

In his use of his Empiricist Principle (EP) against the existence of necessary connection, Hume fails to recognize mental impressions inherently contained in human perception of external objects. Through empirical analysis of human method of perception and argument for the existence of purely mental impressions from sense data, this paper will contend that Hume's application of his Empiricist Principle to the perception of external objects contains certain weak spots that can cripple the effectiveness of the EP. It will also examine how the argument in favor of the perception of mental impressions holds up against the objections concerning relations of ideas and the reality required for mental impressions. This existence of mental impressions in human perception would be a serious violation of the Empiricist Principle and perhaps a foothold which one might leverage towards arguing for necessary connection.

In his *Enquiry*, Hume uses his Empiricist Principle (EP) to stir up serious doubt concerning the idea of necessary connection between events in the natural world. The Empiricist Principle states that every idea is ultimately derived from impressions which are then copied into less vivid simple ideas. Through portraying impressions as strong flashes of sensation that do not yet contain concepts or judgments, Hume is able to show human perception of external objects as snapshots of stimulation that are completely mind-independent. This principle serves as grounds against necessary connection and any causal relationship between the momentary events that generate these perceptions, and gives rise to the Humean Independence Thesis (HIT), which states that there are no necessary connections between distinct events and entities.

From an application of the EP to external objects, Hume comes to the conclusion that humans are unable to discover any kind of necessary connection through experience of perceiving external objects. He states that there is no "quality, which binds the effect to the cause, and renders the one an infallible consequence of the other" (41.7). Perception doesn't

give necessary connection since “we only find that one [event] does, in fact, follow the other” (41.7). In order for there to be a causal relationship between two events, the effect must be necessarily connected to each other through some perceivable connecting quality.

In order to show the lack of connection between external objects and events, Hume employs a simple example of what most people would consider to be a clear case of cause and effect. Hume’s famous billiard ball example on page 41 of the *Enquiry* can be reconstructed to show how Hume comes to the seemingly radical conclusion that the mind is not able to provide any evidence for necessary connection:

1. When one billiard ball strikes another, the second billiard ball is perceived to move
 2. The impression of this interaction between external bodies (i.e. the balls striking each other and moving away) appears only to the outward senses
 3. External bodies are unable to give sentiments/internal impressions to the mind
- C: Since the mind receives no direct sentiment/internal impression, it cannot gain any idea of necessary connection from external bodies

This argument is largely successful for Hume, as the disconnectedness of external objects strongly supports his idea of human perception. In his *Enquiry*, Hume states that all complex ideas are synthesized from previously acquired simple ideas, gained through empirical data. This empirical data comes to humans in the form of impressions, which are lively, buzzing sensory feedback from the world around us. These data pieces are snapshots of stimulus, frozen in time, which are physically perceived by the body as impressions. This view of impressions consequently makes the process of perception completely external to the mind.

It is only in the mind that reflection on these sensations and movements (i.e. impressions) is able to provide mental concepts of the body's perceptions of the external world. Hume highlights the dullness of perceptions of the mind, explaining "these faculties [mental perceptions] may mimic or copy the perceptions of the senses; but they never can entirely reach the force and vivacity of the original sentiment" (10.2). They lack the same force of the external impressions since there exists no direct mental sentiment that comes straight from human experience. Hume supports his physical concept of perception through an example of how deprivation of impressions corresponds to deprivation of ideas. He states that "a blind man can form no notion of colors, a deaf man of sounds" (12.2), and that human perception of the world through physical impressions serves as best explanation of this correlation. But does Hume's concept of how we perceive the natural world actually align with human experience?

Every Tuesday and Thursday afternoon at 12:15 PM, I brew a cup of coffee in the administrative office of the philosophy department. When I drink this cup of coffee during my History of Modern Philosophy class, I receive certain sense data from the characteristics of the cup of coffee. Although I might be able to describe the physical impressions that I receive from consuming the coffee (e.g. the feel of styrofoam in my hand, the sensation of warm liquid in my mouth, the bitter taste of the French Roast flavor, etc.), there still seems to be something inherently unique about this particular set of impressions. No matter how skilled I am in identifying qualities of the coffee and describing these impressions in terms of sense data, it seems that there is no way to for me to explain to someone the full concept of the experience of drinking Green Mountain's French Roast coffee brewed in the philosophy department's Keurig machine. Unless this someone could replicate this experience in its entirety, it would be impossible for him/her to fully understand the subtle differences in impressions that arise from this particular flavor brewed from this specific machine at this very point of the machine's

declining life cycle. Thus, there must be then be some kind of impressions from this experience that remains as a purely mental concept of the perceiver.

An argument made for the existence of mental impressions from inability of the mind to transmit the full concept of the empirical data it perceives could take the following form:

1. The mind is capable of fully understanding its own ideas
2. Ideas are synthesized from impressions of empirical data
3. External communication of the ideas of the mind is a form of empirical sense data
4. Hence, any idea that can be externally communicated or received from the mind is empirical sense data
5. However, the mind is unable to communicate the entirety of its empirical experience

C: Therefore, the mind must also contain some purely mental component from empirical sense data

This purely mental component of empirical data is commonly known in philosophy under the name “qualia.” The Stanford Dictionary of Philosophy defines qualia as “the introspectively accessible, phenomenal aspects of our mental lives” (Tye) which is non quantitative and cannot be expressed purely relationally. Basically, qualia are the purely qualitative mental concepts that the mind gains from its perception of natural phenomena. Qualia exist as empirical data since they are a direct result of human experience, but they are only accessible from mental impressions. The full concept of a quale is indescribable through language, and cannot be gained in any other way except through sense data from a specific experience.

A famous example of qualia is Brian Loar’s argument for the existence of purely phenomenal concepts through describing the color of ripe bananas. No matter how well

someone can describe the appearance of the ripe bananas, he/she will never be able to fully describe the qualitative aspects of the banana to someone who has never seen ripe bananas. There requires some past experience of perceiving bananas, and maybe even perceiving the same exact bananas in question to fully understand the concept of these ripe bananas. The qualitative aspects of the banana (i.e. a specific color in Loar's case) show the ability of external objects to generate mental impressions that cannot be fully conceptualized in sense data. In order for qualia to be fully conceptualized independent of the mind, they would have to be fully understood and transmittable through only descriptions of their physical impressions. In order to prove the concept of the bananas to be completely external of the mind, the person who has not directly perceived these ripe bananas would have to accurately receive the full concept from a description of the perceiver's physical impressions of the bananas.

A pop-culture example of the indescribability of qualia through language is Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart's famous quote, "I know it [obscenity] when I see it" (Wikipedia). In the 1964 case *Jacobellis v. Ohio*, Justice Potter made the famous concession that he was unable to fully define the obscene qualities of a pornographic film in question. Humans can relate to the frustration felt by Potter when his mind was tasked with somehow exactly conceptualizing the qualitative aspects of empirical data. No matter how carefully had he tried to describe the sense data perceived from the film, he would not have been able to sufficiently define the mental impressions, or qualia, that colored his his judgments on the film.

However, one might object to the existence of qualia with a purely physicalist perspective in which all qualitative concepts of human experience can be explained through the relation of ideas (i.e. science). A Humean might contend that any sense data that seems to be mental can actually be quantized and shown as a relation within physical sense data. In regard to color, computer programs already assign a set of unique RGB coded numbers to quantize a

wide array of color. Maybe then the color of a ripe banana can be broken down to three values between 0 and 256 on the RGB color spectrum, which could then be communicated completely in quantifiable terms. But even granting this relational description of color still fails to account for the certain shades of color that slip through the cracks of this coding sequence (e.g. maybe the computer does not have a specific value for some “missing shade of yellow” observed on these particular ripe bananas). No matter how many more coded color values are added to the program, it will never be able to fully cover the infinite shades of yellow that exist in the world. Basically, it is impossible to fully quantize the qualitative concepts of natural phenomena.

One might also offer the objection that the proposition of perceiving mental concepts from physical objects violates the Cartesian Causal Principle of Ideas (CPI). The CPI accounts for the existence of ideas by stating that a particular idea owes its existence in objective reality to an equal amount existence in formal reality. A derivative of the General Causal Principle, the CPI ensures that there is no spontaneous creation of existence, either in objective or formal reality. The Causal Principle of Ideas actually correlates with Hume’s Empiricist Principle as both acknowledge the necessary basis of ideas in objective reality with natural phenomena found in formal reality, either directly, or in Hume’s case, through impressions.

Hence, a Cartesian might fear that the existence of qualia in the mind presupposes some imbalance of objective reality in which purely mental concepts exist without proper basis in formal reality. Therefore, the argument for the mental impressions must then give these mental impressions the same level of reality as Hume’s physical impressions as they would both rely on the formal reality of their corresponding external objects. This explanation external objects providing the necessary formal reality for purely mental qualia would be classified as a form of phenomenology.

In the flavor of coffee example, the purely mental impression gained through the empirical data from the coffee can be directly attributed to the coffee itself. Although the coffee may not be able to be fully conceptualized in a purely physical sense, this does not disqualify its mental impression from fully existing in the natural world. One cannot deny the existence of some difference between certain flavors of coffee, which is an example of a difference in qualia. The existence of flavor itself can be found in formal reality, since there is a distinct difference between the chemical composition of Green Mountain's French Roast flavor and San Francisco Bay's French Roast flavor. But even someone with an expert flavor palette would not be able to fully describe the difference between these two similar coffee flavors, since the full concept of their exact flavors contain some purely mental qualia. In a phenomenal perspective, there is no contradiction when something exists in formal reality without a complete understanding of the thing's concept.

Concerning the ripe bananas, the qualia in question is quite literally a characteristic of the banana (i.e. its yellow color) which exists in formal reality. Any argument against the existence of color in formal reality would be a difficult contention against an impression that is inherently found in every single snapshot of human perception.

The existence of purely mental impressions from natural phenomena holds some serious implications for validity of Hume's Empiricist Principle. These implications may be seriously considered, since a Humean is unable to object to the existence of purely mental impressions either by defining qualitative features of external objects in relational terms or by disproving the capacity of natural phenomena to fully supply the required amount objective reality for qualia. The existence of mental impressions is a direct contradiction to the Empiricist Principle and the Humean concept of human perception, as it would oppose Hume's contention that all ideas are

only less vivid copies of the impressions from sense data. Mental impressions and the qualia they provide, must then be seriously considered as direct aspects of human perception.

If ideas can be supplied directly from mental impressions, the crumbling of Humean foundational ideas of perception becomes a jumping off point for serious upshots concerning the necessary connection of events. For example, a representationalist might attribute mental impressions to the existence of content and semantic properties in phenomenal characteristics. This directly challenges the Humean idea of how humans synthesize empirical data from impressions to complex ideas since sense data would be directly perceivable as more complex ideas. The direct perception of semantic properties without synthesis from the mind might show more complicated relationships and necessary connection in the natural world. Semantic properties concerning content, reference, and truth value (Tye) might paint a more complex picture of perception in which humans can observe connected sensations, causal relationships, and moral distinction. With a more complicated sense of human perception that includes mental impressions, the Humean push against necessary connection begins to collapse as human experience is able to explain the relationships that it has always seemed to contain.

Works Cited

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