

Hume on Materialism (with some comparisons, esp. to Berkeley): Sect. 12

--Berkeley, Reid, Descartes, and then Hume on common/natural and philosophical materialism (with some help from ppt slides)

- a. Hume agrees with Berkeley about the content of the common belief: we take our sensations to be the physical objects, and we believe the objects to be mind-independent.
 - For a bit on why Hume so interprets the common belief, see the *Treatise* passage at the bottom of the other side
 - This contrasts sharply with Descartes, who agrees with Hume that prephilosophical materialism is the result of “spontaneous” “natural impulse,” but who seems to think that even in our pre-philosophical thought, we think of bodies as things that bear certain relations to (some of our) sensory ideas (M3: AT, pp. 38-39; M6: AT 75)
 - Reid on why we don’t think in terms of a double set of existences
- b. Hume agrees with Berkeley that this belief, given the content specified in (a), cannot stand up to reflection; it is, in Hume’s words, “destroyed by the slightest philosophy” (152.2)
- c. Hume does not offer Berkeley’s account of how/why we come to hold this belief (see section 56 of the *Principles* for Berkeley’s account), but instead claims that the belief is the result of a “natural instinct.” (Well, Hume offers no more account than this in the *Enquiry*. In his earlier *Treatise of Human Nature* (in sect. I, IV, 2), Hume offers a long account of how this happens that gets replaced in the later *Enquiry* by those two words, “natural instinct.”)

These aspects of Hume’s treatment of common materialism come out in several places in Part 12 of the *Enquiry*, but, to list just one, features (a) and (c) are both shown in the following, rather compact passage:

It seems evident, that men are carried, by a natural instinct or pre-possession, 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....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. (151.7)

--Hume on reflective/philosophical materialism.

- a. Hume seems to agree with Berkeley that this philosophical belief (that the real bodies are mind-independent resembling causes of our mind-dependent sensations), would need to be backed by some argument – we need some good reason to believe in the material objects posited by this theory.
- b. He agrees with Berkeley that there is no good reason for belief in these philosopher’s objects, though his argument for this conclusion, while similar to Berkeley’s in some ways, is also different in some respects (compare the argument on 152.9-153.8 with sections 18-20 of Berkeley’s *Principles*).

[Note: Hume hints that the natural belief in matter may not stand in need of argument, or at least that a lack of justifying argument is less of a problem, or at least is less clearly a problem, for natural materialism than it is for philosophical materialism. (I take this to be hinted at by Hume’s statement that, in defending philosophical materialism, philosophy “can no longer

plead the infallible and irresistible instinct of nature" (152.7).) Like Berkeley, Hume's "epistemological" argument (as we're calling it) at 152.9-153.8 is aimed at *philosophical* materialism. His main complaint against *natural* materialism is not that there's no evidence for it, but rather that it's evident to the slightest reflection that it's wrong, since sensations can't exist mind-independently.]

- c. In Hume, unlike in Berkeley, the philosopher's system is seen as inevitable outcome of reflection on the problems inherent in the common view. We are "necessitated by reasoning...to embrace [this] new system" (152.7). So this new system is, in its own way, natural; it's the natural outcome of reflection. Hume writes, "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" (152.6). In Berkeley, by contrast, one gets the feeling that the philosopher's system is just an arbitrary attempt to escape the problems -- an attempt that some philosophers just happened to come up with. In Hume, however, this system -- perhaps more accurately called "reflective" than "philosophical" -- is a natural and inevitable result of reflecting on the problems of the unreflective, instinctual belief.
- d. Still, Hume agrees with Berkeley that, in the final analysis, this reflective materialism won't stand up to scrutiny.

--Hume's solution? Berkeley has a solution to the problem: Scrap the philosopher's objects, keep the common person's objects -- like the common person, take the sensations to be the bodies -- but give up the mind-independence of bodies. For Hume, there is no good solution. Nature is too strong for us to give up mind-independence. We could only pretend to be Berkeleyans. The common belief in matter (in the mind-independence of bodies) will force itself back on us whenever we "leave the study." In the study, when we reflect, we naturally tend toward a different materialism, but one which we can't hold on to for long, and which ultimately doesn't stand up to scrutiny anyway. There's no good solution. This seems to be another (since we're in sect. XII, Hume has looked at others already) display of the "whimsical condition of mankind" (160.7). As Hume writes, summing up our whimsical predicament:

This is a topic, therefore, in which the profounder and more philosophical sceptics will always triumph, when they endeavor to introduce universal doubt into all subjects of human knowledge and inquiry. Do you follow the instincts and propensities of nature, may they say, in assenting to the veracity of sense? But these lead you to believe that the very perception or sensible image is the external object. Do you disclaim this principle, in order to embrace a more rational opinion, that the perceptions are only representations of something external? You here depart from your natural propensities and more obvious sentiments; and yet are not able to satisfy your reason, which can never find any convincing argument from experience to prove, that the perceptions are connected with any external objects. (153.8-154.2)

From Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* (Book I, Part IV, Section II):

[H]owever philosophers may distinguish betwixt the objects and perceptions of the senses; which they suppose co-existent and resembling; yet this is a distinction, which is not comprehended by the generality of mankind, who as they perceive only one being, can never assent to the opinion of a double existence and representation. Those very sensations, which enter by the eye or ear, are with them the true objects, nor can they readily conceive that this pen or paper, which is immediately perceiv'd, represents another, which is different from, but resembling it. (*THN* I, IV, 2, p. 202 of the 1978 OUP edition)

Hume's Empiricist Account of Our Ideas and His Search for the Idea of Necessary Connection **(Enquiry, sections 2,7)**

“When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?* No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.” (165.6)

- Impressions vs. (Thoughts and) Ideas (17-18.6).
- The Empiricist Principle (19.5, 62.3). Toward a better simple/complex formulation: 19.0-19.4, 62.5: Every idea one has is either copied from some impression one has had, or else is a complex idea and is composed of simpler ideas that are copied from impressions one has had.
- “Banishing Jargon” (21.8)
- Two (Lockean) Arguments for the Principle (19.6-20.7)
- “One Contradictory Phenomenon” (20.7-21.7)
- “Power, Force, Energy, or Necessary Connection” (62.0)
- The Search for the Impression of Power, Part I: The Outward Senses (63.2-64.2)
- The Search for the Impression of Power, Part II: Berkeley's “Pretension” (64.7): 64.2-73.2; a key (wrap-up) passage: 69.1-3
- On the Verge of Surrender? (74.3)
- Impression Found!: feeling (note the italicization of “*feel*”) of expectation (75.5)
- Hume's “Two” Definitions of Cause (76.8-77.2)
 - Def. 1a (Constant Conjunction): “an object, followed by another, and where all objects similar to the first are followed by objects similar to the second”
 - Def. 1b (Subjunctive Conditional): “an object, followed by another...where, if the first object had not been, the second had never existed”
 - Def. 2 (Subjective): “an object, followed by another, and whose appearance always conveys the thought to that other”
 - problems for each of 1a (doesn't make use of the identified impression we worked so hard to locate) and 2 (circularity), and a Humean definition of cause that avoids these problems
 - deeper problems: Hume's admission: “Yet 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.” (76.7)

Undergoing Conceptual Analysis



And when you see the first billiard ball roll into the second, how does that make you *feel*?

*Drawn by Jesse Prinz. Idea by Keith DeRose. Impression from which idea was derived: Hume's *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, sect. VII.

The Treatise version of Hume's second (subjective) definition of cause:

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.

—Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, I, III, XIV, p. 170.3 in the L.A. Selby-Bigge, ed., Oxford UP (1978) edition

A Humean definition of cause:

Event A causes event B iff A is followed by B and the observation of A-type events is constantly followed by the expectation of a B-type events (and (perhaps) also: thinking about A-type events is constantly followed by the thinking of B-type events).

Hume on Unobserved Matters of Fact: Sections 4 and 5

1. Two Kinds of truths: Relations of Ideas vs. Matters of Fact

	Relations of Ideas	Matters of Fact
Modal Status	Necessary	Contingent: "The contrary of every matter of fact is still possible" (25.9)
How Known	(Can be) known <i>a priori</i> : "discoverable by the mere operation of thought" (25.6)	Cannot be known <i>a priori</i> ; only from experience [<i>a posteriori</i>]
How Securely Known	(Can be) "Intuitively or demonstratively certain" (25.4)	Not intuitively or demonstrably certain
Studied by	Geometry, algebra, arithmetic (25.4)	Natural sciences. Also comprise much of our everyday knowledge.
Examples	"That the square of the hypotenuse is equal to the squares of the two sides"; "That three times five is equal to half of thirty" (25.5)	"The sun will rise tomorrow" (see 26.0); When the first billiard ball strikes the second, the second ball will move (see 29-30)

-This is not just innocent observation & classification. That only necessary truths can be known *a priori* is a substantive claim.

-Why one might hold it

2. This substantive claim drives **Hume's great skeptical argument of section IV** (see other side of sheet).

3. **Hume's own negative conclusion**: "Our conclusions...are not founded on reasoning or any process of the understanding" (32.8)

4. **Hume's "Skeptical Solution"** (title of section V): The belief is the (unavoidable) result of "custom or habit" (43.0)

5. Hume cozying up to the inference/belief (& sounding non-skeptical):

- "some other process of equal weight and authority" (41.9)
- "none but a fool or a madman" (36.3)
- Hume "quite satisfied...as an agent" (38.6)
- "Nature will always maintain her rights and prevail in the end over any abstract reasoning" (41.7)
- "pre-established harmony" (54.8)
- Two propositions, one "justly inferred" from the other -- at least "allowed" (34.5)
- "We need only ask such a sceptic [the "excessive" sceptic] *What his meaning is? And what he proposes by all these curious researches?* He is immediately at a loss, and knows not what to answer." (159.9)

6. Hume casting skeptical shadows on the inference/belief:

- Title of section IV: "Skeptical Doubts..."
- Challenge: "produce that reasoning!" But where's the "required" "medium"?! (34.7)
- "if there be any suspicion"; experience becomes "useless" (37.9-38.0)
- "whimsical condition of mankind" (160.7) -- at least hints of some kind of skeptical stance
- Mainly, I take the argument to be skeptical in order to make it an interesting & important philosophical argument. Not very interesting or good as a piece of cognitive psychology, telling us which faculty these beliefs come from. Also, at key points, Hume seems to rule against the claim that reason is operating on evaluative grounds: our thinking seems to him unreasonable or not rationally justified.

Hume's Sceptical Argument of *Inquiry*, Sect. IV

Scope: All matters of fact that go "beyond the present testimony of our senses, or the records of our memory" (p. 26.3) -- we will call these "S-propositions"

Force: ??? But we'll start with knowledge.

P: When I officially release this eraser, it will fall.

U: Uniformity of Nature: "The future will resemble the past" (p. 37.9): The laws and regularities of Nature that we have discovered in our experience of the world will continue to hold in the future. Better for Hume's purposes would be: Phenomena I haven't observed follow (or followed or will follow) the same laws and regularities that have governed what I have observed. Or, if Hume does want to keep this principle limited to the future, then he should likewise limit the scope of his skepticism.

A Version of the Argument:

1. If a proposition is a matter of fact, then one can know it only if one has come to know it through experience.
2. P is an S-proposition.
- ∴ 3. I can know that P only if I have come to know it through experience. (from 1,2)
4. One can come to know an S-proposition through experience only if one already knows that U.
- ∴ 5. I can come to know that P through experience only if I already know that U. (from 4,2)
6. U is an S-proposition.
- ∴ 7. One can know that U only if one has come to know it through experience. (from 1,6)
- ∴ 8. One can come to know that U through experience only if one already knows that U. (from 4,6)
9. If one can come to know that U through experience only if one already knows that U, then one cannot come to know that U through experience.
[“But we’ll cross that bridge after it’s gone, after we’re way past it,” “YAGN”]
- ∴ 10. One cannot come to know that U through experience. (from 8,9)
- ∴ 11. One cannot know that U. (from 7,10)
- ∴ 12. I cannot come to know that P through experience. (from 5,11)
- ∴ 13. I cannot know that P. (from 3,12)