Oxford Lectures on David Hume, 2024-25

David Hume, 1711-1776

6. From Book 1 Part 3 to Part 4: "Sceptical Systems of Philosophy"

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From Last Time …

- We studied *Treatise* 1.3.14, the culmination of Hume's search for the source of the idea of causal necessity, which largely structures Book 1 Part 3.
- We noted some interpretative complications, which can be largely resolved by reference to Hume's later presentation of the same topic in *Enquiry* 7, also titled "Of the Idea of Necessary Connexion".
- Despite some misleading passages, Hume seems clearly to be a believer in *objective* causal necessity (understood in terms of regularity). He identifies what he takes to be a *legitimate* impression for the crucial idea, and advocates causal investigation …

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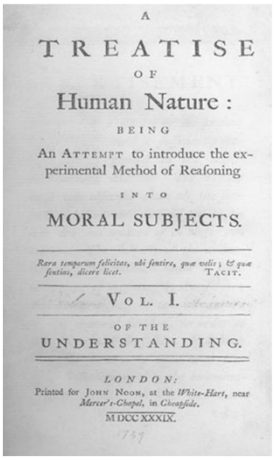
Causal Rules, to Liberty and Necessity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The Rules of *Treatise* 1.3.15

- Following the two definitions of cause and their corollaries (at the end of *Treatise* 1.3.14), Hume in the next section gives his (clearly objectivist) "Rules by which to judge of causes and effects":
  - "Since therefore 'tis possible for all objects to become causes or effects to each other, it may be proper to fix some general rules, *by which we may know when they really are so*." (*T* 1.3.15.1, emphasis added)
  - "[Phenomena] in nature [are] compounded and modify'd by so many different circumstances, that … we must carefully separate whatever is superfluous, and enquire by new experiments, if every particular circumstance of the first experiment was essential to it". (*T* 1.3.15.11)

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"1. The cause and effect must be contiguous in space and time.

2. The cause must be prior to the effect.

3. There must be a constant union betwixt the cause and effect. 'Tis chiefly this quality, that constitutes the relation.

4. The same cause always produces the same effect, and the same effect never arises but from the same cause. ...

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

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

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

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

(T 1.3.15.3-10)

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Quantitative Powers in the *Enquiry*

- In the *Enquiry*, Hume recognises that mechanical causation cannot be analysed in the crude *discrete* manner of his rules, but involves *continuously* varying *forces*: theoretical entities that can be quantified, and enter into equations describing objects' behaviour:
  - "it is a law of motion, discovered by experience, that the moment or force of any body in motion is in the compound ratio or proportion of its solid contents and its velocity; …" (*E* 4.13)
  - Two footnotes in *Enquiry* 7 (7.25 n.16, 7.29 n.17) help to bring such quantitative "powers" within the scope of Hume's theory of causation, generalising beyond constant conjunction and the rules of *Treatise* 1.3.15.

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

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

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"Of the Reason of Animals" (*T* 1.3.16)

- Significantly, *three* parts of the *Treatise* (1.3, 2.1, and 2.2) end with sections comparing humans with animals (and the last paragraph of *T* 2.3.9 says the similarity regarding "the will and direct passions" is too "evident" to need discussing).
  - Hume is a "biological naturalist", in the sense of seeing humans as continuous with other animals, and operating by similar principles (as opposed to being separate beings "made in the image of God").
  - A century later, Charles Darwin was reading Hume "Of the reason of animals" (*Enquiry* 9) around the time he came up with the theory of natural selection.

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

  "let any philosopher make a trial, and endeavour to explain that act of the mind, which we call *belief*, and give an account of the principles, from which it is deriv'd, independent of the influence of custom on the imagination, and let his hypothesis be equally applicable to beasts as to the human species; and after he has done this, I promise to embrace his opinion." (§8)
- "Reason" – in both humans and animals – "is nothing but a wonderful and unintelligible instinct" that enlivens our ideas according to custom (§9).

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A Positive View of Causation

- Later in the *Treatise*, Hume continues to use his account of causation to positively identify causal relations (so it is certainly *not* a sceptical or debunking account, as sometimes claimed):

  "all objects, which are found to be constantly conjoin'd, are *upon that account only* to be regarded as causes and effects. … the constant conjunction of objects constitutes *the very essence* of cause and effect …" (*T* 1.4.5.32, emphasis added)

  "two particulars [are] essential to necessity, *viz.* the constant *union* and the *inference* of the mind … wherever we discover these we must acknowledge a necessity." (*T* 2.3.1.4)

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Of Liberty and Necessity

- In the *Treatise*, the discussion "Of Liberty and Necessity" is postponed until late in Book 2, and this has led to its unfortunate neglect by interpreters. In the *Enquiry*, it is appropriately placed immediately after "Of the Idea of Necessary Connexion".
- Hume argues here that <u>*exactly the same necessity that applies in the physical realm applies equally in the moral realm*</u> (a point we saw made also in the corollaries to his definitions at *T* 1.3.14.32-33).
  - This depends on <u>*our understanding of necessary connexion as being completely exhausted by the two factors of constant conjunction and customary inference*</u>, both of which can be seen to apply in the moral realm.

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No Further Idea of Causal Necessity

- "[Opponents] … must allow … union and inference with regard to human actions. They will only deny, that this makes the whole of necessity. But then they must shew, that we have an idea of something else in the actions of matter; which, according to the foregoing reasoning, is impossible." (*A* 34)
- "I define necessity two ways, conformable to the two definitions of cause, … I place it either in the constant union … of like objects, or in the inference of the mind … [Opponents] … will maintain there is something else in the operations of matter. … [I assert] that we have no idea of any other connexion in the actions of body" (*T* 2.3.2.4)
- "[Opponents] … will maintain it possible to discover something farther in the operations of matter. … [I assert] that there is no idea of any other necessity or connexion in the actions of body" (*E* 8.27)

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"A New Definition of Necessity"

- Hume presents this argument as turning crucially on his distinctive definition(s) of necessity:

  "Our author pretends, that this reasoning puts the whole controversy in a new light, by giving a new definition of necessity." (*A* 34, cf. *T* 2.3.1.18, *E* 8.2)

- This requires that his definitions be understood as specifying "the very essence of necessity", an emphatic phrase used four times in this context (*T* 2.3.1.10, 2.3.2.2; *E* 8.22 n. 18, 8.25 n. 19).
  - This important application of his definitions of necessity might well be Hume's primary motivation for investigating the idea of necessity connexion!

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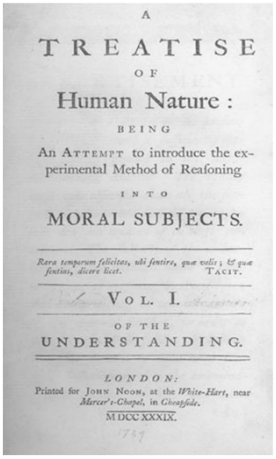
Treatise 1.4.2

"Of Scepticism with Regard to the Senses"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Treatise Book 1 Part 4
"Of the Sceptical and Other Systems of Philosophy"

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

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Scepticism with Regard to Reason

- "Of Scepticism with Regard to Reason" (*Treatise* 1.4.1) contains a radical sceptical argument which seems to wreak havoc in the Conclusion of Book 1.
  - It first argues that we are humanly fallible, even in mathematical reasoning; hence "all knowledge degenerates into probability". To take this into account, we have to judge the probability of error in all of our judgments.
  - But such judgments of error are themselves fallible, so we are rationally obliged to judge that probability of error too, leading to a fatal regress. Thus "all the rules of logic require … a total extinction of belief and evidence".
  - For discussion of this dubious argument, see "Hume's Sceptical Texts 2" at https://davidhume.org/teaching/.

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Scepticism with regard to the Senses

- *Treatise* 1.4.2, "Of Scepticism with regard to the Senses", is notoriously complex and confusing, but widely respected as deep and insightful.
- Hume starts out noting that *the sceptic continues to believe even when he discovers that his beliefs cannot be defended*. Hume made this point about his "scepticism with regard to reason" at *T* 1.4.1.7, and now applies it to the belief in body:

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

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Doubts About the Existence of Body

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

  "I begun … with premising, that we ought to have an implicit faith in our senses … But … I feel myself *at present* of a quite contrary sentiment, and am more inclin'd to repose no faith at all in my senses, or rather imagination, than to place in it such an implicit confidence." (*T* 1.4.2.56 – continued on slide 258).

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Analysing the Belief

- Hume analyses the belief in body into two aspects, each of which is to be explained:
  - "why we attribute a CONTINU'D existence to objects, even when they are not present to the senses"
  - "why we suppose them to have an existence DISTINCT from the mind and perception"
  - He goes on to explain that the *distinctness* of bodies involves both their *external* position and also their *independence*. (*T* 1.4.2.2)
  - He then states that *continued* existence implies *distinct* existence, and vice-versa (this point becomes prominent at *T* 1.4.2.44 below).

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Which Faculty?

- Hume now declares his aim, to consider:

  "whether it be the *senses*, *reason*, or the *imagination*, that produces the opinion of a *continu'd* or of a *distinct* existence. These are the only questions, that are intelligible on the present subject. For as to the notion of external existence, when taken for something specifically different from perceptions, we have already shewn its absurdity. [note: *T* 1.2.6]" (*T* 1.4.2.2)

- At *T* 1.2.6.8, Hume had appealed to the Copy Principle as proving "that 'tis impossible for us so much as to conceive or form an idea of any thing specifically different from ideas and impressions".

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Eliminating the Senses

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

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Fallacy, Illusion, and Transparency

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

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Externality to the Body

- It might seem relatively unproblematic for our senses to present things as external to our body, but this presupposes that we have identified our body to start with:

  "ascribing a real and corporeal existence to [our limbs etc.] is an act of the mind as difficult to explain, as that which we examine at present." (*T* 1.4.2.9)

- Hume adds considerations from the nature of our various senses, and the primary/secondary quality distinction (*T* 1.4.2.12-13).

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Reason and the Vulgar View

- Children, peasants, and the "vulgar" in general clearly believe in the external world without consulting philosophical reason (*T* 1.4.2.14):

  "For philosophy informs us, that every thing, which appears to the mind, is nothing but a perception, and is interrupted, and dependent on the mind; whereas the vulgar confound perceptions and objects, and attribute a distinct continu'd existence to the very things they feel or see. This sentiment, then, as it is entirely unreasonable, must proceed from some other faculty than the understanding."

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Eliminating Reason

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

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Turning to the Imagination

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

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Constancy and Coherence

- *Constancy* of perceptions involves their similarity, when they "return upon me" (e.g. after closing then opening my eyes) "without the least alteration" (*T* 1.4.2.18).
- *Coherent* perceptions change, but in regular (and hence expected) or explicable patterns.
  - §19 introduces coherence; §20 gestures towards what we now call "inference to the best explanation"; §21 says this is not standard induction (since it infers more regularity that is observed); §22 ascribes it instead to a "galley principle"; but §23 then alleges that this is "too weak" to support our belief in body.

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Explaining the Vulgar View

- Focusing now on *constancy*, Hume summarises the account he is about to give, explaining our natural and unreflective ("vulgar") belief in body:

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

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> "But as this interruption of their existence is contrary to their perfect identity, and makes us regard the first impression as annihilated, and the second as newly created, we find ourselves somewhat at a loss, and are involv'd in a kind of contradiction. In order to free ourselves from this difficulty, we disguise, as much as possible, the interruption, or rather remove it entirely, by supposing that these interrupted perceptions are connected by a real existence, of which we are insensible. This supposition, or idea of continu'd existence, acquires a force and vivacity from the memory of these broken impressions, and from that propensity, which they give us, to suppose them the same; and … the very essence of belief consists in the force and vivacity of the conception." (*T* 1.4.2.24)

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The Four-Part Account

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

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A Problematic Assumption

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

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Fallacy and Fiction

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

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The Key Experiment

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

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The Philosophical System

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

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Recapitulation and Overview

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

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The Despairing Conclusion

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

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Carelessness and Inattention are the only "Remedy"

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

"'Tis impossible upon any system to defend either our understanding or senses; and we but expose them farther when we endeavour to justify them in that manner. As the sceptical doubt arises naturally from a profound and intense reflection on those subjects, it aways encreases, the farther we carry our reflections, whether in opposition or conformity to it. Carelessness and in-attention alone can afford us any remedy." (*T* 1.4.2.57)

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"'Tis impossible … to defend either our understanding or senses"

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

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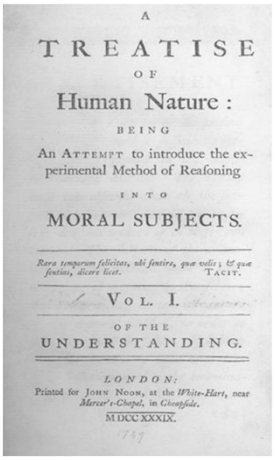
Treatise 1.4.3

"Of the Antient Philosophy"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Of the Antient Philosophy

- Section 1.4.3 of the *Treatise* is largely devoted to debunking Aristotelianism:

  "the fictions of the antient philosophy, concerning *substances*, and *substantial forms*, and *accidents*, and *occult qualities*; which, however unreasonable and capricious, have a very intimate connexion with the principles of human nature." (*T* 1.4.3.1)

- Hume explains these "fictions" as naturally arising from the imagination, by which the "Peripatetics" (i.e. Aristotelians) allowed themselves – far too easily and naively – to be seduced.

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False Simplicity and Identity

- "The most judicious philosophers" [e.g. Locke, *Essay* II xxiii] consider "that our ideas of bodies are nothing but collections form'd by the mind of the ideas of the several distinct sensible qualities, of which objects are compos'd".
- But the sorts of confusions outlined in *T* 1.4.2 lead us naturally to think of objects as *simple* things that retain their *identity* through time:

  "The smooth and uninterrupted progress of the thought … readily deceives the mind, and makes us ascribe an identity to the changeable succession …" (*T* 1.4.3.3)

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Inventing Substance

- When we realise these supposedly identical things have actually changed over time,

  "the imagination is apt to feign something unknown and invisible, which it supposes to continue the same under all these variations; and this unintelligible something it calls a *substance*, or *original and first matter*." (*T* 1.4.3.4)

- We likewise imagine this *original substance* to be simple and uncompounded, supplying

  "a principle of union or cohesion among [the object's] qualities" (*T* 1.4.3.5)

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Substantial Forms and Accidents

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

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

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Faculties and Occult Qualities

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

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

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Ridiculing Sympathies and Antipathies

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

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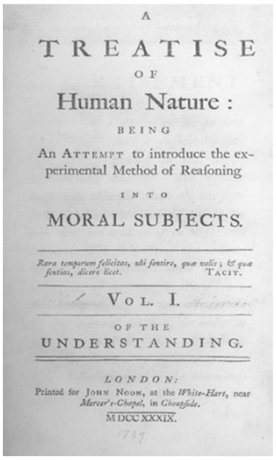
Treatise 1.4.4

"Of the Modern Philosophy"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INTO
MORAL SUBJECTS.
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Imaginative Principles, Good and Bad

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

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

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Hume's Way Out?

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

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"Of the Modern Philosophy"

- Modern (Lockean) philosophy claims to be based on the "solid, permanent, and consistent principles of the imagination" (*T* 1.4.4.2). But now Hume will argue – by attacking the primary/secondary quality distinction – that it has no such secure foundation.
- He suggests that the only "satisfactory" argument for the distinction "is deriv'd from the variations of [sensory] impressions" depending upon our health, constitution, situation etc. (*T* 1.4.4.2).
  - This is actually a bit unfair to Locke, who argued for the distinction on *explanatory* grounds: the primary qualities of objects *explain* how they appear (e.g. *Essay* II viii 21).

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A Causal Argument from Variation

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

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A Berkeleian Objection

- Against the primary/secondary quality distinction, Hume focuses on one objection, which takes inspiration from George Berkeley:

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

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Annihilating Matter

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

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Reason Against the Senses

- Hume elaborates this argument further over *T* 1.4.4.10-14, and then sums up:

  "Thus there is a direct and total opposition betwixt our reason and our senses; or more properly speaking, betwixt those conclusions we form from cause and effect, and those that perswade us of the continu'd and independent existence of body." (§15)
- Causal reasoning concludes that secondary qualities aren't objective; but then without appeal to (subjective) colour and feel, we cannot form any coherent notion of an extended body.

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