



**Perchance to Dream: A Reply to Traiger**

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PERCHANCE TO DREAM: A REPLY TO TRAIGER<sup>1</sup>

In "Hume on Memory and Causation" I argued that Hume took ideas of the memory to be relative ideas corresponding to definite descriptions of the general form "the complex impression that is the (original) cause of a particular positive idea m and which exactly (or closely) resembles m," where 'm' is a variable ranging over positive ideas (mental images). My argument was based primarily upon what I called Hume's formal criterion, i.e., Hume's contention that, unlike the imagination, memory preserves "the same order and form with the original impressions" (T9), it preserves "the original order and position of its ideas" (T85). Saul Traiger has recently taken exception to my interpretation of Hume, suggesting that my interpretation suffers from at least four defects. First, Traiger maintains that there is evidence that Hume took some ideas of the memory to be simple, while my account requires that they are all complex. Secondly, he maintains that my interpretation will not allow Hume to remember dreams or the contents of his imaginings, and Traiger contends that this provides at least prima facie evidence against my interpretation. Thirdly, he maintains that my account of the formal criterion is not sufficient to distinguish ideas of the memory from ideas of the imagination. Finally, he raises several questions regarding the temporal reference of ideas of the memory. I do not believe that any of Traiger's points require a significant modification of my account. I shall begin by discussing his third and fourth points and then focus on his first and second points.<sup>2</sup>

1. Memories and fictions. Traiger suggests that if my account of the formal criterion is correct, the formal criterion is not sufficient to distinguish

ideas of the memory from ideas of the imagination, "because there are complex ideas which are caused by resembling complex impressions but which are not memories" (FHAM, p. 170). He illustrates this by appealing to a writer of fiction who might appeal to some of his memories in constructing his fictitious world. Why, then, would not the resulting ideas of fiction count as ideas of the memory, since they meet both the causal conditions and the order and position requirements? The answer is that in the case of an idea of fiction one does not conceive of one's positive idea as a representative of some other perception. It is only because one conceives of the positive idea of which one is aware in memory as a representative of some other particular perception or perceptions that questions of form and order come into play.

2. Temporal reference. At several places in his paper, Traiger raises questions concerning the temporal reference of ideas of the memory. He suggests, first, that Hume's concern with "order" was with temporal order, rather than the order and arrangement of simple ideas in the complex positive component of an idea of the memory (FHAM, p. 168), and, secondly, that "when we remember, we place an impression in its temporal context, its place among a temporal sequence of perceptions" and this "temporal reference is generally not secured by the causal and resemblance relations an idea bears to an antecedent impression" (FHAM, p. 171). Regarding the first of these claims, it is clear that an idea of the memory can be "true" only if it represents a past impression or event, and since Hume construed representation in terms of resemblance (T233), this indicates that at least part of his concern with "order" must be with the arrangement of simple ideas in the complex positive component of an idea of the memory. Were it not for

such a correspondence between the "order" of simple ideas in the positive component of one's relative idea of the memory and the "order" of the simple impressions in the original impression, one's idea of the memory could not represent the original impression. Resemblance, however, plays no role in determining what the temporal position of the original impression was, and this brings us to Traiger's second point.

Since Hume's account of time would seem to require that one locate a past impression within a series of perceptions (cf. T35-36), one must ask how one can so locate it? My suggestion that a Humean idea of the memory is a relative idea of the original causal antecedent of the positive idea of which one is aware will allow one to locate the relevant impression, and I doubt that there is any other way Hume could locate it. Given Hume's contention that one cannot be directly aware of past impressions (T87), it follows that one cannot be directly aware of the position of the relevant impression within a series of perceptions. It also will not do to simply date the impression, for this would not locate the exact position of the impression within a series of perceptions. Indeed, the date would be no more than another bit of data in one's positive idea. But if an idea of the memory is a relative idea, and if a relative idea is analogous to a definite description, such an idea will single out the relevant impression. Further, since it is a fact that the impression singled out occupies a particular position within a series of perceptions, a relative idea will locate the position of that impression within that series of perceptions. (If there is no such complex impression, of course, the relative idea would be "false".) Thus, on my account, a Humean idea of the memory allows one to locate the relevant impression

within a series of perceptions, and this seems to be all that Traiger requires.

3. Simple Ideas. Although the notions of simple impressions and simple ideas play a significant role in Hume's epistemology, he has provided his reader with neither an extended discussion of the kind of simplicity germane to simple perceptions nor of the possibility of perceiving, imagining, or conceiving a simple perception in isolation from all other perceptions. While in some of his discussions of simple perceptions Hume suggests that the relevant sense of simplicity is qualitative simplicity (T2), he was clearly concerned with a geometrical notion of simplicity when discussing one's putative idea of substance (T219, 221, 263, 633-636). Further, even if one were to assume that Hume's primary concern was with qualitative simplicity, and, therefore, that a simple idea is an idea of a single determinate quality, this leaves open the question whether one can form a positive idea of a simple quality in isolation from all other ideas. Now it is quite clear that Hume did not believe it possible to form positive ideas of all kinds of qualities in isolation from one another. For example, he suggests one cannot form a positive idea of an uncolored figure, although by means of a distinction of reason one can conceive of figure without color (T25). Similarly, one cannot form a positive idea of extension apart from color or some tangible quality, although the doctrine of minimum sensibles would seem to allow that one can form an idea of an unextended point of color (cf. T27). This does not entail, however, that one can form a geometrically simple idea of a particular color in isolation from all other ideas of color points, for Hume's example of seeing a minimum visible indicates that minimum visibles are "seen" only

within the context of a spatially and qualitatively complex impression (cf. T27).<sup>3</sup>

Although this would seem to indicate that one cannot, in fact, form a qualitatively simple idea of an object of the sight or touch, one might contend that it is possible to form a simple idea of such nonspatial qualities as sounds, odors, and savors. It is not clear, however, that such ideas are ever sufficiently "pure" to count as simple ideas. Consider, for example, one's idea of the pitch middle C. If such an idea were simple, it would be an idea of that pitch which is neither an idea of the sound of a trumpet, nor of the sound of a piano, nor of the sound of anything else that can cause the sound of the pitch middle C. If one can form such an idea -- in the ordinary course of things one is certainly never aware of so "pure" an impression -- it would be an abstract idea of that which is common to all soundings of middle C. Now there is some evidence that Hume held that all "simple ideas" are abstract ideas. In a letter to Francis Hutcheson, Hume wrote the following:

The Word, simple Idea, is an abstract Term comprehending different Individuals that are similar. Yet the point of their Similarity from the very Nature of such Ideas is not distinct nor separable from the rest. Is not this a Proof, among many others, that there may be a similarity without any possible Separation even in thought?<sup>4</sup>

If the term 'simple idea' denotes nothing more than the respects in which complex ideas are similar, and if one can know simple ideas only on the basis of abstraction, then even though simple ideas are components of any ideas of which one is aware, one's idea of a simple idea of a particular kind is itself a relative idea: it is the idea corresponding to a definite description of the form, "the respect in which a resembles b more than

a resembles c,"<sup>5</sup> where a, b and c are (carefully chosen) complex ideas. Thus, since Hume took it to be impossible to be aware of a simple idea except as a component of a complex idea, he was committed to holding that it is impossible to remember a simple idea except as a component of a complex idea.

4. Dreams and other imaginings. A more serious challenge is posed by Traiger's suggestion that obviously one can occasionally remember one's dreams and one's imaginings. I shall not argue, as Traiger suggests I might, that "when we have dreams we are really having impressions, not ideas" (FHAM, p. 170), since Hume himself seems to have construed dreams in terms of ideas. In Hume's words, "It is acknowledged, that, in fact, many of these perceptions arise not from anything external, as in dreams, madness, and other diseases" (E153). Is there, then, any way in which my account of memory in Hume can accommodate the memory of dreams? If Hume's impressions of reflection perform the same function as Locke's ideas of reflection, it will be possible to modify my account of memory in Hume to accommodate memories of dreams. In Locke, ideas of reflection were held to allow one to distinguish the various operations of the mind,<sup>6</sup> and it is reasonable to take such ideas to be the various "feelings" that accompany the several operations of the mind. If Hume's impressions of reflection also allow one to distinguish among the operations of the mind, one could distinguish a dream state from a state of imagining, remembering, or some other state of mind on the basis of an impression of reflection. Further, one could remember a dream, as a dream, on the basis of an idea of reflection together with a complex idea of sensation (the content of the dream). The question, then, is whether Hume also distinguished the several operations of the mind on the basis of impressions of reflection.

There is some evidence that he did. To see this, we should briefly consider one of his discussions of the difference between belief and mere conception.

In the Appendix to the Treatise Hume raised the following question:

This, therefore, being regarded as an undoubted truth, that belief is nothing but a peculiar feeling, different from the simple conception, the next question, that naturally occurs, is, what is the nature of this feeling, or sentiment, and whether it be analogous to any other sentiment of the human mind? (T624, Hume's emphasis; cf. E47-50)

Notice that Hume here construes belief as a peculiar feeling, and he asks whether it is analogous to any other sentiment of the human mind. He answers this question by claiming that it is analogous to an impression insofar as both an impression and a belief are forceful and vivacious. Notice that both here and in the first Enquiry Hume indicates that in belief the conception of an object "is attended with a feeling or sentiment, different from the loose reveries of the fancy" (E48; cf. T636). This "feeling or sentiment" is not a component of the idea conceived, e.g., it is not an idea of existence, rather, it is a feeling or sentiment that accompanies or "attends" the conception of an object. While he describes this in terms of the force and vivacity of the ideas, he explains that he intends those terms "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" (T629 and E49, my emphasis). Insofar as this peculiar feeling that accompanies a belief concerns an operation of the mind, it is comparable to a Lockean idea of reflection. Further, insofar as imagining (the construction of an idea of the

imagination) is an act of the will, it will also be accompanied by a peculiar internal impression (cf. T399). Since dreaming is also an operation of the mind, one might reasonably suggest that there is also a peculiar "feeling" that accompanies dreams, and part of what is remembered in remembering a dream is the "feeling" that is peculiar to dreams: it is the idea of this feeling that distinguishes one's memory of a dream from a memory of some other operation of the mind. In remembering a dream one has a positive idea of both this "dream feeling" and the content of the dream, and it is the latter that individuates one's dream (distinguishes it from others). Thus, in the case of remembering a dream, one's relative idea would correspond to the definite description of the general form, "the 'feeling' (impression of reflection) that was associated with some complex idea  $d_1$  and is the cause of a positive idea  $f$  that is associated with a positive idea  $d_2$ , and  $d_2$  exactly or closely resembles  $d_1$ ." With a change in the kind of "feeling" involved, one could also account for one's memories of imaginings, one's memories of rememberings, one's memories of believings, and so forth.

Thus, while I do not believe that Traiger's comments provide an insuperable challenge to my account of Hume on memory, I believe his comments on remembering dreams raise some fundamental issues regarding the interpretation of Hume's notions of "force and vivacity," viz., whether there are a large number of distinct "feelings" or impressions of reflection that are covered by these terms. Indeed, if Hume held that one can distinguish among operations of the mind on the basis of the "feelings" that accompany various ideas of sensation, and if he held that these "feelings" are analogous insofar as they are "forceful and vivacious," it might be necessary to question

whether his phenomenal criterion of memory is properly construed as a phenomenal cum doxastic criterion (HMC, p. 3).

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1. All references to David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. revised by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) and to David Hume, An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding in Enquiries concerning the Human Understanding and concerning the Principles of Morals, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902) will be made parenthetically within the text of the paper. References to my "Hume on Memory and Causation" (Hume Studies, 10th Anniversary issue, 1985, pp. 168-188) will be abbreviated "HMC" and followed by the relevant page; references to Saul Traiger's "Flage on Hume's Account of Memory" (Hume Studies, Nov. 1985, pp. 166-172) will be abbreviated "FHAM" and followed by the relevant page.
2. Traiger raises two additional points in his discussion. First, he claims, that "Hume's primary concern is with inference, and not with memory per se" (FHAM, p. 167). I shall grant Professor Traiger that in his discussion of memory -- indeed, in many of his discussions in Book I of the Treatise -- Hume's primary concern was with inference, i.e., with explaining the inferences we actually make. With regard to this, it is primarily the question of the transference of "mental momentum" (force and vivacity -- cf. T 12-13) that holds sway. Positive ideas of the memory are like impressions insofar as they are relatively forceful and vivacious, and capable of transferring this force and vivacity to other ideas in accordance with the principles of the association of ideas. Traiger is quite correct in suggesting that none of the traditional epistemological issues raised by the phenomenon of memory rest upon this question. From this, however, nothing follows regarding Hume's concern with the epistemological issues. Secondly, Traiger suggests that the fact that there is a "'significant temporal distance' between a cause

and its effect does not, by itself, show that temporal contiguity fails. To show this Flage must also demonstrate that there is no causal mechanism which preserves temporal contiguity between the cause and its effect" (FHAM, p. 171). This I shall also grant Traiger. Indeed, I shall grant that Hume would probably account for this temporal contiguity on the basis of the bodily correlates of mental phenomena (see my "Hume's Dualism," Nous 16 (1981): 527-541). My objective in the second part of the paper was simply to show that Hume's own discussions of causation do not require that objects be temporally contiguous in order to be causally related, and since his discussion in Treatise I.iv.2 indicates that one is never fully warranted in claiming the existence of bodies, one need not appeal to the existence of a human body in claiming that an idea of the memory is caused by an earlier impression.

3. This also indicates that the idea of the missing shade of blue, even if construed as a positive idea, cannot be properly simple unless it is construed as a minimum visible. (Cf. FHAM, note 6).
4. Letter of 16 March 1740, in The Letters of David Hume, ed. G.Y.T. Greig, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), 1:39.
5. On resemblance see Panayot Butchvarov, Being Qua Being (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979), pp. 199-206.
6. John Locke, An Essay concerning Human Understanding, ed. P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 2.1.5, p. 105.