, between pages 459 and 463 of his book. Also, it should be mentioned that in my reiteration of his argument I have excluded reference to the frequently lengthy Humeian passages which Smith intersperse between his interpretive claims. This is in accordance with my policy to avoid all unnecessary references to Hume's text. Of course, where I take issue with Smith on a particular point, I shall take care to indicate the evidence he gives for his position.

⁵⁰See ibid., p. 234, where Smith claims that, in Hume's view, when an idea entirely loses its vivacity, it becomes a perfect idea; such ideas, not being tied down by any act of assent or belief, are at the free and full disposal of the imagination to be used as the individual may decide.

⁵¹Cf. ibid., pp. 137, 494.

has an almost directly opposite meaning to its meaning in the ordinary sense, inasmuch as it signifies vivacity of conception.⁵² As a consequence of this signification, and in accordance with his early doctrine of belief (i.e., the doctrine of belief Hume espouses in the body of the Treatise---the doctrine that belief is nothing but vivacity of conception), 'imagination' is the title appropriate to those mental processes through which realities are apprehended. In other words, 'imagination' (in this sense) signifies those very faculties with which imagination in its current or ordinary sense has to be contrasted. In still other words, 'imagination' (in this special sense) signifies the faculty which is at work whenever belief, and not mere feigning, is in possession of the mind. It is noteworthy that imagination, so conceived, can be operative only when principles which are "permanent, irresistible, and universal" are in control, since belief is precisely not subject to the individual's arbitrary choice. It is also noteworthy that it is this view of imagination, this way of conceiving that faculty, which leads Hume to speak of the imagination as that faculty upon which the senses, memory, and understanding are, all of them, founded.

Second, in spite of the fact that these two senses of 'imagination' have an almost directly opposite meaning, Hume (at least in certain passages in Treatise I [e.g., p. 225]) seems to assume that

⁵²Cf. ibid., p. 137.

in employing the term in the special sense, he is still employing it in a usual sense.

Third, this assumption by Hume might be allowed, if, on the one hand, his doctrine of belief in its earlier form could be strictly held to and, on the other hand, the supplementary factors (identity through change, unity in complexity, and causal efficacy), which are required in the objects of belief, were correctly describable as being due to a species of feigning.

Fourth, Hume has, however, an outstanding difficulty when he proceeds on these lines. For when he holds strictly to his early doctrine of belief and assumes that the supplementary factors (named immediately above) are correctly describable as being due to a species of feigning, he has great difficulty in distinguishing, by any clear principles, between fact and fiction.

Fifth, in a note (presumably a late insertion) appended to a passage in the Treatise (p. 117), Hume indeed states that 'imagination' is commonly used in the two diverse senses in which he has used it; and he apologizes for having been guilty of falling into "this inaccuracy."

Sixth, as we should expect, 'imagination', in the special sense, does not reappear in Enquiry I; indeed, such usage is there quite explicitly disavowed. Moreover, in these very passages in Enquiry I in which this explicit disavowal takes place, Hume is endeavoring to distinguish between fiction and belief (i.e., between ideas of the judgment and fictions of the imagination) and is at pains to

emphasize that belief is a state of mind to the achievement of which the imagination, in the common sense, is not equal. Furthermore, he is also (in this same context) engaged in modifying his early doctrine of belief; for belief is no longer held by him to be nothing but vivacity of conception but is held to be, in addition to this, a quite distinctive attitude of mind, a peculiar, indefinable feeling or sentiment.

Having made these six points (plus two or three subordinate or supporting points), Smith offers what appears to be a kind of one-sentence summarization of at least some of these points when he says (about Hume) that "on modifying his early doctrine of belief in the Appendix to the Treatise and the Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding, the reasons which had led him to extend the functions of the imagination beyond those ordinarily assigned to it ceased to hold."⁵³ The connection this statement bears to what I have labelled as Smith's sixth point is evident. What is not so evident is its relation to the other points. One thing is clear, however, and this is the fact that Smith maintains that Hume's extension of the functions of the imagination beyond those ordinarily assigned to it consisted essentially in his ascription of belief to that faculty. This would seem to be a logical inference from the first point, i.e., from Hume's alleged special use of 'imagination'. But even if it is not, it is a claim which Smith rather obviously makes earlier in his discussion of

⁵³Ibid., p. 463.

Hume, i.e., prior to the discussion under consideration,⁵⁴ and is definitely reiterated somewhat later in it.⁵⁵ But what exactly Smith intends to include in the "reasons" which led Hume to so extend the functions of the imagination is not at all evident. I would surmise, though, that he has in mind the following two (at a minimum): (1) that Hume thought (in Treatise I) that belief was nothing but vivacity of conception; and (2) that he seemed to assume (again, in Treatise I) that in employing 'imagination' in the more special sense, he was still employing it in a usual sense---or, in other words, that he was so far influenced by his use of the term as signifying a faculty of feigning as to seem to suggest that even in the sense peculiar to his philosophy imagination was still a faculty of feigning and not of legitimate belief.⁵⁶ It is easy to see that the first of these two "reasons" is connected with the first and third points, and the second, with the second point. I think that it is evident that Smith feels that neither of these "reasons" is a good one, and that Hume eventually realized this. His first reason ceased to hold when, in the Appendix to the Treatise and Enquiry I, he modified his early doctrine of belief, by claiming that in addition to involving vivacity of conception it also represents a quite distinctive attitude of mind or peculiar feeling. His second reason ceased to hold when

⁵⁴See ibid., pp. 449, 453, 456.

⁵⁵See ibid., pp. 493-94.

⁵⁶Cf. ibid., p. 494.

it became evident to him that this assumption led him into insuperable difficulties in distinguishing between fact and fiction. These considerations clearly exhibit the relations between Smith's summarizing statement and the remaining ones of his six points.

In the light of the preceding remarks, it would seem correct to assert that Smith is suggesting that if, on modifying his early doctrine of belief the reasons which had led Hume to extend the functions of imagination beyond those ordinarily assigned to it ceased to hold, then his ascription of primacy to the imagination has no greater importance in the philosophy of the Treatise than that of being merely a corollary to his early doctrine of belief. The latter, of course, is the main conclusion Smith is trying to reach concerning Hume's teaching with regard to the imagination. I venture the guess that the reason (or ground) for Smith's use of the word 'corollary' in this connection is that he thinks that the primacy which the imagination has in the philosophy of Treatise I is derived entirely from the primacy which Hume attaches to the topic of belief in that work. For it is a fact that Smith thinks he has shown conclusively that "Hume's doctrine of belief is the central theme of his argument, from start to finish of Book I" of the Treatise.⁵⁷

A fitting conclusion to this exposition would be to call attention to the apparent corollary to Smith's own view. Clearly, it is

⁵⁷Ibid., p. 110.

that imagination ceased to have any primacy at all in the philosophy of Enquiry I.

Evaluation

I should make it perfectly clear from the start of my criticism that I reject Smith's main claim concerning Hume's teaching in regard to the imagination. I think that it is quite false to say that Hume's ascription of primacy to the imagination has no greater importance in the philosophy of the Treatise than that of being merely a corollary to his early doctrine of belief.⁵⁸ My objections will be directed to the way in which he argues for this claim.

First of all, one of Smith's major points is that Hume's assumption (in Treatise I) that in employing 'imagination' in his special sense he is still employing it in the ordinary sense is not an allowable one. I shall make three critical comments on this point. (1) In the light of what he takes to be the relation between Hume's two senses of 'imagination', it is rather puzzling that Smith should maintain that if Hume's earlier doctrine of belief could have been strictly adhered to and were the supplementary factors required in the objects of belief correctly describable as being due to a species of feigning, then his assumption (in Treatise I) that in employing 'imagination' in his special sense he is still employing it in the ordinary sense might be allowed. For if these two senses of the term really

⁵⁸I am, of course, assuming that I have correctly understood what Smith means by 'corollary' in the statement of his claim.

do have an almost directly opposite meaning from each other, then it would surely seem that there would be no conditions under which such an assumption would be allowable. (2) Suppose, then, Smith would admit that the nerve of his point lies in his contention that these two senses have almost directly opposite meanings. This claim is one which I am most anxious to refute. Smith maintains that "the two senses agree only in one respect, namely, that in both the imagination has to be contrasted with reason, strictly so-called . . ."⁵⁹ Now, I do not believe that this is correct, and it will be one of my main tasks (in the next chapter) to show that it is not. It is my view that Hume has a general conception of imagination which encompasses, as it were, both of these two senses. Accordingly, I think that the two senses have more in common than the purely negative factor of contrast with reason. Let me point out here that I believe that the real basis for Smith's "opposition" claim rests upon the opposition between faint and lively ideas. It is not because feigning and belief are opposed (supposing they are) and imagination is identified with both that the one sense is opposed to the other. This would be to put the cart before the horse. It is because imagination is linked with vivacity of conception (or lively ideas) and is also held to be the faculty of our fainter ideas---plus the fact that there is a contingent connection between

⁵⁹Smith, op. cit., p. 461.

our faint ideas and our feigning-capability and our lively ideas and belief---that 'imagination' is allegedly used in two senses with opposite meanings. But this opposition in meaning can be rigorously maintained only on the assumption that there is a strict identification between imagination and our lively ideas, on the one hand, and imagination and our faint ideas, on the other. In other words, there is an opposition in meaning only so long as lively ideas and faint ones are taken as defining characteristics of imagination. There is no opposition, or incompatibility, in maintaining that one and the same faculty of imagination is a faculty involved with both sorts of ideas. (3) But even assuming that these two criticisms are in some way misguided, there is still another criticism to be made in regard to Smith's line of argument for his point. Smith maintains that when Hume did strictly hold to his early doctrine of belief and did describe the supplementary factors in the above-mentioned way, he had great difficulty in distinguishing, by any clear principles, between fact and fiction. And he seems to infer directly from this that Hume's assumption (in Treatise I) about simultaneous employment of the two opposed senses of 'imagination' is not allowable. However, it is being tacitly assumed here that if Hume recognized that any doctrine to which he was strictly holding caused him great difficulty in distinguishing between fact and fiction, then he would not continue to adhere to it. Now I think that this assumption may be challenged. Certainly, one thing that is being ruled out of court here (without argument) is that one of Hume's central aims was precisely

to show that it is not possible for us to distinguish, by any clear principles, between fact and fiction. Later in my investigation, I shall be trying to sustain the claim that, in a sense, this was in fact one of his central aims. But even if this were a false reading of Hume's aims, Smith is also ruling out the possibility that Hume was really not especially concerned with the problem of distinguishing the two. After all, it seems possible to make a reasonably plausible case for the view that Hume was at most concerned to distinguish what we take to be a fact from what we take to be a fiction, and not the real things. At any rate, Smith's tacit assumption rests upon a reading of Hume's aims which is at least challengeable. Perhaps it stands or falls on the validity of Smith's general interpretation of Hume's philosophy of the human understanding. About the latter I shall have more to say later.

Another weak point in Smith's argument seems to me to be his claim that Hume (in Enquiry I) explicitly disavowed his use of 'imagination' in the special sense. I do not think that he provides any real evidence for this claim. It is not enough to claim (as Smith does) that Hume explicitly denies in Enquiry I that imagination can ever, of itself, attain belief.⁶⁰ In fact, it is really no evidence at all for explicit disavowal; since even if Hume had held (in Treatise I) that imagination can sometimes, of itself, attain belief,

⁶⁰To be fair to Smith perhaps it ought to be mentioned that he does not appear to think that this fact alone is sufficient evidence. However, this is irrelevant to my essential claim.

it still would not follow from its rejection (in Enquiry I) that he ceased to use the term in the special sense. He could still be using it there to signify vivacity of conception. A repudiation or modification of Hume's view of belief as being identifiable with vivacity of conception does not necessitate an explicit denial of his use of 'imagination' as so identifiable. What Smith needs to show is that Hume explicitly denies that imagination can be identified with vivacity of conception. This he does not do.⁶¹

But even if Smith can show that the immediately preceding criticism is invalid, his argument may yet be challenged on another related point. As we have seen, Smith contends that when Hume modified in the Appendix and Enquiry I the doctrine of belief he had held in the Treatise (in particular, in Treatise I), the reasons which had led him to extend the functions of imagination beyond those ordinarily assigned to it ceased to hold.⁶² Thus, it is presupposed that Hume did in fact modify his Treatise doctrine of belief. However, it does

⁶¹In the light of the fact that the point I have tried to make proves relatively little, perhaps it should be mentioned that my main concern in making it has been to bring to the reader's attention two things: (1) a confusion in Smith's mind in regard to the relation between imagination (in the supposed special sense) and belief and (2) a fallacious inference which he appears to draw on the basis of it. Actually, there is more to be said on the issue in behalf of Smith's position and argument, but I prefer to discuss it in the context of my evaluation of Furlong's interpretation. For Furlong attacks this same point in Smith's view, but from a somewhat different angle than I have.

⁶²My preceding criticism might be construed as an attempt to show that the inference which this statement expresses is not valid in a strict logical sense.

not seem to me that this key factor in his argument can be adequately supported by an appeal to Hume's texts. That is to say, it is not at all clear that Hume definitely modified, in any significant way, the doctrine of belief he expressed in Treatise I. First of all, it will be recalled that Smith maintains that the modification in Hume's Treatise doctrine of belief as vivacity of conception does not consist in the abandonment of vivacity of conception as characteristic of belief; rather, it consists in the addition to it of a peculiar sentiment or feeling. Now, in the Appendix Hume says that

an idea assented to feels different from a fictitious idea, that the fancy alone presents to us: And this different feeling I endeavour to explain by calling it a superior force, or vivacity, or solidity, or steadiness.⁶³

He says the same thing in Enquiry I: after asserting that "the difference between fiction and belief lies in some sentiment or feeling which is annexed to the latter, not to the former,"⁶⁴ he describes this sentiment of belief as "nothing but a more vivid, lively, forcible, firm, steady conception of an object, than what the imagination alone is ever able to attain."⁶⁵ In fact, he says flatly (in this same context) that "the sentiment of belief is nothing but a conception more intense and steady than what attends the mere fictions of the imagination."⁶⁶ I infer from these pronouncements that the modification in Hume's Treatise doctrine of belief---if it can

⁶³Appendix to the Treatise, p. 629.

⁶⁴Enquiry I, p. 48.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 49.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 50.

legitimately be called a "modification" at all---is at most a verbal, not a real or material, one.⁶⁷ Furthermore, there is even evidence indicating that Hume linked belief with a kind of feeling or sentiment in Treatise I as well. In his earliest statement about the nature of belief, he asserts that

the belief or assent, which always attends the memory and senses, is nothing but the vivacity of those perceptions they present; and . . . this alone distinguishes them from the imagination. To believe is in this case to feel an immediate impression of the senses, or a repetition of that impression in the memory.⁶⁸

Hume is about as close as he can be to actually saying that belief, as it relates to the senses and memory, is a peculiar feeling or sentiment and that to assert this is virtually equivalent to asserting that it is nothing but vivacity of conception. It will do no good to claim that Hume held that the belief which attends the senses and memory is of a quite different sort than the belief which attends causal inference, which alone is the subject of dispute. For Hume did not hold this. He held that "the belief, which attends our memory, is of the same nature with that, which is deriv'd from our judgments concerning causes and effects."⁶⁹ And finally, there is a

⁶⁷Also, in Hume's An Abstract of A Treatise of Human Nature, the notion of feeling does not supplement in any substantive way his view of belief as vivacity. See David Hume, An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding, ed. by C. W. Hendel (N. Y., 1954), p. 191. This edition of Inquiry I contains an edition of the Abstract, and all of my subsequent page references to this work will be to this edition of it.

⁶⁸Treatise I, p. 86. 'To feel' was underlined by me.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 154.

passage in Treatise I in which Hume refers to belief as "some sensation or peculiar manner of conception."⁷⁰ In the light of these considerations, can it be seriously maintained that Hume modified his doctrine of belief from Treatise I to Enquiry I? I think not---at any rate, not in the way Smith suggests.

There are certain questions which may be raised in connection with Smith's assertion that Hume (in Treatise I) extended the functions of imagination beyond those ordinarily assigned to it, but I prefer to leave them to the evaluative section of my consideration of the views of E. J. Furlong. To his views I now turn.

E. J. Furlong's Interpretation

Exposition

Very near the beginning of a paper entitled "Imagination in Hume's Treatise and Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding," E. J. Furlong makes clear what it is that has led him to entertain the two main questions with which his paper is concerned, as well as what he understands to be the connection between these two questions. He says:

Hume . . . is constantly referring to imagination. Where an intellectualist solves problems by recourse to reason or intellect, Hume's universal remedy appears to be imagination. Imagination for him plays a keypart in our perception of the external world. Imagination is allied to sympathy, the lynch-pin of Hume's moral theory.

To solve philosophical problems by invoking imagination is indeed an unusual procedure. We naturally ask, why is

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 184.

imagination so prominent in Hume's thought? And this question prompts another. What exactly did Hume mean by imagination?

These are the two questions with which this paper is concerned.⁷¹

To the first of these two questions, Furlong provides a two-fold answer. He claims, for one thing, that consistency demanded a star role for imagination in Hume's thought; and what he means is consistency with his theory that to think is to imagine. Furlong says:

To think is, for Hume, to have ideas. But all ideas, he holds, are images. Hence to think is to have images, i.e., to imagine. A theory of thinking will be a theory of imagining. We therefore find Hume using "imagination" where another man, uncommitted to the view that all ideas are images, would employ "thought" or "mind." Sometimes, of course, Hume forgets, and we find him using "mind" in a context where his theory would require "imagination"; e.g., cf. "the imagination, when set into any train of thinking . . ." and "as the mind is once in the train of observing an uniformity . . .".⁷²

On the other hand, Furlong maintains that "there is another and more interesting reason why imagination is prominent in Hume's writings"; for, in his view, it is a

fact that Hume did assign unprecedented functions to imagination. It was his opinion that certain of our beliefs---beliefs of the common man---cannot be accounted for completely by reference to present experience (impressions), past experience (memory) or reasoning. In a full description of how these beliefs are formed the imagination---and moreover, a remarkable property of the imagination---has, in Hume's opinion, a necessary place. In

⁷¹E. J. Furlong, "Imagination in Hume's Treatise and Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding," Philosophy, 1961 (36), p. 63.

⁷²Ibid., p. 63. Furlong's quotations are from Treatise I, p. 198.

morals also imagination has a distinctive and crucial function: it is a necessary agent in the process by which sympathy is produced.⁷³

Immediately after presenting these reasons, Furlong places a kind of qualification on what they are supposed to explain. He maintains that "the phrase 'prominent in Hume's philosophy' needs revision: 'prominent in Hume's Treatise' is more accurate, for the faculty is much less evident in the Enquiry."⁷⁴ This remark about the supposed relative lack of prominence in the Enquiry---Enquiry I is obviously what he has in mind---leads Furlong to raise the question as to whether we have here a change of view on Hume's part, or something else. As it turns out, it is his answer to this question which places him at odds with N. K. Smith. However, before he attempts to answer this question, Furlong thinks he must answer the second of his two main questions, viz., what exactly did Hume mean by imagination?

In giving his answer to this question, Furlong begins by acknowledging his debt to Smith and, accordingly, follows Smith in distinguishing two quite different Humeian senses of 'imagination' in the Treatise. "We have," he says, "imagination as the faculty of perfect ideas, the faculty of feigning; and we have imagination as the faculty which plays an important part in the formation of our beliefs---our perceptual beliefs, memory-beliefs and beliefs reached by

⁷³Ibid.

⁷⁴Ibid.

understanding or reasoning."⁷⁵ He elaborates somewhat on the latter by claiming that Hume admits that

imagination as a belief-faculty operates not only in the case of such respectable beliefs as those of memory, sense and understanding, but also in the case of "whimsies and prejudices." The distinction between the acceptable and the fanciful is given by that between principles "permanent, irresistible and universal" and principles which are "changeable, weak, and irregular." "The former principles," he tritely adds, "are received by philosophy and the latter rejected."⁷⁶

Perhaps it is worth noting that Furlong feels that there is at least one passage in the Treatise---footnote on p. 117---which strongly suggests that Hume draws a distinction between two senses of 'imagination' that is not quite the same as the one just mentioned. As he sees it, the distinction Hume draws---whether wittingly or unwittingly---in this passage is between imagination as the faculty of feigning and imagination as the faculty of capricious belief, rather than between the former and imagination as the faculty of belief in general (i.e., as including both respectable and whimsical beliefs). In other words, Furlong thinks that Hume seems to conceive of imagination not only as the faculty of feigning and as the faculty of belief in general, but also (at times) as a more limited belief-faculty, viz., the faculty of whimsical or capricious belief.⁷⁷ Furlong hastens to add, however, that this point is of relatively minor importance. For "whichever of Hume's passages we take we have

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 64.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷Furlong refers to this more limited sense of 'imagination' as Hume's "anti-reason" sense of the term (see ibid., p. 65).

a distinction between imagination as a faculty of feigning and imagination as a faculty of belief";⁷⁸ and a question of considerably more importance is: Did Hume reject this second usage of 'imagination' in Enquiry I?

The relation between this question and the change-of-view question (mentioned above) should be apparent. For if Hume did reject this second, belief-producing, sense of 'imagination' in Enquiry I, then we have an affirmative answer to the change-of-view question and also a simple, convenient, and reasonable way of accounting for the lack of prominence of imagination in this work. We have already seen that Smith answers this question affirmatively, since he argues that Hume did reject this usage in Enquiry I. Furlong, on the other hand, takes an opposite view. He argues "that the sense is not rejected, but merely omitted, and that the omission can be reasonably explained."⁷⁹ Let us, then, examine Furlong's argument.

We may conveniently analyze Furlong's procedure into five distinct, though closely related, steps. First, he contends that neither in the Treatise nor in Enquiry I does Hume avow what Smith (by implication) claims he avows in the former work, but explicitly disavows in the latter, regarding the relation between imagination and the production of belief. Second, he makes a contention about what Hume did avow in the Treatise regarding this relation. Third, he contends that the usage or sense of 'imagination' which implies

⁷⁸Ibid., pp. 65-66.

⁷⁹Ibid., p. 64.

this relation is omitted in Enquiry I. Fourth, he contends that this omission from Enquiry I does not imply any change in Hume's view about how belief is produced; and that this view is, indeed, the same one that appears in the Treatise. Fifth, he offers his own explanation of the omitted sense or usage.

In support of the first step, Furlong appeals to what he obviously considers to be the main passage utilized by Smith in support of his claim. The components of this passage from Enquiry I, which Furlong singles out as crucial to the matter at hand, are Hume's approximately equivalent assertions (a) "that belief is nothing but a more vivid, lively, forcible, firm, steady conception of an object, than what the imagination alone is ever able to attain,"⁸⁰ and (b) that "it is impossible that this faculty of imagination can ever, of itself, reach belief."⁸¹ Furlong maintains that, "apart from one careless passage, which he corrected in the Appendix to the Treatise, and which is out of line with his general position,"⁸² Hume never held anything different from this in the Treatise. That is, he contends that Hume did not maintain, even in the Treatise, that the imagination alone is capable of attaining or producing belief. In effect, Furlong's point against Smith is that what Smith appears to consider to be implied in Hume's usage of 'imagination', in the belief-producing sense of the Treatise, is not really implied in it. That is, in Furlong's opinion, Smith clearly seems to consider Hume's assertion

⁸⁰Enquiry I, p. 49.

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Furlong, op. cit., p. 66.

in Enquiry I that imagination can never, of itself, reach belief as constituting direct evidence of his explicit disavowal in Enquiry I of the belief-producing sense of 'imagination' avowed in the Treatise. However, if this assertion is really to count as sufficient evidence of a disavowal, then it must be implicit in Hume's belief-producing sense of 'imagination' in the Treatise that imagination can (at least sometimes), of itself, reach belief. It is this latter point, of course, that Furlong denies. His evidence for his denial is actually provided in his attempt to support what I have referred to as the second step of his argument---to which I now turn.

What is it that Furlong thinks Hume positively avows in the Treatise regarding the relation between imagination and the production of belief? It is this:

The imagination, when operated on by certain principles, assists in the production of belief. He does not say that the imagination "of itself" can reach belief. The imagination is just one link in the chain.⁸³

The passage to which Furlong appeals in support of this claim is the following one from the Treatise:

Experience is a principle, which instructs me in the several conjunctions of objects for the past. Habit is another principle, which determines me to expect the same for the future; and both of them conspiring to operate upon the imagination, make me form ideas in a more intense and lively manner, than others, which are not attended with the same advantages.⁸⁴

⁸³Ibid., p. 67.

⁸⁴Treatise I, p. 265.

What I have referred to as the third and fourth steps of his argument follow closely upon the second step and are not clearly distinguished from each other. Furlong says:

We may add that if Hume does not refer in the Enquiry to imagination as a factor in the production of belief, his account of how belief is formed is nevertheless the same as in the Treatise. Compare Enquiry 41, where we are told that association with an object of the senses or the memory gives rise to that "steadier and stronger conception" which we call belief. This, Hume considers, is "a general law, which takes place in all the operations of the mind." If this passage had occurred in the Treatise he might have worded the last phrase "all the operations of the imagination." So far as the nature of belief is concerned the difference between the Treatise and the Enquiry lies in the dropping of a word, not a change of theory.⁸⁵

The fifth step in his argument---his explanation of the omission of the belief-producing sense of 'imagination' from Enquiry I---is accomplished in the following way. He puts the issue in the form of a question:

If the omission of imagination in the sense of a belief-producer is not to be explained as a change of theory, how do you explain it? I think the answer is to be found in the fact that the Enquiry is a more compressed work than the Treatise. The former is a shorter writing and yet it contains more: its topics are more numerous. The compression is achieved by economy. And this, I think, is the main reason why Hume's second sense of imagination is discarded.⁸⁶

Furlong proceeds to give a concrete illustration of Hume's drive for economy in Enquiry I. This illustration is worthy of note if for no other reason than that it offers Furlong's view of one of

⁸⁵Furlong, op. cit., p. 67.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 68.

the connections between Hume's theory of imagination and the argument of his philosophy of the human understanding. He says:

There is a revealing instance of this drive for economy in the Enquiry, 124-5, a passage where the imagination is also concerned. Hume has been considering paradoxes relating to the infinite divisibility of space and time. He had solved these in the Treatise by referring to a tendency of the imagination to go beyond experience. [Treatise I, p. 48] Thus, having noticed various cases of equality---what we might call carpenter's equality, engineer's equality, physicist's equality---we proceed to imagine a perfect but he considers fictitious and indeed false equality. The extrapolating tendency of the imagination he will express later as follows: "the imagination, when set into any train of thinking is apt to continue, even when its object fails it, and like a galley put in motion by the oars, carries on its course without any new impulse." [Ibid., p. 198] Our galley, we might say, leaves the daylight of experience and is carried on by its acquired momentum into the dark cave of fiction and illusion.

Now in the Enquiry Hume states the infinite divisibility paradoxes and is almost prepared to leave them there unsolved as just another instance of the failure of reason. But candour wins the day, and in a footnote to 125 he hints at a solution, the conclusion of which is "If it be admitted . . . it follows that all the ideas of quantity, upon which mathematicians reason, are nothing but particular, and such as are suggested by the senses and imagination, and consequently, cannot be infinitely divisible. It is sufficient to have dropped this hint at present, without prosecuting it any further." Hume could very well have mentioned the Treatise galley-theory at this point. That he did not do so can hardly have been due to dissatisfaction with the view---it is quite a useful theory which he puts to good account in the Treatise when giving his ingenious explanation of the belief in "body." Rather, I suggest we have another instance of his pruning-knife at work. It may be added that the Enquiry contains nothing comparable to the Treatise discussion of "ybod"[sic]. If it had, Hume would have had reason to mention the galley-theory; and if he had done so in that context he might possibly done so in the footnote to para. 125, so that the two instances could mutually support each other.⁸⁷

⁸⁷Ibid.

Evaluation

In criticizing Furlong's interpretation of Hume's views on imagination, I shall follow quite closely the topical order of exposition which I adopted---it was Furlong's also.

On the reasons for the prominence of imagination.---There are several difficulties which seem to me to be present in Furlong's offering of reasons for the prominence of imagination in Hume. For one thing, there is a question as to whether the reasons (especially one of them) Furlong offers meet a condition of adequacy, as it were, which he himself has imposed---wittingly or unwittingly---upon them. Even though they were announced at first as reasons for the prominence of imagination in Hume's philosophy as a whole, the two reasons he gives actually turn out to be reasons for its prominence in the Treatise; because, immediately after presenting them, Furlong announces that "prominent in Hume's philosophy" must be modified to "prominent in Hume's Treatise." As a consequence of this restriction, one of the conditions of the acceptance of these reasons as satisfactory ones is that they do not prove more than they are supposed to. What I mean is this: since Furlong maintains that imagination is comparatively lacking in prominence in Enquiry I, he must provide reasons which apply to the Treatise but not to Enquiry I. Yet, in regard to one of these two reasons in particular, it is not at all clear that this condition of adequacy is met. It will be recalled that one of Furlong's contentions is that the need to remain consistent with his Treatise doctrine, that to think = to have

ideas (i.e., images) = to imagine, demanded a star role for imagination in that work. In other words, if Hume remained even reasonably consistent with this doctrine in the Treatise (and Furlong seems to assume that he did), then imagination would naturally have a relatively high degree of prominence in that work. Now, if the need to remain consistent in this way were a good reason for the prominence of imagination in the Treatise, then it certainly ought to be an equally good reason for its prominence in Enquiry I---if this same doctrine of thought were present in the latter work as well. But is this not just the truth of the matter? Is it not the case that this doctrine of thought is present, not only in the Treatise, but also in Enquiry I? Or, at any rate, is there not as much evidence for its presence in the latter work as in the former?

But apart from this difficulty, there are other problems connected with this same "consistency" argument. On the one hand, it may be questioned whether Hume actually maintained the doctrine of thinking which Furlong appears to be attributing to him. For it is one thing to hold that all thinking involves the having of ideas or images; it is quite another to hold that to think just is to have ideas. Again, it is one thing to hold that imagining involves the having of ideas; it is quite another to hold that to imagine just is to have the latter. It seems much more likely that Hume actually held the former of these two alternatives, not the latter. Nonetheless, even supposing that he was committed to these reductivistic views, it still might be doubted that it follows (in any relevant

sense) from such a commitment that imagination is prominent in Hume. I have a suspicion that the apparent validity of this "consistency" argument rests upon a kind of ambiguity in the expression "prominence of imagination." This expression might mean merely the frequent occurrence of the word 'imagination' in a man's writings, or it might also signify a frequent and doctrinally significant appeal therein to the faculty of imagination as a distinct faculty of the mind (i.e., a cognitive faculty distinct from, say, memory and reason). Surely, it is the latter alone for which Furlong is interested in providing explanatory reasons. Yet I somehow think that his "consistency" argument proves only the former. Given the special subject-matter of Hume's Treatise I, the fact that Hume remained reasonably consistent with the view that thinking = the having of images = imagining seems to imply (in some sense) the frequent occurrence of the word 'imagination'. Nevertheless, it does not seem to me to imply (in any appropriate sense) the frequent and doctrinally significant appeal to a distinctive faculty of imagination. Actually, when a philosopher maintains a reductive doctrine of the sort in question, what he is doing is stretching a commonly used term (the definiens) to make it cover types of activities or phenomena which are distinct from each other and perhaps only one of which is usually designated by the term. Either this, or he is simply refusing to use the definiendum in the way in which it is ordinarily used (i.e., with the extension which the term usually has). If the former alternative is adopted (which is generally the case), then the kind of increased prominence given

to the definiens is of a purely verbal sort and does not entail any increase in the prominence given to the distinctive activities phenomena, etc., normally marked out by that term. Such would appear to be the case with respect to the term 'imagination' as a result of the adoption of the doctrine of thinking in question.

On this same issue, there is still another point worth mentioning. Furlong claims that a person holding this "image" theory of thinking (particularly with reference to the part of it which asserts that all ideas are images) is required to use the term 'imagination' in situations where one uncommitted to this theory would use 'thought' or 'mind'. He also claims that Hume sometimes forgets himself and uses 'mind' in a context where his theory would require 'imagination'; and he cites an alleged instance of this. My question is this: is it really true that Hume's (alleged) commitment to this doctrine of thinking places such rigorous linguistic strictures upon him? Unless this doctrine amounted merely to a request or recommendation to change our linguistic usage, I would not think so. After all, wouldn't this be the same sort of thing as saying that in situations where one uncommitted to monistic materialism would use the term 'mind', the monistic materialist, in order to remain consistent with his materialism, must use the term 'brain' or 'brain-process'? Nonetheless, I cannot but admit that Hume does at times interchange the terms 'imagination', 'thought', and 'mind', and that this phenomenon does need an explanation. I would suggest that when Hume uses 'imagination' where

'mind' would seem more appropriate, he is merely wanting to emphasize the fact that the mind is imagining---rather than, say, reasoning.

The other reason Furlong assigns for the prominence of imagination in Hume's Treatise is the alleged fact that Hume assigned unprecedented functions to that faculty. It is obvious that the appeal to this fact alone is not sufficient to constitute a valid argument. What is missing is a premise to the effect that this assignment of unprecedented functions is a prominent feature of Hume's Treatise---or, in other words, that such assignment was a major pre-occupation of Hume's in that work. Now, when Furlong says that Hume assigned unprecedented functions to imagination, what he appears to have in mind (at least insofar as Treatise I is concerned) is the presumed fact that Hume maintained, in contrast with his predecessors, that certain beliefs of the common man cannot be accounted for completely by present experience, past experience (memory) and reasoning; in a full description of their formation imagination has a necessary place. It is inferable from this that Furlong contends that a major pre-occupation of Hume's Treatise I was that of providing full descriptions of the formation of these beliefs.

I am most certainly willing to admit that one of Hume's major concerns in Treatise I was to account for the formation of such beliefs, and that he felt that the faculty of imagination must be appealed to in providing such accounts---whether or not such an

appeal was unprecedented.⁸⁸ However, insofar as Furlong is (or may be) suggesting that this concern was the main or primary concern of that work (everything else being subordinate to this), I must take a stand against him. And more particularly, insofar as he is (or may be) suggesting that the place of Hume's theory of imagination in that work is virtually constituted by Hume's indication of how imagination enters into the production of these beliefs, I must express my disagreement with him. That Furlong does offer such suggestions is evidenced by his preliminary remarks about Hume's constant reference to imagination, his appeal to that faculty as a universal remedy, and coupled with this, the claim that Hume solves philosophical problems by invoking imagination (in contrast with an intellectualist, who solves them by recourse to reason or intellect).⁸⁹

On the criticism of Smith's interpretation.---Furlong seems to contend that the only real evidence Smith marshalls in support of his claim that Hume disavowed (whether explicitly or implicitly) the belief-producing sense of 'imagination' is the fact that Hume asserts in Enquiry I that imagination can never, of itself, reach belief. Is

⁸⁸See Hendel, op. cit., p. 72ff., for evidence against the view that all of the beliefs of the common man which Hume accounts for by an appeal to imagination represented an assignment of unprecedented functions to that faculty.

⁸⁹A kind of side-light on this issue is an apparent implication of Furlong's statements concerning the nature of the problems which Hume solved by his appeal to the imagination. We have seen that these problems were those of giving full descriptions of how certain beliefs of the common man are formed. What is noteworthy is the fact that Furlong refers to these problems as philosophical ones; whereas it seems apparent that they are not philosophical but psychological ones.

he really correct in his contention? It should be pointed out that Smith prefaces the quotation containing this Humeian assertion with the comment that Hume "is at pains to emphasize that [belief] is a state of mind to the achievement of which the imagination (in the common sense) is not equal."⁹⁰ Obviously, Smith means by "the common sense" of 'imagination' what he had previously referred to as Hume's sense or use of the term "as ordinarily understood"⁹¹---that is, in the sense in which it signifies the faculty of feigning. Furlong seems to have misread Smith on this issue and to have thus misrepresented his position and argument. For quite clearly Smith is not claiming that this Humeian assertion by itself gives evidence of explicit disavowal of the sense of 'imagination' as a belief-producer. Actually, Smith gives a sequence of three quotations---all from Enquiry I---to support his explicit-disavowal claim, and Furlong seems to have been too selective in the matter. However, I will have to admit that Smith does not really succeed in showing that Hume explicitly disavowed the belief-producing sense. Indeed, I argued the point in my criticism of Smith. What Smith ought to have said was that he was presenting evidence for Hume's implicit disavowal of this sense of 'imagination'. The passage Smith offers first is the following one:

Nothing is more free than the imagination of man . . .
It can feign a train of events, with all the appearance
of reality, ascribe to them a particular time and place,
conceive them as existent, and paint them out to itself

⁹⁰Smith, op. cit., p. 462; underlines mine.

⁹¹Ibid., p. 459.

with every circumstance, that belongs to any historical fact, which it believes with the greatest certainty. Wherein, therefore, consists the difference between such a fiction and belief?⁹²

The second passage he offers need not be quoted, inasmuch as it simply indicates that the difference between belief and fiction lies in a sentiment or feeling attached to the latter but not the former. The third and final passage offered is the one from which Furlong selects the assertion (italicized by Smith) about the inability of the imagination, of itself, to reach belief. If I understand Smith, the really crucial assertion (also italicized by Smith) is that "we can go no farther than assert, that belief is something felt by the mind, which distinguishes the ideas of the judgment from the fictions of the imagination."⁹³ In short, what I think Smith is arguing for in exhibiting these passages is this: that Hume is trying, among other things, to make it clear that fiction is one thing, belief another; and that imagination is definitely aligned with the former, not the latter---and hence that the use of 'imagination' in the sense of the faculty of feigning is the one and only legitimate sense of that term.

There are two further points which appear to confirm this reading of Smith's interpretation of Hume: (1) It will be recalled that Smith argues, on good literal textual grounds, that Hume (in the Treatise) seemed to hold at times that 'imagination', in the special sense, signifies vivacity of conception---although, as we have seen, it would have been more accurate on Hume's part to have said that

⁹²Enquiry I, p. 47.

⁹³Ibid., p. 49.

this term signifies the faculty of our lively or more forceful ideas. Furlong seems plainly to be in agreement with Smith on this, since he quotes him with approval on it. Yet Furlong fails to realize that this is the real cornerstone of Smith's position. Smith holds that "imagination, thus conceived, is the faculty which is at work whenever belief, and not mere 'feigning', is in possession of the mind."⁹⁴ The reason for this, according to Smith, is that belief itself, as conceived by Hume (at this stage of his philosophical enterprise), is identified with vivacity of conception. It follows from this that imagination can attain belief; since, in this sense of the term, it is defined in such a way as to be virtually identical with belief. Indeed, it seems to follow from this that imagination (so conceived) can, by itself, attain belief. However, Smith never actually asserts that it can. In fact, he asserts that "since belief is precisely not subject to the individual's arbitrary choice, imagination in this sense can be operative only when principles 'permanent, irresistible, and universal' are in control."⁹⁵ Thus, it appears that Furlong is wrong in supposing that Smith maintains that imagination alone can generate belief.⁹⁶ (2) Smith at one point in his argument claims

⁹⁴Smith, op. cit., pp. 459-60.

⁹⁵Ibid., p. 460.

⁹⁶There seems to be a kind of ambiguity here. For saying that imagination can, by itself, attain belief may mean that the mind can engage in imaginative activity (where 'imagination' is taken in the supposed special sense) at will and thus without extraneous aid can generate belief. Or it may merely mean that when the mind engages in this sort of imaginative activity, belief is present. I think that

that in a note---the footnote on p. 117 of Treatise I---which was presumably a late insertion, "Hume has indeed stated that 'imagination' is commonly used in the two diverse senses, and has apologised for being himself guilty of having fallen into 'this inaccuracy'."⁹⁷ It seems to me that Smith is maintaining that Hume's main reason for disavowing and abandoning the belief-producing sense of 'imagination' in Enquiry I was that he came to realize that he was guilty of an inaccuracy in using the term in this sense and was anxious to correct it. I suppose that Smith's way of interpreting 'this inaccuracy' would be to say that it means that Hume came to realize that in using 'imagination' in this sense he was using the term in a sense which "has an almost directly opposite meaning" to its ordinary sense (as the faculty of feigning). What better reason could there be for abandoning the special sense? At any rate, this will definitely explain why Smith should add, shortly after making the remark about 'this inaccuracy', that "as we should expect, 'imagination' in the special sense does not reappear in the Enquiry concerning Human Understanding."⁹⁸ My conclusion, then, is that Furlong has definitely misunderstood and hence misrepresented Smith's position and argument in

Smith denies the former but (implicitly) affirms the latter. Furlong definitely denies the former, but does not seem to consider the latter at all. His mistake seems to be in asserting that Smith (implicitly) affirms the former.

⁹⁷Smith, op. cit., p. 461.

⁹⁸Ibid. 'As we should expect' was underlined by me.

this regard. Where Furlong thought there was an issue between himself and Smith, there really was none.

Perhaps I should add that my defense of Smith against Furlong's attack must not be construed as constituting an agreement on my part with Smith's position. In fact, I think that both men have failed to see that the two different senses of 'imagination' which Hume talks about are, when properly understood, subsumable under an implied general conception of imagination. Moreover, I think, contrary to both men, that there is rather good evidence of the presence of the supposed "special" sense of 'imagination' in Enquiry I. Indeed, I think that if Smith had continued one sentence beyond one of the very passages he quotes in evidence for his position, he would certainly have acknowledged the presence of both senses. For immediately after telling us that the difference between fiction and belief lies in some sentiment or feeling annexed to the latter but not to the former, Hume adds that

whenever any object is presented to the memory or senses, it immediately, by the force of custom, carries the imagination to conceive that object, which is usually conjoined to it; and this conception is attended with a feeling or sentiment, different from the loose reveries of the fancy. In this consist the whole nature of belief.⁹⁹

The occurrence of the word 'imagination' here seems to me to be an occurrence of it in its belief-producing sense, especially if we bear in mind that even in Enquiry I Hume explicitly says that belief

⁹⁹Enquiry I, p. 47; underlines mine.

is nothing but a vivid, lively, forcible, firm, steady conception of an object.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, the occurrence of the expression "the loose reveries of the fancy" is surely roughly synonymous with the expression "the fictions of the imagination." After all, Smith himself asserts in one place that 'imagination', in the sense of the faculty of feigning, is equivalent (in Hume) to fancy.¹⁰¹ This passage is not a particularly isolated one, either. There are others in Enquiry I which clearly point to this same belief-producing sense of 'imagination'.¹⁰² Hence, I am satisfied that Smith and Furlong are wrong in their contention that this supposed "special" sense of 'imagination' is absent from Enquiry I, whether or not my hypothesis about the presence of an implied general conception of imagination (in both Treatise I and Enquiry I) is correct.

On the function Hume assigns to imagination in the production of belief.—A further criticism to which Furlong's account is subject relates to his claims about the function or role Hume assigns to imagination in the attainment of belief. It will be recalled that Furlong claims that Hume held (in Treatise I) that imagination, when operated on by certain principles, assists in the production of belief; it is just one link, though a necessary one, in the chain of events ending in belief. He also claims that although Hume does not

¹⁰⁰See Ibid., p. 49.

¹⁰¹See Smith, op. cit., p. 137.

¹⁰²See Enquiry I, pp. 52, 57, 75.

refer in Enquiry I to imagination as a factor in the production of belief, his account of how belief is formed is substantially the same as in Treatise I. In order to bring out the point I want to make, it will be helpful to refer again to Furlong's elaboration on this second claim. He tells us to

compare Enquiry 41, where we are told that association with an object of the sense or the memory gives rise to that "steadier and stronger conception" which we call belief. This, Hume considers, is "a general law, which takes place in all the operations of the mind." If this passage had occurred in the Treatise he might have worded the last phrase "all the operations of the imagination." So far as the nature of belief is concerned the difference between the Treatise and the Enquiry lies in the dropping of a word, not a change of theory.¹⁰³

Even granting the truth of his two main claims, Furlong seems to me to have singularly failed (not only in this passage, but elsewhere in his paper) to elucidate something which he clearly ought to elucidate. For he has failed to point out just exactly what the imagination does in this whole affair. Imagination assists in the production of belief. How? It is a necessary link in the chain of events ending in belief. What sort of link is it? and how does it differ from the link which, say, the memory constitutes? Surely, Hume has not left us completely in the dark on such an important point. Moreover, it does not seem to me that Furlong's talk about the dropping of a word in Enquiry I, i.e., replacing 'imagination' with 'mind', does anything to clear up the situation. If anything, it tends to obscure it. Is Furlong seriously maintaining that Hume held in Enquiry I that

¹⁰³Furlong, op. cit., p. 67.

mind, along with other principles, assists in the production of belief? that it (mind) is a necessary link in the chain? This would be decidedly odd; it would also appear to be a category-mistake of sorts. My feeling is that, although Hume does interchange 'imagination' and 'mind' (both in Treatise I and in Enquiry I), he does not do it in quite the same way that Furlong seems to suggest that he does.

I attribute Furlong's failure on this point to his acceptance, at face value, of the type of interpretation Smith gives of Hume's talk about the different senses of 'imagination'. No attempt is made to seek out the general conception of imagination which underlies these different senses. Indeed, I suspect that Furlong, in maintaining that Hume uses 'imagination' in a belief-producing sense, is committing himself to the view that Hume's real reason for being able to sustain his claim that imagination is one of the principles necessary for the production of belief is the fact that he used this word in a sense in which it stands for one of those necessary principles. If this is so, then he would seem to be putting Hume into the position of maintaining that the property of being a principle necessary to the production of belief is a defining property of imagination (in the sense in question). In other words, it is part of the very meaning of the term (in this sense); the proposition that imagination plays a necessary role in the production of belief would be an analytic statement. And this would mean that Hume's assignment of unprecedented functions to the imagination simply amounted to his using

'imagination' in a special belief-producing sense. I suppose that it is possible that Hume was guilty of a blunder of this sort; but I doubt it very much.

Later in my investigation I shall try to answer the questions I have claimed Furlong---and really Smith, as well---has failed to answer.¹⁰⁴ The key to the situation is naturally Hume's implied general conception of imagination.

On Hume's drive for economy in Enquiry I.---Although the hypothesis that Furlong offers concerning Hume's drive for economy in Enquiry I is contrary to fact (viz., that Hume omitted the belief-producing sense of 'imagination' from that work), it still appears to me to be of value in explaining something which is a fact about Enquiry I, viz., that imagination has a reduced prominence in that work. The critical questions I wish to put to Furlong concern the concrete illustration he gives of this drive for economy. It will be recalled that he maintains that whereas in Treatise I Hume referred to the tendency of imagination to go beyond experience (the so-called "galley-theory") to solve the paradoxes relating to the infinite divisibility of space and time, in Enquiry I he entirely omits such references and confines himself to hinting at the solution of these paradoxes by asserting that our ideas of quantity are particular and, hence, cannot be infinitely divisible. Furlong maintains that it would have been entirely appropriate for Hume to have supplemented

¹⁰⁴See Chapter IV, pp. 217-20.

this talk about our ideas of quantity with the galley-theory, and the fact that he chose not to do so points up, not a dissatisfaction with this theory, but just one instance in Enquiry I of his "pruning knife" at work.

There are two points I should like to make on this matter. First, is the galley-theory really invoked to solve the infinite divisibility paradoxes, or is it invoked for some other purpose? It appears to me that, at most, the galley-theory is designed to explain why someone would be (falsely) led to entertain the notion that space and time are infinitely divisible. But this does not seem to be the same thing as solving the paradoxes of infinite divisibility. At the very least it is misleading for Furlong to have spoken in such a way about the galley-theory. Hume does not do so. In fact, Hume brings up this theory in the context of his attempted refutation of certain "objections drawn from the mathematics against the indivisibility of the parts of extension."¹⁰⁵ Second, does the use of 'imagination' involved in the galley-theory correspond to any of the three senses of the term which Furlong distinguishes? It looks, prima facie, as if Hume's reference to a particular tendency of the imagination to go beyond experience reflects a usage of 'imagination' which, strictly speaking, is not subsumable under any of the three senses of the term that Furlong distinguishes. For the product which issues forth from

¹⁰⁵Treatise I, p. 42. I shall have more to say on this point. See my Chapter IV, p. 191 (footnote 15).

this tendency is held by Hume to be "a mere fiction of the mind [which is] useless as well as incomprehensible";¹⁰⁶ hence, it is a sheer supposition without any corresponding idea. I am quite sure that Furlong would hasten to place this particular usage of the term under the heading of the faculty of capricious or whimsical belief. The trouble with this is that this sense of the term, like the sense which has to do with respectable belief, is allegedly tied-up with (indeed, identified with) vivacity of conception (i.e., with our lively ideas); this is what these two belief-senses have in common.¹⁰⁷ But the belief in a perfect equality is not to be identified or equated with a lively idea---or with any idea, for that matter. It is the belief in a "correction beyond what we have instruments and art to make."¹⁰⁸ And this takes us beyond the sphere of ideas. We must remember that, for Hume, "the very idea of equality is that of such a particular appearance corrected by juxta-position or a common measure . . ."¹⁰⁹

Harold Taylor's Interpretation

Exposition

In discussing Smith's interpretation of Hume's theory of imagination, I did not feel it necessary to make reference to his rather

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 48.

¹⁰⁷Since Furlong does not dispute with Smith on this point, I can only assume that he is in agreement with him.

¹⁰⁸Treatise I, p. 48.

¹⁰⁹Ibid.

well-known interpretation of Hume's philosophy in general.¹¹⁰ Interestingly enough, in considering Harold Taylor's paper, "Hume's Theory of Imagination,"¹¹¹ it will be necessary to do so. The reason is that Taylor begins his account of Hume's theory by accepting and adopting Smith's general interpretation, which is as follows: the determining factor of Hume's philosophy is the establishment of a purely naturalistic conception of human nature by the thorough subordination of reason to feeling and instinct.¹¹² Taylor thinks that this hypothesis functions as a corrective to "the traditional view of Hume as primarily a phenomenalist and self-defeating sceptic."¹¹³ With this hypothesis in mind, he tries

to show that the key to Hume's naturalism lies in his theory of the imagination; that when the faith in imagination as a genuine creative faculty breaks down, his naturalism disintegrates; that the breakdown of Hume's faith in imagination is a result of the influence on him of contemporary rationalistic dogma.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁰This interpretation is found not only in Smith's book, The Philosophy of David Hume (previously referred to), but also in two earlier papers. See N. K. Smith, "The Naturalism of Hume (I.)," and "The Naturalism of Hume (II.)," Mind (N.S.), 1905 (14), pp. 149-73 and 335-47, respectively.

¹¹¹Harold Taylor, "Hume's Theory of Imagination," University of Toronto Quarterly, 1942-43 (12), pp. 180-90.

¹¹²Cf. Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume, pp. v-vii, 129-32, 154-55; Smith, "The Naturalism of Hume (I.)," op. cit., p. 150. [Unless otherwise indicated, all subsequent references to Smith's work on Hume will be to his book, rather than to his papers.] Taylor's reference is exclusively to the latter.

¹¹³Taylor, op. cit., p. 180.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

Before examining Taylor's arguments for his claims, two preliminary comments are in order. (1) Taylor, like Gore, restricts his attention exclusively to the Treatise---specifically, to Treatise I.¹¹⁵ (2) It seems rather odd that Smith and Taylor should share the same general interpretation of Hume and yet should have such strikingly opposed theses about Hume's theory of imagination.¹¹⁶ For it would seem to be very hard, indeed, to reconcile the claim that Hume's theory of imagination is the key to his naturalism with the claim that Hume's ascription of primacy to the imagination has no greater importance in the philosophy of the Treatise than that of being merely a corollary to his early doctrine of belief. What is perhaps the first thing that occurs to the reader on this score is the possibility that the two men do not attach the same meaning to the words expressive of the allegedly shared general interpretation. Whether this is so or not, it would appear that the meaning which Taylor seems to attach to these words is the best place to begin considering his views. This should enable us to understand what he means by "Hume's naturalism,"

¹¹⁵Strictly speaking, this is not true; since Taylor does mention the Enquiry---Enquiry I, that is---once in his paper, saying that a certain problem connected with Hume's theory of imagination is to be found in both Treatise I and Enquiry I.

¹¹⁶This situation is not to be explained away by contending---and it is a true contention---that Taylor's reference is not to Smith's book on Hume, but rather to his two early papers. (Smith's thesis about Hume's theory of imagination is to be found only in his book, not in the early papers.) For Smith still retains his general interpretation in the later book, as I have already indicated.

when he asserts that the key to his naturalism lies in his theory of the imagination.

It is obvious that Taylor intends to identify Hume's naturalism with the purely naturalistic conception of human nature. Unfortunately, he never provides us with an explicit definition or general description of such a conception. This means that we must take note of those of his comments which indirectly reveal his meaning. One thing appears certain and obvious from the very statement of the general interpretation itself, and that is that such a conception is achieved by the thorough subordination of reason to feeling and instinct. However, it might seem from this statement that this subordination is merely a means to, but not necessarily a part of, this naturalistic conception. To this extent, I think that the statement proves to be misleading. For subsequent pronouncements by Taylor make it clear that Hume's naturalism involves the rejection of the notion of human reason as a transcendental faculty, i.e., as an instrument of intellectual vision into the nature of things. For he claims that, according to Hume,

the reason . . . is not a unique faculty peculiar to man alone, but is an unintelligible instinct shared by all animals, by means of which it is possible to make inferences from experience. Reasoning about matters of fact is not concerned with an intellectual intuition of the agreement and disagreement of ideas, but is rather, an instinct, giving unavoidable belief in the reality of

objects inferred to be attached to certain ideas in the mind by the constant conjunction of the objects with the ideas in past experience.¹¹⁷

A page later Taylor asserts that, in Hume's view,

the analytic reason, being unable to create a new idea, or even to progress logically from one perception to the next within the mind, must depend for its beliefs on the unavoidable presumptions of the imagination.¹¹⁸

In this second passage, we have a claim regarding the subordination of (analytic) reason: the claim is that it is, in a sense, dependent on the imagination. That this also shows its subordination to instinct is clear if we take note of the fact that Taylor (at one point in his account) contends that "the imagination, according to Hume, is nothing but a natural instinct by means of which certain true ideas are rendered lively and intense."¹¹⁹ Thus, from just these few passages we not only have gained some idea of what Taylor means by "Hume's naturalism"; we can also understand more clearly what he means when he says that the key to Hume's naturalism lies in his theory of imagination. Hume's naturalism involves a kind of subordination of (analytic) reason to imagination; and since the latter is nothing but a kind of instinct, it involves its subordination to instinct.

Of course, Taylor feels that more can be said about Hume's naturalism than that it involves the denial of a transcendental

¹¹⁷Taylor, op. cit., p. 184.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 185.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 181.

reason, the affirmation of an instinctive reason, and the subordination of analytic reason to imagination and thus to instinct—although it seems to me that not everything else that he says goes beyond a kind of elaboration of one or more of these three primary points. At any rate, Taylor suggests that Hume's naturalism

implies an organic philosophy which considers the mind a focal point for various organic functions, of which reasoning and imagining are but two. The formation of beliefs and judgments is as natural and unavoidable as breathing and walking. It accompanies animal life. It consists in the conscious and continuous adaptation of the human organism to things as they are, and is expressed in a manner of behaviour (in both physical and mental activity) rather than in a mode of intellectual intuition.¹²⁰

Thus, Hume's naturalism (or naturalistic conception of human nature) considers man's faculties as "forms of the adaptation of the human organism to the external world."¹²¹ It stresses the importance of "those basic instinctive beliefs which we get automatically from the dynamic interconnection which exists between the perceiving mind and its external objects";¹²² consequently, it gives paramouncy to the concepts of experience, custom, habit and instinct.¹²³ That Hume's naturalism is supposed to be anti-supernaturalistic is suggested at the very end of Taylor's paper, when he implies that "the naturalistic import" of Hume's philosophy is revealed in his attempt to refute "certain dogmas and superstitions in contemporary rationalism concerning final causes, necessary connection, and supernatural entities."¹²⁴

¹²⁰Ibid., p. 184. ¹²¹Ibid., p. 188. ¹²²Ibid., p. 182.

¹²³Ibid., pp. 181-82. ¹²⁴Ibid., p. 190.

And since, as we observed, it is nothing but a natural instinct by means of which certain true ideas are rendered lively and intense, imagination plays a vital role in such a scheme. In fact, if Taylor is correct then "Hume considered it a natural function of the mind, and the most important faculty which man possesses."¹²⁵ Were we without this natural faculty we could not get conviction in belief concerning matters of fact.¹²⁶ Indeed, "these qualities [of liveliness and intensity] in true ideas are all we have to distinguish between truth and falsity."¹²⁷ Taylor has the following to say about Hume's view of the process whereby certain ideas acquire these qualities, and of the role of imagination therein:

The fact that some ideas acquire the qualities of liveliness, intensity and vitality is due to the principle of experience, which "instructs me in the several conjunctions of objects for the past," and the principle of habit which "determines me to expect the same for the future," both working on the imagination, which in turn works on the ideas.¹²⁸

Taylor's summarizing remarks on Hume's theory of imagination bear a rather marked resemblance to Gore's view on the nature of imagination and its role in Hume's theory of knowledge. They are as follows:

The imagination for Hume is defined in functional terms; it works as a unifying agent for the impressions of sense and the ideas of reflection; when opposed to reason it is fancy; when opposed to memory its ideas are of less strength, less orderliness; when joined to both, it supplies the foundation of belief by lending qualities of liveliness and

¹²⁵Ibid., p. 181.

¹²⁶Ibid., p. 182.

¹²⁷Ibid., p. 181.

¹²⁸Ibid.

intensity to true ideas, and thus to true propositions; it transcends the present and the past, co-ordinating ideas to give expectancy of certain regularities in the future; by its propensity to synthesize, it provides the possibility of a conception of causation, of objectivity, indeed of the entire system of the external world.¹²⁹

It seems quite evident from these summarizing remarks, and the preceding considerations generally, that Hume's theory of imagination is supposed to be the key to his naturalism not merely in the sense that an understanding of that theory is essential to an understanding of his naturalism, but also in the sense that the theory is an integral part (indeed, the most important single part) of the latter. Another remark warranted from these same considerations is that Taylor feels that Hume's having held this particular view of imagination is really tantamount to his having had faith in imagination as a genuine creative faculty. This of course brings us to the second part of Taylor's thesis, viz., that when Hume's faith in that faculty as genuinely creative breaks down, his naturalism disintegrates.

In reality, the first two parts of his thesis are quite closely connected. For it is easy to see that if Hume's theory of imagination was an integral part of his naturalism and if this involved his faith in imagination as a genuine creative faculty, then the breakdown of that faith would tend to result in the disintegration of his naturalism. Now, one of the attendant factors leading to this breakdown is the alleged fact (previously mentioned) that Hume feels that the

¹²⁹Ibid., p. 183.

qualities of liveliness and intensity in true ideas are the only things we have to distinguish between truth and falsity. According to Taylor, this fact generates for Hume "the most important problem connected with his theory of imagination":¹³⁰ "if we have nothing in reason but the liveliness of ideas to determine the validity of belief, how are we to know that in any given instance we are not dealing with imaginary objects and ideas, rather than with real ones?"¹³¹ Taylor claims that "Hume's attempt to answer this question occupies a great part of the Treatise and Enquiry,"¹³² and is of the opinion that to it

Hume's final answer is that true belief concerning matters of fact rests with the manner of conceiving an idea or an object, and is expressible in terms of a feeling associated with the true idea. The adjectives by which Hume describes this feeling are comparative: the feeling is stronger, livelier, more vivid, firmer, more intense, forcible, vivacious, coherent, and steady, than the looser conceptions of idle imagining. The imagination may join, mix, or vary patterns of ideas, and conceive any number of objects; but, as a matter of fact, it can never force the mind into the error of believing in their existence because it is impossible for the faculty to achieve an idea which the mind will conceive in the correct "belief manner." The imagination, as passive to customary arrangement of an accepted regularity in the external world, makes no mistakes. The imagination as active in the formation of fanciful ideas in various combinations makes no mistakes, because it is unable to create by itself the correct feeling of belief which is essential to the acceptance of any true idea. Hume admits that his attempt to describe the feeling of belief itself is inadequate and unphilosophical, but adds that everyone understands its application to common life, since we use such belief as the governing principle of all our actions.¹³³

¹³⁰Ibid., p. 186.

¹³¹Ibid., pp. 185-86.

¹³²Ibid., p. 186.

¹³³Ibid.

Up to this point, everything seems to be satisfactory. However, trouble arises when Hume invokes, in the name of reason, two contemporary rationalistic dogmas. These two dogmas (or assumptions) are

(1) that a Newtonian atomism . . . is applicable to the field of mental experience and is an a priori rule for sense perception; (2) that knowledge as clear and distinct apprehension of complete certainty is the only "philosophical" knowledge, and as such is the only kind which can be ultimately satisfactory in philosophical discourse.¹³⁴

In Taylor's opinion, it is the espousal of these two dogmas by Hume---Taylor speaks of it once as Hume's "retreat into rationalism"¹³⁵---which forces him into a self-defeating scepticism.¹³⁶ And it does this by introducing an opposition (in typical eighteenth-century style) between imagination and reason,¹³⁷ an opposition which is absent when we take these two faculties "in their naturalistic and functional sense, as the two most important forms of the adaptation of the human organism to the external world."¹³⁸ Taylor expresses the manner in which this supposed opposition manifests itself, as follows:

Having achieved the co-ordination of discrete perceptions due to the effects of custom, the imagination presents certain conclusions concerning continuity, causation, and the like, to the reason. The reason then has the task of rejecting or accepting, on the grounds of the psychological concomitants of the ideas themselves, their truth and falsehood. In this way, conflicts sufficient to throw the mind

¹³⁴Ibid., p. 188.

¹³⁵Ibid.

¹³⁶Ibid.

¹³⁷Taylor also speaks here of "an inconsistency in Hume's conception of imagination and reason"(ibid.).

¹³⁸Ibid. In their naturalistic and functional sense, imagination and reason are supposed to operate as co-ordinate faculties.

into a dilemma are set up between the two faculties. Which of the faculties can one trust? Suppose the natural belief in the identity of the self, the independence of the external world, the necessary connection of events, and the continuity of perception, is guaranteed by the propensive quality of the imagination, yet is denied by the reason? We have a lively feeling that experience is composed of discrete units of perception, incoherent as to a continuum. It is impossible to determine which of these feelings is the livelier or truer, the one from imagination or the one from reason. They each have what Professor Laird calls the full "conviction-coefficient." The law of contradiction denies us the possibility of accepting both feelings at once, and philosophy defeats itself by its own analysis.¹³⁹

The presence of the first of the two rationalistic dogmas in this passage is not hard to discern. For Newtonian atomism appears under the guise of that equally lively "rational" feeling that experience is composed of discrete units of perception, incoherent as a continuum. However, the presence of the second dogma is not at all easy to discern. Suffice it to say that this dogma is supposed (by Taylor) to manifest itself in the criticism by "the rationalistic reason" of "the irrational, instinctive principles of imagination (causation, necessary connection, continuity, etc.) on the ground that they are alogical."¹⁴⁰

Taylor devotes the remainder of his paper to a brief indication of how he thinks that "Hume's sceptical dilemma" can be avoided. Of the remarks he makes in this attempt, the only ones which seem to me to be of concern to this inquiry are the following:

Having begun a psychological account of the knowing process, Hume interrupts it to search for logical factors of formal validity. The consequent opposition of reason and

¹³⁹Ibid., p. 187.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., p. 188.

imagination eliminates the natural role of the latter faculty from activity in the comparison of ideas, and represents an unnecessary dualism between the cognitive and sensitive nature in Hume's account of the operations of reason.¹⁴¹

It is apparent from this passage that Taylor wants to draw a sharp distinction between the psychological and the epistemological dimensions of Hume's discussion in the Treatise and very definitely to link the former with his naturalism. Inasmuch as he maintains that his naturalism is the determining factor in his philosophy, it seems clear that his interpretation bears considerable resemblance to that of Gore.

Evaluation

I shall begin my evaluation by stating that I do not accept the Smithian general interpretation of Hume's philosophy of the human understanding---at any rate, not the version of it which Taylor adopts in his paper.¹⁴² I do not believe that the determining factor of this philosophy is the establishment of a purely naturalistic conception of human nature, if by its "determining factor" is meant the main or primary goal of it. Rather, I hold that its determining factor is the establishment of a mitigated scepticism. Later in my investigation I will spell out in detail what I understand to be the nature of

¹⁴¹Ibid., p. 189.

¹⁴²Actually, I do not accept Smith's own interpretation either. See my Chapter III, p. 168ff.

this kind of scepticism. At this juncture, I shall (for the most part) speak negatively about it---saying what it is not, rather than what it is. Nevertheless, I should not neglect mentioning here that, given the various strands which I isolated from the complex which Taylor appears to refer to as Hume's naturalism, what I understand to be Hume's mitigated scepticism is not entirely distinct from what I have considered to be Taylor's view of Hume's naturalism. That is, there is some over-lap between the two. For instance, I consider the denial of a transcendental reason as part of Hume's mitigated scepticism, just as Taylor seems to consider it as part of his naturalism. However, there appears to be a difference in the status which this element has in the two conceptions of Hume's philosophic enterprise in Treatise I. It is a core element in his mitigated scepticism, whereas I suspect that it is really a peripheral element in his naturalism. Let me explain. The really crucial or essential elements of Hume's supposed naturalism are positive in character, or are intended to be such. Unless we take them as so, it is hard to understand Taylor's assertion that the naturalistic hypothesis serves as a kind of corrective to the traditional view of Hume as primarily a phenomenalist and self-defeating sceptic.¹⁴³ Furthermore, keeping in mind that Taylor asserts that Hume's naturalism disintegrates in Treatise I, it is hardly the negative element mentioned above which

¹⁴³My hypothesis concerning Hume's mitigated scepticism must not be identified with the view of Hume as a self-defeating sceptic.

is held to disintegrate. What it is that is supposed to disintegrate is Hume's alleged reliance on instinctive reason and, more generally speaking, his alleged confidence in and satisfaction with man's faculties, considered as forms of adaptation of the human organism to the external world. Imagination enters here because it is supposed to be the most important of these "natural" faculties. Also involved is the presumed fact that although Hume started out subordinating analytic reason to imagination, he was led (because of his espousal of certain rationalistic dogmas) to reject this subordination. This is what is involved in Taylor's assertion that Hume's faith in imagination as a genuine creative faculty broke down. It is this picture of Hume's enterprise in Treatise I which I emphatically reject. The crux of the matter is that I do not believe that Hume ever had the sort of faith in imagination which Taylor seems to think he had; and I do not believe that he ever lost the faith he had. If this faith involved the view that there is an inseparable connection between certain operations of the imagination and the attainment of certain basic truths about the world, then Hume never had such faith. If this loss of faith involved a denial of the view that there is a very close connection between certain operations of the imagination and certain basic (though unwarranted) beliefs about the world, then he never lost such faith. Moreover, it seems to me to be a mistake to assume that Hume was particularly concerned with the faculties of man considered as forms of adaptation of the human organism to the

external world; consequently, I am not convinced that Hume ever did subordinate analytic reason to imagination in the manner in which Taylor envisages it. I might add that as it will turn out, I will want to distinguish what I shall refer to as a "naturalistic" element in Hume's enterprise in his philosophy of the human understanding, but the meaning I shall attach to the term will not be the sort of meaning Taylor attaches to it.

So much for my reaction to Taylor's basic orientation and main theses. I shall continue and conclude my discussion of his views by considering some points of a somewhat more specific nature. The first of these has to do with Taylor's interpretation of Hume's talk about reason as an unintelligible instinct---"instinctive" reason, as I referred to it in the preceding exposition. Even though Taylor admits that this sort of reason is rather difficult to differentiate from the "naturalistic" imagination, he nevertheless holds them to be distinct from each other. Otherwise, he could hardly maintain, as he does, that the two work together in generating matter-of-fact beliefs. I could scarcely deny that Hume ever identifies reasoning (of a certain sort) with a certain sort of instinct---there are passages in both Treatise I and Enquiry I which are explicit on the point.¹⁴⁴ What I deny, however, is that such "reasoning" is anything different from the so-called "naturalistic" imagination. As I see it, the two

¹⁴⁴Cf. Treatise I, p. 179; Enquiry I, p. 108.

are actually identical. In other words, I maintain that there really is no such thing, in Hume, as an "instinctive" reason, where the latter is taken to be a distinct faculty or mental activity. Hume says

that the experimental reasoning itself, which we possess in common with beasts, and on which the whole conduct of life depends, is nothing but a species of instinct or mechanical power, that acts in us unknown to ourselves; and in its chief operations, is not directed by any such relations or comparisons of ideas as are the proper objects of our intellectual faculties. Though the instinct be different, yet still it is an instinct, which teaches a man to avoid the fire; as much as that, which teaches a bird, with such exactness, the act of incubation, and the whole economy and order of its nursery.¹⁴⁵

My subsequent discussion of Hume's general conception of imagination, as well as that of reason, will make it clear that the above can scarcely be anything other than a description of a certain sort of activity of imagination.¹⁴⁶

And while I am on the topic of reason in Hume, I should perhaps say a few more words (than I did above) on the issue of Hume's supposed subordination of analytic reason to imagination. Taylor does not make the meaning of "analytic reason" entirely clear, although presumably he has in mind Hume's notion of the sort of reason which is concerned solely with relations between ideas (i.e., intuitive and demonstrative reason). As far as our day-to-day existence is

¹⁴⁵Enquiry I, p. 108.

¹⁴⁶See my discussion in Chapter II, p. 120ff.; see also Chapter IV, p. 212.

concerned, there can be little doubt that Hume maintained that analytic reason is, in some sense, subordinate to imagination. It is subordinate in the sense that imagination (i.e., the "naturalistic" imagination) is more vital to our continued survival and adaptation to our environment than is analytic reason. But the question is: what philosopher would disagree with this? That there is a de facto subordination of this sort is scarcely a matter of dispute between philosophers. The question of philosophic importance, and the question which I believe Hume to be primarily concerned with, is not this; rather, it is the question whether or not analytic reason is held by Hume to be subordinate to imagination in a de jure sense. Does imagination, in Hume's view, provide an adequate support for the basic beliefs we carry with us throughout our lives, beliefs which imagination itself gives rise to? Does it supercede analytic reason in this regard? It is these questions to which, in my opinion, Hume gives a negative answer. Of course, Taylor admits that Hume eventually winds up giving such an answer; but he insists that he did not start out doing so. As I see it, he is mistaken in maintaining this "developmental" view of Hume's philosophy of the human understanding.

Obviously related to this developmental view is Taylor's claim regarding the most important problem connected with Hume's theory of imagination. As we have seen, he thinks that this problem is expressible as the difficulty of knowing, in any given instance, whether

when we believe something we are dealing with real objects and ideas or with imaginary ones---since we have nothing but the liveliness of our ideas to determine the validity of these beliefs. One of the things Taylor is here presupposing is that this problem represents a genuine difficulty for Hume, i.e., an issue which concerns him and which he feels obliged to resolve satisfactorily. Now, inasmuch as I maintain that Hume has a sceptical goal (of sorts) in mind in his philosophy of the human understanding, I can hardly admit that this is the case. At any rate, I cannot admit it to be the case in regard to basic matter-of-fact beliefs, such as those in necessary connexion and in the external world. I must insist that it is a mistake to hold that Hume is concerned with legitimizing our basic beliefs about the world; on the contrary, he is trying to show that such beliefs cannot be legitimized.

Another point which is related to Taylor's developmental view is his talk about the two eighteenth-century rationalistic dogmas to which Hume allegedly subscribed. It is evident, that in labelling these as "dogmas," he wishes to persuade us of their falsity. As regards Hume's espousal of the doctrine that a Newtonian atomism is applicable to the field of mental experience (and is an a priori rule for sense perception), everything depends on what Taylor takes to be the nature and implications of this atomism. Apparently, he thinks that an espousal of this doctrine implies an acceptance of the view

"that experience is composed of discrete units of perception, incoherent as to a continuum."¹⁴⁷ If what this means is that Hume denies that we are ever aware of sensible continuity, then it is very doubtful that Hume held this. As Price says,

if he did [deny awareness of sensible continuity], why did he explicitly assert the existence of complex impressions? It is true that he also asserted that there are minima visibilia. But the two assertions are perfectly consistent. It may be both true that we sense a complex as a whole---form quality and all---and also true that the complex contains a finite number of sensibly distinguishable parts, which are such that no part smaller than they are could be sensed by us.¹⁴⁸

If what this view about incoherence-as-to-a-continuum means is that Hume denies that we are ever aware of necessary connexions between events or objects, then there can be no doubt that Hume is an atomist in this sense. However, one may wonder whether this sort of atomism is an eighteenth-century dogma or a a priori rule; one may also wonder whether it is a dogma or a a priori rule at all. Again, as Price says, "may it not be that Atomism in this sense is a very good thing?"¹⁴⁹ And if Taylor is maintaining that, in his denial of our awareness of

¹⁴⁷Taylor, op. cit., p. 187.

¹⁴⁸Price, op. cit., p. 73. It may well be true that Taylor identifies Hume's affirmation of minima visibilia with a denial of sensible continuity, since he maintains that Hume's conception of physical points constituting space and time seems to be analogous with a Newtonian atomism.

¹⁴⁹Ibid., p. 74.

necessary connexions, Hume is implicitly denying our awareness of sensible continuity (and hence that he implicitly, and perhaps inconsistently, holds the latter sort of atomism), then he is maintaining a falsehood. These two doctrines are logically independent of one another. I conclude that if Taylor is to have a point here, he simply must make clearer what he has in mind when he speaks of Hume's atomism. As regards the dogma that knowledge as clear and distinct apprehension of complete certainty is the only "philosophical" knowledge, and as such is the only kind which can be ultimately satisfactory in philosophical discourse, there are two things that might be said in reply. (1) Hume realizes that his definition of knowledge, and consequent distinction between knowledge and probability, is somewhat arbitrary and restrictive and does not conform to ordinary usage.¹⁵⁰ And precisely because of this, he adds a category between knowledge and probability, viz., proofs; and he defines the latter as "those arguments, which are derived from the relation of cause and effect, and which are entirely free from doubt and uncertainty."¹⁵¹ (2) I fail to see how Taylor can explain satisfactorily the fact that Hume is willing to proceed unabashed with his science of human nature, when he discovers that one of the basic principles of the latter is subject to an exception. I am thinking, of course, of the notorious missing-shade-of-blue experiment.

¹⁵⁰Treatise I, p. 124. Cf. also Enquiry I, p. 56.

¹⁵¹Treatise I, p. 124.

My final point has to do with Taylor's claim that imagination, for Hume, is defined in functional terms. In its most generalized form, his statement of this "functional" definition is as follows: imagination works as a unifying agent for the impressions of sense and the ideas of reflection. Apart from this unusual duality in regard to the "objects" of the unifying activity of imagination, is it really the case that Hume's considered opinion is that imagination itself is some sort of agency? I doubt it. Surely, it is the mind ---perhaps acting imaginatively---that is the unifying agency, not the imagination. Also, Taylor, becoming more specific in his description of this unifying activity, asserts that this same imagination, when opposed to reason, is fancy. My question here is this: Is the imagination, when opposed to reason and identifiable with fancy, still operating as a unifying agent for the impressions and ideas mentioned above?¹⁵² Taylor goes on to speak of imagination when opposed to memory and when joined with reason and memory. Can all of these "oppositions" be subsumable under a single faculty working as a unifying agent for impressions and ideas? Taylor does not give us the answers to these questions; he does not seem to be alive to the problem of possible radically different senses of 'imagination' in Hume. My conclusion is that he has not addressed himself

¹⁵²Taylor speaks of imagination *qua* fancy as a faculty which is free to juggle ideas in a variety of ways (see Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 181). This is hardly a description befitting a unifying agent.

to a crucial problem with respect to Hume's theory of imagination, and hence he has left a great deal to be desired in his account.¹⁵³

Concluding Remarks

In the preceding discussion, I have presented a good many specific criticisms of and claims against the four Humian commentators I have chosen to consider. In the last analysis, however, what these purportedly valid claims are, in one way or another, intended to support (or to contribute to) is the more general claim that these commentators have failed, both singly and collectively, to give a fully satisfactory solution to the central problem of the present investigation. That is, they have failed to provide an accurate and comprehensive answer to the question, How is Hume's theory of imagination related to, or involved in, the generic features and main lines of argument of his philosophy of the human understanding? And they have failed to achieve this because they have failed to provide entirely correct answers to the two questions which are necessary preliminary questions to the central question itself: (1) What exactly is Hume's theory of imagination, i.e., what are the elements of which it is comprised? (2) What are the generic features and main lines of

¹⁵³One may very well raise the question as to whether Taylor is correct in assuming that there can be such a thing as a definition in functional terms. It would seem that the functions of something are one thing; its essence (or nature) is another. When we have asserted that X performs such and such functions, we may always legitimately be asked, what is the nature of this X which performs these functions? Moreover, it would never be correct to answer by simply repeating the functions one has ascribed to the thing.

argument of his philosophy of the human understanding? Nevertheless, to say this is emphatically not to say that they have made no contribution whatever toward the solutions of these two problems. Had I been convinced that they had utterly failed to say anything of value in regard to them, I should certainly not have taken the trouble to expound and criticize their views. And after all, regarding the question of the generic features and main lines of argument of this major segment of his total philosophy, it just happens that I disagree with the way these men interpret Hume; and, though I think I am right and they are wrong on this matter, this fact need not necessarily---though I believe that in fact it does---lead to any differences of consequence regarding the involvement of his theory of imagination therein. It naturally depends on the character and extent of the disagreement. Moreover, in point of fact, I think that these Humian interpreters have managed, at least in a collective sense, to exhibit some of the crucial components of Hume's theory of imagination, even if I also believe that they have definitely failed to bring to light what is the central and, in some relevant respects, the single most important component of it, viz., his general conception (or definition) of imagination.

I shall conclude this chapter by presenting two considerations which, I hope, will serve to support this claim about Hume's general conception, i.e., about the importance of our coming to know what it is. (1) I believe that unless the nature of his general conception

is fully explicated, it is not possible to understand what at least some of the other parts of his theory amount to. In other words, it is not possible to know what one is talking about when one is speaking of these other components. Without going into the question of the exact nature of these other components (a task for the following chapter), let me illustrate the point in the following way. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that one component (or a part thereof) of his theory is accurately expressed by saying that the imagination plays a necessary part in our coming to believe in the existence of material things. Actually, we really do not know what this amounts to saying unless we know what Hume means by 'imagination' in this statement. (2) It seems to me that unless one uncovers Hume's general conception of imagination, one is quite unlikely to observe the full extent of the involvement of his theory of that faculty in his philosophy of the human understanding. Indeed, I am convinced that the failure on the part of all of the Humian interpreters I have considered in this chapter---in fact, on the part of all of the Humian interpreters with whom I am acquainted---to come up with this general conception has been responsible for their failure to identify certain highly important Humian claims with that theory, and hence for their failure to appreciate the full scope and significance of the latter in this major segment of his total philosophy.

CHAPTER II

THE ELEMENTS OF HUME'S THEORY OF IMAGINATION

At the close of the preceding chapter, I not only asserted that Hume's general conception of imagination is the most important single element of his theory of imagination; I also tried to support that assertion. It follows from this that I conceive the task of bringing to light this general conception to be the most important single task connected with his theory. Nevertheless, it does not follow from this that I conceive it to be the only important task connected with it. On the contrary, one of the fruits of the examination of other Humian commentators' interpretations is precisely this: that it leaves me with several important tasks to perform with regard to Hume's theory, even when it is considered apart from its involvement with the argument of his philosophy of the human understanding. These tasks, though, are reducible to the following general ones: (1) that of enumerating and articulating all of the essential elements of Hume's theory as they appear in, or emerge from, Treatise I; and

(2) that of determining which of these elements are present in and which, if any, are absent from Enquiry I.¹

A good starting-point will be to state those questions, Hume's answers to which will provide us with all of the essential elements or components of his theory of imagination. As I see it, Hume's theory is comprised of answers to the following seven questions, some of which are extremely closely related to one or more of the others:

(1) What are the "data" of imagination? or What are the materials by means of which imaginative activity takes place? (2) From what are the data of imagination derived? or From what source (or sources) are drawn the materials by means of which imaginative activity takes place? (3) How can we determine, in our immediate experience, whether or not we are imagining---as opposed to, say, sensing or remembering? or How can we distinguish, in their operation, between imaginative activities and the various other types of cognitive activity?

(4) What rules or principles, if any, govern or influence at least some of the activities of imagination? or To what rules or principles, if any, does imaginative activity (or at least some of it) conform?

(5) What is the nature of imagination? or How are imaginative activities to be formally distinguished from all other cognitive

¹I am clearly assuming here that it is not the case that there are any elements of the theory which are present in Enquiry I but absent from Treatise I; in other words, that whatever else may be the case, there are no new elements in the theory in Enquiry I. However, I believe that this is a warranted assumption. At any rate, I have been unable to find any evidence to falsify or even to cast doubt on it.

activities? (6) What sorts of "ontological" connections, if any, does imagination possess? or What sorts of "reality" claims, if any, can we make on the basis of the occurrence of imaginative activity? (7) How does imagination function in cognition? or What is the place or role of imaginative activity in cognition?

Even though it might seem most desirable, even requisite, to consider first Hume's answer to the question about the nature of imagination, this is really not so. The order in which I have stated these questions is, I think, preferable as the order of exposition. This being the case, it will be desirable, even necessary, to preface this account with a few remarks about Hume's views on the basic types of contents of the mind and the relations between them. These views provide, among other things, the general framework within which Hume's theory of imagination, as well as practically all of the other theories he holds in his philosophy of the human understanding, is set forth.

The Contents of the Mind

Although there are certain differences in detail between the two, the accounts in Treatise I and Enquiry I of the contents of the mind and their relations to each other are doctrinally equivalent. Hume divides the contents of the mind into two basic types: impressions and ideas (or thoughts).² He says that this distinction

²Treatise I, p. 1; Enquiry I, p. 18.

corresponds to the distinction we ordinarily draw between feeling and thinking.³ He maintains, further, that ideas are exact copies (or images) of their corresponding impressions and that the qualitative difference between the two lies solely in the fact that the latter have more force and vivacity than do the former.⁴ His subdivision of impressions into those of sensation and those of reflexion helps to provide the principle of division of the subject-matter between Treatise I and Treatise II.⁵

In terms of his primary purposes, the most important relation Hume holds to obtain between impressions and ideas is that of causation. Impressions are the causes of ideas; that is, all ideas are derived from (or have as their source) impressions. In order to make this claim more accurate and precise, Hume distinguishes between simple and complex impressions (and ideas),⁶ and asserts, as the first principle of his science of human nature, that all of our simple ideas are derived from the corresponding and resembling simple

³Treatise I, pp. 1-2; Enquiry I, pp. 17-18.

⁴Treatise I, pp. 1-3; Enquiry I, pp. 17-19.

⁵It is of importance, as well, to Hume's discussion of causation, inasmuch as the impression from which our idea of necessary connexion is derived is held by him to be an impression of reflexion, not of sensation. See Treatise I, p. 165.

⁶Treatise I, p. 2; Enquiry I, pp. 19, 62.

impressions.⁷ This is Hume's most technical statement of the basic empiricist principle that all the materials of thought are derived ultimately from experience.

We should now be in a more favorable position to consider the various elements of Hume's theory of imagination, beginning with the one relating to the materials or data by means of which imaginative activity takes place.⁸

The Materials of Imagination

In the light of the preceding remarks, it should seem to be fairly obvious what Hume's views are regarding the data of imagination. It clearly appears to be deducible from Hume's position with

⁷As is well-known, Hume feels that he is forced to modify this claim somewhat—or, rather, to admit that it may have a few exceptions. My reference, of course, is to the notorious example of the missing shade of blue (cf. Treatise I, pp. 5-6; Enquiry I, pp. 20-1). Maybe it is worth mentioning, in passing, that this so-called experiment, if valid, does not refute the looser principle that all ideas are ultimately derived from impressions, but only the precise principle which implies an exact correspondence between the two.

⁸It must be borne in mind that my discussion of the first four elements of Hume's theory anticipates, in a sense, my discussion of the fifth (i.e., of the formal nature of imagination). In fact, when I speak of, say, the materials of imaginative activity, the notion of imagination which will be operative will be what I have previously referred to as Hume's general conception of imagination. I mention this because I feel that Hume uses 'imagination' in a sense—to be discussed later in this chapter—which is not encompassed by this general conception. As a consequence, some of the statements I shall be making about imagination, in explicating the first four elements, would not be applicable to this sense of 'imagination'.

regard to the contents of the mind that he maintains that all types of thinking take place by means of ideas; indeed, that the having of ideas is absolutely indispensable to the process of thinking. And since he surely holds imagination to be a distinctive type of thinking, or a power to engage in a certain type of thinking,⁹ it follows that the data of imagination must be ideas (i.e., mental images).

We must never lose sight of the fact that the materials of the imagination are, in Hume's view, the same as those of all other types of thinking; that the having of ideas (or images) is something which is common to memory, imagination, and reason. It is not something which is peculiar to imaginative activity. Thus, a statement indicating the materials of imaginative activity must never be confused with a statement indicating the definition of such activity. Now, it might seem entirely unnecessary to even mention such a naively simple point. Nevertheless, I think that we found in the last chapter an instance of an individual who comes dangerously close to being guilty

⁹Unless we admit this, we seem to be at a loss in understanding what Hume means when he raises such questions as "whether it be the senses, reason, or the imagination, that produces the opinion of a continu'd or of a distinct existence" (Treatise I, p. 188). Furthermore, Hume explicitly says in Enquiry I that "it cannot be doubted, that the mind is endowed with several powers and faculties, that these powers are distinct from each other . . . [and that] there are many obvious distinctions of this kind, such as those between the will and understanding, the imagination and passions, which fall within the comprehension of every human creature . . ." (Enquiry I, pp. 13-14).

of just such a confusion---or, rather, of attributing it to Hume. As we have seen, Furlong maintains as one of his reasons for the prominence of imagination that Hume contends that to think is to have ideas (or images) and to have ideas is to imagine. As I understand him, Hume holds that if one is imagining then one is having ideas; he does not hold that if one is having ideas then one is necessarily imagining.

The Source of the Materials of Imagination

Like his view on the materials or data themselves of imagination, Hume's view on the source of these materials is immediately derivable from what I have referred to as his position on the contents of the mind. Since the materials of imagination are ideas, and it is Hume's position that all ideas are ultimately derived from previous impressions (of sensation or reflexion), it follows that the source of all the materials of imagination is experience (either sensational or reflexional).

This element, like the preceding one, would seem to be so simple and straightforward that there could be no problems with regard to the interpretation of it. However, it seems to me that at least one Humian commentator with whose views I am familiar construes it in a rather misleading way. According to A. H. Basson, an essential part of Hume's philosophic enterprise is the attempt to establish a limitation on the human understanding; and, in his view, "Hume proposes

to establish the limitation of the human understanding, by establishing a limitation of the human imagination."¹⁰ What is significant is the fact that Basson thinks that in holding that we can imagine only what can be experienced, Hume is claiming to establish this limitation of the imagination.¹¹ The reason I think that it is misleading to speak this way is this. When a man seeks to establish limitations on something, he surely presumes the need to do so. That is, he undoubtedly supposes that other individuals with whom he is acquainted either positively disagree with him or are quite unaware of such limitations (and, as a result, are perhaps assuming that they do not exist). Yet it seems extremely unlikely that any of the philosophers of note with whom Hume was acquainted would have met either of these two conditions, especially if they were told (as we are told by Basson) that according to Hume's usage of 'imagine', "to imagine something is to form a sort of mental picture of it."¹² Of course, there is a harmless sense in which one can say that the imagination is limited to the sphere of possible experience; but to say this and at the same time to suppose that one is establishing limits on the imagination is, at the very least, to make a rather trite claim. In fact, as I see it, Hume really did not seek to establish a limitation on imagination but rather to establish the

¹⁰Basson, op. cit., p. 24.

¹¹Ibid., pp. 27, 29.

¹²Ibid., p. 27.

fact that we are limited to our imagination in our basic beliefs about the world. In other words, it is not because the human imagination is limited to the realm of possible experience that the human understanding is, in Hume's view, limited; rather, it is because the human reason is so limited as well.

The Criteria for Recognizing Imaginative Activity

What I have referred to as the third element of Hume's theory is his answer to the question, What means or criteria, drawn from our immediate experience, do we have to distinguish in its operation the activity of imagination from the activities of the other cognitive faculties? In other words, it is his answer to the question, How can we tell, in a given situation, whether we are imagining rather than remembering or sensing or even reasoning? In discussing Hume's answer, I shall consider the following points: (1) the degree of comprehensiveness with which he answers it; (2) his actual answer to it; (3) the adequacy or satisfactoriness of his answer to it; and (4) the failure of certain Humian commentators to fully appreciate the nature of this element of Hume's theory.

1. In both Treatise I and Enquiry I are to be found criteria for distinguishing between imagining and sensing (or sense-perceiving); only in Treatise I are there to be found criteria for distinguishing between imagining and remembering.¹³ In neither of the two works are

¹³Cf. Treatise I, pp. 8-9, 85-86; Enquiry I, p. 17.

there to be found criteria for distinguishing imagining and reasoning. Apparently, Hume never sees the need to address himself to this issue. Perhaps he thinks that they are different enough in nature not to require criteria for distinguishing them.

2. Since the only difference between the account in Treatise I and that in Enquiry I is in the degree of comprehensiveness with which Hume answers the question at hand, I shall confine my attention exclusively to the account in the former work. Let us begin with his discussion of the criteria for distinguishing, in their operation, between imagination and memory. As Hume puts it,

'tis evident at first sight, that the ideas of the memory are much more lively and strong than those of the imagination, and that the former faculty paints its objects in more distinct colours, than any which are employ'd by the latter. When we remember any past event, the idea of it flows in upon the mind in a forcible manner; whereas in the imagination the perception is faint and languid, and cannot without difficulty be preserv'd by the mind steady and uniform for any considerable time. Here then is a sensible difference betwixt one species of ideas and another.¹⁴

Although, in his saying that we have here a sensible difference between imagination and memory, it is suggested that there may be other such differences, it becomes clear in a later discussion (to which Hume here refers the reader) that this is the only sensible difference between them. As Hume says later,

since . . . the memory is known, neither by the order of its complex ideas, nor the nature of its simple ones; it follows, that the difference betwixt it and the imagination

¹⁴Treatise I, p. 9.

lies in its superior force and vivacity. A man may indulge his fancy in feigning any past scene of adventures; nor wou'd there be any possibility of distinguishing this from a remembrance of a like kind, were not the ideas of the imagination fainter and more obscure.¹⁵

Regarding the criterion for distinguishing between imagining and sensing, it turns out to be of the same sort as that between imagining and remembering. Bearing in mind the basic Humean view that the only sensible difference between impressions (including those of sensation) and ideas is that the former are more forceful and lively than the latter, it follows that the only sensible difference between sensing and imagining is just that: the perceptions we have while sensing are more forceful and lively than the ones we have while imagining.

Thus, the perceptions we have while sensing, remembering and imagining fall on a kind of continuum and this is what supplies us with the only criterion we have for distinguishing, in their operation, between these three faculties. The perceptions of the faculty of sensation have the highest degree of force and vivacity; those of the imagination, the lowest; and those of the memory have an intermediate degree of these qualities.

3. Anyone who has read him at all carefully knows that Hume himself does not believe that this criterion of force and vivacity

¹⁵Ibid., p. 85.

is universally applicable. As far as its applicability to the distinction between memory and imagination is concerned, he asserts that

as an idea of the memory, by losing its force and vivacity, may degenerate to such a degree, as to be taken for an idea of the imagination; so on the other hand an idea of the imagination may acquire such a force and vivacity, as to pass for an idea of the memory, and counterfeit its effects on the belief and judgment.¹⁶

Similarly, with regard to its applicability in the case of sensation and imagination, it is possible in particular instances for our impressions and ideas to approach each other in force and vivacity.

Thus in sleep, in a fever, in madness, or in any very violent emotions of soul, our ideas may approach to our impressions: As on the other hand it sometimes happens, that our impressions are so faint and low, that we cannot distinguish them from our ideas.¹⁷

It is interesting that Hume should be so ready and willing to find exceptions to the criteria he gives for distinguishing between sensation, memory, and imagination; and equally interesting that he should appear to be so unconcerned at his failure to find unexceptionable criteria. Perhaps this is a sign that the sort of epistemological concern he has is quite different in nature from that of, say, Descartes or Berkeley.

4. As I see it, there appears to be a tendency in certain Humian commentators to confuse Hume's answer to the question relating to this third element of his theory with his answer to the question relating

¹⁶Ibid., p. 86.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 2.

to what he means by 'imagination' (i.e., relating to his general conception or definition of imagination). I have already taken note of apparent interpretational errors of some consequence on the part of certain Humian commentators in regard to the first two elements of Hume's theory. These errors do not seem to me to be quite as significant as the ones which have been made in regard to this third element. What I mean is this: in one way or another, a failure to realize fully the real nature of the question to which this element of Hume's theory is an answer, and its distinctness from the question as to what he means by 'imagination', has been responsible for perhaps the most serious misinterpretations of the theory itself.¹⁸ It lies at the heart of the position of those who appear to find some sort of ultimacy in Hume's talk about different senses of 'imagination'---in those who seem to see his answer to the question of what he means by the term fully embodied in such talk. For, by those who adopt this line of approach, 'imagination' (in one of its so-called senses) is invariably held to be conceived by Hume as the faculty of our fainter ideas. In other words, in this sense of the term, 'imagination' just means our faculty of forming faint ideas.¹⁹ As we have just seen, it is this distinction between our fainter ideas

¹⁸For instance, I see this confusion to be at the very heart of Smith's contention that the primacy of imagination in Hume's Treatise I amounts to nothing more than a mere corollary to his early doctrine of belief.

¹⁹See my discussion of Smith's view, where I pointed out that he refers to Hume's other sense of 'imagination' as signifying vivacity of conception and thus claims that these two senses have an almost directly opposite meaning from each other (Chapter I, pp. 37-38).

and our more lively ones which Hume claims to be the only sensible difference between memory and imagination.

It can scarcely be questioned that Hume is partly responsible for the misinterpretations which have resulted from his remarks about the means we have, in our immediate experience, of distinguishing between imagining and remembering. For one thing, when he begins making this distinction in Treatise I he gives almost every indication of a man attempting to provide his reader with definitions of these two faculties. For another, at least once in that work he explicitly refers to one sense of 'imagination'---when opposed to memory---as standing for the faculty of our fainter ideas.²⁰ Thus, on the one hand, his initial discussion of the distinction between memory and imagination seems to issue forth in the following definitions of these two faculties:

Memory is that faculty by which we repeat our impressions (as ideas) in such a way that in their new appearance (as ideas) they retain a considerable degree of their first vivacity (as impressions), and are somewhat intermediate in vivacity between an impression and a perfect idea (i.e., an idea which has entirely lost that original vivacity).

Imagination is that faculty by which we repeat our impressions (as ideas) in such a way that in their new appearance (as ideas) they retain virtually none of their first vivacity (as impressions), and hence are perfect ideas.²¹

It is easy to forget Hume's explicit advice to look to his later discussion of the distinction between memory and imagination (where he

²⁰See Treatise I, p. 117 (note).

²¹See ibid., pp. 8-9.

makes it clear that he is---and was---looking for the "sensible difference" between these two faculties), and to go away with the opinion that he is telling us what he means by 'imagination'. On the other hand, it is likewise easy to fail to take note of the fact that Hume tells us that it is the same faculty of imagination which is involved when he opposes imagination to memory (where imagination is said to be the faculty of our fainter ideas) as is involved when he opposes it to reason, and to go away with the belief that Hume is recognizing two distinct (even opposed) meanings of 'imagination'.²²

I cannot but admit that Hume's manner of articulating his theory of imagination leaves much to be desired. But of course if he had done a good job of it, I should not need to be engaging in the present inquiry.

Principles Governing the Imagination

As I mentioned earlier, the fourth element of Hume's theory is represented by his answer to the question, What principles, if any, govern or influence the operations of the imagination?

During his discussion in Treatise I of the question of criteria for distinguishing imaginative activities from memorial activities (i.e., part of the preceding element of his theory), Hume considers the possibility that this distinction could be drawn in terms of the

²²See ibid., p. 117 (note).

fact that whereas the memory is, in a way, tied down to the same order and form of the impressions from which its ideas originate, without any power of variation, the imagination may transpose and change them in whatever way it pleases.²³ Even though he rejects this fact as constituting a satisfactory criterion for distinguishing these two faculties in their operation (on the ground that it is impossible to recall the past impressions in order to compare them with our present ideas and thus to see whether their arrangement is exactly similar),²⁴ he nevertheless points out that an important principle of the imagination is its liberty to transform and change its ideas.²⁵ This same principle of liberty appears in Enquiry I in Hume's proclamation that "nothing is more free than the imagination of man."²⁶ However, despite this claim, Hume is anxious to persuade his readers (in both Treatise I and Enquiry I) that this

²³Gr. Treatise I, pp. 9, 85. It seems to me that, literally interpreted, this distinction of Hume's is a spurious one. In truth, it appears to be just one instance of his tendency to drift into the language of a proponent of the "little prime movers" theory of the mental faculties. It is simply not the case that faculties themselves are free to do what they please with their data; nor are they actually restrained from doing what they do with them. It is the mind and the mind alone which is free, or determined, in regard to the ordering of its data. The question then is whether the mind, in imagining, is free or determined in regard to its data, and whether, in remembering, it is free or determined. It is one thing to assert that imagination is the power to modify the order and form its data originally had; it is another to assert that it is free to do this modifying.

²⁴See ibid., p. 85. ²⁵Ibid., p. 10. ²⁶Enquiry I, p. 47.

faculty is "guided by some universal principles, which render it, in some measure, uniform with itself in all times and places."²⁷ He thinks that if it were not so guided (i.e., if its ideas were entirely loose and unconnected and were there no bond of union between them, no associating quality by which one idea naturally introduces another), then chance alone would join them and it would not be the case that the same simple ideas fall regularly into complex ones (as they commonly do). Moreover, he believes that

the qualities, from which this association arises, and by which the mind is after this manner convey'd from one idea to another, are three, viz. Resemblance, Contiguity in time or place, and Cause and Effect.²⁸

Thus, Hume maintains that there are principles which influence the operations of the imagination and that these principles are but three in number, viz., the three mentioned immediately above.

There are several points regarding this element of Hume's theory which deserve our attention. First, one of the most significant things about these principles of association is their involvement in the genesis of certain of our beliefs---indeed, certain of our basic beliefs. For instance, Hume says that

when the mind . . . passes from the idea or impression of one object to the idea or belief of another, it is not determin'd by reason, but by certain principles, which associate together the ideas of these objects, and unite

²⁷Treatise I, p. 10

²⁸Ibid., p. 11. Cf. Enquiry I, p. 24.

them in the imagination. Had ideas no more union in the fancy than objects seem to have to the understanding, we cou'd never draw any inference from causes to effects, nor repose belief in any matter of fact. The inference, therefore, depends solely on the union of ideas.²⁹

Second, there is a question as to whether Hume held that the imagination is the only faculty whose activities are influenced by the principles of association. A. H. Basson suggests that it is not when he asserts that Hume appeals to these principles because "he wants to explain how thinking, and even imagining, follows a more or less orderly sequence."³⁰ It seems to me that we can satisfactorily answer this question only if we have ascertained Hume's general conception of imagination. Hume makes it rather evident that these principles influence the mind to unite ideas. If it is his view that it is the imagination alone which can truly be said to unite ideas, then it follows that these principles influence this faculty and this faculty alone. In anticipation of my discussion of Hume's implied general conception of imagination, let me assert that I think

²⁹Treatise I, p. 92.

³⁰Basson, op. cit., p. 50. That Basson seriously maintains this position is clear from a criticism he subsequently offers of Hume's doctrine. He says that "Hume does not prove that these three principles: resemblance, contiguity, and cause and effect are the only principles of association, but reports that he has been unable to discover any others. In fact he omits one obvious associating relation, namely logical consequence . . ." (ibid., pp. 51-52). While I admit that Hume is not entirely clear on this matter, I do not believe that this criticism is a just one. I am inclined to think that he would deny that logical consequence is an associating relation and assert that it is solely a philosophical relation (see Treatise I, p. 69).

that this is just the case. The uniting of ideas is a property peculiar to imaginative activity, and one of its defining properties.³¹

Third, it is apparent that Hume maintains that imaginative activity is not rigidly determined by these principles of association. Basson's remarks on this matter are instructive. He says that Hume

specifically states that association does not completely determine a train of thought. It exercises a gentle guidance, rather than a rigid control. Evidently he is here concerned to preserve some element of freedom in our thinking, and he wants this freedom to be a kind of lawlessness or arbitrary irregularity. Any such thing is entirely contrary to his real aims, and in fact he pushes the association of ideas to its limit.³²

Although I agree substantially with this assessment, I want to add that Hume does manage in Treatise I (at least) to suggest that we have a kind of freedom which is not of this lawless, arbitrary sort.

For he maintains that these principles are

neither the infallible nor the sole causes of an union among ideas. They are not the infallible causes. For one may fix his attention during some time on any one object without looking farther. They are not the sole causes. For the thought has evidently a very irregular motion in running along its objects, and may leap from the heavens to the earth, from one end of the creation to the other, without any certain method or order.³³

I think that in denying that these principles are the infallible causes of the union of ideas Hume is suggesting, albeit somewhat

³¹It is true that Hume suggests in Enquiry I that the principles of association influence the memory as well as the imagination; but I think that this is just carelessness on his part (see Enquiry I, p. 23).

³²Basson, op. cit., p. 52.

³³Treatise I, p. 92.

elliptically, that we have a kind of freedom of thought which is different from and additional to the lawless, arbitrarily irregular type he refers to in denying that these principles are the sole causes of union. I think that the following passage reveals a clear-cut instance of Hume's appeal to this sort of freedom:

'Tis natural for men, in their common and careless way of thinking, to imagine they perceive a connexion betwixt such objects as they have constantly found united together; and because custom has render'd it difficult to separate the ideas, they are apt to fancy such a separation to be in itself impossible and absurd. But philosophers, who abstract from the effects of custom, and compare the ideas of objects, immediately perceive the falshood of these vulgar sentiments, and discover that there is no known connexion among objects.³⁴

Surely, abstracting from the effects of custom is an instance of the exercise of the sort of freedom Hume had in mind in denying that the principles of association are the infallible causes of a union of ideas.

The Nature of Imagination

This brings me to perhaps the most crucial consideration of the present chapter: the element of his theory which represents his view of the nature of imagination. According to Hume, how are imaginative activities to be formally distinguished from all other cognitive activities? Or, more simply put, what is imagination? In this chapter and the preceding one I have spoken out against the view that Hume's

³⁴Ibid., p. 223.

talk about different senses of 'imagination' is ultimate, in the sense that his intent in speaking of these senses is to reveal quite divergent notions or conceptions of imagination. I have suggested that there is a single general conception of imagination which encompasses the two different senses of the term which Hume talks about in Treatise I; and I have suggested that this conception is present and operative not only in Treatise I but also in Enquiry I. However, I have also suggested (in a footnote in this chapter) that there is, particularly in Treatise I, a usage of 'imagination' which is distinct from this general conception---although Hume does not "officially" recognize it as such.³⁵ In what immediately follows, I shall try to sustain these two claims. Quite naturally, my discussion

³⁵I do not mean to imply by this claim that there is nothing relevant in common between Hume's general conception and this other usage, but merely that there is enough difference between them to refer to the latter as a different sense of the term. In contrast to this, I am inclined to say that what Hume himself refers to as different senses of the term are not different senses of it. Or, at any rate, I think that it has proven to be misleading for Hume to have done so. Undoubtedly, the real truth of the matter is that there are different senses of "senses of a term," and two of these senses are exhibited in the issue at hand. However, the present inquiry does not seem to me to stand in need of a discussion of the different senses of "senses of a term." All that is required is that we remain conceptually clear-headed about the true implications of Hume's talk about different senses. I am convinced that some of my fellow students of Hume have not remained clear-headed in the matter, and that their failure to do so has had a damaging effect on some of their main theses concerning his theory of imagination.

will be divided into two parts: a consideration of his general conception and a consideration of his "special" usage of 'imagination'.

Hume's General Conception of Imagination

Inasmuch as Hume never explicitly states his general conception (or definition) of imagination, any view regarding it must be considered as a kind of hypothesis.³⁶ My hypothesis is the following: imagination, in Hume's view, is the faculty of forming, uniting and separating ideas. I believe that there are several considerations which lend support to this hypothesis, not the least of which is the fact that Hume espouses a doctrine of mental faculties, i.e., the view that there are distinct faculties (or powers) of the mind.³⁷ Actually, my exposition of the preceding elements of his theory of imagination has been predicated on the assumption that he held some such doctrine. And the evidence for this seems to me to be quite good. For one thing, consider his division of the original Treatise into two main parts: "Of the Understanding" and "Of the Passions." He is quite explicit on the point that the understanding and the passions are "two faculties of the mind."³⁸ It would appear that

³⁶Of course, even if he had stated his general conception of imagination, it would not follow necessarily that he consistently employed the term 'imagination' (and its equivalents or derivatives) in a way which accords with that conception.

³⁷For instance, one who makes out Hume to be a kind of phenomenalist with regard to the mind would most likely deny that he held such a doctrine, or that he could consistently hold such. See H. A. Prichard, Knowledge and Perception (London, 1950), p. 177.

³⁸Treatise II, p. 339. Cf. Treatise III, p. 493.

this two-fold general division of the mental faculties is roughly equivalent to the traditional division of them into cognitive and motive. But there are considerations of an even more direct nature which point to his adoption of the traditional faculty doctrine. Not only is it the case that there are numerous passages throughout the Treatise in which he refers to various specific faculties of the mind;³⁹ in the opening Section of Enquiry I, he states flatly that

it cannot be doubted, that the mind is endowed with several powers and faculties, that these powers are distinct from each other, that what is really distinct to the immediate perception may be distinguished by reflexion; and consequently, that there is a truth and falsehood in all propositions on this subject, and a truth and falsehood, which lie not beyond the compass of human understanding.⁴⁰

In fact, he seems to describe his science of human nature in general as an attempt at "an accurate scrutiny into the powers and faculties of human nature."⁴¹ As far as his philosophy of the human understanding is concerned, it seems to be described here as an attempt to "enquire seriously into the nature of human understanding" and to give "an exact analysis of its powers and capacity."⁴² Hence, I do not think that it can be seriously doubted that Hume held a doctrine of mental faculties, or that he held that imagination is one of these faculties.

³⁹Cf. Treatise I, pp. 5, 8-9, 85, 117-18 (note), 149, 188, etc.

⁴⁰Enquiry I, pp. 13-14.

⁴¹Ibid., p. 13.

⁴²Ibid., p. 12.

As regards direct evidence of Hume's usage of 'imagination' in a way which indicates that he held that the activities named in my hypothesis are activities of that faculty, I think that there are numerous passages to which we can appeal.⁴³ At present, though, I shall only make reference to a few, since in my discussions in subsequent chapters there will be ample opportunities to do so. Let us take first the activity of forming ideas. Early in Treatise I, Hume says that he observes

that many of our complex ideas never had impressions, that corresponded to them, and that many of our complex impressions never are exactly copied in ideas. I can imagine to myself such a city as the New Jerusalem, whose pavement is gold and walls are rubies, tho' I never saw such. I have seen Paris; but shall I affirm I can form such an idea of that city, as will perfectly represent all its streets and houses in their real and just proportions?⁴⁴

If it is agreed that the raising up to oneself of an idea is just a way of saying that one forms an idea, then the following passage, again from Treatise I, gives direct evidence that this activity is held by Hume to belong to the imagination. Hume is here talking about the phenomenon of the missing shade of blue:

Now I ask, whether 'tis possible for him, from his own imagination, to supply this deficiency, and raise up to himself the idea of that particular shade, tho' it had

⁴³However, I must admit that they are considerably more numerous in Treatise I than in Enquiry I.

⁴⁴Treatise I, p. 3; 'imagine', 'form', and 'idea' were underlined by me.

never been conveyed to him by his senses? I believe there are few but will be of opinion that he can . . .⁴⁵

One thing that should not go unmentioned here is the fact that, in Hume's view, to conceive something is to form an idea of that thing; that is, the formation of ideas and conceiving are one and the same mental process. The following passage gives a clear indication of Hume's intent to identify conceiving, imagining, and the formation of ideas:

'Tis an established maxim in metaphysics, That whatever the mind clearly conceives includes the idea of possible existence, or in other words, that nothing we imagine is absolutely impossible. We can form the idea of a golden mountain, and from thence conclude that such a mountain may actually exist. We can form no idea of a mountain without a valley, and therefore regard it as impossible.⁴⁶

A question that may be raised on this point is whether or not the formation of ideas is an activity of mind which is peculiar to the imaginative faculty. It might seem that this sort of activity is common to all of the "ideational" faculties. Do not remembering and reasoning also involve the forming of ideas? As a matter of fact, Hume finds the occasion to raise the following rhetorical question in his discussion of personal identity: "what is the memory but a faculty, by which we raise up the images of past perceptions?"⁴⁷ And what is the raising up of images, for Hume, but the forming of

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 6. Cf. Enquiry I, p. 21.

⁴⁶Treatise I, p. 32. Cf. Enquiry I, pp. 19, 48.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 260.

ideas? Despite such remarks as these about memory, Hume seems to me to tend to consider the activity of forming ideas to be unique to the imaginative faculty. He might have distinguished between imagination and memory, in regard to the formation of ideas, by maintaining that whereas imagination is the mere raising up of images of past perceptions, memory is the recognition that they are past perceptions. However, he does not make it perfectly clear that he holds this view. As regards reasoning and the formation of ideas, Hume's position appears to be that reasoning as such does not, strictly speaking, involve the formation of ideas. As he says in one passage in Treatise I,

wherever we reason, we must antecedently be possest of clear ideas, which may be the objects of our reasoning. The conception always precedes the understanding . . .⁴⁸

I shall have something to say shortly about Hume's general conceptions of memory and reasoning, as well as of sensation (and perception).

The other two constituents of Hume's general conception of imagination are (as I mentioned previously) the uniting and separating of ideas. These two can and should be taken together, as they are correlative opposites. Again, the best direct evidence of Hume's intent to link imagination with these two activities is Treatise I. Quite early in this work, Hume asserts that "all simple ideas may be separated by the imagination, and may be united again in what

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 164.

form it pleases."⁴⁹ In speaking in this manner about the separation and union of ideas in the mind, Hume is of course alluding to the principle of the liberty of the imagination. We may, indeed, speak of this sort of imagination as the "free" imagination, provided we do not necessarily identify this (as Hume unfortunately tends at times to do) with loose, indeterministic imagining. However, it is also the case (as I took notice of in considering the principles which govern the imagination) that Hume thinks that there are certain qualities "by which two ideas are connected together in the imagination, and the one naturally introduces the other."⁵⁰ These qualities are, of course, the principles of association or natural relations; and they are factors influencing the uniting of ideas by the mind. Perhaps it is worth mentioning at this juncture that Hume maintains that

the idea of a substance as well as that of a mode, is nothing but a collection of simple ideas, that are united by the imagination, and have a particular name assigned them, by which we are able to recall, either to ourselves or others, that collection.⁵¹

This example seems to bear witness to the fact that Hume is willing to admit that certain unitings of ideas by the mind may take place not only involuntarily, but also in a largely unconscious way. But even if it does not, our subsequent discussions will reveal that he actually holds that this is the case.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 10. Cf. Enquiry I, pp. 19, 47.

⁵⁰Treatise I, p. 13.

⁵¹Ibid., p. 16.

I think that it would be agreed that a good way to provide additional, confirmatory evidence for my hypothesis concerning Hume's general conception of imagination would be to uncover his general conceptions of the other cognitive faculties he recognizes and find them to cohere with my hypothesis concerning imagination---at least in the minimal sense of their being distinct from the latter. This I shall try to do. As I understand him, Hume recognizes three cognitive faculties in addition to the faculty of imagination: sensation (and/or perception), memory, and reason.⁵²

Regarding the first of these three, even though Hume asserts that in perception there is not "any exercise of thought, or any action, properly speaking, but a mere passive admission of the impressions thro' the organs of sensation," he clearly suggests that an awareness of relations between these impressions is involved. One may, I think, infer that he is at least dimly aware of a distinction between pure sensation and perception, and that his distinction comes to this: sensation is the power of the mind to receive sense-impressions, whereas sense-perception is this plus the mind's power to discern relations between these impressions.⁵³

⁵²Hume speaks also of judgment and understanding, but these two are never very clearly distinguished from reason. In fact, I think that he normally treats them as identifiable with at least one of the forms of reasoning he recognizes.

⁵³There are problems here, especially in regard to the kind of theory of sense-perception Hume actually maintained or presupposed. Did he hold a representative theory? Was he some sort of phenomenalist? Did he hold a causal theory? In my opinion, Hume *qua* philosopher never abandoned the distinction between sense-impressions

As far as Hume's general conception of memory is concerned, I am convinced that he conceived this faculty to be essentially retentive in character. As Hume puts it in one place, "the chief exercise of the memory is not to preserve the simple ideas, but their order and position."⁵⁴ In another place, he says that it is "a peculiar property of the memory to preserve the original order and position of its ideas."⁵⁵ Hence, it appears that memory is the faculty of retaining, in idea-form, the same order and form of the original impressions (of sensation and reflexion).

If one accepts this claim of mine about Hume's general conception of memory, then one might very well be led to ask why I do not maintain that his general conception of imagination is most accurately expressed in the proposition that it is the faculty of modifying, in idea-form, the order and form of the original impressions. This is a natural and legitimate question to raise concerning my view, particularly in the light of Hume's discussions in Treatise I of the principle of liberty of imagination and of the "sensible" difference

and the qualities of material things. And in several places in Treatise I (e.g., pp. 27-28, 33-34, 38) he quite clearly seems to be presupposing a straight-forward Lockean representative realism. There are also several passages, again in Treatise I (e.g., pp. 7, 67, 84), indicating that he held some sort of causal theory of sense-perception (cf. also Treatise II, p. 275). What he seems to be convinced of is that we can never be certain of the true nature or character of these causes. The primary source of difficulty, of course, is his discussion "Of scepticism with regard to the senses," in Part IV of Treatise I---and, I might add, the abbreviated version of this discussion in Section XII of Enquiry I.

⁵⁴Treatise I, p. 9.

⁵⁵Ibid., p. 85.

between imagination and memory. Indeed, such a view might even seem to accord better with Hume's talk in Enquiry I about imagination as the faculty of mixing, compounding, separating, and dividing, in all the varieties of fiction and vision, the ideas furnished it by the internal and external senses.⁵⁶ I will offer two reasons against adopting this suggestion as regards Hume's general conception of imagination. (1) Such a view is essentially linked with Hume's talk about the "free" imagination and is thus one-sided. It does not accommodate very well Hume's talk about the "determined" imagination. The concept of a union of ideas is not limited in this way, since the unitings of ideas may be either free or determined. (2) To hold the "modification" view of imagination, in conjunction with the "retention" view of memory, would seem to commit one to the position that these two faculties must have exactly opposite functions; and hence are, cognitively speaking, directly opposed to one another. If this were Hume's view, then it would seem that he must hold that these two faculties are always at odds with one another and can never complement or supplement each other. Yet, as a matter of fact, Hume holds that one of the most important activities of imagination actually presupposes the action of memory and involves a sort of projection into the future of certain elements of the order retained by the latter faculty. I have in mind, of course, the process of causal inference.

⁵⁶See Enquiry I, p. 47; cf. also p. 19.

As regards Hume's general conception of reason, the following sentence from Treatise I seems to provide a good starting-point:

All kinds of reasoning consist in nothing but a comparison, and a discovery of those relations, either constant or inconstant which two or more objects bear to each other.⁵⁷

In view of the extremely important role which reason plays in his philosophy of the human understanding, it will be desirable to go into some detail in explicating and elaborating upon the above statement. First of all, perhaps it should be pointed out at the beginning that since Hume holds that nothing can ever be present to the mind but perceptions, he really should be saying 'perceptions' here, rather than 'objects'. Second, regarding the meaning he attaches to the term 'relation' in this passage, it should be mentioned that Hume calls the various relations which reason can discover by its comparisons "philosophical relations," and he defines the latter in a rather general and loose way---relating it directly to the notion of comparison itself. In his usage, the expression "philosophical relation" stands for any situation or circumstance which may form a particular subject of comparison by the mind, whether or not the "objects" compared are united by some sort of connecting principle. In slightly different terms, it stands for that particular circumstance in which we may think proper to compare "objects," even in those cases in which there is an arbitrary uniting of ideas by the mind.⁵⁸ This

⁵⁷Treatise I, p. 73.

⁵⁸See ibid., pp. 13-14.

reference to the union of ideas should enable us to see that Hume wants to distinguish between the comparison of ideas and the uniting of them. This of course is central to the distinction between reasoning and imagining. Third, as far as his use of the term 'comparison' is concerned, it is a rather broad and vague term and Hume uses it in a way which seems to include a reference to certain sorts of inferences. He might well have had in mind in his use of it what Descartes had in mind in his use of it in Rules for the Direction of the Mind. There Descartes says that

in every train of reasoning it is by comparison merely that we attain to a precise knowledge of the truth. Here is an example:---all A is B, all B is C, therefore all A is C. Here we compare with one another a quaesitum and a datum, viz. A and C, in respect of the fact that each is B, and so on . . . All knowledge whatsoever, other than that which consists in the simple and naked intuition of single independent objects, is a matter of the comparison of two things or more, with each other.⁵⁹

Be this as it may, it should be mentioned that Hume does not hold that only reason makes comparisons. That is to say, even though reasoning consists in nothing but the comparison and discovery of philosophical relations between two (or more) "objects," not all comparisons of "objects" may be, properly speaking, said to be reasoning. I have already alluded to the fact that, according to Hume, "when both the objects are present to the senses along with the relation [between

⁵⁹R. Descartes, "Rules for the Direction of the Mind," The Philosophical Works of Descartes, transl. by E. S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross, Vol. I, p. 55.

them], we call this perception rather than reasoning."⁶⁰ Consequently, there are two sorts of comparison and discovery of relations which may, properly speaking, be called reasoning, and which constitute its essence. In other words, there are two general sorts of conditions under which comparisons and discoveries may be made and which may be said to constitute states or processes of reasoning: (1) when both "objects" are ideas and (2) when one "object" is an impression and the other is an idea. Within category (1) Hume distinguishes between comparisons or inferences which are mediated by one or more other ideas and those which are not so mediated. That is, he distinguishes between comparisons of two ideas (or inferences from the one to the other) "either immediately or by the interposition of other ideas."⁶¹ If it takes place immediately it is intuition or intuitive reasoning; if it takes place by the interposition of other ideas it is demonstration or demonstrative reasoning. An essential feature of these two types of reasoning is that the relations discovered by the comparisons must be constant or invariable.⁶² Within category (2) the distinction between constant and inconstant relations applies. This distinction, indeed, is the basis of Hume's division of this type of reasoning into reasoning from proofs and from probabilities

⁶⁰Treatise I, p. 73.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 95. Cf. also pp. 70, 79, and Enquiry I, p. 34.

⁶²Treatise I, pp. 70, 79.

(or from conjecture).⁶³ Hume also makes this distinction in terms of the notion of certainty. At one point in Treatise I he tells us that he means "by proofs, those arguments, which are deriv'd from the relation of cause and effect, and which are entirely free from doubt and uncertainty."⁶⁴ He makes it clear that reasoning from probabilities has to do with "that evidence, which is still attended with uncertainty."⁶⁵

It is certainly the case that considerably more may be said about Hume's view of reason; but the preceding should suffice for our purposes. Clearly, the most important notion in his general conception of this faculty is that of comparison; and it is the latter which distinguishes it from the imagination. While it is quite true that Hume's usage of the term 'reason' does not always reflect his stated definition of that faculty, it is most assuredly the case that his usage in his most crucial arguments does reflect it.⁶⁶

This excursus into what I consider to be Hume's general conceptions of the cognitive faculties he recognizes other than imagination has served, I think, to solidify my position in regard to his

⁶³Ibid., p. 124.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶I have already examined Hume's use of 'reason' as virtually identical with imagination (when the latter is determined or influenced by the causal principle of association). See my discussion of Taylor's view of "instinctive" reason in Hume, Chapter I, pp. 78-79, 89-90.

general conception of imagination itself. It has also served to give an indication of the range of mental activities which Hume recognizes as cognitive in nature. For in addition to the forming, uniting and separating of ideas (imagination), there is the passive reception of sense-impressions (sensation) and the comparison and discovery of relations between them (perception), the retention in idea-form of the original order and position of antecedent sense-impressions (memory), and the comparison and discovery of relations between either ideas alone (intuitive and demonstrative reasoning) or impressions and ideas (probable or matter-of-fact reasoning).⁶⁷ This is pretty much Hume's general picture of the cognitive life of man, i.e., what is or can be involved in it.

⁶⁷It really ought to be pointed out that Hume's considered position in regard to probable reasoning is not, as he suggests in his general conception of the latter, that it discovers relations between impressions and ideas---although the latter of necessity involved in all such reasonings. It is careless of Hume not to make unambiguously clear his view that in probable reasoning we discover relations between objects, and not relations between impressions and ideas. To be sure, "probability . . . must in some respects be founded on the impressions of our memory and sense, and in some respects on our ideas" (Treatise I, p. 89). But what this means is (1) that "'tis . . . necessary, that in all probable reasonings there be something present to the mind, either seen or remember'd," and (2) that 'tis also necessary "that from this we infer something connected with it, which is not seen nor remember'd" (ibid.). Hume's view is that in such inferences ideas are involved, but these ideas are ideas of objects or states of affairs which are supposed to exist; it is the relation between observed (i.e., seen or remembered) objects or states of affairs and the unobserved but supposed objects or states of affairs which probable reasoning is held to discover. The involved ideas themselves are not that "which is not seen nor remember'd," although they are neither seen nor remembered. The distinction which Hume does

Hume's "Special" Usage of 'Imagination'

I am now ready to turn to the second main part of my discussion of the fifth element of Hume's theory of imagination---his usage of 'imagination' in a sense which is not encompassed, as it were, by his general conception of that faculty. As in the case of my discussion of his general conception itself, I shall only be presenting evidence sufficient to confirm its presence in Hume's philosophy of the human understanding; further evidence will be provided in my account of the relation his theory of imagination bears to the main lines of argument of the latter. Actually, this usage of 'imagination' is pretty much restricted to his Treatise I, at least as far as its significant involvement in his argument is concerned. Nevertheless, I should hasten to add that I do not think that its absence from Enquiry I is a sign that Hume has repudiated the usage of the term in that "special" sense; rather, I should suggest that this usage is merely omitted.

I believe that we find at least an allusion to this "special" usage or sense of 'imagination' quite early in Treatise I. Not many pages back, I took note of Hume's view (expressed in Section vi of Part I) that

the idea of a substance as well as that of a mode, is nothing but a collection of simple ideas, that are united by the imagination, and have a particular name assigned

not fully explicate is that between the materials involved in the process of probable reasoning or inference (viz., impressions and ideas) and the product of this inferential process (viz., the supposed objects or states of affairs inferred).

them, by which we are able to recall, either to ourselves or others, that collection.⁶⁸

Now, despite his "nothing but" language, Hume's statement really indicates only what he thinks the ideas of substances and modes have in common; it most certainly does not exhaust the essence, as it were, of our notion of a substance. This is made clear when Hume differentiates between the two sorts of ideas. He says:

The difference betwixt these ideas consists in this, that the particular qualities, which form a substance, are commonly refer'd to an unknown something, in which they are supposed to inhere; or granting this fiction should not take place, are at least supposed to be closely and inseparably connected by the relations of contiguity and causation.⁶⁹

What deserves our attention is the reference to a supposition--- particularly of an unknown something, but also of the existence of certain connecting relations. Later in the same paragraph from which these two passages are taken, Hume refers to this supposition as a "principle of union" and even claims that we regard it as "the chief part of the complex idea" of a substance.⁷⁰ If we take these remarks in the light of what Hume says in Section 111 of Part IV about the so-called fictions of the ancient philosophers, there can be no doubt that this supposition of an unknown something is the

⁶⁸Treatise I, p. 16.

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid.

product of the imagination.⁷¹ That is, to suppose the existence of an unknown something, in which the qualities of a thing inhere, is to engage in an act of imagining. And what is noteworthy about such imaginative acts, such acts of supposing, is that no idea (in Hume's sense of the term) of the entity supposed or imagined to exist is possible. Thus, in addition to conceiving, which is Hume's frequently used term for the activity of the imagination in forming ideas of things, he recognizes a supposing activity of this faculty. The best evidence I can find of Hume's intention to make explicit this distinction between conceiving and supposing is the following passage from Section ii of Part IV:

We may well suppose in general, but 'tis impossible for us distinctly to conceive, objects to be in their nature any thing but exactly the same with perceptions.⁷²

The reason for our inability to conceive objects to be in their nature something different from perceptions is the fact that "we never can conceive any thing but perceptions."⁷³

⁷¹See ibid., pp. 220-21. See also his letter to Henry Home (July 24, 1746), in which he says that "as to the Idea of Substance, I must own, that as it has no Access to the Mind by any of our Senses or Feelings, it had always appear'd to me to be nothing but an imaginary Center of Union amongst the different & variable Qualitys that are to be found in every Piece of Matter" (R. Klibansky and E. C. Mossner, New Letters of David Hume [Oxford, 1954], p. 21).

⁷²Treatise I, p. 218.

⁷³Ibid., p. 216; cf. also p. 234.

I take the evidence presented above as casting grave doubt on Annis Flew's contention that Hume

ignored the possibility of our imagining (supposing) anything without an accompanying image. (And, for that matter, he also ignored the possibility of our imagining (perhaps mistakenly thinking) anything without imagery.)⁷⁴

Hume devotes quite a few pages of Treatise I to providing explanations of our imagining (i.e., supposing), albeit falsely, that we have ideas (i.e., images) of certain "things": for instance, "of a time and duration, without any change or succession,"⁷⁵ and "of a vacuum, or space, where there is nothing visible or tangible."⁷⁶ And, though in so doing he appeals to his principles of the association of ideas---claiming that "from these three relations we are apt to confound our ideas"⁷⁷---, it is still the case that the false supposition itself (i.e., the object of the supposition) has no accompanying (i.e., corresponding) image. Likewise, there is no accompanying or corresponding image present to the mind when it supposes (or imagines) "an unknown something, or original substance and matter," as a principle of union or cohesion among the various qualities which comprise a material object.⁷⁸

⁷⁴Annis Flew, "Images, Supposing, and Imagining," Philosophy, 1953 (28), p. 248.

⁷⁵Treatise I, p. 218. ⁷⁶Ibid., p. 53. ⁷⁷Ibid., p. 65.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 221. The word 'original' was underlined in the text.

To the best of my knowledge, this special supposal sense of 'imagination' has not hitherto been clearly recognized. It is true that H. H. Price thinks he finds an incipient Kantian distinction between the empirical and transcendental imagination in Hume, but this distinction does not appear to me to "square" entirely with the distinction I find between Hume's general conception of imagination and his special usage of 'imagination'---at any rate, not according to the way in which Price draws the Kantian distinction. In Price's view,

the Transcendental Imagination, according to Kant, is something which makes experience possible, where 'experience' means our consciousness of Nature, or of the Phenomenal World, which includes both material objects and empirical selves. Without its synthetic and supplementative activities, we should be aware of nothing but a stream of sense-impressions; we should not even be aware that the stream is a stream and has a temporal order. The Empirical Imagination, on the other hand, is something within the Empirical Self, whose workings (like those of any other 'power', mental or physical) can only be discovered inductively. It is that which is manifested in the associative processes studied by Empirical Psychology---as when a man's name reminds us of his face or of another similar name.⁷⁹

Price, then, holds that Hume is in substantial agreement with Kant "that the phenomenal world, the world of material objects and empirical selves, is in some sense an imaginative construction."⁸⁰ Our very consciousness of these entities is a product of the activity of the Transcendental Imagination. Now, I would agree that it is Hume's view that were it not for the synthetic and supplementative activities

⁷⁹Price, op. cit., pp. 15-17.

⁸⁰Ibid., p. 16.

of imagination---not in the supposal sense of the term, though---we should not believe that there are objects having continued and distinct existence or selves having personal identity; neither would we believe in the existence of necessary connexions between objects or in the possibility of an "empty" time and an "empty" space. Yet this does not appear to be the same thing as saying that we are conscious of these things. Moreover, I am inclined to believe that the very concept of a phenomenal world is foreign to Hume's philosophy. As T. E. Jessop has said, "Hume gives psychologically a subjectivist account of our knowledge of matters of fact, while holding to an objectivist postulation of them."⁸¹ This sort of viewpoint is, I believe, incompatible with an adherence to the notion of a phenomenal world. Thus, I cannot agree with Price when he asserts that Hume resolved "our consciousness of material objects into sense-acquaintance plus imaginative supplementation."⁸² The bearing this has on the question concerning the recognition, by Price, of a supposal sense of 'imagination' in Hume is as follows. In talking about this imaginative supplementation (which is supposedly involved in our consciousness of material objects), Price makes it clear that he believes that this sort of imaginative activity---he usually refers to it as imaginative postulation---is not to be identified with imaging or picturing

⁸¹T. E. Jessop, "Some Misunderstandings of Hume," Revue Internationale de Philosophie, 1952 (6), p. 167.

⁸²Price, op. cit., p. 73.

(i.e., forming "Humian" ideas). Certainly, this much it has in common with what I consider to be Hume's supposal sense. The difference is this: whereas Price is willing to admit (and, indeed, claims) that imaginative postulation does involve imaging of some sort,⁸³ I deny that Hume's supposal sense of 'imagining' involves it at all.⁸⁴ Furthermore, I should add that I am not convinced that Hume himself recognized the existence of imaginative postulation---as it is described by Price.⁸⁵

Imaginative Activity and the Real

What I have referred to as the sixth element of Hume's theory of imagination represents his answer to the question, What "ontological" connections, if any, does imaginative activity have? In order to give an answer to this question which accurately reflects Hume's position, it will be essential to keep in mind the distinction (just drawn) between his general conception of imagination and his special usage of the term.

⁸³Ibid., pp. 94-95.

⁸⁴This is not to deny, however, that such imagining can be caused by the formings and unitings of ideas (or images).

⁸⁵I am not at all certain that Price's specific talk about imaginative postulation, in connection with our consciousness of material things, is on all fours with his more general talk about the presence of the Transcendental Imagination in Hume.

In terms of the argument of his philosophy of the human understanding, what is undoubtedly Hume's most important "ontological"--- I use this term for want of a more appropriate one---principle of the imagination (under his general conception of that faculty) is actually one to which I have made reference in this chapter. It is the following: "that whatever the mind clearly conceives includes the idea of possible existence, or in other words, that nothing we imagine is absolutely impossible."⁸⁶ Although Hume does not use the term 'logical' in this connection, it is apparent from his example that he maintains that whatever we imagine (i.e., form a distinct idea of) is logically possible.⁸⁷ For he says that "we can form the idea of a golden mountain, and from thence conclude that such a mountain may actually exist."⁸⁸

Hume makes repeated use of this principle in Treatise I, and I shall be exhibiting several instances of its use in my subsequent discussion of the involvement of Hume's theory in his philosophy of the human understanding. As far as Enquiry I is concerned, even though he does not provide an abstract formulation of the principle there, he does nevertheless make use of it in his discussion of causation.⁸⁹

⁸⁶Treatise I, p. 32.

⁸⁷In this same passage, Hume appears to be recognizing the principle that whatever we cannot imagine, or distinctly conceive, is (logically) impossible; since he asserts that "we can form no idea of a mountain without a valley, and therefore regard it as impossible."

⁸⁸Treatise I, p. 32.

⁸⁹See Enquiry I, p. 35.

In exhibiting this important "ontological" principle of imagination, I have been speaking solely of Hume's general conception of that faculty. For even though it is his view that whatever we imagine (i.e., form an idea of) is possible, it is also his view that we can imagine (i.e., suppose, where no idea or image is directly involved) things which are not possible. We can, for instance, imagine or suppose we have an idea which it is really impossible for us to have. More specifically, we can imagine we have an idea of "a vacuum and extension without matter"; moreover, we can imagine we have an idea of "a time, when there was no succession or change in any real existence."⁹⁰ Yet, according to Hume, to imagine this is to imagine what is logically impossible, since "the ideas of space and time are . . . no separate or distinct ideas, but merely those of the manner or order, in which objects exist."⁹¹ Another instance of imagining the impossible, according to Hume, is our alleged supposition "of an union in place betwixt an extended body, as a fig, and its particular taste."⁹² Since such qualities, as those of taste,

⁹⁰Treatise I, p. 40.

⁹¹Ibid., pp. 39-40. Of course, it is debatable whether Hume has shown that such ideas are logically impossible. I suspect that there is a kind of ambiguity in the concept of logical impossibility involved here, even if Hume is correct. But whatever the case may be, I think that it is Hume's view that this is an instance of imagining the logically impossible (in some sense).

⁹²Ibid., p. 238.

exist nowhere, it is logically impossible for them to form a conjunction in place with an extended thing.⁹³

Another issue, regarding the question of the "ontological" connections of imagination, is that of the relation between imaginative activity and truth about matters-of-fact. As we have seen, what Taylor takes to be the most important problem connected with Hume's theory of imagination is this: if we have nothing but the liveliness of ideas, furnished by the imagination, to determine the validity of belief, how are we to know that in any given instance we are not dealing with imaginary objects and ideas, rather than with real ones?⁹⁴ What this problem seems to me to boil down to is the question, How reliable is the natural, instinctive imagination (i.e., "the imagination, as passive to customary arrangement of an accepted regularity in the external world"⁹⁵) in generating true belief? We may also recall from the preceding chapter that Smith maintained that Hume's outstanding difficulty, when he identified imagination (in his supposed special sense of that term) and belief (in accordance with his early doctrine of this mental phenomenon) with vivacity of conception, was to distinguish by any clear principles between fact and fiction.⁹⁶ In maintaining this, it would appear that Smith is alluding to pretty much the same problem as is Taylor---or, at any

⁹³Ibid., pp. 235-38.

⁹⁴Taylor, op. cit., p. 186.

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Smith, op. cit., p. 460.

rate, to a facet of the same underlying problem. Furthermore, we find Hendel saying, in his book on Hume's philosophy, that Hume was trying to show that "imagination and its principles [i.e., the principles of the association of ideas] constituted a new medium of truth."⁹⁷ Interpretations such as these, if valid, bespeak a main concern, on Hume's part, to establish a close link between certain imaginative activities (viz., those taking place under the influence of the principles of association) and the attainment of truths about matters of fact or existence. While I should agree that Hume felt that many matter-of-fact inferences (in particular, causal ones), which involve imagination in an essential way, are valid in the sense that the predictions (anticipations or expectations) they express are very often fulfilled, I must insist that such things are not of primary concern to Hume in his philosophy of the human understanding. His primary concern---one of them, at least---was to show that certain basic beliefs about the world, to which such imaginative activities (and others resembling them) give rise, are without any justification at all. But even apart from this interpretive claim, it surely must be evident from the following passage that Hume did not view imagination and its principles as a new medium of truth:

'Tis indeed evident, that as the vulgar suppose their perceptions to be their only objects, and at the same time believe the continu'd existence of matter, we must account for the origin of the belief upon that supposition. Now upon that supposition, 'tis a false opinion

⁹⁷Hendel, op. cit., p. 411.

that any of our objects, or perceptions, are identically the same after an interruption; and consequently the opinion of their identity can never arise from reason, but must arise from the imagination. The imagination is seduc'd into such an opinion only by means of the resemblance of certain perceptions; since we find they are only our resembling perceptions, which we have a propension to suppose the same.⁹⁸

The Function of Imagination in Cognition

The seventh and final element of Hume's theory of imagination can be dealt with very quickly, i.e., gauged in terms of the extent to which it needs to be considered in the present context. Actually, in my later discussion of the involvement of the theory in the main lines of argument of his philosophy of the human understanding, one of my main tasks will be concerned with the exposition of this element of it. As I noted earlier, this element is represented by Hume's answer to the question, What role(s) or function(s) does imagination, or imaginative activity, play in cognition?

Perhaps a few explanatory comments should be made regarding the notion of cognition. By 'cognition' I mean one of the three traditionally recognized generic aspects of consciousness or conscious experience, the other two being conation and affection.⁹⁹ In a broad

⁹⁸Treatise I, p. 209. This is not the only instance of this kind of talk by Hume about imagination (cf. ibid., p. 149).

⁹⁹Some philosophers (e.g., Hume) seem to want to collapse the distinction between conation and affection, treating them as two "dimensions" of one and the same aspect of consciousness.

sense, a cognitive process or act is one the direct object of which is the acquisition of knowledge, belief, opinion, etc. Accordingly, such faculties as those of sensation, memory, imagination, and reason are almost universally recognized as cognitive faculties.

It seems to me that, for the most part, a statement of the role or function which a cognitive faculty (such as imagination) plays in a particular cognitive process comes down to a statement of the specific way(s) in which the sort(s) of mental activities named in the general conception(or definition) of that faculty take place. Nevertheless, in the case of imagination in particular, it must be added that not every one of the three sorts of activities (i.e., forming, uniting, and separating ideas) mentioned in its definition are necessarily present in all of the sorts of cognitive processes Hume discusses. Some of them will simply involve the forming and uniting of ideas.¹⁰⁰ This is especially true in regard to the kind of role Hume claims the imagination plays in the genesis of certain basic beliefs we supposedly maintain concerning space, time, and necessary connexion, the external world, and personal identity.

¹⁰⁰However, it must also be kept in mind that there is the activity of supposing, which Hume ascribes to the imagination and which (as we have seen) does not fall under his general conception. As it will turn out, this activity is closely linked with the forming-uniting activities of imagination---or, at any rate, certain of them.

Concluding Remarks

This brings to a close my account of Hume's theory of imagination proper. I believe that I have succeeded in mentioning and explicating (to a degree sufficient for the present) all of the essential elements of the theory. These elements are expressible in statements which reveal: (1) the nature of the data of imagination (viz., ideas or mental images), (2) the ultimate source of its data (viz., experience, sensational and reflexional), (3) the criteria, drawn from our immediate experience, for distinguishing its activities from those of the other cognitive powers (viz., the faintly distinction between ideas), (4) the principles which influence at least some of its activities (viz., the principles of association), (5) what its nature is (viz., the general conception and the special usage), (6) the "ontological" connections it has (viz. the relation between imaginative activity and possible existence), and (7) the cognitive roles it performs.

As far as the remainder of this study is concerned, the elements of the theory which will be most prominent and important are (4) through (7).¹⁰¹ The first three elements are comparatively minor ones and were discussed primarily because they seemed useful in paving the way to a revelation of the crucial fifth element, i.e., the

¹⁰¹The close connections between (4), (5) and (7) are so obvious that they do not require elucidation.

general conception. If nothing else, I believe that the proper identification and discrimination of these three elements enables us to avoid confusing any one of them---but especially the first and third---with Hume's general conception.

CHAPTER III

THE GENERIC FEATURES AND BASIC ARGUMENT-STRUCTURE OF HUME'S PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUMAN UNDERSTANDING

In the preceding chapter, I attempted to show, among other things, that Hume maintains the same (albeit implied) general conception of imagination in both Treatise I and Enquiry I, the two major statements of his philosophy of the human understanding. In the present chapter, I shall attempt to show that the generic features of both these works are likewise identical. By "generic features" I mean the primary aims or goals and the basic, governing principles employed in attempting to achieve these aims; I do not include in this notion the basic structure of the argument, i.e., the over-all manner in which the main lines of argument develop or unfold. For while it seems to me that the primary aims and basic principles of Treatise I and Enquiry I are the same, I must admit that it is certainly not the case that the two works share the same basic argument-pattern. Nevertheless, I do believe that the pattern of argument Hume follows in Section XII of Enquiry I provides a definite clue to the over-all pattern of argument he adopts in Treatise I as a whole. Consequently, another of the main

attempts of this chapter will be to show that this is the case; and this will be to show that there is a striking similarity between the two patterns of argument. If I am successful in showing this, then I will not only have provided a kind of confirmation of my contention about the identity of the primary goals and basic principles of the two works; I will also have provided a degree of supporting evidence for my claim about the nature of the difference between Hume's theory of imagination in the one and in the other.

My procedure will be to discuss, first, the problem of the primary goals, second, the problem of the basic argument-structure, and last, the problem of the basic principles.

The Primary Goal of Hume's Philosophy
of the Human Understanding

Although I have already made it rather plain that I believe that the primary intent of Hume's philosophy of the human understanding (in both Treatise I and Enquiry I) was the establishment of a moderate or mitigated scepticism---and not, as Smith and Taylor maintain, the establishment of a naturalistic conception of human nature---, I think that it is desirable to spell out the meaning and implications of this contention as clearly and accurately as possible before proceeding to demonstrate the point. It of course follows from my claim that not only is there no essential difference between the primary conclusion (or result) of Treatise I and of Enquiry I, but also that

this conclusion (or result) represents the primary goal or end of Hume's inquiry in both works. In other words, the claim is that Hume was not a reluctant, hesitating sceptic in Treatise I and a confirmed, resolute one in Enquiry I; nor is it maintained that he became a confirmed, resolute sceptic within Treatise I itself---and perhaps became an even more confirmed and resolute one between Treatise I and Enquiry I.¹ On the contrary, the claim is that he was an equally confirmed and resolute sceptic in both works.² I reject any

¹I should take note here of the fact that Basson maintains, as I do, that "Hume professes to be, and is in fact, a Sceptic" (Basson, op. cit., p. 140). However, he also feels that "anyone who tries to assess the nature and purpose of Hume's philosophical investigations is faced with certain difficulties" (ibid., p. 149). Prominent among these difficulties, he says, is that "there is considerable difference in attitude between his two chief works, the Treatise and the Enquiries" (ibid.). "The calm and resolved scepticism of the Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding contrasts strongly with the knotted argumentation and progressively increasing stresses of the first Book of the Treatise of Human Nature" (ibid., p. 150). Basson thinks that, for sufficient evidence of this, "we need only compare the triumphant conclusion of the former with the anxious and apologetic ending of the latter" (ibid.). My comment here is that I do not believe that we have so much a difference in attitude on Hume's part as a difference in mode of exposition. It is the almost autobiographical mode of discourse, that characterizes parts of Treatise I, which is abandoned in Enquiry I.

²Thus, I cannot accept John Laird's seeming suggestion, in his Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature (London, 1932), that Hume was less sceptical in Enquiry I than in Treatise I. Laird tells us that "Hume's argument in the concluding Section of the Enquiry showed broad similarities to the argument of the Treatise, although, with some loss of consistency, he inclined towards the 'mitigated scepticism' of the academic sceptics and no longer aspired to being the truest Pyrrhonian of them all" (ibid., p. 186). As will become clear in the sequel, my position is that Hume is a mitigated sceptic in both Enquiry I and Treatise I, and not a Pyrrhonian in either.

"developmental" theory regarding Hume's primary goal or end in the two major expressions of his philosophy of the human understanding.³ Hume's scepticism did not develop or mature between Treatise I and Enquiry I; nor did it develop within Treatise I itself. The differences, if any, between the scepticism of Treatise I and that of Enquiry I lie in the manner of its expression, not its nature.⁴

This should suffice as a clear, accurate statement of my interpretation. In what immediately follows, I shall devote myself to the task of showing that it is an interpretation which is supported

³I discussed such a theory in Chapter I (see my discussion of Taylor's views, p. 75ff.). Actually, Gore's interpretation of Hume may likewise be considered a type of developmental theory (see my discussion of Gore's views, p. 14ff.).

⁴This way of speaking about the difference between Treatise I and Enquiry I, in regard to the question of Hume's scepticism, very closely parallels the way Hume himself speaks, at times, of the difference between the two works generally. In the Advertisement to Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects (London, 1777), Hume proclaims that "most of the principles, and reasonings, contained in this volume, were published in a work in three volumes, called A Treatise of Human Nature: A work which the Author had projected before he left College, and which he wrote and published not long after. But not finding it successful, he was sensible of his error in going to the press too early, and he cast the whole anew in the following pieces, where some negligences in his former reasoning and more in the expression, are, he hopes, corrected." And in a letter to Gilbert Elliot (Mar or Apr, 1751), he says that "by shortening and simplifying the Questions, I really render them much more complete. Addo dum minuo. The philosophical Principles are the same in both: But I was carry'd away by the Heat of Youth & Invention to publish too precipitately" (J. Y. T. Greig, The Letters of David Hume [London, 1932], Vol. I, p. 158). Moreover, in a letter to John Stewart [?] (Feb, 1754), he speaks of "the same Doctrines" as those in the Treatise as being "better illustrated & exprest" in the later essays, including Enquiry I (ibid., p. 187).

by adequate evidence. Since, in my view, Hume expresses the nature of his sceptical position much more clearly and adequately in Enquiry I than anywhere else, I shall begin by considering his views on it as expressed therein. Immediately thereafter, I will try to show that all the essential elements of his scepticism are present and operational in Treatise I. To supplement my claim, I will present supporting evidence from both the Appendix to the Treatise and the Abstract.

Hume's Primary Aim as Expressed in Enquiry I

There is rather widespread agreement on the part of Humian interpreters that Hume's primary aim or intent in Enquiry I is, in some sense, sceptical. But even if there were not, what he says in Sections I, V, and XII of this work is convincing enough evidence of it. I see no need to cite passages from Sections I and V, which (taken in conjunction with what he says in Section XII) place this interpretation beyond reasonable doubt.⁵ I shall confine myself to an exposition and analysis of his remarks on the nature of scepticism in Section XII alone.

In Section XII of Enquiry I, Hume, in effect, professes himself to be a mitigated or moderate sceptic and indicates that he wishes to

⁵Cf. Enquiry I, Section I, pp. 11-12, 14-16, and Section V, pp. 40-41.

inculcate this kind of scepticism in his readers.⁶ In order to make perfectly clear the nature and character of this type of scepticism, it will be helpful to compare and contrast it with certain other types of scepticism which Hume discusses in this same section. In fact, this is doubtlessly Hume's primary intention in discussing these other types. Mitigated scepticism, according to Hume, is a species of consequent scepticism; and consequent scepticism is to be distinguished from, but not necessarily opposed to, antecedent scepticism.⁷ The difference between the two, as the names imply, is the difference between the sort of scepticism which is prior to inquiry or science and that which is posterior to and a result of it. As a species of consequent scepticism, mitigated scepticism is to be directly compared and contrasted with excessive (total or extravagant) scepticism or Pyrrhonism.⁸ Since mitigated scepticism is held by Hume to be "the natural result" of Pyrrhonism⁹ and is in fact extremely

⁶See ibid., pp. 161-62, 163.

⁷My principal reason for saying "distinguished from, but not necessarily opposed to" is to impress upon the reader the fact that a given species of antecedent scepticism may be combined with a given species of consequent scepticism. Indeed, in addition to recommending moderate (consequent) scepticism, Hume appears to recommend moderate (antecedent) scepticism.

⁸There is an analogous distinction between the two species of antecedent scepticism, but it need not concern us.

⁹See Enquiry I, pp. 161, 162.

closely related to it in its very nature, it will be imperative to consider first what he regards the nature of this excessive scepticism to be.¹⁰ Although Hume himself does not explicitly do so, it seems to me to be useful (as well as basically correct) to analyze Pyrrhonism, as he views it, into three distinct components: a basic recommendation or attitude, a principal claim (from which the basic recommendation is derived or inferred), and a set of arguments (designed to support the principal claim). At this juncture, I shall confine my attention to the basic recommendation and principal claim. A consideration of the arguments will come later.

There is no doubt that Hume thinks that the basic recommendation of Pyrrhonism is the following: we ought not to maintain any assurance or conviction on anything, whether it be a matter of practice (or action) or of theory (or speculation).¹¹ In other words, we ought not to believe or assent to anything at all, but should maintain a perpetual state of total suspense of judgment. The principal claim from which this basic recommendation is derived or inferred is

¹⁰It is rather interesting to note that Laird claims that "Hume remained a complete Pyrrhonian regarding all ultimate principles" (Laird, *op. cit.*, p. 180). If my analysis and interpretation of Hume's view of Pyrrhonism is correct, then Laird's comment is peculiarly inept. Nonetheless, it does seem to me that it may well be true, if what he really means is simply that Hume recommended a total and permanent suspense of judgment on all matters of profound metaphysics (i.e., on matters which go beyond the sphere of common life).

¹¹See Enquiry I, p. 149; also, pp. 13, 159.

that inquiry reveals to us that our mental faculties are either absolutely fallacious or that they are entirely unfit to reach any fixed determination in any of the subjects with which they are concerned, whether these subjects be those of common life or of profound metaphysics.¹² In a word, the Pyrrhonist's basic position is simply that since our cognitive faculties are in extremely wretched condition, we ought to hold everything to be uncertain and not assent to anything.

With regard to mitigated scepticism, we may likewise divide it into the same three sorts of components---again, only two of which will be considered at this point.¹³ However, instead of merely one basic recommendation and one principal claim, as in the case of Pyrrhonism, there are two of each in the case of mitigated scepticism. The two basic recommendations are, first, that we ought to preserve or maintain a degree of doubt, caution, and modesty in all our

¹²See *ibid.*, pp. 161, 162. It is not clear to me whether Hume is here expressing the sort of alternative he seems to be expressing.

¹³The reader may notice that this analysis seems to be in verbal conflict with my preceding terminological distinction between generic features and main lines of argument. And, in a way, it is. But this should present no problem if the reader bears in mind the fact that I have adopted my terminology largely for the sake of convenience and that the context practically always makes my meaning clear. In fact, the reader will notice that at times I shall be employing the expression "mitigated scepticism" in a more restricted sense than the one seemingly implied by the present analysis. That is, I shall be using it to refer to one, or perhaps to two, of the three elements of the latter---but not all three. Again, the context should reveal my meaning.

philosophical decisions¹⁴ and, second, that we ought to limit our philosophical inquiries to such subjects as are best adapted to the narrow capacity of our understanding---which is to restrict them "to common life, and to such subjects as fall under daily practice and experience."¹⁵ It is easy to see a resemblance between these two recommendations (especially the first) and the recommendation of Pyrrhonism. Nonetheless, they are significantly different from each other. The term 'mitigated' does seem entirely appropriate. As I see it, there are (coupled with these two recommendations) two principal claims of this scepticism. On the one hand, there is the claim, held in common with Pyrrhonism, that our faculties are either absolutely fallacious or are entirely unfit to reach any fixed determination in any of the subjects with which they are concerned. On the other hand, there is the claim (variously expressed) that it is literally (i.e., psychologically) impossible for us to remain in a state of doubt or suspense of judgment for any length of time in regard to matters of common life (i.e., on "such subjects as fall under daily practice and experience"). According to Hume, only very abstract and profound reasonings could enable us to attain such a state; but we find that "nature will always maintain her rights, and prevail in the end over any abstract reasoning whatsoever,"¹⁶ because

¹⁴Enquiry I, pp. 161-62; see also, p. 41.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 162; see also, p. 41.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 41.

"nature is always too strong for principle."¹⁷ "In common life, we reason every moment concerning fact and existence, and cannot possibly subsist, without continually employing this species of argument."¹⁸ The simple truth of the matter is that "mankind . . . must act and reason and believe."¹⁹ Nature has not left this to our choice. Here we have the claim which, if just, allegedly invalidates the Pyrrhonian inference and recommendation. Taken in conjunction with the principal claim of Pyrrhonism, it allegedly justifies the inferences and recommendations of the mitigated sceptic. There simply can be no reasonable doubt that Hume would in fact accept this analysis and interpretation of his mitigated scepticism, particularly when we observe him asserting that

nothing can be more serviceable, than to be once thoroughly convinced of the force of the Pyrrhonian doubt, and of the impossibility, that anything, but the strong power of natural instinct, could free us from it. Those who have a propensity to philosophy, will still continue their researches; because they reflect, that, besides the immediate pleasure, attending such an occupation, philosophical decisions are nothing but the reflections of common life, methodized and corrected. But they will never be tempted to go beyond common life, so long as they consider the imperfection of those faculties which they employ, their narrow reach, and their inaccurate operations.²⁰

Hume's Primary Aim as Expressed in Treatise I

Having shown what I take to be the main goal of Hume's Enquiry I (viz., the establishment of a mitigated scepticism), I want to try to show that this same goal is to be found in Treatise I also---though

¹⁷Ibid., p. 160. ¹⁸Ibid., p. 158. ¹⁹Ibid. ²⁰Ibid.

it is not as adequately or clearly expressed, and is not actually labelled as such.

There are, it seems to me, several passages in the last Section of Part IV of Treatise I which provide good evidence of the aforementioned three basic components of the mitigated sceptical position, and of Hume's adoption of them. As before, I shall consider at this stage of my discussion only the first two components of the position, setting aside for the time being a consideration of the arguments employed by Hume in support of the basic claims.²¹

In the very first paragraph of this final Section, Hume speaks of having discovered the wretched condition, weakness, and disorder of the faculties he must employ in his inquiries, and of the impossibility of amending or correcting them.²² Several pages later we find him on the brink of drawing the Pyrrhonic inference from this discovery. He says:

The intense view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another.²³

²¹Actually, it would be more correct to say here "basic claim"; because the naturalistic claim is not one for which a reasoned support or justification is given. It is just stated as being a kind of fact which everyone, presumably, can verify in his own experience.

²²Treatise I, p. 264.

²³Ibid., p. 268.

However, nature intervenes to prevent him from becoming a full-fledged Pyrrhonian. He says:

Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras.²⁴

Indeed, he says,

I find myself absolutely and necessarily determin'd to live, and talk, and act like other people in the common affairs of life . . . I may, nay I must yield to the current of nature, in submitting to my senses and understanding.²⁵

It is evident from these passages that we have the two basic claims of mitigated scepticism: the negative one it shares with Pyrrhonism (the "Pyrrhonistic claim"), and the positive, "naturalistic" one which distinguishes it from Pyrrhonism and prevents the Pyrrhonistic inference or recommendation. What remains to be exhibited are the two principal recommendations of mitigated scepticism, viz., the recommendation to maintain a degree of doubt, caution, etc., in all our philosophic decisions and the recommendation to limit our inquiries to common life and experience.

The first of these is fairly obviously suggested in the following passage:

In 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. Nay if we are philosophers, it ought only

²⁴Ibid., p. 269.

²⁵Ibid.

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.²⁶

The second recommendation is not as clearly drawn, but I think that the following comments will suffice to show that it is present. In the next two paragraphs following the one from which the passage quoted immediately above was taken, Hume expresses his determination to continue his researches in the science of man (presumably since his reason is lively and mixes itself with a propensity or natural inclination to do so) and boldly recommends philosophy (which "contents itself with assigning new causes and principles to the phaenomena, which appear in the visible world") over superstition (which "opens a world of its own, and presents us with scenes, and beings, and objects, which are altogether new").²⁷ He also suggests (by implication) that both philosophy and superstition (as described) tend to become involved in "speculations without the sphere of common life," and that this is certainly no positive recommendation for either of them. But philosophy is not as bad as superstition in this respect.

For as superstition arises naturally and easily from the popular opinions of mankind, it seizes more strongly on the mind, and is often able to disturb us in the conduct of our lives and actions. Philosophy on the contrary, if just, can present us only with mild and moderate sentiments; and if false and extravagant, its opinions are merely the

²⁶Ibid., p. 270.

²⁷Ibid., pp. 270-71.

objects of a cold and general speculation, and seldom go so far as to interrupt the course of our natural propensities.²⁸

Finally, in the next paragraph, Hume expresses the wish that he could communicate to the founders of philosophic systems a share of the "gross earthy mixture" which is possessed by many honest English gentlemen, "who being always employ'd in their domestic affairs, or amusing themselves in common recreations, have carried their thoughts very little beyond those objects, which are every day expos'd to their senses."²⁹ This mixture "would serve to temper those fiery particles" of which these system-builders are composed. For

while a warm imagination is allow'd to enter into philosophy, and hypotheses embrac'd merely for being specious and agreeable, we can never have any steady principles, nor any sentiments, which will suit with common practice and experience. But were these hypotheses once remov'd, we might hope to establish a system or set of opinions, which if not true (for that, perhaps, is too much to be hop'd for) might at least be satisfactory to the human mind, and might stand the test of the most critical examination.³⁰

I interpret this as a sort of plea to confine one's philosophizings as closely as possible to the sphere of common life and experience.

²⁸Ibid., pp. 271-72.

²⁹Ibid., p. 272.

³⁰Ibid.; underlines mine. This passage seems to me to be roughly parallel to the following one in Enquiry I, in which Hume is describing his mitigated scepticism: "The imagination of man is naturally sublime, delighted with whatever is remote and extraordinary, and running, without control, into the most distant parts of space and time in order to avoid the objects, which custom has rendered too familiar to it. A correct judgment observes a contrary method, and avoiding all distant and high enquiries, confines itself to common life, and to such subjects as fall under daily practice and experience; leaving the more sublime topics to the embellishments of poets and orators, or to the arts of priests and politicians" (Enquiry I, p. 162).

Is this not the import of the following remark, which he makes in this same paragraph?

For my part, my only hope is, that I may contribute a little to the advancement of knowledge, by 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.³¹

Consideration of a possible objection
to the foregoing account

It has been the express purpose of the preceding remarks to give evidence of the primary goal or objective of Hume's philosophy of the human understanding---in both Enquiry I and Treatise I. However, it may be objected that I have not provided any evidence thus far to warrant a conclusion regarding Hume's ultimate goals---at least, not as far as Treatise I is concerned. That is, it may be granted that I have satisfactorily shown that Hume concludes his inquiry in Treatise I with an espousal of a mitigated sceptical position---or, in other words, that the main conclusion of this work is fully expressed in the principal recommendations (perhaps coupled with the basic claims) of this sort of scepticism. Yet it might very well be questioned whether this conclusion represents the main goal (or end) of his inquiry in that work. For it does not follow from the fact that Hume, at the close of his Treatise I, is a mitigated sceptic that he intended to be one, i.e., that his main arguments in that work were

³¹Ibid., p. 273.

designed to support and defend this sort of philosophic position. As I mentioned in Chapter I, Taylor (for one) seems to think that Hume became a self-defeating---presumably, meaning a Pyrrhonian---sceptic during the progress of Treatise I.

Now, I fully agree that inasmuch as I have thus far taken all of my evidence for my contention from the concluding Section of Part IV of Treatise I, it certainly does not follow that I have shown that Hume really intended to adopt such a philosophic position. He could well have been driven to adopt it, for all that I have thus far demonstrated. Those who hold a view quite different from mine would point at once to the prevailing positive statement of intentions in the Introduction to the Treatise---to passages which I have as yet totally ignored. I shall not attempt to meet this objection (which is a sound one) by trying to show directly that the prevailing positive outlook in the Introduction is merely an appearance, not a reality. I do feel that the Introduction is, to a certain extent, misleading. But it must never be forgotten that the paragraphs which comprise it are purportedly intended to be an introduction to the whole Treatise, and not merely to Treatise I; and I have not made any claims whatever about the nature of the arguments in Treatise II and Treatise III. My claim is only that Hume intended to reach a mitigated sceptical conclusion in Treatise I---and in his philosophy of the human understanding generally. In order to meet this objection I shall offer evidence (later in this chapter) which indicates that the basic or

over-all structure of the argument of Treatise I is designed to support this sceptical position.³² However, in order to help confirm my view that there are no changes or developments in what I take to be the goal of Hume's philosophy of the human understanding from Treatise I to Enquiry I, I shall offer evidence from the Abstract and the Appendix to the Treatise which clearly points to the fact that Hume was, even there, firmly and openly espousing this same type of sceptical position.

Hume's Primary Aim as Expressed in the
Abstract and the Appendix
to the Treatise

There can scarcely be any doubt about Hume's intentions in Treatise I if we can trust his statements about them in the Abstract. Here he unhesitatingly proclaims that

the reader will easily perceive that the philosophy contained in this book is very skeptical and tends to give us a notion of the imperfections and narrow limits of human understanding. Almost all reasoning is there reduced to experience, and the belief which attends experience is explained to be nothing but a peculiar sentiment or lively conception produced by habit. Nor is this all; when we believe anything of external existence or suppose an object to exist a moment after it is no longer perceived, this belief is nothing but a sentiment of the same kind. Our author insists upon several other skeptical

³²Actually, the complete removal of this objection will require the exhibition of considerably more evidence than I shall be offering in the present chapter. Further evidence for its removal will be provided in the next two chapters.

topics; and upon the whole concludes that we assent to our faculties and employ our reason only because we cannot help it. Philosophy would render us entirely Pyrrhonian, were not nature too strong for it.³³

Are not the basic elements of the mitigated sceptical position clearly in evidence here?

As far as the Treatise is concerned, there are two passages to which I should like to make reference. The one is from a note which is intended to be appended to a passage in Part II (which is ostensibly about our ideas of space and time). What concerns me here is not the particular point at issue, but Hume's remarks in generalizing upon it. These general remarks are as follows:

As long as we confine our speculations to the appearances of objects to our senses, without entering into disquisitions concerning their real nature and operations, we are safe from all difficulties, and can never be embarrass'd by any question . . . But if we carry our enquiry beyond the appearances of objects to the senses, I am afraid, that most of our conclusions will be full of scepticism and uncertainty . . . The real nature of this position of bodies [Hume's immediate topic is an invisible and intangible distance between bodies] is unknown. We are only acquainted with its effects on the senses, and its power of receiving body. Nothing is more suitable to . . . philosophy, than a modest scepticism to a certain degree, and a fair confession of ignorance in subjects, that exceed all human capacity.³⁴

Now, what is this last remark but a plea to confine one's philosophical inquiries to the sphere of common life and experience? The other

³³Abstract, pp. 193-94.

³⁴Appendix to the Treatise, pp. 638-39. This first sentence, in particular, echoes the remarks which Hume had made in none other than the Introduction to the Treatise (see pp. xxi-xxii).

passage from the Appendix is taken from the lengthy and rather notorious remarks Hume makes on his account of personal identity in Part IV of Treatise I. These remarks are frequently referred to by "developmental" theorists as constituting conclusive evidence for their position. It can also be used by those who hold further that Hume had a purely constructive (i.e., non-sceptical) aim in Treatise I. My present purpose in utilizing this passage is not to try to positively refute their claims, but primarily to show that Hume uses this occasion to reaffirm his mitigated scepticism. He says:

I had entertain'd some hopes, that however deficient our theory of the intellectual world might be, it wou'd be free from those contradictions, and absurdities, which seem to attend every explication, that human reason can give of the material world. But upon a more strict review of the section concerning personal identity, I find myself involv'd in such a labyrinth, that, I must confess, I neither know how to correct my former opinions, nor how to render them consistent. If this be not a good general reason for scepticism, 'tis at least a sufficient one (if I were not already abundantly supplied) for me to entertain a diffidence and modesty in all my decisions.³⁵

It is interesting to observe that as we found one of the two recommendations of Hume's mitigated scepticism in the note on Part II (quoted above), so we find the other recommendation in these remarks. It is also noteworthy that Hume here reminds us that even apart from the reasons with which this immediate discussion provide him for

³⁵Ibid., p. 633. Words in parenthesis underlined by me.

his mitigated scepticism, he is "already abundantly supplied" with such reasons.³⁶

An alternative to the preceding account
of Hume's primary aim

The immediately preceding account of the primary aim of Hume's philosophy of the human understanding certainly puts me at nominal odds (at least) with those who maintain that the determining factor of this philosophy is the attempt to establish a purely naturalistic conception of human nature. In Chapter I, I took note of Taylor's views on this topic and found that the difference between his general interpretation and mine is not merely nominal but real.³⁷ Perhaps a few words are in order here concerning the rather well-known views of Norman Kemp Smith, to whom Taylor expresses his indebtedness as regards this naturalistic interpretation of Hume.

Whereas Taylor never even speaks of mitigated scepticism in connection with Hume, Smith asserts (near the beginning of his book

³⁶Could this be offered as at least a partial explanation of Hume's exclusion of the topic of personal identity from Enquiry I? At any rate, it does not seem to me to be self-evident (from his remarks in the Appendix) that Hume's apparent dissatisfaction with his treatment of the topic is the only reason for its omission from Enquiry I. Also, it is easy to magnify or exaggerate the extent of Hume's dissatisfaction with his treatment of the topic. Nevertheless, I must admit that if my interpretation of Hume is correct and if Hume thought it was an extremely important topic to discuss in his philosophy of the human understanding, then it would be rather odd for him to omit it from discussion in Enquiry I. I will have more to say on this whole issue in Chapter V (see p. 276ff.).

³⁷See p. 86ff.

on Hume) that his mitigated scepticism is a tool by means of which he supports and supplements his positive, naturalistic teaching.³⁸ Later, he seems to be expressing this same view, saying that scepticism---the qualifier "mitigated" is not added, though---serves as an ally to Nature, but in due subordination, not as an equal.³⁹ This puts Smith at explicit verbal odds with me. Whether or not the difference is real, or merely nominal, is another matter. It depends, of course, on what Smith is talking about when he speaks of Hume's naturalism and his mitigated scepticism. As I understand Smith, Hume's naturalism, negatively speaking, represents a denial of the assumption that the assurance with which we hold such beliefs as those in the independent existence of bodies, in causes, in the existence of the self and of other selves, ought to rest on direct insight, or failing direct insight, on evidence.⁴⁰ Positively speaking, it represents the view that such assurance may legitimately rest on feeling or passion.⁴¹ Expounding on the notion of feeling or passion, Smith says that

'passion' is Hume's most general title for the instincts, propensities, feelings, emotions and sentiments, as well as for the passions ordinarily so called; and belief, he teaches, is a passion. Accordingly the maxim which is central in his ethics---'Reason is and ought to be the slave of the passions'---is no less central in his theory of knowledge, being there the maxim: 'Reason is and ought to be subordinate to our natural beliefs.'⁴²

³⁸Smith, *op. cit.*, p. vii. ³⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 131-2. ⁴⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 8, 10.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴²*Ibid.*; see also, p. 44.

Unfortunately, although Smith speaks of Hume's mitigated scepticism, he really does not make any attempt to analyze the notion and it is frequently hard to be certain of the distinction he appears to want to make between it and naturalism. For instance, he speaks in one place of the naturalistic type of philosophy for which Hume argues as being "sceptical of reason in its speculative tendencies, and yet careful of its rights, insistent indeed on the duty and benefits, as well as the pleasures, of reflective thinking."⁴³ But he then adds that this scepticism, which is a mitigated one, "recognizes that it is in the natural economy of our human nature, not any abstract criteria of pure reason, or even of empirical evidence, that the ultimate sanctions (as well as the ultimate sources) of belief are alone to be found."⁴⁴

Whether or not there is really much of a difference, in Smith's view, between Hume's mitigated scepticism and his naturalism, it should be fairly clear what he thinks his naturalism consists in and hence what he thinks is the central concern of his philosophy of the human understanding. What is perhaps the main difference between my view and Smith's is that whereas Smith claims that Hume thinks that our assurance in regard to beliefs of the sort mentioned may legitimately rest upon feeling, I do not believe that he thinks this. I agree that Hume thought that the ultimate sources of such beliefs

⁴³Ibid., p. 491.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 492.

are to be found in the natural economy of our human nature, but I do not agree that he thought that the ultimate sanctions of them are to be found there. I think that he felt that such beliefs have no sanctions at all---if this implies that they can have some sort of justification or vindication. I do not believe that Hume ever really thought that natural instinct was a satisfactory foundation for anything---certainly not if it conflicts with "rational" considerations. And, in Hume's view, each of the basic beliefs which Smith mentions do have their difficulties with reason. I cannot agree that it was Hume's maxim that reason (in the sense of this term which is appropriate to this context) is and ought to be subordinate to our natural beliefs.⁴⁵

The Argument-Structure of Section XII of Enquiry I and
its Relation to the Basic Argument-Structure
of Treatise I as a Whole

I am now ready to move on to the second main task of the present chapter, viz., to a consideration of what I understand to be the basic structure of the argument of Treatise I. Inasmuch as it is my contention that a careful examination of the way in which Hume argues in Section XII of Enquiry I in support of his mitigated sceptical position provides a definite clue to the underlying structure of the

⁴⁵On this same point, see my earlier discussion of Taylor's interpretation (Chapter I, pp. 90-91).

argument of Treatise I as a whole, I shall quite naturally begin this task by returning to that Section of Enquiry I and to Hume's discussion of scepticism contained therein. I am assuming, of course, that I have given sufficient evidence for the view that the conclusion of Enquiry I represents the goal or end of that work. I feel that if I can show that there is at least a rough parallel between the manner in which Hume argues for his mitigated scepticism in Enquiry I (in Section XII in particular) and the general structure of the argument of Treatise I, then I will have come a long way toward showing that the conclusion of Treatise I represents the goal or end of this work as well. Having done this, I hope to show in the next two chapters (by an examination of the way in which it enters into the main lines of argument of Treatise I in particular) that Hume's theory of imagination is, in a way, the key to his mitigated scepticism.

What I shall be concerned with in this chapter is the more general aspects of his argument---the "categories" of argument he employs. The two generic categories into which he places his arguments in Enquiry I (Section XII) are the following: arguments directed against the evidence of sense⁴⁶ and those directed against the evidence of reason.⁴⁷ From the very descriptions of them---which are Hume's own---it is apparent that these arguments are sceptical in nature, or are intended to be so. Indeed, Hume purportedly intends

⁴⁶Enquiry I, p. 151ff.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 155ff.

these arguments to support the basic claim which Pyrrhonism and mitigated scepticism have in common, viz., the claim that inquiry reveals either the absolute fallaciousness of our mental faculties or their unfitness to reach any fixed determination in all those curious subjects of speculation about which they are commonly employed.⁴⁸ In the context of the actual discussion, what happens is that the Pyrrhonic inference is first drawn from the specific arguments presented in support of this basic claim, and then the naturalistic claim is introduced or elicited in order to invalidate the Pyrrhonic inference and validate the recommendations of mitigated scepticism.⁴⁹ It is worthy of note that Hume's naturalistic claim is made within the framework of sceptical argumentation, and not the other way around. As I see it, this tends to support my view that we should treat Hume's naturalism as falling within his scepticism, and not the other way around.

In addition to the basic division of arguments into those against sense and those against reason, there is a subdivision of the latter into arguments against abstract reasoning and those

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 150.

⁴⁹However, for the sake of accuracy, it ought to be mentioned that in Section XII of Enquiry I the naturalistic claim is not elicited specifically in connection with the arguments against the evidence of reason. Nevertheless, my subsequent discussion should make it clear that this in no way damages any claim I shall be making about Hume's position.

against matter-of-fact (or "moral") reasoning.⁵⁰ Though there are several distinct arguments against sense, these arguments are not similarly subdivided or sub-categorized.⁵¹ They are all directed to questions about the physical world, and thus may be said to be arguments against external (as contrasted with internal) sense. It is my contention that almost all of the arguments against sense and reason in this Section of Enquiry I are ones which Hume had used in Treatise I. The arguments against external sense are to be found mainly in Sections ii-iv of Part IV of Treatise I; those against abstract reasoning are to be found mainly in Part II; and those against matter-of-fact reasoning are to be found mainly in Part III. For the most part, the sorts of arguments which are present in Treatise I but absent from Enquiry I are those which could be described as arguments against internal (as contrasted with external) sense. What I have in mind are the arguments concerning the mind (or soul) in general and personal identity in particular in Sections v-vii of Part IV of Treatise I. In sum, what we have in Section XII of Enquiry I is the

⁵⁰The argument presented against the latter type of reasoning turns out to be simply a brief recapitulation or summarized version of the main claims Hume had made concerning causation in Sections IV and V (of Enquiry I).

⁵¹Actually, though, there is a different sort of subdivision of the arguments against sense and those against matter-of-fact reasoning into trite (or popular) and more profound arguments (cf. ibid., pp. 151, 158-59). Since the trite ones are just what the name implies, and are quite evidently presented solely for the sake of completeness, I shall not even consider them.

following set of arguments (in the order of exposition): those against the evidence of abstract reasoning, and those against the evidence of matter-of-fact reasoning. And what we find in Treatise I as a whole is the following set of arguments (again, in the order of exposition): those against the evidence of abstract reasoning, those against the evidence of matter-of-fact reasoning, those against the evidence of external sense, and those against the evidence of internal sense. Aside from a reversal in the basic order of exposition, and the addition of the set of arguments against internal sense, the essential difference, as I see it, between the two sets consists in the much greater elaboration of details in each of the sub-sets of arguments which are presented in Treatise I (including several sorts of arguments which are not to be found at all in Enquiry I). Thus, extremely brief though it is, Hume's delineation in Section XII of Enquiry I of arguments supporting the basic claim of mitigated scepticism and leading up to an affirmation of the principal recommendations of the latter, exhibits a basic argument-pattern which is to be found in the earlier Treatise I as a whole---excluding, of course, Part I of the latter, which presents "the elements of [Hume's] philosophy." In order to express my view somewhat more clearly and accurately, I shall indicate what I take to be the basic structure of the argument of Treatise I as follows:

- I. Arguments against the evidence of reason (Part II to Part IV, Section i).
 - A. Arguments against abstract reasoning (Part II to Part III, Section i).

- B. Arguments against matter-of-fact reasoning (Part III, Section ii, to Part III, Section xvi).
- C. Combined argument against abstract and matter-of-fact reasoning (Part IV, Section i).
- II. Arguments against the evidence of sense (Part IV, Sections ii-vi).
 - A. Arguments against external sense (Sections ii-iv).
 - B. Arguments against internal sense (Sections v-vi).

My task, then, is to try to sustain this interpretive claim.

However, a full defense of it is surely not merely beyond the scope of this chapter but also beyond the scope of this work as a whole. Nevertheless, if I can show how, in a general way, each of the above-mentioned segments of Hume's total argument in Treatise I helps him to sustain the basic claim of his mitigated scepticism, then I shall be satisfied that I have provided a degree of plausibility for it sufficient for my purposes. If, in addition to this, I can show that Hume's theory of imagination is thoroughly woven into the fabric of his argument for these basic claims, then I shall be satisfied that I will have provided a satisfactory degree of confirmation of this general interpretation of his philosophy of the human understanding and will have provided a defensible answer to the central problem of this study. I will have succeeded in showing that Hume's theory of imagination is, in a way, the key to his mitigated scepticism.

Hume's Basic Principles

The third and final main task of the present chapter is that of delineating the basic principles that Hume employs in attempting to achieve his mitigated sceptical goal. These basic principles are the

same in both Treatise I and Enquiry I and, in my opinion, may be appropriately labelled as the primary determinants of the outcome of Hume's philosophy of the human understanding. They are to be found in Part I of Treatise I and Sections II and III of Enquiry I. Their connection with Hume's theory of imagination is, as will be evident, an extremely intimate one.

The first primary determinant of the outcome of this philosophy is the principle that all our ideas are ultimately derived from antecedent impressions.⁵² This first principle of Hume's philosophy is clearly intended to establish the fact that the mind in thinking (and particularly in reasoning) is severely limited or restricted as regards the data which are available to it. We have already seen that, in the Abstract, he openly links this reduction of our reasoning to experience with the notion of "the imperfections and narrow limits of human understanding" and with the sceptical nature of his inquiry.⁵³ If, as Hume says in both Treatise I and Enquiry I, ideas are faint images or copies of impressions, then it is evident that the scope of our cognitive faculties must be rather narrowly restricted and hence that one of the principal recommendations of Hume's mitigated scepticism is virtually secured at the start of his inquiry.⁵⁴ We have

⁵²Treatise I, p. 4; Enquiry I, p. 19. ⁵³Abstract, p. 193.

⁵⁴Smith maintains that "the apparently final, decisive character of the doctrine which Hume expounds in these opening sections of the Treatise [his reference is to the doctrine or principle presently under consideration] is a main reason why the traditional view of

already seen the connection this principle has with Hume's theory of imagination. It is in fact a principle of the imagination, although it is certainly not a principle of this faculty alone; it is also a principle of reason. However, what I take to be the other two primary determinants are principles of the imagination alone; and it is largely because of this that I think that it is legitimate to say that Hume's theory of imagination is the key to his scepticism. As I see it, the roots of his mitigated scepticism are firmly planted in this very first segment of Treatise I---and are re-planted in the second and third Sections of Enquiry I.

The second primary determinant is none other than what Hume himself refers to in Treatise I as the second principle of his science of human nature, viz., the principle "of the liberty of the imagination

Hume's teaching has gained such general currency" (Smith, *op. cit.*, p. 218). According to Smith, the traditional view of Hume is the view which "takes the opening sections of the Treatise as an adequate statement of Hume's central position, and accordingly regards a scepticism of an extreme self-destructive type as being their sole legitimate outcome" (*ibid.*, p. 7); it is "the view . . . that Hume's teaching is sheerly negative, being in effect little more than a reductio ad absurdum of the principles which Hume's predecessors, and Hume himself, have followed in their enquiries" (*ibid.*, p. 3). Now, along with Smith, I reject this "traditional view" of Hume. But I also reject the Smith alternative to this view. For I simply cannot agree that Hume was trying to supply a justification (albeit different from, though parallel to, the Cartesian, Lockean, and Berkeleyan types of justification) for our belief in such things as the independent existence of bodies, in causes, etc. (see *ibid.*, p. 9). To hold this kind of view of Hume is to underestimate the strength of the Pyrrhonic element in his argument.

to transpose and change its ideas."⁵⁵ Hume thinks that this principle "is an evident consequence of the division of ideas into simple and complex."⁵⁶ Thus, what the principle implies is that the imagination is capable of separating all its complex ideas into their simple components and of reuniting them in any manner which pleases it. Hume's stress throughout his philosophy of the human understanding seems clearly to be on the separating, rather than on the reuniting, aspect of this free activity of imagination. This is evident from the fact that he derives, from this second principle of his philosophy, the important principle that whatever is different is distinguishable, and whatever is distinguishable is separable by the imagination.⁵⁷ This principle, coupled with the further principle that nothing we can imagine is absolutely impossible, provides Hume with a tool which he uses over and over again to cast doubt on certain of our knowledge-claims (e.g., our claim concerning necessary connexions between objects or events).

The third major determinant of the outcome of this philosophy is embodied in the view that the imagination is "guided by some principles, which render it, in some measure, uniform with itself in all times and places."⁵⁸ It will be recalled that I considered this to

⁵⁵Treatise I, p. 10. All words underlined in text. Cf. also Enquiry I, pp. 19, 47.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Ibid., pp. 54, 233.

⁵⁸Ibid., p. 10; cf. Enquiry I, pp. 23-24.

be one of the main elements of Hume's theory of imagination. It will also be recalled that I noted that these principles are held by Hume to be three in number and are identical with the so-called natural relations, since they are qualities "by which two ideas are connected together in the imagination, and the one naturally introduces the other."⁵⁹ Thus, these principles or relations serve as the foundation of Hume's naturalism---at least as I understand it. As Hume puts it in the Abstract,

it will be easy to conceive of what vast consequence these principles must be in the science of human nature if we consider that so far as regards the mind these are the only links that bind the parts of the universe together or connect us with any person or object exterior to ourselves.⁶⁰

The operations of these principles are thus at the root of the uniting function which the imagination serves in our cognitive experience, a uniting function which is a main source of our basic beliefs about the world. According to Hume, if our minds were lacking in this function or capability, which was furnished us by nature and which is largely involuntary and unconscious in its operation, our reason would render us entirely Pyrrhonian.

It appears that we have here, in Part I of Treatise I (and in an abbreviated version in Sections II and III of Enquiry I), all of the basic ingredients for Hume's mitigated scepticism. It is noteworthy that one and the same faculty of imagination is involved both in the development of belief and in its destruction. Could it not be the

⁵⁹Treatise I, p. 13.

⁶⁰Abstract, p. 198.

case that in the last analysis the disorderliness of our cognitive faculties (of which Hume speaks) is essentially a kind of conflict or tension within the imaginative faculty itself, viz., a conflict between its involuntary (determined), uniting functions and its voluntary (free), separating functions? I think that a careful examination of the nature of Hume's argument---especially in Treatise I---will bear out this contention.

Concluding Remarks

I believe that I have now said all that needs to be said regarding the generic features of Hume's philosophy of the human understanding (in the two major statements of it), as well as of the basic argument-structure of Treatise I in particular. I am now in a position to move on to the task of exhibiting the role Hume's theory of imagination plays in the development of the argument of Treatise I. In carrying out this task, I shall make use of what I am now going to assume to be the general structure of the argument, beginning with Part II. In the next chapter, I shall consider the attacks on the evidence of reason, both abstract and matter-of-fact; in the one following, the attacks on the evidence of sense, both external and internal. As I have already pointed out, this will amount to following pretty much Hume's own order of exposition in Treatise I. In so doing, I claim to be exhibiting to the fullest extent the role of Hume's theory in his philosophy of the human understanding, my assumptions being (1) that Treatise I contains all of the "parts" of

its role in this philosophy, and (2) that there are no differences between its role in Treatise I and in Enquiry I, save certain omissions from the latter. Nevertheless, in regard to the Pyrrhonian aspects of his argument in particular, I shall be making ample use of his abbreviated discussions in Section XII of Enquiry I, just as I did in the foregoing exposition and analysis of the fundamental characteristics of this aspect of Hume's total philosophy. My main purpose in this, quite obviously, is to provide as high a degree of confirmation as I can of my hypothesis regarding the nature of the sceptical goal of Treatise I.

CHAPTER IV

HUME'S THEORY OF IMAGINATION IN THE ARGUMENT OF HIS

PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUMAN UNDERSTANDING (I.):

THE ATTACK ON REASON

In the last chapter, I showed that Hume's arguments against the evidence of reason divide into three main groups. There is, first, an attack on abstract reasoning; second, an attack on matter-of-fact reasoning; and third, a combined attack on both types of reasoning. In the present chapter, I shall examine each of these in order and shall indicate the manner in which Hume's theory of imagination, as I understand it, enters into each of them.

One of the things which should be constantly kept in mind in considering these three arguments (indeed, the arguments against sense, as well) is the basic claims of Hume's mitigated scepticism which they are all presumably intended to help sustain or support, i.e., what I have previously referred to as the Pyrrhonistic and the naturalistic claims. I say "presumably" here because, in regard to the attack on abstract reasoning in particular, it is not easy to

discern the presence of the naturalistic claim.¹ Indeed, according to certain prominent Humian commentators, even the Pyrrhonic claim is absent, since it is held that Hume is not at all sceptical in this part of his argument.² I will try to show, contrary to this, that a careful examination of his argument against abstract reasoning does clearly reveal a Pyrrhonic component. I will also try to show that at the very least the discussion of space, time and geometry in Part II of Treatise I does contribute, in its own way, to the support of the recommendations of his mitigated scepticism, even if it does not, strictly speaking, do so via the usual Pyrrhonic-plus-naturalistic claim. Indeed, an examination of what Hume says in Section XII of Enquiry I on the subject reveals a definite, explicitly announced argument for the Pyrrhonic claim.³ And since, in reading these

¹Two points are in order here: (1) This comment about the presence of the naturalistic claim does not apply to the combined argument against both types of reasoning, for there very definitely is a naturalistic claim there; (2) there is a kind of naturalistic claim made in the attack on abstract reasoning, but it is not clear that it is made to destroy the Pyrrhonic inference from the Pyrrhonic claim.

²Smith maintains that Hume's "main motive in denying space and time to be infinitely divisible, and in his consequent heterodox treatment of geometry, was his desire to vindicate for reason the right to have jurisdiction in every field of possible human knowledge, with no limitation save such as is prescribed by the absence or insufficiency of the data required for dealing with them . . . [Thus,] in Part ii, Book I of the Treatise, Hume is not approving the depreciation of reason; he is condemning it" (Smith, op. cit., pp. 287-88). And according to Hendel, "the Treatise makes no mention of doubts . . . until we reach the subject of the external world" (Hendel, op. cit., p. 409).

³In this discussion, a way is suggested to circumvent the Pyrrhonic inference. However, this way is not by making the naturalistic claim---except perhaps in a very indirect way.

passages, I find no arguments or principles which are new and different from those made use of in Part II of Treatise I, I shall commence my discussion of Hume's argument regarding abstract reasoning by considering what he says in this Section of Enquiry I.

The Attack on Abstract Reasoning

The Account in Enquiry I

It will be well to take note first of what Hume says when he introduces his abbreviated discussion of the sceptical arguments against reason generally (i.e., including those against both abstract and matter-of-fact reasoning). He says that "it may seem a very extravagant attempt of the sceptics to destroy reason by argument and ratiocination; yet is this the grand scope of all their enquiries and disputes."⁴ Here we have a clear statement of what Hume takes to be the motive of the Pyrrhonist. The question of moment, then, is the following one: "According to Hume, how (i.e., by what sort of argument and ratiocination) does the Pyrrhonist attempt to destroy abstract reasoning?" As Hume conceives it, the Pyrrhonist first points out that the ideas of space and time are "the chief object" of abstract reasoning, and then he tries to show that certain principles, which "all geometricians and metaphysicians" (who, presumably, are exemplars of abstract reasoning) have derived from scrutinizing

⁴Enquiry I, p. 155.

these ideas---in particular, these principles are those of the infinite divisibility of space and of time---, are in direct conflict with "the clearest and most natural principles of human reasoning."⁵ In fact, the latter turn out to be the basic principles of Hume's own science of human nature (as he sometimes refers to the Treatise as a whole), excluding the naturalistic principle of association. "What renders the matter more extraordinary," Hume says (talking about the principle of the infinite divisibility of space, in particular), is that these principles of the geometrician and metaphysician "are supported by a chain of reasoning, the clearest and most natural; nor is it possible for us to allow the premises without admitting the consequences."⁶ For instance, once we receive the geometer's

conclusions concerning the properties of circles and triangles . . . , how can we deny, that the angle of contact between circle and its tangent is infinitely less than any rectilineal angle, that as you may increase the diameter of the circle in infinitum, this angle of contact becomes still less, even in infinitum, and that the angle of contact between other curves and their tangents, may be infinitely less than those between any circle and its tangent, and so on, in infinitum?⁷

Furthermore,

the demonstration of these principles seems as unexceptionable as that which proves the three angles of a triangle to be equal to two right ones, though the latter opinion be natural and easy, and the former big with contradiction and absurdity.⁸

⁵Ibid., p. 156.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid., pp. 156-57.

⁸Ibid., p. 157.

In other words, what the Pyrrhonist tries to show us is that even if we realize that the "rational" principle of the infinite divisibility of space contradicts, and really cannot stand up in the face of, a principle which has solid support in experience, this is not the end of the matter. Since the procedures involved in deriving this principle are strictly analogous to the ones involved in deriving other seemingly unexceptionable principles, we are led to wonder about the validity of the latter procedures themselves. As Hume puts it,

reason here seems to be thrown into a kind of amazement and suspense, which, without the suggestions of any sceptic, gives her a diffidence of herself, and of the ground on which she treads. She sees a full light, which illuminates certain places; but that light borders upon the most profound darkness. And between these she is so dazzled and confounded, that she scarcely can pronounce with certainty and assurance concerning any one object.⁹

Hume does think, however, that

it seems . . . not impossible to avoid these absurdities and contradictions, if it be admitted, that there is no such thing as abstract or general ideas, properly speaking; but that all general ideas are, in reality, particular ones, attached to a general term, which recalls, upon occasion, other particular ones, that resemble, in certain circumstances, the idea, present to the mind . . . If this be admitted (as seems reasonable) it follows that all the ideas of quantity, upon which mathematicians reason, are nothing but particular, and such as are suggested by the senses and imagination, and consequently, cannot be infinitely divisible.¹⁰

Whether or not this suggestion---and that is all that Hume claims it to be in Enquiry I---does indeed avoid entirely "these absurdities

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 130 (note).

and contradictions," it is noteworthy how well it coheres with something Hume says at the end of Section i of Part III of Treatise I (which I consider as part of his attack on abstract reasoning):

'Tis usual with mathematicians, to pretend, that those ideas, which are their objects, are of so refin'd and spiritual a nature, that they fall not under the conception of the fancy, but must be comprehended by a pure and intellectual view, of which the superior faculties of the soul are alone capable. The same notion runs thro' most parts of philosophy, and is principally made use of to explain our abstract ideas, and to show how we can form an idea of a triangle, for instance, which shall neither be an isosceles nor scalenum, nor be confin'd to any particular length and proportion of sides. 'Tis easy to see, why philosophers are so fond of this notion of some spiritual and refin'd perceptions; since by that means they cover many of their absurdities, and may refuse to submit to the decisions of clear ideas, by appealing to such as are obscure and uncertain. But to destroy this artifice, we need but reflect on that principle so oft insisted on, that all our ideas are copy'd from our impressions.¹¹

And when we consider these remarks in the light of his plea in the Appendix to the Treatise to "confine our speculations to the appearance of objects to our senses," how can we doubt that he is arguing in Enquiry I for one of the recommendations of his mitigated scepticism, viz., the recommendation to confine our speculations to the sphere of common life and experience? It seems to me that we find here in Enquiry I, in his discussion of abstract reasoning, both an argument (albeit an abbreviated one) for the Pyrrhonic claim and some considerations for one, if not both, of the basic recommendations

¹¹Treatise I, p. 72.

of his mitigated scepticism.¹² What needs to be done now is to show that this same basic methodological pattern of approach is followed in the discussion of abstract reasoning in Part II of Treatise I, and hence to confirm the inference drawn on the basis of the above-quoted passage from the latter work. What also needs to be shown---something not very much in evidence in the discussion in Enquiry I---is the role of Hume's theory of imagination in the argument.

The Account in the Abstract

But before turning to Part II of Treatise I, it will be worthwhile to spend a moment or two on what Hume has to say on this topic in the Abstract. This extremely brief discussion clearly brings out a facet of Hume's views on abstract reasoning which is not considered in Enquiry I. And though it is considered in Part II of Treatise I, I think that the discussion in the latter is somewhat more obscure than it is in the Abstract. At any rate, the discussion in the Treatise is considerably more complicated than in the Abstract.

In his discussion in the Abstract, Hume tells us, in effect, that since in Treatise I he had denied the principle of the infinite divisibility of extension(space), he felt obliged to refute the

¹²Indeed, we may conceivably look upon his appeal to his doctrine regarding abstract ideas as at least an indirect expression of the naturalistic claim. See Hume's discussion of abstract ideas, Treatise I, p. 17ff. (esp. pp. 20-22).

mathematical arguments which had been adduced in support of the principle.¹³ He thinks that he had accomplished this refutation by having presented valid arguments supporting the denial of geometry's being a science exact enough to admit of conclusions so subtle as those regarding the infinite divisibility of extension. Assuming that geometry is, in some sense, founded on the notions of equality and inequality, and inferring from this that according as we have or have not an exact standard of this relation, this science will or will not admit of sufficient exactness to warrant these conclusions, Hume had tried to show that there is but one standard which has any pretention of exactness; yet this standard, though exact, is not only useless but is also founded on the supposition of the finite divisibility of extension and, consequently, could never provide support for any conclusions contrary to that supposition itself.¹⁴ Continuing, he says that

the greatest part of philosophers, when asked what they mean by "equality," say that the word admits of no definition, and that it is sufficient to place before us two

¹³He adds that these are the only arguments of any weight for the principle. The inference from this, of course, is that these are the only arguments he is obliged to refute. In Treatise I, however, he presents two arguments in addition to those which he labels as "objections drawn from the mathematics against the indivisibility of the parts of extension" (Treatise I, p. 42).

¹⁴This exact, though useless, standard is expressed in Treatise I in the following way: "lines or surfaces are equal, when the numbers of points in each are equal; and . . . as the proportion of the numbers varies, the proportion of the lines and surfaces is also vary'd" (Treatise I, p. 45).

equal bodies, such as two diameters of a circle, to make us understand the term. Now this is taking the general appearance of the objects for the standard of that proportion, and renders our imagination and senses the ultimate judges of it. But such a standard admits of no exactness, and can never afford any conclusion contrary to the imagination and senses.¹⁵

Thus, just as in Enquiry I, we find ourselves confined to the appearance of objects to our senses and imagination. These faculties, such as they are, are the ultimate standards in geometry. This shared

¹⁵Abstract, p. 195. In Treatise I, Hume, talking about the notion of equality and of this same problem of an exact standard of it in geometry, had pointed out that since "the very idea of equality is that of such a particular appearance corrected by juxta-position or a common measure, the notion of any correction beyond that we have instruments and art to make, is a mere fiction of the mind, and useless as well as incomprehensible" (Treatise I, p. 48). Nevertheless, "as sound reason convinces us that there are bodies vastly more minute than those, which appear to the senses; and as a false reason wou'd persuade us, that there are bodies infinitely more minute; we clearly perceive, that we are not possess'd of any instrument or art of measuring, which can secure us from all error and uncertainty. We are sensible, that the addition or removal of one of these minute parts, is not discernible either in the appearance or measuring; and as we imagine, that two figures, which were equal before, cannot be equal after this removal or addition, we therefore suppose some imaginary standard of equality, by which the appearances and measuring are exactly corrected, and the figures reduc'd entirely to that proportion. This standard is plainly imaginary" (ibid.). In Chapter I (p. 58), I took note of the fact that Furlong maintains that these remarks of Hume's constitute his way of solving the paradoxes relating to the infinite divisibility of space, inasmuch as they make reference to a tendency of the imagination to go beyond experience. I also objected to this claim about Hume as being, at the very least, rather misleading (cf. p. 74). My remarks in the present discussion should tend to confirm my objections to Furlong's views. In the discussion of the Treatise, Hume was attempting to refute certain mathematical arguments for the principle of the infinite divisibility of space; he was not really trying to solve any paradoxes relating to infinite divisibility. As he was to say later in Treatise I, what he was trying to do was merely to give "the reason, why, after considering several

role of imagination must be accepted as part of Hume's theory of imagination, though I do not consider it to be an especially important feature of the latter.

I think that, among other things, the consideration of the two brief discussions in Enquiry I and the Abstract helps to provide a sort of outline of the main topic of Part II of Treatise I. I realize that this commits me to saying that the really central issues of this Part of Treatise I have reference to what might be called the foundations of mathematics (and of geometry in particular),¹⁶ and not to the ideas of space (or time) per se. It follows from this, of course, that the title of this Part is, in a sense, rather misleading. However, I do not regard this as an especially dangerous admission or commitment. I am quite sure that a case could be made out for the claim that any number of titles, particularly of Sections of the four Parts of Treatise I, are to an extent misleading. Furthermore, it does not follow from my commitment that I must say that Hume's account of the nature of our ideas of space and time (as distinct from his discussion of the doctrine of infinite divisibility of extension (or

loose standards of equality, and correcting them by each other, we proceed to imagine so correct and exact a standard of that relation, as is not liable to the least error or variation" (ibid., p. 198).

¹⁶Hume himself (at one point in Treatise I) characterizes his discussion in this way, i.e., as an examination of "the foundation of mathematics" (Treatise I, p. 198).

space) and its relation to the science of geometry) is not essential to the achievement of his aims in this Part of Treatise I. On the contrary, I believe that it is; but I also think that it is of derived or secondary, rather than of central or primary, importance to him.¹⁷ After all, Hume himself speaks of these two topics as "parts of his system," and as parts "which are intimately connected together."¹⁸ In addition to this, two specific roles or functions of imagination emerge from his discussion of the ideas of space and time per se.

The Account in Treatise I

In the very first paragraph of Section i of Part II of Treatise I, Hume says some things which seem to me to provide evidence that he had essentially the same objective in mind, regarding abstract reasoning, as he had in Enquiry I and the Abstract. He says:

Whatever has the air of a paradox, and is contrary to the first and most unprejudic'd notions of mankind is often greedily embrac'd by philosophers, as shewing the

¹⁷Hendel maintains that "unless we suppose . . . that imagination accounts for our actual perception of a world in space and time, through its disposition to unite and connect particular things in certain ways ultimately peculiar to human nature, we can hardly understand why this Second Part of the Treatise should have its important position in the book" (Hendel, op. cit., p. 152). This seems definitely to imply that Hume's discussion of the ideas of space and time per se is what is central or primary in Part II, not the discussion of the doctrine of infinite divisibility. Contrary to Hendel, I maintain that we can understand the important position of this Part of Treatise I without making the supposition he makes about imagination. Nevertheless, I do maintain that Hume's theory of imagination plays a significant role in what really is central in Part II. It seems to me that Hendel fails to observe that this Part of Treatise I is an attack on abstract reasoning.

¹⁸Treatise I, p. 136.

superiority of their science, which cou'd discover opinions so remote from vulgar conception. On the other hand, any thing propos'd to us, which causes surprize and admiration, gives such a satisfaction to the mind, that it indulges itself in those agreeable emotions, and will never be perswaded that its pleasure is entirely without foundation. From these dispositions in philosophers and their disciples arises that mutual complaisance betwixt them; while the former furnish such plenty of strange and unaccountable opinions, and the latter so readily believe them. Of this mutual complaisance I cannot give a more evident instance than in the doctrine of infinite divisibility, with the examination of which I shall begin this subject of the ideas of space and time.¹⁹

Moreover, I think that my contention is confirmed when we look carefully at some of his remarks near the close of his discussion (Section iv) of this doctrine of infinite divisibility---of extension, in particular. There he tells us that

the ideas which are most essential to geometry, *viz.* those of equality and inequality, of a right line and a plain surface, are far from being exact and determinate, according to our common method of conceiving them. Not only we are incapable of telling, if the case be in any degree doubtful, when such particular figures are equal; when such a line is a right one, and such a surface a plain one; but we can form no idea of that proportion, or of these figures, which is firm and invariable . . . As the ultimate standard of these figures is deriv'd from nothing but the senses and imagination 'tis absurd to talk of any perfection beyond what these faculties can judge of; since the true perfection of any thing consists in its conformity to its standard.

Now since these ideas are so loose and uncertain, I wou'd fain ask any mathematician what infallible assurance he has, not only of the more intricate and obscure propositions of his science, but of the most vulgar and obvious principles? How can he prove to me, for instance, that two right lines cannot have one common segment: Or that 'tis impossible to draw more than one right line betwixt any two points?²⁰

¹⁹Ibid., p. 26.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 50-51.

Hume's general conclusion from these considerations clearly appears to be that the foregoing reflections

may open our eyes a little, and let us see, that no geometrical demonstration for the infinite divisibility of extension can have so much force as what we naturally attribute to every argument, which is supported by such magnificent pretensions. At the same time we may learn the reason why geometry fails of evidence in this single point, while all its other reasonings command our fullest assent and approbation. And indeed it seems more requisite to give the reason of this exception, than to shew, that we really must make such an exception, and regard all the mathematical arguments for infinite divisibility as utterly sophistical. For 'tis evident, that as no idea of quantity is infinitely divisible, there cannot be imagin'd a more glaring absurdity, than to endeavor to prove, that quantity itself admits of such a division; and to prove this by means of ideas, which are directly opposite in that particular. And as this absurdity is very glaring in itself, so there is no argument founded on it, which is not attended with a new absurdity, and involves not an evident contradiction.²¹

Inasmuch as I have already appealed to a passage from Section i of Part III of Treatise I to confirm Hume's view of the connection between the absurdities of mathematicians and metaphysicians and their appeal to abstract ideas (i.e., to the "notion of some spiritual and refin'd perceptions"), I believe that I have provided sufficient evidence that Hume is arguing for his mitigated sceptical position in regard to abstract reasoning not only in Enquiry I but likewise in Treatise I; and that the same elements of the abbreviated argument given in the former are to be found in the latter. What remains to be done---a most important task---is to exhibit the role that Hume's theory of imagination plays in supporting this argument.

²¹Ibid., p. 52.

As far as his formal argument is concerned, I think that it is fair to say that his central contention is that space (extension) and time (duration) consist of a finite, not of an infinite, number of parts, and consequently that these parts become at least simple and indivisible.²² In other words, space and time themselves consist of a finite number of simple, indivisible parts. His argument consists in showing, first, that no idea of space or of time consists of an infinite number of parts (or "inferior" ideas), but of a finite number of them---and ultimately of parts which are simple and indivisible; second, that it follows from this that it is possible for space and time themselves to exist conformable to these ideas we have of them; and third, that because the infinite divisibility of space and time is an utter absurdity (i.e., there are genuine demonstrations against their infinite divisibility), the possible conformity of space and time themselves to our ideas of them entails their actual conformity thereto.²³

²²This contention is what Hume refers to as the first part of his "system concerning space and time" (ibid., p. 39). I am not overlooking or ignoring "the other part" of his system. It will be considered shortly. I merely wish to reiterate my view that the argument regarding infinite divisibility is primary, and the other secondary. Hume considers "the other part" of his system because it "is a consequence of" the first, and because this consequence itself requires a kind of defense---since it not only clashes with the philosopher's views but also with the view of the vulgar. But more of this later.

²³Treatise I, p. 39. I am simply paraphrasing Hume's argument here.

It is clear that Hume's theory of imagination, as I conceive it, is involved in both the first and the second steps of this argument. For what supports the first step, according to Hume, is the fact that "the imagination reaches a minimum, and may raise up to itself an idea, of which it cannot conceive any sub-division, and which cannot be diminished without total annihilation;²⁴ in other words, that "nothing can be more minute, than some ideas, which we form in the fancy; . . . since there are ideas . . . perfectly simple and indivisible."²⁵ There are limits to the ability of the imagination to subdivide our ideas of space and time; the imagination is not capable of dividing such ideas in infinitum.²⁶ What supports the second step of the argument is the principle "that whatever the mind clearly conceives includes the idea of possible existence, or in other words, that nothing we imagine is absolutely impossible."²⁷ I have mentioned already that Hume over and over again in Treatise I makes this sort of appeal to our ability or inability to freely form certain ideas in order to refute certain pretensions of philosophers (including mathematicians, in this case). It is precisely these appeals which most Humean commentators fail to mention, or at any rate, to fully appreciate. These appeals to the free imagination (as I have referred to it)

²⁴Ibid., p. 27.

²⁵Ibid., p. 28.

²⁶Ibid., p. 32.

²⁷Ibid. All words, excepting "in other words," are italicized in the text.

are absolutely integral to his scepticism---just as integral as his appeals to the determined imagination (i.e., the imagination as influenced by the principles of the association of ideas).

Logically connected with Hume's view that space and time themselves, as well as our ideas of them, are finitely divisible is his view that "'tis impossible to conceive either a vacuum and extension without matter, or a time, when there was no succession or change in any real existence."²⁸ According to Hume, "as 'tis from the disposition of visible and tangible objects we receive the idea of space, so from the succession of ideas and impressions we form the idea of time."²⁹ His argument for the denial of the conceivability of an empty space and an empty time (as I shall refer to them) is as follows:

If a point be not consider'd as colour'd or tangible, it can convey to us no idea; and consequently the idea of extension, which is compos'd of the ideas of these points, can never possibly exist. But if the idea of extension really can exist, as we are conscious it does, its parts must also exist; and in order to that, must be consider'd as colour'd or tangible. We have therefore no idea of space or extension, but when we regard it as an object either of our sight or feeling.

The same reasoning will prove, that the indivisible moments of time must be fill'd with some real object or existence, whose succession forms the duration, and makes it be conceivable by the mind.³⁰

Perhaps it would be helpful to re-express his argument in slightly different terms, in order to better see the connection between the doctrine of finite divisibility and of the inconceivability of empty

²⁸Ibid., p. 40.

²⁹Ibid., p. 35.

³⁰Ibid., p. 39.

space and empty time. Hume's claim is that it follows from the fact that our ideas of space and time consist of a finite, not an infinite, number of parts that these parts become at last simple and indivisible; and since these simple, indivisible parts, being nothing in themselves, are inconceivable when not filled with something real and existent, it follows that the ideas of space and time are no separate or distinct ideas but merely those of the manner or order in which objects exist; but to say the latter is just another way of saying that it is impossible to conceive an empty space or an empty time.

A few pages back, I mentioned that it would be important to my purposes to consider this part of Hume's "system concerning space and time." For it is here that his first real discussion of fictions of the imagination occurs,³¹ and hence it marks the first full-fledged and explicitly drawn distinction between the conceiving and supposing activities of imagination. Hume was well aware of the fact that his denial of the very conceivability of an empty space and time was a very radical view, one which conflicted with "the common opinion of philosophers as well as of the vulgar."³² I think that it was mainly

³¹Actually, I have already mentioned one such discussion in this Part of Treatise I. I am referring, of course, to my abbreviated consideration of Hume's so-called "galley theory" (see p. 191 [note]).

³²Treatise I, p. 37. This passage mentions only space, not time. However, a passage later in Treatise I supports my contention about the latter (see ibid., p. 201).

for this reason that Hume felt the need to account, in some fashion, for the prevalence of this mistaken common opinion. Thus, he felt the need to determine "the causes why we falsely imagine we can form such an idea" as that of an empty space or of an empty time.³³ I see no necessity in following his accounts of both of these false imaginings; it will suffice to consider his account of the former. And even here, Hume's account is not only complex but also obscure; therefore, I shall only give the barest outlines of his discussion. In most general terms, it is the phenomena of motion and/or darkness that cause us, according to Hume, to falsely imagine that we can form an idea of an empty space or vacuum. Again, for the sake of simplicity and convenience, I shall consider only his discussion of the phenomenon of darkness. It is the phenomenon of darkness, either alone or attended with visible objects, which causes us to falsely imagine that we can form this idea. After having proved, to his own satisfaction, that the phenomenon of darkness, either alone or when attended with visible objects, really cannot give rise to the idea of an empty space (or vacuum), Hume identifies the latter with an invisible distance between visible objects and attempts to show how this invisible distance, though incapable of even furnishing us with the idea of extension, is capable of making us suppose or imagine that we can form the idea of an extension without matter---for this

³³Ibid., p. 58; see also pp. 37, 60, 65.

is what a vacuum is supposed to be. It is capable of doing this because it bears a rather close resemblance (in certain pertinent respects) to the only kind of distance which can give rise to an idea of extension: a visible distance between visible objects, i.e., a distance which is filled with visible objects. This resemblance (the nature of which need not be elucidated) between the two can cause us to confound them, thus giving rise to the false supposition in question.

One of the salient features of this matter is Hume's appeal to the influence of the natural relation of resemblance in giving rise to this false supposition or imagination. Hume thinks that this specific situation is really just an instance of a more general phenomenon. Consequently, he claims that

we may establish it as a general maxim in this science of human nature, that wherever there is a close relation between two ideas, the mind is very apt to mistake them, and in all its discourses and reasonings to use the one for the other.³⁴

It is obvious that this sort of influence of the natural relations is different from the influence they have in the formation of certain ideas.³⁵ This activity of supposing or imagining we have an idea of

³⁴Ibid., p. 60

³⁵For instance, see Enquiry I, p. 24, where Hume speaks of the thought or idea of a wound giving rise to the thought or idea of the pain attendant with it. The natural relation (or principle of association) operative here, though, is the causal relation, not the relation of resemblance.

something when we do not and cannot have one is manifestly a sort of mental activity in which it is not appropriate to say that an accompanying and corresponding idea (i.e., image) is present before the mind. For to falsely imagine or suppose we have an idea of X is not to have an idea that we have an idea of X or to have an idea of an idea of X. It is not to have an idea at all.

The Attack on Matter-of-Fact Reasoning

In discussing Hume's attack on matter-of-fact reasoning, there will be no need to spend much time on the account Hume gives in Enquiry I. For, in my opinion, the only differences between the two accounts (at least insofar as they involve Hume's theory of imagination) are the omissions from the latter of material discussed in Treatise I.³⁶ All that is requisite is the exhibition of evidence sufficient to confirm my thesis in regard to its primary aim.

The Account in Enquiry I: Its Primary Aim

There are several passages in Enquiry I which give direct evidence that Hume intends his argument concerning matter-of-fact reasoning to support his mitigated scepticism. It will suffice to

³⁶See my Chapter I, p. 64ff., where I deal with and attempt to counteract both Smith's and Furlong's views on one phase of Hume's account, viz., his view of the involvement of imagination in the attainment of factual belief.

consider his remarks on the subject in Section XII. In this Section, Hume provides us with a brief summary of the main points of his discussion of matter-of-fact reasoning in the body of Enquiry I---specifically, his discussions in Sections IV, V, and VII. He tells us that when the Pyrrhonist sees fit to display those of his objections which arise from profound researches,

he seems to have ample matter of triumph; while he justly insists, that all our evidence for any matter of fact, which lies beyond the testimony of sense or memory, is derived entirely from the relation of cause and effect; that we have no other idea of this relation than that of two objects, which have been frequently conjoined together; that we have no argument to convince us, that objects, which have, in our experience, been frequently conjoined, will likewise, in other instances, be conjoined in the same manner; and that nothing leads us to this inference but custom or a certain instinct of our nature; which it is indeed difficult to resist, but which, like other instincts, may be fallacious and deceitful. While the sceptic insists upon these topics, he shows his force, or rather, indeed, his own and our weakness; and seems, for the time at least, to destroy all assurance and conviction.³⁷

Furthermore, were such Pyrrhonian reasonings to have a constant influence on the minds of men, were they universally and steadily to prevail,

all discourse, all action would immediately cease; and men remain in a total lethargy, till the necessities of nature, unsatisfied, put an end to their miserable existence. It is true; so fatal an event is very little to be dreaded. Nature is always too strong for principle. And though a Pyrrhonian may throw himself or others into a momentary amazement and confusion by his profound reasonings; the first and most trivial [sic] event in life will put to flight

³⁷Enquiry I, p. 159; see also p. 76.

all his doubts and scruples, and leave him the same, in every point of action and speculation, with the philosophers of every other sect, or with those who never concerned themselves in any philosophical researches. When he awakes from his dream, he will be the first to join in the laugh against himself, and to confess, that all his objections are mere amusement, and can have no other tendency than to show the whimsical condition of mankind, who must act and reason and believe; though they are not able, by their most diligent enquiry, to satisfy themselves concerning the foundation of these operations, or to remove the objections, which may be raised against them.³⁸

It scarcely needs mentioning that we have here both the Pyrrhonist argument and the naturalistic counter-claim, thus legitimizing the recommendations of mitigated scepticism---and, of course, vitiating the recommendation of the Pyrrhonist.³⁹

The Account in Treatise I

In the concluding Section of Part IV of Treatise I, we find substantially the same points being made by Hume, though in a somewhat more dramatic manner. First, we have an indication both of the paramountcy of the natural relation of causation in our beliefs about the world and of its basic irrationality:

Experience is a principle, which instructs me in the several conjunctions of objects for the past. Habit is another principle, which determines me to expect the same for the future; and both of them conspiring to operate upon the imagination, make me form certain ideas

³⁸Ibid., p. 160.

³⁹See ibid., pp. 41-42, where Hume asserts the naturalistic counter-claim against Pyrrhonism.

in a more intense and lively manner, than others, which are not attended with the same advantages. Without this quality, by which the mind enlivens some ideas beyond others (which seemingly is so trivial, and so little founded on reason) we cou'd never assent to any argument, nor carry our view beyond those few objects, which are present to our senses.⁴⁰

Second, we have the agonizing truth about that central element of the notion of a cause, viz., necessary connexion:

When we trace up the human understanding to its first principles, we find it to lead us into such sentiments, as seem to turn into ridicule all our past pains and industry, and to discourage us from future enquiries. Nothing is more curiously enquir'd after by the mind of man, than the causes of every phaenomenon; nor are we content with knowing the immediate causes, but push on our enquiries, till we arrive at the original and ultimate principle. We wou'd not willingly stop before we are acquainted with that energy in the cause, by which it operates on its effect; that tie, which connects them together; and that efficacious quality, on which the tie depends. This is our aim in all our studies and reflections: And how must we be disappointed, when we learn, that this connexion, tie, or energy lies merely in ourselves, and is nothing but that determination of the mind, which is acquir'd by custom, and causes us to make a transition from an object to its usual attendant, and from the impression of one to the lively idea of the other? Such a discovery not only cuts off all hope of ever attaining satisfaction, but even prevents our very wishes; since it appears, that when we say we desire to know the ultimate and operating principle, as something, which resides in the external object, we either contradict ourselves, or talk without a meaning.⁴¹

Finally, we have the flirtation with the Pyrrhonic inference and a recognition of its ultimate defeat by Nature:

The intense view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and

⁴⁰Treatise I, p. 265.

⁴¹Ibid., pp. 266-67.

reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another. Where am I, or what? From what causes do I derive my existence, and to what condition shall I return? Whose favour shall I court, and whose anger must I dread? What beings surround me? and on whom have I any influence, or who have any influence on me? I am confounded with all these questions, and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environ'd with the deepest darkness, and utterly depriv'd of the use of every member and faculty.

Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relazing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impressions of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hours' amusement, I wou'd return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain'd, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther.

Here then I find myself absolutely and necessarily determin'd to live, and talk, and act like other people in the common affairs of life . . . I may, nay I must yield to the current of nature, in submitting to my senses and understanding; and in this blind submission I shew most perfectly my sceptical disposition and principles.⁴²

I feel that this direct appeal to Hume's own words in Treatise I, as well as in Enquiry I, establishes the fact that the intent of his argument concerning matter-of-fact reasoning in both of these works is the same and is, in fact, the establishment of the position of mitigated scepticism within this specific topic-area.

In discussing Hume's sceptical attack on matter-of-fact reasoning, I shall not make any attempt to present a systematic exposition

⁴²Ibid., pp. 268-69.

of his rather complex argument.⁴³ This task would seem to me to not be requisite to the accomplishment of my purposes. Moreover, this task is one which is carried out in practically every book on Hume's theory of knowledge. Accordingly, I shall adopt the alternative procedure of considering the manner in which Hume's theory of imagination enters into the following five problem-areas: (1) the question of the necessity of a cause for the beginning of every existence; (2) the question of the nature of the inference from cause to effect (and vice-versa); (3) the question of the status of the so-called principle of the uniformity of nature (or principle of induction); (4) the question of the nature of the belief involved when causal inferences take place; and (5) the question of the nature of necessary connexion and of the fiction of necessary connexion between objects (or events).

The necessity of a cause

Regarding the first question, Hume tries to show that the principle that whatever has a beginning also has a cause of its existence--- which "is commonly taken for granted in all reasonings, without any proof given or demanded," and which is "suppos'd to be founded on intuition"⁴⁴---is actually founded on neither intuition nor demonstration and therefore has no basis in knowledge or scientific reasoning.

⁴³I shall also have very little to say about his view on reasoning from conjecture, i.e., the "species" of matter-of-fact reasoning other than causal reasoning.

⁴⁴Treatise I, pp. 78-79.

The main positive argument employed by Hume in support of this claim is the following one: (1) the proposition that whatever begins to exist has also a cause of its existence is based on intuition or demonstration if and only if the proposition that it is impossible that anything can begin to exist without some productive principle is capable of demonstrative proof; (2) but the proposition that it is impossible that anything can begin to exist without some productive principle is utterly incapable of demonstrative proof; hence, (3) the proposition that whatever begins to exist has also a cause of its existence is based neither on intuition nor demonstration.

Although the first premise of this argument would appear to be self-evident (since it is analytic), the second premise is certainly not so. It requires support and Hume is of course aware of this. What is especially significant for our purposes is the manner in which he attempts to support this premise; for it clearly reveals a role for the imagination. I can do no better than to reproduce Hume's own words on this matter:

As distinct ideas are separable from each other, and as the ideas of cause and effect are evidently distinct, 'twill be easy for us to conceive any object to be non-existent this moment, and existent the next, without conjoining to it the distinct idea of a cause or productive principle. The separation, therefore, of the idea of a cause from that of a beginning of existence, is plainly possible for the imagination; and consequently the actual separation of these objects is so far possible, that it implies no contradiction nor absurdity; and is therefore incapable of being refuted by any

reasoning from mere ideas; without which 'tis impossible to demonstrate the necessity of a cause.⁴⁵

Since, as we have observed, the separation of ideas is part of Hume's general conception of imagination, we can see that what Hume is doing here, in effect, is appealing to our ability to engage in a certain mental activity (properly referred to as imaginative in character) in order to refute a claim about the necessity of a cause. However, this is not all that he is doing. For in saying that the possibility of the actual separation of an object beginning to exist from a cause of its existence follows from our ability to separate in thought the ideas of these things, he is also making use of that part of his theory of imagination which asserts that whatever we can imagine is possible. Basically, we have the same sort of appeal to the theory here as we had in the case of Hume's attack on abstract reasoning, in his attempted refutation of the doctrine of the infinite divisibility of space and time.

The nature of causal inference

Since our belief in the causal principle (as we may conveniently refer to it) is not derived "from knowledge or any scientific reasoning," it must, in Hume's view, be derived from experience.⁴⁶ It is in the process of answering the question of its derivation from experience that Hume considers our second question, viz., the question

⁴⁵Ibid., pp. 79-80.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 82.

of the nature of causal inference. His initial move is to analyze the notion of causal inference into three basic components or elements: (1) an impression of the senses (or idea of the memory), (2) an idea of that existent which produces or causes the object of the impression (or idea), or is produced or caused by it, and (3) a transition from (1) to (2).⁴⁷ This is really a preliminary analysis, inasmuch as it makes reference only to the moment, as it were, of the transition (or inference) itself. As it turns out, a reference to the past experience of the agent is essential to a complete analysis of the inference.⁴⁸ Accordingly, shortly after making this preliminary analysis, Hume says "that the transition from an impression present to the memory or senses to the idea of an object, which we call cause or effect, is founded on past experience, and on our remembrance of their constant conjunction."⁴⁹ The main questions for the present discussion are these: What is the role of imagination in this process? Does Hume think that causal inference is exclusively a process of imagination, or exclusively one of reasoning? or neither of these? or what?

At the beginning of his discussion, Hume speaks of this phenomenon of causal inference as a kind of reasoning.⁵⁰ Moreover, not long

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 84.

⁴⁸It is also crucial to an understanding of the very notions of cause and effect (see ibid., p. 169).

⁴⁹Treatise I, p. 88.

⁵⁰See ibid., pp. 82, 84.

before this discussion, he had appeared to define probable reasoning in such a way as to conform pretty much to the present analysis; since he seemed to hold it to be nothing but a comparison of objects and a discovery of those relations which two (or more) of them bear to each other, where one of these objects compared is present to the senses and the other(s) not.⁵¹ However, during the progress of this discussion (and afterwards), he seems to suggest that causal inference is primarily, if not exclusively, a process of imagining.⁵² Indeed, in regard to the past experience upon which causal inference is allegedly founded, Hume's main question seems to be "whether experience produces the idea by means of the understanding or of the imagination; whether we are determin'd by reason to make the transition, or by a certain association and relation of perceptions."⁵³ His answer is that

reason can never shew us the connexion of one object with another, tho' aided by experience, and the observation of their constant conjunction in all past instances. When the mind, therefore, passes from the idea or impression of one object to the idea or belief of another, it is not determin'd by reason, but by certain principles, which associate together the ideas of these objects, and unite them in the imagination. Had ideas no more union in the fancy than objects seem to have to the understanding, we could never draw any inference from causes to effects, nor repose belief in any matter of fact. The inference, therefore, depends solely on the union of ideas.⁵⁴

⁵¹See ibid., p. 73.

⁵²See ibid., pp. 92-93, 97, 103. At one point he even says that "all probable reasoning is nothing but a species of sensation" (ibid., p. 103).

⁵³Ibid., pp. 88-89.

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 92.

I have already had the occasion to consider the fact that Hume remarks, in both Treatise I and Enquiry I, that reason---he obviously means probable reasoning---is nothing but a species of instinct, and that he gives a description of the process which is virtually identical with his description (above) of the operation he attributes to the imagination.⁵⁵

Clearly, there appears to be a degree of confusion in Hume's mind on this matter. We are naturally led to wonder whether there really is, in his view, such a thing as causal reasoning, i.e., an operation of the mind distinct from imagining (in causal inference). Does he maintain that causal inference is exclusively a process of imagining, i.e., a process in which the mind, under the influence of certain associating principles, unites certain ideas? Is there not also a process of comparing (hence reasoning) involved? But perhaps the question has been unfairly put. Maybe the question should be this one: Does Hume maintain that all causal inferences are exclusively processes of imagination, and hence do not involve any reasoning whatever? I find it incredible that he should maintain this view and yet admit (as he does) that there is an opposition, in certain situations, between imagination and judgment regarding causes and effects, and even go on to explicitly formulate those "general rules,

⁵⁵See my Chapter I, p. 90. It is undoubtedly remarks such as this which lead Smith to maintain that Hume holds that "reason . . . is nothing distinct from our natural beliefs" (Smith, "Hume's Naturalism (I.)," op. cit., p. 156; cf. also his Philosophy of Hume, pp. 100, 461).

by which we ought to regulate our judgment concerning causes and effects"---rules which "are form'd on the nature of our understanding, and on our experience of its operations in the judgments we form concerning objects."⁵⁶ Moreover, it seems to me that Hume, in Enquiry I, tries to distinguish between two sorts of causal inferences: those which can and those which "cannot be established without some process of thought, and some reflection on what we have observed, in order to distinguish its circumstances, and trace its consequences."⁵⁷ What I think he has in mind is the difference between such common sense causal inferences as those concerning heat and fire, cold and snow, etc., and the extremely complex inferences of, say, a Newtonian physicist. Later in Enquiry I he appears to be supplementing his account of this distinction, when he says that

the vulgar, who take things according to their first appearance, attribute the uncertainty of events to such an uncertainty in the causes as makes the latter often fail of their usual influence, though they meet with no impediment in their operation. But philosophers, observing that almost in every part of nature there is contained a vast variety of springs and principles

⁵⁶Treatise I, p. 149. The rules themselves are formulated in Section xv of Part III of Treatise I. It is worth remarking that this opposition between imagination and judgment could scarcely be anything other than an opposition between imagination and reason, since surely the latter would qualify as the faculty of applying general rules. The word 'applying' appears to be an important one, for I take it that the imagination can be influenced by rules of some generality, though it cannot apply those rules.

⁵⁷Enquiry I, p. 44 (note).

which are hid by reason of their minuteness or remoteness, find that it is at least possible the contrariety of events may not proceed from any contingency in the cause but from the secret operation of contrary causes.⁵⁸

The correct inference from these passages would seem to be that Hume wants at times, at least, to distinguish between those causal inferences which are pure processes of imagination, inasmuch as they arise from the first appearance of things (and thus do not involve any process of reasoning), and those which, though they may include some process of imagination, may legitimately be called processes of reasoning.⁵⁹

The principle of the uniformity of nature

The third question, which has to do with the connection between his theory of imagination and the status of the principle of the uniformity of nature, can be dealt with rather quickly, as Hume's way of handling it is analogous to his way of handling our first question, i.e., the one regarding the necessity of a cause. I shall lead into

⁵⁸Ibid., pp. 86-87. This same passage is to be found in Treatise I, p. 132.

⁵⁹If my hypothesis about Hume's general conception of imagination is correct (imagination being the faculty of forming, uniting and separating ideas), then it would seem to follow that all causal inferences must include some process of imagination. The reason, obviously, is that even if there were some causal inferences which do not involve any uniting of ideas, there would seem to be none which do not involve the forming of them. However, see my remarks in Chapter II about the formation of ideas as part of the general conception of imagination (pp. 123-24).

it by establishing the context within which the principle of uniformity comes up for discussion.

After having briefly examined the nature of causal inference and having found that it involves "the transition from an impression present to the memory or senses to the idea of an object, which we call cause or effect," and that it "is founded on past experience, and on our remembrance of their constant conjunction," Hume raises the following question: Does experience produce this idea (of an object we call cause or effect) by means of the understanding (i.e., are we determined by reason to make the transition) or by means of the imagination (i.e., are we determined by a certain association and relation of perceptions)?⁶⁰ His claim is that "if reason determin'd us, it wou'd proceed upon that principle, that instances, of which we have had no experience, must resemble those, of which we have had experience, and that the course of nature continues always uniformly the same."⁶¹ We know that, in his view, reason does not so determine us. What we must take note of is the way in which he proceeds to show us that it does not; for it seems to me that if we observe this, then we will see that what he is primarily worried about is the basis (or foundation) of causal inferences and not the nature of such processes,

⁶⁰Treatise I, pp. 88-89.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 89. Beginning with the first 'that', all words are underlined in the text.

i.e., whether they are properly to be called "rational" or not.⁶²

The question he tries to answer is whether or not there are any demonstrative or probable arguments to prove (or justify) the principle of the uniformity of nature. Actually, Hume holds that we do in fact proceed on a belief in this principle. His claim, however, is

that the supposition, that the future resembles the past, is not founded on arguments of any kind, but is deriv'd entirely from habit, by which we are determin'd to expect for the future the same train of objects, to which we have been accustom'd. This habit or determination to transfer the past to the future is full and perfect . . .⁶³

Since Hume's theory of imagination comes in only in his attempt to show that there are no demonstrative arguments to prove this principle of uniformity, I shall forego any further mention of his attempt to show that no probable arguments can prove it. His proof that there are no demonstrative arguments is quite simple. He says:

We can at least conceive a change in the course of nature; which sufficiently proves, that such a change is not absolutely impossible. To form a clear idea of any thing, is an undeniable argument for its possibility, and is alone a refutation of any pretended demonstration against it.⁶⁴

Since, under Hume's general conception of imagination, to conceive or form an idea is to imagine, it is clear that he is appealing to our

⁶²See Enquiry I, p. 34, where Hume asserts that he will allow that the proposition, I foresee that objects which are similar in appearance to object X will be attended with effects similar to Y, "may justly be inferred from" the proposition, I have found that X-like objects have always been attended with Y-like effects.

⁶³Treatise I, p. 134.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 89.

ability to imagine an alternative to an orderly universe, to a belief in which our belief in the principle of uniformity gives expression. This very definitely is a process of imagination, if for no other reason than the fact that our ability to conceive a change in the course of nature involves or presupposes our ability to separate certain ideas which have been united in our minds. And, of course, we should not neglect to mention that we have (in the above argument) an appeal to that element of Hume's theory of imagination which asserts that whatever we can imagine is possible.

Belief and causal inference

Our fourth question concerning Hume's attack on matter-of-fact reasoning has to do with the nature and origin of the belief which is involved in causal inference. Specifically, the question is: How does Hume's theory of imagination relate to his view of the nature and origin of the belief which is involved therein? At the beginning of this discussion it is well to remind the reader that I have already addressed myself to the problem of whether Hume's views on this sort of belief undergo a change in the course of his philosophy of the human understanding;⁶⁵ as a consequence of this, it will not be necessary to go into the problem again. My view, as will be recalled, is that there is no material change.

⁶⁵See my Chapter I, p. 47ff.

It is worth mentioning that Hume distinguishes between belief (1) as it relates to the deliverances of our senses and memory, (2) as it relates to matters of fact, and (3) as it relates to matters of intuition and demonstration. Hume has something to say about each of these, although it is (2) which is his primary concern in his philosophy of the human understanding. There are similarities between all three of these "species" of belief, but the strongest ones are to be found between (1) and (2). In fact, Hume's "official" view is that belief in any thing presupposes or involves a conception of that thing. Nevertheless, he does not think that the mere conception of a thing can ever constitute the belief in that thing, belief always being something super-added to the conception of a thing. With regard to (3), that which is super-added is an awareness that it is impossible to conceive the contrary. Hume tells us that

the person, who assents, not only conceives the ideas according to the proposition, but is necessarily determin'd to conceive them in that particular manner, either immediately or by the interposition of other ideas. Whatever is absurd is unintelligible; nor is it possible for the imagination to conceive any thing contrary to a demonstration.⁶⁶

With regard to (1), that which is super-added is merely the vivacity of the perceptions involved. As Hume says,

the belief or assent, which always attends the memory and sense, is nothing but the vivacity of those perceptions they present . . . To believe is in this case to feel an immediate impressions of the senses, or a repetition of that impression in the memory.⁶⁷

⁶⁶Treatise I, p. 95; cf. Abstract, p. 189. ⁶⁷Treatise I, p. 86.

Furthermore, Hume held that "the belief, which attends our memory, is of the same nature with that, which is deriv'd from our judgments concerning causes and effects"⁶⁸---the most important "species" of judgment concerning matters of fact. Thus, with regard to (2), that which is super-added is the vivacity of the perceptions involved. Actually, Hume does not clearly distinguish between the nature of such belief and its origin or source. For he asserts that "belief may be most accurately defin'd, a lively idea related to or associated with a present impression."⁶⁹ Belief is the lively idea itself; the fact that it is related, in a certain way, to a present impression is what gives rise to belief. That this is the case is manifest in the following statement (made shortly after he gives the preceding definition of belief): "a present impression with a relation of causation may enliven any idea, and consequently produce belief or assent, according to the precedent definition of it."⁷⁰

There are any number of passages in Hume's philosophy of the human understanding which serve to reveal, fairly well, the relationships between causal inference, belief, and his theory of imagination.⁷¹ The following one appears to me to be as good as any:

All kinds of reasoning from causes or effects are founded on two particulars, viz. the constant conjunction of any two objects in all past experience, and the resemblance of a present object to any one of them. The effect of these

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 154.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 96.

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 103.

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 92, 93, 97, 140, 144, 149.

two particulars is, that the present object invigorates and enlivens the imagination; and the resemblance, along with the constant union, conveys this force and vivacity to the related idea; which we are therefore said to believe, or assent to.⁷²

First of all, we have here the source of this sort of belief (viz., the constant conjunction and the resemblance); second, though it is put in a rather figurative way, we have the operation of imagination involved (viz., the formation of a lively idea); and third, we have an allusion to the nature of this sort of belief (viz., the lively idea itself). It is clear, then, that the source of the belief and the source of the operation of imagination are the same; indeed, it is clear that the product of the operation of imagination and the belief itself are identical. Thus, it is correct to say that to imagine (under these circumstances) is to believe.⁷³

⁷²Ibid., p. 142.

⁷³There is evidence indicating that the mere forming of ideas is not the only operation of imagination involved in these circumstances. It is also suggested, in places, that the uniting of ideas is involved. Perhaps the best evidence for this is to be found in Hume's discussion of conjectural reasoning. Since what he says has the additional virtue of linking up quite well with his view of the relation between imagination and belief, I shall quote it here. He says: "'Tis obvious in this species of reasoning, that if the transference of the past to the future were founded merely on a conclusion of the understanding, it cou'd never occasion any belief or assurance. When we transfer contrary experiments to the future, we can only repeat these contrary experiments with their particular proportions; which cou'd not produce assurance in any single event, upon which we reason, unless the fancy melted together all those images that concur, and extracted from them one single idea or image, which is intense and lively in proportion to the number of experiments from which it is deriv'd, and their superiority above their antagonists. Our past

Necessary connexion

The fifth and final question, concerning Hume's discussion of causation and matter-of-fact reasoning generally, can be made fairly quickly and easily. Having discussed Hume's view of the nature of causal inference and its relation to his theory of imagination, we have at our disposal virtually all of the materials needed for an answer to the question. Actually, the question is divided into two parts, both of which concern Hume's views on necessary connexion. The first has to do with the relation between Hume's theory of imagination and the nature of necessary connexion, and especially the derivation of our idea of the latter. The question of the derivation of the idea of necessary connexion is important to Hume because it forms an essential part of his question concerning the derivation of the idea of a cause. The notion of necessary connexion is, in Hume's view, an essential part of the complex notion of a cause—at least the ordinary man's notion of the latter.⁷⁴ Since here, as elsewhere,

experience presents no determinate object; and as our belief, however faint, fixes itself on a determinate object, 'tis evident that the belief arises not merely from the transference of past to future, but from some operation of the fancy conjoin'd with it. This may lead us to conceive the manner, in which that faculty enters into all our reasonings" (Treatise I, pp. 139-40). It is evident that this melting together of ideas (or images) is either just another name for the uniting of them, or, at any rate, could not take place unless there were a prior uniting of them.

⁷⁴See Treatise I, p. 77. However, as a result of Hume's own analysis of the notion of a cause, it becomes clear that this notion of necessary connexion plays no legitimate part or role in the

Hume applies his fundamental dictum that all ideas are derived from precedent impressions, his central problem regarding the derivation of the idea of necessary connexion is to track down the impression of that relation. He finds that after having observed the frequent repetition of like objects existing in like relations of contiguity and succession,

upon the appearance of one of the objects, the mind is determin'd by custom to consider its usual attendant, and to consider it in a stronger light upon account of its relation to the first object. 'Tis this impression, then, or determination, which affords me the idea of necessity.⁷⁵

Thus, the impression of necessary connexion just is this determination of the mind involved in causal inference, i.e., the "determination of the mind to pass from one object to its usual attendant, and to conceive it in a stronger light upon account of that relation."⁷⁶ "Necessity, then, . . . is nothing but an internal impression of the mind, or a determination to carry our thoughts from one object to another."⁷⁷ The word 'internal' is significant, inasmuch as it reflects Hume's view that the impression of necessity (or necessary

"enlightened" philosopher's view of causation. This difference between the philosophical and the ordinary man's notion of causation is implied in Hume's distinction between cause as a philosophical relation and cause as a natural relation, and consequently in the exhibition of two distinct, though related, definitions of a cause (cf. ibid., pp. 169-70, 172).

⁷⁵Ibid., p. 156.

⁷⁶Ibid., p. 165.

⁷⁷Ibid.; cf. Enquiry I, p. 75.

connexion) is not an impression of sensation. This, presumably, would be an external impression; but, according to Hume, "there is no impression convey'd by our senses, which can give rise to that idea."⁷⁸ Indeed, as Hume sees it,

there is no internal impression, which has any relation to the present business, but that propensity, which custom produces, to pass from an object to the idea of its usual attendant. This therefore is the essence of necessity.⁷⁹

There is some justification for Hume's referring to this determination or propensity of the mind as an impression of reflexion, since the latter in general are held by him to be derived from impressions of sensation via the occurrence of certain ideas. And most certainly ideas are involved, in various ways, in causal inference.

As a consequence of these considerations, it is clear that the role of imagination in the origin of the idea of necessary connexion ---indeed, in the origin of the impression of necessary connexion--- is precisely that of its role in causal inference itself. Hume says:

The necessary connexion betwixt causes and effects is the foundation of our inference from one to the other. The foundation of our inference is the transition arising from the accustom'd union. These are, therefore, the same.⁸⁰

An important implication of this view of the nature of necessary connexion leads to the second part of this fifth question. This implication is the extremely paradoxical one (in Hume's view) that

⁷⁸Treatise I, p. 165.

⁷⁹Ibid.

⁸⁰Ibid.

"necessity is something, that exists in the mind, not in objects";⁸¹ it is a quality of perceptions, not of objects.⁸² It is precisely this implication which Hume has in mind in the concluding Section of Part IV of Treatise I, when he declares that "when we say we desire to know the ultimate and operating principle, as something, which resides in the external object, we either contradict ourselves, or talk without a meaning."⁸³ Since an acquaintance with the connecting tie between causes and effects is our aim in all our studies and reflections, the realization of this as the true state of affairs is bound to be an extreme disappointment to us. Indeed, the very fact that such has been our aim is likely to make the present doctrine strike upon us with a degree of astonishment that will create a bias or prejudice against it. It is in view of the likelihood of this that Hume elects to try to account for the occurrence in us of the supposition that there is a necessary connexion between objects (which are causally related). And in so doing, he appeals to his theory of imagination, for he thinks that this supposition is a product, a fiction, of the imagination. The general principle to which he appeals in his explanation is the principle that "the mind has a great propensity to spread itself on external objects, and to conjoin with them any internal impressions, which they occasion, and which always make their appearance at the same time that these objects discover

⁸¹Ibid.

⁸²Ibid., p. 166.

⁸³Ibid., p. 267.

themselves to the senses."⁸⁴ This is the reason why it is natural for men,

in their common and careless way of thinking, to imagine they perceive a connexion betwixt such objects as they have constantly found united together; . . . because custom has render'd it difficult to separate ideas, they are apt to fancy such a separation to be in itself impossible and absurd.⁸⁵

Hume endeavors to make this account more plausible by referring to another manifestation of this "great propensity," viz., to the supposition of a conjunction in place between the sounds and smells which are always found to attend certain visible objects and these objects themselves. According to Hume, we must realize on reflection that the qualities of sound and smell are of such a nature that they cannot admit of a conjunction in place and really exist nowhere.⁸⁶ The reason for this is that their "parts are not so situated with respect to each other, as to form any figure or quantity; nor the whole with respect to other bodies so as to answer to our notions of contiguity or distance."⁸⁷ Yet we ordinarily suppose them to admit of such a conjunction. How can this be explained except by an appeal to the "great propensity" (mentioned above)? What is noteworthy is the use of 'imagination' involved here. To imagine, in these cases, is to suppose; and this sort of supposing is not

⁸⁴Ibid., p. 167; see also p. 223.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 223.

⁸⁶Ibid., p. 235ff.

⁸⁷Ibid., pp. 235-36.

identical with conceiving (in Hume's sense of this term), since we can have no idea (again, in Hume's sense) of that which is supposed.

We suppose necessity and power to lie in the objects we consider, not in our mind, that considers them; notwithstanding it is not possible for us to form the most distant idea of that quality, when it is not taken for the determination of the mind, to pass from the idea of an object to that of its usual attendant.⁸⁸

The distinction appears to be strictly analogous to the one Hume makes with regard to external existence: "we may well suppose in general, but 'tis impossible for us distinctly to conceive, objects to be in their nature any thing but exactly the same with perceptions."⁸⁹ In conclusion, perhaps it should be mentioned that this explanation of the supposition of a necessary connexion between objects is not repeated in Enquiry I.

The Combined Attack on Both Types of Reasoning

We have now examined Hume's separate attacks on abstract reasoning and matter-of-fact reasoning and their connection with his theory of imagination. In Section 1 of Part IV of Treatise I, entitled "Of scepticism with regard to reason," his attack against reason, in a sense, reaches its climax in a combined attack on both types of reasoning. To this brief but, in Hume's view, devastating attack we must now turn, inasmuch as it also involves his theory.⁹⁰

⁸⁸Ibid., p. 167.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 218.

⁹⁰This combined attack is not repeated in Enquiry I.

Perhaps the best place to begin is with Hume's brief summation of this attack in the concluding Section of Part IV of Treatise I. This will serve the useful purpose of exhibiting rather succinctly, yet clearly, its relation to his theory of imagination. In this Section, we find Hume saying at one point that

the understanding, when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence [by 'evidence', he seems here to mean 'belief'] in any proposition, either in philosophy or common life. We save ourselves from this total scepticism only by means of that singular and seemingly trivial property of the fancy, by which we enter with difficulty into remote views of things, and are not able to accompany them with so sensible an impression, as we do those, which are more easy and natural.⁹¹

In a word, our reason would make total sceptics of all of us if it were not for our imagination. That is to say, if we were purely rational beings and steadily exercised our reason, we would be (or would become) total sceptics. This attack on reason is, then, an attack or criticism to which reason is allegedly subject when it is considered as a possible foundation of belief.

We must, first of all, take note of how Hume thinks that reason (acting in the manner described above) would entirely subvert itself and leave us in a state of total suspense of judgment, and then take a closer look at the nature of this property of the fancy (or imagination) by means of which alone we are able to avert this sceptical

⁹¹Treatise I, pp. 267-68.

state---in an effort to discern its relation to his general conception of that faculty.

Hume's Pyrrhonic attack on reason takes place in two distinguishable stages: (1) an attempt to show that a consistent pursuit of the dictates of reason results in the degeneration of knowledge (which carries absolute certainty with it) into probability (wherein a degree of uncertainty is to be found); and (2) an attempt to show that a consistent pursuit of the dictates of reason results in the degeneration of probability, by "a continual diminution," into a state of total suspense of judgment (i.e., "a total extinction of belief and evidence").⁹²

Hume states the first stage of the argument as follows:

In all demonstrative sciences the rules are certain and infallible; but when we apply them, our fallible and uncertain faculties are very apt to depart from them, and fall into error. We must, therefore, in every reasoning form a new judgment, as a check or controul on our first judgment or belief; and must enlarge our view to comprehend a kind of history of all the instances, wherein our understanding has deceiv'd us, compar'd with those, wherein its testimony was just and true. Our reason must be consider'd as a kind of cause, of which truth is the natural effect; but such-a-one as by the irruption of other causes, and by the inconstancy of our mental powers, may frequently be prevented. By this means all knowledge degenerates into probability; and this probability is greater or less, according to our experience of the veracity or deceitfulness of our understanding, and according to the simplicity or intricacy of the question.⁹³

What Hume is claiming here is that in every judgment we can form concerning knowledge (i.e., concerning matters of intuition and

⁹²Ibid., pp. 182-83.

⁹³Ibid., p. 180.

demonstration) we are obliged by our reason "to correct the first judgment, deriv'd from the nature of the object, by another judgment, deriv'd from the nature of the understanding [i.e., from the nature of our cognitive faculties]."⁹⁴ In other words, if our reason alone were in command in matters of intuition and demonstration, we could find ourselves comparing the one judgment with the other and discovering the true relation---it would be merely a probable one---between them.⁹⁵ Hume thinks that exactly similar considerations are involved in the case of probability.

As demonstration is subject to the controul of probability, so is probability liable to a new correction by a reflex act of the mind, wherein the nature of our understanding, and our reasoning from the first probability become our objects.⁹⁶

Again, I can do no better than to quote Hume's own words in his presentation of the second stage of the argument. In his view, we find that

in every probability, beside the original uncertainty inherent in the subject, a new uncertainty deriv'd from the weakness of that faculty, which judges, and having adjusted these two together, we are oblig'd by our reason to add a new doubt deriv'd from the possibility of error in the estimation we make of the truth and fidelity of our faculties. This is a doubt which immediately occurs to us, and

⁹⁴Ibid., p. 182.

⁹⁵The two words I have underlined here were so underlined to bring to the reader's attention the accordance of Hume's use of 'reason' in these passages with his general conception of that faculty.

⁹⁶Treatise I, p. 182.

of which, if we wou'd closely pursue our reason, we cannot avoid giving a decision. But this decision, tho' it shou'd be favourable to our preceeding judgment, being founded only on probability, must weaken still further our first evidence, and must itself be weaken'd by a fourth doubt of the same kind, and so on in infinitum; till at last there remains nothing of the original probability, however great we may suppose it to have been, and however small the diminution by every new uncertainty. No finite object can subsist under a decrease repeated in infinitum; and even the vastest quantity, which can enter into human imagination, must in this manner be reduc'd to nothing. Let our first belief be never so strong, it must infallibly perish by passing thro' so many new examinations, of which each diminishes somewhat of its force and vigour. When I reflect on the natural fallibility of my judgment, I have less confidence in my opinions, than when I only consider the objects concerning which I reason; and when I proceed still farther, to turn the scrutiny against every successive estimation I make of my faculties, all the rules of logic require a continual diminution, and at last a total extinction of belief and evidence.⁹⁷

Hume thinks that these two arguments are entirely cogent. Indeed, he tells us explicitly that "experience will sufficiently convince any one, who thinks it worth while to try, that . . . he can find no error in the foregoing arguments."⁹⁸ This being the case, it follows that once we become acquainted with them our reason obliges us to adopt total scepticism, i.e., to adopt the recommendation of Pyrrhonism. Yet even when we do become acquainted with them, we do not adopt this

⁹⁷Ibid., pp. 182-83. Aside from the two occurrences of the expression "in infinitum," all underlined words in this passage were underlined by me.

⁹⁸Ibid., p. 184.

position---or if we do, we cannot sustain ourselves in it for any length of time.

Shou'd it here be ask'd me, whether I sincerely assent to this argument, which I seem to take such pains to inculcate, and whether I be really one of those sceptics, who hold that all is uncertain, and that our judgment is not in any thing possest of any measure of truth and falshood; I shou'd reply, that this question is entirely superfluous, and that neither I nor any other person was ever sincerely and constantly of that opinion.⁹⁹

The explanation of this is already familiar to us. It is that

nature, by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determin'd us to judge as well as to breathe and feel; nor can we any more forbear viewing certain objects in a stronger and fuller light, upon account of their customary connexion with a present impression, than we can hinder ourselves from thinking as long as we are awake, or seeing the surrounding bodies, when we turn our eyes toward them in broad sunshine.¹⁰⁰

Thus,

whoever has taken the pains to refute the cavils of this total scepticism, has really disputed without an antagonist, and endeavour'd by arguments to establish a faculty, which nature has antecedently implanted in the mind, and render'd unavoidable.¹⁰¹

It is worthy of note that in telling us (above) that we cannot forbear viewing certain objects in a stronger and fuller light, upon account of their customary connexion with a present impression, he is presenting in a nutshell his theory of the nature and origin of belief. This is certainly a main factor in his attempt to show the utter pointlessness of trying to refute these arguments of the Pyrrhonist. For instance, "if belief . . . were a simple act of thought, without

⁹⁹Ibid., p. 183.

¹⁰⁰Ibid.

¹⁰¹Ibid.

any peculiar manner or conception, or the addition of a force and vivacity,"¹⁰² not only would it be possible for us to reach a total scepticism in the face of these Pyrrhonic arguments; we would in fact reach such a state. For if this were what belief amounted to, "it must infallibly destroy itself, and in every case terminate in a total suspense of judgment."¹⁰³ Yet the very fact that we still continue to believe, even upon a confrontation with these arguments and a full awareness of their cogency, is about the best evidence possible for the view that "belief is some sensation or peculiar manner of conception, which 'tis impossible for mere ideas and reflections to destroy."¹⁰⁴ Now although our continuing to believe (under these circumstances) is to an extent explained by this theory of belief, it is obvious that more than a bare statement of it is required to provide a sufficient or fully satisfactory explanation of it. Granting that we cannot forbear viewing certain objects in a stronger and fuller light (i.e., believing in their existence) on account of their customary connection with a present impression, it does not follow from this that we will be able to retain any degree of our original belief in a subject when we correct our first judgment (derived from

¹⁰²Ibid., p. 184.

¹⁰³Ibid.

¹⁰⁴Ibid. We must be careful here not to confuse the evidence for a theory with the theory itself, or to claim that the theory is the foundation of the evidence existing for it. Hume's theory of belief does not prove that we will continue to believe in certain of our judgments despite our confrontation with the Pyrrhonic arguments, or justify this continuance in belief in any way. Rather, it is the fact that we continue to believe under these circumstances

the nature of the object itself) by another (derived from the nature of our faculties), and again by another (derived from the possibility of an error in the estimation of the fidelity of our faculties), and so on. Hume fully realizes that it is still possible to ask, How does it happen, even on this theory of belief, that the Pyrrhonian argument or procedure does not produce a total suspense of judgment? Under these conditions, how is the mind able to retain a degree of belief which is sufficient for the purposes of philosophy and common life? The substance of Hume's answer is as follows:

After the first and second decision [i.e., after our judgment derived from the nature of the object and our first corrective judgment derived from the nature of our faculties]; as the action of the mind becomes forc'd and unnatural, and the ideas faint and obscure; tho' the principles of judgment, and the ballancing of opposite causes be the same as at the very beginning; yet their influence on the imagination, and vigour they add to, or diminish from the thought, is by no means equal. Where the mind reaches not its objects with easiness and facility, the same principles have not the same effect as in a more natural conception of the ideas; nor does the imagination feel a sensation, which holds any proportion with that which arises from its common judgments and opinions. The attention is on the stretch; the posture

that proves (i.e., gives evidence for) Hume's theory. It seems to me that Hume's central point here is to convince us that there is no proof, no justification, for our continuing to believe under these circumstances, though there is of course an explanation for it. What is more, as far as justification is concerned, there is ample justification for our discontinuing to believe under these circumstances. Thus, it is an explanation of our continuing to believe, and this alone, that Hume is trying to provide. I mention this because, as we have already seen, N. K. Smith (among others) seems at times to be holding that Hume in presenting and applying his theory of belief is trying to offer some kind of justification for certain "natural" beliefs we cling to.

of the mind is uneasy; and the spirits being diverted from their natural course, are not govern'd in their movements by the same laws, at least not to the same degree, as when they flow in their usual channel.¹⁰⁵

Perhaps a better statement than the above of the general claim which forms the basis of his specific contention against the Pyrrhonist argument, is contained in the following remarks made by Hume earlier in Treatise I:

Any reasoning is always the more convincing, the more single and united it is to the eye, and the less exercise it gives to the imagination to collect all its parts, and from them to the correlative idea, which forms the conclusion. The labour of the thought disturbs the regular progress of the sentiments [on which belief depends]. . . The idea strikes not on us with such vivacity; and consequently has no such influence on the passion and imagination.¹⁰⁶

And if we ask the foundation of this general claim, we find that Hume's answer would seem to be the following one:

'Tis certain, that when an inference is drawn immediately from an object, without any intermediate cause or effect, the conviction is much stronger, and the persuasion more lively, than when the imagination is carry'd thro' a long chain of connected arguments, however infallible the connexion of each link may be esteem'd. 'Tis from the original impression, that the vivacity of all the ideas is deriv'd, by means of the customary transition of the imagination; and 'tis evident this vivacity must gradually decay in proportion to the distance, and must lose somewhat in each transition . . . One must have a very strong and firm imagination to preserve the evidence to the end, where it passes thro' so many stages.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁵Ibid., p. 185.

¹⁰⁶Ibid., p. 153. A justification for my insert will be found on page 185 of Treatise I.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., p. 144.

I confess to a certain uneasiness about the adequacy of these several statements as comprising an answer to the question which Hume is here posing to himself. Is what Hume is saying in these statements merely an expansion upon or an elucidation of his recapitulating comment (in Section vii of Part IV of Treatise I) about a singular and seemingly trivial property of the fancy? Just what does it mean, in Humian language, to be able to "enter with difficulty into the remote views of things" and to be unable to "accompany them with so sensible an impression, as we do those, which are easy and natural"? I suspect that what Hume manages to point out in these statements is simply that we cannot successfully carry through the Pyrrhonist argument or procedure because we cannot, on account of its subtlety and length, preserve a belief in it to the end. If this is so, then we have the paradoxical situation of requiring a preservation of belief in order to destroy it; for this is exactly what the carrying through of the Pyrrhonist argument or procedure is supposed to do.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸Oddly enough, Hume addresses himself (in this very context) to a paradox which bears a resemblance to the present one. He says that he "cannot approve of that expeditious way, which some take with the sceptics, to reject at once all their arguments without enquiry or examination" (ibid., p. 186). The actual paradox which the dogmatists hold up to the sceptics may be expressed in the following argument-form (which is virtually identical with the manner in which Hume expresses it): if the sceptical arguments against reason are strong, then they prove that reason may have some force and authority; if they are weak, then they can never be sufficient to invalidate all the conclusions of reason; but the sceptical arguments against reason must be either strong or weak; hence, either these arguments prove that reason may have some force and authority or they cannot be sufficient to invalidate all the conclusions of reason. If this is the case, then it follows that these arguments may be rejected without

Let us recall that Hume's question is: How does it happen that the Pyrrhonic argument does not produce a total suspense of judgment, i.e., how does it happen that, even after all, we retain a degree of belief which is sufficient for the purposes of philosophy and common life? Is Hume's answer to this question something like this: in order to reach a state of total suspense of judgment it would be requisite for us to be able to retain a belief in the Pyrrhonic argument through to its conclusion, and yet this is exactly what we are incapable of doing? Hume explicitly says, at one point in his discussion of this question, that it is no wonder that

the conviction, which arises from a subtle reasoning, diminishes in proportion to the efforts, which the imagination makes to enter into the reasoning, and to conceive it in all its parts. Belief, being a lively conception, can never be entire, where it is not founded on something natural and easy.¹⁰⁹

Since 'conviction' is obviously just another word for 'belief' in the above sentence, and since the Pyrrhonic arguments are definitely held by Hume to be instances of "subtle reasoning," it would appear that I am correct in my suspicion as to his answer. At any rate, his

enquiry and examination. Hume begins his reply to this by saying: "this argument is not just; because the sceptical reasonings, were it possible for them to exist, and were they not destroy'd by their subtlety, wou'd be successively both strong and weak, according to the successive dispositions of the mind" (*ibid.*). His final position on the question seems to be that it is nature, not reason, which breaks the force of these Pyrrhonic arguments (see *ibid.*, p. 187). Obviously, there is a connection between their destruction by nature and their destruction by their "subtlety."

¹⁰⁹Treatise I, p. 186.

answer, such as it is, does rather clearly exhibit the manner in which the force of the Pyrrhonian argument is broken. It is broken primarily, if not exclusively, by the rather severe limitations that nature has imposed upon our ability to form and unite ideas. Thus the only thing "wrong" with the sceptical argument is that it imposes too great a strain on our imagination.

In the light of this, is it any wonder that we should find Hume saying (in the final Section of Part IV of Treatise I) that "I must be a fool, as all those who reason or believe in any thing certainly are"¹¹⁰ But fools we must be, since this is our nature. Yet we are beings capable of reasoning; this, too, is part of our nature. Should we strive to become reasonable fools, then? It seems to me that, in a way, this is exactly what it is to be a mitigated sceptic. Shortly after he has told us what fools we are, he says that

in 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. 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.¹¹¹

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 270.

¹¹¹Ibid.

CHAPTER V

HUME'S THEORY OF IMAGINATION IN THE ARGUMENT OF HIS

PHILOSOPHY OF THE HUMAN UNDERSTANDING (II.):

THE ATTACK ON SENSE

The Attack on External Sense

A comparison of Hume's argument concerning reasoning generally (which I dealt with in the immediately preceding chapter) with his argument concerning the evidence of external sense reveals a rather striking parallel, which many Humian commentators seem to have failed to observe. For just as Hume thinks that it is a singular and seemingly trivial property of the imagination which prevents us from becoming Pyrrhonian sceptics with regard to reason, so he thinks that it is yet another trivial property (or natural propensity) of that faculty which prevents us from becoming Pyrrhonian sceptics with regard to our external senses.¹ Let us see how Hume comes to draw this parallel conclusion and in particular what he takes the nature of this further trivial property to be. I shall begin by exhibiting the brief but clear argument which we find in Section XII of Enquiry I,

¹Cf. Treatise I, pp. 210, 214, 217.

and then show how this argument stands related to the lengthier and also considerably more complex and more obscure argument on the same subject in Part IV of Treatise I. My objective in doing this will be to show that apart from certain differences in detail and even in the over-all structure and order of the argument in the two cases, the central aim of both accounts is the same, viz., to establish the position of mitigated scepticism with regard to the evidence of external sense.

The Account in Enquiry I

Since Hume's argument regarding the evidence of external sense resolves itself into a critical discussion of what has come to be known as the problem of the external world, a word about the connection between the external senses and the external world is perhaps in order here. By "the external senses"---Hume usually uses the expression "the senses"---I mean of course the senses of sight, smell, taste, touch, and hearing; by "the external world"---Hume actually employs this expression at least once in Treatise I²---I mean the collection or totality of material objects (i.e., objects which, if they exist, have a continued and distinct existence³). The connection

²See ibid., p. 218.

³See ibid., p. 189. The notion of continued existence seems to be self-explanatory. As far as the notion of distinct existence is concerned, Hume says that "under this . . . head I comprehend their situation as well as relations, their external position as well as the independence of their existence and operation" (ibid., p. 188).

between the external senses and the external world is that the former are ordinarily taken to be the basis of our belief in the existence of the latter.⁴ Thus, we find Hume suggesting in Enquiry I that it is because we "repose faith" in our external senses that "we always suppose an external universe, which depends not on our perception, but would exist, though we and every sensible creature were absent or annihilated."⁵ With this connection firmly in mind let us examine the Pyrrhonic aspect of Hume's argument in Enquiry I regarding the evidence of external sense.

I take the following ten-step proof to be a kind of outline or schema of this Pyrrhonic part of his argument:⁶ (1) we ought to withhold our assent from any supposition which does not rest upon an adequate foundation; (2) we all suppose the continued and distinct existence of objects, and our supposition of such an existence rests

⁴I say "ordinarily" because, in Hume's view, "the opinion of a continu'd and of a distinct existence never arises from the senses" (ibid., p. 192), but rather is "entirely owing to the imagination" (ibid., p. 193). Though these are Hume's words, his actual position is not that our sense-experience plays no role whatsoever in the origin of our belief in the existence of an external world; rather, it is that our sense-experience (or certain features of it) and our imagination concur in the generation of this belief (see ibid., p. 194). Nonetheless, my comment about "ordinarily" still holds, for it is surely not ordinarily supposed that something more than our senses are involved.

⁵Enquiry I, p. 151.

⁶I have remained quite close to Hume's own language in Enquiry I. My additions to his own explicit assertions are primarily expressions of what I take to be the unexpressed premises of his argument.

either upon natural instinct or upon reason; (3) given any supposition, if natural instinct is an adequate foundation for our assent to that supposition, then there is no conflict between it and reason as a foundation for that supposition; (4) but there is a conflict between these two as foundations for the supposition of such an existence, since (a) if this supposition rests upon natural instinct, then it involves the further supposition that the impressions presented by our external senses are identical with the material objects themselves,⁷ and (b) if it rests upon reason, then it involves the further supposition that the impressions presented by our external senses are different and distinct from material objects;⁸ (5) natural instinct is not an adequate foundation for our assent to the supposition of such an existence [follows from premises 3 and 4]; (6) given any supposition, if reason is an adequate foundation for our assent to that supposition, then that supposition must carry some rational evidence with it which would convince an impartial inquirer, and it must not be in any sense contrary to reason itself; (7) but the supposition of the continued and distinct existence of objects (in the form which it takes when based upon reason) carries no rational evidence with it which would convince an impartial inquirer, and it is

⁷In Treatise I this is referred to as the vulgar view or system (see, e.g., Treatise I, p. 213).

⁸In Treatise I this is referred to as the philosophical view or system (see, e.g., Treatise I, p. 213).

even in a sense contrary to reason itself;⁹ (8) reason is not an adequate foundation for our assent to the supposition of such an existence [follows from premises 6 and 7]; (9) our supposition of the continued and distinct existence of objects does not rest upon an adequate foundation [follows from premises 2, 5 and 8]; and therefore (10) we ought to withhold our assent from the supposition of the continued and distinct existence of objects [follows from premises 1 and 9].

Now, Hume does not take the time in Enquiry I to "mitigate" this Pyrrhonic argument---at any rate, not in a direct way. As a consequence of this, no explicit appeal is made to a particular trivial property of the imagination to explain why the Pyrrhonic argument is ineffectual. The mitigation procedure, though doubtlessly intended to cover not only the Pyrrhonic attacks on the evidence of abstract reasoning and of matter-of-fact reasoning, but also the attack on the evidence of sense, is focussed more or less on the attack on the evidence of matter-of-fact reasoning. Since we have already reviewed the latter, the only thing that will be required here is to indicate how the general mitigation procedure would be adapted to this particular Pyrrhonic argument.

⁹This is of course the crucial Pyrrhonic premise and Hume offers several distinct arguments in support of the first of its two claims. The second claim rests on the premise that the principle that all sensible qualities are in the mind and not in the object itself is true and is a principle of reason. (See Enquiry I, pp. 152-55). Practically all of these arguments and claims had been given or made in Treatise I.

I surmise that had he taken the time, Hume would have claimed that even though the preceding argument is entirely cogent, it cannot possibly have the effect on the mind which it is presumably intended to have. The reason for this is the simple fact that we cannot, for any length of time (at any rate), withhold our assent from the supposition of the continued and distinct existence of objects.

So much for the adaptation of Hume's general mitigation procedure in Enquiry I to his Pyrrhonic argument directed specifically against the evidence of external sense. It will be noted that this adaptation does not reveal, except by implication, anything about the specific form taken by this supposition of continued and distinct existence---whether it is the form it takes when based on natural instinct or on reason. Nor was any mention made of the role played by Hume's theory of imagination in the mitigation. These two omissions---and Smith's view to the contrary notwithstanding, they are merely omissions on Hume's part¹⁰---are actually connected with one another and with the compressed nature of most of Hume's discussions in Enquiry I (as compared with their counterparts in

¹⁰See Smith, op. cit., p. 535, where it is asserted that in Enquiry I Hume is "no longer attempting to account by an associative mechanism for belief in an independently existing world. That belief he now treats as being, like the moral sentiments, in itself an ultimate---a natural belief which as little allows of being evaded in thought as in action." This is obviously connected with Smith's view about a material change in Hume's theory of belief from Treatise I to Enquiry I. I have already given my grounds for rejecting this view (see my Chapter I, p. 47ff.).

Treatise I). For in Treatise I Hume makes it perfectly clear that it is the form the supposition takes when based on natural instinct from which we cannot withhold our assent for any considerable length of time,¹¹ and that to say that this supposition is based on natural instinct is tantamount to saying that it is the result of a natural propensity of the imagination.¹²

The Account in Treatise I

These remarks should suffice to introduce the question of the exact nature of Hume's discussion of the evidence of external sense in Treatise I, as well as the question of its relation to the discussion in Enquiry I. During the progress of my exposition of the account in Treatise I, I shall indicate what Hume takes the nature of this propensity of our imagination to be.

To begin, there seems to me to be no doubt whatsoever that the three Sections (ii, iii and iv) of Part IV of Treatise I which comprise his discussion of the evidence of external sense (and hence of the problem of the external world) exhibit a definite Pyrrhonic element. This fact is clearly discernible in a statement he makes at the very beginning of Section v. Here he claims that he has found "contradictions and difficulties in every system concerning external objects, and in the idea of matter."¹³ If we assume that

¹¹Cf. Treatise I, pp. 206, 214, 216.

¹²See ibid., p. 211.

¹³Ibid., p. 232.

these contradictions and difficulties are irremovable, then an obvious inference from this claim would seem to be that we should permanently suspend judgment on all questions regarding the nature and existence of an external world. This, however, is not an inference which Hume draws from it. On the contrary, he begins his discussion by claiming that the Pyrrhonic sceptic, like everyone else,

must assent to the principle concerning the existence of body, tho' he cannot pretend by any arguments of philosophy to maintain its veracity. Nature has not left this to his choice, and has doubtless esteem'd it an affair of too great importance to be trusted to our uncertain reasonings and speculations. We may well ask, What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body? but 'tis in vain to ask, Whether there be body or not? That is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasonings.¹⁴

Now it must be observed that Hume does not appear to think that it follows from the fact that the existence of body (i.e., the continued and distinct existence of objects) is a point which we must take for granted in all our reasonings, that it is utterly impossible for us ever, at any time (however brief it may be in duration), to doubt such an existence. For if he did so think, it would be extremely hard to understand why he should make the following remarks near the

¹⁴Ibid., p. 187.

close of the first (and, I think, the most important) segment of his discussion:¹⁵

Having thus given an account of all the systems both popular and philosophical, with regard to external existences, I cannot forbear giving vent to a certain sentiment, which arises upon reviewing those systems. I begun this subject with premising, that we ought to have an implicit faith in our senses, and that this wou'd be the conclusion, I shou'd draw from the whole of my reasoning. But to be ingenuous, I feel myself at present of a quite contrary sentiment, and am more inclined to repose no faith at all in my senses, or rather imagination, than to place in it such an implicit confidence.¹⁶

Pyrrhonian doubt with regard to the external senses is, then, attainable, even if it can be maintained only for a brief period of time. As Hume himself says (in this same context), "the sceptical doubt arises naturally from a profound and intense reflection" on the subject of the evidence of external sense, and "always encreases, the farther we carry our reflections."¹⁷

Carelessness and in-attention alone can afford us any remedy. For this reason I rely entirely upon them; and take it for granted, whatever may be the reader's opinion at this present moment, that an hour hence he will be persuaded there is . . . an external . . . world.¹⁸

It seems to me that in speaking of carelessness and inattention as the sole remedies for the Pyrrhonian doubt, Hume is not really

¹⁵I am referring to his discussion in Section ii.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 217. I think that this passage gives as good a description as there is in Hume of what he means by the mental state resulting from a confrontation with Pyrrhonic argumentation. Is not this what Hume has in mind when he speaks, in Enquiry I, of "that momentary amazement and irresolution and confusion, which is the result of scepticism" (Enquiry I, p. 155 [note])?

¹⁷Treatise I, p. 218.

¹⁸Ibid.

conveying anything more to us than he is when he tells us "that nature breaks the force of all sceptical arguments in time, and keeps them from having any considerable influence on the understanding."¹⁹ After all, what it is that we have to be indifferent and inattentive to are the difficulties and contradictions the Pyrrhonist has made us acutely conscious of, and we most certainly do not have to work at this sort of carelessness and inattention. Indeed, this very carelessness and inattention is a sign of the operation of nature, as it were. Better yet, to even speak of carelessness and inattention in this context is hardly anything else than to say that "our natural and obvious principles here prevail above our study'd reflections."²⁰

What I believe I have shown thus far about Hume's discussion of the evidence of external sense in Treatise I is that it has the same goal as does its counterpart in Enquiry I, viz., the establishment of the position of mitigated scepticism with regard to external sense. As far as the basic or primary means of achieving this goal are concerned, I have not said, nor have I needed to say, very much beyond a bare mentioning of the fact that involved therein (in both discussions) is a consideration of two systems regarding the external world: that of the vulgar (the one based on natural instinct) and that of the philosophers (the one based on reason). As I see it, the primary difference between the two discussions, insofar as they are directly related to the achievement of this main goal, lies in the

¹⁹Ibid., p. 187.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 214-15.

greater degree of detail into which Hume goes in Treatise I in elucidating the nature of and relations between these two systems. For my purposes, this difference is an extremely important one, inasmuch as in the elaboration of these details in Treatise I a very interesting and significant facet of Hume's theory of imagination emerges. To this facet of his theory I now turn.

According to Hume, the belief in the existence of body, which most of us espouse every moment of our adult lives and which we can reject only during brief moments of intense reflection, is actually the product or result of the concurrence of certain qualities which are peculiar to certain of our impressions with certain qualities of the imagination.²¹ As far as the qualities of impressions are concerned, Hume thinks that there are but two of them: constancy and

²¹See ibid., p. 194. Hume thinks that this belief is demonstrably false because it involves the false assumption that our impressions themselves (or certain of them) have a continued and distinct existence. He thinks that "when we compare experiments, and reason a little upon them, we quickly perceive, that the doctrine of the independent existence of our sensible perceptions is contrary to the plainest experience" (ibid., p. 210). And given his definition of continued and distinct existence, it follows from this that our sensible perceptions (i.e., our impressions of sensation) do not have such an existence. This is the basis of Hume's claim that "the vulgar confound perceptions and objects, and attribute a distinct continu'd existence to the very things they feel or see" (ibid., p. 193). (Presumably, it is part of the very definition of an 'object' that it has continued and distinct existence.) It is likewise the basis of his claim that the so-called philosophical system---a system which distinguishes between perceptions and objects, and attributes an internal, interrupted, perishing existence to the former and a continued and distinct existence to the latter---is based on reason.

coherence. It would be hard to improve very much on his own descriptions of these qualities.

All those objects, to which we attribute a continu'd existence, have a peculiar constancy, which distinguishes them from the impressions, whose existence depends upon our perception. Those mountains, and houses, and trees, which lie at present under my eye, have always appear'd to me in the same order; and when I lose sight of them by shutting my eyes or turning my head, I soon after find them return upon me without the least alteration. My bed and table, my books and papers, present themselves in the same uniform manner, and change not upon account of any interruption in my seeing or perceiving them. This is the case with all the impressions, whose objects are supposed to have an external existence; and is the case with no other impressions, whether gentle or violent, voluntary or involuntary.²²

But since constancy is not invariable, so coherence is also required:

Bodies often change their position and qualities, and after a little absence or interruption may become hardly knowable. But here 'tis observable, that even in these changes they preserve a coherence, and have a regular dependence on each other; which is the foundation of a kind of reasoning from causation, and produces the opinion of their continu'd existence. When I return to my chamber after an hour's absence, I find not my fire in the same situation, in which I left it: But then I am accusom'd in other instances to see a like alteration produc'd in a like time, whether I am present or absent, near or remote. This coherence, therefore, in their changes is one of the characteristics of external objects, as well as their constancy.²³

Perhaps it is worthy of note that since Hume holds---despite what he clearly appears to be saying in his description of constancy (above) ---that "all our perceptions are dependent on our organs, and the disposition of our nerves and animal spirits"²⁴ and, hence, that none

²²Ibid., pp. 194-95.

²³Ibid., p. 195.

²⁴Ibid., p. 211.

of them continue to exist unperceived, these descriptions of constancy and coherence seem to imply that the former is merely a limiting case of the latter, and not a different kind of quality. Be this as it may, the important question is the nature of those qualities of imagination which concur with these two qualities in giving rise to our belief in the existence of body.²⁵

Since Hume thinks that the concurring qualities of imagination are somewhat different in the two cases, I will consider them separately. As far as coherence is concerned, it will be observed (from the above descriptive passage) that this quality is held by Hume to be "the foundation of a kind of reasoning from causation." The use of this rather guarded language is deliberate; for Hume thinks that even though the inference (concerning continued existence) which we draw

from the coherence of appearances may seem to be of the same nature with our reasonings concerning causes and effects; as being deriv'd from custom, and regulated by past experience; we shall find upon examination, that they are at the bottom considerably different from each other, and that this inference arises from the understanding, and from custom in an indirect and oblique manner.²⁶

²⁵Hume thinks that the quality of coherence is of itself incapable of generating belief in the continued and distinct existence of all of those impressions to which we ascribe it (see ibid., pp. 198-99). Apparently he feels the same way about the quality of constancy.

²⁶Treatise I, p. 197.

What Hume has in mind here is that whereas "custom can only be the effect of repeated perceptions," the inference from the coherence of certain perceptions to their continued existence is actually an extension of custom beyond these perceptions.²⁷ That is, in inferring the continued existence of our sense-impressions from their coherence, we bestow a degree of regularity greater than what they can ever be observed to have. If we make such a bestowal and yet also suppose that its sole foundation is a custom or habit, then we are supposing that the latter can be acquired by what never can be present to the mind. However, to suppose this is to suppose a contradiction, since no custom, by its very nature, can be acquired otherwise than from the regular succession of our observed perceptions.²⁸ Therefore, though custom may be one of the "principles" involved in our inference from coherence, it is certainly not the only one. This inference "must arise from the co-operation of some other principles."²⁹ A principle to which Hume turns is the following one:

The imagination, when set into any train of thinking, is apt to continue, even when its object fails it, and like a galley put in motion by the oars, carries on its course without any new impulse.³⁰

It is this principle which

makes us easily entertain this opinion of the continu'd existence of body. Objects have a certain coherence even

²⁷Ibid., p. 198.

²⁸Ibid., p. 197.

²⁹Ibid.

³⁰Ibid.; underline mine.

as they appear to our senses; but this coherence is much greater and more uniform, if we suppose the objects to have a continu'd existence; and as the mind is once in the train of observing an uniformity among objects, it naturally continues, till it renders the uniformity as compleat as possible. The simple supposition of their continu'd existence suffices for this purpose, and gives us a notion of a much greater regularity among objects, than what they have when we look no farther than our senses.³¹

Whether, in speaking of various "principles" being at work, Hume thinks he is providing a scientific (or quasi-scientific) explanation of what allegedly happens when we come to suppose the continued existence of body, I am not sure. I am convinced, however, that the very most that he is providing is an accurate description of what happens, plus a kind of generalization on one aspect thereof. Indeed, I do not think that his description is particularly accurate. At any rate, it does not seem to me to be complete. We are not told explicitly what is involved in the supposition itself---what the imagination does when it makes this supposition, or that results in this supposition. I take it, the answer to this question will reveal to us the nature of the concurring quality of the imagination and will amount to spelling out what is meant by saying that the imagination, once in the train of observing a uniformity among objects, naturally continues until it renders the uniformity as complete as possible. Let us look to one of Hume's own examples for help on this matter:

I receive a letter, which upon opening it I perceive by the hand-writing and subscription to have come from

³¹ Ibid.

a friend, who says he is two hundred leagues distant. 'Tis evident I can never account for this phaenomenon, conformable to my experience in other instances, without spreading out in my mind the whole sea and continent between us, and supposing the effects and continu'd existence of posts and ferries, according to my memory and observation.³²

Now, it seems to me that this talk of spreading our "objects" in the mind is just a kind of suggestive metaphor for the forming and uniting of ideas in a certain manner, viz., in a manner conformable to one's (past) experience in other instances. Thus, to speak of that concurring quality of imagination is nothing more than to speak of the formation and union of ideas in a certain manner and under certain circumstances. This is the literal claim behind his suggestive metaphor of our connecting the past and present appearances of objects and giving them a union with each other which we have found by experience to be suitable to their particular natures and circumstances.³³

According to Hume,

whatever force we may ascribe to this principle [coherence], I am afraid 'tis too weak to support alone so vast an edifice, as is that of the continu'd

³²*Ibid.*, p. 196. This appeal to memory does not entail a role for this faculty in the actual supposition (of continued existence) itself, even though without the operation of this faculty we should surely never entertain the latter. As Hume says, "my memory, indeed, informs me of the existence of many objects; but then this information extends not beyond their past existence, nor do either my senses or memory give any testimony to the continuance of their being" (*ibid.*, p. 196). I think that it is safe to say that, in Hume's view, even the imagination, which alone is responsible for this supposition (i.e., for its being---though not its coming into being), does not give any testimony (in the sense of 'evidence') for its truth.

³³See *Treatise I*, p. 197.

existence of all external bodies; and that we must join the constancy of their appearance to the coherence, in order to give a satisfactory account of that opinion.³⁴

Hume's discussion of how the quality of constancy concurs with a quality of the imagination to give rise to this opinion is considerably more lengthy and complex than is the discussion of coherence. When we observe constancy in our sense-impressions---for instance, when we find that the impressions, which we call the sun or the ocean, return upon us after an absence or annihilation with like parts and in a like order as at their first appearance---, we tend to ascribe a perfect (or numerical) identity to them. That is, we tend to regard them as not only invariable in their existence (which is all our observation entitles us to say) but also as uninterrupted in it (which, in Hume's view, is not merely without justification, but is demonstrably false).³⁵ The reason that we do this is that we tend to

³⁴Ibid., p. 199.

³⁵According to Hume, perfect (or numerical) identity "is nothing but the invariableness and uninterruptedness of any object, thro' a suppos'd variation of time, by which the mind can trace it in the different periods of its existence, without any break of the view, and without being oblig'd to form the idea of multiplicity or number" (ibid., p. 201). The occurrence of the word 'supposed' in this definition is significant, inasmuch as Hume (in conformity with his view of time in Part II of Treatise I) maintains that "time, in a strict sense, implies succession, and . . . when we apply its idea to any unchangeable object, 'tis only by a fiction of the imagination, by which the unchangeable object is suppos'd to participate of the changes of the co-existent objects and in particular of that of our perceptions" (ibid., pp. 200-01). Clearly, it follows from this that, strictly speaking, perfect (or numerical) identity is or involves a fiction of the imagination.

confound the perfect or numerical identity of objects with what Hume calls, elsewhere in Treatise I, their specific identity.³⁶ In other words, we tend to mistake an object which remains the same with itself through a period of time with a succession of resembling (even qualitatively identical), yet different, objects. In Hume's view,

there are two relations, and both of them resemblances, which contribute to our mistaking the succession of our interrupted perceptions for an identical object. The first is, the resemblance of the perceptions: The second is the resemblance, which the act of the mind in surveying a succession of resembling objects bears to that in surveying an identical object. Now these resemblances we are apt to confound with each other . . .³⁷

We can understand how the imagination is supposed to enter the picture by taking note of one of Hume's examples.

I survey the furniture of my chamber; I shut my eyes, and afterwards open them; and find the new perceptions to resemble perfectly those, which formerly struck my senses. This resemblance is observ'd in a thousand instances, and naturally connects together our ideas of these interrupted perceptions by the strongest relation, and conveys the mind with an easy transition from one to another. 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 we consider one constant and uninterrupted perception. 'Tis therefore very natural for us to mistake the one for the other.³⁸

It should be apparent from this that Hume is here trying to make use of his doctrine of the association of ideas, i.e., his view of the

³⁶See Treatise I, p. 257.

³⁷Ibid., p. 205 (note).

³⁸Ibid., p. 204.

influence of natural relations on the imagination.³⁹ Moreover, it is easy to see how it is that this mistake on the part of the imagination (i.e., this propensity it has to bestow an identity on our resembling perceptions) produces the fiction of a continued existence. If we bestow a numerical identity upon our resembling but interrupted sense-impressions, this has the effect of remedying the interruption. And to remedy the interruption is nothing other than to bestow continued existence.

However, there is more to Hume's story than this. What has been disclosed thus far is how we come to feign the continued existence of objects when confronted with the constancy of certain of our sense-impressions. There is, though, a difference between feigning and believing, and it is the latter which is the prime object of Hume's endeavor. He is trying to answer the question, What causes us to believe in the existence of body? The manner in which he proceeds in moving from feigning to believing is to re-examine what is involved in this very propensity to feign such existence. What he finds is that "this propensity arises from some lively impressions of the memory" and consequently "bestows a vivacity on that fiction" which results from it.⁴⁰ Since (matter-of-fact) "belief in general consists in nothing, but the vivacity of an idea; and . . . an idea may

³⁹If it is not apparent, then see ibid., p. 203.

⁴⁰Treatise I, p. 209.

acquire this vivacity by its relation to some present impression,"⁴¹
 "this propension causes belief by means of the present impressions of
 the memory."⁴² In other words, it is the imagination itself, with
 the help of certain lively impressions---really, ideas---of the mem-
 ory, which gives rise to our belief in the continued existence of
 objects.

Along with this observation concerning the involvement of the
 imagination, we should observe as well that Hume's doctrine of the
 association of ideas is present, albeit slightly below the surface.
 It will be recalled that Hume holds that all belief in matters of
 fact arises from the natural relation of cause and effect. That this
 relation is operative in the present affair is clear from the general
 remarks Hume makes when he begins his answer to the question of the
 origin of our belief in continued existence. He says:

It has been prov'd already, that belief in general con-
 sists in nothing, but the vivacity of an idea; and that
 an idea may acquire this vivacity by its relation to some
 present impression. Impressions are naturally the most
 vivid perceptions of the mind; and this quality is in
 part convey'd by the relation to every connected [i.e.,
 causally related] idea. The relation causes a smooth
 passage from the impression to the idea, and even gives
 a propensity to that passage. The mind falls so easily
 from the one perception to the other, that it scarce per-
 ceives the change, but retains in the second a consider-
 able share of the vivacity of the first. It is excited
 by the lively impression; and this vivacity is convey'd
 to the related idea, without any great diminution in the
 passage, by reason of the smooth transition and the pro-
 pensity of the imagination.⁴³

⁴¹Ibid., p. 208.

⁴²Ibid., p. 209.

⁴³Ibid., p. 208.

Hume's problem in this case is to discover the particular sorts of lively impressions which convey a significant degree of their liveliness to their related ideas. As we have seen, he finds them in certain impressions of the memory---or, better, in "the remembrance of former sensations."⁴⁴ Moreover, it would seem to be his view that this transfer or conveyance of liveliness is possible only because of the ability of our imagination to make a smooth transition from the one to the other. Actually, it seems to me that speaking of such a transition is simply a way of saying that under certain circumstances or conditions the imagination (or mind) is able to form and unite ideas of a certain degree of liveliness. If so, then we can easily understand the connection between the activity of the imagination under consideration and Hume's general conception of that faculty. Furthermore, although Hume appears to want to distinguish between the quality of the imagination which concurs with the quality of constancy and the one which concurs with coherence, I am not convinced that there is any distinction of importance to be made. The difference does not seem to me to lie primarily in the qualities of imagination themselves but rather in the circumstances which bring about their exhibition. The essential point in both cases is that the imagination, governed as it is (most of the time) by certain natural relations or principles of association, serves a kind of gap-filling

⁴⁴Ibid., pp. 209-10.

function by forming and uniting certain lively ideas. For by its very definition, a continued and distinct existent is unexperienceable, not just unexperienced. Therefore, since our only possible acquaintance with impressions is the acquaintance with which actual experience provides us, it is in principle impossible to have an impression of a continued and distinct existent. And as all ideas are derived from impressions, it follows that it is impossible in principle to have an idea of such an existent. To say the same thing in another way, we could have an idea of a continued and distinct existent if and only if we could experience an unexperienceable impression. But to experience an unexperienceable impression is a contradiction in terms. Hence, we cannot have an idea of a continued and distinct existent. The gap-filling ideas we do have are simply ideas of previously experienced existents (i.e., impressions). Now, of course it is logically possible that certain impressions we experience have a continued and distinct existence. If they did, then it would be true to say that the ideas we had of them would, in a sense, be representative of continued and distinct existents. Nevertheless, the ideas we had of them would not, strictly speaking, be representative of them qua continued and distinct existents, i.e., of their existence qua continued and distinct. The fact of their continued and distinct existence could never provide us with any corresponding and resembling ideas. What these reflections suggest are distinctions, as well as close relations, between entertaining

certain gap-filling ideas (given rise to by the qualities of coherence and constancy), conceiving (i.e., having an idea of) the continued and distinct existence of sense-impressions, and merely supposing such an existence (where no corresponding idea is present). When we believe in the continued and distinct existence of certain of our sense-impressions, we have certain gap-filling ideas. However, the entertaining of these gap-filling ideas does not amount to conceiving, nor to supposing, such an existence. It cannot amount to conceiving such an existence, because, strictly speaking, such an existence is inconceivable. And though such gap-filling ideas are the cause (or occasion) of our supposing such an existence, they cannot amount to supposing such an existence, because the mere entertainment of ideas, whatever they may be like, can never be identical with the supposition of an existence the idea of which is impossible. I think that we can infer from this that our belief in the existence of body involves the imagination in two ways---or, better, the two senses of 'imagination' (previously distinguished) find application in the development of this belief. We have 'imagination' in its idea-forming and idea-uniting sense (i.e., Hume's general conception of imagination), and we also have it in its mere supposal sense.

Some remarks on the discussions in Sections iii and iv

Thus far, my analysis and interpretation of Hume's views in Treatise I on the evidence of external sense has centered on his discussion in Section ii of Part IV of that work. As I see it, Hume feels that he has attained his primary conclusion concerning external sense---the establishment of the mitigated sceptical position---in this Section. This contention calls for a comment on the nature and significance of Sections iii and iv, which are also concerned with the evidence of external sense---at least in the sense that they are concerned with the question of the nature of the external world. My claim is that these two Sections of Treatise I, though highly significant in relation to Hume's theory of imagination, are essentially supplemental in character. I have already presented evidence to indicate that Hume thinks he has reached this mitigated sceptical position in Section ii.⁴⁵ What needs to be shown now is that Hume himself actually gives some indication that he looks upon the discussions in these two later Sections as essentially supplementary. I hold that such an indication or suggestion is indeed to be found at the close of Section ii, immediately following his proclamation of

⁴⁵Hume actually says, near the end of this Section, that he has "given an account of all the systems both popular and philosophical, with regard to external existences" (ibid., p. 217; underline mine). I infer from this that he thinks that the philosophical systems which are presented and criticized in Sections iii and iv are versions of, or in some sense presuppose the philosophical system presented in Section ii.

the mitigated sceptical position regarding the external world. For Hume contends that "whatever may be the reader's opinion at this present moment" (after he has followed and appreciated the significance of the discussion in Section ii),

an hour hence he will be persuaded there is both an external and internal world; and going upon that supposition, I intend to examine some general systems both ancient and modern, which have been propos'd of both, before I proceed to a more particular enquiry concerning our impressions [i.e., our impressions of reflexion, discussed in Treatise II]. This will not, perhaps, in the end be found foreign to our present purpose.⁴⁶

A careful scrutiny of what Hume says in Sections iii and iv seems to me to reveal---at least as far as the external senses are concerned ---that this "present purpose" involves an attempt to further advance the cause of mitigated scepticism. This attempt involves an effort to show the dependency on the imagination of the views about the external world of both the ancients and the moderns, and an underscoring of the utter inadequacy of this faculty to serve as a satisfactory

⁴⁶Treatise I, p. 218. I should like to make three brief comments on this passage. (1) It should be observed that Hume does not specify what form the supposition regarding the external world is to take, even though earlier in his discussion (i.e., in Section ii) he announced---after having presented the evidence against the vulgar identification of perceptions and objects---that in the future he was going to distinguish between perceptions and objects (see ibid., p. 211). (2) In his reference to the general systems, both with regard to the external and internal worlds, Hume may well be suggesting that his discussion of the latter is also essentially supplementary in nature. (3) It should be observed that Hume is here clearly announcing that, in his ensuing discussions of these general systems, he is going to suppose or assume (albeit entirely without rational warrant) that there is both an external and an internal world.

foundation for these views. The procedure which Hume employs in attempting to bring out this inadequacy is quite different in the two cases, however. In the case of the views of the ancients, Hume starts by presenting (without argument) what he takes to be the true idea of a body and then proceeds to indicate how easily and naturally the fictions of the imagination of the ancients regarding this idea arose---the fictions of substance, substantial form, etc. That it is fictions of the imagination which arose in their minds is assumed by Hume to be transparent from the mere eliciting of them, or virtually so. In the case of the views of the moderns, Hume tries to show that although the moderns claim to be rid of the fictions of the imagination made use of by the ancients (since they rest on principles of the imagination which "are changeable, weak, and irregular") and to have rested their systems on the "solid" principles of that faculty (i.e., principles which are "permanent, irresistible, and universal"),⁴⁷ the presence of certain facts render two of these permanent, irresistible, and universal principles incompatible with each other.

Since both of these discussions serve to bring out conflicts within the imaginative faculty itself, it will be necessary to consider them in somewhat more detail than this. Regarding the section on "the antient philosophy," Hume begins by asserting that the "true" idea of a body is the (complex) idea of several distinct, successive

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 225.

qualities which are united together by certain close relations. He maintains that we commonly tend to attribute simplicity and identity to such a compound of qualities, inasmuch as we regard it as one thing which continues the same even under very considerable alterations. Since these attributions are false ones, Hume tries, first, to account for their occurrence (which he thinks is quite common) and, second, to show how the ancient philosophers have endeavored to retain them---by invoking certain fictions of the imagination. It will suffice to consider here his discussion of simplicity. Hume seems to think that there are three factors leading us to conceive a material object as something simple, despite its evident compositeness: the fact that the co-existent parts of the compound (which is the material object) are connected together by strong relations; the fact that the action of the mind in considering such a compound is similar to its action in considering a perfectly simple and indivisible object; and the principle that, given any two objects, A and B, if the action of the mind in considering A is (or would be) almost the same as its action in considering B, then there is a tendency for the considering mind to confuse A and B. Now, it seems clear that this principle amounts to a way of referring to the influence of one of the principles of association Hume recognizes, viz., resemblance. Consequently, it involves a reference to the imaginative activity of uniting ideas---even to the point of confusing them. Undoubtedly, the ancient philosophers also felt the influence of this natural

relation and accordingly were guilty of the same false ascription. However, being philosophers, their minds did not rest here; they were able to abstract from the influence of this relation. In so doing, they viewed material objects in a different light and were led to the discovery that all the qualities which comprise them are different, hence distinguishable and separable from each other. (Note that this process of discovery would surely seem to involve the exercise of the free imagination, specifically the ability of the mind to separate ideas.) This view of them, being destructive of their "primary and more natural notions," obliged them

to feign an unknown something, or original substance and matter, as a principle of union or cohesion among these qualities, and as what may give the compound object a title to be call'd one thing, notwithstanding its diversity and composition.⁴⁸

This feigning of an unknown something or substance is held by Hume to be an operation of the imagination. It is, indeed, an instance of his usage of 'imagination' in the sheer supposal sense, since it is impossible for us to have an idea (i.e., a mental image) of such a thing. It seems to me that we have here a clear-cut case of the determined vs. the free imagination, leading to a further, but different, act of imagining on the part of the mind.⁴⁹

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 221.

⁴⁹Hume also discusses the origins of the notions of substantial form, accident, and occult quality in the vocabulary of the ancient philosophers. His treatment is roughly analogous to his treatment of the notion of substance.

Regarding the section on "the modern philosophy," I already mentioned that Hume tries to show that two of the so-called permanent, irresistible and consistent principles of the imagination are in conflict with each other. These two "principles" are actually products of the determined imagination: belief in causality and belief in the existence of an external world. As Hume puts it,

there is a direct and total opposition . . . betwixt those conclusions we form from cause and effect, and those that persuade us of the continu'd and independent existence of body. When we reason from cause and effect, we conclude, that neither colour, sound, taste, nor smell have a continu'd and independent existence. When we exclude these sensible qualities there remains nothing in the universe, which has such an existence.⁵⁰

Without going into the details of his argument, what Hume does in order to support the claim made in this last sentence is to present evidence to support the contention that the remainder of the intelligible qualities of a material object---the so-called primary qualities---depend in a manner upon these sensible qualities.⁵¹ It should be noted, in passing, that Hume makes a point of reminding his readers of this alleged conflict between two products of the imagination in the concluding Section of Treatise I.⁵² His intent, it seems to me, is to make it clear that he does not think that it is legitimate to rest one's philosophy on even the permanent, irresistible, and consistent (?) principles of the imagination.

⁵⁰Treatise I, p. 231.

⁵¹Hume seems to believe that the kind of dependence he establishes here is of a causal sort---a highly debatable point, I think.

⁵²See Treatise I, pp. 265-66.

The Attack on Internal Sense

I turn now to the last of the topic-areas which Hume discusses in Treatise I, viz., his discussion of the evidence of internal sense.⁵³ As is quite well-known to Humian readers, this topic-area is entirely omitted from discussion in Enquiry I. To my knowledge, aside from his account in Sections v and vi of Part IV of Treatise I, the topic is addressed (in the sense of at least some kind of discussion, however brief) in four other places in Hume's philosophical writings: the Appendix to the Treatise, the Abstract, a letter to Henry Home, and the essay "Of the Immortality of the Soul."⁵⁴ The fact of its entire omission from Enquiry I, coupled with the fact of Hume's expression of apparent dissatisfaction in the Appendix with his treatment of the topic of personal identity in Treatise I, has formed at least a part of the basis of various developmental theories regarding the main objectives of Hume's philosophy of the human understanding. Inasmuch as I have declared my opposition to any such theory, I must somehow show that these two facts do not have the implications the developmental theorists claim they do. This I intend to do in the course of my exposition and analysis---along with

⁵³I am using the expression "internal sense" in the Lockian sense of the power of reflexion.

⁵⁴The essay is to be found in Essays Moral, Political, and Literary by David Hume, ed. by T. H. Green and T. H. Grose (London, 1898), Vol. II, p. 399ff. As far as the question of the nature of the self or mind is concerned, it offers nothing beyond what Hume had claimed in the Treatise.

indicating the role of Hume's theory of imagination in his discussion. I shall begin by offering evidence that Hume's discussion in Treatise I is intended to support his general mitigated sceptical position.

The Account in Treatise I

At the very beginning of his discussion, Hume says that

having found such contradictions and difficulties in every system concerning external objects, and in the idea of matter, which we fancy so clear and determinate, we shall naturally expect still greater difficulties and contradictions in every hypothesis concerning our internal perceptions, and the nature of the mind, which we are apt to imagine so much more obscure, and uncertain. But in this we shou'd deceive ourselves. The intellectual world, tho' involved in infinite obscurities, is not perplex'd with any such contradictions, as those we have discover'd in the natural. What is known concerning it, agrees with itself; and what is unknown, we must be contented to leave so.

'Tis true, wou'd we hearken to certain philosophers, they promise to diminish our ignorance; but I am afraid 'tis at the hazard of running us into contradictions, from which the subject is of itself exempted. These philosophers are the curious reasoners concerning the material or immaterial substances, in which they suppose our perceptions to inhere.⁵⁵

A careful examination of what Hume says in Sections v and vi, and especially the sort of criticisms he offers in Section v of these "curious reasoners" concerning the soul, make it rather obvious that

⁵⁵Treatise I, p. 232. Substantially these same views are reiterated in a passage in Treatise II, where Hume says that "the essence and composition of external bodies are so obscure, that we must necessarily, in our reasonings, or rather conjectures concerning them, involve ourselves in contradictions and absurdities. But as the perceptions of the mind are perfectly known, and I have us'd all imaginable caution in forming conclusions concerning them, I have always hop'd to keep clear of those contradictions, which have attended every other system" (Treatise II, p. 366).

he feels that he has shown that we must confine ourselves in this matter to the realm of common life and experience. This is to confine ourselves to our perceptions. The curious reasoners concerning material and immaterial substances are persons who attempt to transcend the domain of our perceptions; consequently, they are led into contradictions and absurdities. Let us recall that at the very beginning of his inquiry it had seemed evident to Hume that

the essence of the mind being equally unknown to us with that of external bodies, it must be equally impossible to form any notion of its powers and qualities otherwise than from careful and exact experiments, and the observation of those particular effects, which result from its different circumstances and situation. And tho' we must endeavour to render all our principles as universal as possible, by tracing up our experiments to the utmost, and explaining all effects from the simplest and fewest causes, 'tis still certain we cannot go beyond experience . . .⁵⁶

Just as this statement very early in the Treatise seems to me to give expression to Hume's mitigated sceptical position, so the statements currently under consideration seem to me to give expression to it.

It will not be necessary to consider all of the various arguments Hume offers to show that these curious reasoners do in fact run into contradictions and absurdities.⁵⁷ It will suffice to consider his

⁵⁶Treatise, p. xxi.

⁵⁷This will mean that I will be eliminating from consideration a discussion of Hume's which directly involves his theory of imagination. I am referring to his attempt to account for our tendency to bestow a place (or location) upon such things as tastes and smells, even though they are in fact utterly incapable of having it (see Treatise I, pp. 237-39). Inasmuch as I think that his account is almost strictly analogous to his account of the fiction of the continued and distinct existence of objects, I do not see any harm in omitting it from consideration. Actually, I considered it very briefly in Chapter IV (see p. 225).

attempt in Section v to undermine a basic presupposition of all the disputes among such reasoners, viz., the assumption that the soul or mind is a substance in which our perceptions inhere.⁵⁸

What Hume tries to show is that "the question concerning the substance of the soul is absolutely unintelligible."⁵⁹ That is, he endeavors to convince us that there is no possibility of answering the question, whether perceptions inhere in a material or in an immaterial substance, because "we do not so much as understand the meaning of the question"⁶⁰---and this, because we cannot render intelligible two of its central terms: substance and inhesion. Since the bulk of Hume's argument focusses on the former of these two terms, I shall confine my attention exclusively to it.

The major claim of his argument is that "neither by considering the first origin of ideas, nor by means of a definition are we able to arrive at any satisfactory notion of substance."⁶¹ Regarding the former possibility, Hume naturally invokes the first principle of his science of human nature in attempting to show that we cannot arrive at a satisfactory notion of substance by means of an idea of it--- because we can have no idea of a substance. Hume's theory of imagination enters here in the sense that what he is implying is that since there can be no impression of a substance, the mind can form no

⁵⁸It is plain that Hume thinks that all these reasoners share in common the so-called "substance" theory of mind.

⁵⁹Treatise I, p. 250.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 234.

⁶¹Ibid.

idea of the latter and, in accordance with his general conception of imagination, cannot imagine such. We can only imagine (i.e., form an idea of) the experienceable; but substance is unexperienceable. Regarding the latter possibility, Hume takes a very common definition of a substance, as something which may exist by itself,⁶² and tries to show us that "this definition agrees to everything, that can possibly be conceived; and never will serve to distinguish substance from accident, or the soul from its perceptions."⁶³ The essential claim is that perceptions themselves---which are held by the curious reasoners to be quite different in nature from substances---qualify as substances on this definition. On the one hand, use is made of the different-distinguishable-separable principle---the principle of the liberty of the imagination---to prove that we can imagine perceptions as existing by themselves. On the other hand, use is made of the principle that whatever we can imagine (i.e., form an idea of) is possible. The argument, then, is simply that since we can imagine or conceive different perceptions as existing by themselves, they may actually exist by themselves; and if they may exist by themselves, then they qualify as substances.

We should not underestimate the importance of this argument to Hume's objectives in this topic-area. It is as important as, if not

⁶²He seems to assume that it is quite sufficient for him to consider only this one definition.

⁶³Treatise I, p. 233.

more important than, his attempt to reveal contradictions and absurdities in the views of the curious reasoners. In fact, it seems to show their ultimate absurdity. At any rate, both must be considered as essential parts of the Pyrrhonic element of Hume's discussion of the evidence of internal sense. And after all, the appeal to his theory of imagination in showing the unintelligibility of the notion of a substance bears a striking resemblance to the appeal thereto in regard to his Pyrrhonic attacks on abstract and matter-of-fact reasoning.

What seems to me to be an additional part of the Pyrrhonic component is to be found in Hume's attempt (in Section iv) to show not only (1) that the (allegedly) common supposition that the mind has a perfect simplicity and identity is a mistaken one, but also (2) that the "imperfect" identity it does have is not really what perhaps it should have to rightfully merit the label. Concerning (1), Hume's claim appears to rest on an introspective report. He admits that there may be some metaphysicians who perceive something simple and continued in them which they call themselves, but he is certain that no such "principle" is discoverable in himself. "But setting aside some metaphysicians of this kind," he says,

I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are, nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement . . . The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an

infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no simplicity in it at one time, nor identity in different; whatever natural propensity we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity.⁶⁴

A sizeable portion of Hume's subsequent discussion is devoted to explaining (particularly in regard to identity) what it is that gives us "so great a propensity" to ascribe simplicity and identity to the mind.⁶⁵ (Notice that Hume, in the above passage, speaks of this as an imagined simplicity and identity.) All that needs to be mentioned about this phase of his discussion is that it bears a rather striking resemblance to his earlier discussion of the genesis of the fictions of the ancient philosophers in regard to the material world.

Concerning (2), some words of explanation would seem to be requisite, since Hume himself does not employ the expression "imperfect identity." Even though Hume does not employ such terminology, I believe that he wants to recognize a sort of identity in regard to the mind that is not, as it were, perfect.⁶⁶ What I mean by perfect identity is defined by Hume as follows:

We have a distinct idea of an object, that remains invariable and uninterrupted thro' a suppos'd variation of time; and this idea we call that of identity or sameness.⁶⁷

In his discussion of the problem of the material world, Hume had

⁶⁴Ibid., pp. 252-53.

⁶⁵See ibid., pp. 253ff., 263.

⁶⁶There is no corresponding notion of an "imperfect" simplicity in Hume; it is hard to see how there could be.

⁶⁷Treatise I, p. 253.

referred to this sense of identity as perfect, when he stated that "what we call a mind, is nothing but a heap or collection of different perceptions, united together by certain relations, and suppos'd, tho' falsely, to be endow'd with a perfect simplicity and identity."⁶⁸

Interestingly enough, this same passage seems to me to allude to a type of identity which is not perfect and which appears to be recognized by Hume as a legitimate kind of identity in his discussion of personal identity. For Hume here remarks that even though we must admit

that every distinct perception, which enters into the composition of the mind, is a distinct existence, and is different, and distinguishable, and separable from every other perception, either contemporary or successive, . . . we [still] suppose the whole train of perceptions to be united by identity;⁶⁹

and the question which "naturally arises concerning this relation of identity [is] whether it be something that really binds our several perceptions together, or only associates their ideas in the imagination."⁷⁰ I infer that this relation of identity is not the same thing as the perfect identity Hume also talks about. If such a relation exists, it is constituted by those close relations which unite together the heap or collection of different perceptions which compose the mind. In other words, it is those close relations to which Hume was alluding in his earlier statement (presented above) of the

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 207; underline of 'perfect' was mine.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 259.

⁷⁰Ibid.; underline mine.

nature of the human mind. Again, if such a relation exists, it is something which really binds our several perceptions together and makes them form a whole. What Hume tries to show is that we have no evidence that such a binding relation exists. In other words, he answers the question he raises concerning this relation by claiming that as far as we can discern, it is only something which associates the ideas of these perceptions in our imagination. He says:

This question [i.e., the question "whether in pronouncing concerning the identity of a person, we observe some real bond among his perceptions, or only feel one among the ideas we form of them"⁷¹] we might easily decide, if we wou'd recollect what has been already prov'd at large, that the understanding never observes any real connexion among objects, and that even the union of cause and effect, when strictly examin'd, resolves itself into a customary association of ideas. For from thence it evidently follows, that identity is nothing really belonging to these different perceptions, and uniting them together; but is merely a quality, which we attribute to them, because of the union of their ideas in the imagination, when we reflect upon them.⁷²

Thus, even this type of identity is a product of the imagination. Since, in Hume's view, the only qualities which can give rise to a union of ideas in the imagination are the natural relations of resemblance, contiguity and causation, it is these which cause us to ascribe (imperfect) identity to the mind of man.

The preceding considerations seem to me to serve not only to indicate the extent of the Pyrrhonic component of Hume's argument but also to provide all of the ingredients necessary to exhibit the

⁷¹Ibid.

⁷²Ibid., p. 260.

naturalistic component. Although Hume does not stress the point in this context, I take it that his invocation of the principles of association (or natural relations) signalizes the presence of the naturalistic claim. Does not Hume explicitly tell us that "notwithstanding this distinction and separability [which characterizes the perceptions which constitute the mind], we suppose the whole train of perceptions to be united by identity"⁷³ I believe that this is sufficient evidence to warrant the conclusion that he maintains that it is really not possible for us to doubt that our minds have some type of identity---not for any length of time, that is. This is a belief which is generated by the influence of the principles of association; hence, it involves the operation of the determined imagination in an essential way and is, thereby, unavoidable.

Hume's Remarks in the Appendix to the Treatise

This is pretty much the way things stand in the Treatise---or, rather, in the body of the Treatise. The presence of the theory of imagination in both the Pyrrhonic and naturalistic elements of his argument is manifest. Furthermore, this whole discussion of the evidence of internal sense (as I have chosen to refer to it) bears various resemblances to the earlier discussions of the Treatise, both with respect to the Pyrrhonic-naturalistic components and to

⁷³Ibid., p. 259.

the involvement of the theory of imagination as well. The conclusions drawn by Hume in this discussion appear to be in line with the sorts of conclusions drawn by him in the other topic-areas (i.e., abstract reasoning, matter-of-fact reasoning, and external sense). Nevertheless, in the Appendix to the Treatise Hume expresses---or appears to express---genuine dissatisfaction with the Treatise-account of personal identity. He says:

I had entertain'd some hopes, that however deficient our theory of the intellectual world might be, it wou'd be free from those contradictions, and absurdities, which seem to attend every explication, that human reason can give of the material world. But upon a more strict review of the section concerning personal identity, I find myself involv'd in such a labyrinth, that, I must confess, I neither know how to correct my former opinions, nor how to render them consistent.⁷⁴

What Hume immediately proceeds to do is to give a brief but lucid review of the very aspects of his account in the Treatise which I have seen fit to stress. There is the argument against the intelligibility of mental substance;⁷⁵ and there is the affirmation of the bundle-of-perceptions theory as the only defensible alternative theory of mind.⁷⁶ What Hume appears reluctant to grant as satisfactory in the account of the Treatise is the explanation given there of "the principle of connexion, which binds [the bundle of perceptions] together, and makes us attribute to them a real . . . identity."⁷⁷ He maintains

⁷⁴Appendix, p. 633.

⁷⁵Ibid., pp. 633-34.

⁷⁶Ibid., pp. 634-5.

⁷⁷Ibid., p. 635.

that "if perceptions are distinct existences [and his bundle theory compels him to hold that they are], they form a whole only by being connected together."⁷⁸ What this seems to mean is that perceptions, which are distinct existences, can legitimately be said to have an identity---presumably he is talking about "imperfect" identity---only by being connected together. And here is where the trouble begins. On his own showing in the Treatise,

no connexions among distinct existences are ever discoverable by human understanding. We only feel a connexion or determination of the thought, to pass from one object to another.⁷⁹

This latter claim, of course, is simply a short-hand way of referring to the influence of the principles of association on the imagination. Apparently, what it is that bothers Hume is the fact that in maintaining that all the distinct perceptions which comprise the mind are distinct existents and that we never perceive any real connexions between distinct existents, he believes that it is impossible for him to make any sense out of what he now feels he ought to be able to make sense out of, viz., the fact that these distinct perceptions do form a whole (i.e., do have some sort of identity). An appeal to the principles of association is obviously insufficient. It gives us a surrogate, not the real thing.

⁷⁸Ibid.

⁷⁹Ibid.

Some comments on Hume's remarks

It is clear that the view of this situation which is most congenial to my general interpretation of Hume's philosophy of the human understanding is that his expression of dissatisfaction with the Treatise-account of personal identity is not genuine, but feigned. If this view were correct, then it would appear that his "revised" comments in the Appendix represent the culmination of his scepticism, in the sense that they bring out, perhaps more forcefully and explicitly than any of his other discussions, a vital nerve of his position. What I mean is that these remarks illustrate in a rather dramatic way the underlying tension or conflict that exists between the imagination as separator of ideas and the imagination as uniter of them. Can there be any doubt that the reason that Hume claims he cannot renounce the belief that our perceptions do form a whole is that it comes from the determined imagination (i.e., the imagination as governed by the natural relations)? After all, Hume asserts in his Treatise-account that the latter

are the uniting principles in the ideal world, and without them every distinct object is separable by the mind, and may be separately consider'd, and appears not to have any more connexion with any other object, than if dis-join'd by the greatest difference and remoteness.⁸⁰

And since the different-distinguishable-separable principle here alluded to is likewise a principle of the imagination (viz., the free

⁸⁰Treatise I, p. 260.

imagination), what better way could be found to conclude his philosophy of the human understanding than to clearly reveal the main underlying source of our epistemological dilemma? It is not too much of an exaggeration or distortion of Hume's thought to assert that this tension or conflict between the free and the determined imagination is at least implicit in each of the four topic-areas which Hume discusses in Treatise I. I believe that it lies at the very heart of his mitigated sceptical position. The unitings of ideas by the determined imagination give rise to certain basic beliefs--- concerning space, time, causation, the external world, and the self. But these beliefs (all of them) can be shown to be quite baseless, even absurd or unintelligible, by appealing to the free imagination ---coupled, of course, with an appeal to sense-experience and reason. However, aside from being able to recognize their baselessness, we are quite unable to cease giving our assent to them---for any length of time, that is. They are beliefs which are, as it were, part of our very nature.

If it could be decisively shown that Hume is merely feigning dissatisfaction (perhaps in order to dramatize his sceptical position), then the above picture of the basic intent of his philosophy of the human understanding would be unequivocally vindicated. However, is he merely feigning dissatisfaction, or is he genuinely

dissatisfied? At the close of his discussion in the Appendix, he says the following:

For my part, I must plead the privilege of a sceptic, and confess, that this difficulty [with regard to personal identity] is too hard for my understanding. I pretend not, however, to pronounce it absolutely insuperable. Others, perhaps, or myself, upon more mature reflexions, may discover some hypothesis, that will reconcile those contradictions.⁸¹

This certainly appears to bespeak a genuine dissatisfaction with his account. Moreover, in a letter to Henry Home (July 24, 1746), Hume, speaking of Home's work on the problem of personal identity, says:

I likt exceedingly your Method of explaining personal Identity as more satisfactory than any thing that had ever occur'd to me.⁸²

Inasmuch as Home was a rather close friend of his, it seems unlikely that Hume was merely trying to flatter him and thus was not really meaning what he was saying. It is much more likely that this is a candid expression on Hume's part of his attitude toward his own account.

Let us suppose then that I admit that Hume was genuinely dissatisfied with his account of personal identity. What follows from this admission? Does it follow that my interpretation of the basic intent of Hume's philosophy of the human understanding is entirely vitiated? I think not. It does not follow necessarily that Hume

⁸¹Appendix, p. 636.

⁸²Klibansky and Mossner, op. cit., p. 20.

did not have mitigated sceptical goals in the topic-areas other than that of the self. In fact, it does not even imply that there is no Pyrrhonic element present in his discussion of personal identity itself. After all, Hume shows no inclination to repudiate his attack on the intelligibility of the notion of mental substance, and hence no tendency to adopt the substance theory of mind. He does not even show any inclination to adopt a single-impression theory (as we might call it) of the mind;⁸³ and thus he shows no tendency to adopt a theory which maintains that the human mind has a perfect identity and simplicity. As far as I can determine, what he appears to want to be able to defend is a real-connexion theory, i.e., a theory which maintains that the distinct perceptions which compose the mind form a whole (i.e., have some sort of identity) by being really connected with each other. Put slightly differently, he wants to be able to say that we do perceive real connexions between at least some distinct existents, viz., those which compose the mind. What torments him is that he is certain that we never perceive real connexions between any distinct existents.

⁸³A single-impression theory would be one which maintains that the human mind may correctly be said to have a perfect simplicity and identity, since there is, within the bundle which constitutes it, a single simple, invariable and uninterrupted impression. This is a theory which would allegedly do the job of substance, in the substance theory, but without invoking the latter. There are hints at the beginning of Hume's Treatise-account that he entertains this as a possible theory---though he rejects it almost out-of-hand as empirically false. See Treatise I, p. 251.

In conclusion, let me make a further remark on this issue. Even if my attempt to play down the significance of Hume's dissatisfaction with his account of personal identity is ultimately untenable, it is still possible for me to maintain that what I have taken to be the general structure and main lines of argument of his philosophy of the human understanding is substantially correct. The organization of Hume's argument is one thing; the attitude he ultimately adopts toward one segment of this argument is another. We must remember that Hume never lets us know what his "more mature reflexions" were---if, indeed, there were any---on the particular issue at hand. Furthermore, we must admit that Enquiry I gives us no evidence of the sort of change of principles which would seem to be required to resolve satisfactorily the problem of personal identity. Indeed, as we have seen, we find him most clearly and unequivocally adopting the mitigated sceptical position in this work.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

I believe that I have provided in the foregoing pages (particularly, from Chapter II onward) a detailed, comprehensive and satisfactory solution to the central problem I raised at the outset of this work, viz., the problem of determining how Hume's theory of imagination is related to, or involved in, the generic features and main lines of argument of his philosophy of the human understanding. I also believe that I have furnished (not only in Chapter I, but elsewhere) sufficient evidence for the contention that such a solution has not hitherto been provided.

It was obvious that a satisfactory solution to the above-mentioned problem rested upon a satisfactory solution to two other problems closely related thereto---problems suggested by the very statement of that problem: (1) What is Hume's theory of imagination? (2) What are the generic features and main lines of argument of his philosophy of the human understanding?¹

¹Even though these two problems are logically distinct---in part, at least---from each other, the peculiarly intimate relation between certain aspects of them made it unfeasible to consider these aspects separately.

A presupposition of the first of these two preliminary problems is that Hume, indeed, has what may be properly described as a theory of imagination; and one may legitimately say that one of my main efforts was devoted to sustaining the claim that this presupposition is a valid or true one. I have maintained that Hume's theory may be conveniently divided into seven distinct, though (in some cases) extremely closely related, elements. Clearly, the central or "core" elements of the theory turned out to be the ones which reveal (a) what Hume means by 'imagination', (b) what principles govern at least some of its operations, (c) what "ontological" connections it has, and (d) what specific cognitive functions or roles it performs. Hume seems to have two distinct meanings or usages of 'imagination'; one which is encompassed by what I have referred to as his general conception of imagination; the other which is not. His general conception of imagination is that it is a faculty or power of forming, uniting, and separating ideas; in his other usage, imaginative activity is the activity of supposing things, where the things supposed are such that no idea of them (in Hume's sense of that term) is possible. Hume believes that certain unions of ideas by the imagination are influenced or determined by certain principles, which he refers to either as the principles of association or as natural relations. These principles, he thinks, are just three in number: resemblance, contiguity, and causation. Hume's view of the "ontological" connections of imagination is expressed by the principle that whatever we

can imagine (i.e., form an idea of) is possible. In general, his claims concerning the cognitive functions of the imagination reduce to claims about the particular contexts in which the activities named in his general conception take place---in particular, those of forming and uniting ideas. Thus, his claims about imagination being responsible for certain fictitious beliefs about space, time, necessary connexion, material objects, and the self, turn out to be claims about particular contexts in which imagination---it would be equally correct to say "the mind"---forms and unites ideas. The other three elements of the theory---those which reveal (e) the data of imagination, (f) the ultimate source of its data, and (g) the criteria we have (in immediate experience) to recognize or identify imaginative activity, as distinguished from the other cognitive activities---were presented primarily in order to pave the way for a proper understanding of element (a), i.e., of his general conception or definition of imagination.

In dealing with the second preliminary problem, I considered Treatise I and Enquiry I as the two main expressions of Hume's philosophy of the human understanding and made a concerted effort to defend the view that despite evident differences in the arrangement of their subject-matters (as well as some differences in the latter themselves), these two works share the same basic conclusion/goal and employ the same basic principles in attempting to achieve it. In my terminology, they share the same generic features. What is

more, I contended that Section XII of Enquiry I furnishes us with Hume's clearest, most systematic and adequate statement of this basic conclusion/goal; and I also maintained that the rather brief review of arguments there offered in support of the latter reveals an argument-structure which Hume had employed in the earlier Treatise I---indeed, it reveals the over-all structure of the argument of that work as a whole. As far as the conclusion/goal is concerned, I took it to be the establishment of that species of "consequent" scepticism which he refers to as mitigated (or moderate).² It is a species of scepticism which makes two principal recommendations: (1) that we maintain a degree of modesty, caution, doubt, etc., in all of our intellectual pursuits, and (2) that we eschew all inquiries which go beyond the sphere of common life and experience. As far as the basic principles are concerned, they are three in number and consist in the claims (A) that all our ideas are ultimately derived from experience, (B) that the imagination is free to transpose and change any of its (complex) ideas, and (C) that despite its freedom, this faculty is strongly influenced in its unions of ideas by certain principles of association (or natural relations).³

²A "consequent" scepticism is one which is consequent to inquiry, rather than antecedent to it. Descartes' so-called methodological doubt is an instance of an "antecedent" scepticism.

³It hardly needs mentioning that this statement exhibits the extremely intimate relation between certain of the generic features of Hume's philosophy of the human understanding and his theory of imagination.

The application of these three principles (plus certain others) is supposed to support two primary claims: (i) that our cognitive faculties are in irremediably bad condition (i.e., they are not only weak, but are in some instances in conflict with each other---and even with themselves), and (ii) that, even so, it is impossible for us to withhold our assent for any length of time to certain basic beliefs about the world which result from their operation. I have referred to (i) and (ii) as the Pyrrhonic and the naturalistic components, respectively, of his philosophy of the human understanding. Incidentally, basic principles (A) and (B) were found to be invariably connected with the Pyrrhonic component, whereas principle (C) was always involved in the naturalistic one.⁴

Since I was convinced not only that there were no elements of Hume's theory of imagination in Enquiry I which were absent from Treatise I, but also that the striking resemblance between the argument-structure of Section XII of the former work and that of the latter work in general was not an accident, I devoted my primary

⁴There is a sense in which principle (C) is also connected with the Pyrrhonic component. It is so connected insofar as the exhibition of the activities of the determined imagination [principle (C)] are shown to lead to results which are in conflict with the activities of the free imagination [principle (B)]. The reason for this is that one of the aims of the Pyrrhonic component is to show conflicts between (and within) cognitive faculties. To this end, Hume tries to show that there is a conflict even within the determined imagination itself (see my discussion of his claim about a conflict between our belief in causation and our belief in the existence of material objects, p. 266).

attention to Treatise I and organized my discussion of the role of the theory in the main lines of argument of that work along the lines dictated by the presumed truth of my "resemblance" theory (as one might call it). What this amounted to doing was dividing Hume's argument into two major segments: an attack on reason and an attack on sense. Each of these two segments was subdivided into two further segments: attacks on abstract and matter-of-fact reasoning, and attacks on external and internal sense, respectively.⁵ I tried to follow each of these segments very closely and to exhibit in them both the Pyrrhonic and the naturalistic components, as well as the elements of the theory of imagination which are crucially involved therein. Unfortunately, the task was rendered somewhat difficult, inasmuch as none of these discussions was exactly parallel to any of the others. For instance, in the case of the discussion of abstract reasoning, it was not particularly easy to discern a bona fide naturalistic claim---even though, in regard to the fictions of an empty space and time, the determined imagination is obviously at work. Again, in what I took to be the main portion of the attack on external sense, there seemed to be no appeal to the free imagination nor to the principle that whatever we can imagine is possible; yet both of these elements of Hume's theory of imagination appear in

⁵For the sake of accuracy, I should mention the combined attack on abstract and matter-of-fact reasoning---since it is distinct from the separate attacks on these two types of reasoning.

practically every other segment of his argument.⁶ However, in each of these segments of Hume's argument, at least some elements of his theory were to be found; and they were in each case found to play a significant role.

Whether or not, lying at the heart of Hume's mitigated scepticism, there is a kind of unresolvable conflict or tension---or supposed one---between the free and the determined imagination (as I suggested near the close of the last chapter), there can be no doubt that there are these two sorts of imagination in Hume and that they both play vital roles in the main lines of argument of his philosophy of the human understanding.

⁶I say practically every other one, because neither of these two elements are in evidence in the combined attack on abstract and matter-of-fact reasoning.

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