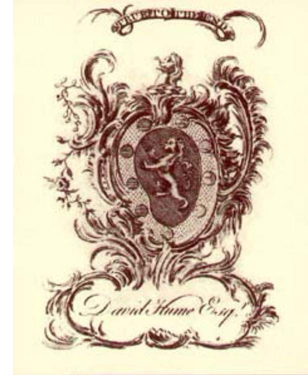

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HUME'S PYRRHONISM: A DEVELOPMENTAL INTERPRETATION*

Hume's approach to philosophical problems is unique.[1] Whether the issue is causality, external objects, or personal identity, we find the same approach. He begins by launching devastating attacks against popular theories. He then convinces us that *his* solution to the issue at hand is the only one that makes sense. But, then, he dashes our hopes by arguing that even his solutions contain 'contradictions', 'manifest absurdities', 'obscurities', and 'perplexities'. In short, Hume is a skeptic in the Pyrrhonian tradition in his belief that fundamental aspects of the human understanding are wrought with contradiction.[2]

Commentators invariably recognize these contradictions in Hume's writings, but further explanation is desirable. What are these contradictions which Hume finds inevitable, and when do they arise? This is the question I will try to answer. The answer is no less intriguing than Hume himself, for throughout his philosophical career, Hume continually discovered new contradictions. I will be arguing for a developmental interpretation of Hume's Pyrrhonism, the key area of change involving a contradiction with morality. Briefly, I will argue that in the main text of the *Treatise*, Hume discovers contradictions in areas involving external objects and causality, but denies that contradictions arise with morality. For, insofar as morality involves only the world of mental events, he believes it to be free from contradiction. However, in his discussion of 'the self' in the Appendix to the *Treatise*, he changes his position and asserts that contradictions arise even for the world of mental events. In the conclusion to his second *Enquiry*, Hume

extends this Pyrrhonism even further in the face of another contradiction, this time directly involving morality. Thus, where Hume rejects Pyrrhonian moral skepticism in the Treatise, he comes to affirm it in the second Enquiry. I conclude by comparing Hume's lists of contradictions in the Treatise and first Enquiry showing that, again, Hume expanded the realm of Pyrrhonism.

What I have been calling 'Pyrrhonism' (skepticism involving the discovery of contradictions)[3] Hume also calls 'excessive consequential skepticism'. Some background here will be helpful. 'Excessive consequential skepticism' refers to the negative conclusions that skeptics come to at the end of an investigation, because of "either the absolute fallaciousness of their mental faculties, or their unfitness to reach any fixed determination in all those curious subjects of speculation, about which they are commonly employed" (E 150). Here the skeptic is at his strongest since, for a certain class of epistemologically foundational propositions P (such as the existence of external objects), the best evidence supporting P also emplies 'not P'. Hume notes, though, that this excessive skepticism, even when securely argued, cannot be followed in practice since it runs counter to our common experiences. It is a theoretical enterprise, and Hume objects strongly to those who recommend cynicism in such matters.[4] Hume's excessive consequential skepticism (which is purely theoretical) stands in contrast to what he calls moderate consequential skepticism. This moderate variety involves two practical lessons which can be learned from Pyrrhonism or extreme theoretical skepticism. These lessons are what Flew has recently called Hume's effort at the

containment of his skepticism.[5] First, the philosopher should entertain "a degree of doubt, and caution, and modesty, which, in all kinds of scrutiny and decision, ought for ever to accompany a just reasoner" (E 162). Second, philosophers should limit their inquiries so they will "never be tempted to go beyond common life, so long as they consider the imperfection of those faculties which they employ, their narrow reach, and their inaccurate operations" (E 162). Although Hume opts for moderate skepticism, he makes it quite clear that the moderate variety is "the result of this Pyrrhonism, or excessive scepticism, when its undistinguished doubts are, in some measure, corrected by common sense and reflection" (E 161). In other words, Hume's moderate skepticism must presuppose the theoretical legitimacy of the contradictions that the excessive skeptic uncovers. The moderate skeptic, though, does not carry these problems over into common life.[6]

Thus, broadly construed, consequential skepticism involves three features: (1) the discovery of a contradiction within the understanding (excessive-theoretical), (2) a recommendation for philosophical modesty (moderate-practical), and (3) a recommendation that we remain within the bounds of common life (moderate-practical). For Hume, these three features accompany each other. Whenever a contradiction is discovered, we are immediately reminded to be philosophically modest and remain within the bounds of common life. Although our focus is on the excessive or Pyrrhonian aspect of consequential skepticism (the discovery of contradictions), the presence of the two moderate recommendations in a given textual passage will serve to confirm the existence of a conceptual contradiction.

What, though, is a conceptual contradiction? Is it a logical contradiction? an inconsistency? a paradox? The answer is that it involves inconsistent ideas which arise in the faculty of the imagination. Streminger makes this point by observing that Hume's Pyrrhonism involves a dilemma within the imagination between what he calls the scientific and metaphysical faculties.[7] Streminger's analysis, though, is incomplete since he fails to trace the cause of this dilemma back to its ultimate psychological foundation: the strong and weak natural propensities of the imagination. To explain, we must explore the role of the imagination in Hume's writings.

Contradictions Within the Imagination

In the *Treatise*, Hume divides ideas in the following manner, according to the psychological faculty that is responsible for their production:[8]

FROM MEMORY

IDEAS < FROM UNDERSTANDING

FROM IMAGINATION <

FROM FANCY

In Book I, the imagination and the memory are mental faculties responsible for producing ideas (T 8-10). The memory produces ideas sequentially, in the order the recalled events were perceived. The imagination, by contrast, transforms previously acquired ideas by either separating them or combining them (T 8). The imagination does not transform ideas randomly. It is because of instincts or natural propensities (such as the principles of association, habit, and sympathy)

that the imagination combines ideas in the order it does.

Hume tells us that these natural propensities can be roughly divided into two groups when aiding the imagination in organizing ideas: those of the understanding, and those of the fancy. The division between the understanding and the fancy is seen most clearly in Hume's frequent comments noting the dual meaning of the term 'imagination':

> ...it appears that the word, imagination, is commonly us'd in two different senses.... When I oppose the imagination to the memory, I mean the faculty, by which we form our fainter ideas. When I oppose it to reason [or under-standing], I mean the same faculty, excluding only our demonstrative and probable reasonings. (T fn. 1, pp. 117-118, cf. 10, 371)

Hume's point here is that he sometimes uses the term 'imagination' in its most general sense, as I have diagrammed above, and at other times uses the term to mean 'the fancy'. A good example of the latter use of the term 'imagination' (as 'fancy') is where Hume notes how we may proceed upon "one singular quality of the imagination" (T 268). Three sentences earlier, though, Hume makes clear his intention noting how we may proceed from a "singular and seemingly trivial property of the fancy" (T 268, emphasis is mine). To avoid confusion, I will use the term 'imagination' to refer only to the general faculty that includes both the understanding and the fancy.

Clearly, Hume endorses a strict division in the imagination between the understanding and the fancy. What is most interesting about this division is that it follows a distinction between two classes of natural propensities: the strong propensities

(which form the understanding) and the weak propensities (which form fancy):

> ...I must distinguish in the imagination betwixt the principles which are permanent, irresistible, and universal; such as the customary transition from causes to effects, and from effects to causes: And the principles, which are changeable, weak, and irregular; such as those I have just now taken notice of. The former are the foundation of all our thoughts and actions, so that upon their removal human nature must immediately perish and go to ruin. The latter are neither unavoidable to mankind, nor necessary, or so much as useful in the conduct of life; but on the contrary are observ'd only to take place in weak minds, and being opposite to the other principles of custom and reasoning, may easily be subverted by a due contrast and opposition. (T 225)

Unfortunately, Hume gives only one example of a strong principle of the understanding (i.e., causality). R.P. Wolff argues that there are a total of five such propensities: causal inference, union, coherence, continuous existence and belief.[9] Against Wolff, it is more likely that Hume had in mind seven strong propensities, according to the seven philosophical relations responsible for demonstration and probability. For Hume, the understanding is divided between reasoning about demonstration and probability:

ABOUT RELATIONS OF IDEAS
(demonstration)

IDEAS FROM UNDERSTANDING <

ABOUT MATTERS OF FACT
(probability)

This is seen most clearly where he argues that "the understanding exerts itself after two different ways,

as it judges from demonstration [about relations of ideas] or probability [about matters of fact]" (T 413). Further, the seven philosophical relations listed in Book I exhaust the relations needed for demonstrative and probable reasoning (T 69-73). Accordingly, the strong principles (and philosophic relations) would include (1) resemblance, (2) contrariety, (3) degrees in quality, (4) proportions in quantity or number (which are involved in demonstration), (5) identity, (6) relations in time and place, and (7) causation (which is involved in demonstration).

Hume's account of weak principles of the fancy is more clear than that of the strong principles of the understanding. For in most cases problematic ideas produced in the fancy result from the natural relation of resemblance (T 61).[10] Hume occasionally characterizes fanciful ideas based on weak principles as being those of a 'false philosophy'. These include the classical theories of substances, substantial forms, accidents, and occult qualities (T 222-224), as well as modern theories of primary qualities (T 226-231). More frequently, though, his concern is with erroneous 'vulgar' or popular ideas which are founded on weak principles. Some of these are vulgar theories of necessary connection (T 222, 223, 267), passion (T 437), reason (T 419), ethics (T 297, 470, 526), and religious superstition (E 198; cf. T 241, 271; E 51, 53).[11] What makes both vulgar and false philosophical theories wrong, argues Hume, is not just that they proceed from weak principles, but they do so unreflectively and prejudicially, at the expense of strong principles of the understanding (T 117, 224, 268).

The strong/weak (and understanding/fancy) distinction is central to Hume's Pyrrhonism as can be seen in his skeptical conclusion to Book I:

> ...if we assent to every trivial suggestion of the fancy; beside that these suggestions are often contrary to each other; they lead us into such errors, absurdities, and obscurities, that we must at last become asham'd of our credulity.
>
> ...if the consideration of these instances makes us take a resolution to reject all the trivial suggestions of the fancy, and adhere to the understanding, that is, to the general and more establish'd properties of the imagination; even this resolution ... would be dangerous.... For, as I have already shewn, that the understanding, when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles entirely subverts itself.... (T 267; emphasis is mine)

Hume argues here that Pyrrhonian contradictions trace back to some propensity within the imagination. Some involve weak principles of the fancy and, not surprisingly, produce problems. More interestingly, though, other contradictions arise exclusively from strong principles of the understanding. In either case, some principles of the imagination are self-defeating and others, when conjoined, lead to contradictions. For Hume, these contradictions are an unavoidable consequence of any investigation into the imagination, and are always lurking beneath the surface of our common life. Accordingly, Manfred Kuehn notes that, "...there is in Hume a fundamental class of contradictions which he believed were neither accidental nor created by his analysis, but were essential characteristics of the human mind."[12]

A.J. Ayer argues that "Hume here greatly exaggerates the skeptical import of his reasoning" when stressing the permanence of these contradictions.[13] Perhaps the individual occasions where contradictions arise may be far removed from normal understanding of that phenomena (such as the contradiction Hume notes with causality). But Hume's point is that concepts which on the surface appear coherent have problems which cannot go away, even though these problems must ultimately be ignored. In any case, in the face of these contradictions, Hume does not conclude that we should doubt all products or ideas of the imagination. In fact, such doubt is virtually impossible since other natural propensities or instincts compel us to proceed both with common life and with philosophical inquiry.[14] Hume's Pyrrhonism (or excessive consequential skepticism), then, consists of the imagination's inherently contradictory nature insofar as key propensities gives rise to incompatible ideas.

Contradictions in the Treatise

To see how the imagination is contradictory in nature, I will look at the three main contradictions uncovered in Book I of the *Treatise*.[15] The first contradiction is the classic problem of induction, which Hume describes as a problem with *a posteriori* reasoning.[16] Briefly, this involves the manner by which we form habits when observing causal relations, specifically when judging the probability of a given causal connection between objects *A* and *B* (T 154-155, 180-187, 267).[17] A habit of expectation is formed as we observe repetitious occurrences between objects *A* and *B*. But upon the first observed occurrence of *A*

and B, we cannot judge the two to be causally connected because such a connection is evidently uncertain. Call this $uncertainty_1$. We are next impelled to make a judgment about the reasonableness of $uncertainty_1$; that is, we consider whether we are justified in assuming that the causal connection between A and B is uncertain. But this new judgment about the reasonableness of $uncertainty_1$ can only be based on experience of past judgments about past cases similar to $uncertainty_1$. Because all judgments based on past experience contain elements of doubt, this produces a new doubt -- call it $uncertainty_2$. We are next impelled to make a judgment about $uncertainty_2$, which similarly yields $uncertainty_3$, and the pattern continues. Hume's conclusion is that "no finite object can subsist under a decrease repeated *in infinitum*.... Let our first belief be never so strong, it must infallibly perish by passing thro' so many new examinations, of which each diminishes somewhat of its force and vigour" (T 182-183). Since causal inferences rest on a *strong* propensity to form habits (T 225; E 43), the above argument contradicts this inference by implying the *impossibility* of forming such habits even under the most optimal conditions. Thus, the strong principle of forming habits is 'contradictory' in the sense that it is self-defeating.

The second of the three contradictions Hume presents involves our perception of external objects. Although this concerns a problem with the *senses*, it ultimately traces back to a problem within the imagination, particularly the fancy.[18] The problem involves a conflict between two theories of perception: a 'vulgar' extreme realist view, and a 'philosophical' copy theory of perception (T 187-218). According to

the extreme realist view, the fanciful principle of resemblance connects our individual perceptions of an object, and has us suppose that our perceptions and the object itself are identical. Further, we are forced into believing the object and the perceptions are identical given the liveliness of our perceptions when recalled by our memory (T 209). But a natural train of thought, again aided by the fancy, refutes this extreme realist view since quite simple perceptual experiments show that objects and their perceptions cannot be identical. This refutation suggests the philosophical view that our impressions are only copies of objects (T 213). However, the copy theory also fails since there is no reason to suppose that perceptions resemble objects. Thus, the falsehood of extreme realism suggests the truth of the copy theory, and the falsehood of the copy theory suggests the truth of extreme realism. The contradiction within the imagination, then, is that principles of the fancy, particularly resemblance, give rise to two theories of perception which by themselves are indefensible, and together are incompatible.

The final contradiction in Book I is between the understanding and the senses insofar as it is not possible "for us to reason justly and regularly from causes and effects, and at the same time believe the continu'd existence of matter" (T 266).[19] Hume begins by noting that principles of the fancy incline us to believe in externally existing primary qualities (T 227). Next, Hume notes that some secondary qualities are internally caused (T 230-231). Since we assume like causes from like effects, we conclude that all secondary qualities are internally caused. Further, since ideas of primary qualities (especially exten-

sion) are ultimately derived from secondary qualities (particularly color), then we must conclude that primary qualities are internally caused as well. What remains is a substance which is devoid of all quality. The contradiction, then, is that we have two principles of the imagination (causality and the belief in primary qualities) and these produce conflicting ideas that there are and are not external primary qualities.

In the famous conclusion to Book I of the _Treatise_ Hume discusses the implications of these three contradictions (T 265-267). He stresses the inevitability of these contradictions, but quickly points out that our skepticism on these issues must remain theoretical since nature forces us to believe in causality and external objects (T 183, 269). Hume concludes by warning us against forgetting our modesty by using terms such as "'_tis evident_, '_tis certain_, '_tis undeniable_" (T 274). This, we will recall, is part of Hume's _moderate_ consequential skepticism which accompanies his Pyrrhonism.

So much for the contradictions in Book I. Turning to Books II and III of the _Treatise_, Hume at first denies that contradictions arise with internal perceptions of the mind, like the passions and moral sentiments. This can be seen in the following passage:

> The essence and composition of external bodies are so obscure, that we must necessarily, in our reasonings, or rather conjectures concerning them, involve ourselves in contradictions and absurdities. But as the perceptions of the mind are perfectly known, and I have us'd all imaginable caution in forming conclusions concerning them, I have always hop'd to keep clear of those contradictions,

> which have attended every other system. (T 366)

Two things are apparent in the above passage. First, the contradictions which emerge from Hume's theories in Book I are the result of conjectures about the nature of external bodies. Such conjectures bring us "beyond the reaches of the human understanding" (T 64). The problems arise when we carry our investigations beyond appearances and arrive at conclusions about external objects themselves (T 639, cf. 266). Since we cannot avoid believing in the existence of external objects or causal relations concerning them (T 187, 210, 225), the contradictions are inevitable. The second important point in the above is that investigations restricted to internal perceptions of the mind do not produce these kinds of problems. Theories of passions, then, are safe from contradiction because they are about mental events as opposed to extramental events. Since moral sentiments are a subset of the passions (and these sentiments alone constitute moral approval) then morality would also be immune to contradiction.[20]

This, at least, was Hume's intention when writing the main text of the Treatise. But when writing the Appendix (which was included in the publication of Book III), these intentions were dramatically altered. In the Appendix, as a serious afterthought to his discussion on personal identity, he writes that,

> I had entertain'd some hopes, that however deficient our theory of the intellectual world might be, it wou'd be free from those contradictions, and absurdities, which seem to attend every explication, that human reason can give of the material world. But upon a more strict review of the section concerning personal identity,

> I find myself involv'd in such a labyrinth, that, I must confess, I neither know how to correct my former opinions, nor how to render them consistent. If this be not a good general reason for scepticism, 'tis at least a sufficient one (if I were not already abundantly supplied) for me to entertain a diffidence and modesty in all my decisions. (T 633)

In this passage we see that after reflecting further on the problem of personal identity, Hume has discovered another contradiction.

Hume believes that the self consists only of a series of perceptions which are united in the imagination by some principle. In Book I he argued that this principle was resemblance (T 253-254). In the Appendix, though, he is not satisfied with this explanation as two factors stand in opposition. First, each of the distinct successive perceptions of our mind constitutes a distinct existence and cannot be conflated into a single existence. Second, the imagination cannot perceive any real connection between these distinct existences (T 636).[21] Were we to overcome either of these two obstacles, then a successful account of personal identity could be offered. Hume is not suggesting that there is no principle that unites our successive impressions. His point is that whatever principle is offered, it will conflict with one of the two propositions above. For example, the principle of resemblance, as suggested in Book I, goes against the second proposition above, which maintains that the imagination cannot perceive a real connection between distinct existences. The contradiction, then, is that no principle of the imagination can coherently account for our idea of a unified self. Once uncovering this problem, Hume

concludes by recommending modesty. This, as we have seen, is one of the features of moderate consequential skepticism which accompanies the discovery of contradictions.

The effect of this new contradiction is not merely that it subjects personal identity to Pyrrhonism. There are implications for morality as well. It is important to note, though, that the _specific_ contradiction with personal identity presents no direct problem for morality. Although the notions of personal identity and identity in general are used in ethical matters,[22] so too are the concepts of external objects and causality.[23] Since Hume's account of morality already presupposes foundational concepts which involve contradictions, the problem of personal identity in the Appendix adds no unique Pyrrhonian taint. The real problem this new contradiction presents for morality involves a larger issue. Hume believed he had freshly opened the world of mental events to contradictions because of the personal identity problem. For, his despair in the Appendix owes largely to finding problems in the intellectual world which he hoped would be free from contradictions (T 633). The possibility is now open that other aspects of the mental world yield similar contradictions, particularly with the passions and morality. When looking at Hume's moral _Enquiry_, which was written ten years after the Appendix to the _Treatise_, this is precisely what we find.

A Contradiction in the Moral Enquiry

In the Conclusion to his moral _Enquiry_, Hume makes the following summary statement reflecting his own attitude about the success of his moral theory:

> ...I must confess, that this enumeration [of the various virtues] puts the matter in so strong a light, that I cannot, at present be more assured of any truth, which I learn from reasoning and argument, than that personal merit consists entirely in the usefulness or agreeableness of qualities to the person himself possessed of them, or to others, who have any intercourse with him. But when I reflect that, though the bulk and figure of the earth have been measured and delineated, though the motions of the tides have been accounted for, the order and economy of the heavenly bodies subjected to their proper laws, and Infinite itself reduced to calculation; yet men still dispute concerning the foundation of their moral duties. When I reflect on this, I say, I fall back into diffidence and scepticism, and suspect that an hypothesis, so obvious, had it been a true one, would, long ere now, have been received by the unanimous suffrage and consent of mankind. (E 278)

Hume falls back into skepticism here specifically because of a tension he feels between two inclinations: on the one hand the truth of his account of personal merit (or the virtues) appears certain to him. On the other hand he is inclined to doubt the truth of his theory since it is not accepted unanimously as are other theories of natural phenomena. So, Hume has uncovered another contradiction. As with the other contradictions Hume uncovers, the "diffidence and skepticism" he falls back into is clearly theoretical. For, he argues, "even if excessive scepticism could be maintained, it would not [i.e., could not] be more destructive to all just reasoning inquiry" (E 278, cf. E 169). Again, the discovery of this contradiction is also accompanied by a plea for modesty: "nothing can be more unphilo-

sophical than to be positive or dogmatical on any subject" (E 278).

Neither of Hume's _Enquiries_ contains the precise psychological distinctions and arguments that we find in the _Treatise_. There is less talk of propensities, the imagination, and the fancy. Hume's explanation is that,

> These sciences are but too apt to appear abstract to common readers, even with all the precautions which we can take to clear them from superfluous speculations, and bring them down to every capacity. (E fn. 1, 317)

Nevertheless, if we explore the cognitive base which underlies the above moral tension, we may see that this contradiction, like the others, arises from inconsistent principles of the imagination.

The conflict is between two positions grounded in principles of the imagination, one regarding his account of the virtues, and the other regarding induction (and, ultimately, causality). On the one side, we have Hume's account of personal merit (mental qualities that are useful and agreeable to oneself and others). In general, Hume notes that his theory is based _only_ on the "phenomena of nature" and the "unbiased sentiments of the mind" (E 322). Similarly, he notes that moral sentiments arise from "the original fabric and formation of the human mind, which is naturally adapted to receive them" (E 172). The instinctive basis for sympathy (which is crucial to Hume's moral theory) is also made clear (E 298; T 387, 586).[24] Hume's theory of personal merit, then, is firmly founded on principles of the imagination (whether they are strong or weak is not completely clear). On the other side, Hume's doubt about his theory of personal merit results from the following

reasoning: if a theory about a widely known natural phenomenon is true (e.g., the measurements of the earth) then it is highly probable that most people will agree that the theory is true. But most people do not agree that Hume's theory of personal merit is true (where personal merit is a widely known natural phenomenon), hence, his theory probably is not true. The key premise in this argument, which links unanimity to truth, is clearly inductively based given the various examples Hume provides for its support. Since the idea of induction is related to causality (but with an imperfect habit, T 134), then Hume's suspicion of the falsehood of his theory is also grounded in a strong principle of the imagination. Thus, we have two principles (moral sentiment and induction) which yield contradictory ideas (morality is and is not defined by Hume's account of personal merit).

Contradictions in the First Enquiry

So far I have argued that the basis of Hume's Pyrrhonism is that contradictory ideas arise because of an inherent conflict with one or more principles of the imagination. Further, I have argued that Hume had continually discovered more contradictions, the most significant being a contradiction involving morality. A final development in Hume's Pyrrhonism is found in his first *Enquiry*. In the *Treatise*, Hume's use of the word 'contradiction' clearly dominated his discussion of Pyrrhonism. In the *Enquiry*, though, the word rarely occurs. Instead, Hume prefers words such as 'objection', 'absurdity', 'perplexity', and 'obscurity'. The change in wording also denotes a change in approach. In the final section to this

work, which is dedicated to the topic of Pyrrhonism, Hume entertains a variety of possible Pyrrhonian perplexities, accepting some and rejecting others.[25]

Several perplexities are rejected outright for being trite. For example, Hume does not feel that optical illusions and differing vantage points of an object undermines the senses. Also, he does not feel that "the variations of our judgment in sickness and health, youth and old age, prosperity and adversity" undermine the understanding. But he does develop five significant perplexities. Two of these were also presented in the _Treatise_: first, the conflict between extreme realism and the copy theory of perception, and, second, the problem that causality reduces all primary qualities to secondary qualities, leaving us with an "inexplicable something" (E 155). Nothing is new with his presentation of these contradictions as they closely parallel his account in the _Treatise_.

He then offers two additional contradictions concerning _a priori_ reasoning, both variations on Zeno's paradoxes. One problem arises with the notion of the infinite divisibility of space (or euclidean geometry). In geometry one can argue that any segment on a line may be divided again and again, on to infinity. This notion of the infinite divisibility of space contradicts our natural view of space as composed of finite or atomic particles (E 156). A second and similar contradiction arises with the concept of time. According to our abstract notions, time consists of an infinite succession of shorter moments, but this idea strikes us as absurd (E 157). In both of these cases there seems to be a contradiction between our abstract and our natural notions of space and time. Although Hume's verdict on these two

contradictions is hazy, three things suggest that he does not endorse these contradictions. First, his tone is slightly sarcastic toward advocates of these arguments. Second, he suggests a solution to these two dilemmas in a footnote (E 156). More significantly, though, Hume dedicates several sections of the Treatise to the refutation of the infinite divisibility of space and time (T 26-65). It would seem odd for him to suddenly endorse this theory in the Enquiry.

The final Pyrrhonian perplexity Hume offers is directed against a posteriori reasoning. This is more interesting than the previous four since it does not appear in the Treatise and Hume clearly does endorse it. The problem is that all a posteriori reasoning ultimately depends upon causal reasoning. But the instinct of custom upon which causal reasoning is based "...is indeed difficult to resist, but ... like other instincts, may be fallacious and deceitful" (E 159). This is a feature of causality that Hume continually draws to his readers' attention. Here, though, it is identified as a Pyrrhonian perplexity. It is difficult to see how this new perplexity could be a contradiction like the others we have examined. In those cases, a definite inconsistency arose from principles of the understanding or the fancy. The problem here is not so much a contradiction or absurdity as it is a limitation upon the accuracy of causal reasoning. This suggests that Hume may have expanded his concept of Pyrrhonism to include limitations as well as more severe contradictions.

Alternatively, Hume may have meant this to be another of the more severe contradictions. We have seen that the ability to form causal habits is a

strong principle of the imagination. In the Treatise, Hume argues that we also have a weak principle of the fancy which has us impute subjectively perceived qualities (such as causal relations) onto external objects (T 167). This suggests a contradiction between the notions of a subjective causality and an objective one, both of which are grounded in principles of the imagination. If this is the reasoning Hume had in mind for this contradiction, it is a unique departure from the Treatise. In the Treatise, Hume simply dismisses the fanciful idea of an external cause. Had this posed a genuine dilemma, he would not have dismissed it (parallel to his treatment of the contradictions in the Treatise). Whether the present dilemma is a mere limitation or a genuine contradiction, in either case Hume's Pyrrhonism has undergone another change.

In conclusion, it is clear that contradictions occupy a central place in Hume's philosophy, affecting most of his key ideas. It is clear also that Hume's attitude about these contradictions was not fixed. He began in Book I of the Treatise with three contradictions, and over the years discovered three additional contradictions of significant import. (There are hints of further contradictions in Hume's Natural History of Religion and his chapters on free will and miracles in the Enquiry.)[26] Some interpretations of Hume try to play down this skeptical side of Hume's philosophy.[27] I hope to have shown that, if anything, Hume's skepticism widened throughout his life.

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* Thanks to Lilly-Marlene Russow, Manfred Kuehn, Larry May and William L. Rowe for their comments.

1. All quotes by David Hume are from, A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. L.S. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed., revised by P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), hereafter abbreviated 'T'; Enquiries Concerning the Human Nature and Concerning the Principles of Morals, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), hereafter abbreviated 'E'; The Natural History of Religion, ed. H.E. Root, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1956), hereafter abbreviated 'NHR'.

2. For a brief account of how Hume scholars have treated skepticism in Book I, see John Wright's The Skeptical Realism of David Hume (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 1-9, and Joseph Agassi's "The Unity of Hume's Thought," in Hume Studies: 10th Anniversary Issue, (1985), pp. 87-109.

3. The discovery of conceptual contradictions is only one part of traditional Pyrrhonian skepticism, since the goal of skepticism is tranquility. See Philip Hallie, Sextus Empiricus: Selections, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1985), pp. 3-27; David Norton, David Hume, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 262-269. Our focus will be on the contradictions, though, since these are what concerned Hume. Norton believes that Hume is more of an Academic skeptic than a Pyrrhonian insofar as Hume argues for a certain "modesty and diffidence" (Norton, pp. 220, 294). Although the Academic or Ciceronian aspect of Hume's skepticism is now undeniable (see Peter Jones's Hume's Sentiments, (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1982), pp. 161-179), Norton fails to give full weight to these Pyrrhonian contradictions.

4. The contrast I am drawing between theoretical and practical skepticism is seen in Hume's distinction between speculative and actional skepticism at the outset of Section XII of the Enquiry (E 148). This distinction is strongly grounded in both Hume scholarship and contemporary epistemology. See Richard Popkin, "The Skeptical Precursors of David Hume," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, (1955), pp. 61-71; "David Hume and the Pyrrhonian Controversy," Review of

Metaphysics, (1952), pp. 65-81; Robert Fogelin, Hume's Skepticism, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), p. 5; Arne Naess, Skepticism, (New York: Humanities Press, 1968), pp. 36-58.

5. Antony Flew, David Hume: Philosopher of Moral Science, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 113-118.

6. Robert Anderson makes this same point in Hume's First Principles, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press), p. 128.

7. "Hume's Theory of Imagination," G. Streminger, Hume Studies (1980), pp. 91-118.

8. Compare this division to George Stern's in his A Faculty Theory of Knowledge (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1971), p. 34. Stern errs by failing to note that the understanding (or reason) is a branch of the imagination.

9. Wolff construes these principles as "propensities to form propensities." "Hume's Theory of Mental Activity," Hume, ed. V.C. Chappell (Notre Dame: University Press, 1968), pp. 99-129.

10. The weak principle of resemblance noted here is what Hume calls a natural relation (or principle of association). This is to be distinguished from the strong principle of resemblance which is a philosophical relation (T 11-14). Informally, the difference is that of unconscious mental transitions versus conscious comparisons. For example, the natural relation of resemblance is used when the sight of Smith's Ford car has me think about my Ford car with no special conscious effort. On the other hand, the philosophical relation of resemblance is used when we quite consciously note that triangle A resembles triangle B insofar as both are right triangles. The natural relation of resemblance allows me, without any conscious effort, to unconsciously open any door, given that the door in question resembles doors that I know how to operate.

11. Other vulgar theories are those of ambition and self-love (E 271), pride and humility (T 323), calm and violent impressions (T 276), fortune (E 246), misfortune (T 370), mental limits of imagining minuteness and greatness (T 28) and vulgar opinion in general (T 175). Hume's

Natural History of Religion is an attempt to explain vulgar religion according to weak principles of the imagination, such as the propensity to anthropomorphize (NHR 29), and the propensity to adulation (NHR 44).

12. See Manfred Kuehn, "Hume's Antinomies," Hume Studies, (1983), p. 26.

13. A.J. Ayer, Hume, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1980), p. 20.

14. By "common life" (T 268) Hume does not mean 'vulgar views'. The latter refers to specific theories which are held popularly and uncritically, whereas the former refers to common experience or daily life unguided by specific theories. Donald Livingston builds Hume's entire philosophy around the concept of common life (or a narrative context) in his Hume's Philosophy of Common Life (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 34-59. On my interpretation, though, 'common life' is only one legitimate perspective of experience, and stands in contrast to a 'philosophical' perspective (see T 269-270; E 9).

15. John Passmore recognizes only one of these three contradictions -- the problem of induction -- in the conclusion to Book I; Hume's Intentions, (London: Duckworth, 1968). Surprisingly, he identifies this as antecedent skepticism, in the Cartesian manner, and not as Pyrrhonian or excessive consequential skepticism. My discussion which follows, though, clearly links the problem of induction with consequential skepticism.

16. This contradiction dominates the section of the Treatise entitled "Of skepticism with regard to reason" (T 180-187). By "reason", Hume means the understanding, and particularly that part of the understanding dedicated to a posteriori reasoning about matters of fact.

17. The details of Hume's problem of induction have been variously explored. Beauchamp and Rosenberg contest the standard interpretation that Hume is in fact presenting a skeptical view about induction; Hume and the Problem of Causation, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 33-79. See Fred Wilson's response to this view in "Hume's Skeptical Argument Against Reason," Hume Studies,

(1983), pp. 90-129. Wilson concludes that Hume's problem of induction remains a legitimate problem, in spite of Beauchamp's and Rosenberg's attempt to gloss over it, or Pritchard's attempt to refute it.

18. This is clearly evident in Hume's comment that, "I feel myself at present of a quite contrary sentiment, and am more inclin'd to repose no faith at all in my senses, or rather imagination..." (T 216; emphasis is mine). The context here clearly indicates that the term 'imagination' refers to the fancy (T 212, cf. 118 note).

19. John Bricke is one of few commentators who has recognized the fundamental contradiction that Hume exposes between causality and the belief in external objects; Hume's Philosophy of Mind, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 9. Bricke also notices that this contradiction is a problem within the imagination, but he, like Streminger, fails to trace the problem to the conflicting natural propensities.

20. For the best accounts of how moral sentiments are subsets of the passions, see Pall Ardal, Passion and Value in Hume's Treatise, (Edinburgh: University Press, 1966); "Another Look at Hume's Account of Moral Evaluation," Journal of the History of Philosophy, (1977), pp. 405-421; Alfred Glathe, Hume's Theory of the Passions and of Morals, (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1950).

21. Hume appears to argue that the conflict is between these two principles. I agree with Kemp Smith that Hume is not really arguing that these two principles are inconsistent; The Philosophy of David Hume, (London: Macmillan, 1941), p. 558. The problem Hume finds is that if either of these propositions could be proven false, then the natural inclination of the continuing self would not be opposed.

22. Hume's account of the indirect passions (which include the moral sentiments of pride, humility, love and hate) rely on an idea of oneself and the idea of someone else. Terence Penelhum notes this in his Hume, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1975), pp. 86-87. Further, since the object of all moral judgments is a durable mental quality

of the mind of the agent (T 575), such durability presupposes that the quality has identity.

23. When a spectator makes a moral judgment about an agent, he presupposes that the agent has external existence and assumes that there is a causal connection between the agent's motives and actions.

24. An additional propensity which is part of his moral theory is the reflective process by which we adjust differences in proximity (E 227, 228; T 583, 603). This propensity is probably a strong principle of the understanding, particularly the relation in time and place. For, the passages cited above make clear that this adjustment to proximity is necessary to "think or talk steadily on any subject." This accords well with Hume's description of strong principles as solid, permanent and consistent (T 226).

25. The types of Pyrrhonian objections which Hume looks at in the closing section of the Enquiry are outlined as follows:

    1. Arguments against the senses
        a) Trite topics from imperfection of organs
        b) Profound arguments
            (1) Realism vs. copy theory
            (2) Primary and secondary qualities

    2. Arguments against reason (or the understanding)
        a) Relations of ideas
            (1) Infinite divisibility of space
            (2) Infinite divisibility of time
        b) Matters of fact
            (1) Popular objections
            (2) Philosophical objections

26. Given Hume's often ambiguous treatment of religious issues, a full analysis of these religious contradictions is beyond the scope of this paper. Here, though, are the contradictions which stand out. In the Natural History of Religion, Hume notes that several vulgar propensities have us postulate an infinitely powerful creator, yet attribute to this creator human qualities and vulnerabilities -- a position he considers contradictory and absurd (NHR 45, cf. 54, 67). In the first Enquiry, Hume notes that

psychological determinism and the principle of sufficient reason imply that God is the ultimate origin of evil human actions; however, our ordinary concept of God entails goodness, which contradicts the idea of an evil God (E 103). Also, the irrationality of belief in miracles contrasts with the common life necessity to believe in miracles as a matter of piety (E 131).

27. See Kemp Smith and Donald Livingston cited above.