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Hume on Dreams and Reality

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HUME ON DREAMS AND REALITY

Ph.D. Dissertation

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## Dissertation: Hume on Dreams and Reality

Jon C. Miller

### *Abstract*

I first outline the controversy surrounding Hume's ontology which is essentially the question: is Hume a realist or an idealist? The realists or 'New Humeans' claim that Hume's natural beliefs allow one to have confidence that there is an external world of objects in causal relation even though reason shows this belief to be unfounded. They further argue that one can form relative ideas of the external world. Finally they claim that evidence for this interpretation is found mostly in the *Enquiry*, thus they argue that the latter text is superior to the *Treatise*.

The idealists claim that Hume is at base a radical sceptic who if he has any ontological commitments they are the idealist assertion that only perceptions exist. They also tend to favour the *Treatise* over the *Enquiry*.

After providing a critical overview of both of these arguments, which also includes the question regarding Hume's alleged projectivism, I then show how the analysis of dreams in Hume's empiricism breaks the stalemate that has occurred in this controversy surrounding Hume's ontology. I show that the natural belief in dreams points the argument towards an idealist interpretation of Hume.

In the concluding section I summarize the findings of the dissertation and provide answers to some anticipated objections.

## Introduction

The following Dissertation argues that an analysis of dreams in Hume's empiricism shows him to be an Idealist. The background for this argument is the so-called New Hume Debate, where according to some scholars, Hume is actually a type of Realist. Clearly, I argue for the more traditional reading against that of the New Humeans.

Chapter One comprises a critical overview in what is undoubtedly the major area of contention, namely, the status of so-called natural beliefs in Hume's philosophy. The major players in this chapter are Norman Kemp Smith and John P. Wright, who argue for the sceptical/causal realist interpretation of Hume. Kenneth A. Richman and David Fate Norton argue against them. Also we look briefly at what Lorne Falkenstein has highlighted as the problems concerning the questions of normativity and natural belief. I show that there are good arguments on both sides and that the discussion of natural beliefs within the New Hume Debate has essentially reached a stalemate.

In Chapter Two we look critically at the issue of a realist interpretation of causation as put forth by Kemp Smith and its more recent champion, Galen Strawson. We also look critically at the counterarguments of Martin Bell, Kenneth P. Winkler, and Simon Blackburn. Similarly, I show that this area of the debate has also reached a stalemate.

Chapter Three is a closer look at themes that have appeared in the first two chapters, notably the topics of relative ideas of the external world and projectivism. Here we critically examine the arguments put forth mainly by Galen Strawson for the existence of relative ideas, and the arguments against, put forth by Daniel Flage. Afterwards, we

look critically at the argument concerning a projectivist interpretation of Hume put forth by Simon Blackburn, Barry Stroud, and P.J.E. Kail. I show that these arguments are also not conclusive.

In Chapter Four we look at the issue surrounding the priority of the Hume texts. As will become evident in the first three chapters, a large part of the New Humean argument centres upon elevating the *Enquiry* over the *Treatise*. I show that this is done mostly through avoiding the background context of many of Hume's private correspondence. I conclude that there is good reason to continue to view the *Treatise* as Hume's major work, where the *Enquiry* should be seen as a vital companion piece to the *Treatise*, not its replacement.

In Chapter Five we examine the overlooked aspect of Hume's natural belief in dreams. I show that Hume has a very unique theory of dreams, and one that does not support the New Humean interpretation. The analysis of dreams in Hume's empiricism leaves the New Humeans in the absurd position of having to grant the existence of an external world of objects in causal relation in our dreams.

In the Conclusion I provide a final analysis and deal with anticipated objections.

## Chapter One

### Natural Beliefs

Much of the argument for a sceptical/causal realist interpretation of Hume rests upon interpreting the role of *natural beliefs* within his empiricism. According to Kenneth A. Richman in his Introduction to *The New Hume Debate*:

A puzzle in the interpretation of Hume, perhaps the main puzzle, is the fact that Hume appears to do the following: (a) endorse beliefs in objects and causes, (b) hold that we should not endorse beliefs that do not have appropriate grounding in our impressions (as described in the theory of ideas), and (c) hold that the beliefs in objects and causes do not have the grounding in our impressions. Defenders of the old reading of Hume reject or qualify (a), arguing either that Hume does not endorse these beliefs, or that he endorses them in a way that does not commit him to the truths of the beliefs . . . . New Humeans accept (a), and either reject or modify (b) or (c).<sup>1</sup>

The beliefs in question are referred to as “natural belief[s]” by Norman Kemp Smith<sup>2</sup>—the classic source of the “Old Humeans”—who argues that Hume provides a naturalistic foundation for our beliefs in causation and the existence of an external world<sup>3</sup> that puts them “beyond the reach of our sceptical doubts,”<sup>4</sup> which he deems to have been arrived at

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth A. Richman, “Debating the New Hume” in *The New Hume Debate*, revised edition, eds. Kenneth A. Richman and Rupert Read (London: Routledge, 2007), 3.

<sup>2</sup> The term “natural belief” first appears in the Hume literature in Norman Kemp Smith’s “The Naturalism of Hume (I.,” *Mind*, 14, 54 (April 1905): 149-73, 151. Kemp Smith continues his argument in “The Naturalism of Hume (II.,” *Mind*, 14, 55 (July 1905): 335-47. However he slightly modifies his argument in *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines*, reprint (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 1941/2005). Because the latter work is generally considered Kemp Smith’s complete treatment of Hume, I will be referring to this work primarily for Kemp Smith’s analysis while only acknowledging the two earlier papers when it seems more appropriate to do so.

<sup>3</sup> Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines*, 127.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.* 87.

through the analysis of ideas. To back up this claim Kemp Smith emphasizes a much-quoted passage in the *Treatise*:

Thus the sceptic still continues to reason and believe, even tho' he asserts, that he cannot defend his reason by reason; and by the same rule he 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. (T 1.4.2.1)<sup>5</sup>

Because "Nature has not left this to his choice," Hume concludes that "'tis in vain to ask, *Whether there be body or not?*" However, how one is to fully interpret this passage (and others like it) is essential to the debate regarding Hume's ontology. Consider, for example, the following passage that Richman alerts us to:<sup>6</sup>

There is a great difference betwixt such opinions as we form after a calm and profound reflection, and such as we embrace by a kind of instinct or natural impulse, on account of their suitableness and conformity to the mind. If these opinions become contrary, 'tis not difficult to foresee which of them will have the advantage. 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. Nay she has sometimes such an influence, that she can stop our progress, even in the midst of our most profound reflections, and keep us from running on with all the consequences of any philosophical opinion. (T 1.4.2.51)

From quotations such as these, one can see how there could be a strong justification for the Kemp Smith interpretation that champions natural beliefs in Hume's empiricism. It

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<sup>5</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, reprinted with corrections, eds. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005). Hereafter T. Parenthetical references show book, part, section, and paragraph numbers.

<sup>6</sup> Kenneth A. Richman, "Debating the New Hume," 7.

also helps to explain the powerful influence Kemp Smith has had on Hume scholarship since the appearance of his seminal 1905 papers<sup>7</sup> regarding Hume's naturalism. Not many today read Hume in the way Thomas Hill Green did in the 19<sup>th</sup> century—"Hume is as much a Berkeleian as Berkeley himself,"<sup>8</sup>—although one can also see how Green could arrive at this interpretation. For example, when Hume claims that, "perceptions are our only objects," (T 1.4.2.50) and "nothing is ever present to the mind but perceptions," (T 1.2.6.8) or in the quotation Green himself highlights: "properly speaking, 'tis not our body we perceive, when we regard our limbs and members, but certain impressions, which enter by the senses," (T 1.4.2.9)<sup>9</sup> one can be forgiven for thinking Hume was a "Berkeleian." Critically, as Kemp Smith states, "Green, in ignoring this new doctrine of [natural] belief . . . misrepresents both the spirit and the letter of Hume's *Treatise*."<sup>10</sup> But although Green *may* misrepresent the *Treatise* to the extent that Kemp Smith claims, Green's omission of any discussion of beliefs grounded within some form of naturalism poses a serious limitation to his overall interpretation of Hume. This is because, as Kemp Smith notes, later in the first *Enquiry* Hume provides frequent statements that claim the existence of causation in an external world outside of our perceptions of it. Consider, for example, the following passages from the *Enquiry*:

[W]e may discover the reason why no philosopher, who is rational and modest, has ever pretended to assign the ultimate cause of any natural operation, or to show distinctly the action of that power, which produces any

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<sup>7</sup> See footnote 2.

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Hill Green, "General Introduction," *David Hume: The Philosophical Works*, eds. Thomas Hill Green and Thomas Hodge Grose, Vol 1 of 4, reprint of the London edition (Germany: Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1886/1964), 163.

<sup>9</sup> It should be mentioned here that Hume has a specific definition for the word "impression." In a footnote to the *Treatise* Hume states: "By the term of *impression* I wou'd not be understood to express the manner, in which our lively perceptions are produc'd in the soul, but merely the perceptions themselves; for which there is no particular name either in the *English* or any other language, that I know of." (T 1.1.1.1n2)

<sup>10</sup> Norman Kemp Smith, "The Naturalism of Hume (I.)," *Mind*, 14, 54 (April 1905): 149-73, 151.

single effect in the universe. It is confessed, that the utmost effort of human reason is to reduce the principles, productive of natural phenomena, to a greater simplicity, and to resolve the many particular effects into a few general causes, by means of reasonings from analogy, experience, and observation. But as to the causes of these general causes, we should in vain attempt their discovery; nor shall we ever be able to satisfy ourselves, by any particular explication of them. These ultimate springs and principles are totally shut up from human curiosity and enquiry. Elasticity, gravity, cohesion of parts, communication of motion by impulse; these are probably the ultimate causes and principles which we shall ever discover in nature; and we may esteem ourselves sufficiently happy, if, by accurate enquiry and reasoning, we can trace up the particular phenomena to, or near to, these general principles. The most perfect philosophy of the natural kind only staves off our ignorance a little longer: as perhaps the most perfect philosophy of the moral or metaphysical kind serves only to discover larger portions of it. Thus the observation of human blindness and weakness is the result of all philosophy, and meets us at every turn, in spite of our endeavours to elude or avoid it. (E 4.12.27–28)<sup>11</sup>

Similarly:

It must certainly be allowed, that nature has kept us at a great distance from all her secrets, and has afforded us only the knowledge of a few superficial qualities of objects; while she conceals from us those powers and principles on which the influence of those objects entirely depends. Our senses inform us of the colour, weight, and consistence of bread; but neither sense nor reason can ever inform us of those qualities which fit it for the nourishment and support of a human body. (E 4.16.29)

So it seems no surprise that Hume states that, “In reality, all arguments from experience are founded on the similarity which we discover among natural objects,” (E 4.20.31) and that “Nature will always maintain her rights, and prevail in the end over any abstract reasoning whatsoever,” (E 5.2.36) for, in the *Enquiry* at least, Hume’s empiricism assumes our existence in an external world of objects in causal relation even though we have no perceptions of this external world.

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<sup>11</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Critical Edition, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000). Parenthetical references show section, paragraph and page numbers.

Since, according to Hume’s theory of ideas, “All the perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into two distinct kinds, which I shall call IMPRESSIONS and IDEAS,” (T 1.1.1.1) and as we saw above, “perceptions are our only objects,” (T 1.4.2.50) and “nothing is ever present to the mind but perceptions,” (T 1.2.6.8), our awareness of an external world lies outside of our perceptions. It must be an instinctual awareness, or “natural belief” in an external world and causation even though nature’s “ultimate springs and principles are totally shut up from human curiosity and enquiry.” (E 4.12.27) At least this is the core argument from Kemp Smith and later sceptical/causal realists.

One strategy, however, that we immediately notice from Kemp Smith (and one that is followed by the later sceptical/causal realists) is that he relies rather heavily on the *Enquiry* to inform us about the *Treatise*. As will become evident, particularly in the next chapter on causation, this tactic is combined with using passages from Hume’s letters—mostly his business correspondence—to also argue for the case of our natural beliefs acting as an ontological window to nature outside of our perception. At this point, I will refrain from any judgement of this practice until Chapter Four. For now, I believe it is safe to say that without the *Enquiry* or the existence of certain Hume letters it is doubtful the debate today regarding Hume’s ontology would have the same amount of fervour. Nevertheless the passage at (T 1.4.2.1) from the *Treatise* itself, plus a brief quotation from Hume’s Introduction to the *Treatise*, gives credence to some sort of naturalism within Hume’s empiricism:

’Tis evident, that all the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature; and that however wide any of them may seem to run from it, they still return back by one passage or another. Even Mathematics, Natural

Philosophy, and Natural Religion, are in some measure dependent on the science of Man; since they lie under the cognizance of men, and are judged of by their powers and faculties . . . And as the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences, so the only solid foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observation . . . 'tis still certain we cannot go beyond experience; and any hypothesis, that pretends to discover the ultimate original qualities of human nature, ought at first to be rejected as presumptuous and chimerical . . . But if this impossibility of explaining ultimate principles should be esteemed a defect in the science of man, I will venture to affirm, that 'tis a defect common to it with all the sciences, and all the arts, in which we can employ ourselves, whether they be such as are cultivated in the schools of the philosophers, or practised in the shops of the meanest artizans. None of them can go beyond experience, or establish any principles which are not founded on that authority. Moral philosophy has, indeed, this peculiar disadvantage, which is not found in natural, that in collecting its experiments, it cannot make them purposely, with premeditation, and after such a manner as to satisfy itself concerning every particular difficulty which may arise. When I am at a loss to know the effects of one body upon another in any situation, I need only put them in that situation, and observe what results from it. But should I endeavour to clear up after the same manner any doubt in moral philosophy, by placing myself in the same case with that which I consider, 'tis evident this reflection and premeditation would so disturb the operation of my natural principles, as must render it impossible to form any just conclusion from the phænomenon. We must therefore glean up our experiments in this science from a cautious observation of human life, and take them as they appear in the common course of the world, by men's behaviour in company, in affairs, and in their pleasures. Where experiments of this kind are judiciously collected and compared, we may hope to establish on them a science, which will not be inferior in certainty, and will be much superior in utility to any other of human comprehension. (T Intro.4–10)

For Hume, his stated purpose in the *Treatise* is a project that, although cannot “discover the ultimate original qualities of human nature”—a problem which affects “all the sciences”—nevertheless endeavours to develop a “science of Man” that will conform to “natural principles.” And with regard to acknowledged metaphysical handicaps, he hopes that if “we must for ever be a prey to errors and delusions, that they shall at least be natural and entertaining.” (T Intro.3) This appeal to what is *natural* about the operations of the mind is found throughout the *Treatise*. For example, regarding the association of

ideas, Hume believes that “it will not be very necessary to prove, that these qualities produce an association among ideas, and upon the appearance of one idea naturally introduce another.” (T 1.1.4.2) And, “Here is all the Logic I think proper to employ in my reasoning; and perhaps even this was not very necessary, but might have been supply’d by the natural principles of our understanding.” (T 1.3.15.11) Consequently there is strong textual evidence for Hume having some form of naturalism within his empiricism.

The first question regarding Hume’s natural beliefs is how to make them cohere with what appears to be a devastating attack on what causes our belief in an external world (and causation).<sup>12</sup> As we have seen, Hume already appears to acknowledge the existence of an external world through the fact that we have no choice but to naturally believe in one. (T 1.4.2.1) So instead of questioning *if* there is an external world, he asks what causes us to believe in one. In his well-known argument, outlined in the section of the *Treatise* entitled “Of scepticism with regard to the senses,” (T 1.4.2.1–57) Hume states that the belief in an external world is based upon two “intimately connected” (T 1.4.2.2) suppositions: that there is “a continu’d existence to objects, even when they are not present to the senses,” and that objects “have an existence distinct from the mind and perception.” (T 1.4.2.2) Since it must be either the “*senses, reason, or the imagination*” (T 1.4.2.2) which causes these suppositions, Hume analyzes each in turn and finds that there is no philosophical justification for them and, consequently, no philosophical justification for the belief in an external world.

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<sup>12</sup> In this chapter I will focus mainly on the natural belief in the external world. Since the natural belief in causation also involves issues arising from alleged causal powers and necessary connections between cause and effect, I will leave the discussion of causation until Chapter Two.

First, Hume shows that the senses “give us no notion of continu’d existence, because they cannot operate beyond the extent, in which they really operate.” (T 1.4.2.11) In other words, our senses merely provide us with perceptions, which in themselves do not and cannot contain any content that shows them to be the representations of objects outside of the perceptions. (T 1.4.2.3–11)

Second, the imagination *does* give rise to the belief but it is only through *imagining* an insensible existence to explain the observed constancy and coherence of certain impressions:

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 as individually the same, upon account of their resemblance. 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 the propensity, which they give us, to suppose them the same; and according to the precedent reasoning, the very essence of belief consists in the force and vivacity of the conception. (T 1.4.2.24)

However, this fiction of a continued existence of perceptions violates the principle of identity. This means that reason can never be involved in the causes of the belief. It is “a false opinion 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,” and so this fictional belief “must arise from the imagination.” (T 1.4.2.43) Hume claims

that his analysis shows that the belief in an external world is based in a fiction created by the imagination regarding “a continu’d existence to objects, even when they are not present to the senses,” and that objects “have an existence distinct from the mind and perception.” (T 1.4.2.2)

So neither the senses, reason, nor the imagination can *philosophically* justify the belief in an external world. The idea of an external world is, therefore, a *fiction*. “’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.” (T 1.4.2.43) In other words, the belief in an external world is at root, merely a vulgar belief. However Hume recognizes that reasoning out the fiction-based cause of the vulgar belief does not make it go away:

[A] little reflection destroys this conclusion, that our perceptions have a continu’d existence, by shewing that they have a dependent one, [so that] ’twou’d naturally be expected, that we must altogether reject the opinion, that there is such a thing in nature as a continu’d existence, which is preserv’d even when it no longer appears to the senses. The case, however, is otherwise. Philosophers are so far from rejecting the opinion of a continu’d existence upon rejecting that of the independence and continuance of our sensible perceptions, that tho’ all sects agree in the latter sentiment, the former, which is, in a manner, its necessary consequence, has been peculiar to a few extravagant sceptics; who after all maintain’d that opinion in words only, and were never able to bring themselves sincerely to believe it. (T 1.4.2.50)

Although all philosophers agree that reason points to a radical ontology of perceptions with their own individualistic existence, only “a few extravagant sceptics”—that is, Berkeley et. al., “maintain’d that opinion in words only, and were never able to bring themselves sincerely to believe it.” We feel compelled to live the lie of the natural belief. What subsequently results from this tension is the philosopher’s compromise:

But tho' our natural and obvious principles here prevail above our study'd reflections, 'tis certain there must be some struggle and opposition in the case; at least so long as these reflections retain any force or vivacity. In order to set ourselves at ease in this particular, we contrive a new hypothesis, which seems to comprehend both these principles of reason and imagination. This hypothesis is the philosophical one of the double existence of perceptions and objects; which pleases our reason, in allowing, that our dependent perceptions are interrupted and different; and at the same time is agreeable to the imagination, in attributing a continu'd existence to something else, which we call objects. This philosophical system, therefore, is the monstrous offspring of two principles, which are contrary to each other, which are both at once embrac'd by the mind, and which are unable mutually to destroy each other. The imagination tells us, that our resembling perceptions have a continu'd and uninterrupted existence, and are not annihilated by their absence. Reflection tells us, that even our resembling perceptions are interrupted in their existence, and different from each other. The contradiction betwixt these opinions we elude by a new fiction, which is conformable to the hypotheses both of reflection and fancy, by ascribing these contrary qualities to different existences; the interruption to perceptions, and the continuance to objects. Nature is obstinate, and will not quit the field, however strongly attack'd by reason; and at the same time reason is so clear in the point, that there is no possibility of disguising her. Not being able to reconcile these two enemies, we endeavour to set ourselves at ease as much as possible, by successively granting to each whatever it demands, and by feigning a double existence, where each may find something, that has all the conditions it desires. (T 1.4.2.52)

Therefore modern philosophers create the “hypothesis . . . of the double existence of perceptions and objects.” They have no choice because “Nature is obstinate, and will not quit the field, however strongly attack'd by reason.” This “hypothesis” allows them somehow to keep what are still two contradictory notions in their minds by “successively granting to each whatever it demands.” Importantly, the fiction of “double existence” allows us to be “at ease” between both our vulgar and idealistic notions, but only at a cost that it both “denies and establishes the vulgar supposition” in an external world.

The main question then, is how are we to interpret this argument? As we see, we can either view Hume as stating (1) that according to reason, we have no grounds for

accepting a belief in anything other than that our “dependent perceptions are interrupted and different.” Or, (2) that because we are forced by nature to believe in an external world, we should accept that belief if only to keep us “at ease”? Or (3) should we try to believe in a compromise of both (1) and (2) through what we know is a fiction (double-existence) since there doesn’t seem to be any alternative? As we see, Hume essentially rejects all three possibilities: (1) is simply not possible because of our nature to think otherwise, (2) is to ignore what reason tells us, and (3) is to find a solution only by creating an illusion we find on reflection is not really true.

This dilemma is combined with Hume’s equally famous argument against reason in the section entitled “Of scepticism with regard to reason” (T 1.4.1.1–12) whereby all our knowledge is downgraded to levels of probability:

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. (T 1.4.1.1)

Because reason shows itself sometimes to be unreliable, we need to form new rational judgements as a corrective measure in order to prevent future mistakes; but since it is reason itself which forms these new safety measures, there is no assurance that these new judgements are any less fallible than our previous ones. From all which Hume concludes,

“‘Tis happy, therefore, that nature breaks the force of all sceptical arguments in time, and keeps them from having any considerable influence on the understanding. Were we to trust entirely to their self-destruction, that can never take place, ’till they have first subverted all conviction, and have totally destroy’d human reason.” (T 1.4.1.12)

Noticeably Hume appeals to the force of natural belief to break the scepticism that reason leads us into. “Our reason must be consider’d as a kind of cause, of which truth is the natural effect.” (T 1.4.1.1) Consequently the conclusion from reason that reason itself is unreliable leads to a *natural truth* about reason and truth. The fact that Hume says truth is a “natural effect” of reason once again makes his overall meaning ambiguous. Does he mean that reason is surpassed by nature, which in turn is the cause of truth? Or does he mean that because we are forced by nature to believe that reason can be trusted—although reason shows itself to be untrustworthy—that this natural belief is not to be considered anything more than just our need to remain “happy”?

The problem inherent within the New Hume Debate is that there are good arguments on both sides to view Hume as either putting forth natural beliefs as some sort of an epistemological and ontological rescue from scepticism, of seeing that scepticism in the end is the unavoidable outcome with nature acting merely as a force that allows us to function within this uncompromising scepticism by allowing us to forget what reason tells us about reality.

Kemp Smith’s interpretation is that Hume views human nature as intrinsically linked with basic animal nature.<sup>13</sup> This is partially backed up by the following passage:

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<sup>13</sup> Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines*, 129.

It seems evident, that men are carried, by a natural instinct or prepossession, to repose faith in their senses; and that, without any reasoning, or even almost before the use of reason, 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. Even the animal creation are governed by a like opinion, and preserve this belief of external objects, in all their thoughts, designs, and actions. (E 12.7.113)

Although Kemp Smith's use of this passage omits the opening remarks about reason's ability to counter this original supposition,<sup>14</sup> he claims that it is not just here, but also and indeed primarily within the opening sections of the *Treatise*, that Hume considers "man chiefly in his kinship with the animals, and has insisted that no account of any fundamental activity of the human mind can be accepted which is not also applicable in the explanation of animal behaviour."<sup>15</sup> Thus basic explanations for how we experience the world through sensation and form beliefs about it are essentially the same as those that describe how animals experience the world. It is only when Hume considers the difference with regard to reasoning that exists between humans and animals that "the sceptical aspects of his teaching gain prominence."<sup>16</sup> "Man, [Hume] insists, while a creature of Nature, is yet a being in whom reflexion plays so large a part, and operates so extensively in the formation of *artificial* beliefs [i.e., the non-natural kind], that nothing short of the dispassionate questionings of a sceptical philosophy can avail to keep him in wholesome conformity with Nature's ends."<sup>17</sup>

Human beings are primarily animals who only manage to avoid being within "wholesome conformity with Nature's ends" by applying an equally natural impulse to

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<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 129. The chapter where Kemp Smith makes this claim he entitles "Preliminary Outline Statement Of Hume's Teaching, As Expounded in Parts i, iii And iv Of Book I Of The *Treatise*," 105.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 130.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

reflect on knowledge. However reason shows this knowledge to comprise of only “*artificial* beliefs.” “Hume teaches, man like the other animals, is primarily an active, and only secondarily (however notably) a reflective being, he is a *believing* animal, and in consequence of this also a *credulous* animal.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore when Hume states that, “belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures,” (T 1.4.1.8) Kemp Smith takes this to be “Hume’s main thesis.”<sup>19</sup>

With regard to the above, Kemp Smith raises a pivotal question: “Is not belief itself a passion?”<sup>20</sup> This is important because we already know that Hume considers reason to play a secondary role to the passions. In his famous quote he states, “Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions.” (T 2.3.3.4) However, as Don Garrett points out, Kemp Smith is a bit liberal with his claim that Humean beliefs are passions: “Hume makes this statement [T 2.3.3.4] as the conclusion of an argument concerning the relation between reason and the passions in motivating action—the section in which it occurs is entitled “Of the influencing motives of the will”—but Kemp Smith reads the claim more broadly, stretching Hume’s term ‘passions’ to encompass sentiments and feelings of all kinds.”<sup>21</sup>

By doing so Kemp Smith modifies Hume’s statement at T 2.3.3.4 to read, “reason is, and ought to be, ‘the slave’ of the *natural beliefs* and of the passions.” (my italics)<sup>22</sup> His justification for this is that Hume claims that, “Where reason is lively, and mixes

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<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* 546.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 130.

<sup>21</sup> Don Garrett, “Introduction,” to Norman Kemp Smith’s, *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines*, xxxi.

<sup>22</sup> Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines*, 131.

itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate upon us.” (T 1.4.7.11) Additionally:

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. (T 1.4.7.14)

Since Hume insists that reason be “lively” and that, with Kemp Smith’s inclusion, this lively reason “mixes itself with some [natural] propensity,” it sounds as if Hume is making *natural feeling* the all-encompassing aspect of human nature that therefore necessitates conclusions of reason themselves to *feel* right in order to be acknowledged as “satisfactory.” Moreover, Hume equates the need for both “steady principles” and “sentiments” within that “set of opinions” we can assent to. In other words, both reasoned principles and impassioned sentiments are required for the “system” that “might stand the test of the most critical examination.”

From this line of thought, Kemp Smith advocates what David Fate Norton calls “the subordination thesis.”<sup>23</sup> According to Kemp Smith:

In the difficulties and complexities of man’s life, irrevocably natural, and yet in such large part also conventional, he stands in need of a twofold philosophical discipline—a sceptical discipline to open his eyes to the deceptiveness of the mistaken endeavours, both moral and speculative, into which his specifically human powers are ever tending to betray him, and a positive naturalistic philosophy to mark out the paths upon which he can confidently travel without any such attempted violation of his human

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<sup>23</sup> David Fate Norton, *David Hume: Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1982), 209.

nature, and in the furtherance of its essential needs. In this twofold task it is Nature, through the beliefs to which it gives rise, which acts as arbiter. It defines the conditions of health, and the regimen suitable for its maintenance. Scepticism serves as an ally, but in due subordination, not as an equal.<sup>24</sup>

Consequently, the sceptical conclusions Hume reaches in the *Treatise* are only to be viewed as the result of what happens when reason acts alone in its analysis of itself. Reason has a tendency to “betray” us when it does not have the arbitrating powers of natural beliefs to “confidently travel without any such attempted violation of his human nature, and in the furtherance of its essential needs.” Reasoning is still a necessary process, but only as a junior “ally” to natural belief. Kemp Smith rejects the interpretation of Hume being a Pyrrhonian sceptic out to destroy reason by emphasizing Hume’s passage in the *Enquiry* criticizing such extreme scepticism: “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. They endeavour to find objections, both to our abstract reasonings, and to those which regard matter of fact and existence.” (E 12.17.116)<sup>25</sup> For Kemp Smith then, Hume’s postulation of a “mitigated scepticism” in the *Enquiry* (E 12.24.120) is his answer to the debilitating scepticism of Pyrrhonism. Mitigated scepticism is to be viewed as allowing Nature to act so as to avoid extreme scepticism and allow reason to play its role to avoid extreme beliefs. According to Hume:

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

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<sup>24</sup> Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines*, 131–2.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 132. Kemp Smith does not use the full quotation that I show here.

has rendered too familiar to it. A correct Judgement 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 embellishment of poets and orators, or to the arts of priests and politicians. To bring us to so salutary a determination, 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. (E 12.25.120–1)

Accordingly, reason can adjust our enquiries away from the “sublime topics” of “poets” and “priests,” while the natural belief or “instinct” can steer reasoning away from the “Pyrrhonian doubt” and allow reason to focus on the “reflections of common life” so that these naturally believed “reflections” of the external world can be “methodized and corrected.” Nature and reason work together but, as Kemp Smith interprets it, never as equals. Nature in the end is paramount due to our most basic commonality with all other animal life. So the natural beliefs act “as balancing factors in a complex mechanism—the mechanism through which Nature has provided for the needs of *animal* consciousness, and for the ‘reasoning’ processes required in the special, more complicated conditions of *human* existence.”<sup>26</sup>

However, Norton criticizes Kemp Smith’s “subordination thesis” for the way it relates reasoning and belief. Recall how Hume modifies his theory of belief in the *Treatise*: “In the early stages of the *Treatise* (T 1.3.7.1–6), Hume . . . defines belief as “A lively idea related to or associated with a present impression” . . . [However, later in the

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<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 543.

Appendix Hume] modified it by emphasizing the affective character of the perception.”<sup>27</sup>

Let’s look at Hume’s theory of belief more closely:

As mentioned, Hume’s early analysis of belief is that it is “A lively idea related to or associated with a present impression”:

All the perceptions of the mind are of two kinds, viz. impressions and ideas, which differ from each other only in their different degrees of force and vivacity. Our ideas are copy’d from our impressions, and represent them in all their parts. When you wou’d any way vary the idea of a particular object, you can only encrease or diminish its force and vivacity. If you make any other change on it, it represents a different object or impression. The case is the same as in colours. A particular shade of any colour may acquire a new degree of liveliness or brightness without any other variation. But when you produce any other variation, ’tis no longer the same shade or colour. So that as belief does nothing but vary the manner, in which we conceive any object, it can only bestow on our ideas an additional force and vivacity. An opinion, therefore, or belief may be most accurately defin’d, A lively idea related to or associated with a present impression. (T 1.3.7.5)

However Hume later shows his dissatisfaction with this early definition:

This operation of the mind, which forms the belief of any matter of fact, seems hitherto to have been one of the greatest mysteries of philosophy: tho’ no one has so much as suspected, that there was any difficulty in explaining it. For my part I must own, that I find a considerable difficulty in the case; and that even when I think I understand the subject perfectly, I am at a loss for terms to express my meaning. I conclude, by an induction which seems to me very evident, that an opinion or belief is nothing but an idea, that is different from a fiction, not in the nature, or the order of its parts, but in the manner of its being conceiv’d. But when I wou’d explain this manner, I scarce find any word that fully answers the case, but am oblig’d to have recourse to every one’s feeling, in order to give him a perfect notion of this operation of the mind. 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 firmness, or steadiness. (T 1.3.7.7.App)

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<sup>27</sup> David Fate Norton, *David Hume: Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician*, 212n34.

Consequently Hume changes his original description of belief to that of merely an idea with a “superior force, or vivacity, or solidity, or firmness, or steadiness.” As Norton reminds us, within the Appendix Hume does associate belief with the sentiments whereby “belief consists merely in a certain feeling or sentiment” (T App.2).<sup>28</sup> However there is room for criticism of how Kemp Smith relates reason to belief as sentiments and feelings, particularly natural beliefs. Hume asks how, if reason dissolves into mere levels of probability, are we able to make judgements? His response is:

I feel a stronger and more forcible conception on the one side, than on the other. This strong conception forms my first decision. I suppose, that afterwards I examine my judgment itself, and observing from experience, that 'tis sometimes just and sometimes erroneous, I consider it as regulated by contrary principles or causes, of which some lead to truth, and some to error; and in ballancing these contrary causes, I diminish by a new probability the assurance of my first decision. This new probability is liable to the same diminution as the foregoing, and so on, in infinitum. 'Tis therefore demanded, how it happens, that even after all we retain a degree of belief, which is sufficient for our purpose, either in philosophy or common life. (T 1.4.1.9)

So all judgements from reason are based on levels of belief. Yet these beliefs themselves can be subverted by further reflection, and so on. Here is the answer Hume provides to the question he poses above, whereby “how it happens, that even after all we retain a degree of belief, which is sufficient for our purpose, either in philosophy or common life”?

I answer, that after the first and second decision; 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 the 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

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<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* 212n34.

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 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. (T 1.4.1.10)

Because of the uneasiness of the dilemma we face with regard to making judgements, in the end it is ultimately a matter of how they “feel.” As Hume says, “Belief, being a lively conception, can never be entire, where it is not founded on something natural and easy.” (T 1.4.1.11) In other words, it is the “easiness and facility” of certain beliefs that allows them to retain a foothold on us even though we can further undermine them. As we have already seen, this “easiness and facility” is also the explanation as to why we have natural beliefs in the first place. However the *normal* beliefs and the judgments we make regarding probable outcomes require more than just a feeling of “easiness.” According to Hume: “I wou'd willingly establish it as a general maxim in the science of human nature, *that when any impression becomes present to us, it not only transports the mind to such ideas as are related to it, but likewise communicates to them a share of its force and vivacity.*” (T 1.3.8.2)<sup>29</sup> As we recall, there are essentially three ways all perceptions interrelate with one another, “*viz. RESEMBLANCE, CONTIGUITY in time or place, and CAUSE and EFFECT.*” (T 1.1.4.1) From this Hume claims that, “all belief arises from the association of ideas.” (T 1.3.9.10) This answer regarding levels of vivacity being transmitted through the association of ideas is also Hume’s answer for how we make probable judgements as well. As Hume states in his analysis of belief: “all probable reasoning is nothing but a species of sensation.” (T 1.3.8.12) So both beliefs

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<sup>29</sup> Hume also allows for ideas to have this ability (T 1.3.8.15).

and probable reasoning are in the end determined by an idea that has had its level of vivacity increased through the association of ideas. In short, then, Hume's account for our normal beliefs is arrived at and (somewhat) explained through the theory of ideas.

However, according to Norton, one problem that Kemp Smith has when relating reason to belief is that he conflates two different descriptions of Humean reason when he applies it to his "subordination thesis":

"[W]e must recognize a . . . Humean distinction between what might be termed *reflexive* reasoning on the one hand, and *reflective* reasoning on the other. Our inferences from causes to effects are, on Hume's analysis, examples of reflexive reasoning. They are, as he says, immediate and instinctive, or as we might say, involuntary or unwilled. In contrast, reflective reasoning is characterized by deliberation or voluntary, wilful activity, or as Hume says, by an "effort of thought." In comparison to the automatic or natural character of reflexive reasoning, reflective reasoning is "forc'd and unnatural."<sup>30</sup>

Norton's argument is that by conflating these two types of reasoning Kemp Smith misses the fact that Hume thought *reflective* reasoning was able to "correct and overturn our natural propensities or sentiments,"<sup>31</sup> that is, our natural beliefs. However in attacking the "subordination thesis," Norton chooses to use Barry Stroud's version of it rather than Kemp Smith's. Before launching into what he believes will "show that Hume not only believed that humans are capable of such reflective reasoning, but also, contra those holding the subordination thesis, that he believed that this form of reasoning is both evaluative and effective,"<sup>32</sup> Norton adds in a footnote:

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<sup>30</sup> David Fate Norton, *David Hume: Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician*, 209. Norton does not provide references for his Hume quotes however "forc'd and unnatural" (as we have already seen) seems to appear only at T 1.4.1.10, however the phrase "effort of thought" is used by Hume several times in the *Treatise*.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 210.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 209.

A reminder of the subordination thesis is perhaps in order here. A recent and unequivocal version of it is Stroud's claim that "in Hume's hands the denigration of the role of reason and the corresponding elevation of feeling and sentiment is generalized into a total theory of man. Even in the apparently most intellectual or cognitive spheres of human life, even in our empirical judgements about the world and in the process of pure ratiocination itself, feeling is shown to be the dominant force." To which is added the remark cited in the Introduction, namely, that Hume's negative arguments "show that reason, as traditionally understood, has no role in human life."<sup>33</sup>

However Miriam McCormick more accurately describes Kemp Smith as being "concerned mainly with defending Hume against allegations that he was an extreme sceptic. [Because] He regarded Hume's doctrine of natural belief as his defence against scepticism."<sup>34</sup> And this is borne out by Kemp Smith's own understanding of the "subordination thesis" where he states that, "Scepticism serves as an ally, but in due subordination, not as an equal. For, as Hume has pointed out in the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, it is only in an excessive scepticism of the Pyrrhonian type that the extravagant attempt is made "to destroy reason by argument and ratiocination."<sup>35</sup> The functions of reason fail to be defined in some positive manner, in accordance with the facts of human experience."<sup>36</sup>

Consequently, even if Norton's attack on the subordination thesis is correct in outlining Kemp Smith's conflating of different types of Humean reason, it also overreaches to critique a more severe subordination thesis than the one Kemp Smith in fact held. It therefore becomes difficult to know how one should treat Kemp Smith's

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 210n31. See also Barry Stroud, *Hume* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 10–11, 14.

<sup>34</sup> Miriam McCormick, "Hume on Natural Belief and Original Principles," in *Hume Studies* XIX.1 (April 1993), 112. Although to be fair, natural belief is not "Hume's doctrine" but Kemp Smith's interpretation of Hume's doctrine.

<sup>35</sup> E 12.17.116

<sup>36</sup> Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines*, 132.

analysis of reason and belief. One particular area of contention was that, as we saw above, Kemp Smith chooses to include beliefs with other feelings, including passions and sentiments within Hume's empiricism. As Norton claims, "I have not thought to challenge the claims that belief for Hume is a feeling or sentiment, or that he supposed that there are natural beliefs in the sense specified. I have accepted these views as adequately grounded in Hume's text. The subordination thesis is mistaken not because of what it says about natural beliefs per se, but because of what it says about reason and its relation to natural belief."<sup>37</sup> Additionally, as we have seen above, Hume does say that, "belief consists merely in a certain feeling or sentiment." (T App.2) However Garrett's critique as to whether this should broadly include "passions" must also be taken into account. Hume seems to prefer to use the word 'passions' to describe specific impressions and ideas of pride, fear, etc. However for Kemp Smith, it was because of "Hume, in entering into his philosophy by the gateway of morals, and in the process of formulating a theory of the passions and therefore of sympathy, was led in due course to attempt to work out an analogous view of belief."<sup>38</sup> (This argument, of course, necessitating that the discussion of the passions in book two of the *Treatise* was written before the analysis of belief in book one was written). In other words, since the indirect passions are instinctual and necessitated upon a belief in an external world of objects in which one can be instinctually passionate about, according to Kemp Smith, the natural beliefs of that external world must also be, like the indirect passions, instinctual feelings. Furthermore Kemp Smith believes Hume was so committed to showing that these instinctual experiences are immediate, interrelated, and necessary for all other

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<sup>37</sup> David Fate Norton, *David Hume: Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician*, 210n34.

<sup>38</sup> Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines*, 110.

experience, that although in books one and two of the *Treatise* Hume tried to explain “the supposed origins of the natural beliefs” and with “still greater elaboration” tried to show “his corresponding account of the mechanisms upon which the indirect passions are declared to rest,” by the time he writes the *Enquiry* these attempts to explain the mechanisms are abandoned: “[T]hat Hume, soon after the publication of the *Treatise*, came to be more than doubtful as to the cogency and value of these methods of explanation [regarding natural beliefs and indirect passions] we have evidence in the omission of any mention of them in the *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*.”<sup>39</sup> However there is much assumed here by Kemp Smith with regard to the differences that exist between the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*. Evidently, Kemp Smith’s view (one that is shared by all who advocate the New Humean view) is that the *Enquiry* is the more mature work and was written because Hume wanted to put forth a more advanced analysis. This controversial outlook on the ranking of Hume’s works will be dealt with in Chapter Four. Needless to say, it allows Kemp Smith to make the following claim with regard to natural beliefs: “As a result of this change of [Hume’s] view, the natural beliefs are no longer taken as being explicable in terms of processes and propensities more ultimate than themselves. Instead they are accepted as being *for us* ultimate: operating in the manner of the indirect passions, they have the *de facto* prescriptive rights which Nature, in thus predetermining us to them, has conferred upon them.”<sup>40</sup>

Consequently natural beliefs are *instinctual* beliefs. This aspect of natural beliefs is crucial to New Humeans for, as Kemp Smith wishes to show, natural beliefs, being

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<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 125.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 125.

instinctual feelings, bypass the regular acquisition of beliefs as feelings that can, as we saw above, be accounted for by Hume's theory of ideas.

Yet according to Richman's interpretation, natural beliefs *are* explainable within Hume's empiricism.<sup>41</sup> As we see from Hume's analysis above, he examines all three explanations for a belief in the external world (the vulgar, the rational—which leads to a radical Idealism, and the modern philosophical *solution* of double-existence), from which he essentially shows that neither explanation justifies the belief. Richman's claim is that Hume only gives some credence to the vulgar notion (the natural belief in the external world) simply because it is practical if not unavoidable.<sup>42</sup> This is all Hume has to say about these natural beliefs. They are not a different access to knowledge outside of his empiricism, for Hume shows how natural beliefs arise within it and further judges them consistent with his empirical foundation whereby all ideas have precedent impressions. (T 1.1.1.1) According to Richman, "In order to show our belief in body to be consistent with Hume's empiricism, we need only supply the impression(s) from which our idea of body is derived. Hume consistently writes that our idea of body is the product of "fictions of the imagination." Products of the imagination are complex ideas whose component simple ideas were not experienced together as one complex impression."<sup>43</sup> In other words, fictions are still perceptions; they are ideas that are derived at in an indirect rather than direct copying method. For example, if I have the imaginary idea of a dragon, I have a complex idea that was not directly derived or copied from the complex impression of a dragon. But the fictional complex idea of a dragon is still made up of

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<sup>41</sup> Kenneth A. Richman, "Empiricism, Natural Belief and the New Hume," in *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 12.4 (Oct 1995) 425–441.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* 428–9.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* 429.

simple ideas: of a lizard, of fire, etc... Thus fictional ideas do not lie outside of Hume's empiricism; their origin is easily explained within the theory of ideas. Accordingly, with regard to the fictions that cause the belief in the external world: "We are wrong about the relationship between various perceptions, but since no new content is introduced, this offers no challenge to Hume's empiricism. We can provide impressions from which are derived all of the ideas involved in our natural belief in body: ideas of the object whose continuity we feign, of objects coexisting and of the objects with which the continuing object is supposed to coexist when not perceived. Thus the natural belief in body is consistent with Hume's empiricism."<sup>44</sup> In other words, Hume does explain how the fictions arise. We have seen how the imagination *develops* the fictions that cause the idea of an external world. Hume does not place it outside of the theory of ideas as a separate avenue to truth, or as a way to avoid the sceptical conclusions posed through the analysis of ideas. So Richman's point is: why should this natural belief be seen as operating outside of empiricism? The answer from Kemp Smith is, as we have also already seen, that his interpretation of not only Hume's work but the intentions behind the writings of those works allows him to conclude that in the *Enquiry* "natural beliefs are no longer taken as being explicable in terms of processes and propensities more ultimate than themselves."<sup>45</sup> Consequently, a main element of the debate regarding Kemp Smith's analysis of natural belief will have to wait until Chapter Four where we look at why some, such as he, take the *Enquiry* to be a superior work to the *Treatise*.

It should also be mentioned here that Richman has more recent advocates of the sceptical/causal realist interpretation in his sights with his claim that natural beliefs can

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<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* 430.

<sup>45</sup> Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines*, 125.

be explained within Hume's empiricism, namely, John Wright and Galen Strawson.<sup>46</sup>

Let us here focus on Wright's argument,<sup>47</sup> and leave Strawson's argument<sup>48</sup>—since this primarily involves causation and alleged relative ideas—until Chapters Two and Three.

The main element of Wright's argument, and how it differs from Kemp Smith's regarding the natural belief in an external world, is his stress on the influence of Malebranche.<sup>49</sup> According to Wright, although they have their differences, their overall similarities, and the fact that we know that Hume read Malebranche, shows that Hume's theory of natural belief was based upon Malebranche's theory of "natural judgement."<sup>50</sup>

For Malebranche, we have an ability to *naturally* judge the distance and size of objects over-and-above the sensory information received onto the optic nerves of our eyes.<sup>51</sup> With regard to this, Wright argues that, according to Malebranche, "We make the judgement of size constancy without being conscious of the process by which the separate stimuli are combined."<sup>52</sup> The "judgment depends upon different visual cues"<sup>53</sup> whereof the impression of distance or the size of objects becomes conscious to us.<sup>54</sup> Accordingly, Malebranche's actual natural judgment is a pre-conscious knowledge acquisition that Wright argues is also the origin for Hume's concept of natural belief.

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<sup>46</sup> Kenneth A. Richman, "Empiricism, Natural Belief and the New Hume," 432.

<sup>47</sup> John P. Wright, *The Sceptical Realism of David Hume* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1983).

<sup>48</sup> Galen Strawson, *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume*, reprint (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).

<sup>49</sup> John P. Wright, *The Sceptical Realism of David Hume*, 42. Strangely, Richman does not attack this important Malebranchean link that Wright makes with Hume but rather deals only with Wright's interpretation of certain passages in Hume's texts. Considering the overall importance Malebranche has for Wright's interpretation of Hume, this seems a glaring oversight on Richman's part.

<sup>50</sup> John P. Wright, *The Sceptical Realism of David Hume*, 66, 74–5.

<sup>51</sup> Nicolas Malebranche, *The Search after Truth*, first published 1674/5, translated and edited by Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 40–47.

<sup>52</sup> John P. Wright, *The Sceptical Realism of David Hume*, 67.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* 66.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* 67.

However there are problems with Wright's argument. First, as we have seen, Hume explains how we develop a belief in the external world through the imagination creating fictions out of two vulgar suppositions regarding mind-independent objects that exist continually when not perceived. For Wright's analogy to hold he has to show how the Humean explanation also involves the Malebranchean "pre-conscious nature of the judgment about the continuous existence of our resembling impressions."<sup>55</sup> In other words, there also needs to be a pre-conscious Humean perception of the external world that allows us to make the vulgar judgment that there is an external world even though, à la Malebranche, the pre-conscious perception itself does not become *conscious*. Since, as Wright recognizes, Hume insists that impressions "must necessarily appear in every particular what they are, and be what they appear," (T 1.4.2.7) Wright concludes that it must be some type of pre-conscious *idea* that allows for us to know there is an external world.<sup>56</sup> In doing so he uses the passage where Hume claims that "many of our ideas are so obscure, that 'tis almost impossible even for the mind, which forms them, to tell exactly their nature and composition." (T 1.2.3.1) From which Wright concludes that, "The judgement that our resembling impressions have a continuous existence springs from obscure ideas of this sort."<sup>57</sup> However, aside from the fact that Hume shows how the imagination develops these fictions regarding a continuous existence without the prior need for an "obscure" pre-conscious idea, the context of Hume's quotation at (T 1.2.3.1) deals with the problem regarding the idea of extension, not the natural belief in the external world. According to Hume:

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

The table before me is alone sufficient by its view to give me the idea of extension. This idea, then, is borrow'd from, and represents some impression, which this moment appears to the senses. But my senses convey to me only the impressions of colour'd points, dispos'd in a certain manner. If the eye is sensible of any thing farther, I desire it may be pointed out to me. But if it be impossible to shew any thing farther, we may conclude with certainty, that the idea of extension is nothing but a copy of these colour'd points, and of the manner of their appearance. (T 1.2.3.4)

Hence Hume's answer is not to posit a Malebranchean pre-conscious perception in order to explain how we come to have the idea, or in Malebranchean terms, make the natural judgment that there is something extended. Instead, Hume clearly keeps the question within the confines of his empiricism. He states, "we may *conclude with certainty*, that the idea of extension is nothing but a copy of these colour'd points, and of the manner of their appearance [my italics]." His final analysis as to how from "these colour'd points" we come to have the idea of extension is that extension is an "abstract idea." (T 1.2.3.5) Nowhere in his explanation does Hume suggest that the idea of extension is a natural belief or requires information outside of what is immediately present to the senses.

Moreover, much of Wright's Malebranche/Hume analogy is used to put forth evidence for what he calls the "psychophysiological overtones that cannot be neglected in [Hume's] accounts of the origins of our natural beliefs,"<sup>58</sup> wherein "Malebranche provides the link between the views of Descartes and Hume."<sup>59</sup> Although Wright puts forth much convincing evidence to show that Malebranche does influence Hume's descriptions for how the mind/brain forms ideas, the claim that they share a "psychophysiological" explanation for "the origins of our natural beliefs" is not so convincing. For example, with regard to Malebranche's view regarding the origins of

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<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.* 16.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 225.

natural judgement, Wright claims that Malebranche “insists that they are formed ‘in ourselves, independently of ourselves, and even in spite of ourselves’. This, he writes, is why he calls them ‘natural.’” Consequently, “These themes are also connected with the notion of natural judging or reasoning as it appears in Hume’s writings.”<sup>60</sup> Yet this is not exactly what Malebranche says. His more complete quotation is: “I feel I must again warn that judgements about the distance, size, and so on, of objects are formed in the ways I have just explained, not by the soul, but by God according to the laws concerning the union of the soul and body. I have therefore called these sorts of judgements *natural* in order to emphasize that they occur in us independently of us, and even in spite of us.”<sup>61</sup> It is Malebranche’s intention to use the word “natural” as essentially deriving from God. This is clearly not so easily “connected with [Hume’s] notion of natural judging or reasoning.” Nevertheless Wright’s alerting us to the many times Hume does put forth physiological explanations for the mind’s operations does indicate that Hume is following Malebranche, if not Descartes, in apparently supposing (if perhaps only for argument’s sake) some sort of dualism.

Moreover, Wright’s analysis does show us how Hume viewed his own sense of what is *natural*. On the question of the naturalness of natural beliefs, Wright claims that “Hume appears to prefer a sense of the word ‘natural’ which requires that what is natural to man be both beneficial and truth-preserving.”<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, “[Hume] accepts the view that human nature is constituted in such a way that it produces a psychological

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<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Nicolas Malebranche, *The Search after Truth*, 46.

<sup>62</sup> John P. Wright, *The sceptical realism of David Hume*, 229.

response which is appropriate for its own survival.”<sup>63</sup> This is backed up by the following well-known passage from Hume:

I must distinguish in the imagination betwixt the principles which are permanent, irresistable, and universal . . . And the principles, which are changeable, weak, and irregular . . . The former are the foundation of all our thoughts and actions, so that upon their removal human nature must immediately perish and go to ruin. The latter are neither unavoidable to mankind, nor necessary, or so much as useful in the conduct of life; but on the contrary are observ'd only to take place in weak minds, and being opposite to the other principles of custom and reasoning, may easily be subverted by a due contrast and opposition. For this reason the former are received by philosophy, and the latter rejected. One who concludes somebody to be near him, when he hears an articulate voice in the dark, reasons justly and naturally; tho' that conclusion be deriv'd from nothing but custom, which infixes and inlivens the idea of a human creature, on account of his usual conjunction with the present impression. But one, who is tormented he knows not why, with the apprehension of spectres in the dark, may, perhaps, be said to reason, and to reason naturally too: But then it must be in the same sense, that a malady is said to be natural; as arising from natural causes, tho' it be contrary to health, the most agreeable and most natural situation of man. (T 1.4.4.1)

Consequently the “principles, which are permanent, irresistable, and universal” are the ones that matter for “upon their removal human nature must immediately perish.” So, for Hume, there is an important difference between the man who “reasons justly and naturally” and the one “who is tormented he knows not why, with the apprehension of spectres in the dark” although he can also “be said to reason, and to reason naturally too.” The difference is that in the latter case it is “contrary to health, the most agreeable and most natural situation of man.” Hence, for Hume, what is natural seems to be the *healthy* state of the mind.

The final element that needs some discussion is the alleged normative aspect of these natural beliefs. According to Gary Hatfield, Hume “posited belief producing

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.* 230.

processes that were neutral with respect to whether the beliefs produced are true or false.”<sup>64</sup> Richman concludes from this that if “correct, Hume’s naturalism does not invoke any norms that can be called epistemic.”<sup>65</sup> Yet the main problem with this issue is, as Lorne Falkenstein observes:

Until recently, these questions [concerning normative beliefs] were little-considered by Hume scholars, perhaps because neither of the two dominant interpretative traditions, the sceptical and the naturalistic, is particularly congenial to them. If one supposes that Hume was simply a sceptic, then one will not accept that he took one belief to be any more legitimate than another, but will insist that he rejected them all as unfounded. If, alternatively, one supposes that he took belief to be the ineluctable effect of the operation of certain natural causes, then one will infer that questions of warrant are moot, since we have no choice but to believe what natural causes induce us to believe, whether warranted or not.<sup>66</sup>

Falkenstein argues that “Hume drew the bounds of rationality so tightly, while yet making claims about the legitimacy or illegitimacy of certain beliefs that are so broad that it remains a question how most of his normative claims can be justified.”<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless there is a problem, for Hume *does* seem to acknowledge a form of normativity with regard to natural beliefs. For example, as Falkenstein observes, Hume states that, “If the cause be known only by the effect, we never ought to ascribe to it any qualities, beyond what are precisely requisite to produce the effect” (E 11.13.103). Additionally, with regard to causation, there are “some general rules, by which we ought to regulate our judgment” (T 1.3.13.11). Considering what we have seen above as to how Hume

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<sup>64</sup> Gary Hatfield, *The Natural and the Normative: Theories of Spatial Perception from Kant to Helmholtz* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1990), 26.

<sup>65</sup> Kenneth A. Richman, “Debating the New Hume,” 6.

<sup>66</sup> Lorne Falkenstein, “Naturalism, Normativity, and Scepticism in Hume’s Account of Belief,” *Hume Studies*, 23.1 (April 1997), 29–72, 30.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.* 30.

describes the origins of belief, *and*, in how the sheer force of natural beliefs makes them unavoidable, Falkenstein comes to the following conclusion: “I take [Hume] to be sceptical of the ability of reason to provide a warrant for most of our beliefs, and I also take him to be completely persuaded of the force of Pyrrhonian arguments on such themes as knowledge of the existence of external objects,”<sup>68</sup> however:

Both the vulgar and the philosophers have their beliefs determined by natural mechanisms. But in the philosophers these mechanisms work in a different way than they do in the vulgar. What determines which way any given person’s mechanisms will work is, in the case of the philosophers, a decision to attend to the force of the sceptical arguments, grounded in a laudable curiosity to learn the truth, and, in the case of the vulgar, a despicable decision to ignore not only the task of inquiry, but even any consideration of reports of the simplest results of the inquiry undertaken by others—a decision grounded in laziness, imbecility, obstinacy or other such blameworthy character defects.<sup>69</sup>

Consequently, according to Falkenstein at least, there is a possible place for normativity for the “philosophers” within the Humean theory of belief, but it is extremely tenuous and does not provide a way out of the sceptical roadblock concerning natural beliefs. In the following chapter we will see how the argument for causation has taken a somewhat different route, where it has been argued that it is both grounded but also separate from the force of natural belief.

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<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.* 32.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.* 60.

## Chapter Two

### Causation

As we saw in the previous chapter, the belief in an external world is a “natural belief” that, according to those who subscribe to the sceptical/causal realist interpretation, is beyond the purview of sceptical analysis. In a similar fashion, the sceptical/causal realists also argue for the existence of causation.

But let us first consider Thomas Hill Green’s more traditional reading of Hume on causation:

It is their supposed necessary connection which distinguishes objects related as cause and effect from those related merely in the way of contiguity and succession, and it is a like supposition that leads us to infer what we do not see or remember from what we do . . . [N]ot being an impression of sense or a copy of such [sense impression], must be shown to be an ‘impression of reflection,’ according to Hume’s sense of the term, *i.e.* a tendency of the soul, analogous to desire and aversion, hope and fear, derived from impressions of sense but not copied from them; and the inference which it determines must be shown to be the work of the imagination, as affected by such impression of reflection. This in brief is the purport of Hume’s doctrine of causation.<sup>70</sup>

Briefly then, it is only an “impression of reflection” or more specifically a feeling of being determined that gives us our belief that there is a “necessary connection” between a

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<sup>70</sup> Thomas Hill Green, “General Introduction,” *David Hume: The Philosophical Works*, 243.

cause and an effect. (T 1.3.14.1) To see this better let's look at Hume's famous argument as it appears in the *Abstract* to the *Treatise*:<sup>71</sup>

Here is a billiard-ball lying on the table, and another ball moving towards it with rapidity. They strike; and the ball, which was formerly at rest, now acquires a motion. This is as perfect an instance of the relation of cause and effect as any which we know, either by sensation or reflection. Let us therefore examine it. It is evident, that the two balls touched one another before the motion was communicated, and that there was no interval between the shock and the motion. *Contiguity* in time and place is therefore a requisite circumstance to the operation of all causes. It is evident likewise, that the motion, which was the cause, is prior to the motion, which was the effect. *Priority* in time, is therefore another requisite circumstance in every cause. But this is not all. Let us try any other balls of the same kind in a like situation, and we shall always find, that the impulse of the one produces motion in the other. Here therefore is a *third* circumstance, *viz.* that of a *constant conjunction* between the cause and the effect. Every object like the cause, produces always some object like the effect. Beyond these three circumstances of contiguity, priority, and constant conjunction, I can discover nothing in this cause. The first ball is in motion; touches the second; immediately the second is in motion: and when I try the experiment with the same or like balls, in the same or like circumstances, I find, that upon the motion and touch of the one ball, motion always follows in the other. In whatever shape I turn this matter, and however I examine it, I can find nothing farther. (A 9.409)

There is thus a “constant conjunction” or necessary connection that needs to be examined. Hume writes:

What is our idea of necessity, when we say that two objects are necessarily connected together. Upon this head I repeat what I have often had occasion to observe, that as we have no idea, that is not deriv'd from an impression, we must find some impression, that gives rise to this idea of necessity, if we assert we have really such an idea. In order to this I consider, in what objects necessity is commonly suppos'd to lie; and finding that it is always ascrib'd to causes and effects, I turn my eye to two objects suppos'd to be plac'd in that relation; and examine them in all the situations, of which they are susceptible. I immediately perceive, that they are contiguous in time and

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<sup>71</sup> David Hume, *An Abstract of a Book lately Published entitled, A Treatise of Human Nature*, in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, reprinted with corrections, eds. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 404–417. References are to the paragraph and page number.

place, and that the object we call cause precedes the other we call effect. In no one instance can I go any farther, nor is it possible for me to discover any third relation betwixt these objects. I therefore enlarge my view to comprehend several instances; where I find like objects always existing in like relations of contiguity and succession. At first sight this seems to serve but little to my purpose. The reflection on several instances only repeats the same objects; and therefore can never give rise to a new idea. But upon farther enquiry I find, that the repetition is not in every particular the same, but produces a new impression, and by that means the idea, which I at present examine. For after a frequent repetition, I find, that 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. (T 1.3.14.1)

Consequently it is only an impression of reflection (as opposed to an impression of sense which Hume has already ruled out) or feeling of determination evolving out of habitual experience that makes one believe that a particular effect will follow a particular cause. As such, there is no actual impression of *causation* and thus no actual idea, only a feeling that certain objects are necessarily connected together because of their apparent *regular conjunction*; a certain feeling of determination that on the appearance of a particular object, it will be the cause of a particular effect or, that with the appearance of an object we will be able to infer its particular cause.

However, according to Kemp Smith, in the above argument “Hume has never questioned that we *do* have an idea of necessary connexion.”<sup>72</sup> The feeling of determination we have concerning causal inference is a belief that “is psychologically, not logically grounded.”<sup>73</sup> As a result it is not that a necessary connection between certain objects (i.e., causation), is being questioned by Hume; only why is it we seem predisposed to believe in it. “[W]hat Hume is here endeavouring to justify is not a

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<sup>72</sup> Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines*, 391.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.* 392.

uniformity view of causation, but a view in which causal agency—power, efficacy, determination—is presupposed throughout.”<sup>74</sup>

As we have seen, Hume’s justification is that the presupposition for a necessary connexion is grounded in a feeling of determination which in turn is caused by the experience of objects in regular conjunction. Indeed the necessary connexion *is* this feeling of determinacy. Not surprisingly, since we have already been introduced to Kemp Smith’s overall interpretation of Hume with regard to natural beliefs in the previous chapter, he further claims:

This feeling [of determination] is not, however, experienced by us in complete isolation, as merely a feeling, merely itself. As in the case of other impressions Nature, in the constitution which it has given to the animal and the human mind, has secured that the feeling functions in a determinate fashion—in this particular case that it operates in conditioning a specific, *objectively* directed mode of belief, viz. the belief that *bodies* (or other existents) are causally operative one upon another.<sup>75</sup>

For Kemp Smith then, Hume’s analysis of the feeling or belief in causation seems not only to be an analysis whereby he is seeking the presupposition for the necessary connexion, but his analysis itself presupposes the belief in an external world of bodies with causal power, or in other words, *external objects* that are necessarily connected. Kemp Smith especially points this out with regard to Hume’s analysis of the alleged causal maxim whereby all objects have a cause for their existence. (T 1.3.3.1–9) With regard to Hume’s analysis of the causal maxim, Kemp Smith states correctly, “The [causal] relation asserted is not between ideas but existents.”<sup>76</sup> In this analysis of the causal maxim, Hume takes on three main arguments: (1) Hobbes’ claim that without a

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.* 393.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.* 395.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.* 405.

cause, objects “must remain in eternal suspense; and the object can never begin to be,” (T 1.3.3.4); (2) Samuel Clarke’s claim that without a cause objects would have to cause themselves to exist, (T 1.3.3.5); and (3) Locke’s claim that without a cause objects would have to be caused into existence by nothing, (T 1.3.3.6–7). Hume shows all three arguments to be flawed because they all presuppose the notion of cause to begin with. However, according to Kemp Smith, “neither there nor elsewhere in the *Treatise* does he raise the question of the *truth* of the maxim. His discussions concern only the grounds, or causes, upon which our *belief* in it, our *opinion* or *judgement* regarding it, really rests. These, he consistently maintains, are sheerly natural, and allow of no kind of absolute or metaphysical justification.”<sup>77</sup> Additional proof that Kemp Smith provides for this claim whereby necessary connections “allow of no kind of absolute or metaphysical justification” and yet still retain their “*truth*” is Hume’s claim that, “the necessity of a cause to every beginning of existence is not founded on any arguments either demonstrative or intuitive.”<sup>78</sup> (T 1.3.14.35)

But perhaps more important for Kemp Smith’s argument is his highlighting of a much-quoted passage in a letter Hume wrote to John Stewart in 1754 stating:

I never asserted so absurd a Proposition as *that any thing might arise without a Cause*: I only maintain’d, that our Certainty of the Falsehood of that Proposition proceeded neither from Intuition nor Demonstration; but from another Source. *That Caesar existed, that there is such an Island as Sicily*; for these Propositions, I affirm, we have no demonstrative nor intuitive Proof. Would you infer that I deny their Truth, or even their Certainty? There are many different kinds of Certainty; and some of them as satisfactory to the Mind, tho perhaps not so regular, as the demonstrative kind.

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<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.* 407.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.* 405n1

Where a man of Sense mistakes my Meaning, I own I am angry:  
But it is only at myself: For having exprest my Meaning so ill as to have  
given Occasion to the Mistake.<sup>79</sup>

For Kemp Smith then, Thomas Green and others who claim that Hume *denied* causation have not understood Hume's actual "Meaning" in that we do not necessarily require a "demonstrative nor intuitive Proof" for causation. The answer as to how we can have "different kinds of Certainty" regarding causation is, for Kemp Smith, the same answer one arrives at with regard to the belief in the external world: "To both questions [Hume] gives an affirmative answer; and in both cases this affirmative answer is made to rest on 'natural belief'."<sup>80</sup>

The two natural beliefs [causation and the external world] have also this in common, that being, beyond possible question, beliefs which determine the mind both in thought and in action, they are to be regarded as more certain than any theories that can be propounded in explanation of the manner in which, and the causes in virtue of which, they thus take possession of the mind. The explanations propounded, viz. that the beliefs rest on, and operate through, complex associative mechanisms, are, as Hume has himself emphasised, more hypothetical than the beliefs themselves.<sup>81</sup>

As we recall this was Kemp Smith's reasoning in the previous chapter on the natural belief in the external world, wherein the explanations for the beliefs are trivial compared to the force of the natural beliefs themselves. However, as was previously mentioned, since causation, like the belief in the external world, largely rests upon Kemp Smith's take on the role of the passions as beliefs, and in his claims regarding the primacy and

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<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.* 407. See also "Letter 91, To John Stewart," in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, vol. 1 of 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 187.

<sup>80</sup> Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines*, 409.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

chronology of Hume's texts, a main element of his argument for causation also hinges on the analysis that will have to wait until Chapter Four.

Meanwhile a more recent advocate of the sceptical/causal realist position—one particularly focused upon the question of causation—offers a different argument. Galen Strawson claims that “Hume believes in the existence of Causation . . . without qualification, and not only in so far as he writes as a Realist (or Basic Realist) about objects,”<sup>82</sup> but moreover, as to the claim that objects merely appear in regular conjunctions, “he would have been quick . . . to acknowledge the *logical possibility* . . . But he never seriously considered this possibility (i.e. the ‘Humean’ view).”<sup>83</sup> With regard to this latter objection concerning causation as nothing but regular conjunctions, David Pears is helpful:

[The objection] is based on the idea that a constant conjunction—even one that is constant for ever—might merely be a massive coincidence and, therefore, belief in such a conjunction is no indication of belief in necessity. But this is hardly convincing. If such a conjunction were coincidental, that would be because none of the cases in which the sequence would have been broken ever became actual, and in that way it would be preserved by chance. But in an unlimited sequence the actual cases of the cause-event could not fail to be a fair sample of the set which also includes the merely possible cases. Therefore, the idea of an unlimited coincidence of this kind is incoherent.<sup>84</sup>

With this in mind, there are two things one must say before examining Strawson's argument. First, his claim about Hume writing as a realist about objects derives from his general agreement with Kemp Smith about Hume's commitment to a natural belief in the

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<sup>82</sup> Galen Strawson, *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume*, (1989) reprint of the 1996 paperback edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003), 222.

<sup>83</sup> Galen Strawson, *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume*, 222.

<sup>84</sup> David Pears, *Hume's System: An Examination of the First Book of his Treatise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 82.

external world<sup>85</sup> but more so because of what Hume apparently says regarding our ability to have relative ideas of external objects. (T 1.2.6.9) Because the issue of relative ideas is to be dealt with in the next chapter, I will leave criticism of this claim until then. Second, Strawson is unabashedly (even more so than Kemp Smith) a proponent of the *Enquiry* as being Hume's major (if not sole) work on metaphysics. For example, according to Strawson, "If you want to know what Hume thought about causation, you have to give priority to his first *Enquiry*."<sup>86</sup> Not surprisingly then, Strawson admits that with regard to his own analysis, "The main case rests on the *Enquiry*."<sup>87</sup> As just mentioned above concerning Kemp Smith's interpretation, the issue regarding the priority of the texts will be discussed in Chapter Four. However it is worthwhile to get a glimpse as to why Strawson (and Kemp Smith) take this position. Strawson highlights what is an admittedly convincing-sounding advertisement that Hume wrote for the *Enquiry*:<sup>88</sup>

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 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. Yet several writers, who have honoured the author's philosophy with answers, have taken care to direct all their batteries against the juvenile work, which the author never acknowledged, and have affected to triumph in any advantages, which, they imagined, they had obtained over it: *a practice very contrary to all rules of candour and fair-dealing, and a strong instance of those polemical artifices, which a bigoted zeal thinks itself authorized to employ.* Henceforth, the author desires, that the following

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<sup>85</sup> "A *fortiori*, the supposition—and natural belief—that there are external objects is intelligible, and hence meaningful. Hume himself takes it that it is true, for the belief that it is true is part of natural belief." See Galen Strawson, "David Hume: Objects and Power," *The New Hume Debate*, revised edition, eds. Kenneth A. Richman and Rupert Read (London: Routledge, 2007), 31–51, 38.

<sup>86</sup> Galen Strawson, "David Hume: Objects and Power," 31.

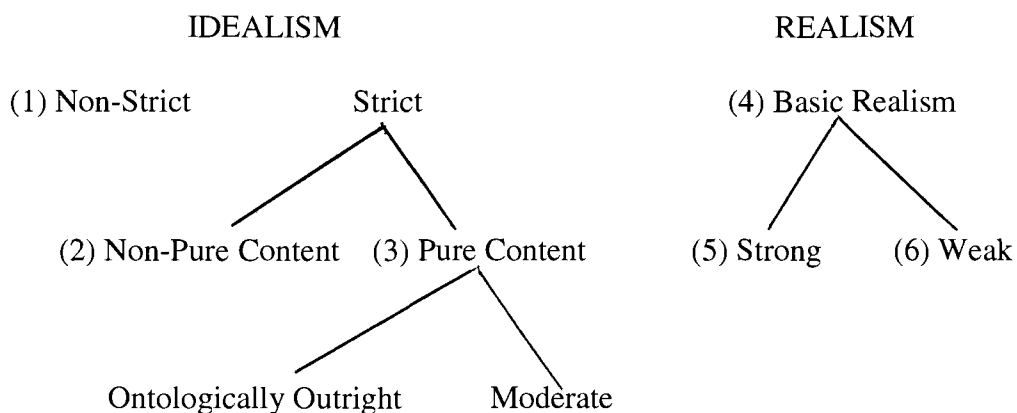
<sup>87</sup> Galen Strawson, *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume*, 8.

<sup>88</sup> Quoted in Galen Strawson, "David Hume: Objects and Power," 31.

pieces may alone be regarded as containing his philosophical sentiments and principles. (E 1)<sup>89</sup>

Consequently Strawson accepts this to be Hume's final wish: that the *Enquiry* should "alone be regarded as containing [Hume's] philosophical sentiments and principles." This is why Strawson's analysis rarely if ever ventures into the *Treatise*. With all this in mind, let us now look closely at Strawson's argument.

To begin with, Strawson distinguishes between different varieties of the Idealist and Realist positions (In what follows I will capitalize the terms in keeping with Strawson's own capitalization of them). With regard to Idealism, there is non-Strict and Strict Idealism, where Strict Idealism can be further divided into two types: non-Pure and Pure Content Idealism; and the latter can be further divided into either Ontologically Outright Pure and Ontologically Moderate Pure Content Idealist accounts. With regard to Realism, Strawson categorizes traditional Realism as a subsection of Basic Realism, from which the latter can be viewed as either Strong or Weak Basic Realist accounts.



<sup>89</sup> Nearing the end of his life Hume mentions in a letter to his publisher William Strahan: "There is a short Advertisement, which I wish I had prefix'd to the second Volume of the Essays and Treatises in the last Edition. I send you a Copy of it." See "Letter 509, To William Strahan," in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, vol. 2 of 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 301.

It is worth looking closely at the definitions Strawson gives for this will prove instructive not only in seeing why he considers Hume to be, in the end, a Basic Realist, but also in showing how (in Chapter Five of this dissertation) dream perceptions fit into this scheme.

Accordingly, with regard to Idealism:

1. Non-Strict Idealism:

[O]bjects are constituted out of (Berkeleyan Idealist) non-self-subsistent perceptions. The ultimate ontological truth about them is that they are real states of immaterial, non-bundle-theory minds, ontologically speaking perception-transcendent minds. They are grounded in some ontologically perception-transcendent substance.<sup>90</sup>

2. Strict non-Pure Content Idealism:

[Objects] are either things which do [like the objects mentioned above in Non-Strict Idealism] have some content-transcendent ontic aspect or mode of being: according to the second conception, objects are constituted out of perceptions conceived of as entirely self-subsistent but ontologically content-transcendent things.<sup>91</sup>

3. Strict Pure Content Idealism:

[T]hey are things which have no content-transcendent ontic aspect or mode of being whatever: according to the third conception, objects are constituted out of perceptions conceived of not only as entirely self-subsistent things, but also as entirely content-constituted things.<sup>92</sup>

As mentioned, Strawson allows for version 3 to be split into the above “ontologically outright” definition, but also into a “moderate Pure Content Idealism, which allows that perceptions may and indeed do have some non-content-constituted nature.”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Galen Strawson, *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume*, 38. Strawson is aware of the controversy in categorizing Berkeley as holding a non-strict account of Idealism: “Berkeley’s position is often taken as the paradigm of an Idealist account of objects. But it is clearly not a Strict Idealist account of objects on the present view, because it supposes that things other than perceptions—minds which are not constituted out of perceptions—are essentially involved in the existence of objects. One could say that Berkeley is a Strict *Mentalist* (one who holds that there is nothing non-mental) but not a Strict Idealist” 35.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.* 39.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.* 40–1.

With regard to Realism:

4. Basic Realism:

It is not simply (1) that there is something ‘external’ or ‘out there’ just in the sense of being independent of, or something other than, our perceptions. For to this is added the idea (2) that this something somehow *affects* us, and so gives rise to our perceptions, and is the reason why they are as they are (leaving aside any contribution we may also make to their character). Roughly, whatever it is that is ‘out there’ in this sense *just is* ‘the objects’ (strong version of Basic Realism); or is at least as *essential part* of what the existence of ‘the objects’ consists in (weak version). It is the thing (whatever its exact nature) which stands in relation to us (whatever our exact nature) as affecting object or as thing encountered.<sup>94</sup>

5. Strong Basic Realism:

[T]he objects are *entirely* distinct from our perceptions: our perceptions are not only not the objects, but are not even any part of what the existence of the objects consists in. ‘The objects’ simply names what our perceptions are perceptions of (relationally speaking).<sup>95</sup>

6. Weak Basic Realism:

[T]he objects are certainly not to be *identified* with our perceptions or their content (as in Strict Idealism), because the existence of the objects essentially involves the existence of something more than our perceptions; but our perceptions are nevertheless *part* of what the existence of the objects consists in.<sup>96</sup>

These, then, are the six main ways Strawson defines versions of Realism and Idealism.

To understand them a little better, (1) non-Strict Idealism, is the account whereby there is no reality outside of the *mental*, which also means that minds can exist *as well as* perceptions as an “ontologically perception-transcendent substance[s],” in other words, minds exist as something more than just mental entities made up of perceptions. (2) and (3) are both Strict Idealist accounts, which means nothing exists except perceptions; (2)

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.* 60–1.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.* 61.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*

and (3) are thus both bundle-theories of the mind; minds that are made up, to use Strawson's words, of "*self-subsistent* perceptions."<sup>97</sup> However Strawson realizes there are two possible ways in which one may say that perceptions are self-subsistent, and this accounts for the difference between (2) and (3). In Pure Content Idealism (3) "perceptions are pure contents; all there is, ontologically speaking, is content." In non-Pure Content Idealism (2) perceptions "are not just contents: they are content-possessing *vehicles* of content; they have some ontologically speaking *content-transcending* nature."<sup>98</sup> However, as mentioned above, (3) can also be seen as either "outright" or as "moderate." The importance of this for Strawson is that, as we shall see, it is moderate Pure Content Idealism that is particularly pertinent to his discussion of Hume and causation.<sup>99</sup>

In his discussion of moderate Strict Pure Content Idealism, Strawson admits he is entering "aery regions."<sup>100</sup> This is because in the moderate version one accepts the Pure Content notion, but also accepts the *possibility* that there may be some vehicle for content without asking (or not being able to ask) that particular question regarding the vehicle for content: "That is, one can when considering perceptions just in respect of their content simply abstract from all sorts of questions about their ultimate ontological nature as perceptions."<sup>101</sup> In other words, version (2) states there are vehicles for content, whereas the outright version (3) says there are no vehicles for content, and moderate (3) says that there *may* be vehicles, we're just not going to consider whether there are vehicles or not but will simply focus on the content while accepting the *possibility* that the perceptions

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<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.* 37.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.* 38.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.* 39.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.* 40.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

may have “some non-content-constituted nature.”<sup>102</sup> According to Strawson, this leaves essentially two choices: “[O]ne may either suppose that the perceptions definitely do have some further content-transcendent ontic aspect or mode of being, as Berkeley does. Or one may simply leave the question open, as Hume does—in so far as he ever explicitly conceives things within the maximally ontologically uncommitted framework of the Pure Content Idealist approach to the notion of objects.”<sup>103</sup> Consequently Strawson considers Hume to be a moderate Strict Pure Content Idealist with regard to objects and causation, but only in so far as one “conceives things.” This difference that Strawson draws between the *supposing* versus the *conceiving* of objects relies heavily on his analysis of so-called relative ideas. However, since the analysis of this aspect of the New Hume Debate will be covered in the next chapter, this part of Strawson argument will have to wait until then. Needless to say, Strawson wants to make a distinction between what Hume *supposes* and what he *conceives* in that when *conceiving* objects, Hume is a moderate Strict Pure Content Idealist, but when *supposing* objects—and this, Strawson argues is more vital to Hume’s empiricism—he is a Basic Realist regarding objects and causation. Since Strawson’s final conclusion is that Hume is a Basic Realist, let us now look closely at those two Realist categories.

As we saw above, with regard to Realism, Strawson sets Basic Realism (4) as the ground for all types of Realism, with Strong (5) and Weak (6) versions being the major division of Basic Realism. According to Strawson, a good way to see the differences between (5) and (6) is that Strong Basic Realism “includes all Realist theories like

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.* 41.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.* 42.

Locke's,"<sup>104</sup> although strangely, since it "does not require that there be any *external* reality,"<sup>105</sup> in that, Strong Basic Realism (5) only "requires that there should be something which is different from our perceptions,"<sup>106</sup> Berkeley's empiricism can also be viewed as Strong Basic Realism through the controversial interpretation whereby "archetype' perceptions in God's mind are taken as 'the objects'; [so that] our perceptions are just resembling representations of these."<sup>107</sup> For Strawson, "Kant's theory of the 'empirically real world' arguably provides a very clear example of Weak Basic Realism [6]."<sup>108</sup> Here is how Strawson further explains his reasons for claiming that Kant subscribes to Weak Basic Realism: "On the one hand 'the objects'—the spatio-temporal objects we deal with from day to day—are thought of as nothing but a "species of representations" or 'appearances'. On the other hand they are—crucially—considered as things which are appearances (relationally) of the 'noumenal reality', which is to that extent part of what the existence of the 'the objects' consists in."<sup>109</sup> Strawson concedes that "Basic Realism extends very far."<sup>110</sup> But it is precisely this flexibility that enables him to fit Hume into the Basic Realism framework. To the famous passage in the *Enquiry* where Hume questions how we can ever be sure of what our perceptions are perceptions of, Strawson adds his own comments:

By what argument can it be proved, that the perceptions of the mind must be caused by [*Lockean*] external objects, entirely different from them, though resembling them (if that be possible) and could not arise either from the energy of the mind itself [as in *Solipsism*], or from the suggestion of some invisible and unknown spirit [as in *Berkeley's* view], or from

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<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.* 61.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.* 61–2.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.* 62.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.* 63.

some other cause still more unknown to us [as in *Kant's* view, for example]?<sup>111</sup> (E 12.11.114)

Strawson suggesting that although Hume acknowledges the reality of an external world, as a sceptic, he “could never decide between these various Basic Realist options.”<sup>112</sup> However, it is important to point out that in Strawson’s rephrasing of Hume’s famous passage he omits the line that states, “It is acknowledged, that, in fact, many of these perceptions arise not from any thing external, as in dreams, madness, and other diseases.” (E 12.11.114) (This line arguably showing that Hume was implying that all of these are not Basic Realist options in the way that Strawson seems to suggest, unless one wishes to view Hume as a Basic Realist with regard to dreams). Nevertheless Strawson insists that even the solipsistic option is a Basic Realist option, since within it “Perceptions are “produced by” or “arise from the energy of” the mind, which is not itself just perceptions. The fundamental Basic Realist thought remains: there must be something other than our perceptions.”<sup>113</sup>

From this categorization of the many shades of grey which exist between the Idealist and the Realist positions, Strawson’s argument regarding how Hume should be interpreted is essentially that (1) Hume considers causation to be only the regular conjunction of perceptions when he writes as a moderate Strict Pure-Content Idealist—this view being based only upon what we can actually *conceive* or *know* about reality. However, (2) although Hume’s considers (1) as a logical possibility it is unlikely—

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.* 67.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.* 67n67.

since we have good reason to *suppose* that reality is more than just our perceptions<sup>114</sup>—so that causation cannot be just regular conjunction, for with regard to actual objects which are external (although ultimately unknowable) there must be some reason as to why they are appearing as regular, and this reason is that causation actually exists in the external world of objects.

However Pears disagrees about what conclusions can ultimately be drawn from asking why “there must be some reason as to why [objects] are appearing as regular”:

When we look back on [Hume’s] theory from our standpoint in this century, we are likely to see it as the reductive theory that a general causal statement only means that the relevant conjunction is constant. But this cannot be represented as his theory, unless the word ‘constant’ means ‘constant for ever’, and thus carries the implication of necessity. But the stipulation that the conjunction is constant for ever is not a specification of a collection of evidence that is ever going to be available. So although Hume puts a restriction on the type of evidence—it will be more and more instances of the same conjunction—he never reduces the content of the general causal belief to any finite sequence of instances. The belief is always audacious, and this is not a supplement hastily added to an originally reductive theory. It was an essential part of the right from the start . . . The point is worth remembering, because his critics often represent him as eliminating the gap between belief and evidence, keeping the evidence meagre, and then giving an inadequate account of the content of the belief. But this is not what he does.<sup>115</sup>

The essential aspect of Strawson’s argument is to state that since (in the *Enquiry*) Hume speaks of objects as more than just our perceptions—that is, he is some sort of Basic Realist when he writes about objects—Hume cannot commit himself to believing that the external world is simply regular in appearance without there being real causation to explain this regularity. The reason for this, according to Strawson, is drawn from the

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<sup>114</sup> Admittedly, it is not clear how we can *suppose* something without at least there being some level of *conception*. Much of Strawson’s argument for this point involves his discussion of relative ideas in Hume. See Chapter Three.

<sup>115</sup> David Pears, *Hume’s System: An Examination of the First Book of his Treatise*, 86.

basic assumptions that are made with regard to the theory of regular conjunction. To see why Strawson argues for this, let us look at his general argument for causation, which is based upon the analysis above regarding the different shades of Idealism and Realism:

- (i) You must be a realist of some sort. You must accept that (I) something exists. You may be a realist of a fairly minimal sort—a Berkeleian immaterialist, or even an atheistic ‘bundle’ theory solipsist, for example. But to deny that there is anything at all is pragmatically self-defeating. Your act of denial is already something real.
- (ii) If you accept (I), as you must, then you need only accept one other thing in order to have a compelling (if not logically conclusive) reason to postulate Causation. The only other thing you need to accept is something nobody denies—and that is, that (II) there is some sense in which the reality whose existence you admit is highly regular in character.
- (iii) For as soon as you accept this, you have reason to suppose that (III) there is some reason why reality is regular in character—*however exactly reality is conceived*. That is, you have reason to suppose that there is something about reality in virtue of which it is regular in the particular way that it is, something which is therefore not simply the fact of regularity itself. That is, you have reason to accept that there is such a thing as Causation in reality.<sup>116</sup>

According to Strawson, Hume fits into this line of reasoning regarding the existence of causation. The crucial thing is that Hume writes as a Basic Realist with regard to objects, and that he does “suppose that there is something about reality in virtue of which it is regular in the particular way that it is, something which is therefore not simply the fact of regularity itself.” However, Strawson further argues that no one can really believe in the Regularity Theory of causation, regardless of his or her particular ontological/metaphysical outlook:

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<sup>116</sup> Galen Strawson, *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume*, 222–223.

. . . it just doesn't matter what one's conception of reality is—it needn't be Realist or even Basic Realist—so long as one continues to think of reality as regular in character. Whatever one's particular conception of reality (or indeed one's scepticism about claims to know the nature of reality), one has reason to suppose that there is something about reality in virtue of which it is regular in the way it is, something which is therefore not just the regularity itself—some entirely objective feature of its nature given which it is in fact the case that it cannot but be regular in the way that it is. (Who, really, does not believe this?) And so one has reason to reject the Regularity theory of causation; or, at the very least, reason not to assert it. The only way to avoid this conclusion, which flows from the twin suppositions (1) that something is real and (2) that it is (objectively) regular in character, is to reject (2), since one cannot reject (1). But if one rejects (2) one has no reason to accept the Regularity theory of causation—for one has rejected the very thing it was a theory about. Hence, there is no case in which one can reasonably adopt the Regularity theory of causation, even though it is apparently logically possible that it is true.<sup>117</sup>

Although Strawson states that one's ontological outlook "needn't be Realist or even Basic Realist" in order to reject the Regularity Theory of causation, he stresses the fact that Hume writes about objects in the *Enquiry* as a Realist in order to emphasize that, for Hume, not only is there causation, but there is an external world of causally related objects. However, on this particular issue—that Strawson repeatedly stresses, and which Kemp Smith also highlights—is that when Hume writes about objects as being external existents, there is another possible explanation that seems to have been overlooked.

There are passages in both the *Enquiry* and the *Treatise* where Hume seems to be doing more than just stating that the belief in an external world of objects is unavoidable, but moreover is *showing* that *he*—since he does not make himself an exception to the phenomenon in any way—is also unable to resist the force of this natural belief, *as he is writing about it*. Consider the following three passages:

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<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.* 226–227.

To begin with the question concerning external existence, it may perhaps be said, that setting aside the metaphysical question of the identity of a thinking substance, our own body evidently belongs to us; and as several impressions appear exterior to the body, we suppose them also exterior to ourselves. The paper, on which I write at present, is beyond my hand. The table is beyond the paper. The walls of the chamber beyond the table. And in casting my eye towards the window, I perceive a great extent of fields and buildings beyond my chamber. From all this it may be infer'd, that no other faculty is requir'd, beside the senses, to convince us of the external existence of body. But to prevent this inference, we need only weigh the three following considerations. First, That, properly speaking, 'tis not our body we perceive, when we regard our limbs and members, but certain impressions, which enter by the senses; so that the ascribing a real and corporeal existence to these impressions, or to their objects, is an act of the mind as difficult to explain, as that which we examine at present. Secondly, Sounds, and tastes, and smells, tho' commonly regarded by the mind as continu'd independent qualities, appear not to have any existence in extension, and consequently cannot appear to the senses as situated externally to the body. The reason, why we ascribe a place to them, shall be consider'd afterwards. Thirdly, Even our sight informs us not of distance or outness (so to speak) immediately and without a certain reasoning and experience, as is acknowledg'd by the most rational philosophers. (T 1.4.2.9)

Here Hume mentions how as he is writing the *Treatise* “that the ascribing a real and corporeal existence to these impressions, or to their objects, is an act of the mind as difficult to explain, as that which we examine at present.” Eventually we know that the reason for believing that there is paper upon which he is writing is that it is *forced* upon him by nature. Consider now this passage:

After a little examination, we shall find, that 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 suppos'd to have an external existence; and is the case with no other impressions, whether gentle or violent, voluntary or involuntary. (T 1.4.2.18)

Again Hume mentions how, as he is writing, the belief in a continued existence, which as we have seen is the foundation for the natural belief in the external world, is unavoidable to him. Finally in the *Enquiry*:

It seems also evident, that, when men follow this blind and powerful instinct of nature, they always suppose the very images, presented by the senses, to be the external objects, and never entertain any suspicion, that the one are nothing but representations of the other. This very table, which we see white, and which we feel hard, is believed to exist, independent of our perception, and to be something external to our mind, which perceives it. Our presence bestows not being on it: our absence does not annihilate it. It preserves its existence uniform and entire, independent of the situation of intelligent beings, who perceive or contemplate it.

But this universal and primary opinion of all men is soon destroyed by the slightest philosophy, which teaches us, that nothing can ever be present to the mind but an image or perception, and that the senses are only the inlets, through which these images are conveyed, without being able to produce any immediate intercourse between the mind and the object. The table, which we see, seems to diminish, as we remove farther from it: but the real table, which exists independent of us, suffers no alteration: it was, therefore, nothing but its image, which was present to the mind. These are the obvious dictates of reason; and no man, who reflects, ever doubted, that the existences, which we consider, when we say, this house and that tree, are nothing but perceptions in the mind, and fleeting copies or representations of other existences, which remain uniform and independent. (E 12.8–9.113–114)

Once again we see Hume admitting that when following the “blind and powerful instinct of nature” one cannot help but believe in external objects. The point I want to suggest is that Hume highlights these difficulties with our natural belief in the external world *with his actual writing of these difficulties*. In other words, he is not just illustrating the difficulty one has with being forced to believe in external objects, but is also to

suggesting something to the reader. It is as if Hume is saying to us, *Dear Reader, I am no different from you with regard to having to believe in an external world. So even as I write these words, take this into account when I mention external objects.* So, in other words, although Kemp Smith, Strawson, and many others make much of the point of Hume occasionally speaking of objects as more than just perceptions, in fact, Hume has already stated that, like everyone else, this is not really a choice for him. Although Hume has stated that through reason one can see the falsity of natural belief, he is compelled, while writing, to slip back into belief in the external world (as we all are forced to eventually). So is it really such a surprise the Hume sometimes speaks of external objects? If one wishes to counter this claim one has to somehow assume that Hume did have a choice, and thus *chose to write about objects as external existences*—something Kemp Smith, Wright, and Strawson all focus upon as evidence for their arguments. But why assume this when Hume has explicitly ruled out the possibility of having any strong choice in this matter? In short, Hume does not make himself an exception to the rule with regard to having to eventually submit to the natural belief in the external world, yet this is assumed by the sceptical/causal realists when they argue that Hume *chose* to write about objects as if they were more than just perceptions. Consequently merely pointing out that Hume speaks of external objects is not certain evidence that he genuinely accepts the existence of external objects in the way the New Humeans claim.

One particular criticism of Strawson's reading is his somewhat ambiguous stance with regard to the role of natural belief. Strawson opens his argument in *The Secret Connexion* by stating, "The force of Hume's doctrine of natural belief is often underestimated, and this point is an important one. But I hope to show that Hume takes

the existence of something like natural necessity or causal power for granted not only in common life but also as a philosopher.”<sup>118</sup> Yet as Martin Bell has shown, one might think that, “[W]hen Strawson says Hume took causal powers for granted he means that Hume regarded belief in their existence as a natural belief . . . But Strawson seems to mean something more.”<sup>119</sup> And indeed he does. As Strawson claims:

[T]he truth of the claim that Hume believes in causal power is deducible from the details of his discussion of causation considered independently of his doctrine of natural belief: the most direct evidence for the view that Hume believes in causal power is simply that he standardly takes its existence for granted in his discussions of causation in the *Treatise* and in the *Enquiry*, making essential appeal to the idea that it exists in contexts that contain no relevant trace of irony, and no explicit appeal to the notion of natural belief.<sup>120</sup>

Although, as we have seen, it is the *Enquiry*, not the *Treatise* upon which Strawson bases his argument, this view, as Bell notices, puts a rather strong stress on what Strawson means by “takes [causation’s] existence for granted” if it means something other than natural belief.<sup>121</sup> As we saw in the previous chapter, it is precisely this ‘taking for granted’ that Kemp Smith argues helps define natural belief: “*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). Yet according to Bell, with regard to Strawson’s view, “It seems to mean that [Hume’s] belief in the real existence of causal power was, so to speak, *so* taken for granted by Hume *that he never proposed to account for it at all.*”<sup>122</sup> And this does seem to be Strawson’s intention; to argue somewhat against Kemp Smith’s claim that both the

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<sup>118</sup> Galen Strawson, *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume*, 1.

<sup>119</sup> Martin Bell, “Sceptical doubts concerning Hume’s causal realism,” *The New Hume Debate*, revised edition, eds. Kenneth A. Richman and Rupert Read (London: Routledge, 2007), 122–137, 124.

<sup>120</sup> Galen Strawson, *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume*, 2.

<sup>121</sup> Martin Bell, “Sceptical doubts concerning Hume’s causal realism,” 124.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.* 125.

external world and causation are accounted for chiefly by natural belief. Rather, for Strawson, although natural belief plays some sort of role, causation stands outside as being real even without the force of natural belief: “[Hume] never considers the suggestion that one may after hard sceptical philosophical reflection interrupt one’s natural belief in the existence of something in reality given which reality is regular in the way that it is, and so come (at least temporarily) to have no belief at all in the existence of any such thing.”<sup>123</sup> And this does seem to be borne out by the text. Hume apparently does not consider it possible *not* to see the regular conjunction of our perceptions. However this does not mean that Hume would not have considered it possible at some time. Because Hume explains that this regular conjunction appears behind habitual experience, one could argue that in the initial moments of experience there is no regular conjunction, and that this only becomes a force over time. However Strawson’s point is to claim that under normal circumstances the regular conjunction cannot be questioned. And this combined with his analysis regarding the nature of regular experience—in that it reasonably presupposes a reason for the regular conjunction that may be ultimately unknowable to us—does lend weight to Strawson’s disagreement with Kemp Smith with regard to the more fundamental aspect of causation. The importance of this element of Strawson’s view of natural belief and ‘takes for granted’ will become evident in Chapter Five. The natural belief in dreams, like the regular nature of experience, the regular nature in dreams, if not the *reality* of dreams themselves, also seems incapable of being questioned, when experienced.

One final element of Strawson’s argument is to stress that the sceptical/causal realist interpretation of causation is the only one that can make sense of Hume’s

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<sup>123</sup> Galen Strawson, *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume*, 3.

dissatisfaction regarding his famous (or infamous) two definitions cause. According to Hume:

[W]e may define a cause to be *an object, followed by another, and where all the objects similar to the first are followed by objects similar to the second*. Or in other words *where, if the first object had not been, the second never had existed*. The appearance of a cause always conveys the mind, by a customary transition, to the idea of the effect. Of this also we have experience. We may, therefore, suitably to this experience, form another definition of cause, and call it, *an object followed by another, and whose appearance always conveys the thought to that other*. (E 7.29.60)

Additionally:

If we examine the operations of body, and the production of effects from their causes, we shall find that all our faculties can never carry us farther in our knowledge of this relation than *barely* to observe that particular objects are *constantly conjoined* together [first definition], and that the mind is carried, by a *customary transition*, from the appearance of one to the belief of the other [second definition]. (E 8.21.70)

The interpolations in the passage above are Strawson's, as is, his emphasis upon the word "*barely*." This aspect of the definitions is crucial for Strawson's argument. For example, he highlights Hume's comment regarding the definitions whereby "so imperfect are the ideas which we form concerning it, that it is impossible to give any just definition of cause, *except what is drawn from something extraneous and foreign to it*." (E 7.29.60 [Strawson's emphasis])

It is this aspect of the nature of cause whereby *any* definition of it will "*barely*" touch its true nature and will only be able to deal with what is "*extraneous and foreign to it*," from which Strawson asks: *if* Hume was only providing the conclusions that result

from the theory of ideas, *then* why does he show such dissatisfaction with the definitions for cause?

Clearly, if causation in the objects were just regular succession [of which the theory of ideas shows it to be], there would be no inconvenience of imperfection in the first definition *at all*. And, in giving the first definition, we could hardly be said to be in the position of finding it “impossible to give any just definition of cause, except what is drawn from something extraneous and foreign to it.”<sup>124</sup>

Or in the second [definition], for that matter. To put the point more fully: if causation in the objects were just regular succession of a sort which gave rise to a feeling of determination or habit of inference in the mind, then there would be no imperfection in the two definitions at all.<sup>125</sup>

Consequently it is because Hume shows disappointment in the definitions that, “At no point [in the *Enquiry*] does [Hume] even hint at the thesis that there is (or even might be) no such thing as Causation.”<sup>126</sup> Similar to Kemp Smith’s argument, Strawson wishes to emphasize that it is only when reason operates that we cannot know the nature of causation; it does not imply that causation does not actually exist. Indeed it is this element of moving from the epistemological to the ontological inherent within the standard reading of Hume that Strawson particularly laments:

[T]he ‘standard’ view confuses Hume’s epistemological claim

(E) All we can ever know of causation is regular succession with the positive ontological claim

(O) All that causation actually is, in the objects, is regular succession.

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<sup>124</sup> Galen Strawson, *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume*, 209.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.* 209n6.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.* 214.

“It moves, catastrophically, from the former to the latter. The former is arguably true. The latter is fantastically implausible. It is ‘absurd’, as Hume would have put it.”<sup>127</sup> As we shall see in the next chapter, this distinction is further emphasized through the analysis of *supposing* versus *conceiving* with regard to relative ideas of the external world and causation. However as Kenneth Winkler reminds us, although in the *Enquiry* Hume regrets that his definitions for cause are “imperfect,” in the *Treatise*, he refers to his two definitions for cause (T 1.3.14.31)<sup>128</sup> as being “exact.”<sup>129</sup> (T 1.3.14.30) Yet as we have already seen, this criticism has presumably little effect on Strawson due to his feelings regarding the superiority of the *Enquiry*. Additionally though, Winkler shows that through a comparative analysis with other definitions for “cause” prevalent during the Eighteenth century, “Hume’s definitions of ‘cause’ are . . . deliberately *latitudinarian* . . . The definitions call for no more than constant conjunction, or the expectation to which such conjunctions gives rise.”<sup>130</sup> But, contrary to Strawson’s claim regarding Hume’s comments regarding the definitions of cause, “the imperfection of Hume’s definitions is quite compatible with the standard

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<sup>127</sup> Galen Strawson, “David Hume: Objects and Power,” 33.

<sup>128</sup> “There may two definitions be given of this relation, which are only different, by their presenting a different view of the same object, and making us consider it either as a philosophical or as a natural relation; either as a comparison of two ideas, or as an association betwixt them. We may define a cause to be ‘An object precedent and contiguous to another, and where all the objects resembling the former are plac’d in like relations of precedency and contiguity to those objects, that resemble the latter.’ If this definition be esteem’d defective, because drawn from objects foreign to the cause, we may substitute this other definition in its place, viz. ‘A cause is an object precedent and contiguous to another, and so united with it, that the idea of the one determines the mind to form the idea of the other, and the impression of the one to form a more lively idea of the other.’ Shou’d this definition also be rejected for the same reason, I know no other remedy, than that the persons, who express this delicacy, should substitute a juster definition in its place.” (T 1.3.14.31)

<sup>129</sup> It should be mentioned that although Winkler is correct in pointing out that Hume refers to his definitions as being “exact,” there remains the question as to whether they actually are or not.

<sup>130</sup> Kenneth P. Winkler, “The New Hume,” *The New Hume Debate*, revised edition, eds. Kenneth A. Richman and Rupert Read (London: Routledge, 2007), 52–87, 69.

view.”<sup>131</sup> “The imperfection need not lie, as Strawson assumes, in the fact that ‘there is something about the cause itself which it cannot capture or represent’.” In other words, just because Hume states, “that it is impossible to give any just definition of cause, except what is drawn from something extraneous and foreign to it,” (E 7.29.60) does not, according to Winkler, “follow that that the underlying circumstances will not be just another regularity. (That is, there may be brute regularity *all the way down*).”<sup>132</sup>

In apparent response to this latter criticism by Winkler and a similar one by Simon Blackburn (see below),<sup>133</sup> Strawson responds: “I am not sure what ‘brute’ means, but I am certainly not worried by the brutishness of the regularity of the world so long as it does not have the consequence that the regularity of the world is, as it continues from moment to moment, and from year to year, a continuous fluke or chance matter.”<sup>134</sup> This mentioning of the regular conjunction being some sort of possible “continuous fluke or chance matter” appears to be a direct response to Blackburn’s (and Pears) criticism of Strawson.

According to Blackburn there are two ways that one can refer to alleged causal connections: If there is an observed connection between certain objects *at a time*, it can

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<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* 68.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>133</sup> In Strawson’s “Preface to the Paperback Edition” (1996, reprinted in 2003) of his *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume*, he states, “One objection to [his argument against the regularity theory of causation] is so common that it is worth mentioning here. Briefly it claims that one must in the end admit that the regularity of the world’s behaviour is a ‘brute’ fact, and hence admit that the regularity theory of causation is true. For if one tries to deny that the regularity of the world is a brute fact, and proposes that there is something X which is other than the regularity of the world, then one will need an account of why X is itself regular in its underwriting of the regularity of the world. And either one will have to say that X’s regularity of operation is a brute fact, or one will have to embark on a regress which can be stopped only by saying that there is *something* whose regularity of operation is a brute fact. Hence the regularity theory of causation—or something like it—must be true.”

<sup>134</sup> Galen Strawson, “Preface to the Paperback Edition” (1996, reprinted in 2003) to his *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume*.

be called “a nexus.” But to believe that this nexus provides evidence for a law of connectivity that will hold for all similar objects in the future—this latter connectivity Blackburn refers to as “a straightjacket.”<sup>135</sup>

When we think of a causally connected pair of events, such as the impact of the first billiard ball causing the motion of the second, we want there to be a further fact than (mere) regular succession. We want there to be a dependency or connection, a fact making it so that when the first happens the second *must* happen. Call this the desire for a causal nexus. But now suppose we shift our gaze to the whole ongoing course of nature. Again, we may want there to be a further fact than mere regular succession. We feel that the ongoing pattern would be too much of a coincidence unless there is something *in virtue of which* the world has had and is going to go on having the order that it does. We want there to be some secret spring or principle, some ultimate cause, ‘on which the regular course and succession of objects totally depends’ (E 5.22.45).<sup>136</sup> This is whatever it is that ensures the continuation of the natural order, that dispels the inductive vertigo that arises when we think how natural it might be, how probable even, that the constrained and delicate pattern of events might fall apart. Call the desire for this further fact the desire for a straightjacket on the possible course of nature: something whose existence at one time guarantees constancies at any later time.<sup>137</sup>

The problem that Blackburn highlights is that there is a difference, which Hume also recognizes, between a nexus and a straightjacket: “They are different because whatever the nexus between two events is at one time, it is the kind of thing that can in principle change, so that at a different time events of the same kind may bear a different connexion.”<sup>138</sup> However with regard to a straightjacket, some sort of ground is required, “For otherwise, the fact that [the course of nature] keeps on as it does would itself be a case of coincidence or fluke, another contingency crying out for explanation and

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<sup>135</sup> Simon Blackburn, “Hume and thick connexions,” *The New Hume Debate*, revised edition, eds. Kenneth A. Richman and Rupert Read (London: Routledge, 2007), 100–112.

<sup>136</sup> Blackburn slightly misquotes Hume here. The actual sentence is, “on which *this* regular course and succession of objects totally depends,” (my emphasis).

<sup>137</sup> Simon Blackburn, “Hume and thick connexions,” 103.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

engendering inductive vertigo.”<sup>139</sup> The problem is that, “Nexuses by themselves do not provide a straightjacket.”<sup>140</sup>

[S]uppose we grant ourselves the right to think in terms of a thick connection between one event and another: a power or force whereby an event of the first kind brings about events of the second. Nevertheless, there is no contradiction in supposing that the powers and forces with which events are endowed at one time cease at another, nor in supposing that any secret nature of bodies upon which those powers and forces depend itself changes, bringing their change in its wake. Hume emphasizes this point in both the *Enquiry* and the *Treatise* (E37; T90–1). It is his reason for denying that the problem of induction can be solved by appeal to the powers and forces of bodies. But it is equally a reason for separating the question of a nexus from that of a straightjacket . . . The ongoing regularity and constancy even of thick nexus between one kind of event and another is just as much a brute contingent regularity as the bare regular concatenation of events. In each case, we have something that can engender the inductive vertigo, or whose continuation through time might be thought to demand some kind of ‘ground’ or ultimate cause or straightjacket.<sup>141</sup>

Consequently, with particular reference to Strawson, Blackburn asserts:

[U]nless we understand the extraordinary demands on a straightjacket, we shall fail to see that realism concerning it is hardly important compared to the scepticism. Thus, when Strawson opposes the Regularity Theory, with its ongoing flukes, by citing ‘fundamental forces’ essentially constitutive of ‘the nature of matter’, and invokes these to soothe away inductive vertigo, he is surely forgetting Hume’s point. Even if forces are taken ‘to latch on to real, mind independent, observable-regularity-transcendent facts about reality,’ they need something further in order to serve as a straightjacket. They need *necessary* immunity to change; they need to be things for which the inductive vertigo does not arise.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.* 104.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.* 103–4.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.* 105.

Strawson does appear merely to cite “‘fundamental forces’ essentially constitutive of ‘the nature of matter’”<sup>143</sup> in anticipation of the type of problem Blackburn raises. Moreover he states that, “if someone were to ask ‘Why is the nature of matter the particular way it is?’, the best reply might very well reject the request for a reason, and say ‘That’s just the way things are.’”<sup>144</sup> In other words, Strawson (at least originally) treats the question as potentially unanswerable, or as like asking, “‘Why is there something rather than nothing?’”<sup>145</sup> However, perhaps realizing the shortcoming of such a reply, he adds:

Some [i.e., Blackburn and Winkler] will now undoubtedly object that one must then ask why these *forces* are regular in their operation; and they will suggest that unless one supposes that there is in turn a *reason* for their regularity of operation, one is led back to a Regularity account according to which one says that the forces ‘just are’ regular in their operation, this being, ultimately, a ‘complete fluke’. But this is a mistake. The difference between the present account and the Regularity account remains untouched, and is, to repeat it once more, just this: the present account postulates the existence, as a fundamental aspect of reality, of something—fundamental objective forces—constitutive of the nature of matter and given which it is in fact the case that it cannot but behave as it does.<sup>146</sup>

Thus on this issue in the New Hume Debate, one predominantly between Strawson and Blackburn, we reach a sort of stalemate, (one reason why I have gone into particular detail with it in this chapter in order to highlight where the debate is today, and why I hope the analysis of dreams in Chapter Five will break the impasse). Either we accept that forces of nature are just as they are, or we ask that there be some sort of ground for a straightjacket on the regular nature of objects (causation). Strawson seems to end the discussion by asking: “does anyone really believe that there is definitely nothing about

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<sup>143</sup> Galen Strawson, *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume*, 90.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.* 91.

the nature of matter or reality in virtue of which it is regular in the way that it is?”<sup>147</sup> In the end, advising opponents to take a hike: “Perhaps the best thing to do, if one doubts this, is to go for a walk in order to exercise the idea that Causation does not exist—in order to exercise the idea that there is nothing about reality that surrounds one in virtue of which it is regular from moment to moment, from century to century.”<sup>148</sup> Let’s now turn to issue of relative ideas.

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<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.* 93.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter Three

### Relative Ideas and Projectivism

#### I. Relative Ideas

As we saw in Chapter Two, Strawson emphasizes what he believes is an important Humean distinction between what can be *conceived* as opposed to what can be *supposed*. This feature of his interpretation lends the most weight to his account that Hume is, in the end, a Realist. Hume's apparent reference in the *Treatise* to our ability to create "relative idea[s]" of external objects provides the main foundation to this reading. According to Hume, "The farthest we can go towards a conception of external objects, when suppos'd specifically different from our perceptions, is to form a relative idea of them, without pretending to comprehend the related objects." (T 1.2.6.9) Now Strawson highlights this passage in order to argue that Hume explicitly distinguishes between *supposing* external objects are "specifically different from our perceptions," as opposed to our inability to actually *conceive*, or "comprehend" them. Importantly for Strawson, although only a "relative idea" of external objects, this still means "a relative idea is not no idea at all".<sup>149</sup>

Hume's thoughts can perhaps be expounded as follows. We cannot "comprehend" external objects in any way . . . Nevertheless (Hume seems to be saying), even if we cannot form any idea of external objects that counts as positively contentful on the terms of the theory of ideas, we can still form a 'relative' idea of such objects. It is a merely relative idea because we cannot in any way conceive of or descriptively represent the nature of an external object as it is in itself (when it is supposed

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<sup>149</sup> Galen Strawson, *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume*, 50.

specifically different from perceptions); we can conceive it only indirectly.<sup>150</sup>

Strawson's reading focuses on what we are to understand "specifically different" to mean. Strawson gives his own definition:

In Hume's use, 'X is specifically different from Y' does not mean simply (1) 'X is of an entirely different species from Y', but rather (2) 'X and Y are in their properties entirely (*toto caelo*) dissimilar in character'. And, crucially, (1) does not entail (2): cats and lions (elephants or lizards) are (1) of entirely different species, but they are not (2) entirely dissimilar in character. Turning to the case of external objects and perceptions, these are taken to be (1) of entirely different species. But if some form of Lockean representative realism is defensible, then they are *not* (2) entirely dissimilar in character. For ideas (perceptions) of primary qualities are, precisely, held to *resemble* (be similar to) and thus truly represent primary qualities as they are in objects. So although external objects and perceptions are (1) of entirely different species there is an important sense in which they are not held to be 'specifically different' in the sense of being (2) entirely dissimilar in character. So on this view we can form some positive conception of the nature of external objects.<sup>151</sup>

So Strawson's interpretation depends on how Hume took Locke's "representative realism." But one immediate criticism is that, in Strawson's use of Hume's passage mentioning relative ideas, he omits the last sentence where Hume clearly states that, "Generally speaking we do not suppose them specifically different, but only attribute to them different relations, connexions and durations." (T 1.2.6.9) Consequently this seems to mean that we don't actually *suppose* anything about external objects at all (let alone form positive conceptions of them), "we do not [even] suppose them specifically different." All we can do is "attribute to them different relations, connexions and durations," or in other words, *pretend* they exist and then treat them as we would

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<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.* 50–51.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.* 51n31

perceptions. This reading does not appear to lead to Strawson's more wide-ranging claim that "we can form some positive conception of the nature of external objects."

Two other criticisms are obvious. First, Strawson omits what Hume says immediately before speaking of relative ideas.<sup>152</sup> Let us hear Hume:

Now since nothing is ever present to the mind but perceptions, and since all ideas are deriv'd from something antecedently present to the mind; it follows, that 'tis impossible for us so much as to conceive or form an idea of any thing specifically different from ideas and impressions. Let us fix our attention out of ourselves as much as possible: Let us chace our imagination to the heavens, or to the utmost limits of the universe; we never really advance a step beyond ourselves, nor can conceive any kind of existence, but those perceptions, which have appear'd in that narrow compass. This is the universe of the imagination, nor have we any idea but what is there produc'd. (T 1.2.6.8)

So although it is true that Hume speaks of the limits to what we can "conceive," his overall tone in the passage is surely idealist: "nothing is ever present to the mind but perceptions"; "Let us chace our imagination to the heavens, or to the utmost limits of the universe; we never really advance a step beyond ourselves." Moreover Hume states that this limit applies to what we can "form an idea of." And this statement appears to directly contradict Strawson's insistence that "we can *form* some positive conception of the nature of external objects" (my emphasis). So when considering the *complete* passage at (T 1.2.6.9) plus how Hume sets up the passage through what he states immediately prior (T 1.2.6.8), it appears that all Hume seems to mean when he says afterwards, that we can "form a relative idea" is, as Hume mentions: "Generally speaking we do not suppose them specifically different; but only attribute to them different

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<sup>152</sup> Blackburn also notices this omission in Strawson's reading. See his "Hume and Thick Connexions," 102.

relations, connexions and durations.” (T 1.2.6.9) Contrary to Strawson, we do not have, nor can we ever have, a “positive conception of the nature of external objects.”

But as Daniel Flage reminds us, Hume actually has very little to say about relative ideas.<sup>153</sup> The only occurrence of the phrase “relative idea” is in the above quoted passage (T 1.2.6.9). Only two other passages allude to relative ideas:

(A)

. . . let us remember, that as every idea is deriv’d from a preceding perception, ’tis impossible our idea of a perception, and that of an object or external existence can ever represent what are specifically different from each other. Whatever difference we may suppose betwixt them, ’tis still incomprehensible to us; and we are oblig’d either to conceive an external object merely as a relation without a relative, or to make it the very same with a perception or impression. (T 1.4.5.19)

(B)

[T]he 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. But if they had any idea of power, as it is in itself, why could not they Measure it in itself? The dispute whether the force of a body in motion be as its velocity, or the square of its velocity; this dispute, I say, need not be decided by comparing its effects in equal or unequal times; but by a direct mensuration and comparison.

(E 7.29.60n17)

The context of passage (A) is Hume’s attack on Spinoza’s notion of substance. As Flage notes, “Given [Hume’s] allusion to specific difference and his allusion to ‘a relation without a relative’ . . . it is not unreasonable to suggest Hume is alluding to a relative

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<sup>153</sup> Daniel Flage, “Relative Ideas Re-viewed,” *The New Hume Debate*, revised edition, eds. Kenneth A. Richman and Rupert Read (London: Routledge, 2007), 138–155, 138–139.

idea.”<sup>154</sup> Additionally in passage (B), “Hume seems to suggest that one can form a relative idea of power that singles out the unknown aspect of an object that is constantly conjoined with a known effect.”<sup>155</sup> However, in passage (A) Hume says *we can* “conceive an external object merely as a relation without a relative.” He apparently wishes to place the emphasis on our ability to “form a relative idea” (T 1.2.6.9), that is, on the *relation* rather than on the imagined unknown *object* or *relatum*. As Flage notices:

To be adequate, one must have a clear and distinct positive idea of both the *relation* that provides the basis for the relative idea and of the relation that obtains between that idea and the unknown *relatum*. In Hume’s parlance, both the idea that provides the basis for the relative idea and the idea of the relation must be copies of impressions (T 1.3.1.7 – 1.3.2.1–2) . . . But since in many cases the presumed relation obtains between a positive idea and a non-ideational entity, the question *whether* the relation in question obtains may remain open, a point Hume stressed (T 1.4.2.46–57)<sup>156</sup>

Flage bases his analysis on the accounts of relative ideas that we know Hume was familiar with.<sup>157</sup> Strawson, on the other hand, focuses his definition on what “specifically different” means by what he believes is Hume’s understanding of “Lockean representative realism.” However as Flage notes:

Locke’s discussion [of relative ideas] makes several points clear. First, substance *as such* is known solely on the basis of a relation, the relation of inhesion or support, which obtains between a positive idea conceived as a quality of a thing and the thing of which it is a quality. Second, this relation of support is central to one’s relative idea of substance in general. Finally, this relative idea provides one with no understanding of the intrinsic properties of a substratum.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.* 139.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.* 146.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.* 138–145.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.* 142.

Flage's evidence for his first two claims derives from Locke's response to the charge that he was "almost discarding substance out of the reasonable part of the world."<sup>159</sup>

Evidence for Flage's final claim derives from Locke's comment that "we have no *Idea* of what [substance] is, but only a confused obscure one of what it does."<sup>160</sup> But Locke's explanation here seems somewhat ambiguous, something that Berkeley seized upon in the following remark:

[Locke claims] . . . that extension is a mode or accident of matter, and that matter is the *substratum* that supports it. Now I desire that you would explain what is meant by matter's *supporting* extension: say you, I have no idea of matter, and therefore cannot explain it. I answer though you have no positive, yet if you have any meaning at all, you must at least have a relative idea of matter; though you know not what it is, yet you must be supposed to know what relation it bears to accident, and what is meant by it supporting them. It is evident *support* cannot here be taken in its usual or literal sense, as when we say that pillars support a building: in what sense therefore must it be taken?<sup>161</sup>

Here Berkeley seems to argue that there cannot be *any relation* that can support a relative idea, for there is nothing for the relation to support. Nevertheless Flage argues that there was a "definable tradition in the eighteenth century according to which it is possible in principle to single out imperceptible objects."<sup>162</sup> Although Strawson's account fails by being "ahistorical."<sup>163</sup> Flage concedes that *perhaps* Humean relative ideas can account

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<sup>159</sup> John Locke, *A Letter to the Right Reverend Edward, Lord Bishop of Worcester*, in *The Works of John Locke*, reprint, Vol. 4 (Darmstadt: Scientia Verlag Aalen, 1963), 5.

<sup>160</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, reprinted with corrections, ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 2.13.19.175. References are to Locke's book, chapter and paragraph number, followed by the Nidditch page number.

<sup>161</sup> George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, in *Philosophical Works Including the Works on Vision*, reprint, ed. Michael R. Ayers (London: Everyman's Library, 2000), 1.16.94–95. References are to part, paragraph and page numbers.

<sup>162</sup> Daniel Flage, "Relative Ideas Re-viewed," 152.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.* 152. "[Strawson] does not recognize that a fundamental element of that tradition is the recognition that a necessary condition for the acceptability of a relative idea is a clear understanding of the putative relation that obtains between the positive idea which provides its basis and the imperceptible related object . . . Locke assured Stillingfleet that he had ideas of relations and therefore could use relations to reach

for something in his empiricism, namely the problems encountered in his analysis of memory, although he admits that, “Hume never described his ideas of memory as relative ideas.”<sup>164</sup>

So with regard to Hume’s use of the phrase “relative idea”—even if he was influenced by Locke—the question remains as to what sort of relation Hume had in mind which could satisfy “the putative relation that obtains between the positive idea which provides its basis and the imperceptible related object.” According to Flage, “In the case of a relative idea of substance—“a relation without a relative” (T 1.4.5.19)—Hume’s discussion works under a theoretical constraint . . . The only plausible candidate for inhesion is the relation of identity, which results in absurd (inconsistent) consequences (T 1.4.5.22–26).”<sup>165</sup> Consequently it appears that, if Hume did have some sort of working notion of relative ideas, it was highly constrained and the issue of any sort of relation that can satisfy the criteria needed for relative ideas, for Hume “remains open.”<sup>166</sup> Therefore, contrary to Strawson’s more wide-ranging view, “The doctrine of relative ideas is not a blank check that allows one to claim to conceive of anything one might wish.”<sup>167</sup>

Yet in Strawson’s defence, he does not say we can “conceive of anything” but only *suppose* objects *by way of* relative ideas. Moreover, an important element of Strawson’s argument concerning relative ideas involves an understanding of Hume’s use of language. There is, in his words, the appearance of a “Meaning Tension”<sup>168</sup>:

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beyond the immediately given. Berkeley argued that the putative relation of support that provides the basis for the Lockean relative idea of material substance is unknown, and, therefore, the Lockean idea is unacceptable.”

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.* 146–149. Flage adds that, “The *sole* reason for claiming that they are is that it fits the representative features that any idea of memory must have.”

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.* 146.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.* 152.

<sup>168</sup> Galen Strawson, *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume*, 121.

... [Which] arises from the opposition between (1) a certain interpretation of the strict empiricism of his theory of ideas of meaning, on the one hand, and two other things, on the other hand: (2) his strictly non-committal Scepticism with respect to knowledge claims about what may or may not exist and (3) his strong, considered tendency towards Realist forms of thought and expression. The theory of ideas rejects as ‘unintelligible’ or ‘meaningless’ certain ideas or expressions that both Scepticism and Realism allow as intelligible.<sup>169</sup>

Consequently when Hume says that “the energy of the cause is as *unintelligible* as in the most unusual [event], and that we only learn by experience the frequent Conjunction of objects, without being ever able to comprehend anything like Connexion between them.” (E 7.21.55 [my emphasis]); or that, “As we can have no idea of any thing which never appeared to our outward sense or inward sentiment, the necessary conclusion seems to be that we have no idea of connexion or power at all, and that *these words are absolutely without any meaning*, (E 7.26.58 [my emphasis]) the “appearance of tension arises because our understanding of words like ‘meaning’ and ‘unintelligible’ is not the same as Hume’s.”<sup>170</sup> Here is how Strawson explains this “simple” point:

When present-day philosophers say that something is unintelligible they mean that it is incoherent and cannot exist. But Hume—with Locke, Berkeley, and many others—uses the word ‘unintelligible’ in the literal sense, which survives in the standard non-philosophical use of the word—as when we say that a message is unintelligible, meaning simply that we cannot understand it, although it exists (‘Ni chredai Hume nad yw achosiaeth yn ddim ond cydddigwyd-diad rheolaidd’). When Hume says that something is unintelligible, then, he means that we cannot understand it. In particular, he means that we cannot form an idea of it or term for it that has any positive descriptive content on the terms of the theory of ideas. To say this, however, is not to say that we cannot refer to it, or that the notion of it is incoherent.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.* 120.

<sup>170</sup> Galen Strawson, “David Hume: Objects and Power,” 42.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.* 35.

However, if this is the case, why does Hume add, in the above quoted passage that “these words are absolutely without any meaning,” and that this is true “when employed either in philosophical reasonings or common life”? (E 7.26.58) Moreover, Hume seems to anticipate this very line of reasoning—regarding liberal interpretations of language: “When we entertain, therefore, any suspicion that a philosophical term is employed without any meaning or idea (as is but too frequent), we need but enquire, *from what impression is that supposed idea derived?* And if it be impossible to assign any, this will serve to confirm our suspicion. By bringing ideas into so clear a light we may reasonably hope to remove all dispute, which may arise, concerning their nature and reality.” (E 2.9.16) Now it may be objected that Hume is here referring to the theory of ideas on purpose, particularly to the historical use of the term “innate,” even though he says this applies to determining the “nature and reality” of ideas. Yet this makes it difficult to see how (in Strawson’s words), “To say this [“meaningless” etc.], however, is not to say that we cannot refer to it, or that the notion of it is incoherent.” For as we have seen, Hume also says that these terms are “without any meaning or idea.”

Finally, in a footnote to (E 2.9.16) Hume criticizes Locke precisely for not being sufficiently exact with his own use of language: “To be ingenuous, I must own it to be my opinion, that Locke was betrayed into this question [regarding innate ideas] by the schoolmen, who, making use of undefined terms, draw out their disputes to a tedious length, without ever touching the point in question. A like ambiguity and circumlocution seem to run through that philosopher’s reasonings on this as well as most other subjects.” (E 2.9.16n1) Surely Hume did not wish to emulate Locke’s failure to employ precise terms (although one could argue that perhaps he did nevertheless). So we can feel mainly

confident that when Hume says ‘unintelligible’ or ‘meaningless’ he means *unintelligible* or *meaningless*.

The main problem with Strawson’s argument though, is as Flage notes, that it “assume[s] that Hume had a sophisticated theory of linguistic reference. But he did not have a full-blown theory of linguistic reference.”<sup>172</sup> Indeed it is precisely this lack of such a sophisticated linguistic theory that Flage recognizes makes his own reading of Hume rather unHumean inasmuch as it is based upon a “Russellian analysis of denoting phrases” that is rather dubious for it “would be anachronistic to contend that the eighteenth-century British philosophers anticipated the notion of a propositional function.”<sup>173</sup> However Flage contends that Hume, Locke, Berkeley etc., nevertheless “distinguished between knowledge by acquaintance and knowledge by description,” so perhaps “they accepted some of the same criteria for claiming knowledge by description that Russell accepted.”<sup>174</sup> However, correctly recognizing this anachronism, Flage’s analysis is admittedly more Flage than Hume. But for the same reason Strawson’s reading of Hume on relative ideas is probably more Strawson than Hume.

Simon Blackburn is another critic of Strawson’s claim that, “Hume invokes a distinction between what we can ‘suppose’ and what we can ‘conceive’” and Blackburn insists that Hume’s “texts give no direct support to this interpretation of Hume”: “While [Hume] uses both a ‘relative’ versus ‘specific’ distinction and the possibility of ‘supposing’ what we cannot ‘conceive’, he uses them very sparingly indeed. In fact he never uses either, nor mentions either in connexion with causation. He never uses or

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<sup>172</sup> Daniel Flage, “Relative Ideas Re-viewed,” 152–3.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.* 153.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid.* 143.

mentions either in the *Enquiry* or in the *Dialogues* in any context at all.”<sup>175</sup> Strawson’s reply to Blackburn’s charge here is weak. All he can come up with is that the reason Hume does not mention the distinction in the *Enquiry* is because, unlike the *Treatise*, where Hume—being influenced by the “iconoclastic ardour of youth”—feels “the necessity of making the distinction between what we can suppose and what we can conceive” more evident, later, in his more mature outlook, “Hume takes it for granted in the *Enquiry* which omits nearly all of the technicalities of the *Treatise*.”<sup>176</sup> So we are once again back to the slogan that the ‘*Enquiry* is better than the *Treatise*’ defence, together with the difficulty of understanding what Strawson means when he says that “Hume takes it for granted.”<sup>177</sup>

Yet there is still some merit to Strawson’s argument. He highlights, and Blackburn overlooks, a passage in the *Treatise* where Hume seems to want there to be a definite distinction between *supposing* and *conceiving*, and one with wide-ranging consequences: “[S]ince we may suppose, but never can conceive a specific difference betwixt an object and impression; any conclusion we form concerning the connexion and repugnance of impressions, will not be known certainly to be applicable to objects.” (T 1.4.5.20)<sup>178</sup> As I hope to show in Chapter Five, the question regarding relative ideas can perhaps be placed into tighter focus if we ask—particularly if Strawson’s reading is correct—what can we *suppose* about the objects of our dreams? For it is unlikely that Hume would concede that we can suppose anything about them in the way Strawson

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<sup>175</sup> Simon Blackburn, “Hume and thick connexions,” 101–2.

<sup>176</sup> Galen Strawson, “David Hume: Objects and Power,” 39.

<sup>177</sup> See Chapter Two for more on this point.

<sup>178</sup> Galen Strawson, “David Hume: Objects and Power,” 40.

suggests. This, of course, still leaves open though, the question as to what Hume really meant by relative ideas.

## II. Projectivism

Another kind of argument that has been put forth in the New Hume Debate concerns a similar problem that we have found with relative ideas. How does Hume explain how we form certain ideas about what we experience when there is apparently no preceding impression? The response to this problem invokes Hume's so-called projectivist explanation as to how we acquire ideas of, say, beauty, virtue, and, of particular importance, causation. As we saw in Chapter Two, Blackburn's argument regarding how we can acquire an idea of causal connection that he refers to as a "nexus" is that we *project* necessity onto objects. Blackburn is not agreeing with either the sceptical/causal realists, who say that causal regularity can tell us there is causation in the external world of objects, or with those who side with T. H. Greene, that all we have is the experience of regularity. Rather for Blackburn it is the habitual experience of causal regularity that makes us *project* a causal nexus onto assumed objects and so acquire our notion of causal inference.

To understand the projectivist argument, we can do no better than look at Barry Stroud's analysis, which is often considered to be the classic argument for the projectivist Hume. According to Stroud, Hume *argues* more than *explains* how we acquire the idea

of causation (and other ideas such as vice or virtue, beauty, etc.) by forming an idea that puzzlingly “does not represent anything.”<sup>179</sup> He focuses upon Hume’s passage:

There is, then, nothing new either discover’d or produc’d in any objects by their constant conjunction, and by the uninterrupted resemblance of their relations of succession and contiguity. But ’tis from this resemblance, that the ideas of necessity, of power, and of efficacy, are deriv’d. These ideas, therefore, represent not any thing, that does or can belong to the objects, which are constantly conjoin’d. This is an argument, which, in every view we can examine it, will be found perfectly unanswerable. (T 1.3.14.19)

For Stroud, “The problem then is to explain how we come to have such thoughts. It is not just a matter of identifying the occasions on which thoughts like that first come into our minds.”<sup>180</sup> As Stroud observes, Hume’s apparent answer is that, if we look for the origin for the idea, “You never can find it, till you turn your reflexion into your own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action. Here is a matter of fact; but ’tis the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself, not in the object.” (T 3.1.1.26) Consequently it is a “‘sentiment’ that always arises in such cases [as] something new, something beyond or at least different from any thought or belief produced by reason or the understanding.”<sup>181</sup> According to Stroud, “What is important for Hume is that it is what he calls ‘the imagination’, not reason or the understanding, that is the source of the ‘new’ or ‘additional’ item which must make its appearance in the mind.”<sup>182</sup> And as we saw in Chapter Two, with regard to the feeling that objects are necessarily connected, “the new item is an impression—a ‘sentiment’ or

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<sup>179</sup> Barry Stroud, “‘Gilding or staining’ the world with ‘sentiments’ and ‘phantasms’,” *The New Hume Debate*, revised edition, eds. Kenneth A. Richman and Rupert Read (London: Routledge, 2007), 16–30, 18.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.* 18.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.* 19.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.* 20.

feeling or an impression of reflection.”<sup>183</sup> Consequently it is a *feeling* that we project—just as in Blackburn’s case regarding a causal nexus—onto the *world*. This interpretation is based upon passages such as the following:

’Tis a common observation, 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 themselves to the senses. Thus as certain sounds and smells are always found to attend certain visible objects, we naturally imagine a conjunction, even in place, betwixt the objects and qualities, tho’ the qualities be of such a nature as to admit of no such conjunction, and really exist no where. (T 1.3.14.25)

This “great propensity” the mind has to “spread itself on external objects” also explains for Hume “why we suppose necessity and power to lie in the objects we consider, not in our mind, that considers them.” (T 1.3.14.25) Similarly, as Stroud observes, in the Appendix to the 2<sup>nd</sup> *Enquiry*, Hume also advocates this projectivist answer when he claims that the imagination “has a productive faculty, and gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment, raises, in a manner, a new creation.” (EM, Appendix 1.21)<sup>184</sup>

Yet although this appears to be Hume’s explanation as to how we project our minds onto the ‘external world,’ Stroud insists that “there is a real problem here for anyone who would interpret Hume as holding that we do really think of objects as causally or necessarily connected” because there remains “The question . . . [of] how this ‘gilding or staining’ is supposed to work.”<sup>185</sup> Stroud himself concludes that Hume does

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<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, A Critical Edition, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 89. Cited in Barry Stroud’s, “‘Gilding or staining’ the world with ‘sentiments’ and ‘phantasms’,” 21.

<sup>185</sup> Barry Stroud, “‘Gilding or staining’ the world with ‘sentiments’ and ‘phantasms’,” 21.

not really have answer to this question primarily because “The world as [Hume] conceives of it does not just happen to lack causal connections . . . There is no coherent place for them in any world which he conceives of.”<sup>186</sup> Stroud here concedes that Hume lacks the sophisticated notion of intentionality required to explain why we have such ideas:

That is the problem I find at the centre of Hume’s philosophy. It is not unique to Hume. There is admittedly a completely general problem of intentionality which he faces because of his own special conception of the mind and its contents. Strictly speaking, I believe he is not really in a position to explain how we could ever have any thoughts at all of something’s being so. That is largely because of that ‘theory of ideas’ he inherited from Locke and Berkeley . . . On that conception, the ‘objects’ of the different senses—the only things sensed—are in each case strictly speaking only qualities.<sup>187</sup>

It has been noted that “Stroud is not sympathetic to Hume’s views.”<sup>188</sup> But a good critical discussion of both Stroud’s and Blackburn’s projectivist interpretations has recently been put forth by P.J.E. Kail:

Both ways of understanding ‘projection’, different though they are, share two features. First, the metaphor of projection is supposed to be explanatory of a belief, of an idea or (more vaguely) of the subject’s taking the world to be a certain way. Second, both tie themselves to forms of *anti-realism*. For Stroud . . . the anti-realism is equivalent to an error theory: our thoughts embodying systematic error because of some false referential presumption in the projected thoughts (we think there are real powers or values but there are none). Blackburn, by contrast, offers a different form of anti-realism, one that is not an error theory. For his Hume, the use of terms like ‘power’ and ‘virtue’ are perfectly legitimate, for we are not trying to represent something to be there which is *not* ‘really out there’. Instead we are expressing habits of inference or

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<sup>186</sup> *Ibid.* 27.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.* 28.

<sup>188</sup> Corliss Swain, “Review” of *The New Hume Debate*, eds. Kenneth A. Richman and Rupert Read (London: Routledge, 2000), in *Hume Studies* 28.1 (April 2002), 157–160, 158.

sentiments and even though we talk in certain ways, we never really thought there were such powers or values.<sup>189</sup>

Kail admits that he once saw these projectivist interpretations as incompatible with any form of realism, yet he has recently changed his mind, claiming that there is a sceptical/causal realist projectivism, one that clearly favours the realist more than it does any anti-realist assumptions.<sup>190</sup> His argument rests on the claim that Hume can appeal to what Kail refers to as “Bare Thoughts”: “[W]e can specify uniquely that which we cannot understand by reference to the cognitive consequences that a genuine impression would yield, namely the capacity to make *a priori* inference from cause to effect and a related incapacity to conceive cause without its effect.”<sup>191</sup> Kail finds evidence for this in the Appendix to the *Treatise* where Hume describes the famous labyrinth he finds himself in concerning the difficulties regarding his account of personal identity, together with something that Kail believes is assumed by Hume in the *Dialogues*.

Much ink has been spilled on the famous section in the Appendix concerning the labyrinth. Kail’s own interpretation is to argue that only a realist Hume would find himself in such a labyrinth:

The reasoning Hume exploits to undo the notion of the self as a simple substance of which perceptions are modes, forces the conclusion that perceptions are metaphysically independent items, items that cannot be necessarily connected. But the self, on his system, is a bundle of perceptions, a bundle, furthermore, connected by *causation*. A realist Hume assumes that anything that is causally connected is connected by an unknowable necessary connection. So his account of self forces an unacceptable conclusion.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> P.J.E. Kail, “Introduction” to his *Projection and Realism in Hume’s Philosophy*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), xxv.

<sup>190</sup> P.J.E. Kail, *Projection and Realism in Hume’s Philosophy*, 124.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.* 98.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.* 125.

Consequently if Hume believes in the Bare Thought of a self sustained through causation, and even if that causation is “unknowable,” it forces him into the labyrinth of personal identity. Yet Kail does not address the issue of time in Hume’s philosophy at all, and consequently misses the temporal factor involved in Hume’s notion of the self. This aspect of time and identity has, for example, been elaborated most recently by Donald Baxter.<sup>193</sup> Unfortunately this omission leaves Kail’s interpretation of the labyrinth as just another on the mountain: interesting but far from conclusive.

Kail’s evidence from the *Dialogues* is also open to conjecture. He maintains that the following passage involving “necessary existence” has “similar considerations [which] apply to necessary connection”.<sup>194</sup>

It is pretended that the Deity is a necessarily existent being; and this necessity of his existence is attempted to be explained by asserting, that if we knew his whole essence or nature, we should perceive it to be as impossible for him not to exist, as for twice two not to be four. But it is evident that this can never happen, while our faculties remain the same as at present. It will still be possible for us, at any time, to conceive the non-existence of what we formerly conceived to exist; nor can the mind ever lie under a necessity of supposing any object to remain always in being; in the same manner as we lie under a necessity of always conceiving twice two to be four. The words, therefore, necessary existence, have no meaning; or, which is the same thing, none that is consistent. (DNR IX, 91–92)

The voice is that of Cleanthes, and according to Kail:

The sense of ‘necessity’ is such that were we to know [God’s] essence we would find it impossible to conceive his non-existence. This is a direct analogue to our way of specifying necessary connection in terms of the

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<sup>193</sup> Donald L. M. Baxter, *Hume’s Difficulty: Time and Identity in the Treatise* (New York, Routledge, 2008).

<sup>194</sup> P.J.E. Kail, *Projection and Realism in Hume’s Philosophy*, 99.

cognitive consequences captured by the Bare Thought. The words ‘necessary existence’ have no meaning because there is an incoherence to be found in their elucidation: we can always find the supposition of his non-existence conceivable.<sup>195</sup>

However, Kail also observes that the key feature of this “direct analogue” is Cleanthes’ statement that this incoherence regarding necessary existence is only present “while our faculties remain as at present.” For Kail, “This suggests a different place for Cleanthes’ ‘contradiction’: it is not that necessity so characterized is incoherent, but rather as we presently are we cannot grasp any such feature. That is crucially different from saying that there could never be any such feature, specified by reference to its cognitive consequences for those with different cognitive equipment.”<sup>196</sup> Yet this interpretation puts a huge stress on what Cleanthes—and Hume—are stating, since Cleanthes is often taken to be the hero of the *Dialogues*. Cleanthes is responding mainly to the incoherent ontological arguments of the dogmatically religious Demea. Given this, one can easily assume that Cleanthes is suggesting sarcastically that, if there were a possible afterlife, where “our faculties [do not] remain as [they are] at present,” we would be able to know the “essence or nature” of God and the idea of necessity. Yet to say that Cleanthes’ argument is actually *not* showing an incoherence, is to take as serious the sarcastic remark concerning a time when our faculties could understand God. This also assumes that Hume was taking seriously the belief in an afterlife where we could know God’s essence and thus also understand the idea of necessity—a radical interpretation indeed.

In the end, Kail’s sceptical/causal realist interpretation regarding our ability to have Bare Thoughts is very much like the similar interpretations we have already seen:

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<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.* 100.

<sup>196</sup> *Ibid.*

“Hume’s realism is a very deep form of scepticism,”<sup>197</sup> in that “Our conceptual resources are geared to sensory experiences and, as for all the other animals, the structure of the world is closed off to us.”<sup>198</sup>

Consequently, projectivism, relative ideas, and the suggestion as to what role these play in Hume’s empiricism are still ongoing in the New Hume Debate.

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<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.* 143.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.* 144.

## Chapter Four

### The *Treatise* versus the *Enquiry*

As we have seen in the previous chapters, much of the New Hume Debate could be called the New Hume Text Debate. There is a definite stress on the primacy of the *Enquiry* over the *Treatise* by those who advocate the sceptical/causal realist interpretation. The reason is obvious: In the *Enquiry* Hume appears to—in Strawson’s words—take “for granted”<sup>199</sup> the existence of causation and the existence of external objects. Moreover as we noted in Chapter One, they also accept Kemp Smith’s claim that, in the *Enquiry* “the natural beliefs are no longer taken as being explicable in terms of processes and propensities more ultimate than themselves. Instead they are accepted as being *for us* ultimate.”<sup>200</sup> But in the *Treatise*, there are passages that are completely opposed to this interpretation, and which lend themselves more to the traditional reading of Hume as an extravagant sceptic who, if he was making any ontological claims at all, was essentially an idealist for whom only perceptions exist. (T 1.4.2.50)

There are two main lines of argument in this Text Debate: (1) That the *Enquiry* is a better-written work which shows advances in Hume’s thought; and (2) not only is the *Treatise* the superior work but the main reason why Hume wrote anything was because of his chief desire for literary fame. Both arguments draw heavily on Hume’s biography.

First, the fact that the *Enquiry* is a better-written work than the *Treatise* is not really disputed. Kemp Smith correctly observes that, “No one questions that in respect of

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<sup>199</sup> Galen Strawson, *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume*, 1.

<sup>200</sup> Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines*, 125.

exposition the *Enquiries* are a great advance upon the *Treatise*.”<sup>201</sup> Of course this stylistic observation is only an aesthetic claim. It doesn’t imply (or shouldn’t imply) anything about the philosophical merits of the work. No one would claim that a Coles Notes version of *Hamlet* is a superior work to Shakespeare’s original play just because it is easier to read and understand. However what the New Humeans try to argue partly from this stylistic claim is that this so-called “great advance” in writing style also speaks “to the quality of Hume’s critical powers, and more especially to his powers of self-criticism.”<sup>202</sup> But can we easily move from the fact that the *Enquiry* is stylistically superior to the *Treatise* to the claim that it is also a superior philosophical work?<sup>203</sup> Kemp Smith claims Hume’s power of self-criticism begins to show itself early, in his addition of the Appendix to Book 3 of the *Treatise*:

What better evidence—evidence reinforced by the recently discovered *Abstract*<sup>204</sup>—could we have of Hume’s readiness to revise his own work in an impersonal, critical manner than the Appendix in which he expresses dissatisfaction with his account of the doctrine which is central in Book 1, his doctrine of belief, and in which he also frankly confesses that his methods of dealing with the self have proved abortive.<sup>205</sup>

Strawson too shares this view that Hume was a more self-reflecting writer when he wrote the *Enquiry*, thus implying it is also a superior work: “Hume was at the height of his

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<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.* 537.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> To be fair, John Wright is an exception to this view, arguing that, “The advantage of the *Treatise* [that is, specifically for Wright’s psychophysical interpretation of Hume (see Chapter One)] is that it gives a clear indication of the nature of doctrines which are only described in an abstract way in the *Enquiry*.” (See John P. Wright, *The Sceptical Realism of David Hume*, 8n15, 76.)

<sup>204</sup> David Hume, *An Abstract of a Treatise of Human Nature 1740: A Pamphlet hitherto unknown by David Hume*, reprinted with an Introduction, eds. J. M. Keynes and P. Sraffa (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1938).

<sup>205</sup> Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines*, 523–4. Hume attaches an Appendix to Book 3 of the *Treatise* in 1740. See Ernest Campbell Mossner’s, *The Life of David Hume*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 138.

powers when he wrote the *Enquiry*. He had not gone soft in the head. He had had more time to think. He was trying to make his position as clear as possible. He meant what he said and said it beautifully.”<sup>206</sup> Although the strawman fallacy of Strawson’s views are obvious<sup>207</sup>—no critic is seriously claiming that Hume was “soft in the head” when he wrote the *Enquiry*—he bases his position on the persuasive argument championing the *Enquiry* put forth by Anthony Flew.<sup>208</sup> According to Flew, “The stylistic deficiencies of the production of ‘a solitary Scotchman’ [in the *Treatise*] have yielded to the urbane polishings of the rising professional man of letters [in the *Enquiry*].”<sup>209</sup>

All of these accounts reinforce the claim which Hume himself apparently gives for favouring the *Enquiry* over the *Treatise*. In his 1754 letter to John Stewart, Hume regrets his “very great mistake in conduct, viz. my publishing at all the *Treatise of Human Nature* . . . a book which I composed before I was five and twenty” and is so flawed by “the ardour of youth” that he further declares that it “so much displeases me that I have not patience to review it.”<sup>210</sup> Hume takes a similar view (as we have already seen in Chapter Two) in the Advertisement to the *Enquiry*, in which he allegedly refutes “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.” He was upset that his critics “care to direct all their batteries against that juvenile work” (E 1) rather than directing them towards the more mature *Enquiry*. On his deathbed, Hume’s views concerning the *Treatise* were the same. In his brief autobiography he laments how “I had always

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<sup>206</sup> Galen Strawson, *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume*, 8.

<sup>207</sup> No pun intended.

<sup>208</sup> Galen Strawson, *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume*, 8n4.

<sup>209</sup> Anthony Flew, *Hume’s Philosophy of Belief* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd., 1961), 4.

<sup>210</sup> “Letter 91, To John Stewart,” in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, vol. 1 of 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 187.

entertained a notion that my want of success in publishing the *Treatise of Human Nature* had proceeded more from the manner than the matter, and that I had been guilty of a very usual indiscretion in going to the press too early.” (MOL 612)<sup>211</sup>

Although these statements by Hume appear to agree with the New Humean outlook in championing the *Enquiry*, there is a controversy as to what Hume’s motives were when making these statements. T. H. Huxley epitomizes a popular view of Hume in the nineteenth century:

It must be confessed that . . . Hume exhibits no small share of the craving after mere notoriety and vulgar success, as distinct from the pardonable, if not honourable, ambition for solid and enduring fame, which would have harmonized better with his philosophy. Indeed, it appears to be by no means improbable that this peculiarity of Hume’s moral constitution was the cause of his gradually forsaking philosophical studies, after the publication of the third part of the *Treatise* . . . and turning to those political and historical topics which were likely to yield, and did in fact yield, a much greater return of that sort of success which his soul loved.<sup>212</sup>

The Danish scholar, Vinding Kruse, voiced a similar view in the 1930’s:

It is well known that in his later life Hume time after time suppressed his most radical ideas in order to be better appreciated by the public, and it is characteristic that in his autobiography he describes the “ruling passion” of his life not as a Spinoza would have done, as the urge of philosophical cognition, but love of literary fame. And this literary ambition was not of the nature which was content with the immortality usually accorded to great thinkers by a late posterity; but, practical and concrete as he was, he craved first and foremost the admiration of his contemporaries.<sup>213</sup>

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<sup>211</sup> David Hume, “My Own Life,” in Ernest Campbell Mossner’s, *The Life of David Hume*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 611–615. Reference shows page number.

<sup>212</sup> T. H. Huxley, *English Men of Letters Series*, 1880, 11.

<sup>213</sup> Vinding Kruse, *Hume’s Philosophy in his Principle Work, A Treatise of Human Nature and in his Essays*, Trans. (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 8.

Unfortunately these views about Hume's character are not without some basis in fact.

Kruse quotes from Hume's deathbed autobiography where Hume states rather

humorously:

To conclude historically with my own Character—I am, or rather was (for that is the Style, I must now use in speaking of myself; which emboldens me the more to speak my Sentiments) I was, I say, a man of mild Dispositions, of Command of Temper, of an open, social, and cheerful Humour, capable of Attachment, but little susceptible of Enmity, and of great Moderation in all my Passions. Even my Love of literary Fame, my ruling Passion, never soured my humour, notwithstanding my frequent Disappointments. (MOL 615)

However Hume also speaks of his “ruling Passion” earlier in his autobiography in relation to the type of authors he was interested in, and also to the extent in which he believed literary success was a way out of poverty and illness:

My family . . . was not rich; and being myself a younger Brother, my Patrimony, according to the Mode of my Country, was of course very slender . . . I passed through the ordinary Course of Education with Success; and was seized very early with a passion for Literature which has been the ruling Passion of my Life . . . I found an insurmountable Aversion to every thing but the pursuits of Philosophy and general Learning . . . Cicero and Virgil were the Authors which I was secretly devouring.

My very slender Fortune, however, being unsuitable to this plan of Life, and my Health being a little broken by my ardent Application, I was tempted or rather forced to make a very feeble Trial for entering into a more active Scene of Life. (MOL 611)

Hume goes on to mention how, although “forced” to take jobs that took him away from his “ruling Passion,” he “resolved to make a very rigid Frugality supply my Deficiency of Fortune, to maintain unimpaired my Independency, and to regard every object as contemptible, except the Improvement of my Talents in Literature.” (MOL 611, 613)

Yet the main problem is that much of what Hume says regarding the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*, and the related subject of how we are to interpret his analysis of causation in these works, appear not only in the autobiography, and in the Advertisement to the *Enquiry*, but in correspondence, that along with the autobiography and the Advertisement, have suspicious background contexts. And *this* more than anything else makes one wonder whether the comments are being put forth by someone who, although he has the “honourable, ambition for solid and enduring fame,” is actually being “forced” by other practical constraints to be something less than truly honest.

For example, there is the often-quoted letter that Hume wrote to Gilbert Elliot of Minto in 1751:

I believe the philosophical Essays<sup>214</sup> contain every thing of Consequence relating the Understanding, which you would meet with in the *Treatise*; & I give you Advise against reading the latter. By shortening & simplifying the Questions, I really render them much more complete. *Addo dum minuo.*<sup>215</sup> The philosophical Principles are the same in both: But I was carry'd away by the Heat of Youth & Invention to publish too precipitately. So vast an Understanding, plan'd before I was one and twenty, & compos'd before twenty five, must necessarily be very defective. I have repented my Haste a hundred, & a hundred times.<sup>216</sup>

This is a persuasive bit of evidence for those who wish to argue that Hume's own feelings were that the 'shortened' *Enquiry* is actually “more complete.” Yet there is a suspicious context surrounding Hume's comments. The letter was written while Hume was being considered for the Logic Chair at Glasgow University. Many friends, including Adam

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<sup>214</sup> As Tom Beauchamp notes, “*An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* was originally published in 1748 as *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding*.” See Beauchamp's Preface to the *Enquiry*, v.

<sup>215</sup> Tom Beauchamp translates this as “I add while I decrease in size.” See his Introduction to the *Enquiry*, xv n11.

<sup>216</sup> “Letter 73, To Gilbert Elliot of Minto,” in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, vol. 1 of 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 158.

Smith, were pushing Hume's candidacy although there was strong opposition to his appointment. But Mossner notes that, "Gilbert Elliot of Minto, another intimate of Hume's, was also influential and, although opposed to Hume's religious principles, supported his candidacy."<sup>217</sup> Hume's religious views eventually prevented him from getting the position. Unfortunately, as Mossner notes, "The Glasgow appointment would, of course, have provided Hume with a considerable library for his historical studies."<sup>218</sup> This is important for it is only with access to a library that Hume was able to fully take on his cherished project of writing his *History of England*. As Mossner notes, Hume had been eagerly wishing to turn historian, since at least the mid 1740's.<sup>219</sup> However it wasn't until he was "elected Keeper of the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh in January 1752" that he was finally presented "with a library of some 30,000 volumes and the long-sought-for opportunity of turning historian in earnest."<sup>220</sup> We are even given a glimpse into Hume's eagerness for this project, and also his considerations regarding possible fame as a consequence for writing the *History*, in a letter he wrote to his friend John Clephane in January of 1753:

I have begun a work which will employ me several years, and which yields me much satisfaction. Tis a History of Britain, from the Union of the Crowns to the present time. I have already finished the reign of King James. My friends flatter me (by this I mean that they don't flatter me), that I have succeeded. You know that there is no post of honour in the English Parnassus more vacant than that of History . . . I hope it will please you and posterity.<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>217</sup> Ernest Campbell Mossner's, *The Life of David Hume*, 247.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.* 249.

<sup>219</sup> *Ibid.* 301.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>221</sup> "Letter 79, To John Clephane," in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, vol. 1 of 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 170-1.

As we see, although Hume states that at the beginning of 1753 he had “begun . . . a History of Britain” he also admits that the first volume is “already finished.” Therefore we can safely assume that Hume was already working on the *History* before 1753, and quite probably during the controversy surrounding the vacant Logic Chair in 1751. So it is also likely that Hume wrote to Elliot mainly to try and deflate the already vocal controversy over perceived *atheistic* analyses present in the *Treatise* and reassure Elliot—who was “opposed to Hume’s religious principles”—for his continuing support, support he needed if he was to get the Logic Chair and thus have access to the library at Glasgow University which was necessary for his “long-sought-for opportunity of turning historian.”

A similar context shows itself with regard to the equally often-quoted 1754 letter to John Stewart where he defines the *Treatise* as being the product of “the ardour of youth.”<sup>222</sup> John Stewart, the Professor of Natural Philosophy in Edinburgh, had written a scathing attack against an article written by Hume’s friend Henry Home for a publication co-edited by Hume for the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh.<sup>223</sup> In that article, Stewart also takes a severe satirical swipe at Hume’s *Treatise*, and in particular criticizes Hume for claiming there is no self and that causation is not real. He also includes a jibe at Hume’s more recent work.<sup>224</sup> At the time, Hume was a joint secretary of the

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<sup>222</sup> “Letter 91, To John Stewart,” in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, vol. 1 of 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 187.

<sup>223</sup> Henry Home (Lord Kames), “Of the Laws of Motion,” in *Essays and Observations, Physical and Literary, Read before a Society in Edinburgh and Published by Them*, eds. Alexander Munro and David Hume (Edinburgh: Philosophical Society of Edinburgh, 1754). See also Mossner’s, *The Life of David Hume*, 257–258.

<sup>224</sup> John Stewart, “Some Remarks on the Laws of Motion, and the Inertia of Matter,” in *Essays and Observations, Physical and Literary, Read before a Society in Edinburgh and Published by Them*, eds. Alexander Munro and David Hume (Edinburgh: Philosophical Society of Edinburgh, 1754). Although Stewart focuses his attack on Henry Home, he adds the following about Hume: “That something may begin to exist, or start into being without a cause, hath indeed been advanced in a very ingenious and

Philosophical Society of Edinburgh, but was by then also holding the position of Keeper of the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh.<sup>225</sup> The reason this background context is important is that although Hume had been elected to the position of Keeper by a circle of his friends, his position was—as had been the situation a few years earlier concerning his candidacy for the Logic Chair at Glasgow—being strongly contested by others who argued that an “atheist” should not be holding such a station.<sup>226</sup> Obviously the Keeper's job was important to Hume because he enjoyed access to the 30,000 volumes to write his *History*. Since Stewart's charge not only ridicules Hume's *Treatise* but also his more recent work, *and* since Stewart's criticism implies the atheistic charge that there is no self (i.e., no soul) and that there is no notion of cause (i.e., no First Cause or God), it is probable again that the main reason why Hume wrote the letter to Stewart was to try and deflate the issues that could have forced him out of his Keeper position.

One further element in all this is that these letters, and the contexts in which they were written, seem to contradict what Hume says in his autobiography. Looking back on his life and mentioning how around 1749 his books (except for the *Treatise*) were finally gaining some attention, Hume proudly claims:

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profound system of the sceptical philosophy; but hath not yet been adopted by any of the societies for the improvement of knowledge. Such sublime conceptions are far above the reach of an ordinary genius; and could not have entered into the head of the greatest physiologist on earth. The man who believes that a perception may subsist without a percipient mind or perceiver, may well comprehend, that an action may be performed without an agent, or a thing produced without any Cause of the production. And the author of this new and wonderful doctrine informs the world, that, when he looked into his own mind, he could discover nothing but a series of fleeting perceptions; and that from thence he concluded, that he himself was nothing but a bundle of such perceptions.” Stewart adding in a footnote, “*Treatise of Human Nature*, 3 vols. octavo. This is the system at large, a work suited only to the comprehension of Adepts. And excellent compend or sum whereof, for the benefit of vulgar capacities, we of this nation enjoy in the *Philosophical Essays*, and the *Essays Moral and Political*.” See Mossner's, *The Life of David Hume*, 258–259.

<sup>225</sup> Ernest Campbell Mossner's, *The Life of David Hume*, 257–259.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.* 250–252.

[T]he Sale of them was gradually encreasing, and . . . new Editions were demanded. Answers, by Reverends and Right Reverends, came out two or three in a Year: And I found by Dr Warburtons Railing that the Books were beginning to be esteemed in good Company. However, I had fixed a Resolution, which I inflexibly maintained, never to reply to any body; and not being very irascible in my Temper, I have easily kept myself clear of all literary Squabbles. (MOL 612–613)

Well, either Hume forgot about these incidents mentioned above, or he is not being totally honest about the “literary Squabbles” he was involved in. Another option of course is to take Hume’s word for it, and say that these were not “literary Squabbles,” meaning that in Hume’s mind, the letters to Stewart and to Gilbert Elliot do not concern literary or philosophical matters, but are, as they appear to be once we see the background context, *business* (employment, financial, access to academic resources, etc.) matters.

The consequence of this for the New Hume Debate is crucial. For not only do these two letters (Stewart’s and Elliot’s) lend weight to Hume’s apparent dismissal of the *Treatise* and promotion of the *Enquiry*, but the letter to Stewart in particular is frequently cited to show that Hume didn’t really deny the reality of causation. This use of letters in the hope of finding *evidence* for Hume’s true philosophical positions is a questionable practice itself, since we know this goes against Hume’s own wishes. As Greig notes in his Introduction to *The Letters of David Hume*: “David Hume himself would probably have disapproved of this book [*The Letters*]. It troubled him to think that certain of his private letters might, by chance or through the indiscretion of his friends, ‘fall into idle People’s hands, and be honord with a Publication’; and apparently, a little while before

his death, he took pains to call a few back from their recipients, and burned them.”<sup>227</sup>

This part of Hume’s final wishes regarding the destruction of his correspondence is something that is never mentioned by those who quote from the letters to Stewart and Elliot in order to help support their sceptical/causal realist arguments. Even if Hume had not tried to collect and burn his previous correspondence, there is the question as to whether Hume’s business correspondence should be given any scholarly weight at all in contrast to the philosophical claims he puts forth in his published works. Reading the letters to get a glimpse into Hume’s life is one thing, using them to help establish an interpretation of his philosophical claims is quite another matter.

However one might argue that although Hume was trying to destroy his earlier letters and that there is a suspicious context surrounding the letters to Stewart and Elliot, this does not question the fact that Hume wished for the *Treatise* to be seen as inferior to the *Enquiry*, for there is the famous Advertisement for the *Enquiry* that Hume wanted inserted into it at the end of his life along with similar views found in his deathbed autobiography. However there is reason to be suspicious here as well. For example we have already seen that the autobiography is not written in a spirit of full honesty, and on reflection this may not be surprising.

In a letter dated May 3<sup>rd</sup> 1776, to his appointed executor of his unpublished papers, Adam Smith, Hume reveals some of his final wishes<sup>228</sup> regarding his autobiography: “You will find among my Papers a very inoffensive Piece, called *My own Life*, which I composed a few days before I left Edinburgh . . . There can be no Objection, that this small piece should be sent to [Hume’s publishers] Mess<sup>rs</sup> Strahan and

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<sup>227</sup> J. Y. T. Grieg, “Introduction” to *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, vol. 1 of 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), xxi.

<sup>228</sup> Hume died on August 25<sup>th</sup>, 1776.

Cadell and the Proprietors of my other Works to be prefixed to any future Edition of them.”<sup>229</sup> Note here that Hume chooses to describe the autobiography as “very inoffensive.” Why this is so may be gathered from a letter that he writes to William Strahan a month later. After mentioning that Adam Smith will be sending Strahan a copy of *My own Life*, Hume says:

I am also to speak to you of another Work more important: Some Years ago, I composed a piece, which would make a small Volume in Twelves. I call it *Dialogues on natural Religion*: Some of my Friends flatter me, that it is the best thing I ever wrote . . . It is not necessary you should prefix your Name to the Title Page. I seriously declare, that after Mr Millar and You and Mr Cadell have publickly avowed your Publication of the *Enquiry concerning human Understanding*, I know no Reason why you should have the least Scruple with regard to these Dialogues.<sup>230</sup>

The letter to Strahan tells us much about Hume’s worries about whether his *Dialogues* would be published posthumously, and somewhat of his mistrust of Strahan’s ability to carry out his wishes.<sup>231</sup> It is known, for example, that Strahan did not share Hume’s religious views. When Hume was near death, “William Strahan, took occasion to express

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<sup>229</sup> “Letter 522A, To Adam Smith,” in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, vol. 2 of 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 317.

<sup>230</sup> “Letter 525, To William Strahan,” in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, vol. 2 of 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 323–324.

<sup>231</sup> This point could be objected from the fact that in Hume’s last letter (addressed to Adam Smith) he states that, “There is No Man in whom I have a greater Confidence than Mr Strahan.” However Hume adds, “yet have I left the property of that Manuscript [of the *Dialogues*] to my Nephew David in case by any accident it should not be published within three years after my decease. The only accident I could foresee, was one to Mr Strahan’s Life, and without this clause My Nephew would have had no right to publish it. Be so good as to inform Mr Strahan of this Circumstance.” Hume’s worry is evident, but so is his somewhat insincere tone regarding the confidence in Strahan (or Smith, or his nephew for that matter). At the end of his life Hume went out of his way to make sure all three knew his wishes, *and*, that all three were aware that they were not the only ones Hume had made his wishes known to. Consequently Hume’s claim of confidence in Strahan to Adam Smith regarding what he has instructed to his nephew, speaks more of polite manoeuvring to make sure that his final wishes would be carried out than a genuine statement of assurance from Hume concerning Strahan. See “Letter 540, To Adam Smith,” in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, vol. 2 of 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 335–336.

the hope that he would reconsider his religious scepticism.”<sup>232</sup> (The letter also implies something about the *Enquiry*, and particularly asks how we are to interpret its version of causation if Hume considers it more controversial than the *Dialogues*). So there is doubt cast upon Hume’s autobiography. It appears to have been written by Hume with the double-objective of not only having the final word, but also to alleviate Strahan’s hesitation in publishing the posthumous *Dialogues*.

Moreover we know that Hume, in the last letter he wrote two days before dying, gave Adam Smith permission to add his own words to the autobiography: “I give you entire liberty to make what Additions you please to the account of my Life.”<sup>233</sup> Although we know that the additions Smith made did not involve the famous repudiation of the *Treatise*,<sup>234</sup> it does raise the question as to how seriously Hume wanted his autobiography to be taken. It is certainly not the attitude of someone who wishes it to be seen as of *scholarly* value, and to be placed alongside his published works for comparative analysis.

This background to the autobiography also casts doubt onto the legitimacy of the Advertisement to the *Enquiry*. As we saw in Chapter Two, Hume mentions to Strahan that, “There is a short Advertisement, which I wish I had prefix’d to the second Volume of the Essays and Treatises in the last Edition. I send you a Copy of it.”<sup>235</sup> Though the letter to Strahan still exists, the original draft of the Advertisement is lost. Since Strahan was aware that Hume gave Smith permission to make alterations to *My own Life*,<sup>236</sup> this

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<sup>232</sup> Ernest Campbell Mossner’s, *The Life of David Hume*, 599.

<sup>233</sup> “Letter 540, To Adam Smith,” in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, vol. 2 of 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 336.

<sup>234</sup> For information on the Smith additions see “Appendixes L & M,” in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, vol. 2 of 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 449–454.

<sup>235</sup> “Letter 509, To William Strahan,” in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, vol. 2 of 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 301.

<sup>236</sup> See “Adam Smith to William Strahan,” in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J. Y. T. Greig, vol. 2 of 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 450–452.

raises the question of whether, considering Strahan's religious attitude at the time—if not for the purely common-sense business objective of wanting to differentiate the new editions of works from the troubling *Treatise*—the published version of the Advertisement is more Strahan's authorship than Hume's.

Consequently there is little reason to accept Kemp Smith's opinion that, "what we ought in fairness to recognise is that Hume was his own best critic."<sup>237</sup> With regard to the more acute charges put forth by Kruse, that Hume "craved first and foremost the admiration of his contemporaries," and that he regarded "the judgement of the public as his supreme court, his only guide in his literary work," Kemp Smith is more successful at smoothing over this accusation. He points out that although Hume knew "His readers—those possible readers who existed in any considerable number—were Christians in religion," yet he repeatedly challenged the worship of this religion in his works. Notably "In the writing of history, his independence of judgement again landed him on the unpopular side," Kemp Smith asking "Was this the conduct of a man who was ready to violate truth for the gaining of a merely temporary fame";<sup>238</sup> as Kruse charges, treated "the judgement of the public as his supreme court"? Perhaps not, yet this does not rule out Hume's willingness to "violate truth" for more practical means.

Mossner as well tries to put a sympathetic spin onto the controversy surrounding Hume's actual motives. In an early paper cited by Peter Millican in his own defence of Hume's motives,<sup>239</sup> Mossner does a convincing job of showing that the criticism whereby

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<sup>237</sup> Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines*, 536.

<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.* 528.

<sup>239</sup> Peter Millican, "Context, Aims, Structure of the *Enquiry*," in *Reading Hume on Human Understanding: Essays on the First Enquiry*, ed., Peter Millican (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 27–65, 35n12.

Hume was “motivated primarily by the desire to make money” is shortsighted.<sup>240</sup>

However Mossner does not deal with the evidence that Hume’s desire to write his *History* forced him to publicly denounce the *Treatise* and its denial of causation for the reasons outlined above. And although Mossner mentions—in defence of Hume—what is stated in the letter to Stewart, he does not dig into the informative background context surrounding that letter.<sup>241</sup>

Perhaps more revealingly, in his later full biography on Hume, Mossner states:

[The Advertisement is] the petulant retort of an ageing man, tired of controversy and sick in body. The long and unhappy career of the youthful *Treatise* from 1739 to 1775, reaching the climax in the latest spate of abuse from Beattie, must have persuaded Hume to make a public repudiation. Happily, few philosophers of our day have taken the “Advertisement” seriously; and the *Treatise of Human Nature*, so maligned by its author, is considered a masterpiece.<sup>242</sup>

Subsequently it is a bit of a mystery as to why Flew so quickly dismisses the topic of Hume’s actual motives in promoting the *Enquiry* at the expense of the *Treatise*: “It seems that for a long time these charges [regarding Hume’s ulterior motives] were accepted almost as truisms. Fortunately there is no call for us to turn aside to discuss them. Kemp Smith and Mossner have disposed of them faithfully.”<sup>243</sup> Yet clearly they have not. Millican also shows his selective citing of Mossner by choosing to defend Mossner’s incomplete account of Hume’s motives, while ignoring his later explanation as to why Hume wrote the Advertisement.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Ernest Campbell Mossner, “Philosophy and Biography: The Case of David Hume,” *The Philosophical Review* 59.2 (April 1950), 184–201, 192.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 199–200. Of course, in his later full biography “*The Life of David Hume*,” Mossner does reveal this background context.

<sup>242</sup> Ernest Campbell Mossner’s, *The Life of David Hume*, 582.

<sup>243</sup> Anthony Flew, *Hume’s Philosophy of Belief*, 10.

<sup>244</sup> See notes 239 and 240.

However perhaps the main problem with this controversial aspect of the New Hume Debate is its apparent false-dichotomy. Why must one either choose between (1) or (2)? Cannot both be true? Hume was eager not to lose access to the books he required for writing his *History* and was worried enough about his posthumous writings that he wrote things that recommended the *Enquiry* while trashing the *Treatise*. Yet his mature writing style and advanced philosophical outlook are also probably true. Thus it is a question as to how these two aspects were interrelating while Hume wrote the *Enquiry*, the letters, and the Advertisement. That is the difficult question to answer. There is after all good reason to see the *Enquiry* as more than just a trimmed down version of the *Treatise*. The strength of Flew's argument is especially focussed in this area:

In fact Hume does not only rewrite, omit, and abbreviate. He adds. Two hundred and seventy-four pages of the *Treatise* Book 1 are represented [in the *Enquiry*] by eight Sections totalling eighty-five pages. But then the first fourteen pages of Book II, Part III, which treat 'Of liberty and necessity', provide some of the materials for the twenty-four pages of Section VIII, under the same title. Though here we should notice that the last four pages of the second Part of that Section, which propound a theological dilemma in order to draw a modestly worldly moral, have no parallel in the *Treatise* as published. More radically, Hume adds two whole Sections, X 'Of Miracles' and XI 'Of a Particular Providence and a Future State', a total of forty pages. These two additional Sections deal with subjects which Hume did not discuss at all in the *Treatise* as published.<sup>245</sup>

Although this is perhaps a good argument for seeing the *Enquiry* as an important companion to the *Treatise*, it is a bad argument for those who wish to see the *Enquiry* as superior in any way to the *Treatise*. Both need to be read together. Flew himself seems to acknowledge this, although somewhat contradictorily:

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<sup>245</sup> Anthony Flew, *Hume's Philosophy of Belief*, 9–10.

CONSIDERED as a substitute for Book I Part IV of the *Treatise* the present Section XII ‘Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy’ [in the *Enquiry*] is entirely inadequate. It omits altogether two of Hume’s most exciting explorations: the enquiry into ‘What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body?’; and the investigation, with the consequent despairing afterthoughts, of the nature of personal identity. All its three Parts combined amount in length to rather less than a fifth of that one Part of the *Treatise*. But happily there is no question of our having to make do with the *Inquiries* only.<sup>246</sup>

Yet immediately after stating that the *Enquiry* is “entirely inadequate” on these important ontological/metaphysical matters, Flew suddenly appeals to the stylistic aspect and declares contrarily, “While considered in its own right this final Section [of the *Enquiry*] provides a clear and mature—albeit rather brief—statement of the nature of the particular controlled scepticism which Hume desired to sponsor, as well as of the practical consequences which he thought could be drawn from it.”<sup>247</sup> It may be true that the Section XII of the *Enquiry* offers a more “controlled scepticism” but it is difficult to agree with Flew that even with its more “clear and mature” style it can be “considered in its own right” when in his own words it is also “entirely inadequate” for it to be “considered in its own right.”

Similarly Peter Millican has put forth a recent argument championing the superiority of the *Enquiry* over the *Treatise*. In his interpretation, the *Enquiry* is the superior work primarily because it shows how Hume was advancing his empirical theory by scaling back the more wide-ranging place for associationist psychology that we find in the *Treatise*.<sup>248</sup> However it is also possible that Hume scaled back the associationist aspect (he certainly didn’t remove it) for the same reasons much of what is in the *Treatise*

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<sup>246</sup> Anthony Flew, *Hume’s Philosophy of Belief*, 243. Flew is using the old term “*Inquiries*” to refer to the two *Enquiries*.

<sup>247</sup> Anthony Flew, *Hume’s Philosophy of Belief*, 243.

<sup>248</sup> Peter Millican, “Context, Aims, Structure of the *Enquiry*,” 43.

is omitted in the *Enquiry*. Nevertheless Millican believes this rather uncertain interpretation allows him to state that the *Enquiry* is “a relatively unified and systematic presentation of Hume’s epistemology . . . a more faithful representation of his considered opinions than the *Treatise*.” Confident enough to also admit he is “unashamedly partisan on the issue,” and hence preferring to ignore any background contexts to also “suggest that Hume was neither insincere nor misguided in asking his printer in 1775 to prefix, to the volume containing the *Enquiries* . . . his notorious ‘Advertisement’.”<sup>249</sup> Finally Millican, like Flew before him, leaves us with a strange confusion by stating simultaneously that the *Enquiry* is “a more faithful representation” of the *Treatise*, while also maintaining that the *Treatise* is a flawed masterpiece.<sup>250</sup> Does this mean then that for Millican the *Enquiry* is more than a flawed masterpiece, or just a more “faithful representation” of a flawed masterpiece?

Consequently the issue of the *Treatise* versus the *Enquiry* is far from settled. Neither Mossner’s nor Kemp Smith’s analyses has settled the issue concerning Hume’s actual motives, as both Flew and Millican acknowledge. Nor have Flew or Millican made a convincing argument that the *Enquiry* is in any way any superior to the *Treatise* (additions and stylistic matters notwithstanding) let alone that it should be considered an individually great work, as Strawson asserts.

Nevertheless the New Humeans continue to act as if the debate regarding Hume’s motives for the *Enquiry* and the repudiation of the *Treatise* is now settled. Strawson illustrating this over-confidence through deliberately ignoring the background contexts involved: “If asking [in the Advertisement] that the *Enquiry* alone should ‘be regarded as

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<sup>249</sup> Peter Millican, “Introduction,” to *Reading Hume on Human Understanding: Essays on the First Enquiry*, ed. Peter Millican (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002), 2.

<sup>250</sup> Peter Millican, “Context, Aims, Structure of the *Enquiry*,” 34.

containing his philosophical sentiments and principles', Hume lays a clear obligation on us. We can read the *Enquiry* back into the *Treatise*, when trying to understand his considered view; we cannot go the other way."<sup>251</sup> Again:

If we also respect Hume's insistence [in the letter to Gilbert Elliot of Minto] that 'the philosophical principles are the same in both' the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*, we have a further obligation. In order to understand the *Treatise*—in order, in particular, to avoid being misled by the dramatic and polemical exaggerations of the 'ardor of youth' [that Hume mentions in the letter to Stewart]—we must read the *Enquiry* back into the *Treatise* wherever possible, and give it priority.<sup>252</sup>

Strawson laments that "Nearly all present-day commentators ignore this obligation, and many have their exegetical principles exactly the wrong way round . . . I know of no greater abuse of an author in the history of philosophy."<sup>253</sup> Yet perhaps the "abuse" is the continuing snubbing of the controversial background context to Hume's comments regarding his philosophical positions, and as to what place the *Enquiry* should be seen in relation to the *Treatise*. With these questions or concerns put back into view, a more balanced approach is to agree with Mossner's opinion that, "the *Treatise of Human Nature*, so maligned by its author, is . . . a masterpiece"<sup>254</sup> while the *Enquiry* should be seen as a more clearly written, and even in some areas more philosophically developed companion piece, but certainly not a superior nor stand-alone work.

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<sup>251</sup> Galen Strawson, "David Hume: Objects and Power," 32.

<sup>252</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>253</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>254</sup> Ernest Campbell Mossner's, *The Life of David Hume*, 582.

## Chapter Five

## Humean Dreams

In this chapter I shall show that the correct way to break the impasse in the New Hume Debate is to closely examine the much-overlooked place of dreams in Hume's empiricism.<sup>255</sup> In so doing I hope that the reader will acknowledge that the debate can be seen to move compellingly towards the Idealist interpretation.

As we saw in Chapter One, the major element of the New Hume Debate is the status of natural beliefs. Kemp Smith claims that for Hume these special types of belief are "removed beyond the reach of our sceptical doubts."<sup>256</sup> To help back up his claim he emphasizes a passage in the *Treatise* which, considering its crucial importance to the New Humeans, is well-worth looking at again:

Thus the sceptic still continues to reason and believe, even tho' he asserts, that he cannot defend his reason by reason; and by the same rule he 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,

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<sup>255</sup> To say that dreams are overlooked is not an exaggeration. The few scholars of Hume who have mentioned dreams in the context of his empiricism are: E. J. Furlong, *Imagination*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1961); Saul Traiger, "Flage on Hume's Account of Memory," *Hume Studies* 11:2 (Nov 1985), 166-172; Daniel Flage, "Perchance to Dream: A Reply to Traiger," *Hume Studies* 11:2 (November 1985) 173-182; Saul Traiger, "Impressions, Ideas, and Fictions," *Hume Studies* 13:2 (November 1987) 381-399; Graham Solomon, "Some Sources for Hume's Opening Remarks to Treatise I.IV.III" in *Hume Studies* 16:1 (April 1990) 57-66; William Wandless, "Didactic Dream Transformations and the English Novel of the Enlightenment," *The Dream and the Enlightenment*, eds., Bernard Dieterle & Manfred Engel (Paris: Honore Champion Editeur, 2003), 225-241; and Janet Broughton, "Impressions and Ideas," *The Blackwell Guide to Hume's Treatise*, ed. Saul Traiger (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006), 43-58, 45-46.

<sup>256</sup> Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines*, 87.

*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)

As we saw in Chapter One, another advocate of the New Humean sceptical/causal realist interpretation of Hume—John Wright—claims that “While human nature deceives us about the exact nature of external objects it does teach us the general truth that there are things which exist outside our own minds,”<sup>257</sup> through natural belief. So in essence our natural beliefs can assure us through an ontological commitment that an external world exists.

However, as we all know, we also *naturally believe* that in our dreams we are confronted by an external world of objects in causal relation. May we not say that, “Nature has not left this to [our] choice” (T 1.4.2.1) either? Does this mean then that our natural beliefs in dreams can also be “removed beyond the reach of our sceptical doubts”<sup>258</sup>? Surprisingly, although H. H. Price noticed that the “primitive credulity” one encounters in dreams “is much the same as Hume’s” natural beliefs,<sup>259</sup> neither Kemp Smith, Wright, nor anyone else involved in the New Hume Debate has raised this question regarding our natural belief in dreams.<sup>260</sup>

According to Price, “primitive credulity . . . is just the unquestioning acceptance of an idea . . . [where] Strictly, perhaps, an ‘idea’ should be a proposition symbolized by

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<sup>257</sup> John P. Wright, *The sceptical realism of David Hume*, 225.

<sup>258</sup> Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines*, 87.

<sup>259</sup> Henry H. Price, *The Collected Works of Henry H. Price*, vol. 4 of 4, reprint (Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1996), 213. Price does not use the phrase “natural belief,” but from his explanation it is clearly the same as “primitive credulity.”

<sup>260</sup> I will use the phrase ‘natural belief in dreams’ to mean our natural belief in the external world and causation in our dreams. Although there is a slight difference in meaning, it is only because we naturally believe in causation and an external world in our dreams that we then believe our dreams are real, thus we naturally believe our dreams.

mental images.”<sup>261</sup> Hence it is worth looking at how Price defines the operation of primitive credulity, for one can see immediately how it easily compares with Kemp Smith and Wright’s description of Humean natural beliefs:

[T]he human mind has a spontaneous (unacquired) tendency to accept without question any proposition which is presented to it; and this tendency operates as matter of course, unless there is something else to hold it in check. The power of suspending judgment, or asking questions and weighing evidence, the power on which reasonable assent depends, is not something we possess from the beginning. It is an achievement, which has to be learned . . . Moreover, this critical and questioning frame of mind is not only an achievement, it is a somewhat precarious one. Most of us can suspend judgement and weigh evidence when we are healthy and wide-awake, but not so easily when we are tired, or ill, or frightened, or angry. We quite often slip back into the state of primitive credulity under the stress of emotional excitement or fatigue; and . . . we all slip back into it when we are dreaming.<sup>262</sup>

Consequently, dreaming is an experience where primitive credulity operates without the “power of suspending judgment, or asking questions and weighing evidence, the power on which reasonable assent depends.” Similarly, as we saw in Chapter One, Kemp Smith highlights the following passage from the *Enquiry* to argue that “Hume teaches, [that] man, like the other animals, is primarily an active, and only secondarily (however notably) a reflective being, [thus] he is a *believing* animal, and in consequence of this also a *credulous* animal.”<sup>263</sup>:

It seems evident, that men are carried, by a natural instinct or prepossession, to repose faith in their senses; and that, without any reasoning, or even almost before the use of reason, we always suppose an external universe, which depends not on our perception, but would exist,

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<sup>261</sup> Henry H. Price, *The Collected Works of Henry H. Price*, vol. 4 of 4, 213. Price claims that those who hold the doctrine have additionally included “propositions formulated in words.”

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.* 214.

<sup>263</sup> Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines*, 130.

though we and every sensible creature were absent or annihilated. Even the animal creation are governed by a like opinion, and preserve this belief of external objects, in all their thoughts, designs, and actions. (E 12.7.113)

Kemp Smith's take on this naturalistic foundation was, as we saw, to claim that, "In this twofold task it is Nature, through the beliefs to which it gives rise, which acts as arbiter. It defines the conditions of health, and the regimen suitable for its maintenance.

Scepticism serves as an ally, but in due subordination, not as an equal."<sup>264</sup> Consequently reason is merely there to guarantee "conditions of health" with regard to what is naturally believed. Otherwise the natural beliefs have the field in which reasoned scepticism is a subordinate. And we can see how Price's analysis of primitive credulity coincides with this take on natural beliefs and the place reason holds. Although Price does not instantiate a "subordination thesis" he does say that the primitive credulity is always there: "And if we are not wide-awake and on our guard (as we quite often are not) our spontaneous tendency to accept the proposition has free play; there is nothing to inhibit our primitive credulity."<sup>265</sup> So the question becomes, what about natural beliefs in dreams where apparently reason cannot operate? Are these natural beliefs to be automatically accepted or rejected?

In this chapter two main questions will be explored. First, what status do the natural beliefs in dreams have in Hume's empiricism if reason is not there to counter them? Second, even if reason can counter them (which it certainly does after we awaken), is this reason enough for Hume to reject the natural belief in dream perceptions?

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<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.* 131–2.

<sup>265</sup> Henry H. Price, *The Collected Works of Henry H. Price*, vol. 4 of 4, 215.

To begin with, let us look at a basic outline of what Hume considered dreams to be. With regard to dreams, Hume states in the beginning of the *Treatise* that, “in sleep, in a fever, in madness, or in any very violent emotions of soul, our ideas may approach to our impressions” (T 1.1.1.1). So it seems that “in sleep” our dream perceptions are ideas which “approach” impressions, so that they can sometimes be mistaken for impressions.<sup>266</sup> However in the first *Enquiry* Hume indicates that possibly dreams themselves are sense impressions. In his famous passage (which echoes the passage at (T 1.1.1.1) regarding our sense impressions of an alleged external world) he states that “It is acknowledged, that, in fact, many of these perceptions arise not from any thing external, as in dreams, madness, and other diseases.” (E 12.11.114) So later in the *Enquiry* Hume seems to be more confident in his classification of perceptions to imply that dreams are sense impressions and not merely very vivid ideas that we mistake for impressions. (E 12.11–12.114–115)

Yet even if Hume seems to equate dreams with the impressions of sensation that we receive in our normal waking state, in the *Enquiry* Hume also says dreams are ideas, for with regard to the rules of association: “[E]ven in our wildest and most wandering reveries, nay in our very dreams, we shall find, if we reflect, that the imagination ran not altogether at adventures, but that there was still a connexion upheld among the different ideas, which succeeded each other” (E 3.1.17). Hence dreams are ideas that are

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<sup>266</sup> It should also be mentioned that Hume adds, “[O]n the other hand it sometimes happens, that our impressions are so faint and low, that we cannot distinguish them from our ideas. But notwithstanding this near resemblance in a few instances, they are in general so very different, that no-one can make a scruple to rank them under distinct heads, and assign to each a peculiar name to mark the difference.” (T 1.1.1.1) Of course, Hume’s dismissal of the “few instances” of anomalies within his categorization of perception is hardly satisfying. I suggest that it is this difficulty with regard to the categorization of dreams that prevents Hume (unlike his empiricist predecessors) from providing a more in-depth analysis of dreams. An arguable point to be sure, but one not out of character with Hume, as we witnessed in Chapter Four with how he excised from the *Enquiry* the difficult sections of the *Treatise* (discussions of personal identity et. al.). In other words, I suggest that originally the *Treatise* included a section ‘On Dreams.’

connected by “*Resemblance, Contiguity in time or place, and Cause or Effect*” (E 3.2.17). So it seems that for Hume dreams are composed of both possibly sense impressions, and ideas that follow the rules of association. Either way, we can see that Hume has difficulty with the subject of categorizing dream perceptions.

To appreciate the uniqueness of Hume’s account we need to stop at this point and briefly review other theories regarding dreams that were put forth during the Enlightenment and that we know Hume would have been familiar with. The empiricists Hobbes, Locke, and Berkeley all state that dream content originates in waking experience. According to Hobbes’ materialist account:

When a Body is once in motion, it moveth (unless something els hinder it) eternally; and whatsoever hindreth it, cannot in an instant, but in time, and by degrees quite extinguish it: And as wee see in the water, though the wind cease, the waves give not over rowling for a long time after; so also it happeneth in that motion, which is made in the internall parts of a man, then, when he Sees, Dreams, &c. For after the object is removed, or the eye shut, wee still retain an image of the thing seen, though more obscure than when we see it. And this is it, the Latines call *Imagination*, from the image made in seeing.<sup>267</sup>

Consequently, for Hobbes “The imaginations of them that sleep, are those we call *Dreams*. And these also (as all other Imaginations) have been before, either totally, or by parcels in the Sense.”<sup>268</sup> Furthermore:

[B]ecause in sense, the Brain, and Nerves, which are the necessary Organs of sense, are so benumbed in sleep, as not easily to be moved by the action of Externall Objects, there can happen in sleep, no Imagination; and therefore no Dreame, but what proceeds from the agitation of the inward parts of mans body; which inward parts, for the connexion they have with the Brayn, and the other Organs, when they be distempered, do keep the

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<sup>267</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. C. B. MacPherson (London: Penguin Classics, 1985), 1.2.88. References showing part, chapter, and page numbers.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.* 1.2.90.

same in motion; whereby the Imaginations there formerly made, appear as if a man were waking; saving that the Organs of Sense being now benumbed, so as there is no new object, which can master and obscure them with a more vigorous impression, a Dreame must needs be more cleare, in this silence of sense, than our waking thoughts.<sup>269</sup>

Hobbes here claims that the origins for dreams being the “agitation of the inward parts of mans body” whereby because the “Organs of Sense” (eyes) are “benumbed” dreams are more vivid or “cleare” than waking perceptions.

For Locke “The dreams of a sleeping man, are, as I take it, all made up of the waking man’s ideas.”<sup>270</sup> Unlike Hobbes, Locke’s analysis focuses on the problems that *dreamless* or *sound* sleep pose for the question of personal identity. As we will see below, this topic together with the fact that Locke dismisses dreams as linked to madness is a key for understanding Hume’s own take on dreams.

For Berkeley:

The ideas formed by the imagination are faint and indistinct; they have besides and entire dependence on the will. But the ideas perceived by sense, that is real things, are more vivid and clear, and being imprinted on the mind by a spirit distinct from us, have not a like dependence on our will. There is therefore no danger of confounding these with the forgoing; and there is as little of confounding them with the visions of a dream, which are dim, irregular, and confused.<sup>271</sup>

Contrary to Hobbes, Berkeley’s description of dreams being “dim” as compared to the “more vivid and clear” experience of waking life also implies that he means the *waking* “Ideas of Sense are the Real things or Archetypes. Ideas of Imagination, Dreams etc. are

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<sup>269</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>270</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 2.1.17.113

<sup>271</sup> George Berkeley, “Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous,” in *Philosophical Works Including the Works on Vision*, reprint, ed. Michael R. Ayers (London: Everyman’s Library, 2000), 225.

copies, images of those.”<sup>272</sup> He is more clear on this point: “The ideas imprinted on the senses by the Author of Nature are called *real things*: and those excited in the imagination being less regular, vivid and constant, are more properly termed *ideas*, or *images of things*, which they copy and represent.”<sup>273</sup>

So these three empiricist thinkers, although they have their different views on the nature of dreams, all either state or imply that dreams are the copies of waking life. This also seems to be the case with Leibniz<sup>274</sup> and Malebranche,<sup>275</sup> though it is not so clear whether Descartes and Spinoza<sup>276</sup> also consider dreams to *necessarily* be the copies of waking experiences. For example, Descartes argues that, with regard to the differences between waking and dreaming:

[T]here is a considerable difference between these two [dreaming and being awake]; dreams are never joined by the memory with all the other actions of life, as is the case with those actions that occur when one is awake. For surely, if, while I am awake, someone were suddenly to

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<sup>272</sup> George Berkeley, “Notebook A,” in *Philosophical Commentaries: Berkeley’s Notebooks of 1707–8*, in *Philosophical Works Including the Works on Vision*, reprint, ed. Michael R. Ayers (London: Everyman’s Library, 2000), 405.

<sup>273</sup> George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, 1.33.101.

<sup>274</sup> Gottfried Leibniz, “A Fragment on Dreams,” in *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. Leroy E. Loemker (Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1973), 114.

<sup>275</sup> Nicolas Malebranche, *The Search after Truth*, 135. “[I]n sleep we usually dream of objects we have seen during the day.”

<sup>276</sup> According to Spinoza, “We can take no action from mental decision unless the memory comes into play; for example, we cannot utter a word unless we call the word to mind. Now it is not within the free power of the mind to remember or to forget anything. Hence comes the belief that the power of the mind whereby we can keep silent or speak solely from mental decision is restricted to the case of the remembered thing. However, when we dream that we are speaking, we think that we do so from mental decision; yet we are not speaking, or if we are, it is the result of spontaneous movement of the body. Again, we dream that we are keeping something secret, and that we are doing so by the same mental decision that comes into play in our waking hours when we keep silent about what we know. Finally, we dream that from a mental decision we act as we dare not act when awake. So I would like very much to know whether in the mind there are two sorts of decisions, dreamland decisions and free decisions. If we don’t want to carry madness so far, we must necessarily grant that the mental decision that is believed to be free is not distinct from imagination and memory, and is nothing but the affirmation which an idea, insofar as it is an idea, necessarily involves. So these mental decisions arise in the mind from the same necessity as the idea of things existing in actuality, and those who believe that they speak, or keep silent, or do anything from free mental decision are dreaming with their eyes open.” See his “*Ethics*,” in *Spinoza: Complete Works*, edited by Michael L. Morgan, translated by Samuel Shirley (Cambridge, U.S.A.: Hackett Publishing Company Incorporated, 2002), 281–2.

appear to me and then immediately disappear, as occurs in dreams, so that I see neither where he came from nor where he went, it is not without reason that I would judge him to be a ghost or a phantom conjured up in my brain, rather than a true man. But when these things happen, and I notice distinctly where they come from, where they are now, and when they come to me, and when I connect my perception of them without interruption with the whole of the rest of my life, I am clearly certain that these perceptions have happened to me not while I was dreaming but while I was awake. Nor ought I have even the least doubt regarding the truth of these things, if, having mustered all the senses, in addition to my memory and my intellect, in order to examine them, nothing is passed on to me by one of these sources that conflicts with the others. For from the fact that God is no deceiver, it follows that I am in no way mistaken in these matters.<sup>277</sup>

Consequently this appears to mean that Descartes considers dreams, like hallucinations, to be the products purely “conjured up in [the] brain,” without requiring there to have been an earlier waking experience to supply the dream content. Moreover, with regard to the question of knowing whether one is awake or dreaming, although Descartes seems to invoke the knowledge that “God is no deceiver,” his argument is subtler, in that the latter only allows for him to be “in no way mistaken in these matters.” For in a reply to Hobbes’ criticism, Descartes states “[A]n Atheist is able to infer from the memory of his past life that he is awake; still he cannot know that this sign is sufficient to give him the certainty that he is not in error, unless he knows that it has been created by a God who does not deceive.”<sup>278</sup> And this highlights the main criterion that Descartes proposes for distinguishing dreams from waking, in that “when I connect my perception of them without interruption with the whole of the rest of my life, I am clearly certain that these perceptions have happened to me not while I was dreaming but while I was awake.” This

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<sup>277</sup> Rene Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy In Which The Existence of God And the Distinction of the Soul from the Body Are Demonstrated*, 1641, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, Trans. Donald A. Cress (Hackett Publishing Company: Indianapolis, 1993), 58–59.

<sup>278</sup> Rene Descartes, “Objections III with Replies,” in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross, vol. 2 of 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 78.

criterion for distinguishing dreams from waking is shared by Leibniz,<sup>279</sup> Malebranche,<sup>280</sup> and Berkeley,<sup>281</sup> but not by Hobbes and Spinoza<sup>282</sup> (or, it would seem, by Locke).

According to Hobbes' criterion, "For my part, when I consider, that in Dreames, I do not often, nor constantly think of the same Persons, Places, Objects, and Actions that I do waking; nor remember so long a trayne of coherent thoughts, Dreaming, as at other times; And because waking I often observe the absurdity of Dreames, but never dream of the absurdities of my waking Thoughts; I am well satisfied, that being awake, I know I dreame not; though when I dreame, I think my selfe awake."<sup>283</sup> Yet as W. Von Leydon has shown, it is possible to see a paradoxical asymmetry in Hobbes' criterion; for if he is comparing the "concept of waking" with the "state of dreaming," Hobbes can "distinguish waking from dreaming but not dreaming from waking."<sup>284</sup> One can also see how Hobbes' criterion is probably based upon his earlier objections to Descartes. He asks Descartes "whether it is really the case that one, who dreams he doubts whether he dreams or no, is unable to dream that his dream is connected with the idea of a long series of past events. If he can, those things which to the dreamer appear to be the actions of his

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<sup>279</sup> Gottfried Leibniz, "A Fragment on Dreams," 114. "Sleep differs from waking in that when we are awake everything is directed, at least implicitly, towards an ultimate goal. But in dreaming there is no relation to the whole of things. Hence to wake up is nothing but to recollect [*recolligere*] one's self, to think as follows: *Dic cur hic? Sich besinnen*. To begin to connect your present state with the rest of your life or with you yourself. Hence we have this criterion for distinguishing the experience of dreaming from that of being awake—we are certain of being awake only when we remember why we have come to our present position and condition and see the fitting connection of the things which are appearing to us, to each other, and to those that preceded."

<sup>280</sup> Nicolas Malebranche, *The Search after Truth*, 193–194. "The chief cause that prevents us from taking our dreams for reality is that we cannot connect our dreams with the things we have done while awake, for this is how we recognize that they are only dreams."

<sup>281</sup> George Berkeley, "Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous," 225. "And though [dreams] should happen to be never so lively and natural, yet by their not being connected, and of a piece with the preceding and subsequent actions of our lives, they might easily be distinguished from realities."

<sup>282</sup> See note 276.

<sup>283</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1.2.90.

<sup>284</sup> W. Von Leydon, "Descartes and Hobbes on Waking and Dreaming," *Revue Internationale de Philosophie*, no. 10, 1956, 100. Von Leydon does not actually think Hobbes' intent was to be paradoxical. "If Hobbes had made his passage explicit, the paradox would not arise." 100.

past life may be regarded as true just as though he had been awake.”<sup>285</sup> Descartes’ reply is that “One who dreams cannot effect a real connection between what he dreams and the ideas of past events, though he can dream that he does connect them. For who denies that in his sleep a man may be deceived? But yet when he has awakened he will easily detect his error.”<sup>286</sup> This question and answer is similar to one posed to Descartes by the Jesuit Bourdin who asks with regard to Descartes’ “Method of Dreaming”<sup>287</sup>: “What will happen if, so often as you thought that you were awake and thinking, you were not awake and thinking, but you dreamed you were awake and thinking, and consequently the operation is merely the single one of dreaming, which you employ on the one occasion when dreaming that you dream, and on the other, in dreaming that you are awake and thinking.”<sup>288</sup> Descartes’ response is: “I don’t think that I ever gave the least provocation for these jibes . . . when I said that I thought, I did not inquire whether I was awake or asleep when I thought. I am surprised that he calls my method a Method of Dreaming when it seems to have roused him into a sufficiently wide awake condition.”<sup>289</sup>

Descartes’ answers to both Hobbes and Bourdin show that he did not intend to take seriously the objections they raise, for how can a man not know if he *dreams* “that his dream is connected with the idea of a long series of past events,” that is, that you “dreamed you were awake”? Yet Descartes apparently does not notice that he has admitted that his own criterion fails *unless* they first accept that “God is no deceiver.”

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<sup>285</sup> Thomas Hobbes, “Objections III with Replies,” in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross, vol. 2 of 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 78.

<sup>286</sup> Rene Descartes, “Objections III with Replies,” in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross, vol. 2 of 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 78.

<sup>287</sup> Jesuit Bourdin, “Objections VII,” in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross, vol. 2 of 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 293.

<sup>288</sup> Jesuit Bourdin, “Objections VII,” 293.

<sup>289</sup> Rene Descartes, “Objections VII – Annotation,” in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross, vol. 2 of 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 305.

Otherwise “who denies that in his sleep a man may be deceived”? His actual criterion becomes the fact that the act of waking up allows one to see the difference, for “when he has awakened he will easily detect his error.”

G. R. T. Ross unfortunately claims that “the criticisms of Bourdin (*Objections VII*) are most tiresome and almost wholly worthless.”<sup>290</sup> However, Norman Malcolm specifically raises the Hobbes/Bourdin criticisms in his own analysis of dreams to show that it is Descartes’ criterion that is worthless:

There is, *prima facie*, a simple but devastating objection to the use of the coherence principle for finding out whether one is awake or dreaming, and it is surprising that either it has not occurred to the philosophers who accept the principle or, if it has, that they have said nothing about how to deal with it. Making use of the principle consists in noting whether certain ‘phenomena’ presented to one are connected in the right ways with other phenomena, past, present, and future. The objection that should occur to anyone is that it is possible a person should *dream* that the right connections hold, *dream* that he *connects* his present perceptions with ‘the whole course of his life’. The coherence principle tells us that we are awake if we can make these connections and asleep in a dream if we cannot: but how does the principle tell us whether we are noting and making connections or dreaming that we are? It seems to me that obviously it cannot and therefore the principle is worthless.<sup>291</sup>

However Von Leydon argues that not being able to distinguish whether one is awake or dreaming does not mean that we cannot distinguish the *concepts* of being awake and dreaming. Indeed this is what he suspects Hobbes was really attempting to do, and what Spinoza’s criticism of Descartes was also intended to show.<sup>292</sup> In a sense Malcolm also

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<sup>290</sup> G. R. T. Ross, in his “Introduction” to *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross, vol. 2 of 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968).

<sup>291</sup> Norman Malcolm, *Dreaming* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1959), 108.

<sup>292</sup> W. Von Leydon, “Descartes and Hobbes on Waking and Dreaming,” 98–101. According to Von Leydon: “I think Spinoza saw very clearly how far from well-founded Descartes’ doubt is and that the fact that we do not distinguish in sleep between waking and dream realities cannot affect our ways of distinguishing between the concepts of waking and dreaming. In a passage of his *Tractatus de Intellectus Emendatione* (para. 50), obviously with an eye on Descartes’ predicament, he writes: ‘Let us . . .

agrees. “[W]e know that ‘I am dreaming’ is the first person singular present indicative of the verb ‘dream’, and that dreaming and waking are logical contraries, and therefore that ‘I am dreaming’ and ‘I am awake’ are logical contraries.”<sup>293</sup> But, “You cannot know by observation that you are awake because if you could it would make sense to speak of knowing by observation that you are not awake.”<sup>294</sup>

However as was argued in Chapter Three, Hume does not have a developed theory of language. So Hume could not have arrived at the same conclusion. Nevertheless, like Hobbes, Locke, and Malcolm, there is evidence that Hume did not accept the Cartesian criterion for knowing if one was awake or dreaming. First, there is an amusing anecdote in his response to a charge put forth by Rousseau. While Rousseau was travelling to England with Hume, he reports that: “We slept in the same chamber, when during the night, I heard him several times cry out with great vehemence, in the French language, *Je tiens J. J. Rousseau*. [I have you, Rousseau.] I know not whether he was awake or asleep.” To which Hume responded: “I cannot answer for every thing I may say in my sleep, and much less am I conscious whether or not I dream in French. But pray, as Mr. Rousseau did not know whether I was asleep or awake, when I pronounced those terrible words, with such a terrible voice, how is he certain that he

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distinguish and separate the true idea from other perceptions . . . because there are many who have doubts concerning what is true . . . in such a way that they are like men who, while they are awake, have no doubt that they are awake, but afterwards, at some time in their sleep, as often happens, they think they are certainly awake, and afterwards when they find that this is false, doubt also that they are awake: this happens because they never distinguish between sleeping and waking’.”

<sup>293</sup> Norman Malcolm, *Dreaming*, 114.

<sup>294</sup> *Ibid.* 119. Malcolm states, “It is not my aim, however, to propose a piece of reasoning by which someone can arrive at the knowledge that he is awake. My contribution (if it is one) to this renowned sceptical problem had been to try to show that the sentence ‘I am not awake’ is strictly senseless and does not express a possibility that one can think,” 118.

himself was well awake when he heard them?”<sup>295</sup> This remark by Hume may suggest he does not accept the possibility that one truly knows whether one is awake or dreaming.

This also raises one of the questions we asked above: what status do the natural beliefs in dreams have in Hume’s empiricism if reason is not there to counter them? For if Hume does not believe that there is a way of knowing whether one is awake this seems to imply that he thought reason could not operate within dreams to counter the natural beliefs we have in them at the time. Evidence that Hume took this approach comes from his *Abstract* where he highlights the lack of analysis previously done on *probable* judgments. Hume credits Leibniz for bringing this to his attention:

The celebrated *Monsieur Leibniz* has observed it to be a defect in the common systems of logic, that they are very copious when they explain the operations of the understanding in the forming of demonstrations, but are too concise when they treat of probabilities, and those other measures of evidence on which life and action entirely depend, and which are our guides even in most of our philosophical speculations. In this censure, he comprehends *the essay on human understanding, le recherché de la verite, and l’art de penser*. The author of the *treatise of human nature* has been sensible of this defect in these philosophers, and has endeavoured, as much as he can, to supply it. (A 127)<sup>296</sup>

Although Hume is here mostly attributing to Leibniz his own desire to emphasize cause and effect in the *Treatise*, perhaps Hume also accepted what Leibniz (and in turn Hobbes) had to say with regard to making probable judgments concerning dreams. Although, as

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<sup>295</sup> David Hume, *A Concise and Genuine Account of the Relationship between Rousseau and Hume* (1767), 78–79.

<sup>296</sup> This passage also tells us that Hume did not think too highly of the works of Locke, Malebranche, nor Montgeron with regard to their analyses on probable judgements. And this, of course, has a bearing on Wright’s assertion that Hume based his notion of natural belief on Malebranche’s concept of making natural judgements.

we saw, Leibniz accepts the Cartesian criterion he also offers a reply to an anticipated criticism of Hobbes.<sup>297</sup>

Hobbes says that everything appears as present in sleep and that therefore there is no judgement or wonder, but only the occurrence of appearances, as of things observed by the eyes when they are awake and not closed. But, you say, surely we often experience judgement or reflection in dreams, or at least a knowledge of the past which involves judgement, for we both deliberate and remember. But I reply that in dreams we do not do this anew, about the appearances as they are presented, but that a judgment presents itself in a dream only if it is a judgment about the presented appearance which comes from an earlier thought and now recurs as a whole, even though we do not know that it contains the earlier thought. For entire conversations occur to us which are certainly not without judgment, and even dialogues and arguments, not because we are now making judgments about them, but because judgements already made recur with the experiences themselves.<sup>298</sup>

So it is possible that Hume agreed with Leibniz on the fact that reason does not work in dreams, and even if it does, it is only the remembered judgments of the waking experience being replayed in dreams. Of course this means that Leibniz accepts that dreams are the copies of waking experience, and thus if Hume is agreeing, then he also feels this way. However, as we will see below, it is not clear that Hume would accept the condition that dreams are necessarily the copies of waking experience. Moreover, Leibniz offers the following criterion for establishing what is real:

Let us now see by what signs we may know what phenomena are real. We determine this now, both from the phenomenon itself, and from the antecedent and consequent phenomena. From the phenomenon itself, whether it be vivid, multiplex, congruous. It will be vivid, if the qualities, as light, color, heat, appear sufficiently intense; it will be multiplex if they are varied, and adapted to many tests and to the institution of new

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<sup>297</sup> Leibniz also apparently takes seriously the Hobbsean criterion when he states that, "A reason must be given why we do not remember waking experiences in a dream but do remember the dream when awake." Although Leibniz himself does not offer such a reason. See "A Fragment on Dreams," 115.

<sup>298</sup> Gottfried Leibniz, "A Fragment on Dreams," 114.

observations; for example, if we experience in the phenomenon not only colors but also sounds, odors, flavours, tactile qualities, and those things both in the whole and in its various parts, which again we can discuss in various relations (*variis causis tractare*). Which things, indeed, a long series of observations, instituted especially with design and with choice, is wont to meet neither in dreams nor in those images which the memory or the phantasy presents, in which the image is very often weak and disappears (*disparet*) in the course of the discussion.<sup>299</sup>

So Leibniz appeals to an empirical analysis of the phenomenon, in particular if it is “vivid,” and, another, “which again we can discuss in various relations.” Leibniz dismissing dreams because they are “very often weak and disappears (*disparet*) in the course of the discussion.” Yet this disagrees with Hume’s view that dreams are vivid ideas and even possibly sense impressions (which also, as we noticed, disagrees with Hobbes). Yet Leibniz’s claim that we can dismiss dreams merely because they disappear after waking (which of course is not exactly the same thing as adhering to the Cartesian criterion) is something that Hume appears to do too. Consider the following two passages, one from the *Treatise* and one from the *Enquiry*:

When we leave our closet, and engage in the common affairs of life, its [reason’s] conclusions seem to vanish, like the phantoms of the night on the appearance of the morning; and ’tis difficult for us to retain even that conviction, which we had attain’d with difficulty. (T 3.1.1.1)

And though a PYRRHONIAN may throw himself or others into a momentary amazement and confusion by his profound reasonings; the first and most trivial event in life will put to flight 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

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<sup>299</sup> Gottfried Leibniz, “On the Method of Distinguishing Real from Imaginary Phenomena,” in *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. Leroy E. Loemker (Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1973), 363.

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. (E 12.23.119–120 [my emphasis])

Now, both passages imply that Hume recognized, as Hobbes did too, that we have a primitive credulity in dreams that apparently is not countered by reason. Also, he is content to dismiss dreams, not because of a Cartesian criterion, but, as Leibniz argues above, because dreams disappear upon waking. This is evident in another passage from Hume where he uses dreams as an analogy for the desire for glory: “It is an echo, a dream, nay the shadow of a dream, dissipated by every wind, and lost by every contrary breath of the ignorant ill-judging multitude.” (Epicurean 143)<sup>300</sup>

However Berkeley may be another possible influence on Hume with regard to why he chooses to dismiss dreams merely upon waking. For although Berkeley, like Leibniz, agrees with the Cartesian criterion, and furthermore explains how one can distinguish the sensations “imprinted on the sense by the Author of Nature” as compared to “those excited in the imagination” in that the latter are “less regular, vivid and constant,”<sup>301</sup> we have his concluding boast that: “In short, by whatever method you distinguish things from chimeras on your own scheme, the same, it is evident, will hold also upon mine. For it must be, I presume, by some perceived difference, and I am not for depriving you of any one thing that you perceive.”<sup>302</sup>

Consequently, Hume’s “scheme” could be his appealing to some form of this Berkelean criterion. For instance, we can see Berkeley’s influence in the key passage

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<sup>300</sup> David Hume, ‘The Epicurean’, in *David Hume: Essays Moral, Political and Literary*, Revised Edition. Ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985), 138–145.

<sup>301</sup> George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, 1.33.101

<sup>302</sup> George Berkeley, “Three Dialogues Between Hylas and Philonous,” 225.

mentioned above where Hume describes dreams as possibly being sense impressions. (In fact I am willing at this point to say *probably*, for below, although Hume refers to dreams as “perceptions,” one can see from the context in which he is speaking, namely the question as to how we can know if our present experience of an object is more than just the perception, that he is referring to immediate sense experience). Let us look at the full passage:

By what argument can it be proved, that the perceptions of the mind must be caused by external objects, entirely different from them, though resembling them (if that be possible) and could not arise either from the energy of the mind itself, or from the suggestion of some invisible and unknown spirit, or from some other cause still more unknown to us? It is acknowledged, that, in fact, many of these perceptions arise not from anything external, as in dreams, madness, and other diseases. And nothing can be more inexplicable than the manner, in which body should so operate upon mind as ever to convey an image of itself to a substance, supposed of so different, and even contrary a nature. It is a question of fact, whether the perceptions of the senses be produced by external objects, resembling them: how shall this question be determined? By experience surely; as all other questions of a like nature. But here experience is, and must be entirely silent. The mind has never anything present to it but the perceptions, and cannot possibly reach any experience of their connexion with objects. The supposition of such a connexion is, therefore, without any foundation in reasoning.

(E 12.11–12.114–115)

Let us now compare this with a passage from Berkeley:

But what reason can induce us to believe the existence of bodies without mind, for what we perceive, since the very patrons of matter themselves do not present, there is any necessary connexion between them and our ideas? I say it is granted on all hands (and what happens in dreams, phrensies, and the like, puts in beyond dispute) that it is possible we might be affected with all the ideas we have now, though no bodies existed without, resembling them. Hence it is evident the supposition of external bodies is not necessary for the producing our ideas: since it is granted they

are produced sometimes, and might possibly produced always in the same order we see them at present, without their occurrence.<sup>303</sup>

Considering the obvious similarities in the two passages, there is good reason to suspect that Berkeley is influencing Hume here. However it could be argued that both passages imply—somewhat contradictorily—that we know perceptions do not require bodies because dreams do not, yet to know that dreams do not requires us to acknowledge the existence of bodies in the waking state in which to compare them to dreams. Perhaps it is this confusion in Berkeley that Hume wishes to avoid. For Hume’s own unique use of terminology allows us to see where he agrees and disagrees with Berkeley (and the other philosophers of the Enlightenment).

Since determining the nature of Humean dreams requires us to look closely at how Hume describes the contents of the mind, let us now stop and observe Hume’s insistence on a new terminology. First, Hume insists that his use of the word *innate* follows his own definition, and second, that his further terminology with regard to the content of the mind is meant to also be a deliberate break with those terms as used by his contemporaries. For example, on the origin of perceptions:

For 'tis remarkable, that the present question concerning the precedency of our impressions or ideas, is the same with what has made so much noise in other terms, when it has been disputed whether there be any innate ideas, or whether all ideas be derived from sensation and reflexion. We may observe, that in order to prove the ideas of extension and colour not to be innate, philosophers do nothing but shew, that they are conveyed by our senses. To prove the ideas of passion and desire not to be innate, they observe that we have a preceding experience of these emotions in ourselves. Now if we carefully examine these arguments, we shall find that they prove nothing but that ideas are preceded by other more lively perceptions, from which they are derived, and which they represent. I hope this clear stating of the question will remove all disputes concerning it,

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<sup>303</sup> George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, 1.18.95–96.

and will render this principle of more use in our reasonings, than it seems hitherto to have been. (T 1.1.1.12)

Consequently for Hume, his notion of innateness is meant to show that all experience is made up of perceptions. The important element for him is that certain perceptions derive from other perceptions in a particular way, in that the more vivid (impressions) precede their less vivid copies (ideas). *This is essentially his empiricist principle.* To further emphasize that nothing more is to be inferred, such as that there must be something of which these impressions are being derived (a body, an external world, or as Berkeley puts it: “imprinted on the sense by the Author of Nature,”<sup>304</sup>), Hume also adds the following in a rare footnote to the *Treatise*:

I here make use of these terms, *impression* and *idea*, in a sense different from what is usual, and I hope this liberty will be allow’d me. Perhaps I rather restore the word, *idea*, to its original sense, from which Mr. *Locke* had perverted it, in making it stand for all our perceptions. By the term of *impression* I wou’d not be understood to express the manner, in which our lively perceptions are produc’d in the soul, but merely the perceptions themselves; for which there is no particular name either in the *English* or any other language, that I know of. (T 1.1.1.1n2)

This “liberty” that Hume wishes to be “allow’d” for his terminology also allows for us to see something quite remarkable in his empiricism, especially as it applies to dreams. It means that dream impressions and ideas are “merely the perceptions themselves” and do not imply that they are the copies of waking experience. As Hume states in the *Abstract*: “it is evident our stronger perceptions or impressions are innate.” (A 6.408) Although this is a break with his empiricist predecessors (Hume singles out Locke, yet his note is obviously more wide-ranging in that *his* terms, particularly that of *impression* do not

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<sup>304</sup> George Berkeley, *A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, 1.33.101

coincide with any “name either in the *English* or any other language, that I know of”), it is not to say that Hume is on the side of the rationalists either. For where they believe that ideas themselves can be derived from the brain/mind/God, Hume’s *empiricism* declares rather that they must only be the copies of initial sense impressions.

Consequently there is room in Hume’s empiricism to say that while all knowledge comes through the senses, in that “ideas are preceded by other more lively perceptions,” it *does not* necessarily mean that these initial sense impressions are experienced while being awake. That is, if I merely say I have a dream sense impression, and this is copied into an idea, I have not violated Hume’s empiricist principle. Moreover, unlike Berkeley, Hobbes, or Locke, Hume nowhere states or implies that sense impressions are only experienced when awake.

From this we can also see how Hume’s ontology is best described. In Chapter Two, we considered Strawson’s schema of different ontological classifications. Considering what Hume says with regard to his own terminology, it appears that Hume’s position is best described as being, contrary to Strawson’s view, as Ontologically Outright Strict Pure Content Idealist. Hume is not implying anything with his use of the word ‘impression’: “By the term of *impression* I wou’d not be understood to express the manner, in which our lively perceptions are produc’d in the soul, but merely the perceptions themselves.” (T 1.1.1.1n2) Consequently, although he says impressions are “produc’d in the soul,” this also does not imply that there is the possibility the impressions have “some non-content-constituted nature.”<sup>305</sup> This applies to all sense impressions, whether they be perceived while awake or in dreams. In this respect, T. H.

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<sup>305</sup> Galen Strawson, *The Secret Connexion: Causation, Realism, and David Hume*, 41.

Greene is wrong for saying “Hume is as much a Berkeleian as Berkeley himself,”<sup>306</sup> because in fact Hume is even more of an Idealist than Berkeley.

This fuller picture regarding the nature of Humean dream perceptions is only evident when one considers both the account of the *Treatise* and the more “mature” *Enquiry*; for in the *Treatise* Hume seems content to leave dreams as merely ideas (although with a troubling caveat in that they can be just as vivid as impressions) while in the *Enquiry* he adds that dreams themselves can probably be, sense impressions. This fuller account helps us to deflect the concern Janet Broughton has raised by only considering the explanation in the *Treatise*:

Hume’s classification [in the *Treatise*] of dreams as ideas causes trouble . . . It appears he should classify dreams as impressions: I seem to be receptive in having many of my dreams; many of them fill the horizon of my attention; and a nightmare, say, can provoke behavior (for example, a scream) and feelings (for example, terror). What seems to prevent Hume from classifying dreams as impressions is the fact that our dreams are not *sensations*, and this raises a broad question about how Hume sees the connection between the commonplace terms in which we may talk about our mental states and the austere terms in which he develops his theory of the mind.<sup>307</sup>

However I am suggesting that Hume apparently changes his mind when writing the *Enquiry* in order to include the more common sense view that dreams are impressions. He also there removes the charge that Broughton raises in suggesting that Hume perhaps did not think dreams were sensations. Consequently the fact that in the *Enquiry* Hume states that dream perceptions arise “not from any thing external,” (E 12.11.114) allows him not only to remain within the Idealist notion that we can probably have sense

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<sup>306</sup> Thomas Hill Green, “General Introduction,” *David Hume: The Philosophical Works*, 163.

<sup>307</sup> Janet Broughton, “Impressions and Ideas,” in *The Blackwell Guide to Hume’s Treatise*, ed. Saul Traiger (Massachusetts, USA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2006), 45–46.

impressions that do not require any external objects, but also, combined with his insistence on using a unique terminology, allows him to say that we can have empirical based knowledge solely upon dreams. Consequently, although Hume agrees with Berkeley that there is no reason to view dream perceptions to be caused by external bodies, and disagrees with Berkeley's view that all dreams are necessarily dimmer than waking ideas, there is no reason to conclude that, like Berkeley, Hume thought that dreams must be copies of waking experience.

Further evidence that Hume considered it possible for the mind to have sense impressions that are produced by the mind itself is found in his example regarding the double-image:

When we press one eye with a finger, we immediately perceive all the objects to become double, and one half of them to be remov'd from their common and natural position. 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. This opinion is confirm'd by the seeming encrease and diminution of objects, according to their distance; by the apparent alterations in their figure; by the changes in their colour and other qualities from our sickness and distempers; and by an infinite number of other experiments of the same kind; from all which we learn, that our sensible perceptions are not possest of any distinct or independent existence. (T 1.4.2.45)

John Wright's interpretation of this passage emphasizes that "When we say that Hume thought of the perceptions as mind-dependent, it is important to recognize that for him, at least in this context, there is no clear distinction between the mind and the body."<sup>308</sup>

Moreover, for Wright, the fact that Hume mentions that the explanation for the double-image is "that all our perceptions are dependent on our organs, and the disposition of our

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<sup>308</sup> John P. Wright, *The Sceptical Realism of David Hume*, 45.

nerves and animal spirits” seems to bear this out. Yet Hume also mentions directly afterwards that, although this example shows that the perceptions are mind-dependent in relation to an external world (body), he also states that:

But however philosophical this new system may be esteem'd, I assert that 'tis only a palliative remedy, and that it contains all the difficulties of the vulgar system, with some others, that are peculiar to itself. There are no principles either of the understanding or fancy, which lead us directly to embrace this opinion of the double existence of perceptions and objects, nor can we arrive at it but by passing thro' the common hypothesis of the identity and continuance of our interrupted perceptions. Were we not first perswaded, that our perceptions are our only objects, and continue to exist even when they no longer make their appearance to the senses, we shou'd never be led to think, that our perceptions and objects are different, and that our objects alone preserve a continu'd existence. (T 1.4.2.46)

In other words, it is only while our natural belief in an external world is strongly operating upon us that we make the conclusion regarding the double-image. In fact, all we actually experience is a sense impression of a finger pressing upon the impression of our eye, thereby creating a double-image of whatever sense impression I was experiencing. It is still entirely explicable within an idealist framework. The important point is that Hume describes the second image created in the finger-in-the-eye example as being a second *sense impression* that is created by the mind itself. It is not a mind-created very vivid *idea* that approaches our impressions.

Notice that Hume does not say that the second image is a fiction, but only that it is “remov'd from [its] common and natural position.” (T 1.4.2.45) So if dreams, like all other perceptions, are empirically only accounted for *as* mind-dependent perceptions, what makes dream perceptions fictions? This point needs to be looked at carefully for it is unclear as to what justification Hume has for automatically classifying dreams as

fictions. So far, the best candidate is that he accepts the Leibnizean/Berkeleyan claim that either there is some form of criterion that allows us to tell when we are awake, or that when we wake up, we can tell that dreams are not real because they quickly disappear from the mind.

From the above mentioned quotations (T 3.1.1.1; E 12.23.119–120) we have seen that apparently all Hume is saying is that because we pass from one form of experiencing perceptions (dreaming) to another (waking) we can thereby dismiss the dreams. Dreams are “phantoms” that disappear at “the appearance of the morning.” (T 3.1.1.1) He is not saying that these dreams are fictions because they have no preceding impression. How could he say that if dreams themselves are probably sense impressions? There is a difference here with Hume’s dismissing of dream perceptions and his other analyses regarding what he calls *fictions*. For Hume fictions are fictions just because they are ideas that have no preceding sense impression to justify their authenticity.

Evidently the main reason Hume refers to dreams as fictions is because he is merely allowing his own natural belief in the external waking world to affect his judgment on this matter for like everyone else, he is merely stating the apparently obvious claim that when one “awakes from his dream,” (E 12.23.119) the sense impression one had of say a flying dragon disappears because one no longer sees the impression nor the *body* which could have caused the impression.

With regard to the analogy Hume makes in these passages (T 3.1.1.1; E 12.23.119–120), we see that he emphasizes the similarity between the “profound reasonings” we develop because of our naturally having to “act and reason,” with that of our naturally believing in our dreams. Here the point is that, once someone is confronted

by the natural belief in the external world (i.e., a “trivial event in life” (E 12.23.119)), he can then dismiss with any philosophical quandaries, just as “When he awakes from his dream,” (E 12.23.119) he can dismiss with the former natural beliefs he had in those dreams.

So it seems that Hume is merely stating the obvious claim that we naturally believe our dreams, where upon awakening, we can laugh off these former natural beliefs just as we do our sceptical conclusions about the external world. The natural beliefs in dreams apparently hold no type of ontological commitment once we wake up. Yet one has to remember that all that is apparently happening is that we are switching from one form of natural belief (dreams) to another form when awake. In fact it is not really a different form of natural belief at all for, as Hobbes simply puts it, we believe in our dreams because “when I dreame, I think my selfe awake.”<sup>309</sup> Apparently Hume never considers this fact and allows for the same natural belief of an external world in waking to be used as a reason for then dismissing the same natural belief in an external world one experienced when asleep. One could argue that from reason we learn that the formerly believed perceptions we had in sleep are false because once we wake up we no longer *see* the external objects that would have caused those former sense impressions. Yet Hume evidently should not be thinking in this way if the existence of an external world is only acquired through natural belief itself.

So why does Hume say that dreams are fictions? According to Saul Traiger:

Hume is interested in accounting for the acquisition of fictions such as substance, perfect standards, and personal identity, but not in accounting for why any particular person comes to have the particular products of the imagination he in fact has. An explanation of why an individual thinks of

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<sup>309</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1.2.90

a golden mountain on a particular occasion would have to include both the facts about that individual and the principle of psychological association. It is not Hume's concern to explain why Jones dreamed about a three-headed monster last night. Instead, Hume wants to account for the origins of certain central notions, notions shared in human nature. The fables of poets and novelists result from the "very irregular motion" of thought "in running along its objects" which "may leap from the heavens to the earth, from one end of the creation to the other, without any certain method or order." (T 1.3.6.13) So there's not much to be said about the generation of such ideas. Hume is concerned with figuring out the regular motions of thought; and fictions, Hume shows, result from a particularly regular motion of thought.<sup>310</sup>

Traiger concludes that Hume sometimes uses the word "'fiction' or 'fictitious' for the mere offspring of the imagination"<sup>311</sup>; however most of the time Hume means that, "A fiction is an idea applied to something from which it cannot be derived."<sup>312</sup> However the problem here is that all these fictions are based in *ideas* whereas Hume implies in the *Enquiry* that dreams are also impressions. So it *should* be "Hume's concern to explain why Jones dreamed about a three-headed monster last night." The reason why Hume does not do so is more likely that he does not have an answer for their origin, instead of not being concerned. Note that Hume, unlike most of his contemporaries, does not provide a biological explanation for why we have dreams (although, as Wright has shown, he sometimes provides them for waking perceptions), and this is because for Hume with his unique terminology, bodily explanations are not really required. All that Hume seems interested in doing is showing how genuine ideas derive from preceding impressions, but has nothing to say about the origins of impressions. When it comes to possible dream impressions Hume's empiricism is at a loss to state more than the fact that we are experiencing them. It may be likely that at one time, like his empiricist

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<sup>310</sup> Saul Traiger, "Impressions, Ideas, and Fictions," *Hume Studies* 13.2 (Nov 1987); 381–399, 384.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.* 384.

<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.* 386.

predecessors, Hume considered dreams to be copies of waking experience, but since he more accurately describes them in the *Enquiry* as probably being sense impressions, he is at a loss to accurately describe them. Hume does not have a category for sense impressions that are themselves copies of something previously experienced. This is why it is likely that Hume tried initially to explain them away in the *Treatise* as very vivid ideas. Yet once one notices that in the *Enquiry* Hume comes closer to describing them as sense impressions, and when one considers his unique use of certain terms, it is not at all clear how Hume could easily dismiss dreams as fictions. Moreover the fictions involving identity and even personal identity, that is, “certain central notions, notions shared in human nature,” are also evident in dreams. So, even if Hume chooses to dismiss dream perceptions, it does not follow that the fictions of identity that we have even in dreams can also be ignored. We naturally believe in these dreams, and the only criterion for whether this natural belief is one that should be assented to or not is, as was shown by Kemp Smith, whether this natural belief is “‘natural’ [that is, *healthy*], ‘inevitable’, [and] ‘indispensable’.”<sup>313</sup>

Similarly, Louis Loeb has argued that Hume contrasts fictions with belief by stating that “a fiction or fictitious idea” (T 1.3.7.7.App) lacks steadiness.”<sup>314</sup> He uses the following quotations from Hume to support this view. Hume states that, “the mind has a firmer hold, or more steady conception of what it takes to be matter of fact, than of fictions.” (T App.5); “When the imagination, from any extraordinary ferment of the blood and spirits, acquires such a vivacity as disorders all its powers and faculties, there

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<sup>313</sup> Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines*, 87.

<sup>314</sup> Louis Loeb, *Stability and Justification in Hume’s Treatise* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 144.

is no means of distinguishing betwixt truth and falshood; but every loose fiction or idea . . . is receiv'd on the same footing, and operates with equal force on the passions.” (T

1.3.10.9) Finally there is this passage from the *Enquiry*:

All belief of matter of fact or real existence is derived merely from some object, present to the memory or senses, and a customary conjunction between that and some other object. Or in other words; having found, in many instances, that any two kinds of objects—flame and heat, snow and cold—have always been conjoined together; if flame or snow be presented anew to the senses, the mind is carried by custom to expect heat or cold, and to believe that such a quality does exist, and will discover itself upon a nearer approach. (E 5.8.39)

From all which Loeb concludes that “These passages confirm that fictions lack the steadiness essential to belief.”<sup>315</sup> However there are several things to notice here. First, Hume is appealing to fictional ideas not impressions (T 1.3.7.7.App). Second, Hume adds after (T App.5) that, “We can explain the *causes* of the firm conception, but not those of *any* [my emphasis] separate impression.” (T App.6); and, finally, Hume adds at (T 1.3.7.7.App) that steadiness is synonymous with feeling:

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 firmness, or steadiness. This variety of terms, which may seem so unphilosophical, is intended only to express that act of the mind, which renders realities more present to us than fictions, causes them to weigh more in the thought, and gives them a superior influence on the passions and imagination. Provided we agree about the thing, 'tis needless to dispute about the terms. The imagination has the command over all its ideas, and can join, and mix, and vary them in all the ways possible. It may conceive objects with all the circumstances of place and time. It may set them, in a manner, before our eyes in their true colours, just as they might have existed. But as it is impossible, that that faculty can ever, of itself, reach belief, 'tis evident, that belief consists not in the nature and order of our ideas, but in the

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<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.* 144.

manner of their conception, and in their feeling to the mind. (T 1.3.7.7.App)

So given that, “The imagination has the command over all its ideas, and can join, and mix, and vary them in all the ways possible,” this does not explain away our belief in dream sense impressions. And even if it did, and let us say that Hume is thinking of dreams as vivid ideas only, then the steadiness Loeb focuses on is for Hume simply synonymous to a “superior force, or vivacity, or solidity, or firmness,” which surely even some dream ideas/impressions can have. For even if one objects that dreams are not steady, they certainly are often vivid or have a high level of “vivacity.” And, of course, it is possible to have dreams that are just as steady, or normal-seeming, as waking experience; not all dreams are “loose” (T 1.3.10.9). Does this mean that in those exceptions dreams *can* be believed as real? What Hume is apparently referring to at T 1.3.10.9 is the experience of madness. This connection between dreams and madness is an important one and needs to be looked at closely, for as we shall see, Hume does not consider dreams to be equal to the “loose fiction[s]” of madness. Therefore there is no solid textual evidence to show why Hume must so easily dismiss dreams as fictions. Nevertheless he does dismiss them as “phantoms of the night .” (T 3.1.1.1). So it seems that Hume is merely appealing to some sort of criterion to tell him that these dream perceptions are fictions once he is awake.

But then the question immediately becomes: what is Hume’s criterion? As we saw in Chapter One, both Kemp Smith and Wright’s analysis point to a specific *natural* way in which Hume feels one can distinguish between what is true and false. This

criterion is Hume's definition for what is *natural* to the mind. This is illustrated in the following passage:

I must distinguish in the imagination betwixt the principles which are permanent, irresistible, and universal . . . And the principles, which are changeable, weak, and irregular . . . The former are the foundation of all our thoughts and actions, so that upon their removal human nature must immediately perish and go to ruin. The latter are neither unavoidable to mankind, nor necessary, or so much as useful in the conduct of life; but on the contrary are observ'd only to take place in weak minds, and being opposite to the other principles of custom 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. One who concludes somebody to be near him, when he hears an articulate voice in the dark, reasons justly and naturally; tho' that conclusion be deriv'd from nothing but custom, which infixes and enlivens the idea of a human creature, on account of his usual conjunction with the present impression. But one, who is tormented he knows not why, with the apprehension of spectres in the dark, may, perhaps, be said to reason, and to reason naturally too: But then it must be in the same sense, that a malady is said to be natural; as arising from natural causes, tho' it be contrary to health, the most agreeable and most natural situation of man. (T 1.4.4.1)

Consequently the "principles, which are permanent, irresistible, and universal" are the ones that matter to us for "upon their removal human nature must immediately perish." So for Hume there is an important difference between the man who "reasons justly and naturally" and the one "who is tormented he knows not why, with the apprehension of spectres in the dark" although he can also "be said to reason, and to reason naturally too." The difference is that, in the latter cases, it is "contrary to health, the most agreeable and most natural situation of man." For Hume what is natural is the *healthy* state of the mind. For this reason John Wright concludes that "Hume appears to prefer a sense of the word 'natural' which requires that what is natural to man be both beneficial and truth-

preserving.”<sup>316</sup> Furthermore, “[Hume] accepts the view that human nature is constituted in such a way that it produces a psychological response which is appropriate for its own survival.”<sup>317</sup>

So not all forms of natural belief are ontologically binding, only those that are, as Kemp Smith says “‘natural’, ‘inevitable’, [and] ‘indispensable’.”<sup>318</sup> But what about dreams, are they not inevitable? Are we not forced each night to naturally believe in our dreams?<sup>319</sup> So the question now becomes: is the natural belief in dreams both *natural* in a healthy way and indispensable?

It does seem, at least at first glance, that Hume considers dreams—as was the popular view in his day—to be a sign of illness. For example, dreams are mentioned alongside the hallucinations one has “in a fever, [and] in madness,” (T 1.1.1.1) and he does speak of “dreams [alongside of] madness, and other diseases.” (E 12.11.114) However on closer examination we can see that this is an oversimplification. When Hume speaks of dreams and madness, his point is not that dreams themselves arise from an unhealthy mind as hallucinations do, but instead he warns of the danger of how an unhealthy mind can affect, and be affected by, dreams just as hallucinations affect and are affected by the mind.

We have already seen the problems that an overactive imagination and madness can have on our judgement and passions. As Hume states:

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<sup>316</sup> John P. Wright, *The Sceptical Realism of David Hume*, 229.

<sup>317</sup> *Ibid.* 230.

<sup>318</sup> Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines*, 87.

<sup>319</sup> There are rare times when we become aware we are dreaming (lucid dreams) yet I hope the reader will agree that these occurrences are not the norm and that usually we naturally believe in our dreams.

Nor will it be amiss to remark, that as a lively imagination very often degenerates into madness or folly, and bears it a great resemblance in its operations; so they influence the judgment after the same manner, and produce belief from the very same principles. When the imagination, from any extraordinary ferment of the blood and spirits, acquires such a vivacity as disorders all its powers and faculties, there is no means of distinguishing betwixt truth and falshood; but every loose fiction or idea, having the same influence as the impressions of the memory, or the conclusions of the judgment, is receiv'd on the same footing, and operates with equal force on the passions. A present impression and a customary transition are now no longer necessary to enliven our ideas. Every chimera of the brain is as vivid and intense as any of those inferences, which we formerly dignify'd with the name of conclusions concerning matters of fact, and sometimes as the present impressions of the senses. (T 1.3.10.9)

Consequently with regard to madness, hallucinations have the power to override judgment, affect the passions, and be as intense as sense impressions. But note that such hallucinations do not derive from a beneficial or healthy cause. These fictions and chimeras, although naturally believed in, do not carry with them an ontological commitment, because their natural belief results merely from the fact that madness has resulted in an unhealthy reason that is falsely justifying them.

But could dreams be dismissed as the product of a “lively imagination”, which in Hume’s words “very often degenerates into madness or folly, and bears it a great resemblance in its operations”? On this point Hume is not clear as to what exactly he means by a “lively imagination.” It appears to mean a mind that is so excited as to be taken for madness. However Hume does provide a hint when he says afterwards that “We may observe the same effect of poetry in a lesser degree; and this is common both to poetry and madness, that the vivacity they bestow on the ideas is not deriv'd from the particular situations or connexions of the objects of these ideas, but from the present temper and disposition of the person.” (T 1.3.10.10) Yet Hume’s answer to the effects of

this “poetical enthusiasm” is that it “never has the same *feeling* with that which arises in the mind, when we reason.” (T 1.3.10.10) As Hume concludes:

There is no passion of the human mind but what may arise from poetry; tho’ at the same time the *feelings* of the passions are very different when excited by poetical fictions, from what they are when they arise from belief and reality. A passion, which is disagreeable in real life, may afford the highest entertainment in a tragedy, or epic poem. In the latter case it lies not with that weight upon us: It feels less firm and solid: And has no other than the agreeable effect of exciting the spirits, and rousing the attention. The difference in the passions is a clear proof of a like difference in those ideas, from which the passions are deriv’d. Where the vivacity arises from a customary conjunction with a present impression; tho’ the imagination may not, in appearance, be so much mov’d; yet there is always something more forcible and real in its actions, than in the fervours of poetry and eloquence. (T 1.3.10.10)

But although one may agree with Hume that the effects of poetry can be distinguished from the normal workings of the imagination, it is not so true of dreams. For in dreams “there is always something more forcible and real in its actions, than in the fervours of poetry and eloquence.” Nor does it seem that in dreams “A passion, which is disagreeable in real life, may afford the highest entertainment.” So although Hume links dreams and poetry to madness, dreams still seem unique.

The key to this problem is in understanding why the philosophers of the Enlightenment consider dreams to be equated with illness. As Lucia Dacome has shown, there are essentially two reasons: first, the difficulties dreams and in particular dreamless sleep pose for personal identity, and second, the connection dreams have to the dangers of Enthusiastic prognosticators.<sup>320</sup>

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<sup>320</sup> Lucia Dacome, “‘To What Purpose Does It Think?’: Dreams, Sick Bodies and Confused Minds in the Age of Reason,” *History of Psychiatry* 15:4 (2004) 395–416.

A major issue during the Enlightenment was whether dreams posed a danger to personal identity. Let us see whether Locke's analysis was an influence on Hume. To begin with, let us look at Locke's definition for madness and then see how this view, together with his analysis on personal identity, might have influenced Hume:

In fine, the defect in *Naturals*<sup>321</sup> seems to proceed from want of quickness, activity, and motion, in the intellectual Faculties, whereby they are deprived of Reason: Whereas *mad Men*, on the other side, seem to suffer by the other Extreme. For they do not appear to me to have lost the Faculty of Reasoning: but having joined together some *Ideas* very wrongly, they mistake them for Truths; and they err as Men do, that argue right from wrong Principles. For by the violence of their Imaginations, having taken their Fancies for Realities, they make right deductions from them. Thus you shall find a distracted Man fancying himself a King, with a right inference, require suitable Attendance, Respect, and Obedience: Others who have thought themselves made of Glass, have used the causation necessary to preserve such brittle Bodies. Hence it comes to pass, that a Man, who is very sober, and of a right Understanding in all other things, may in one particular be as frantick, as any in *Bedlam*; if either by any sudden very strong impression, or long fixing his Fancy upon one sort of Thoughts, incoherent *Ideas* have been cemented together so powerfully, as to remain united.<sup>322</sup>

So for Locke mental illness is based on the mere association of ideas. This point is further shown in the following passage:

I shall be pardon'd for calling it by so harsh a name as *Madness*, when it is considered, that opposition to Reason deserves that Name, and is really Madness; and there is scarce a Man so free from it, but that if he should always on all occasions argue or do as in some cases he constantly does, would not be thought fitter for *Bedlam*, than Civil Conversation. I do not here mean when he is under the power of an unruly Passion, but in the steady calm course of his Life. That which will yet more apologize for this harsh Name, and ungrateful Imputation on the greatest part Mankind is, that enquiring a little by the bye into the Nature of Madness . . . I found

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<sup>321</sup> Locke appears to use this word to describe simpletons.

<sup>322</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 2.11.13.160–161.

it to spring from the very same Root, and to depend on the very same Cause we are here speaking of.<sup>323</sup>

As we saw above, Locke also presents dreams as “extravagant and incoherent . . . little conformable to the perfection and order of a rational being.”<sup>324</sup> As Dacome shows, “While discussing the notions of identity and diversity, [Locke] presented sleep and dreams as interruptions of consciousness comparable to madness and drunkenness, disturbances of the self.”<sup>325</sup> Much of this has to do with Locke’s insistence that the perfect sleep is sleep without dreams, or ‘sound sleep.’ Consequently a dream is a disturbance of this sound sleep. Now consider the following two passages from Locke concerning the effects sound sleep have on his notion of time and personal identity:

When that succession of *Ideas* ceases, our perception of Duration ceases with it; which every one clearly experiments in himself, whilst he sleeps soundly . . . whilst he sleeps, or thinks not, he has no perception at all, but it is quite lost to him; and the moment wherein he leaves off to think, till the moment he begins to think again, seems to him to have no distance. And so I doubt not but it would be to a waking Man, if it were possible for him to keep only one *Idea* in his Mind, without variation, and the succession of others: And we see, that one who fixes his Thoughts very intently on one thing, so as to take but little notice of the succession of *Ideas* that pass in his Mind . . . thinks that time shorter than it is.<sup>326</sup>

These passages from Locke seem to have influenced Hume. For example, Hume states that, with regard to time, “A man in a sound sleep, or strongly occupy’d with one thought, is insensible of time; and according as his perceptions succeed each other with greater or less rapidity, the same duration appears longer or shorter to his imagination.”

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<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.* 2.33.4.395.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.* 2.1.16.113.

<sup>325</sup> Lucia Dacome, “‘To What Purpose Does It Think?’: Dreams, Sick Bodies and Confused Minds in the Age of Reason,” 397.

<sup>326</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 2.14.4.182.

(T 1.2.3.7)<sup>327</sup> Moreover, in his own section on personal identity in the *Treatise* Hume states, “When my perceptions are remov’d for any time, as by sound sleep; so long am I insensible of *myself*, and may truly be said not to exist.” (T 1.4.6.3) As Locke continues:

I do not say there is no Soul in Man, because he is not sensible of it in his sleep; But I do say, he cannot think at any time waking or sleeping, without being sensible of it . . . I grant that the Soul in a waking Man is never without thought, because it is the condition of being awake: But whether sleeping without dreaming be not an Affection of the whole man, Mind as well as Body, may be worth a waking Man’s consideration; it being hard to conceive, that any thing should think, and not be conscious of it . . . Thus, methinks, every drowsy nod shakes this doctrine, who teach that the soul is always thinking. Those at least, who do at any time sleep without dreaming, can never be convinced that their thoughts are sometimes for four hours busy without their knowing of it; and if they are taken in the very act, waked in the middle of that sleeping contemplation, can give no manner of account of it . . . Twill perhaps be said that the soul thinks even in the soundest sleep, though memory retains it not. That the Soul in sleeping man should be this moment busy thinking, and the next moment in a waking man, not remember, nor be able to recollect one jot of all these thoughts, is very hard to be conceived.<sup>328</sup>

From within this line of reasoning Locke states that “Socrates asleep and Socrates awake, is not the same person.”<sup>329</sup> However, Locke’s view was famously criticized by Leibniz, who argued that, “One is feebly conscious in sleep, even when it is dreamless. The process of waking up itself shows this, and the easier you are wakened the more you are conscious of what goes on without, although this consciousness is not always strong

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<sup>327</sup> In fact we have a direct reference from Hume that this point is indeed from Locke. Hume states, “It has been remark’d by a great philosopher [Locke], that our perceptions have certain bounds in this particular, which are fix’d by the original nature and constitution of the mind, and beyond which no influence of external objects on the senses is ever able to hasten or retard our thought.” (T 1.2.3.7) Although one has to be cautious here and remind ourselves that although Hume is borrowing Locke’s answer regarding an “original nature” in “external objects,” Hume in the end, of course, does not justify the external world but apparently, does agree with the claim of there being an “original nature and constitution of the mind.”

<sup>328</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 2.1.10–14.109–111.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid.* 2.1.11.110.

enough to cause you to wake.”<sup>330</sup> Leibniz’s critique does not necessarily refer to dreams, but rather subconscious thoughts that take place during sleep.<sup>331</sup> However in anticipation of a criticism regarding dreams Locke merely says, “Tis true, we have sometimes instances of Perceptions, whilst we are asleep, and retain the memory of those thoughts; but how extravagant and incoherent for the most part they are; how little conformable to the perfection and order of a rational being, those who are acquainted with Dreams, need not be told.”<sup>332</sup> Thus it is the “extravagance” and incoherence of dreams as they are recalled by the waking memory that makes them irrelevant, apparently even to the question of the sleeping Socrates’ identity. For these reasons, Locke apparently dismisses dreams as irrelevant. It would appear that on this matter Hume sides with Locke over Leibniz with regard to the self. For aside from the Locke-influenced passages noted above, Hume states that we cannot “hinder ourselves from thinking as long as we are awake,” (T 1.4.1.7) just as Locke states that “I grant that the Soul in a waking Man is never without thought, because it is the condition of being awake.”<sup>333</sup>

Yet there is an important difference between Hume and Locke on these topics, which is, that while Locke addresses dreams as a possible solution to the problem sound sleep poses to our experience of time (2.14.4.182) and personal identity (2.1.16.113), Hume does not. I suggest the reason is that while agreeing with Locke on the problems posed by sound sleep, Hume does not agree with the Lockean *definition* of ‘sound sleep.’ As we have seen, Hume’s use of the phrase is only meant to suggest a mind that is

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<sup>330</sup> Gottfried Leibniz, *New Essays Concerning Human Understanding*, translated by Alfred Gideon Langley (Illinois: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1949), 115.

<sup>331</sup> As a point of note, recent discoveries about the sleeping brain appear to have vindicated Leibniz’s position in that famous argument. See Robert Stickgold and Peter Wehrwein’s article, “Sleep Now, Remember Later,” in *Newsweek*, Apr 27, 2009. <http://www.newsweek.com/id/194650>

<sup>332</sup> John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, 2.1.16.113.

<sup>333</sup> *Ibid.* 2.1.11.109.

without dreams, it is not meant to imply the further Lockean suggestion that this sound sleep is thus a *healthy* sleep. For there is a good reason for Hume not to accept the Lockean notion that sound sleep is necessarily healthy sleep, in comparison to dream-filled sleep, and that is the connection that Locke draws between dreams, madness, and the association of ideas. For it is well known that Hume not only disagrees with Locke on the limited role associations of the mind play, but Hume makes it central to his theory of ideas:

Thro' this whole book [*Treatise*], there are great pretensions to new discoveries in philosophy; but if any thing can entitle the author to so glorious a name as that of an *inventor*, 'tis the use he makes of the principle of the association of ideas, which enters into most of his philosophy . . . For as it is by means of thought only that any thing operates upon our passions, and as these are the only ties of our thoughts, they are really *to us* the cement of the universe, and all the operations of the mind must, in a great measure, depend on them. (A 35.416–417)

So Hume has a powerful motive for not wanting to agree with Locke on the connection between madness and association, and so also does not agree with the connection Locke makes between dreams, madness and association.

Another probable reason why Hume would not wish to equate dreams with illness is due to the theory of dreams put forth by his older contemporary Andrew Baxter. For although Locke's empiricism was the main element with regard to the notion that sleep was linked to problems with the self, and dreams to madness, as Dacome shows, a major promoter of these views in the 1730s came from Baxter's claim that in dreams there is a "splitting of consciousness."<sup>334</sup> Baxter's claim is based upon the common experience in dreams whereby we seem to create characters out of our own minds that then have

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<sup>334</sup> Lucia Dacome, "'To What Purpose Does It Think?': Dreams, Sick Bodies and Confused Minds in the Age of Reason," 402.

independent consciousness—we talk with them and do not anticipate their responses.

Baxter's implication for the self is strikingly similar to what Hume himself would later write in the *Treatise*. According to Baxter:

And thus, as I said before, (No 6, and 13.) this assertion, *That the soul itself may produce what it thinks (or is conscious that) another Agent produces in sleep*, destroys the *evidence* of self-consciousness, which is the surest and most intuitive foundation of all our knowledge; or rather it takes away *self-consciousness* altogether, and leaves no distinction between *our own consciousness* and that of *another person*.—I think *another person* speaks or acts so and so; yet it is really *I myself* who speak and act.—Contrarily therefore, I think *I myself* say or do such a thing; yet it may be *another person*. Thus we must not loosen the foundations of this evidence of self-consciousness in one case, and then confine the consequence of it to that case only: The contagion will spread; and the event will be putting a rod into another man's hand to chastise ourselves.<sup>335</sup>

Baxter continues that this problem is even more damaging than that of the question of personal identity over time. He continues:

[T]he opinion asserted in the present objection goes farther, and would pretend to show that the EGO and the TU of the present time, may both be but *one* and the *same person*. Thus *Des Cartes's principle, Cogito, ergo sum*, may no longer be true; for while I fancy *I think*, it may be *some other thing* that thinks, while I am not so much as existing. And all these are no more than the genuine consequences of supposing *that the soul may act and say in sleep, what it thinks another Being acts and says at that time*.<sup>336</sup>

So Baxter warns of a problem involving the splitting of the self and even loss of the self.

Hume's notion of the self as a bundle of perceptions that does not even have identity at a moment let alone over time (T 1.4.6.1–7) is strikingly similar to the case that Baxter

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<sup>335</sup> Andrew Baxter, *An Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul; Wherein the Immateriality of the Soul is Evinced from the Principles of Reason and Philosophy* (London: Printed by James Bettenham, for the author; and sold by G. Strahan; J. Gray; A. Millar; A. Lyon; O. Payne; and G. Hamilton, Edinburgh, 1733), 219.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.* 219–220.

proposed if no solution is to be found to the splitting consciousness in dreams (Baxter provides a solution by stating the ‘other self’ in our dreams comes from a supernatural source—clearly a solution Hume would not be willing to accept). It is known that “Hume knew Baxter’s work,”<sup>337</sup> and that Baxter’s thesis was well-known enough in the 1730s, that Hume would have reason enough to have wished to avoid the Baxter-like consequences for his own theory of the self. Not only does Hume’s self have no identity, there is, as H. H. Price noticed, nothing stopping it from splitting into mini-bundles.<sup>338</sup> Hume states that the perceptions of the ‘bundle’ can be separate from the ‘mind,’ since “as every perception is distinguishable from another, and may be consider’d as separately existent; it evidently follows, that there is no absurdity in separating any particular perception from the mind; that is, in breaking off all its relations, with that connected mass of perceptions, which constitute a thinking being.” (T 1.4.2.39) Indeed his bundle theory of the self can be seen as an answer to Baxter, as to how the self can *seem* to split in dreams without the need for any supernatural intervention. And, if this is the case, then there is another good reason why Hume does not equate dreams with madness.

The feature that defines madness for Hume is its negative effect on the rest of the mind, including the passions (T 1.3.10.9–10). Yet Hume provides one important way that dreams differ from this negative effect which hallucinations and poetry have on the passions and imagination. Hume hints that the effects that dreams have on the passions and imagination may be potentially positive:

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<sup>337</sup> John W. Yolton, *Thinking Matter* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), ch. 5.

<sup>338</sup> Henry H. Price, “Professor Ayer on the Problem of Knowledge,” *Mind* (1958): 461–462. Price claims that since Hume believed “that ‘perceptions’ cannot occur except as members of ‘bundles’ . . . it is logically possible that some of these bundles might be very small indeed . . . because a bundle, by definition, must have at least two members.”

Several moralists have recommended it as an excellent method of becoming acquainted with our own hearts, and knowing our progress in virtue, to recollect our dreams in a morning, and examine them with the same rigour, that we wou'd our most serious and most deliberate actions. Our character is the same throughout, say they, and appears best where artifice, fear, and policy have no place, and men can neither be hypocrites with themselves nor others. The generosity, or baseness of our temper, our meekness or cruelty, our courage or pusillanimity, influence the fictions of the imagination with the most unbounded liberty, and discover themselves in the most glaring colours. (T 1.4.3.1)<sup>339</sup>

According to William Wandless's interpretation of this passage:

Though Hume's remarks on dreams principally serve as an analogy for his critique of ideas of substance in the ancient philosophy, this passing evaluative assessment cuts directly to the heart of dream didacticism, both by valorizing the lack of conscious restraint on dreams and by emphasizing the need for recollection and reflection to make sense of them. Dreams, in Hume's terms, prove instructive precisely because they lack the selectivity and consistency of conscious thought; vivid and indiscriminate, these "fictions of the imagination" unequivocally reflect the propensities of the dreamer.<sup>340</sup>

Hume considers dreams also to have an overriding influence on the passions and imagination, yet this does not mean they are really on a par with the hallucinations that accompany fever and madness, nor with the poetic enthusiasm and the borderline madness of a lively imagination. Dreams themselves need not arise from an unhealthy mind, or else Hume would not, even by analogy, be suggesting the benefits of their recollection. Although one might object here that this is exaggerating the importance of a passage that seems at first sight to be merely Hume's use of dreams as an analogy, the

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<sup>339</sup> Graham Solomon has traced the "several moralists" Hume mentions to most likely being Plutarch and/or John Byrom. See Solomon's "Some Sources for Hume's Opening Remarks to *Treatise* I.IV.III," *Hume Studies* 16:1 (April 1990) 57–66.

<sup>340</sup> William Wandless, "Didactic Dream Transformations and the English Novel of the Enlightenment," in *The Dream and the Enlightenment*, eds. Bernard Dieterle and Manfred Engel (Paris: Honore Champion, 2003), 228.

passage should not be taken too lightly. The passage is a bit odd. It is the only passage in Hume's works that provides a sustained discussion of the topic of dreams and he speaks it quite matter-of-factly. It does not contain the usual ironic tone that is found in passages with regard to ideas he finds ridiculous. And, indeed, why should Hume not advocate the recollection of dreams? There is nothing in this practice that violates his empiricist principle.

Consequently there is good reason to suspect that although it was a popular opinion during the Enlightenment to link dreams with some sort of illness, this was not Hume's position. In other words, having dreams does not necessarily mean the mind is sick, for upon awakening a healthy reason can use the remembrance of those dreams for a positive cause. So it is not that dreams themselves are signs of sickness, or are to be equated with madness, but simply that Hume was particularly dismissive of what *sick minds do with dreams*. Especially a mind that is filled with superstitious fears like the one who fears the "apprehension of spectres in the dark." And it is here where I believe Hume shows more clearly what he means by a "lively imagination." (T 1.3.10.9) For example, consider Philo's remark in the *Dialogues*:

[I]t is here chiefly, cried PHILO, that the uniform and equal maxims of nature are most apparent. Man, it is true, can, by combination, surmount all his *real* enemies, and become master of the whole animal creation: But does he not immediately raise up to himself *imaginary* enemies, the demons of his fancy, who haunt him with superstitious terrors, and blast every enjoyment of life? His pleasure, as he imagines, becomes, in their eyes, a crime: His food and repose give them umbrage and offence: His very sleep and dreams furnish new materials to anxious fear: And even death, his refuge from every other ill, presents only the dread of endless and innumerable woes. Nor does the wolf molest more the timid flock,

than superstition does the anxious breast of wretched mortals. (Dialogues X, 195)<sup>341</sup>

Thus “dreams furnish new materials to anxious fear” in a superstitious mind. But these connections to dreams and their negative influence on us, primarily how they enliven fear, are what for Hume connects a person who is awake and recollecting his dreams through the eyeglass of superstition, or in other words, an unhealthy reason accompanying a lively or superstitious imagination. This connection is found in Hume’s other works as well. Consider a passage in the essay *Of Suicide*: “The superstitious man, says *Tully*, is miserable in every scene, in every incident of life. Even sleep itself, which banishes all other cares of unhappy mortals, affords to him matter of new terror; while he examines his dreams, and finds in those visions of the night, prognostications of future calamities.” (Suicide, 579)<sup>342</sup> Let us note also a couple of passages from the *History of England*:<sup>343</sup> “His [Rollo’s] reputation brought him associates from all quarters; and a vision, which he pretended to have appeared to him in his sleep, and which, according to his interpretation of it, prognosticated the greatest successes, proved also a powerful incentive with those ignorant and superstitious people.” (HOE 1.3.106) Again:

A dream or prophecy, Lord Clarendon mentions, which, he affirms, (and he must have known the truth,) was universally talked of almost from the beginning of the civil wars, and long before Cromwell was so considerable a person as to bestow upon it any degree of probability. In this prophecy, it was foretold, that Cromwell should be the greatest man in England, and would nearly, but never would fully, mount the throne. Such a

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<sup>341</sup> David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 19<sup>th</sup> edition, ed. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1988). Parenthetical references show chapter and page number.

<sup>342</sup> David Hume, “Of Suicide,” in *David Hume: Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, revised edition, ed. Eugene F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1987).

<sup>343</sup> David Hume, *The History of England from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Abdication of James the Second*, 5 vols. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1868). Hereafter HOE. Parenthetical references show volume, chapter, and page numbers.

prepossession probably arose from the heated imagination either of himself or of his followers . . . (HOE 5.61.477)<sup>344</sup>

For the most part then, Hume is criticizing how dreams are used and affected by the unhealthy reasoning of the superstitious mind. Notably in the latter passage regarding the alleged dream prophecy, Hume dismisses it as the result of a “heated imagination.”

Similarly in the *Natural History of Religion*: “Examine the religious principles, which have, in fact, prevailed in the world. You will scarcely be persuaded, that they are any thing but sick men’s dreams” (NHR, 184).<sup>345</sup> It is “sick men’s dreams,” and those that result from a “heated imagination,” that Hume is implying are equal to madness; for all these perceptions, and the beliefs that people have in them, result from an unhealthy superstitious mind accompanied by an unhealthy reason. Finally, on this view of the danger of “sick dreams” combined with religious fervour, there is likely a Hobbsean influence here. It is worth looking at the complete passage from Hobbes:

The most difficult discerning of a mans Dream, from his waking thoughts, is . . . when by some accident we observe not that we have slept: which is easie to happen to a man full of fearfull thoughts; and whose conscience is much troubled . . . We read of *Marcus Brutus* . . . how at *Philippi*, the night before he gave battell to *Augustus Caesar*, hee saw a fearfull apparition, which is commonly related by Historians as a Vision: but considering the circumstances, one may easily judge to have been but a short Dream. For sitting in his tent, pensive and troubled with the horror of his rash act, it was not hard for him, slumbering the cold, to dream of that which most affrighted him; which feare, as by degrees it made him wake; so also it must needs make the Apparition by degrees to vanish: and having no assurance that he slept, he could have no cause to think it a Dream, or anything but a Vision. And this is no very rare Accident: for

<sup>344</sup> Notice how in these quotations from the HOE and in the one above from the essay “Of Suicide,” that it is the alleged connection between dreams and prognostication that is the focus of Hume’s critique. It is the superstitious man’s use of dreams for claiming knowledge of the future that Hume is ridiculing, not dreams themselves.

<sup>345</sup> David Hume, “The Natural History of Religion,” in *David Hume: Principle Writings on Religion including Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and The Natural History of Religion*, ed. J.C.A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, Oxford University Press, 1998).

even they that be perfectly awake, if they be timorous, and superstitious, possessed with fearful tales, and alone in the dark, are subject to the like fancies, and believe they see spirits and dead mens Ghosts walking in Churchyards; whereas it is either their Fancy onely, or els the knavery of such persons, as make use of such superstitious feare, to passé disguised in the night, to places they would not be known to haunt.

From this ignorance of how to distinguish Dreams, and other strong Fancies, from Vision and Sense, did arise the greatest part of the Religion of the Gentiles in time past, that worshipped Satyres, Fawnes, Nymphs, and the like; and now adays the opinion that rude people have Fayries, Ghosts, and Goblins; and of the power of Witches. For as for Witches, I think not that their witchcraft is any reall power; but yet that they are justly punished, for the false beliefs they have, that they can do such mischief, joined with their purpose to do it if they can: their trade being nearer to a new Religion, than to a Craft or Science. And for Fayries, and waling Ghosts, the opinion of them has I think been on purpose, either taught, or not confuted, to keep in credit the use of Exorcism, of Crosses, of holy Water, and other such inventions of Ghostly men. Nevertheless, there is no doubt, but God can make unnatural Apparitions: But that he does it so often, as men need feare such things, more than they feare the stay, or charge, of the course of Nature, which he also can stay, and change, is no point of Christian faith. But evill men under pretext that God can do any thing, are so bold as to say any thing when it serves their turn, though they think it untrue; It is the part of a wise man, to believe them no further, than right reason makes that which they say, appear credible, If this superstitious fear of Spirits were taken away, and with it Prognostiques from Dreams, false Prophecies, and many other things depending thereon, by which, crafty ambitious persons abuse the simple people, man would be much more fitted than they are for civill Obedience.<sup>346</sup>

The passage from Hobbes sounding very similar to the passages we have seen from Hume, providing strong evidence that Hume, like Hobbes, is primarily concerned with the dangers dreams pose when connected to sick, superstitious minds. Although Hobbes blames this situation on “ignorance of how to distinguish Dreams, and other strong Fancies, from Vision and Sense,” the differences between Hobbes and Hume with regard to the nature of perceptions means that Hume most likely did not accept Hobbes’ criterion for knowing whether one was awake or asleep. So there is abundant evidence

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<sup>346</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 1.2.91–93.

that Hume was not saying that dreams themselves are caused by, or are to be equated with illness; but rather that sick minds filled with an overactive imagination can be dangerously led astray by their dreams.

So what is the status of our natural beliefs in dreams in a *healthy* mind? If they arise within a healthy mind must Hume consider them *natural* as well? It would appear that there is good reason to view Hume as committed to this view, even if he does not say this directly. It also appears that our natural belief in dreams could be both *natural* (arising from a healthy mind) and inevitable (it cannot be avoided), but is it indispensable? On this latter point it seems that Hume once hints as to the value of dreams. As we saw above, he mentions how “Several moralists” have claimed that dream recollection can teach us about ourselves by “becoming acquainted with our own hearts, and knowing our progress in virtue.” So arguably dreams are morally indispensable. Although it may be objected that this possible moral indispensability does not make dreaming necessary in the same way that our waking natural beliefs are, we can at least add that we now have good reason to suspect that dreaming itself is indispensable for our health.<sup>347</sup>

Moreover, aside from Kemp Smith’s definition of what should constitute a natural belief (that they are “‘natural’, ‘inevitable’, [and] ‘indispensable’”), Hume’s own definition of those principles that are crucial is that they are “permanent, irresistible, and universal” (T 1.4.4.1). Well, we can now say that our natural beliefs in dreams are permanent (i.e., they are as permanent in dreaming as our beliefs in the external world

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<sup>347</sup> For example Francis Crick and Graeme Mitchison (“The Function of Dream Sleep” in *Nature* 304 (July 14, 1983) 111–114) have argued that dreaming functions to keep our brains healthy by removing some undesirable connections between neural cells. Also J. Allan Hobson has recently speculated that dreaming is a necessary process in the regulating of body temperature. See Hobson’s *Dreaming: An Introduction to the Science of Sleep* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

and causation are permanent in waking); they are irresistible; and they are universal since they apply to everyone. Consequently, unless it can be shown conclusively that Hume considered dreams to be the result of an unhealthy mind, Kemp Smith and Wright must consider the absurd probability, which derives from their own arguments considered in Chapter One, that our natural beliefs in dreams also carry with them an ontological commitment.

Nor does Strawson's claim in Chapter Two concerning how causation is "taken for granted," going to help him here. For we also naturally believe or take for granted the causal connection of *objects* in our dreams. Indeed, considering the meaning Strawson places on "takes for granted" it seems more applicable to dreams than to waking experience, for dreams are almost never questioned while we are dreaming but are immediately accepted. In other words, the natural belief in dreams is arguably even stronger than in waking; the reality of dreams is ostensibly "taken for granted" when we are dreaming.

The other element that Strawson appeals to in his argument that Hume is some sort of Realist, is the case of our supposing rather than knowing through our ability to from relative ideas of the external world. Aside from the criticisms levelled by Flage, there seems to be no reason why using Strawson's understanding of what Hume meant by "specifically different" with regard to the objects of perceptions, that one could not also *suppose* an external object to exist with a dream impression as its representation. Consequently Hume remains an Ontologically Outright Strict Pure Content Idealist.

Nor does the retreat to the argument that the *Enquiry* is the superior text going to help. For although as I showed in Chapter Four, the debate omits evidence to show

Hume's less-than-honourable intentions in his comments regarding the "superiority" of the *Enquiry*. Even if this were not the case, it would only strengthen the dream argument, for as we have seen in this chapter, it is only in the *Enquiry* where Hume is bold in his descriptions of dreams: Instead of referring to them as merely vivid ideas, he implies they are sense impressions. And if one wishes to argue the reverse, that the *Treatise* is the superior text, then the sceptical arguments, along with what Hume says about dreams being potentially beneficial and naturally believed, also pushes the interpretation away from that of the causal/sceptical realists.

Consequently the aspect of dreams in Hume's empiricism shows that unless one wishes to embrace the absurd claim that our natural belief in dreams permits the supposition of a relative external world causing sense impressions, one has to see that natural belief in dreams as well as in waking can be readily accounted for by the theory of ideas, whereby a train of similar perceptions at some level of coherence creates a fictional identity that allows for the formation of a natural belief. But there is no ontological implication attached to the belief. It is only belief.

In the following Conclusion we will consider some objections.

## Conclusion

The analysis of our natural beliefs in dreams in Hume's empiricism asks the New Humeans to either accept the standard Idealist reading, that *reality* is made solely out of perceptions (although we are forced to believe that there is an external world that these perceptions represent), or, that our natural beliefs do assure us through some type of ontological commitment that there *is* an external world, but not just in our waking experience, also in our dreams. Both outcomes are admittedly radical, but I think it is safe to say that the idea that *Hume* would consider the possibility that when we dream, we enter into what is, in effect, another world, would not only seem preposterous to him, it would sound dangerously close to accepting a similar possibility, in that after we die we enter another *world*. Considering Hume's famous position on that matter, we can be confident that he would not entertain the latter possibility. And indeed, as was shown in Chapter Five, he appeals to what appears to be his criterion in which to dismiss dreams as phantoms. Although, as was also shown, his criterion is based upon accepting the natural belief in the waking experience to allow him to dismiss dreams as fictions, which in turn is a contradictory position since it is the same natural belief that allow us to belief in our dreams in the first place. However the fact that Hume does not notice the problem of using natural beliefs to dismiss what was formally naturally believed, shows that Hume either does not care about this asymmetry involved in his criterion (for it would also logically mean that as we are dreaming we should accept the external world being naturally believed while we dream as *real*, and consequently dismiss the former waking perceptions and natural beliefs we had experienced when awake as *phantoms*). Or, that

Hume never meant to imply that there was any form of ontological commitment placed upon natural beliefs. We are merely forced to believe in certain things about the perceptions we experience, whether awake or dreaming. It could be argued however that Hume accepted some form of the Hobbsean criterion in that, “because waking I often observe the absurdity of Dreames, but never dream of the absurdities of my waking Thoughts; I am well satisfied, that being awake, I know I dreame not.” (p. 112). But first, it appears that Hume does not accept any criterion for knowing one is awake or dreaming (p. 116), and second it would still lead to the asymmetry inherent in Hobbes’ criterion that Von Leydon alerts us to (p. 112). However Hume’s criterion does allow him to make a possible distinction between the *concepts* of waking and dreaming, although Norman Malcolm apparently thinks this is not really possible either, for one needs to be sure they are awake first in order to make the conceptual distinction (p. 115). Yet even if it is possible for Hume to make the distinction between the concepts of waking and dreaming, his unique and strict terminology as for what constitutes impression and ideas (pp. 121–123) only means that dreams are more loosely connected by the rules of association ((E 3.1.17) p. 108) than waking perceptions, it cannot imply anything further. To see why this so, let us look more closely at this objection and consider two other possible objections as well:

1. Hume could, and did, distinguish between dreams and waking by implying that dreams were more loosely connected by the rules of association than even “our wildest and most wandering reveries” ((E 3.1.17) p. 108). This means that Hume was justified in dismissing dreams as incoherent.

We have already seen that Hume is not justified within his own system for dismissing dreams as fictions for as he shows in the *Enquiry*: dreams are probably sense impressions (E 12.11.114) p. 120). And Humean fictions only apply to ideas that have no impression from which they are derived. Also we saw that just because Hume says we can distinguish between genuine beliefs and fictional ones based upon a level of steadiness, for Hume this steadiness is also synonymous with vividness, which, of course dreams have (p.132). However, let us suppose that it were just a matter of steadiness, or coherence in the perceptions that determines whether they are *real* or not. As we saw, this criterion, along with the Cartesian one whereby we cannot link up dreams with our waking life, does seem to justify to many philosophers that dreams are just fictions. But we also noticed there is no mention of this criterion in Hume's empiricism. I suggest the answer is that Hume cannot accept these criteria because of what he says about the fiction of identity.

As we recall from Chapter One, it is precisely that identity is a fiction, in that all we really experience are separate though resembling perceptions, that we create the belief in an external world to begin with ((T 1.4.2.50) p. 9). So how can Hume claim to link up dream perceptions with the rest of his life when the rest of his life is admittedly also a fiction of identity (and as we know this includes, for Hume, the fiction of personal identity)? So all there is then is that dreams are less coherent than waking. Nevertheless the fact remains that we still naturally believe in an external world when dreaming. So even if the dreams are less coherent, the level of coherence is enough to satisfy the creation of the belief in an external world. Although it may still be argued that this

diminished level of coherence in dreams means that the natural belief produced should not be assented to, this type of reasoning is based within the claim that natural belief can be explicable to Hume's theory of ideas. Notably this is precisely what the New Humeans reject. They believe it is pure instinct that cannot be reduced to the theory of ideas and the fiction of identity thereby produced.

So there is a choice. Either (1) we accept that dreams are fictions because they are less coherent, and thus the natural belief in them is also to be ignored, or, (2) we accept that natural belief is an instinct that, as Kemp Smith says, is our most primordial belief and one shared with animal life (pp. 12–13), and must be assented to regardless of the theory of ideas and levels of coherence. If we accept (1) it means that the New Humeans are wrong and that there is no ontological commitment to natural belief, since it is, as Kenneth Richman argued, fully explainable within Hume's theory of ideas (p. 25), thus we are ontologically idealists ("perceptions are our only objects," (T 1.4.2.50) and "nothing is ever present to the mind but perceptions," (T 1.2.6.8)). And if we accept (2) it means we cannot use the lower level of coherence in dreams to disregard the natural belief we have in dreams. Number (2) leaving us once again with the problem of whether these instinctual natural beliefs that go beyond the sceptical conclusions we acquire through the theory of ideas, also contains an ontological commitment to an external world in both waking and dream experience. Consequently if you argue that Hume can dismiss the natural belief in dreams on the basis that dreams are less coherent, you cannot agree with the New Humean interpretation of Hume and must see him as an idealist. If you agree with the New Humeans about the origins of natural belief being outside the theory

of ideas, then in order to avoid the absurdity that we exist in *real* dream worlds when asleep, then you must also see Hume as an idealist.

2. Hume simply does not say enough about dreams for us to be sure of what he thought about them. Indeed his omission of any detailed discussion on dreams strongly suggests he did not think dreams to be important at all.

It is true that Hume omits a direct discussion on dreams in his works, although I believe I have put forth compelling evidence to show that Hume may have had other reasons than he just did not think them important. For example his omission of a direct discussion is more likely based upon the fact that, since he understands dreams are probably best defined as sense impressions, this makes it impossible for him to fit into his theory of ideas for he does not have a category for sense impressions being the copies of something previously experienced.

The main issue here is that Hume does not completely omit an analysis of dreams. We can, as I have shown, put together a Humean theory of dreams based upon what he says about dreams, about the unique terminology he insists upon for his theory of ideas, and from what we know he read and was most likely influenced by.

The fact is, that Hume is rather infamous for raising important issues and then dropping them. He raises the issue of the is/ought problem, and then drops it (T 3.1.1.27); he says very little about “complex impressions” (T 1.1.1.2–5); and as we saw in Chapter Three, he only mentions “relative ideas” once (T 1.2.6.9), perhaps alluding to it on two other occasions (T 1.4.5.19; E 7.29.60n17). Finally as I have recently argued,

there is a Pair Principle in Hume's empiricism, although he only mentions that briefly in the *Treatise* as well (T 1.1.1.3, 5).<sup>348</sup>

So it is unfortunate that Hume does this, and in particular concerning the present context, that he omits a detailed discussion of dreams. Nevertheless as I have shown in the previous chapters, he does say enough about dreams for us to take notice. Indeed he says more about dreams than he does about the is/ought problem and relative ideas. Should we then ignore these topics in Hume because he does not provide a detailed analysis of them?

3. Kemp Smith claims that one of the criteria for whether a natural belief should be assented to is its indispensability (p. 130). To say that Hume implies in his passage at T 1.4.3.1 that dreams are "morally indispensable" (p. 149) is unconvincing. Thus the natural belief in dreams fails one of the essential criteria's that require us (and Hume) to take it seriously.

As was shown in Chapter Five, the question over whether our natural beliefs are indispensable is not really what Hume himself puts forth as his own rules, but are rather Kemp Smith's interpretation of them. For Hume, natural beliefs, or "principles . . . [which] are the foundation of all our thoughts and actions", are "permanent, irresistible, and universal," and conform to a notion of "health" (T 1.4.4.1) (p. 31). The question over whether they are indispensable speaks more to the debate regarding the alleged normative aspect of natural beliefs. As Lorne Falkenstein argued in Chapter One, it is hard to see how Hume could have a place for normative beliefs in his system due to how he explains

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<sup>348</sup> See my "Hume's Impression of Succession (Time)," *Dialogue*, 47.3–4 (2008): 603-17.

the origin of beliefs, and in particular natural beliefs (pp. 32–3). Although one can see how believing in an external world and causation is necessary for our survival, the way Kemp Smith and Strawson highlight how Hume says we are *forced* to accept these beliefs (“’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)), leaves no room to choose whether or not we wish to accept these natural beliefs. Consequently it is hard to understand a *normative* belief when there is no place for any real choice in the matter.

Unfortunately Hume is a bit of a victim of history here. There is little question now that dreams are indispensable for our health. Although it is a stretch to conclude that Hume could have foreseen this, as we saw, he does take the first step towards this modern scientific understanding of dreams by not automatically equating dreams with illness.

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