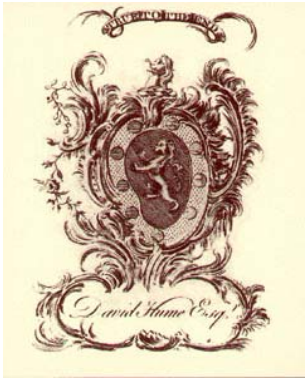

“Gilding and Staining” the World with “Sentiments” and “Phantasms”

Barry Stroud

Hume Studies Volume XIX, Issue 2 (November, 1993), 253-272.

Your use of the HUME STUDIES archive indicates your acceptance of HUME STUDIES’ Terms and Conditions of Use, available at **http://www.humesociety.org/hs/about/terms.html.**

HUME STUDIES’ Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and
you may use content in the HUME STUDIES archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.
Each copy of any part of a HUME STUDIES transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

For more information on HUME STUDIES contact
humestudies-info@humesociety.org

http://www.humesociety.org/hs/

HUME STUDIES
Volume XIX, Number 2, November 1993, pp. 253–272

"Gilding or Staining" the World with "Sentiments" and "Phantasms"

BARRY STROUD

Hume's "science of human nature" is meant to explain, in theory, how human beings come to have all the ideas, thoughts, and beliefs that we know they have. All such mental items are to find their source, one way or another, in experience. But given Hume's conception of perception and feeling, and his understanding of the relation between perception or feeling and the rest of our mental life, there is an important class of thoughts which present a special problem for him.

The question is whether Hume's theory can really explain how we get those thoughts and whether, if the kind of explanation he offers does not succeed as it stands, it could ever be improved on while remaining faithful to the general structure of his conception of the mind and its relation to the world. Many who philosophize today in the spirit of Hume while rejecting what they see as unacceptable but dispensable details of his way of thinking would appear to hold that it can. I think no satisfactory explanation along the right lines has yet been given, or even suggested.

The thoughts I am concerned with are primarily thoughts of something or other's being so. I do not mean only beliefs or judgments that something or other is so; there is also the contemplation or entertaining of something as being so, whether it is actually believed or judged to be so or not. For example, looking at the billiard table, I come to believe that the white ball's hitting the red ball will cause the red ball to move in a certain direction. I also think that *if* the white ball causes the red ball to move in that direction, the red ball will

Barry Stroud is at the Department of Philosophy, University of California–Berkeley, Berkeley, CA 94720 USA.

go into the corner pocket. In this second, conditional, thought, I think *of* the white ball's causing the red ball to move, but I do not then express the belief *that* it will, which I have in the first thought.

This is one example of the kind of thought I have in mind. It involves what is for Hume the problematic idea of one thing's causing another. Another example, from a seemingly very different area, is the thought of an action's being evil, or vicious, or blameworthy. I might observe someone doing something and immediately come to think that it is bad or vicious. Or I might think, purely hypothetically, that if any person were to commit a sufficiently vicious or evil act, he should be executed—or perhaps, more humanely, that he should not, even if what he did is vicious or blameworthy. These thoughts involve what is for Hume the problematic idea of vice, or moral evil, or blameworthiness.

A third example involves the idea of beauty. I can find a particular object beautiful when looking at it, or, with no particular object in mind, I might seek something beautiful. And I might think that *if* I had something beautiful, I would be fortunate or happy.

There seems to me no doubt that we all have thoughts like this. What binds these apparently different examples together is that the ideas involved in each case are special or problematic for Hume in the same way. "Take any action allow'd to be vicious," he says, "Wilful murder, for instance."

> Examine it in all its lights, and see if you can find that matter of fact, or real existence, which you call *vice*. In which-ever way you take it, you find only certain passions, motives, volitions and thoughts. There is no other matter of fact in the case. The vice entirely escapes you, as long as you consider the object.[1]

The idea of vice or viciousness does not denote anything in the "object" to which it is applied. What you think to be true of the "object" simply isn't there.

The "object" is also said to be the wrong place to look in the case of beauty.

> EUCLID has fully explained every quality of the circle, but has not, in any proposition, said a word of its beauty. The reason is evident. Beauty is not a quality of the circle. It lies not in any part of the line *whose* parts are all equally distant from a common center....In vain would you look for it in the circle, or seek it, either by your senses, or by mathematical reasonings, in all the properties of that figure.[2]

There is nothing in any object which can properly be called its beauty. For Hume this is not a matter of controversy.

> If we can depend upon any principle, which we learn from philosophy, this, I think, may be considered as certain and undoubted, that there is nothing, in itself, valuable or despicable, desirable or hateful, beautiful or deformed.[3]

Considering only the objects in question in themselves, there is no vice or evil or beauty or ugliness to be found.

Something parallel is true of causation. However closely we scrutinize a single instance of one billiard ball's causing another to move,

> we find only that the one body approaches the other; and that the motion of it precedes that of the other, but without any sensible interval. 'Tis in vain to rack ourselves with *farther* thought and reflexion upon this subject. We can go no *farther* in considering this particular instance. (T 77)

But we cannot say that contiguity and succession alone give us a "compleat idea of causation." "There is a NECESSARY CONNEXION to be taken into consideration." But, Hume says:

> Here again I turn the object on all sides, in order to discover the nature of this necessary connexion, and find the impression, or impressions, from which its idea may be deriv'd. When I cast my eye on the *known qualities* of objects, I immediately discover that the relation of cause and effect depends not in the least on *them*. When I consider their *relations*, I can find none but those of contiguity and succession; which I have already regarded as imperfect and unsatisfactory. (T 77)

There simply is no such connection to be perceived in any particular case. After we have observed a series of several resembling instances of contiguity and succession, we do in fact come to think of two sorts of things as causally connected. But the repetition alone does not *reveal* something in the current instance that was not to be found in any of the earlier and exactly resembling instances; nor does it *produce* something new in the later resembling instances, each of which is independent of all the rest. Hume concludes:

> There is, then, nothing new either discover'd or produc'd in any objects by their constant conjunction, and by the uninterrupted resemblance of their relations of succession and contiguity. But 'tis from this resemblance, that the ideas of necessity, of power, and of efficacy, are deriv'd. These ideas, therefore, represent not any thing, that does or can belong to the objects, which are constantly conjoin'd. (T 164)

This is perhaps the best description of what is special or problematic about the ideas centrally involved in each of the kinds of thoughts I want to consider. The idea in question does not represent anything "that does or can belong to the objects" which we think of by means of that idea. We think of those objects as being a certain way, but they are not and cannot be that way. There is nothing in, or perceivable in, an act of willful murder that is its vice or its being vicious; beauty is not a quality of any object; there is nothing in, or discernible in, any two objects or the relations between them that is the necessary or causal connection between them. But it appears that we can and do think of some actions as being vicious, of some objects as being beautiful, and of one thing's causing another. We appear to have thoughts in which we predicate those very qualities of certain objects or relations.

The problem then is to explain how we come to have such thoughts. It is not just a matter of identifying the occasions on which thoughts like that first come into our minds. It is also a question of what happens to us on those occasions, and of exactly how whatever happens brings it about that the thought we eventually get is the thought of an act as being *vicious* or of an object as being *beautiful* or of one event as being the *cause* of another.

What Hume thinks happens to produce a thought of an action's being vicious or of an object's being beautiful is that in each case we feel a certain "sentiment." If you are looking for the vice or viciousness of a certain action:

> You never can find it, till you turn your reflexion into you own breast, and find a sentiment of disapprobation, which arises in you, towards this action. Here is a matter of fact; but 'tis the object of feeling, not of reason. It lies in yourself, not in the object. (T 468–9)

Similarly, the beauty of a circle is not a quality of the circle.

> It is only the effect, which that figure produces upon a mind, whose particular fabric or structure renders it susceptible of such sentiments.[4]

If we never got such "sentiments" we would never "pronounce" anything to be "valuable or despicable, desirable or hateful, beautiful or deformed":

> these attributes arise from the particular constitution and fabric of human sentiment and affection.[5]

That is not to say that our getting the relevant "sentiments" is always completely independent of all reason or judgment or thought. Discernment of beauty can be improved; with practice and learning, "the organ acquires greater perfection in its operation."[6] And not just any "sentiment" of pleasure or pain derived from a person's action or character makes us praise or condemn it.

> 'Tis only when a character is consider'd in general, without reference to our particular interest, that it causes such a feeling or sentiment, as denominates it morally good or evil. (T 472)

Experience and informed reflection might well be necessary to arrive at such "*steady* and *general* points of view" (T 581–2). But even when thought or reflection is needed, some actual "sentiments" or feelings are needed as well. Without them, we would never "pronounce" on the moral qualities of actions or characters, or on the beauty or ugliness of objects around us.

The "sentiment" that always arises in such cases is something new, something beyond or at least different from any thought or belief produced by reason or the understanding.

> All the circumstances of the case are supposed to be laid before us, ere we can fix any sentence of blame or approbation....But after every circumstance, every relation is known, the understanding has no further room to operate, nor any object on which it could employ itself. The approbation or blame which then ensues, cannot be the work of the judgment, but of the heart; and is not a speculative proposition or affirmation, but an active feeling or sentiment.[7]

The distinction Hume draws here marks the difference in general between the distinct faculties which he calls "reason" and "taste."

> The former conveys the knowledge of truth and falsehood: the latter gives the sentiment of beauty and deformity, vice and virtue. The one discovers objects as they really stand in nature, without addition or diminution: the other has a productive faculty....From circumstances and relations, known or supposed, the former leads us to the discovery of the concealed and unknown: after all circumstances and relations are laid before us, the latter makes us feel from the whole a new sentiment of blame or approbation. (EPM 294)

Something "new" is also produced in the case of causation, and never by reason or the understanding. There is nothing in a series of resembling pairs of objects which answers to the idea of a necessary connection between their members:

> yet the *observation* of this resemblance produces a new impression *in the mind,* which is its real model. For after we have observ'd the resemblance in a sufficient number of instances, we immediately feel a determination of the mind to pass from one object to its usual attendant, and to conceive it in a stronger light upon account of that relation. This determination is the only effect of the resemblance; and

> therefore must be the same with power or efficacy, whose idea is deriv'd from the resemblance. (T 165)

The "new" or "added" ingredient is something in the mind. The independent but resembling instances of contiguity and succession therefore "have no union but in the mind, which observes them," as Hume puts it (T 165). I take this to mean that there is no necessary connection between the objects; we only think that there is. That is also the way to take his famous (and otherwise disastrous) pronouncement that "Upon the whole, necessity is something, that exists in the mind, not in objects" (T 165): we think things are necessarily connected, but they really are not. That would make the remark about necessity parallel to the even more famous (and almost equally disastrous) adage that "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." This is not to be taken to mean that beholders have beautiful eyes.

What is important for Hume is that it is what he calls "the imagination," not reason or the understanding, that is the source of the "new" or "additional" item which must make its appearance in the mind if we are to be led to "pronounce" any "sentence of blame or approbation," or of beauty or deformity, or of causal or necessary connection. In all these cases the new item is an impression—a "sentiment" or feeling or an impression of reflection.[8] How does the appearance of one of those things in the mind have the effect of giving us thoughts (or "ideas") of vice, of beauty, of causation, or of any other qualities or relations we ascribe to objects, when according to Hume those qualities and relations do not and cannot actually belong to "objects as they really stand in nature" (EPM 294)?

He is aware that the idea that objects do not really stand in causal relations or necessary connections to one another in nature will be greeted as an astonishing and violent "paradox." He thinks there is a deep "biass of the mind" against it (T 166–7). But he thinks that the source of that very "biass" also provides the explanation he is looking for. In the case of causation, for example, we know that a certain "internal impression" arises in the mind after the observation of a constant conjunction between objects of two kinds. And:

> 'Tis a common observation, that the mind has a great propensity to spread itself on external objects, and to conjoin with them any internal impressions, which they occasion, and which always make their appearance at the same time that these objects discover themselves to the senses. Thus as certain sounds and smells are always found to attend certain visible objects, we naturally imagine a conjunction, even in place, betwixt the objects and the qualities, tho' the qualities be of such a nature as to admit of no such conjunction, and really exist no where...the same propensity is the reason, why we

> suppose necessity and power to lie in the objects we consider, not in our mind, that considers them. (T 167)

In the first *Enquiry* he describes that same "spreading" or "conjoining" operation this way:

> as we *feel* a customary connexion between the ideas, we transfer that feeling to the objects; as nothing is more usual than to apply to external bodies every internal sensation, which they occasion. (EHU 78n)

We "feel a determination of the mind" to "pass from one object to the idea of its usual attendant" (T 165), and it is that impression, or what it is an impression of, that we somehow "spread" on or "transfer" to or "conjoin" with the objects now before us, and so come to "imagine" or "suppose" that they are causually or necessarily connected.

In the case of morals, the understanding first discovers and judges the relevant matters of fact in the case, and then "the mind, from the contemplation of the whole, feels some new impression of affection or disgust, esteem or contempt, approbation or blame" (EPM 290). There is again a certain "propensity" at work which starts from that impression or sentiment and somehow takes us beyond the deliverances of observation and the understanding alone. It is the imagination which in all these cases exhibits:

> a productive faculty, and gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment, raises in a manner a new creation. (EPM 294)

The "new creation" is eventually a conception of a world containing good and evil actions, admirable and contemptible characters, and beautiful and ugly objects. It is only because we naturally get certain feelings or impressions, and, even more importantly, only because of the mind's "productive faculty" in "gilding or staining" the world with what those feelings give us, that we ever come to think in those ways at all. Our moral and aesthetic judgments do not report the presence in objects of qualities which really belong to those objects to which we appear to ascribe them.

Hume draws the same parallel to explain the formation of moral and aesthetic judgments as he drew earlier with thoughts of necessary connection. There he compared necessity to sounds and smells; here he adds colours and heat and cold, and invokes the "modern philosophy's" doctrine of "secondary" qualities. The mind operates in moral thinking just as that view says it does with respect to colours, sounds, heat and cold.

> Vice and virtue, therefore, may be compar'd to sounds, colours, heat and cold, which according to modern philosophy, are not qualities in objects, but perceptions in the mind... (T 469)

In each case the mind "transfers" features of its internal workings or contents to an external world which does not really contain them.

The question is how this "gilding or staining" is supposed to work. What is involved in the mind's "spreading" itself on to external objects and "conjoining" with them, or "transferring" to them, something "borrowed" from internal impressions or sentiments? In making the transition, Hume says, the mind "raises in a manner a new creation." I take him to mean that in our thoughts we somehow come to endow objects with something "new," with certain qualities or relations which they do not possess "as they really stand in nature, without addition or diminution" by us. This mental operation I have called "projection,"[9] no doubt more in the dictionary than in the psychoanalytic sense. We put on to objects in our thoughts about them certain features that they do not really possess. We take something mental and see it as external. That is how I take Hume's metaphors of "gilding or staining," or "spreading" something on to, a neutral and unsuspecting world. How does it work?

There is a real problem here for Hume. To put it another way, there is a real problem here for anyone who would interpret Hume as holding that we do really think of objects as causally or necessarily connected, or as evil or vicious, or as beautiful. I do want to interpret Hume that way. I think human beings do have such thoughts, so it would be a good thing if Hume's science of human nature could acknowledge that we have them. That theory is meant to explain every thought and feeling human beings have. But the problem for Hume is that if we do have thoughts of causation, or of the vice or beauty of things, they are thoughts which do not represent "any thing, that does or can belong" to external objects "as they really stand in nature." He has a view of the world or of "nature" according to which no such qualities or relations could belong to or hold between the objects that make up that world. That is one of the things that make it so hard for him to explain how such thoughts or beliefs are possible. What the thoughts are about is never to be found in the world. It seems then that we could arrive at them only by "adding" something to our conception of the world, by "gilding or staining" it with something that does not really belong to it. The source of that extra "stain" or "gilding" could only be the mind itself, or its contents, so it is from there that we must "borrow" whatever materials are used in the "spreading" or "transferring" operation. Anyone who thinks that we do have such thoughts, and who shares Hume's restricted conception of what the world or "nature" can contain—as many philosophers apparently still do—would seem forced into an account along some such lines.

The questions any such account must answer are: what do we "borrow" from our internal impressions, and what do we ascribe to the external objects we "gild or stain"? We presumably do not "borrow" the internal impression itself and ascribe it in thought to an external object. We do not think that the

sequence of events on the billiards table—the one ball's striking the other and the second ball's moving—itself has a feeling or impression like the feeling Hume says we humans get when we observe it. Nor do we think that when the second ball is struck it moves off with a feeling like that.[10] We do not think that an act of willful murder itself has a feeling of disgust or disapprobation, any more than we think that a painting on a wall has a sentiment of pleasure or awe. That is nonsense in each case. It is not the internal impression itself that we ascribe to the external object. Rather, it seems that it should be what the impression is an impression *of* that we so predicate.

But Hume's view of impressions—or at least of those impressions he seems to have principally in mind in his "gilding or staining" metaphor—makes it difficult for him to appeal in the right way to what impressions are impression of. He thinks primarily of colours, sounds, smells, heat, and cold, and all of them he says are "nothing but impressions in the mind" (T 226). The point is not that *impressions* of colours and sounds are impressions in the mind, but that *colours* and *sounds* are impressions in the mind. That is the view he attributes to "modern philosophy" (T 469). It is because such impressions always "attend" the perception of certain external objects that:

> we naturally imagine a conjunction, even in place, betwixt the objects and qualities, tho' the qualities be of such a nature to admit of no such conjunction, and really exist no where. (T 167)

This suggests that Hume endorses "modern philosophy's" view that the redness we see is nothing more than a feature of our impressions. In his essay "Of the Standard of Taste" he says he wants to explain how one color can be "denominated" the "true and real" color of an object, "even while color is allowed to be merely a phantasm of the senses."[11] If that were what color is, it would not be something that could ever be in the same "place" with an apple. In that respect it would be like pain; the pain we feel is not something that could intelligibly be located in, or belong to, or be predicated of, an external object that causes it. It does not exist in, or belong to, the world of external objects at all. In that sense, the felt quality of a painful sensation could be said to exist "no where," i.e., in no place. But presumably in that case no one thinks that it does. There is no "spreading" or "gilding" the objects of the world with pain when we have sensations of pain. What is perceived or felt when a painful impression is present is not something that coherently admits of attribution to an inanimate external object.

The same would be true of the disgust or displeasure we might experience when observing an act of willful murder, or the pleasure we might get from seeing a great painting, if they too are on Hume's view just impressions or feelings of certain distinctive kinds. To try to predicate them of the objects that cause them would be to ascribe a feeling or impression to an act of murder

or to a painting. And that is absurd. The impression or feeling that Hume says comes into the mind when we see objects of one kind constantly followed by objects of another kind would also on that view be yet another distinctive impression. Like a pain, it would be simply an impression or feeling of a certain kind which differs in directly perceivable ways from impressions of other kinds. What distinguishes them in each case would be perceivable or felt qualities of the impressions themselves. Those same qualities which serve to distinguish one kind of impression or feeling from another therefore could not also be thought to be qualities of external objects, any more than the pain we feel or the painfulness of a painful sensation is something that could be a quality of an external object. If impressions *of* something are understood in that way—as we speak of a "sensation of pain"—then what they are impressions *of* is not something that could also be thought to be quality of an object.

To understand the operation of "gilding or staining" the world with something "borrowed from internal sentiment" in that way, then, would mean that that operation could never really succeed in producing an intelligible thought which attributes certain "added" features to external objects or to the relations between them. At best it would produce a kind of confusion or nonsense on our part, perhaps with an accompanying illusion of having coherent thoughts of that kind when we really do not. There certainly are suggestions that Hume sometimes thinks of it that way, especially in what he says about the idea of necessary connection. Necessity, he says, "is nothing but an internal impression of the mind, or a determination to carry our thoughts from one object to another" (T 165). If that is what necessity *is*, then it would seem that any thoughts about necessity would be thoughts either about an impression or about a determination or transition of the mind. But then we could not intelligibly think that necessity, so understood, is a feature of the *relation* between two external objects or events—that the two are necessarily connected. We could not think that one thing *must* or *had to* happen, given that something else had happened earlier.

Hume appears to endorse that conclusion in his gloss on the formula that "necessity is something, that exists in the mind, not in objects":

> nor is it possible for us to form the most distant idea of it, consider'd as a quality in bodies. Either we have no idea of necessity, or necessity is nothing but that determination of the thought to pass from causes to effects and from effects to causes, according to their experienc'd union. (T 165–6)

This seems to say that we can think intelligibly about the passage of our thought from one thing to another, and we can think intelligibly about the impression or feeling of determination which accompanies that transition,

but that is really all there is to think about in connection with necessity. We cannot intelligibly think that something has to happen, or happens of necessity, or that one thing is necessarily connected with another.

When Hume says that we nevertheless do

> ...suppose necessity and power to lie in the objects we consider, not in our mind, that considers them; notwithstanding it is not possible for us to form the most distant idea of that quality, when it is not taken for the determination of the mind... (T 167)

he implies that we are at best confused in our attempts to think of things as causally or necessarily connected. What he says we "suppose" ("Necessity lies in the objects we consider") is not really something we could ever have "the most distant idea of." On this reading, the only idea we could have of the necessity involved in causation is apparently not an idea of any quality which we could intelligibly think belongs to, or could be predicated of, the relation between two objects. It could only be an idea of something (an impression or feeling) which always accompanies the observation of certain pairs of objects, and that is something in the mind, not a quality of the objects or of the relations between them.

There is no question that we can think clearly and without confusion about the passage of our thought from one thing to another, or about impressions which appear in our minds on certain occasions. But such thoughts do not involve "gilding or staining" anything in the world with qualities it does not really possess. If Hume is right, we do in fact feel or experience something when the mind passes from one idea to its usual attendant, and in announcing the presence of such an impression we would be stating no more than a straightforward autobiographical fact. Or, in the moral case, I might say, as Hume suggests, "I feel a sentiment of disgust or disapprobation when I consider that act of wilful murder" (T 469); and if I do, what I say will be no more than the ungilded truth. I would not be "adding" or "spreading" any extra quality on to that act or on to anything else.

We can think, equally clearly, and truly, not only about ourselves and the goings-on in our own minds, but also about external objects. If we think of objects of a certain kind, that observation of them is always accompanied by an impression of a certain kind—a feeling of pleasure, or disgust, or perhaps a "feeling of determination"—then again, in having such thoughts we are not "spreading" a "new creation" on to those objects, or "adding" something to them which does not belong to them "as they really stand" in the world. We merely think, without projection or confusion, about a relation which actually holds in nature between certain objects and certain human feelings. So although we can and do have perfectly intelligible thoughts of these two kinds, they involve no "gilding or staining." Nor do they involve ascribing beauty or

viciousness or a causal connection to any objects either. But those are the kinds of thoughts which need to be explained. If we have them, Hume must acknowledge that we have them, and his theory of the mind must eventually account for them.

To have only thoughts about our impressions, or dispositional thoughts about the natural tendency of external objects to produce such impressions in human minds, we perhaps do not need to think of the impressions involved as anything other than impressions or feelings with their own distinctive and directly perceivable characteristics—on the model of sensations of pain. But that is what we found stands in the way of the apparently most straightforward understanding of the operation of "spreading" or projection. We could not then take the quality which distinguishes impressions of one kind (e.g., disgust) from impressions of another kind (e.g., pain) and somehow predicate that very quality of any external object. The feature of the impression which in that sense makes it the kind of impression it is cannot also intelligibly be thought to be a quality of an external object. But although Hume does often appear to think of impressions of colours, sounds, smells, and heat and cold in this way, and perhaps also feelings of various kinds of pleasure and displeasure as well—along with sensations of pain—it is clear that that view of impressions cannot be accepted in general. Not all impressions "of F" can be understood on the model of sensations "of pain." There must be another way of distinguishing impressions from one another, another way of understanding what it is for an impression to be an impression *of* such-and-such, if we are ever able to think of perceived qualities as belonging to objects in the world.

If, as Hume holds, every case of perceiving something is a matter of our having an impression of something, then if *every* impression were just an impression with a certain distinctive felt or perceived character, we could never come to think of external objects as having any of those very qualities that we can perceive. An impression of a round ball, for example, or of the roundness of the ball, would then also be just an impression with a certain distinctive character perceivably different from other impressions like pain or disgust or pleasure. The quality that we are aware of in having such an impression could not coherently be thought also to be a quality of an external object. And if that were true of all impressions, and so of all perceivable qualities, then either impressions or feelings or things in the mind would be the only things that we could think of as having any qualities at all—as Berkeley held—or none of the qualities that we could *think* of an external object as having could be qualities which we could also *perceive* anything to have. Thought of objects which are not in the mind, if it were possible at all, would be in that way completely cut off from perception or feeling. The objects of thought and the objects of perception would never be the same. What we can perceive and what we can think would not even overlap.

To avoid that unacceptable dilemma, at least some impressions must be understood "intentionally," as being "of" something that could be so, or of something that could be thought to be true of external objects. Hume apparently finds no difficulty in thinking in this way about an impression of a round ball, for example, or of the roundness of a ball, or an impression of one round ball's striking another. It seems that we can and do have such impressions, and when we *think* of one ball striking another, our thought has the very same content; the very qualities and relations that we sometimes perceive—roundness and striking—we also think are qualities or relations of the balls we think about. What we can find in perception is in that case reproduced in thought. We attribute some of the very qualities and relations we perceive to the objects we think about.

It must be said that it is difficult to understand how we could ever have an impression of one round ball's striking another if the thought of two such objects standing in that relation to each other made no sense to us, or was something that we did not think could be so. Our being capable of a perception with just that content would seem to require our finding intelligible the thought of one ball's striking another. For Hume, it is the other way around. Our getting an impression of something is what makes it possible for us to have an idea of that same something.[12] So he needs an independent specification of what we can and cannot, strictly speaking, get impressions of. But the special problem which arises for the problematic thoughts we are interested in is that the impressions which are said to produce them cannot in that sense be impressions *of* "anything, that does or can belong" to external objects. They are not "of" anything that can be so, or that we can perceive to be so, in the world.

This is sometimes obscured by the way Hume occasionally describes those impressions or feelings. In the case of causation, for example, he speaks of "this connexion...which we *feel* in the mind" (EHU 75). He says that after having observed two kinds of events in constant conjunction the observer "now *feels* these events to be *connected* in his imagination" (EHU 75–6). But of course on Hume's view of the world there can be no such thing as a necessary connection between two events, and no such state of affairs as two things' being connected in the mind. Nothing in the world is actually connected with anything else, anywhere. So we can never perceive a connection which holds between two things, and if we can nevertheless be said to "feel" them to be connected, it must be because the idea of two things' being causally connected already makes sense to us. If we really did have such a feeling, there would presumably be no difficulty in "transferring" the content of that feeling to objects in the world and thinking that it is true of the relation between them. We could reproduce in thought exactly what we had found in feeling or perception. But if we must possess the idea of necessary connection in order to "feel" that two things are connected, even in the mind, then it would seem

that we could have such a "feeling" only if we had already performed the operation of "gilding or staining." Hume thinks that that operation is the only way we come to think of two things as causally connected in the first place.

Hume is more careful in describing the experience of exercising the will. He easily resists the suggestion that we get the idea of cause or power from the way in which parts of our bodies and many of our thoughts can be seen to obey the will. He does not deny that we observe the motion of the body to follow upon a "volition" to move it, but we are never able, he says, "to observe or conceive the tie which binds together the motion and volition, or the energy by which the mind produces this effect" (EHU 74).

> the will being here consider'd as a cause, has no more a discoverable connexion with its effects, than any material cause has with its proper effect. (T 632)

There is no impression of the will's efficacy or power; all we are aware of in action is at first a felt "volition," and then an impression of what happens next.

It would be no better to appeal not to the power of the will but to its powerlessness.[13] If we have experienced a correlation between things of two kinds in the past, and an idea of a thing of the first kind appears in the mind, then whatever we happen to will or not to will at that time, an idea of a thing of the second kind will inevitably present itself. That is one of Hume's fundamental "principles of the imagination." If in those circumstances we were to get an impression of the inevitability with which that idea appears in the mind, or of our powerlessness to resist its appearing there, we could presumably then ascribe that very feature that we get an impression of—viz., inevitability or powerlessness—to the happenings on the billiards table and elsewhere in the world of objects. We could reproduce in thought exactly what we can find in perception or feeling. But again it is Hume's view that we could get no such impression or feeling. We could feel a certain desire or "volition" —for example, we will the appearance of an idea other than the idea of the second ball's moving, or perhaps we decide to will nothing at all—and then we immediately find that the idea of the second ball's moving nevertheless appears. Repeated experiments show that that same idea always appears in the appropriate circumstances whatever "volitions" are present in those circumstances. But that discovery of the goings-on in our minds involves no impression of the inefficacy or powerlessness of the will. It involves only the awareness of many very different "volitions," which according to Hume are themselves just different impressions,[14] followed always by the appearance in the mind of one and the same kind of idea. There is and can be no impression of the inevitability with which things happen, even in the mind; there are impressions only of what happens, or of its happening. If we did have an

impression or feeling of the inevitability of something's happening, or of our powerlessness to prevent it, it could only be because we had already acquired the idea of power and were able to recognize its absence. But such an idea is for Hume the product of the operation of "gilding or staining"; if it were required for the very impression from which that operation is supposed to start (as it, in fact, seems to be), it could not also be the product of that very operation.

In explaining his view of morals Hume is careful to point out that:

> We do not infer a character to be virtuous, because it pleases: But in feeling that it pleases after such a particular manner, we in effect feel that it is virtuous. (T 471)

But again, that a given character is virtuous is on Hume's view not something that is or could be so as things "really stand in nature." If we could have a feeling that a certain character is virtuous, it would have to be because we are already capable of intelligibly predicating virtuousness of some of the actions or characters we observe or think about. Simply feeling or thinking that an action pleases us in a certain way does not involve projecting or "spreading" anything on to the action. But feeling or thinking that the action is virtuous does. The "gilding or staining" operation which is supposed to lead to such thoughts could not therefore start from just such a feeling or impression. It must start from a feeling or impression which is "of" something, or has an object, in the "intentional" sense; but it cannot be "of" any object or quality or relation which could be part of the way things "really stand in nature." If it were, no "gilding or staining" would be necessary.

We can of course have many false thoughts about the world, and even impressions of things that do not really exist. Hume's view is that in the normal case that is because there are combined in our thoughts or impressions ingredients which we can and do find in our experience; it is only the complex combination which happens to find no counterpart in the world. If I believe that there are unicorns I am wrong about the way things are, and if I open my eyes and get an impression of a unicorn I am not perceiving anything that actually exists. But in each case the "intentional" object of my thought or perception is something which in the widest sense could be so in the world; it just happens not to be. I can perceive and think what I do in that case because I have perceived both horses and horns in the past, and the thought of a creature with a horse's body and a horn between its eyes is perfectly intelligible to me, even if that idea applies to no actual thing. What is especially problematic for Hume is not this ordinary kind of contingent falsehood or delusion. The world as he conceives of it does not just happen to lack causal connections, virtuous characters, and beautiful objects. He does not just think that if things had been different in certain intelligible ways, those qualities and relations would have been there. There is no coherent place for them in

any world which he conceives of. What is problematic is therefore to explain how we can have intelligible thoughts or perceptions which do not represent "any thing, that does or can belong" to the way things "really stand in nature," if we take the ways things could "really stand in nature" to exhaust the range of what could be so.

That is the problem I find at the center of Hume's philosophy. It is not unique to Hume. There is admittedly a completely general problem of intentionality which he faces because of his own special conception of the mind and its contents. Strictly speaking, I believe he is not really in a position to explain how we could ever have any thoughts at all of something's being so. That is largely because of that "theory of ideas" he inherited from Locke and Berkeley—a way of thinking about the mind which he seems to have imbibed without question just as he unhesitatingly took in the air he breathed. On that conception, the "objects" of the different senses—the only things sensed—are in each case strictly speaking only qualities. For Berkeley, for example, the only or proper objects of sight are colours and shapes, of touch, certain textures and degrees of hardness, and so on. The theory really leaves no room for the intelligible predication of those or any other perceived qualities to an enduring object, despite those philosophers' understandable tendency to continue to speak as if it did.

In the face of this difficulty Berkeley held that an object is really nothing more than a collection or combination of sensible qualities, or what he equivalently called "ideas." But he never explained what a "combination of sensible qualities" amounts to. He was right to find no help in what he thought was Locke's idea of a "substratum"—a *je ne sais quoi* which somehow "supports" the qualities—but he was in no better position than Locke to explain how we can think, of an apple, that it is red, and round, and on the table. What looks like predication of such qualities to an object can be for him nothing more than a thought of a number of qualities somehow being "present" together. I think Hume makes no advance on Berkeley or Locke on this crucial matter.

I believe the difficulty is connected with something deeper: the absence from this theory of any adequate notion of judgment, or assertion, or putting something forward as true. With no account of judgment it would be hard to find a place for predication; predication yields a thought that is capable of truth or falsity. That is why I think Hume ultimately cannot even explain the possibility of our thinking of a particular ball as round, or as striking another. Thinking for him is too much like being presented with pictures. But even to see something as a picture of a round ball, or of one ball's striking another, one must be able to *think* of a ball as round, or as striking another, and that involves the ability to predicate a quality of an object, and to think of one object as related to another. Without an explanation of how we can make sense of such thoughts there can be no account of how we could even have such a

thing as an *impression* of one round ball's striking another. Thought of an object, and of its having qualities and relations, must be possible for us in order to have such experiences, and that requires in turn the possibility of judgment or assertion. This is obviously the kind of objection which Kant, for one, would be eager to press against Hume.

There is, then, a completely general problem of intentionality for Hume which should not be overlooked, or minimized. But even if we drop the restrictions imposed by the theory of ideas, as most philosophers nowadays would claim to have done, the most troubling aspect of the problem I have been drawing attention to seems to me to remain. It has to do with that notion of "the world" or of the way things "really stand in nature" which is supposed to exclude beauty and causal connections and the virtuousness or viciousness of actions and characters. A ball's being round, or its striking another ball, is allowed to be part of that "world," and so unproblematically available as an object of an impression. It might even be said that such things' happening in the world is what explains why we get impressions of a ball's being round, or of one round ball's striking another; what fixes the content of the perceptions we get on certain occasions is precisely what is so or what is going on in plain view on the occasion in question. If we followed Hume in supposing that thought is ultimately derived from perception, we might then be able to explain how it is possible to *think* of one round ball's striking another. We reproduce in thought what we have found in perception. But even on that view of thought we could not be said to have found the source of any thoughts we might have of the causal connection between the movements of those balls, or of the beauty of any objects, or of the virtuousness or viciousness of any actions or characters. On the view of "the world" shared by Hume and his many followers, there can be no such things in the world for us ever to get impressions of. That is precisely why the mental operation of "gilding or staining" the world is needed; it alone is supposed to produce the thought of something that is not really there.

Of course, one could simply deny that we ever do get any thoughts which in their content go beyond the way the world could really be: we think only either about happenings in our own minds or about the dispositions of objects to produce effects in minds that observe them. There is no doubt that we can and do think of the world in those ways, but I have been considering the view that we also believe more; that we predicate moral and aesthetic qualities of objects and attribute necessity to some of the relations between them. But if we do eventually come to think coherently of beautiful objects, of virtuous and vicious actions and characters, or of causal connections between things—however we manage to do it—how can we then hold that the world does not and cannot include such things? How can we make sense of the idea that we do indeed think things are that way, if we also think that they really are not? And if things in the world are not really that way, how can we explain

the fact that we nevertheless think that they are? The Humean suggestion I have been considering is that our thoughts are generated by a creative or productive process which "takes" something or other from our impressions or feelings and leads us somehow to "spread" what it takes on to objects which we unproblematically believe to populate the world. But that is only a prejudice or a hope or a fairy-story without a convincing account of exactly *what* we "take," and exactly how it is turned into something which it becomes intelligible to predicate of objects or the relations between them.

The feelings or impressions from which the "gilding" story is supposed to start cannot be described from the outset as impressions of something in which the very feature that we are said to "spread" appears already in intelligible predicative position, applied to an object. No "new creation" would then be needed to give us the corresponding ideas or thoughts about objects in the world. The thoughts we eventually get are said to predicate something "new" or "added" to objects "as they really stand in nature." So something must happen between the original impression or feeling and the subsequent idea to generate what to us will be a newly intelligible predicative thought.

I think we do have intelligible thoughts about beautiful objects, the virtuousness and viciousness of actions and characters, and causal connections between things that happen. But if we do, how can we avoid regarding such thoughts as representing the way things are, or the way things are in the world? What is the notion of "nature" or "the world" employed by Hume and all those philosophers who hold that only some, but not all, of the things we seriously and unavoidably believe represent things "as they really stand in nature" or in "the world?" For them it is apparently not true that the world is *everything* that is the case, or that the world we believe in is everything we believe to be the case. They draw an invidious distinction within all the things we believe; the "world" they think we believe in amounts to something less than the truth of everything we believe. But on that view the very possibility of our having and making sense of those "extra" thoughts has still to be accounted for.[15]

REFERENCES

1. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (T), edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P. H. Nidditch (London: Oxford University Press, 1978), 468.

2. David Hume, "The Sceptic," in *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary*, edited by E. F. Miller (Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985), 165.

3. "The Sceptic," *Essays*, 162.

4. "The Sceptic," *Essays*, 165.

5. "The Sceptic," *Essays*, 162.

6. "Of the Standard of Taste," *Essays*, 237.

7. David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals* (EHU and EPM), edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 290.

8. There are other thoughts which are problematic for Hume in this same way but which do not arise from particular impressions or sentiments at all. We think of objects as continuing to exist unperceived, although we never encounter such things in our experience, and "the fiction of a continu'd existence..., as well as the identity, is really false" (T 209). We think of minds as existing through time, although "the identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one" (T 259); "there is properly no simplicity in it at one time, nor identity in different; whatever natural propension we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity" (T 253). In these cases, because of certain general "principles of the imagination," the mind is equally naturally led in conflicting directions, and we are said to "feign" or "imagine" certain things as a way of resolving the conflict. The resolution in each case appears to be strictly cognitive, or intellectual. We introduce a new thought or way of thinking into our repertoire; no feeling or "sentiment" works on us in addition to the ideas we possess. I will not enter further into Hume's explanations of "fictions" or "illusions" which arise in this way without a feeling or sentiment. I concentrate here on the relation between feeling or perception and thought, and how the one is supposed to lead to the other in these problematic cases.

9. See Stroud, *Hume* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977), e.g., 86, 87, 185, 186. I find now that the term was used to refer to this operation in Hume by Paul Grice in the early 1970s. See Grice, "Method in Philosophical Psychology: From the Banal to the Bizarre" [Presidential Address to the Pacific Division of The American Philosophical Association, March 1975], *The Conception of Value* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 146.

10. It must be admitted that Hume sometimes suggests that we do suppose something like that.

> No animal can put external bodies in motion without the sentiment of a *nisus* or endeavour; and every animal has a sentiment or feeling from the stroke or blow of an external object, that is in motion. These sensations, which are merely animal, and from which we can *a priori* draw no inference, we are apt to transfer to inanimate objects, and to suppose, that they have some such feelings, whenever they transfer or receive motion. (EHU 78n)

11. "Of the Standard of Taste," *Essays*, 234.

12. Here I ignore for the moment the distinction between simple and complex impressions and ideas. The sweeping generalization strictly holds only for simple perceptions.

13. This has been suggested by David Pears, *Hume's System* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 110–115.

14. I desire it may be observ'd, that by the *will*, I mean nothing but *the internal impression we feel and are conscious of, when we knowingly give rise to any new motion of our body, or new perception of our mind.* (T 399)

15. I am grateful to Janet Broughton and Hannah Ginsborg for very helpful critical comments on earlier versions of this paper.