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Wayne Waxman

In *Treatise 1*, Hume was serenely confident that all problems touching on perceptions and their relations admit of a complete and satisfactory resolution:

Having found such contradictions and difficulties in every system concerning external objects, and in the idea of matter, which we fancy so clear and determinate, we shall naturally expect still greater difficulties and contradictions in every hypothesis concerning our internal perceptions, and the nature of the mind, which we are apt to imagine so much more obscure, and uncertain. But in this we shou'd deceive ourselves. The intellectual world, tho' involv'd in infinite obscurities, is not perplex'd with any such contradictions, as those we have discover'd in the natural. What is known concerning it, agrees with itself; and what is unknown, we must be contented to leave so.¹

However, in an appendix published together with *Treatise 3* (which appeared nearly two years after the first two books were published), Hume avowed that this confidence had been misplaced:

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. (T 633)

Why this change of mind? Hume had not ceased to think that perceptions are distinct existences, in need of no substrate to support their existence. Nor had he come to believe that there is some impression from which the idea of the self (person, mind) might be copied: still finding in what he calls *himself* nothing besides particular perceptions (colours, sounds, pains, emotions, et al.), his view remained

that, " 'Tis the composition of these, therefore, which forms the self" (T 634). Thus, just as in *Treatise* 1.4.6, he saw no alternative to the conclusion that "We only *feel* a connexion or a determination of the thought, to pass from one object to another. It follows, therefore, that the thought alone finds personal identity, when reflecting on the train of past perceptions, that compose a mind, the ideas of them are felt to be connected together, and naturally introduce each other. ... [P]ersonal identity *arises* from consciousness; and consciousness is nothing but a reflected thought or perception" (T 635).

Since Hume saw no flaw in his earlier account of personal identity nor any tenable alternative to it, what reason can he have had to retract it? He described his quandary as follows:

having thus loosen'd all our particular perceptions, when I proceed to explain the principle of connexion, which binds them together, and makes us attribute to them a real simplicity and identity; I am sensible, that my account is very defective, and that nothing but the seeming evidence of the precedent reasonings cou'd have induc'd me to receive it. ... [A]ll my hopes vanish, when I come to explain the principles, that unite our successive perceptions in our thought or consciousness. I cannot discover any theory, which gives me satisfaction on this head.

In short there are two principles, which I cannot render consistent; nor is it in my power to renounce either of them, viz. *that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences*, and *that the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences*. Did our perceptions either inhere in something simple and individual, or did the mind perceive some real connexion among them, there wou'd be no difficulty in the case. For my part, I must plead the privilege of a sceptic, and confess, that this difficulty is too hard for my understanding. I pretend not, however, to pronounce it absolutely insuperable. Others, perhaps, or myself, upon more mature reflection, may discover some hypothesis, that will reconcile those contradictions. (T 635-36)

Hume's account of his difficulty has been the occasion of much dispute among commentators. One point on which all seem to agree, however, is that Hume's two principles are not inconsistent with *one another*,² but with some *third principle* equally impossible for him to renounce. Opinions vary as to just what this third principle is.³ According to Kemp Smith, "Hume must have meant that the two principles cannot be rendered consistent with what has yet to be allowed as actually

occurring, namely, the awareness of personal identity." Insofar as this is correct, it is trivial and unhelpful: surely it goes without saying that there is *something involved* in the awareness of the self with which the two principles are inconsistent! The question is, *what?* Is it something in Hume's account of the awareness of the self *as such* (T 260-61), as Kemp Smith seems to suggest? Yet, Hume gives every appearance of having found no fault with the account given in *Treatise* 1.4.6 in his review of it in the appendix, and Kemp Smith gives us no reason to think otherwise;⁴ his proposal thus gets us nowhere. According to Passmore, the third principle with which the other two are inconsistent is "that the mind perceives a real connexion among our perceptions." Logically, this is of course true; but since it is a principle Hume would not have hesitated to renounce, Passmore's explanation is even less illuminating than Kemp Smith's (Hume did at least acknowledge that the awareness of personal identity actually occurs, but nowhere does his account of it in *Treatise* 1.4.6 presuppose that the mind perceives real connections among distinct perceptions). According to Flage, the first principle "is inconsistent with the belief that the mind is simple," and since the second principle "is nothing but an epistemic corollary" of the first, the same is true of it. Yet, while it is true that the recognition that "the true idea of the human mind" is a complex idea is everywhere in evidence in *Treatise* 1.4, this did not stop him from supposing that we naturally *believe* in the simplicity of the mind just as we believe in its identity.⁵ So, if the distinctness of perceptions did not stop Hume from ascribing to us a natural belief in the simplicity of the mind in *Treatise* 1.4, it seems highly unlikely that it was an incompatibility between them that troubled him in the appendix.⁶

Although many similar analyses of Hume's quandary in the appendix might be considered, all seem to me to commit a single, fundamental mistake: they presume that the fault Hume found lay in his account of the origin *specifically* of the idea of the self, while ignoring the possibility that it might lie deeper, in something presupposed not simply by this but by *any* account of the origin of ideas relying on association in imagination. The problem with this assumption, and the main reason Hume's appendix continues to mystify and vex interpreters, is that it quite clearly flies in the face of Hume's steadfast adherence in the appendix both to the *Treatise* 1 account of "imperfect" identity in general (the result of the conflating by imagination of its feeling when contemplating a succession of uniformly *related* ideas with that in contemplating a succession of resembling *ideas* [= perfect identity]—see T 203ff., 254ff.) and to its account of the identity of the mind in particular (where the uniform relations in question are the *resemblances* and *causal connections* between impressions and ideas—see T 260).⁷ Since Hume clearly found impeccable his earlier

reasoning that personal identity “arises from consciousness; and consciousness is nothing but a reflected thought or perception,” there seems no alternative but to suppose that his difficulty lay in something *presupposed* by this reasoning. The most likely culprit, it seems to me, is *retentive memory*; that is, the consciousness of perceptual succession itself, presupposed for the imagination to associate perceptions in relations of resemblance and causation. For if, for whatever reason, Hume came to the realization that he could furnish no warrant for the principle that we retain our successive perceptions consistent with his two principles, then quite clearly it would have obliged him to admit that the intellectual world is not in fact “free from those contradictions, and absurdities, which seem to attend every explication, that human reason can give of the material world.”

A consideration of the appendix with this possibility in mind reveals considerable evidence that retentive memory was indeed the focus of his concern:

i) If the difficulty lay where most interpreters place it (that is, in personal identity proper and not some presupposition), the problematic succession of T 636 would have to consist of perceptions *already* associated in relations of resemblance and cause and effect. Since such association requires consciousness of the constant conjunction of the perceptions concerned, this thesis assumes that Hume saw no difficulty in explaining the principles whereby we unite a *bare* succession of perceptions in our thought or consciousness *before* association takes place. Yet, if no problem arises here, it is difficult to see how one might arise when it comes to uniting these perceptions in an identical self *after* they become associated as “a system of different perceptions or difference existences, which are link’d together by the relations of cause and effect” (T 261). That is, since to the idea of this system of relations the only thing necessary to add for personal identity is the (perfect) identity-like feeling in contemplating it, it seems clear that this system was not the focus of Hume’s quandary.

ii) It is noteworthy that Hume confessed to being unable to explain the principles that unite our successive perceptions not in the *mind* (person, self)⁸ but in “our *thought or consciousness*”—a phrase which may very well refer not to the explanandum (the mind) but to the explanans (associative imagination). Nor did he once mention *related* (associated) successive perceptions; on the contrary, he spoke of “our *particular* perceptions” and attributed his quandary to “having thus *loosen’d*” them from their bonds. It was “the principle of connexion, which binds them together” that defied explanation. In the *Treatise* 1.4.6 account, he made a quite explicit choice: he denied that “something ... really binds our several perceptions together” and affirmed that their connection is a mere “union in the imagination” in

accordance with "the uniting principles in the ideal world" (T 259-60). In the appendix, where he saw no way to explain retentive memory in terms merely of *ideal* connections, his two unrenouncable principles prevented him from affirming the existence of any *real* principle of connection either (inherence or cause and effect); he was thus left without any kind of principle of relation by which to explain how *distinct* (that is, *yet to be related*) *successive* perceptions can coexist in consciousness.⁹

Retention is required to account for the *compresence* of *distinct successive* perceptions in consciousness: if we failed to retain the impressions we were having a moment ago, then we could never associate them with those we are having now, and so could never feel that ease of transition from one perception to its successor which forms the heart of Hume's account of both causal relations and identity. Yet, because association presupposes retention, "the uniting principles in the ideal world" (T 260) are of no help at all when it comes to explaining retention itself.¹⁰ Only principles of the *real* world beyond that of imagination are capable of explaining retention. However, their use to explain retention was precluded by Hume's two unrenouncable principles. For had it been open to him to posit a perduring substance in which successive perceptions might inhere—a kind of perception catch-basin—there would have been no difficulty in the matter: the imagination could then reflect on the perceptions of different times, establish uniform relations among them, and then feel the smooth, regular transitions thus occasioned. But the distinct existence of every perception mandated by Hume's first principle is incompatible with their inherence in a substance (see T 207, 233-34, 244, 252). Similarly, had it been open to him to suppose that we can perceive real connections among distinct existences, then the perceiver could simply "read off," merely by inspecting the *present* contents of consciousness, which perceptions had preceded them, which in turn preceded these, etc. (that is, the immediate perception of the causes and effects of present perceptions). So, even if our entire existence were encompassed in a single instant, it would be possible in this way to grasp in a flash the whole of past time merely by inspecting the perceptions presently before us. Moreover, by leaving the stamp of our own fleeting existence on what we perceive (that is, a perception of our perceiving), a succession of entities like ourselves might conceivably yield the same result as a single, continuous conscious existence (that is, we could not tell which sort of entity we were—the last in a long line of momentary percipients or "something simple and individual"). Yet, while this hypothesis does away with the need for an imperceptible perduring perception catch-basin, it contradicts the other principle Hume could

not renounce: "the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences."¹¹

It is little wonder that Hume found "this difficulty ... too hard for my understanding," and pleaded "the privilege of a sceptic" (T 636), "to entertain a diffidence and modesty in all my decisions." He saw no alternative to affirming "the strict and proper identity and simplicity of a self or thinking being" (T 633); yet, since his own principles precluded the possibility of acquiring an idea of such a thing (substance), he could not do so even if he would. Of course, in the view of some, he did so nevertheless, whether he realized it or not. This position has never been advanced more forcefully or cogently than by Passmore:

There is one further difficulty, which is not, however, internal to his analysis of causality; it consists in the incompatibility of that analysis with his subsequent account of personal identity. Throughout Hume's causal theory, he assumes a self over and above the order of our perceptions ... It is not enough to say that there is first of all the impression C, then the impressions of necessity N, then a vivid idea of E, because for one thing, there would then be a simple sequence of perceptions and no way of apprehending, or supposing, a connexion *between* C and E, and, for another thing, Hume wants to explain the *origin* of N. This he can only do by assuming the persistence of a mind which can be affected by the occurrence, on quite distinct occasions, of a C followed by an E. And when he goes on to describe the mind's propensity 'to spread itself on external objects and to conjoin with them any internal impressions which they occasion', he assumes that we can distinguish three things—'external' objects, 'internal' impressions, and a mind to which this externality and internality are relative, and which confuses one with the other.¹²

Such an assessment seems to me only as credible as one's opinion of Hume's philosophical self-awareness is low (it was Passmore, after all, who described Hume as "a philosophical puppy-dog, picking up and worrying one problem after another, always leaving his teeth-marks in it, but casting it aside when it threatened to become wearisome").¹³ For if the presence of such a mind in his account of causality is obvious to us, dare we risk assuming that it was not so to Hume as well? There is nothing to prevent one from supposing him to have been such a creature of impulse as not to have the least notion where the pen with which he wrote parts 1-3 would take him, and that, once having composed

Treatise 1.4.6, he was too lazy or unconcerned to bother to render the rest consistent with it. But this seems to me no more true of the Hume of the *Philosophical Works* than the Hume of the *Histories, Essays*, and other writings. Indeed, he strikes me as more the master of his philosophical house than most other philosophers, and certainly more so than any of his interpreters (myself included); so, in the absence of powerful evidence to the contrary, I cannot bring myself to believe him blind to so manifest an inconsistency.

The alternative to Passmore's view is that the inconsistency in question was quite deliberate: that is, that Hume's plan required him to defer that moment when he would subordinate the human mind itself to principles of associative imagination to the very end, so as not to instigate prematurely the vertiginous descent into sceptical despair that marks the concluding section of *Treatise* 1. To see how this can be, we need to distinguish two distinct strands of explanation running side-by-side throughout *Treatise* 1. One is indicated by the work's subtitle: "An Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects." The experimental method is the method of causal explanation. It predominates through much of the *Treatise*, even in the account of the relation of cause and effect itself in *Treatise* 1.3.¹⁴ On the other hand, Hume placed at least as much confidence in the verdicts of immediate consciousness: reports bearing on the objects "immediately present to us by consciousness," and which "command our strongest assent" (T 212). Now, Passmore's complaint is that Hume presupposes the mind in his accounts of both causality and identity. This is true. The question, however, is whether this was illegitimate. I think not. We begin to recognize the immense care with which Hume crafted the *Treatise* when we recall that, in part 3, he kept scrupulously out of account the very causal relations of which the mind is constituted: "Our impressions give rise to their correspondent ideas; and these ideas in their turn produce other impressions" (T 261; see also T 4-5, 8). The mind, together with the system of causal relations that constitute it, is presupposed throughout part 3, where Hume's avowed purpose was to give an *empirical/causal* explanation of both our particular causal inferences and the general causal maxim. But one cannot infer from this failure to apply his general account of cause and effect to these causal relations *in part 3* that he meant to exempt the latter from that account *altogether*, much less that he was unaware of their being causal relations in the first place (T 261 shows that this was not the case); it implies only that he did not *there* wish to confront the problems its application would raise. The intention to postpone the moment of reckoning is also evident in *Treatise* 1.4. Here, too, it was Hume's aim to present an *empirical/causal* explanation—this time of identity relations. But instead of starting with personal identity where

the issue would come to a head too early, he chose to begin with that of bodies. This in itself is not surprising: Locke followed the same procedure. It only becomes so if one accepts that the identity of mind is presupposed by that of bodies, other minds, substances; that is, the whole world external to the individual mind, as I believe.¹⁵ But even then the surprise does not last: by presupposing the mind—that “system of different perceptions or different existences, which are link’d together by the relation of cause and effect” (T 261)—in accounting for all *other* forms of identity, he could postpone the time of reckoning with the problems implicit in accounting for the causal relations that constitute the mind itself until the very last.

When the reckoning finally came, in *Treatise* 1.4.6, a clear choice confronted Hume and he made it: the “system of different perceptions ... link’d together by the relation of cause and effect” is comprised entirely of associations—unions of ideas in imagination belonging not to the real but “the ideal world” (T 260). So who—or what—observes all this and makes these connections? Hume’s position is again quite clear: we must remain silent; our powers of reason simply do not equip us to explain this. We can, if we like, try to penetrate its “infinite obscurities” (T 232) and “run into the notion of a *soul*, and *self*, and *substance*” (T 254). But such endeavours prove futile:

We have no perfect idea of any thing but of a perception. A substance is entirely different from a perception. We have, therefore, no idea of a substance. Inhesion in something is suppos’d to be requisite to support the existence of our perceptions. Nothing appears requisite to support the existence of a perception. We have, therefore, no idea of inhesion. (T 234)

The import of this passage, and others like it, is that Hume was quite willing to jettison the supposition of a mind when it comes to considerations bearing on *perceptions themselves as such*. Their priority with respect even to mind itself could not have been made more explicit.

what we call a *mind*, is nothing but a heap or collection of different perceptions, united together by certain relations, and suppos’d, tho’ falsly, to be endow’d with a perfect simplicity and identity. Now as every perception is distinguishable from another, and may be consider’d as separately existent; it evidently follows, that there is no absurdity in separating any particular perception from the mind; that is, in breaking off

all its relations, with that connected mass of perceptions, which constitute a thinking being. (T 207)

The upshot of this is that causal explanation (implying necessary connection) is no longer possible when one withdraws to the point before our successive perceptions have been related by imagination to form "that connected mass of perceptions which constitute a thinking being." Yet, to concede that causal relation is no longer possible is, from Hume's perspective, tantamount to saying there can be no explanation at all. If we try to go further, our words outrun our ideas; we grope, invent principles whose meaning we do not really know, and to no purpose but to blind ourselves with our own smoke and mirrors. Recognition of the limits of causal explanation

not only cuts off all hope of ever attaining satisfaction, but even prevents our very wishes; since it appears, that when we say we desire to know the ultimate and operating principle, as something, which resides in the external object, we either contradict ourselves, or talk without a meaning. (T 266-67)

We have no alternative but to resist the urge to speculation and accept that the ultimate sources and operating principles of that succession of perception which constitutes the "raw material" of associative imagination are veiled in impenetrable obscurity.

The suggestion that Hume planned *Treatise* 1 so as to conclude it with the subordination of the mind of his own theory of ideas to his imagination-based scepticism may not convince everyone, but at least it represents an alternative to viewing him as a heedless puppy-dog. Indeed, if correct, Hume deserves to be counted among the most penetrating, meticulous, and systematic-minded of philosophers. Yet, it is not quite the whole story. Hume explained necessary connections entirely in terms of imagination and its feelings: a reflexive impression comprised of feelings of facility (in the transition from one perception to its successor) and vivacity (if one of the perceptions is an idea and the other an impression). This makes it possible to understand causal relations—or, rather, the customs of which they consist—in two quite different ways: from a *causal* point of view as the effect of the observation of constant precedence; or from an *introspective* viewpoint as a transition of thought imbued with the aforementioned feelings. Here one should be careful to remark that the second (which is an analysis of content, not a causal explanation) is independent of the first. In other words, the first could be false in every respect and there still be ideas of causal relations, and this would be so even if one lacked any memory of constant precedence (just as someone who had never been

exposed to light might be given a sensation of red by using a probe to stimulate certain nerve cells in the appropriate way). Since everything Passmore criticized in Hume's account of causal relations is comprised within the causal explanation (including the mind supposed to have the repeated observations and memories of constant precedence relations), Hume's independent introspective account left him a way out. For he could say to his critic: "according to my analysis of the idea of cause and effect, its sole contents are the immediately perceptible relation of temporal succession and the phenomenological feelings of vivacity and ease of transition; how causal relations arise I have explained so far as experience (= causal explanation) can warrant; beyond that I *will* not go, for I *cannot*, as there is no possible warrant other than experience; I must therefore plead the privilege of the sceptic."

However, such a response to Passmore's criticism contains a flaw which Hume failed to remark before the first book of the *Treatise* went to press: the observation of temporal contiguity implies consciousness of perceptual succession, and so presupposes "principles, that unite our successive perceptions in our thought or consciousness" (T 636). Being unable to account for retention by either ideal or real principles of connection, Hume found himself "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" (T 633). "I pretend not, however, to pronounce it absolutely insuperable" (T 636). That he still believed it possible that "[o]thers, perhaps, or myself, upon more mature reflection, may discover some hypothesis, that will reconcile those contradictions" (T 636), raises the intriguing question of what such a hypothesis might be. If indeed it is correct that "the third principle" irreconcilable with the two Hume stated and refused to renounce is that perceptions exist in actual (that is, pre-imaginative) succession, then the obvious hypothesis is that this principle is false. Plainly, adherence to all three principles leads to an impossible quandary: one cannot possibly hope to explain the consciousness of non-simultaneous perceptions if one, at the same time, affirms that perceptions are distinct existences and that we are incapable of perceiving real connections between distinct existences. Had Hume been content to renounce the principle that perceptions enter consciousness in actual succession to one another, then the impulse to posit real connections between distinct existences or deny the distinct existence of perceptions—in short, the urge to resort to metaphysics—could be squelched. Whether in fact he considered doing without this principle, or, if he did, whether he found himself without the philosophical means to consign perceptual succession to the status of a vulgar fiction, cannot be determined. All one can say is that, had he been able to do so, he not

only could have retained his two principles but kept the rest of his theory of understanding (causality and identity) intact as well.¹⁶

Our question thus becomes the following: could Hume, had he so wished, explain perceptual succession as a fiction without thereby transforming his philosophy beyond recognition? He seems to have been willing to go so far as to treat the relation of idea-copies to impression-originals as fictitious (T 260-61); and his assertion in the concluding section of *Treatise* 1 that "that succession of perceptions, which constitutes our self or person," is so dependent on "the imagination, or the vivacity of our ideas," that, without it, "we cou'd only admit of those perceptions, which are immediately present to our consciousness, nor cou'd those lively images, with which the memory presents us, be ever receiv'd as true pictures of past perceptions" (T 265), suggests that, for him, our *consciousness* of perceptual succession too is a product of idea-enlivening imagination (see also T 427ff.). Yet, the very terms in which he formulated the problem concerning personal identity in the appendix—the inability "to explain the principles, that unite our *successive* perceptions in our thought or consciousness" (T 636, emphasis added)—indicates that he never thought to question the reality of perceptual succession *itself*. So why did he balk at saying the idea of *succession itself* has the status of fiction? One possibility is that he deemed the idea of succession a copy of some impression—a Humean version of the specious present. But this suggestion creates more problems than it solves;¹⁷ and in any case, it still leaves us no way of accounting for the presence in "our thought or consciousness" of those perceptions which precede and are subsequent to the specious present (we would have to have the specious present of gods—encompassing a great span of time all at once—for this to work).

So, if not the specious present, what was it that prevented Hume from ascribing succession to imagination? It may be that he never considered this possibility. Yet, this I doubt. Philosophers before him saw fit to deny (ultimate) reality to perceptual succession (for example, Leibniz), while others who did not, still saw fit to treat it as a merely relative phenomenon (for example, Berkeley).¹⁸ Since speculation about succession was clearly rife at that time, it does not seem too far-fetched to suppose that Hume would have seriously considered denying its reality, as one possible way of resolving his quandary, before publicly confessing "that this difficulty is too hard for my understanding." So, if he did not, it is more probably because he either would not or could not do so. That he *would* not does not seem likely: a philosopher willing to consign causality, mind, body, and substance to the purgatory of fictions of vulgar imagination can hardly be thought too timid to do the same to succession. Accordingly, the more probable

reason for Hume's failure to treat it as a fiction was that his conception of "imagination, or the vivacity of our ideas" was inadequate to the task. One can only speculate as to why. Most likely, it was a consequence of his espousal of Locke's theory of succession and duration (see T 35ff.). For this makes it impossible to understand how one could *perceive* change unless there were a *real* change in one's perceptions; and how can perceptions be supposed to *change* except by successors replacing predecessors? If this supposition is correct, then we must indeed look elsewhere than to Hume for "some hypothesis, that will reconcile those contradictions": since the issue turns on what *precedes* and *makes possible* the consciousness of perceptual succession, an empiricist is in no position to answer it.

Although probably coincidental, it comes as no surprise that the only philosopher to offer such a hypothesis was the one thinker who, in my view, fully and accurately appreciated the nature and magnitude of Hume's philosophical achievement: Kant. He applied his transcendental idealism/empirical realism regarding time to the very question we have been considering:

Against this theory, which admits the empirical reality of time but contests its absolute and transcendental reality, I have heard men of insight so unanimously voicing an objection that I must suppose that it naturally occurs to every reader to whom these considerations are unfamiliar. It runs as follows: alterations are real (as the change of our own representations proves, even if one were to deny [the reality of] all external appearances and their alterations). Now, alterations are possible only in time; consequently, time is something real. There is no difficulty in the response. I concede the whole argument. Time is of course something real, namely, the real form of inner intuition. It thus has subjective reality with respect to inner experience, that is, I really have the representation of time and of my determinations in it. Time is thus real not as an object but as the representation of myself as an object. If, however, I, or some being other than myself, could intuit me apart from this condition of sensibility, then these very same determinations which we now represent to ourselves as alterations would yield a cognition in which neither the representation of time nor, therefore, that of alteration would not occur at all. Time thus retains its empirical reality as a condition of all our experiences. But absolute reality, on our analysis, cannot be attributed to it ... I can indeed say: my representations succeed one another; but this means only that we are conscious of them as being in a

time-sequence, that is, according to the form of inner sense. Time is therefore not something in itself, nor a determination objectively dependent on things.¹⁹

As I interpret Kant, his meaning is the following. While we are indeed *really* conscious of our perceptions as a succession, this consciousness is conditioned by time, our form of intuition. Time is not, however, a condition of *representations themselves* but only of our capacity to become *conscious* of them *as* successive.²⁰ That is, representations are not *intrinsically* successive (successive "in themselves"), and so do not, in any absolute sense, really change. It is only insofar as they have been brought to consciousness (apprehended) that they are *perceived* as successive; and such perception can occur only insofar as the perceiver happens to be so constituted that the form in accordance with which such consciousness is possible is time (as in humans). That is, while it is indeed possible to become conscious of representations other than as successive, their succession is still merely a *representation*, incapable of existence outside or independently of the form determinative of the consciousness to which it thus appears, that is, time. Now, this consciousness is, like any perception, dependent on a synthesis; and since, for Kant, all synthesis is the doing of imagination, it follows that "imagination is a necessary constituent of perception itself."²¹ Thus, Kant held succession to be a product of imagination and time the form of its synthesis (that is, that which permits the imagination to order perceptions in such a way as to yield the *appearance* of a succession).²²

Transcendental idealism thus put Kant in a position safely to endorse Hume's two fundamental principles: that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and that the mind never perceives any real connection among distinct existences. For with absolute reality denied to perceptual succession, he could explain it without resorting to a real (substantial) unity of perceptions (that is, a perception catch-basin).²³ Nor did he have need to resort to real connections between distinct perceptions: their connections, like the perceptions themselves, can exist only as representations of (transcendental) imagination. Thus, transcendental idealism opened the way to a new, transcendental explanation of the identity of consciousness: a purely *formal* unity in the synthesis of representations (hence laws), a *universal* self-consciousness *common* to every possible empirical consciousness (hence universals), and a numerical identity throughout all perception (hence personal and physical identity). What Hume would have thought of this solution is, of course, a matter for conjecture.

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1. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2d ed., rev., ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1987), 232 (hereafter cited as "T").
2. See, e.g., Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume* (London, 1941), 558; also John Passmore, *Hume's Intentions*, 3d ed. (1952; London, 1980), 83; Barry Stroud, *Hume* (London, 1977), 127ff.; John Bricke, *Hume's Philosophy of Mind* (Princeton, 1980), 97-98; Robert Fogelin, *Hume's Skepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature* (London, 1985), 100ff.; and Daniel Flage, *David Hume's Theory of Mind* (London, 1990), 146-47. The citations that follow are from these authors unless otherwise indicated.
3. Not surprisingly, most commentators identify a third principle that amounts to a belated recognition by Hume of the truth of the commentator's own criticism of *Treatise* 1.4.6—a pat on the head for both Hume and the commentator.
4. E.g.: "So far I seem to be attended with sufficient evidence ... Most philosophers seem inclin'd to think, that personal identity *arises* from consciousness; and consciousness is nothing but a reflected thought or perception. The present philosophy, therefore, has so far a promising aspect" (T 635). If the problem lay in Hume's analysis of the idea of the self, could he have said this? I think not.
5. The same point might be rephrased thus: on the one hand, Hume cannot be said to have believed either in the simplicity or the identity of the mind if by 'believe' we mean 'conform to the dictates of reason' (= reasoning in conformity with cause and effect speaks directly against such identity and simplicity—see T 231); on the other hand, the imagination has a strong, indeed irresistible, propensity to believe both.
6. If, instead, it was not belief in simplicity that Flage thinks Hume found incompatible with the first principle but the metaphysical reality thereof, then this seems clearly false. For just as in the case of Passmore's candidate third principle, Hume would not have hesitated to deny a third principle to the effect that the mind is a metaphysically simple entity: "no proposition can be intelligible or consistent with regard to objects, which is not so with regard to perceptions. But 'tis intelligible and consistent to say, that objects exist distinct and independent, without any common *simple* substance or subject of inhesion. This proposition, therefore, can never be absurd with regard to perceptions" (T 634). Short of a wholesale abandonment (of which there is no evidence here or in the *Enquiry*) of such basic tenets of his philosophy as the derivation of every idea from a precedent impression, nothing could have made Hume hesitate to reject the thesis of metaphysical simplicity: for how, even if he would, could he believe something he held it to

be impossible even to conceive? (E.g.: "our belief, however faint, fixes itself on a determinate object" [T 140]; "we can never have reason to believe that any object exists, of which we cannot form an idea" [T 172].) Nor is Flage correct to say that the second principle is simply a corollary of the first: the mind might still perceive real connections among distinct existences *other* than perceptions. The missing premise is that perceptions are the *only* objects perceived by the mind. This is not a merely trivial point: one cannot simply assert that everything which appears to the mind is in all respects what it appears to be, and appears to be everything that it is (a criterion for designating something a perception—see T 190).

7. In fact, so far as one can tell, Hume seems to have stood by his account of the contents of the idea of mind ever after. In the *Abstract* (published around the same time as *Treatise* 3), the *Treatise* 1.4.6 analysis is reaffirmed without qualification or qualm (see T 657). In the *Enquiry*, he in effect re-endorsed the conception of mind as a system of perceptions linked by causal relations: impressions of sense give rise to ideas of sense which in turn produce impressions of reflexion, while customs formed at one stage in a mind's history continue to influence subsequent generations of its perceptions (see section 3, Hendel edition [Can this text be the source of Kant's comparison of the unity of apperception to a theme in a play, speech, or story? See Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Hamburg, 1956), B114 and B131.]). The *Enquiry* differs from the *Treatise* only to the extent that the question of the source of our idea of the mind is never actually posed, and the imaginary character of these causal relations never made explicit. Finally, in the *Dialogues*, Demea asks, "What is the soul of man? A composition of various faculties, passions, sentiments, ideas; united, indeed, into one self or person, but still distinct from each other. ... New opinions, new passions, new affections, new feelings arise, which continually diversify the mental scene, and produce in it the greatest variety, and most rapid succession imaginable" (David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* [Indianapolis, 1980], sec. 4, pp. 27ff.): the resemblance between this and T 252f. hardly needs remarking.
8. I take 'mind', 'self', and 'person' to have been equivalent for Hume: *Treatise* 1.4.6 is entitled "Of personal identity"; it poses the problem in reference to the self (T 251-52), and solves it with an account of "the true idea of the human mind" (T 261).
9. Nor is there any reason to doubt that this problem could not be extended to all other identities as well: since the identities of continued, distinct existences likewise presuppose the

contemplation of a succession of uniformly related perceptions, their explanation also requires us "to explain the principles, that unite our successive perceptions in our thought or consciousness." Why should Hume have singled out personal identity? Perhaps because all other (imperfect) identities presuppose that of the mind (see n. 15, below).

10. In Bricke's view (above, n. 2), Hume's associationalism was the source of his doubts in the appendix: he came to see that it could not satisfactorily explain the plain man's beliefs regarding personal identity (pp. 96-97). Yet, if this were so, why did Hume display undiminished enthusiasm for associationalism in the *Abstract* and the *Enquiry*, while at the same time virtually ignoring identity entirely? It is also somewhat disingenuous on Bricke's part to say the Hume's "own words are quite clear," since as he himself admits, shortly afterwards, "he does not tell us his reasons for this assessment." Indeed, far from mentioning the common man in the appendix, Hume focused his attention on such arcane, quintessentially philosophical concerns as "something simple and individual" in which perceptions inhere (i.e., immaterial substance) and whether the mind ever perceives real connections between distinct existences; surely these are no more concerns of the common man than that, in perceiving one billiard ball converging upon another, his only experience of their connection are converging colour patches and a loud "crack!". Hume's problem seems not to be with associationalism *per se* (i.e., how successive perceptions come to be associated), but with how successive perceptions can, in the first place, be united in our "thought or consciousness" and so *become available* for association.
11. Swain defends the intriguing thesis that, "The labyrinth of contradictions in which Hume finds himself in the Appendix is not a labyrinth he gets into upon *accepting* his own account of personal identity, but rather a labyrinth he finds himself in without that account" (Corliss G. Swain, "Being Sure of One's Self: Hume on Personal Identity," *Hume Studies* 17, no. 2 [November 1991]: 108). However, (I) as Swain admits (see p. 120 n. 7), this reading requires us to take many of Hume's statements at something less than their face value. For example, the "former opinions" Hume confessed himself to be able neither to correct nor render consistent (T 633) must be supposed to refer to "pre-theoretical opinions" such as the vulgar view "that a table could remain the same table even if someone painted it a different colour and that a person could remain the same person even though she had new experiences and ideas" (p. 117), i.e., topics discussed in sections 2-5 of *Treatise* 1.4. Yet, the phrase at the beginning of this sentence—"upon a more

strict review of the section concerning personal identity"—leaves little doubt that, a) the "former opinions" in question are those expressed in *Treatise* 1.4.6 (specifically, the portion detailing Hume's own account of personal identity, beginning on T 260—as his note on T 635 confirms); and, b) *these* are the opinions that a stricter review *subsequent* to the publication of *Treatise* 1 has found to be wanting. (II) Swain does not pay sufficient heed to the possibility of reading T 635-36 as referring to Hume's own account of personal identity. There, after recapitulating the view advanced on T 260-61, that the source of our idea of the self is reflective imagination (i.e., not relations *observed* to hold between perceptions themselves, but relations *felt* to hold in the "thought or consciousness" which contemplates them, i.e., association by resemblance and cause in effect—see T 260-61), Hume confesses that the "promising aspect" of *this* (his own) account of personal identity is ruined when ("upon a more strict review") he comes "to explain the principles, that unite our successive perceptions in our thought or consciousness." There are two things in this last, critical phrase that are overlooked in Swain's account: a) neither in citing, paraphrasing, nor analyzing it does Swain remark the occurrence of the word 'successive'; and, b) never once does Swain consider the possibility that "thought or consciousness" may refer not to the self (the explanandum) but to the associative imagination (the explanans). Yet, surely, if there is any sense in which the *Treatise* 1 account may be deemed defective it is its neglect of the fact that imagination can only associate successive ideas if it itself is extended in time. That is, i) the thesis that the idea of the self is acquired from relations of resemblance and cause and effect felt by consciousness between *successive* perceptions entails that this consciousness *endures* through time; and, ii) no *perception* can be equated with this enduring consciousness since perceptions are temporal minima (i.e., since the perceptions of now and an instant previous are distinguishable, they are, for Hume, distinct; also, since perceptions are objects of immediate consciousness [see T 212; also T 188-89], the fact that we cannot immediately perceive the past implies that an enduring consciousness is not perceivable); hence, Hume's *Treatise* 1 account implicitly assumes an imperceptible, enduring "thought or consciousness" in which successive perceptions inhere—i.e., a mind-substance. As this obviously violates Hume's first principle, and since the only evident alternative to it—the ability to read off the predecessors of present perceptions directly from these perceptions themselves—violates the second, he had to abandon his earlier optimistic assessment of the intellectual world on T 232. I therefore

can agree with Swain only to this extent: the upshot of the appendix is an even firmer conviction on Hume's part that the only tenable attitude towards the mind is a sceptical one.

12. Passmore (above, n. 2), 77-78. Penelhum offers an interesting response to Passmore: "We can dismiss the suggestion that Hume is committed by his procedure to the existence of the substantial self of his opponents. That could only be shown if it could be proved that only a self of that kind could perform the functions that Hume has to ascribe to us ... Hume tells us that the mind is nothing but a bundle or collection of perceptions; so that any apprehensions of the kind Hume's account needs will have, in their turn, to be ... merely additional perceptions in the bundle. So Hume's psychological task becomes that of showing how it is that the sequence of perceptions that I have comes to include within it mistaken judgements about a supposed unity that the series possesses. This task he attempts to fulfil by claiming that such mistaken-judgement perceptions are the outcome of other perceptions in the series, which are in their turn mistaken apprehensions of the nature of other sequences, that is apprehensions of them as identical when they are diverse ... I rest content here with the insistence that Hume can only be shown to be guilty of incoherence on this matter if it can be shown that the ascription of mental acts to perceptions is unintelligible" (Terence Penelhum, *Hume* [New York, 1975], 85-86). However, I do not find this a convincing response to Passmore's criticism; if Penelhum's bundle did not temporally persist, it could not recognize constant conjunctions and so discover itself to be "a system of different perceptions ... which are link'd together by the relation of cause and effect"; yet, if it does persist, then it is substantial; i.e., either it or the perceptions in it seem to require a real, not merely an ideal, identity, to explain their unity in our thought or consciousness.
13. Passmore (above, n. 2), 87-88.
14. E.g., the presence of one perception *causes* the mind to think of another associated with it; if that perception is an impression, the *effect* is that we conceive its associate in a lively manner; such customary associations themselves *depend on* the observed constant conjunction of the perceptions concerned; etc. These explanations are one and all empirical and causal, i.e., connections inferred on the basis of observed constant conjunction.
15. I cannot develop this view in detail here. It rests on two principal considerations: i) Hume claimed that "if the senses presented our impressions as external to, and independent of ourselves, both the objects and ourselves must be obvious to our senses, otherwise they

cou'd not be compar'd by these faculties. The difficulty, then, is how far we are *ourselves* the objects of our senses" (T 189). I see no reason why this claim should be confined to the senses and not extended to the imagination: if a comparison with the self is necessary in the one case, why should it not be in the other? ii) The reason why it is necessary at all, it seems to me, was Hume's commitment to Locke's theory of succession and duration (see T 35ff.). In explicating the identity relation in terms of the fiction of an unchangeable object, Hume referred us back to this theory (see T 200n), and it is very unfortunate that so few commentators have seen fit to scrutinize the one in terms of the other. According to Locke, a change in our thoughts—not merely a change in the objects of our thoughts—is necessary to perceive succession. By making succession fundamentally a matter of internal sense, the existence whose duration is given before any other, and in comparison with which alone any other can be recognized, is the only object we know inwardly, viz. ourselves: "For whilst we are thinking, or whilst we receive successively several ideas in our minds, we know that we do exist; and so we call the existence, or the continuation of the existence of ourselves, or anything else, commensurate to the succession of any ideas in our minds, the duration of ourselves, or any such other thing co-existent with our thinking" (John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* [Oxford, 1975], 2.14.3). An extended consideration of this can be found in chapter 6 of *A False Reason or None at All: Hume's Psychology of Human Understanding* (ms. presently under review for publication).

16. The recognition that the entirety of the theory of *Treatise* 1 could be rehabilitated simply by denying the principle that perceptions exist in actual succession seems to confirm my contention that alternative analyses (which situate his quandary either in his associationalism or in some fault with the explanation of identity *per se*), are on the wrong track.
17. Among the reasons for not attributing to Hume a notion of the specious present are the following: i) Hume, to my knowledge, never said or implied that succession was an immediate datum of the senses, in no way dependent on imagination. In particular, nowhere in his descriptions of impressions does he suggest that, in addition to colours, pains, anger, et al., we have immediate awareness of any *relations*, whether temporal contiguity or any other; on the contrary, he made quite clear that relations are the business not of the senses but imagination (see T 13, 259-60). ii) The claim on T 265 that "that succession of perceptions, which constitutes our self or person" involves imagination would be made

quite pointless, even a non-sequitur, if, without imagination, we would *still* perceive perceptual succession and so not be confined to the immediate present. iii) Since the non-simultaneity of the perceptions in the specious present implies the distinctness of these perceptions, it also implies the distinctness of the *consciousness* apprehending them (by the T 18 criterion). But since the very notion of the specious present is that of a single, indivisible consciousness, it seems to demand the sort of simplicity and individuality over time (i.e., duration of existence) that Hume's theory of personal identity, and of identity generally, precludes (see T 253, 636). iv) To treat succession as an immediate datum of sense is to regard relations (at least temporal contiguity) as full-fledged objects of consciousness, and so to set them on a par with sensations, reflections, and thoughts. Yet, this seems impossible to reconcile with Hume's view that relations result from association and comparison in imagination (see T 13ff., 661-62). Moreover, the supposition that relations exist outside imagination would put Hume in an impossible dilemma. Relations so construed would either have to be distinct from the perceptions they relate or indistinct. If the former, then relations might still be perceived in the absence of anything related, i.e., they could be detached from "that connected mass of perceptions, which constitute a thinking being" (T 207) and exist entirely on their own, as pure relation—*abstracta*; yet, to a committed opponent of abstraction like Hume this clearly would be unacceptable (against Locke, the abstractability of succession is explicitly denied at T 36-37). If the latter, it would mean that the mind *does* perceive real connections among the objects present before it, and nothing is more central to Hume's whole philosophy than that the mind *never* perceives such connections.

18. Although a realist regarding succession (see *Principles of Human Knowledge*, sec. 98), Berkeley deemed its rate to be variable: "is it not possible ideas should succeed one another twice as fast in your mind, as they do in mine, or in that of some spirit of another kind?" (*Three Dialogues*, 150). "The age of a fly for ought that we know may be as long as that of a man ... Query: whether if succession of ideas in the Eternal mind, a day does not seem to God a 1000 years rather than a 1000 years a day?" (*Philosophical Commentaries*, secs. 48, 92). George Berkeley, *Berkeley: Philosophical Works* (London, 1975).
19. Kant (above, n. 7), A36/B55f. and note (my translation).
20. The term 'representation' is Kant's counterpart to Hume's 'perception': it embraces sensations, passions (Humean reflections), and thoughts.

21. Kant (above, n. 7), A120n (my translation).
22. "One can and must concede that space and time are mere thought entities and creatures of the imagination." "Space and time are of course not objects of intuition, but merely its *subjective forms*. They do not exist apart from representations and are given only in the subject; i.e., their representation is an *act* of the subject itself and a *product of the imagination* for the sense of the subject." "[T]hrough synthesis (in that understanding determines sensibility) space and time are first *given* as intuitions." References, numerous other citations to the same effect, and an extended comparison of the views of Kant and Hume, can be found in my book, *Kant's Model of the Mind* (Oxford, 1991).
23. Since Kant also denied reality to time, and time is the form which makes possible the consciousness of succession, he could not have affirmed such an entity even had he so wished.