



### **Review of Hume's Philosophy of Mind**

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Hume's Philosophy of Mind, by John Bricke. (Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1980) Pp. 176. \$18.50.

This book provides a systematic examination of Hume's theory of the mind and the mental. Bricke's case for a dualistic interpretation of Hume, his discussion of mental dispositions, and his careful examinations of Hume's theories of thought, judgment, introspection, and sensory awareness are sufficient to make this work a very important addition to the Hume literature. Nonetheless, there are two shortcomings in the work. First, Bricke pays insufficient attention to Hume's method. Secondly, Bricke's case for Hume's dualism is incomplete: he neither recognizes that Hume's dualism is not merely a dualism of mind and body nor does he provide a positive account of the lines along which Hume drew his dualistic distinctions.

Hume's objective in the Treatise was to discover *the essence of the mind* by employing the Baconian (experimental) method (Txvii; cf. title page). At the heart of the Baconian method is the formulation and testing of hypotheses. Hume's hypothesis was that the mind is a bundle of perceptions held together by the relations of contiguity, causation, and resemblance. In testing this hypothesis, Hume asked whether the principles of the association of ideas would allow him to explain the common man's belief in the external world, the belief in material substance, and the belief in personal identity. Bricke, on the other hand, approaches Hume's discussions of the mind and the mental through the lens of contemporary discussions of those topics and faces the associated hazards, e.g., the tendency to stress judgment rather than belief.

Bricke pays little attention to Hume's explanatory program, and to the extent he discusses that program, he takes it to be primarily intended to explain concept-formation rather than belief. In examining Hume's discussion

of the common man's belief in the external world, for example, Bricke focuses on Hume's discussion of the roles of constancy and coherence in the formation of the concept of an external object (pp. 8, 76-77), while he pays little attention to Hume's extended discussion of the role of resemblance in explaining the belief in the existence of external objects (T200-210). Indeed, even though Hume's task in *Of Scepticism with Regard to the Senses* was to answer the question, What causes induce us to BELIEVE in the existence of body? (T187, my capitals), and he focuses on the belief in the strict or perfect identity of physical objects (T201-202), Bricke takes Hume's task to concern judgments of physical-object identity (pp. 77-79). Given his emphasis on judgments of identity and his enumeration of Hume's senses of "imperfect" numerical identity (p. 78), Bricke seems to be concerned with truth-conditions for judgments of (imperfect) physical-object identity. But there is little reason to believe that Hume was attempting to specify truth-conditions rather than construct a theory of mind. Indeed, Hume's references to such "artifices" as the supposition of a common end or a sympathy of parts in judgments of (imperfect) numerical identity (T257) suggests that physical-object identity is more a matter of subjective construction than of objective fact. On the other hand, within the context of an explanation of the belief in the perfect numerical identity of material objects (and persons), Hume's "handling of questions about relative identity" (p. 79) can reasonably be seen as setting out the fact to be explained, viz., how the mind naturally conflates imperfect numerical and specific identity with perfect numerical identity.

Although he pays scant attention to Hume's explanation of the ancient philosophers' (and everyone else's) belief in material substance, i.e. the belief that material objects are simple and perfectly identical through time (T219-221), in his discussion of personal identity Bricke

initially seems to acknowledge that Hume was engaged in an explanatory program. Bricke claims that "Hume is concerned to explain the plain man's conception [of personal identity]" (p. 81), and unlike many commentators on Hume's discussion of personal identity, Bricke at least acknowledges that Hume was concerned with the question, "Under what conditions does one postulate mental substances?" (p. 84), *i.e.* why does one believe that the mind is simple and perfectly identical through time? (cf. T251, 253, 635). But Bricke focuses on "the observational circumstances that generate judgments of what he [Hume] calls 'fictional identity'" (p. 84) and does not consider Hume's explanation of how this "fictional" (less-than-perfect) identity is conflated with perfect identity, *i.e.* he does not spell out Hume's explanation of the belief in personal identity. Although Bricke examines Hume's discussions of the roles of resemblance and causation--criticizing Hume's third-person discussion of resemblance (pp. 85-88)--he ultimately argues that Hume's position anticipates that of Derek Parfit (p. 90) and that "in the now much revised [*i.e.* clarified and corrected] Humean view, the truth-conditions for mental identity judgments involve the relations of resemblance (including the resemblance between recollection and item recalled) and causality between perceptions" (p. 91). He then argues that the problems of temporal continuity in a Humean mind can be overcome by the intervention of the body (p. 92).

Bricke appears to believe that Hume's task in *Of Personal Identity* was to specify truth-conditions for judgments of personal identity, while Hume's announced task was to determine *What then gives us so great a propension to ascribe an identity to these successive perceptions, and to suppose ourselves possess of an invariable and uninterrupted existence thro' the whole course of our lives?* (T253, my emphasis). Given his attempts to explain beliefs in *Of Scepticism with Regard to the Senses* and in *Of the Antient Philosophy*, this can only be taken to be a call for an

explanation of the belief in personal identity (the belief in the perfect identity and simplicity of the mind). Further, when Bricke discusses Hume's concerns in *Of Personal Identity*, he, like most commentators, focuses only on the topic of identity, merely mentioning Hume's claim that *our notion of identity, as apply'd to the human mind, may be extended with little or no variation to that of simplicity* (p. 89; T263, Hume's emphasis). If Bricke had paid closer attention to Hume's explanatory program and had asked whether the explanation of the belief in the simplicity of the mind parallels that of the belief in identity, he could have developed a stronger case for his claim that, by the time he wrote the *Appendix*, Hume realized that he had "failed to give a satisfactory associationist explanation of the plain man's [and the substance theorists!] beliefs" in personal identity (p. 96). Further, this would explain why the Hume of the *Appendix* was distraught, since, as a Baconian, to recognize the inadequacy of his explanatory principles was sufficient to call his entire theory of mind into question.<sup>1</sup>

Recognizing Hume's Baconianism also sheds light on other aspects of Hume's position on mind and body. First, if one recognizes that in *Of the Modern Philosophy* Hume was concerned with the primary/secondary qualities distinction as an explanatory hypothesis (T227-228), one will recognize that his rejection of that distinction is a rejection of a particular theory of the nature of physical objects, rather than, as Bricke contends, an argument that "the very belief in physical objects can be shown, by causal reasoning, to be false" (p. 11). Hume took showing that the theoretical entities in the explanans (primary qualities) cannot, in fact, be conceived as entirely distinct from the entities in the explanandum (secondary qualities) to provide at least very good evidence that primary qualities are not the sole constituents of physical objects (T228-231; cf. his conceivability criterion of possibility, T32). But to reject a theory of the nature of physical objects does not entail

that there are no physical objects. If this is the correct account of Hume's criticisms of the primary/secondary qualities distinction, however, it implies that Hume's scepticism was not as radical as Bricke suggests (p. 20).

Secondly, recognizing Hume's Baconian program strengthens Bricke's case for interpreting Hume as a representative realist (cf. pp. 23-24). As a Baconian, Hume was committed to the acceptance of the best explanation of any given phenomenon. In the case of the phenomenon of perception, he considered three theories: naive realism, representationalism, and Pyrrhonian scepticism. He argued that the thesis of naive realism is false and extreme scepticism is psychologically untenable (T210-211, 217-218). Further, since extreme scepticism would deny the possibility of explaining the phenomenon of perception, some form of representationalism would provide the best explanation of the phenomenon. As a Baconian, this would commit Hume to representationalism. (Notice that Hume did not entertain phenomenalism as a viable theory of perception.)<sup>2</sup>

Thirdly, a Baconian Hume could go beyond an undefined representationalism to a positive theory of the nature of physical objects. Even if he rejected the classical primary/secondary qualities distinction, if he found some version of the corpuscular hypothesis to provide the best causal explanation of observable phenomena, he could consistently accept such a hypothesis. Indeed, in the Natural History of Religion he seems to have accepted some version of the corpuscular hypothesis. There he wrote:

*Could men anatomize nature, according to the most probable, at least the most intelligible philosophy, they would find, that these [unknown] causes are nothing but the particular fabric and structure of the minute parts of their own bodies and of external objects; and that, by a regular and constant machinery, all the events are produced, about which they are so much concerned.*  
(Works, 4:316)

It is only due to his commitment to the Baconian method

that Hume could suggest that the corpuscular hypothesis provides *the most probable, at least the most intelligible* account of the nature of material objects.

Although Bricke's failure to take account of Hume's method is, perhaps, the most glaring omission in his work, one aspect of his discussion of Hume's dualism is equally incomplete. Bricke argues that Hume was a mind-body dualist (Chapter 2), but he suggests that Hume provided no systematic account of the differences between the mental and the physical. He claims, however, that in *Of the Immateriality of the Soul* Hume rejected the criterion "which takes the material to be essentially extended and the mental to be neither extended nor spatially locatable" (p. 44). But Hume's dualism is more complex than this comment suggests. In *Of the Immateriality of the Soul* Hume argued for a systematic distinction between perceptions on the basis of their susceptibility to spatial relations (T234-236), which is different from the distinction between mind and body. Recognizing this distinction would enable Bricke to develop a stronger argument against the claim that Hume was a neutral monist (cf. pp. 41-43). Further, although Hume provided no detailed account of the mental/physical (mind-body) distinction, his comment that we do not have *the most distant notion of the place* where the perceptions constituting the mind are located (T253) together with his corpuscularianism suggests that all objects in physical systems (physical objects) are subject to spatial relations, while not all objects (perceptions) in mental systems (minds) are susceptible to such relations.<sup>3</sup>

In his discussion of substrata, Bricke writes, "As a thing in its own right an impression is, in Hume's sense, a substance, although it is not, of course, a substrate" (p. 62). There is no reason to deem Hume's perceptions "substances". The only place Hume suggests that perceptions are substances is in his critique of the

Cartesian definition of substance (T233), but that argument is intended to be a reductio ad absurdum, since in the paragraph immediately following the argument Hume wrote, *A substance is entirely different from a perception* (T234). Further, perceptions play none of the theoretically significant roles of a substance. A particular perception is not an individuator, although it is an individual. It is not a continuant. It is not an agent. And, as Bricke acknowledges, it is certainly not a substratum. Why, then, call perceptions "substances"? (It is also not clear what Bricke intends when he claims that Hume "reifies" perceptions [pp. 13, 62-63, and 72-73]. If Bricke means that perceptions are substances, rather than nonsubstantial particulars, he seems to be mistaken.)

In spite of these shortcomings, I found this book very instructive.

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1. I have discussed these issues in more detail in "Hume's Identity Crisis," Modern Schoolman 58 (1980): 21-35.
2. Nor are there good grounds for claiming that Hume was systematically committed to phenomenalism. See my "Hume's Dualism," Noûs 16: 527-241.
3. I have examined these distinctions in detail in "Hume's Dualism."