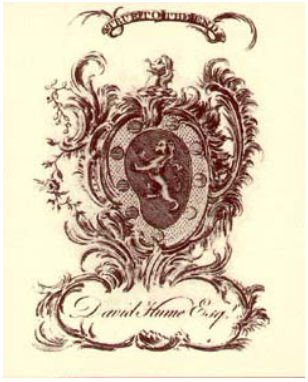

Hume's Impressions of Belief
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HUME'S IMPRESSIONS OF BELIEF

Introduction

Hume's theory of belief is often taken to be fully stated in his opening remarks on the subject in A Treatise of Human Nature, Book I, Part III, Section VII: "An opinion, therefore, or belief may be most accurately defin'd, A LIVELY IDEA RELATED TO OR ASSOCIATED WITH A PRESENT IMPRESSION."[1] Taking this definition as Hume's final account leaves the reader with many problems. What is it for an idea to be lively? How is an idea related to or associated with an impression? Is belief really so simple a phenomenon?

I argue that Hume's theory of belief is much more complex than this, and that the Treatise contains only a rough, preliminary account of belief. By the time he wrote An Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding, Hume had developed his theory in full detail. As I show, in this latter account a belief is an intentional state involving a combination of Humean ideas and impressions. The nature of these ideas and impressions allows the mind to take note of a belief as something quite different from its other perceptions. In the Treatise, however, Hume did not have a clear understanding of how the mind could distinguish beliefs from other perceptions. He could only go so far as to say that an idea believed is livelier than other ideas. He argued that a present impression is capable of calling to mind an idea of something that has been associated with that impression in the past, and of transferring some of its own vivacity to that idea. As we look at the account of belief in the Treatise, we will see how the preliminary concepts of force and liveliness and a transference of vivacity lay the foundation for his

final account, yet point to a need for a fuller explication of the difference the mind notes between beliefs and other perceptions. We will see that in the Appendix to the Treatise Hume tried to work out this difference in terms of 'feeling' but this was unsuccessful without the notion of an intentional act. Finally, we will see that Hume concluded in the Enquiry that a belief is an intentional state in which a new impression of reflection arises about the idea believed. This new impression is the feeling of belief by which beliefs are distinguished from other perceptions of the mind.[2]

The Account in the Treatise

We begin our explication of Hume's theory of belief by looking at the account in A Treatise of Human Nature. Here Hume maintains that it is ideas which are believed, and that these beliefs differ from other ideas only in their "force and vivacity" (T 96). This force and vivacity is a result of the believed idea's relation to an impression. These theses lead us to the familiar Treatise definition of belief as "A LIVELY IDEA RELATED TO OR ASSOCIATED WITH A PRESENT IMPRESSION" (T 96).

Hume begins his analysis of belief in Section VII of the Treatise by stating that "the idea of an object is an essential part of the belief of it, but not the whole" (T 94). The suggestion is that there is more to being in a state of belief than merely entertaining the idea believed. The simple phrase "belief of an object" leads us to presume that it is ideas that are believed, or that we have beliefs of ideas. We will need to examine Hume's meaning of 'idea' in enough depth to understand the role it plays in the theory of belief.

Hume gives some examples of the way we may conceive ideas without believing them:

> Suppose a person present with me, who advances propositions, to which I do not assent, that Caesar dy'd in his bed, that silver is more fusible than lead, or mercury heavier than gold; 'tis evident, that notwithstanding my incredulity, I clearly understand his meaning, and form all the same ideas, which he forms (T 95).

Note that Hume says one may form all the same ideas as another. Yet the ideas one forms are just what Hume had earlier called the propositions one's acquaintance advanced. That Hume uses 'idea' and 'proposition' so loosely and almost interchangeably here should suggest something to us about the nature of ideas. Ideas are those things which give words and propositions meaning. For example,

> That we may fix the meaning of the word, figure, we may revolve in our mind the ideas of circles, squares, parallelograms, triangles of different sizes and proportions, and may not rest on one image or idea. However this may be, 'tis certain that we form the idea of individuals, whenever we use any general term (T 22).

Of course, may of Hume's early examples of ideas suggest that they are simply 'mental pictures' of impressions. For example, on p. 3 of the Treatise he writes, "when I shut my eyes and think of my chamber, the ideas I form are exact representations of the impressions I felt" (T 3). But we can see now that ideas are not merely the 'images' of impressions; not every idea is an 'image' in the sense of 'a mental picture' of an impression, like a snapshot one would look at weeks after an event had taken place. There are many instances in which Hume closely aligns ideas with propositions.[3] In fact, Hume's first illustra-

tion to make clear what he means by 'an idea' seems to be of the sort that is closely related to propositions. On the first page of the Treatise he writes "by ideas I mean the faint images of [impressions] in thinking and reasoning; such as, for instance, are all the perceptions excited by the present discourse." It seems that the ideas which strike upon one's mind during a reading of the Treatise are not snapshot pictures; they are not 'images' like having an image of one's chamber.

By emphasizing that ideas are closely related to propositions, I simply mean to rule out interpretations such as H.A. Prichard's which take 'ideas' strictly as 'pictorial images':

> Hume's account of the nature of a belief is not so much inadequate as wholly false.... Consider Hume's own instance of the traveller who reaches a river and stops short because of a certain belief which Hume describes as foreseeing the consequences of going on. This belief, if we simplify it somewhat to help Hume, must be represented as the belief that if he goes on he will be drowned. Now Hume represents this as actually consisting in his having a lively image of drowning. This is, of course, ridiculous. Even if the belief were simply the belief that he will be drowned, it would be still quite different from his having an image of someone drowning or even of himself drowning.
>
> The broad fact is that Hume's only means of describing the very complicated act which books on logic call an act of judgement is to do so in terms of our having mental images, and yet even if such an act is impossible without mental imagery, it is not itself the having a mental image.[4]

Prichard is right in contending that "an act of judgment" must involve more than mental images alone. I would argue with him, however, that Hume's 'ideas' do include more. The idea, in this case, would not be simply the snapshot 'image' of a drowning. That which gives meaning to a proposition such as 'if one were to go on to cross the river, one would drown' is also an idea. Both pictorial images and propositions are legitimate Humean 'ideas.' In light of Hume's many examples of ideas and their derivations from impressions, we would do best to understand the nature of ideas as a nexus of perceptions of the mind, pictorial images and propositions together, differing from impressions only in their vivacity to the mind. Such an understanding of ideas will be of great help in interpreting many passages regarding the nature of belief.[5]

So ideas are the kinds of things we believe, but Hume has written that "the idea of an object is an essential part of the belief of it, but not the whole" (T 94). What could this 'something more' be? It is clearly not another idea, he holds. The idea of existence, for example, is not an idea distinct from the idea we already have of an object, so it is not some idea of existence that is added when we believe (T 66). Further, to believe some object to exist adds no new idea to it; our conception of it is the same as it would be without the belief.

> But as 'tis certain there is a great difference betwixt the simple conception of the existence of an object, and the belief of it, and as this difference lies not in the parts or composition of the idea, which we conceive; it follows, that it must lie in the manner, in which we conceive it (T 94-95).

The difference in belief and non-belief must be the manner in which we conceive certain ideas, since it does not involve the addition of a new idea. Hume considers only these two alternatives. Notably, he does not here consider the alternative that belief might involve a new impression attached to the idea which is believed. Thus, at this point he has not explicitly ruled out that possibility.

Our manner of conceiving an idea, says Hume, can only vary by an increase or decrease in its force and vivacity (T 96). This is because ideas are derivatives of impressions, and if anything else were changed, the idea would represent a different impression than it did before. Since belief is a particular manner of conception, it cannot change the idea of an object; it can only change its force and vivacity to the mind.

Having established that the 'something more' to belief lies in conceiving the idea in a different manner, and that this manner is the force and liveliness of the idea, Hume makes the following odd statement:

> 'Twill not be a satisfactory answer to say, that a person, who does not assent to a proposition you advance; after having conceiv'd the object in the same manner with you; immediately conceives it in a different manner, and has different ideas of it. This answer is unsatisfactory; not because it contains any falsehood, but because it discovers not all the truth (T 95).

Why does Hume say this is unsatisfactory when he has just asserted that it is a difference in the manner of conceiving that distinguishes ideas we believe from mere conceptions? What does he mean in claiming it is "not all the truth"? Apparently it is

the lack of a principle in the above answer that makes it unsatisfactory, for the paragraph goes on:

> We may mingle, and unite, and separate, and confound, and vary our ideas in a hundred different ways; but 'till there appears some principle, which fixes one of these different situations, we have in reality no opinion: And this principle, as it plainly makes no addition to our precedent ideas, can only change the manner of our conceiving them (T 96).

His description of belief will not be complete until he has found the principle behind the differences in the ways we conceive ideas. In Section VIII he addresses this problem.

> Let us now proceed to examine from what principles [belief] is deriv'd, and what bestows the vivacity on the idea.
>
> 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 98).

The principle to be established is that impressions are capable of calling to mind associated ideas, and of enlivening them at the same time. That one operation of the mind is capable of 'enlivening' another seems very mysterious. What could Hume mean by this? Hume gives a few examples of impressions enlivening ideas. A picture of a friend will enliven our idea of him by its resemblance. Coming close to home enlivens our idea of home by continguity. Relics of a saint enliven our idea of the exemplary way he lived. The operation of the mind is such, Hume says, that when one's spirits are elevated and attention is fixed, the actions of the mind will be

more vigorous. This is why an idea is perceived in such a lively way when there is an impression present.

Surely Hume is right about this much. When one looks at the cover of the Treatise, for example, one probably has a more lively idea of its contents than when one overhears a conversation in which the title 'Treatise' is mentioned. In the former case, attention is probably fixed on the book, and one's thoughts naturally turn to those ideas which have accompanied the book in the past. In the latter, one may think "Oh yes, I've read that, I know what their conversation is about," but attention is not fixed as steadily on the book. This impression is not strong enough to enliven the idea of the book's contents. Even if Hume is right in noticing that this is a common phenomenon, he goes too far in saying that the impression actually "communicates to [the ideas] a share of its force and vivacity" (T 98). There is no relation between the impression and the idea that would allow the vivacious quality of one to be transferred to the other. In fact, I believe that Hume himself would allow us only to say that there is "constant conjunction" between the impression and idea. One may trace the idea one has of the contents of the book to that impression of reading the book at some time in the past. At that time, the impression of reading the book was closely related to the impression of actually seeing the book's cover. Now, when one sees the cover again and has an idea, more lively than usual, of its contents, one may reasonably attribute this liveliness to having seen the cover once again. By a "communication of liveliness," Hume can only mean that the liveliness of the idea can be traced back to the present

impression through the relation of constant conjunction.

> A present impression, then, is absolutely requisite to this whole operation; and when after this I compare an impression with an idea, and find that their only difference consists in their different degrees of force and vivacity, I conclude upon the whole, that belief is a more vivid and intense conception of an idea, proceeding from its relation to a present impression (T 103).

Thus far, Hume has set out his theory that we call an idea a belief when it has become enlivened by its relation to a forceful impression. What he has not yet done is explain why such ideas feel different to us than mere conceptions of the mind feel. He has maintained that beliefs differ from mere conceptions in their manner of conception, in their liveliness to the mind. He has explained how they come to have this liveliness. But he has not told us how the mind distinguishes these lively ideas from mere conceptions, or why they feel different. He has not explained just what liveliness itself is, or what it is to conceive an idea in a certain manner.

If Hume cannot explain this to us, we ought to question whether, from his theory of belief as "a more vivid and intense conception of an idea, proceeding from its relation to a present impression" (T 103), he may legitimately conclude:

> Thus all probable reasoning is nothing but a species of sensation. 'Tis not solely in poetry and music, we must follow our taste and sentiment, but likewise in philosophy. When I am convinc'd of any principle, 'tis only an idea, which strikes more strongly upon me. When I give the preference to one set of arguments above another, I do nothing but decide from my feeling

> concerning the superiority of their influence (T 103).

We saw earlier that the principle Hume desired to establish was that impressions are capable of enlivening ideas. He told us a story about how an impression can transfer its liveliness to an idea, and thinking that his principle was thus well-established he went on to use this very principle in his definition of all reasoning as a matter of taste and sentiment. However, we should not be content with Hume until he tells us just what that feeling is that we should use in deciding the superiority of any set of arguments over another.

The above passage from the Treatise gives us some clues as to what Hume needs to make his inference from belief as a lively idea to reasoning as a matter of taste and sentiment work. All reasoning, apparently, is nothing but "species of sensation." The feeling which we use to decide about matters of reasoning is a species of sensation. What is a sensation for Hume? He mentions it even on page 1 of the Treatise.

> Those perceptions, which enter with most force and violence, we may name impressions; and under this name I comprehend all our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul.

And again in explaining the nature of probable reasoning:

> Were there no mixture of any impression in our probable reasonings, the conclusion wou'd be entirely chimerical: And were there no mixture of ideas, the action of the mind, in observing the relation, wou'd, properly speaking, be sensation, not reasoning (T 89).

'Sensation,' in Hume, is opposed to 'idea.' It is properly one of Hume's impressions, since it is a

perception of the mind which strikes directly upon the mind.

Such direct perceptions may be external impressions, coming to the mind through one's senses, in which case Hume classifies them as "impressions of sensation." But impressions need not come through the senses. More important in this context are Hume's "impressions of reflection." These are internal impressions, arising in relation to ideas already present to the mind. Each kind of impression is a perception as it makes its "first appearance in the soul," not as its "faint image ... in thinking and reasoning" (T 1). Thus, if Hume is to make credible his theory of probabilistic reasoning at Treatise, p. 103, he must show us that there is, in fact, a species of sensation -- an impression -- which one uses to decide, e.g., the superiority of a set of arguments. In other words, he must advance an argument that we use impressions of reflection in this way. He must convince us that each set of arguments has a certain sensation accompanying it, and that such an internal impression would allow us to distinguish superior from inferior arguments. Hume is not able to do this in the Treatise. We will see in the remainder of our explication of the account of belief in the Treatise that Hume grasps at a way to establish his conclusions about reasoning, but he does not realize that he must include these internal impressions in his account. We can find here only the kernel of what would become his full explanation in the Enquiry.

Hume recognizes at the end of Section VIII that he needs a particular 'sensation' to explain one aspect of belief that he has not yet addressed. That is, it seems that, in addition to impressions, ideas and memories may also enliven other ideas so that

they become beliefs, and some sensation is needed to show how this happens:

> In thinking of our past thoughts we not only delineate out the objects, of which we were thinking, but also conceive the action of the mind in the meditation, that certain je-ne-scai-quoi, of which 'tis impossible to give any definition or description, but which every one sufficiently understands (T 106).

What is that certain "I know not what" which Hume is trying to describe here? That it is the "action of the mind in the meditation" may suggest to us more modern accounts of 'acts of mind,' or as J.R. Searle states the problem, of "intentionality."[6] An account of the intentionality of mental states as advanced, for example, by Searle, will help us to understand the sort of 'sensation' Hume needs to include in his account.

For Searle, "intentionality is that property of many mental states and events by which they are directed at or about or of objects and states of affairs in the world."[7] What sorts of mental states are intentional? "If a state S is Intentional then there must be an answer to such questions as: What is S about? What is S of? What is it an S that?"[8] Certainly belief is just such a state. Whenever one has a belief, it is a belief that something is the case. In other words, there are essentially two parts to the state of belief: the 'believing,' and that which one believes. "Every Intentional state consists of an Intentional content in a psychological mode."[9] In any act of mind, or intentional state, there is an awareness, and there is something of which one is aware.[10]

Now we may see how an idea or a memory may bring about belief, as Hume claims at the end of Section VIII:

> For as this idea is not here consider'd as the representation of any absent object, but as a real perception in the mind, of which we are intimately conscious, it must be able to bestow on whatever is related to it the same quality, call it firmness, or solidity, or force, or vivacity, with which the mind reflects upon it, and is assur'd of its present existence. The idea here supplies the place of an impression, and is entirely the same, so far as regards our present purpose (T 106).

An awareness of an idea may be a strong enough internal impression to enliven another idea to the level of belief. The idea which brings about belief is involved in an act of mind. There is an 'awareness of' the idea in addition to the idea itself. Although the awareness is of an idea, it is still an impression just as any other immediate sensation is an impression for Hume. It is simply an internal impression, an impression which strikes the mind not through one's senses, but in relation to the ideas present to the mind.[11] As an impression it is forceful and lively enough that associated ideas are also lively, but I do not think Hume realized this. He simply noted, in his 'thought experiments,' that when one idea is present to the mind, another associated one also arises in a lively way, and concluded that one idea can enliven another.[12]

Just as the concept of an act of mind helps us show how one idea brings about belief of another, it can help us understand just what a "manner of conceiving" may be. For each idea one believes, one has an awareness of that idea. Our awareness of different ideas are themselves different. Because

they are different, they feel different to us. Each awareness, i.e., in each act which has an intention, can be distinguished from another intentional act by the way it feels to the mind. For example, acts which have external objects as intentions feel a certain way to the mind and acts which have ideas involved in a causal relation as intentions feel different. In the former case, one may see that a fire is burning; in the latter, one may believe that there is accompanying heat. The mind is able to distinguish these acts by the way they feel. Here at last we have found those impressions Hume needs in order for him to conclude that all reasoning is but a species of sensation. It is by that internal impression which is an awareness of an idea believed that we distinguish superior from inferior arguments, according to Hume.

The Account in the Appendix to the Treatise

In the body of the Treatise, Hume emphasized a belief's relation to an impression and its force and vivacity. In the Appendix to the Treatise he is more inclined to say something like "belief consists merely in a certain feeling or sentiment" (T 624), or "an idea assented to feels different from a fictitious idea" (T 629). The change from the view of the Treatise is from saying beliefs are distinguished from mere conceptions only by their force and vivacity to saying the two can also be distinguished by their feeling to the perceiver. Does the change from 'force and vivacity' to 'feeling' signal a change in Hume's view of belief from the Treatise to the Appendix? It seems that it does, as Hume admits:

> The second error may be found in Book I. page 96. where I say, that two ideas of the same object can only

> be different by their different degrees of force and vivacity. I believe there are other differences among ideas, which cannot properly be comprehended under these terms. Had I said, that two ideas of the same object can only be different by their different feeling, I shou'd have been nearer the truth (T 636).

If it is true that a belief is distinguished from a mere conception primarily by the way it feels, how does this 'feeling' fit into Hume's scheme of the perceptions of the mind, among impressions and ideas? In the Appendix to the Treatise, Hume maintains that belief is either a new idea, or it is a peculiar feeling (T 623). Just as Hume argued in the body of the Treatise (T 94), he maintains in the Appendix that belief adds no new idea to what is already conceived (T 623-24). There is no separate idea of existence which could be annexed to another idea to make it a belief. Further, we have command over our ideas, but not, Hume maintains, our beliefs, so a belief could not be an idea which accompanies conceptions. Therefore, "belief consists merely in a certain feeling or sentiment" (T 624). Since there is no separate idea conceived, "when we are convinc'd of any matter of fact, we do nothing but conceive it, along with a certain feeling, different from what attends the mere reveries of the imagination" (T 624). And when we compare a belief with a mere conception, "there is nothing but the feeling, or sentiment, to distinguish the one from the other" (T 624).

Belief is not a new idea which arises from an idea when associated with a present impression. But, of special note in the Appendix, neither is it "some impression or feeling" that is annexed to the idea (T 625). "Belief only modifies the idea or conception;

and renders it different to the feeling, without producing any distinct impression" (T 627). This is confusing, for it seems that this feeling of belief must be either an idea or an impression, since all perceptions of the mind are either ideas or impressions. But Hume argues very carefully against the hypothesis, stated in the Appendix, that belief "is only annex'd to [the conception], after the same manner that will and desire are annex'd to particular conceptions of good and pleasure" (T 625). If he can advance a convincing argument against an impression attaching to the conception, he will also have undermined my thesis that his theory of belief must involve both an idea and an internal impression, that impression being the awareness of the conception. He advances a four-part argument, as follows:

> 1. [This hypothesis] is directly contrary to experience, and our immediate consciousness. All men have ever allow'd reasoning to be merely an operation of our thoughts or ideas; and however those ideas may be varied to the feeling, there is nothing ever enters into our conclusions but ideas, or our fainter conceptions .... this whole operation is perform'd by the thought or imagination alone. The transition is immediate. The ideas presently strike us. Their customary connexion with the present impression, varies them and modifies them in a certain manner, but produces no act of the mind, distinct from this peculiarity of conception (T 625-26).

It is contrary to experience that we have a separate impression annexed to each conception of a matter of fact. Whenever some present impression strikes us, the idea of that which usually accompanies it is immediately upon us without any perception of the mind which is separate from that conception. Hume does allow one counterexample to this. When one has

been in doubt and has been agitated, and then comes to a conclusion or a new opinion, a feeling of relief or tranquility ensues. "In this case there is a feeling distinct and separate from the conception. The passage from doubt and agitation to tranquility and repose, conveys a satisfaction and pleasure to the mind" (T 625-26).

2. "It must be allow'd, that the mind has a firmer hold, or more steady conception of what it takes to be matter of fact, than of fictions. Why then look any farther, or multiply suppositions without necessity?" (T 626).

3. "We can explain the causes of the firm conception, but not those of any separate impression. And not only so, but the causes of the firm conception exhaust the whole subject, and nothing is left to produce any other effect" (T 626).

4. "The effects of belief, in influencing the passions and imagination, can all be explain'd from the firm conception; and there is no occasion to have recourse to any other principle" (T 626).

Hume still maintains, as he does in the body of the Treatise, that the only difference between a belief and a mere conception of an idea is in the manner in which we conceive them. He now argues that this manner does not consist of adding some idea onto the belief, nor of annexing an impression to the belief. But even after these arguments, he finds that:

> 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 629).

Having ruled out both possibilities, that belief is either an idea or an impression, Hume is at a loss to say what belief is. He has said over and over in the Appendix that belief is a certain feeling, and that it is by this feeling that we distinguish belief from mere conception. But the reason Hume still feels at a loss is that he cannot explain what the 'feeling' or the 'manner of conception' itself is. The way out of his predicament would be for Hume to conclude that this feeling or manner is an impression of reflection which arises when a present impression calls an idea to mind and 'transfers' some of its own force and vivacity to it. Let us look again at his arguments on p. 625 against belief as a separate impression annexed to the idea believed.

First, he says, we do not experience a separate impression annexed to each conception of a matter of fact. A related idea follows from an impression without any separate perception of the mind. Is it really contrary to experience to have an internal impression about an idea? Once the related idea is present to the mind, is it not possible that we should feel some sensation because of its presence? In fact, this seems to happen in more cases than the one Hume gives about the agitated person who comes to have a belief. For example, when I perceive a flame and believe that heat accompanies it, that particular idea has a feeling to it that a mere conception of heat does not. Even though my belief in the accompanying heat follows immediately from the perception of flame, this immediacy does not prevent my feeling about my idea. This particular

feeling is an internal impression that has come about because an idea was already present in my mind, brought about by an external impression of sensation. Hume himself actually refers to this feeling about ideas in his argument against an impression being involved in belief: "However those ideas may be varied to the feeling, there is nothing ever enters into our conclusions but ideas, or our fainter conceptions" (T 625). If an idea can vary to the feeling, surely we must allow that an internal impression may arise about any idea, including an idea one believes.

Hume's second argument against the possibility that an impression can be annexed to an idea is that he has already proven that a more steady conception distinguishes belief from mere conceptions, and we should not "multiply causes." This is a fine criterion, but he has not told us whether "a more steady conception" is an impression or an idea. Categorizing "a more steady conception" as an internal impression which attaches to an idea is a clarification, not a multiplication of causes. His fourth objection, if we may skip to it, is similar to the second. He argues that any effects belief might have can be traced from "a more firm conception," so we need not suppose a separate impression as well. Again, supposing that a separate impression of reflection is attached to the idea is not just a useless addition to his theory; it is an explication of the phrase "more firm conception."

Finally, Hume has argued that if belief is a more firm conception, we can explain its cause; but we cannot explain the cause of a distinct impression. But his explanation for the cause of a firm conception might just as well explain a new impression:

> An inference concerning a matter of fact is nothing but the idea of an object, that is frequently conjoin'd, or is associated with a present impression. This is the whole of it. Every part is requisite to explain, from analogy, the more steady conception; and nothing remains capable of producing any distinct impression (T 626).

If it is possible for repetitions of constant conjunction to give rise to a more steady conception in the idea of the second of the pair, why is it not possible for constant conjunction to give rise to a new impression of reflection accompanying that idea?

Although Hume's most explicit arguments against my interpretation of his theory of belief occur in the Appendix, his last word in this section is that he still is confused as to exactly how to analyze the notion to make it clear:

> I confess, that 'tis impossible to explain perfectly this feeling or manner of conception. We may make use of words, that express something near it. But its true and proper name is belief, which is a term that every one sufficiently understands in common life. And in philosophy we can go no farther, than assert, that it is something felt by the mind, which distinguishes the ideas of the judgment from the fictions of the imagination (T 629).

The Account in the Enquiry

As in the body of the Treatise and the Appendix to the Treatise, Hume begins his discussion of belief in the Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding with the question of what distinguishes a belief from a mere conception. He again argues that belief is not a new idea attached to the idea believed. In the Enquiry, however, the only argument he offers is that we have command over our ideas, but

not over our beliefs; therefore, belief is not an idea. Since belief is not a separate idea, Hume concludes that:

> the difference between fiction and belief lies in some sentiment or feeling, which is annexed to the latter, not to the former, and which depends not on the will, nor can be commanded at pleasure. It must be excited by nature, like all other sentiments; and must arise from the particular situation, in which the mind is placed at any particular juncture (E 48).

As opposed to the Appendix, where Hume first rules out the possibility that beliefs are ideas or impressions before saying that belief is a certain feeling to the mind, here he has only ruled out the possibility that belief is a distinct idea. He does not argue here, as he did in the Appendix, that it is impossible that belief should be a separate impression annexed to an idea to which we assent. That a new idea is attached to the idea believed is ruled out since we have command over our ideas. It seems that we do not have command over our impressions. Aside from controlling the situation in which one puts oneself, one has little control over the sensations which strike upon the mind. This criterion of 'command' will not rule out a new impression from attaching to an idea believed.

In fact, in the passage above, Hume all but states that a new internal impression is attached to the idea believed. The sentiment or feeling which accompanies beliefs, but not mere conceptions, "depends not on the will, nor can be commanded at pleasure. It must be excited by nature, like all other sentiments." This passage is very close to my interpretation. When a present impression brings its usual accompanying idea to mind, thus 'transferring'

some of its vivacity to it, we are aware of another sensation, or as Hume writes, "this conception is attended with a feeling or sentiment, different from the loose reveries of the fancy" (E 48). An internal impression arises from this process of an idea being brought to mind, and it is this new impression that we call the feeling of belief. We are as immediately aware of this internal impression as of any other impression, internal or external, Hume describes. It is "excited by nature, like all other sentiments" (E 48).

Hume attempts in the Enquiry only to describe belief, not to define it. It would be as difficult, he writes, to define belief as it would be to define the feeling of cold or passion of anger to someone who had never experienced them. Such an analogy to other impressions is more confirmation that belief involves a separate impression. But to go on with the description:

> I say, then, that belief is nothing but a more vivid, lively, forcible, firm, steady conception of an object, than what the imagination alone is ever able to attain. This variety of terms, which may seem so unphilosophical, is intended only to express that act of the mind, which renders realities, or what is taken for such, 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 (E 49).

As in the Treatise and the Appendix, there is an emphasis on the manner of conception. It is the manner in which we conceive a believed idea that distinguishes it from those ideas we do not believe. Unlike the Treatise, this is the only criterion given for distinguishing belief. The above description does not contain an account of an idea's relation to

a present impression. Hume will go on to say that "this manner of conception arises from a customary conjunction of the object with something present to the memory or senses" (E 50). But this is not a part of the description of the nature of belief; it is merely an account of how belief does, in fact, come about. In the Treatise, "a lively idea related to or associated with a present impression" (T 96) was the definition.

Hume has come to realize that the state of believing an idea includes the way one feels about the idea, the internal sensation which arises when that idea is brought to mind. It is not merely because the idea believed has a relation to a present impression that we note a difference between a belief and a mere conception. We note the difference because there is a new impression of reflection accompanying the idea believed that is different from any such impression involved in entertaining a mere conception. Hume's phrase "manner of conceiving" is an attempt to describe that internal sensation we note when we are in a state of entertaining an idea we believe.

In the above description, he clarifies what he means by "a more firm conception" by saying it is "that act of the mind, which renders realities ... more present to us than fictions...." Again we recall our discussion of the intentional nature of acts of mind. In the intentional act of belief, there is both a feeling of belief and an idea believed. When we believe an idea, we have a certain feeling or sensation about that idea. The sensation, be it liveliness, forcefulness, vivacity, etc., is always a feeling about some idea, the idea believed.[13]

Hume then copies the apology from the Appendix straight into the Enquiry: "I confess, that it is impossible perfectly to explain this feeling or manner of conception" (E 49). However, it seems Hume has progressed quite some distance in explaining the feeling simply by not worrying about excluding it from being an impression and by understanding beliefs to be intentional acts. So now when he writes "and in philosophy, we can go no farther than assert, that belief is something felt by the mind, which distinguishes the ideas of the judgement from the fictions of the imagination" (E 49), it seems that we have actually gone pretty far. This is no longer a statement about the limitations of his method, but a conclusion that he has discovered all that there is to know about belief.

Conclusion

We have seen that Hume actually worked out quite a detailed theory of belief after his original statement that "An opinion, therefore, or belief may be most accurately defin'd, A LIVELY IDEA RELATED TO OR ASSOCIATED WITH A PRESENT IMPRESSION" (T 96). The idea believed is not a mere 'mental snapshot,' but a more complicated perception which informs our propositions. The association with a present impression, we found, was only important in describing how a given idea might come to be lively enough to be a belief. But the history of an idea is not so important in the theory of belief as the liveliness of the idea. This liveliness is no longer a mysterious characteristic. A belief is an intentional state, such that there is an internal impression about the idea believed. This internal impression is the feeling of belief which Hume was

trying to describe when he called a belief a "lively idea."

This interpretation of Hume's account of belief has several advantages. It clarifies many of the vague notions Hume uses in his account, such as "force and liveliness," "transfer of vivacity," and "act of mind." It also makes explicit how Hume's fundamental concepts of 'idea' and 'impression' are to be understood in the context of belief.

Finally, this interpretation shows the degree to which Hume's work on belief was consistent throughout the Treatise, the Appendix to the Treatise, and the Enquiry. Hume never abandoned the premise that the fundamental distinguishing characteristic of belief is that difference which the mind notes between belief and mere conception. Although he was not successful in understanding this difference until the writing of the Enquiry, the work in the Treatise and the Appendix laid the foundation for his final theory. The shortcomings of those earlier works simply point to the need for the concept of an internal impression involved in an intentional act to explain the difference the mind notes between belief and mere conception. This interpretation allows us to take advantage of Hume's philosophical work in the Treatise, while taking seriously his wish in the 'Advertisement' to the Enquiries, "that the following Pieces may alone be regarded as containing his philosophical sentiments and principles" (E 2).

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1. David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. revised by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), p. 96. Reference will also be made to David Hume, An Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding, in Enquiries Concerning the Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd ed. revised by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975). References to the Treatise (T) and the Enquiry (E) will hereafter be given within parentheses in the text of the paper.

2. This interpretation, in showing that the seeds of Hume's final account of belief were present even in his earlier writings, resolved the prima facie inconsistencies among Hume's several accounts of belief which several commentators have noted. See, for example, Michael Hodges and John Lachs, "Hume on Belief," The Review of Metaphysics, 30 (1976), 3-18; John Passmore, Hume's Intentions, 3rd ed. (London: Duckworth, 1980).

3. This account of the nature of an idea has been defended in greater detail in Donald W. Livingston, Hume's Philosophy of Common Life (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 56-68; cf. John W. Yolton, "Hume's Ideas," Hume Studies, 6 (1980), 1-25.

4. H.A. Prichard, Knowledge and Perception (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1950), p. 190.

5. If I am correct in claiming that ideas are of such a nature that they inform propositions, and that beliefs are of ideas, then it is possible for Humean beliefs to have a truth value. Cf. discussions on this topic in R.E. Beanblossom, "A New Foundation for Humean Scepticism," Philosophical Studies, 29 (1976), 207-210; L.M. Russow, "The Concept of Truth in Hume's Treatise," Southern Journal of Philosophy, 19 (1981), 217-228; H.H. Price, Belief (London: Humanities Press, 1969), pp. 164-186.

6. Searle, Intentionality: An Essay in the Philosophy of Mind (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); cf. Gustav Bergmann, "Acts," in his Logic and Reality (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1964), pp. 3-44.

7. Searle, Intentionality, p. 1.

8. Searle, Intentionality, p. 1.

9. Searle, Intentionality, p. 12.

10. I continue to use the phrase 'act of mind' despite Searle's objections to it, since it reminds us of the modern theory's relation to Hume's terminology. (Searle writes at p. 3, "Some authors describe beliefs, fears, hopes, and desires as 'mental acts', but this is at best false and at worst hopelessly confused.")

11. Russow, in "The Concept of Truth in Hume's Treatise," pp. 217-228, has argued that the feeling of belief cannot be an impression of reflection; passions are impressions of reflection, while beliefs are ideas. However, the notion of an 'internal impression' is not limited to the passions. In fact, Hume writes that it is by an internal impression that we form the idea of necessary connection (T 165). It seems plausible that such an internal impression, or impression of reflection, might accompany many mental states.

12. By including this account of ideas in Hume's theory of belief, we may readily answer those who criticize Hume's theory for limiting belief to an idea brought about by a present impression with which it has been in constant conjunction. H.H. Price, in Belief, pp. 164-186, criticizes Hume's theory on the basis that a present impression calling an idea to mind cannot explain general beliefs, e.g. 'all fires radiate heat.' H.A. Prichard, in Knowledge and Perception, pp. 176-191, argues that Hume cannot be right about belief since we sometimes have a belief without the experience of constant conjunction. Each of these problems is resolved by understanding that an awareness of one idea can enliven another idea to the level of belief.

13. Understanding Hume's phrase "manner of conceiving" as a description of a component of an intentional act also helps us understand what Hume could have meant by "liveliness" or "force and vivacity." In stating that a belief is livelier than a mere conception, Hume was trying to describe that part of the intentional act directed at the idea believed. Contrary to several commentators, "liveliness" is not Hume's last word on belief; he later explicated this

vague notion in an intentional account of belief. Cf. Prichard, Knowledge and Perception, p. 190; Hodges and Lachs, "Hume on Belief," pp. 3-18.