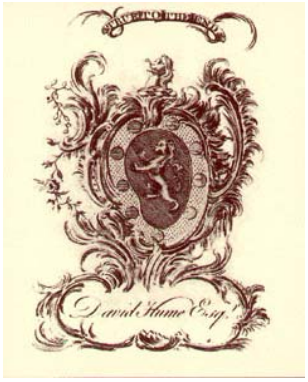

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Hume's First Principle, His Missing Shade, and His Distinctions of Reason

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I. The Puzzle

Hume's First Principle, "all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent," is not only the fundamental principle of his theory of mind; it is also his criterion of significance.[1] Given that all ideas can ultimately be traced to preceding simple impressions which they exactly resemble, to understand an idea, Hume claims, we must examine its corresponding impression (or, if the idea is complex, analyze it into its simple components and examine their corresponding impressions). To show that some putative idea is a fiction, we need only show that we lack the corresponding impression(s). Hume employs the Principle as his criterion of significance when he argues that we have no idea of necessary connection (as a quality of bodies), of substance, or of the (simple) self, among other things.

Quick work could be made of both Hume's psychology and these attacks on our ideas if a counterexample to his Principle could be found. Curiously and infamously, after arguing on behalf of the Principle, emphasizing its importance, and even challenging us to find a counterexample, he introduces "one contradictory phænomenon, which may prove, that 'tis not absolutely impossible for ideas to go before their correspondent impressions" (T 5).[2] He says,

> Suppose...a person to have enjoyed his sight for thirty years, and to have become perfectly well acquainted with colours of all kinds,

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> excepting one particular shade of blue, for instance, which it has never been his fortune to meet with. Let all the different shades of that colour, except that single one, be plac'd before him, descending gradually from the deepest to the lightest; 'tis plain that he will perceive a blank, where that shade is wanting, and will be sensible, that there is a greater distance in that place betwixt the contiguous colours, than in any other. Now I ask, whether 'tis possible for him, from his own imagination, to supply this deficiency, and raise up to himself the idea of that particular shade, tho' it had never been conveyed to him by his senses? I believe there are few but will be of opinion that he can; and this may serve as proof, that the simple ideas are not always derived from the correspondent impressions. (T 6)

This concession and Hume's subsequent treatment of the phenomenon are puzzling. If the phenomenon is a counterexample to the First Principle, then the Principle, and all that rests on it, ought to be abandoned. Yet Hume instead dismisses the phenomenon and does so with hardly any explanation. Whether this dismissal is legitimate has concerned readers ever since. Some say the exception is illusory, that Hume grants only the possibility of an exception (not that one exists), that the idea does not appear before its corresponding impression after all, or that although the idea does precede its impression, it is complex rather than simple. I maintain that the phenomenon is a genuine and important exception to the Principle and argue that Hume can nonetheless deploy the Principle as both his fundamental psychological thesis and his criterion of significance. If I am right, the Principle can be upheld despite its admitting exceptions because Hume's distinctions of reason can account for the exceptions in a way that does not undermine his use of the Principle.[3]

II. Some Unsatisfactory Proposals

I assume that two conditions must be met to explain why Hume can (or at least reasonably thought he could) discard the phenomenon. First, the fact that the phenomenon is contradictory (and contradictory in the sense he claims) must be preserved: The idea of the missing shade must be simple, and it must precede its corresponding impression.[4] Second, the account must explain both why he can uphold the Principle as his fundamental psychological thesis and why he can deploy it as his criterion of significance, even though it has exceptions.

Hume's dismissal of the phenomenon, and his claim that it is "so particular and singular, that 'tis scarce worth our observing" (T 6), suggest that he thinks it is not important. Yet just what he takes to be so particular and singular about it (and hence why he thinks it can be discarded) is obscure. Two

features of the case seem to be relevant possibilities, and each supports a different account of why the case can be dismissed: It may be that the *idea* produced is particular and singular, or it may be that the *genesis* of the idea is insignificant.

The first account, that the phenomenon can be discarded because the idea is insignificant, is unsatisfactory. Since the idea could have been of any of a number of blue shades, or even of a shade of some other color, the fact that it happens to be of a particular shade of blue cannot be what makes the phenomenon relevantly particular and singular. A more likely suggestion is that the case is insignificant because the idea is a simple idea of a color. But this, too, will not work. Although a case of the missing shade may be more easily imagined than that of a missing tone or missing taste, these other sorts of cases seem equally conceivable. The missing idea could have been the simple idea of a taste or a tone.[5] The most promising suggestion is that the phenomenon is particular and singular because the idea produced is a simple idea of a member of a special sort of series, a series of simple sensibles (such as shades of the same hue) that differ from one another only by degree.[6] Of course, the number of such series is vast, and so the number of exceptions to Hume's Principle is potentially quite large. Still, one might argue, few (if any) such ideas are actually produced before their corresponding impressions, and, more importantly, the ideas Hume later attacks (e.g., ideas of necessary connection, of substance, of the self) are not members of this group. Consequently, the suggestion goes, he can both acknowledge these exceptions and retain the Principle.

Hume cannot dismiss the contradictory phenomenon solely on the grounds that simple ideas rarely appear before their corresponding impressions. Were he to discard the phenomenon on this basis alone, his Principle would be a mere empirical generalization and could serve neither as his criterion of significance nor as his fundamental psychological claim.[7] Yet the suggestion that the phenomenon can be dismissed because such simple ideas not only seldom occur but belong to a special sort of series (a kind of series to which the ideas he later attacks do *not* belong) is attractive. Robert Fogelin develops this proposal. Fogelin maintains that because the idea of the missing shade is the simple idea of a member of a series of simple sensibles (a series whose members differ only by degree), and because the subject who raises up the idea has had a number of impressions of the members of this series, to raise up the idea, she need only "produce a specific peg to fit a determinate hole provided for it" (Fogelin 267). The ideas Hume later attacks, in contrast, are not members of such a series and so cannot be produced in this way. (The idea of necessary connection, for example, is not the simple idea of a member of a series of simple sensibles, and the person who raises up this idea can have had no prior impressions whatsoever of necessary connection.) Fogelin argues that if the contradictory phenomenon provided a model for the genesis of the

ideas Hume later attacks, the phenomenon could not be discarded, but that because it fails to provide a model, Hume is justified in dismissing it.

Since Hume grants that there is an idea of the missing shade, if it turned out that the ideas he wants to reject could be produced in the same way, he would have to acknowledge them, too. But Fogelin's corresponding suggestion, that the phenomenon can be discarded because it does not provide such a model, does not explain why the case can be dismissed. The proposal would work if the only way the phenomenon could undermine the Principle were by furnishing such a model. The problem is that the phenomenon might undercut the Principle in another way: Suppose that to account for the idea of the missing shade, Hume had to modify or even give up other important claims he makes about the mind. Then, regardless of whether the ideas he later attacks could be produced in the same way as that of the missing shade, the Principle's ability to serve as his fundamental psychological thesis and his criterion of significance would, at the very least, be suspect. Whether the Principle could function in these ways would depend on the nature and extent of the revisions required in his psychology. Unless Hume can account for the idea of the missing shade without modifying in any significant way his theory of mind, he cannot dismiss his contradictory phenomenon.[8] (A revision in his psychology will be insignificant, I assume, only as long as it does not prevent him from retaining the Principle as his most basic psychological claim and deploying it as his criterion of significance.)

This leads us to a second account of why the phenomenon can be discarded: The production of the idea of the missing shade is a particular and singular affair. Hume reveals little about the idea's genesis. Even the conditions that he takes to be required to produce the idea are obscure. The suggestion that the person who creates the idea must have thirty years experience with colors, be familiar with all sorts of colors, and have all other shades of blue presented to her is implausible. Since the phenomena cannot be restricted to color, even familiarity with color cannot be necessary for raising up a simple idea before its corresponding impression. A likely account of the conditions required to create such an idea is suggested by Fogelin: A series of simple sensibles (e.g., a series of shades or of sounds) must be presented; the members of this series must differ from one another only by degree (e.g., the shades are of the same color, the notes are of the same timbre); and the person who observes the series and raises up the idea must be somewhat familiar with the sensibles. Yet how the ideas that are produced in these unusual circumstances are supposed to be generated, and why their genesis poses no threat to the use Hume makes of his Principle, are unclear. Hume tells us only that (i) to sense a shade is to have a distinct, simple impression of it; (ii) sometime after all the shades of blue, save the missing one, are placed in proper order before a subject, the subject perceives a gap where the missing shade should be; and (iii) sometime after perceiving this gap, she uses her

imagination to create the right idea of the missing one.[9] Presumably, he would agree that to sense a (simple) tone or taste is, likewise, to have a distinct, simple impression of it; that sometime after a relevantly similar series of tones (or tastes) is presented, in proper order, to a subject, the subject would perceive a gap where the missing tone (or taste) should be; and that sometime after perceiving this gap, she could employ her imagination to raise up the appropriate idea of the missing item. What takes place in the interval between the initial awareness of such a gap and the presence of the appropriate simple idea, and why the process that gives rise to the idea does not undermine Hume's Principle, remain to be explained. For convenience, in what follows I focus on the genesis of the idea in the missing shade case. I assume that the same kind of account that can be given to explain how this idea is constructed, and why the process by which it is created is insignificant, can also be used to explain how the idea of, say, a missing tone or taste would be generated, and why the genesis of such an idea would be unimportant.

On Hume's behalf, Barry Stroud and D. M. Johnson attempt to account for the idea of the shade, in different ways. Stroud suggests that a psychological principle introduced later in the *Treatise* could yield it:

> the imagination, when set into any train of thinking, is apt to continue, even when its object fails it, and like a galley put in motion by the oars, carries on its course without any new impulse. (T 198)[10]

The mind of the individual who observes Hume's series of patches (appropriately arranged in order from deepest to lightest) would be set in motion and "continue, even when its object fails it" to produce a simple idea of the missing one.[11] Two features of this account make it attractive. First, it captures something right about how our minds sometimes work. Even if I have never heard an English horn, if someone playing a familiar scale on this instrument interrupts the scale at, say, the sixth note, the next note simply pops into my head. I readily imagine it because my mind has been set into the appropriate train of thinking. That the idea of the missing shade of blue would be produced along the same lines seems plausible. Second, because the principle Stroud appeals to is explicitly recognized by Hume, we seem to have not just an account but a Humean account of the missing idea's production. Reconciling that idea's genesis with Hume's theory of mind (and thereby enabling him to continue to deploy his Principle as both his fundamental psychological principle and as criterion of significance) looks encouraging.

There are, however, difficulties with the proposal. First, since impressions of shades of blue are what set the mind in motion in the missing shade case, and since the object that "fails" the imagination in this case is an impression, too, if the mind were set into a train of thinking in the manner Stroud suggests, what it would produce, I gather, is an impression, not an idea. For the

mind to be set in motion in such a way that it continues even when its object fails it is for it to produce what is not in fact supplied to it: in this case, a vivid and lively perception of the missing shade, i.e., an impression. The idea of the missing shade would then be available but only because of this prior impression, and so Hume's contradictory phenomenon would not be contradictory in the sense he claims.[12] Second, Hume maintains that "[i]deas always represent the objects or impressions, from which they are deriv'd, and can never without a fiction represent or be apply'd to any other" (T 37). That is, an idea which represents not its corresponding object or impression but another, represents that other by a fiction. We may use the idea to represent that object, but it is not an idea *of that object.* (For this reason, we might even call the idea itself a fiction.) Hume claims Stroud's principle generates fictions. So, were the idea of the missing shade produced as Stroud proposes, Hume would either have to say that it represents the shade *by a fiction* (and so is not an idea *of* the shade after all) or that the very same principle of the imagination can produce both fictions and (genuine) ideas. Neither alternative seems satisfactory.

Johnson's proposal encounters some of the same sorts of difficulties, along with others.[13] Johnson argues that Hume's account of our idea of necessary connection provides a model for the genesis of the idea of the missing shade: From observing the constant conjunction of two objects, we come to expect one when we see the other, and this expectation produces an inner impression of constraint from which our idea of necessary connection derives. The idea of the missing shade is supposed be generated in a similar fashion:

> [F]or a person to reconstruct a shade he never saw before, he must have developed an appropriately detailed 'habitual spectrum'—i.e., an ordered set of tendencies and expectations concerning colors, built up as a result of long experience with things having those colors—which he then employs as a basis for generating that shade. (Johnson, 115–116)

Once the subject has acquired a "habitual spectrum," Johnson maintains, she will be able to "extrapolate" or "reconstruct" the idea of the missing shade. That idea will be simple, and it will appear before its corresponding impression.[14]

One difficulty with this proposal concerns the degree to which it is modeled on what Hume says about our idea of necessary connection. Hume maintains that we have no idea of necessary connection "consider'd as a quality in bodies" (T 166); the idea we do have is instead projected onto external things by means of a fiction.[15] If the same mental processes responsible for this idea were supposed to be responsible for the idea of the

missing shade, Hume would have to maintain either that these processes can yield both fictions and (genuine) ideas or that the idea of the shade represents the shade by a fiction (and so the contradictory phenomenon is not contradictory). In defense of Johnson, one might argue that the extrapolating or reconstructing aspect of his account can stand independently of the necessary connection model. The trouble with this suggestion is that Johnson does not discuss the extrapolating or reconstructing processes, consider whether Hume's psychology has the resources to accommodate them, or explain why ideas produced by them would not sabotage Hume's deployment of his Principle.[16] The suggestion that the idea of the shade would be produced by these processes, moreover, seems to be something Hume would want to deny, for an idea produced by means of them would have to have distinguishable components. Hume maintains that the idea is simple, not complex.

III. The Solution

Hume tells us that the individual who raises up the idea of the missing shade first recognizes a gap where the shade should be and then somehow uses her imagination to create the idea. In this section I want to suggest both how, according to Hume, this raising process generates the idea and why the process fails to undermine his use of his Principle. Since Hume maintains that the person who creates the idea can distinguish the patches of the series from one another and recognize a gap where the missing one should be, he must think she can distinguish lightness (or deepness) from hue. Given that she can make this distinction when looking at the series of patches, she should (eventually) be able to distinguish the lightness and hue of a single patch. Provided that she can, she must have both a notion of the hue and some understanding of lightness, and so she should be able to create the idea of the missing shade by imagining the appropriate hue and lightness combined.[17] The idea would be no less simple than the ideas of the other blue shades (or so I argue), and it would precede its corresponding impression.

This proposal, which I call the differentiating and reconstructing account, appears to violate Hume's Principle in several ways. According to the Principle, a simple idea derives from a precedent corresponding impression which it exactly resembles (i.e., of which it is an exact image or copy). The distinguishing and reconstructing account suggests that a simple idea can fail to be a copy of the perception from which it derives, that it can come from another simple idea (not an impression), and that it can derive from precedent perceptions (rather than a single one). The account also seems to conflict with what Hume elsewhere says about both the imagination's capabilities and the difference between simple and complex perceptions.

Some of these difficulties are easily resolved. Hume allows that "as our

ideas are images of our impressions, so we can form secondary ideas, which are images of the primary" (T 6). A simple idea can derive from a precedent, corresponding simple idea, not an impression. Such a secondary idea, moreover, can be traced through its corresponding idea to that idea's corresponding simple impression and so derives from more than a single perception. A more troubling aspect of the distinguishing and reconstructing hypothesis is its claim that a simple idea need not copy the simple perceptions from which it derives. If the imagination can produce new simple ideas, how can the First Principle serve as Hume's fundamental psychological thesis, much less as his criterion of significance? Hume's account of the notion of distinctions of reason provides the tools for answering these questions. He writes,

> 'Tis certain that the mind wou'd never have dream'd of distinguishing a figure from the body figur'd, as being in reality neither distinguishable, nor different, nor separable; did it not observe, that even in this simplicity there might be contain'd many different resemblances and relations. Thus when a globe of white marble is presented, we receive only the impression of a white colour dispos'd in a certain form, nor are we able to separate and distinguish the colour from the form. But observing afterwards a globe of black marble and a cube of white, and comparing them with our former object, we find two separate resemblances, in what formerly seem'd, and really is, perfectly inseparable. After a little more practice of this kind, we begin to distinguish the figure from the colour by a *distinction of reason*; that is, we consider the figure and colour together, since they are in effect the same and undistinguishable; but still view them in different aspects according to the resemblances, of which they are susceptible. When we wou'd consider only the figure of the globe of white marble, we form in reality an idea both of the figure and colour, but tacitly carry our eye to its resemblance with the globe of black marble. (T 25)

Hume introduces these distinctions to explain how figure can be distinguished from body figured, color from figure, and motion from body moved. But his remarks also suggest both how the imagination can create new simple ideas and why the genesis of these ideas does not pose a threat to his deployment of the Principle.[18]

Suppose we present a person, Jim, with a white circle and then give him a black circle and a white square. Hume tells us that by comparing these objects, Jim will discover resemblances between them and come to distinguish color from figure even though, in reality, the two are perfectly inseparable: by "tacitly carrying his eye" to the resemblance between the circles, Jim will consider only their figure; by focusing on the resemblance between the square

and the white circle, he will contemplate only their color. In this way, he will form a notion of the shape *circle* and of the color *white* (though whatever ideas he has will involve both color and figure). By means of similar comparisons, Jim should also be able to form a notion of the shape *square* and of the color *black*. Now suppose that Jim has never seen a black square. Given that he can distinguish color and figure in the way Hume suggests, he should be able to form the idea of this square just by imagining the shape square filled in with the color black. This idea, like the ideas of the white circle, of the black circle, and of the white square, would be nothing but the idea of a (uniform) color "dispos'd in a certain form," and it would be as simple as these other ideas. But unlike the others, it would go before its corresponding impression. This example suggests that by attending to resemblances between simple perceptions, one can, by a distinction (or distinctions) of reason, form notions of the features or aspects in which those perceptions resemble one another (e.g., color, figure). Then, by imagining particular features re-combined as one has not seen them combined before, one can construct a new idea. The idea will be simple and will go before its corresponding impression.

Hume's contradictory phenomenon is more complicated, but in this case, too, his distinction(s) of reason can account for the idea. Like color and figure, hue and lightness are "perfectly inseparable" yet can nonetheless be distinguished. Presented with a collection of patches that differ only in lightness, not hue, an observant perceiver could come to recognize resemblances and, ultimately, to distinguish lightness from hue by a distinction of reason (though any idea she formed of lightness would contain hue, and any idea she formed of hue would involve lightness). She could then raise up the idea of the missing shade by imagining together the appropriate hue and lightness.

As sketched, the distinguishing and reconstructing hypothesis seems vulnerable to the following objection: Although it may explain how some new simple ideas are created, it cannot account for the idea of the missing shade. The hypothesis maintains that each of the components that make up a new simple idea copies a feature found in a prior, simple impression. To create a new idea as the account suggests, then, one must first have simple perceptions that contain the features that are copied. Jim is supplied with everything he needs to create the idea of the black square (for he is given a black circle, a white circle, and a white square). But the person who allegedly raises up the idea of the missing shade is not so fortunate. Although she is given the correct hue and has as many different lightnesses as there are shades provided, she is not supplied with the lightness needed to raise up the right idea of the missing shade. Without it, how can she form that idea?

Answering this question requires a closer look at Hume's contradictory phenomenon. Hume tells us that his patches differ only in lightness, not hue, but just what he has in mind is not obvious. A (uniform) color patch has three

distinguishable features: hue (what we normally think of as color), saturation (the strength of the hue or how close it is to gray), and brightness (the hue's dimness or brilliance). If lightness is either saturation or brightness, but not both, the patches will form a simple series, and the shades of this series will differ in only one aspect: degree of saturation or degree of brightness. If lightness encompasses both saturation and brightness, the patches will differ along two dimensions and, when properly arranged, will form a field. There are thus two possible versions of the missing shade case.[19] Suppose the phenomenon involves a field of patches. The subject will need to distinguish hue, brightness, and saturation. But the hue, brightness, and saturation needed to raise up the idea of the missing shade will be provided, and once she has distinguished them, she will be able to construct the idea of the missing shade by imagining the appropriate combination of the three. If the phenomenon involves merely a series of patches (as most commentators seem to assume), she will need to distinguish only two features: hue-brightness and saturation, or hue-saturation and brightness. In this version of the case, one of the features needed to construct the idea will be missing. Nevertheless there are two ways Hume could try to account for the idea. Provided the difference in lightness between any two adjoining shades is constant, he could argue that she can supply the missing lightness by yet another distinction of reason: By "tacitly carrying her eye" to the resemblances between adjoining shades, she can form a notion of the lightness by which adjoining shades differ (though whatever idea she has will contain both lightness and hue). She can then raise up the idea of the missing shade by imagining that lightness "added" to the shade on the darker side of the gap (or by imagining it "subtracted" from the shade on the lighter side). Alternatively (and less plausibly), given that she is well-acquainted with colors, she may have encountered the missing lightness at some point in the past. If so, then Hume could say she can rely on her memory to produce an idea of a shade with that lightness. By imagining the lightness with the right hue, he could argue, she can create the idea of the missing shade.

Still, the suggestion that new simple ideas can be produced in any of these ways seems unsatisfactory, for it appears incompatible with Hume's simple/complex perception distinction. Hume defines simple perceptions as those that "admit of no distinction nor separation"; complex perceptions are "the contrary to these, and may be distinguished into parts" (T 2). Yet according to the distinguishing and reconstructing proposal, simple perceptions have distinguishable components. The account thus seems to make them complex. Further, the account seems to conflict with what Hume tells us about his contradictory phenomenon, for it appears to make the phenomenon not contradictory. Stroud raises this concern when he writes,

> Hume cannot accept the plausible suggestion that the man fills in the missing shade by noticing certain features in common to all previously perceived members of the spectrum and also noticing a certain respect or degree in which they all differ. That implies that the perceptions of the particular shades are complex, since they would have distinguishable features, whereas it is the very fact that the perceptions are supposed to be simple that gives rise to the problem. Someone's getting a complex idea without having had a corresponding impression poses no threat to Hume's principle about the origin of our ideas. (Stroud, 253)

Had Hume thought the idea could be produced along the lines the distinguishing and reconstructing account proposes, one might argue, he would have regarded the idea as complex and not an exception to his Principle.

I think the account can be defended against these criticisms. Although Hume defines simple perceptions as those which admit no distinction nor separation, he seems to have recognized that even they have distinguishable features, for he acknowledges that they can resemble one another. When introducing the case of the missing shade, for instance, he maintains both that each of the shades in his series is simple and that they resemble each other. His remarks in the Appendix are more explicit:

> 'Tis evident, that even different simple ideas may have a similarity or resemblance to each other; nor is it necessary, that the point or circumstance of resemblance shou'd be distinct or separable from that in which they differ. *Blue* and *green* are different simple ideas, but are more resembling that *blue* and *scarlet*; tho' their perfect simplicity excludes all possibility of separation or distinction. 'Tis the same case with particular sounds, and tastes and smells. (T 637)

Since such partial resemblances are possible only if the perceptions themselves have distinguishable aspects, Hume is committed to the view that simple impressions have distinguishable features.

One might think these passages show only that Hume occasionally realized his account of simplicity was inadequate or confused. But careful attention to the kinds of features simple and complex perceptions have, as well as to the sorts of distinctions and separations each allows, shows both that his simple/complex distinction is not confused in the way that it may first appear and that it is compatible with the distinguishing and reconstructing hypothesis. The impression of an apple, the idea of a golden mountain, and the idea of a winged horse are, for Hume, complex perceptions. Their components, themselves simple perceptions, are distinguishable and

separable in reality. Not only may they be imagined separately, they may even exist separately and, hence, may be regarded as true parts. In contrast, the components of simple perceptions (like the impression of a (uniform) shade of blue or the taste of a pineapple) depend conceptually upon one another; one cannot even be imagined independently of others. A (visual) shape must have some color, a color some hue, a note some timbre, and so on. The features of these perceptions (e.g., hue and lightness, volume and timbre) can be distinguished only by distinctions of reason and so cannot be regarded as genuine parts. If I am right, when Hume tells us simple perceptions "admit of no distinction or separation," he is not denying that they possess components distinguishable by reason; he is saying that their features are not distinguishable and separable in reality. Similarly, when he tells us that complex (but not simple) perceptions "may be distinguished into parts," he is claiming that only complex perceptions have components that can be distinguished and separated in reality.[20]

Provided Hume's simple/complex perception distinction is understood along these lines, the fact that a perception has features which are distinguishable by a distinction (or distinctions) of reason does not imply that it is complex. Hume thus can acknowledge that the idea of the missing shade has distinguishable features without being forced to conclude that it is complex. Indeed, because these features are distinguishable only by a distinction (or distinctions) of reason, the idea cannot be complex. The proposal that a new simple idea can be created by imagining features of simple perceptions combined in a way that has not been observed is neither incompatible with Hume's simple/complex distinction nor does it conflict with what he tells us about the contradictory phenomenon.

Yet if new simple ideas can be created as the distinguishing and reconstructing account proposes, not all simple ideas can be traced to precedent, corresponding impressions, and, consequently, Hume's use of his Principle is, to say the least, questionable. I have argued that he can legitimately deploy the Principle as long as he can account for the idea of the missing shade without modifying or qualifying his theory of mind in such a way that his use of the Principle is undermined. What needs to be shown is that, given that simple ideas can be produced as the distinguishing and reconstructing account maintains, the Principle can nonetheless function as both his fundamental psychological claim and his criterion of significance. If the account allowed that wholly new simple ideas could be imagined, Hume's deployment of his Principle would be undercut. He could not rely on it to show, for instance, that there are no innate ideas, or to support his claim that to understand an idea we must examine the impression(s) from which it derives. But the account does not say that wholly new ideas can be created. It claims that any new simple idea not (ultimately) derived from a corresponding, precedent impression is constructed entirely from elements

encountered in precedent simple impressions.[21] Hume can thus grant that new simple ideas are created as the hypothesis maintains and still uphold the Principle as his most fundamental psychological thesis. That new simple ideas can be constructed as the distinguishing and reconstructing account suggests does not force him to give up his claim that all simple ideas can ultimately be traced to perceptions that appropriately resemble them or to acknowledge that there are innate ideas. He can also deploy the Principle as his criterion of significance, though he must do this a bit more cautiously than he indicates. If, when trying to determine whether an alleged idea is genuine and that idea's corresponding simple impression(s) cannot be found, before concluding that there is no idea, he must determine whether it may be the product of a distinction (or distinctions) of reason. Any idea produced in this way must be acknowledged, even though it fails to derive from its corresponding impression.

Does the ability to construct new simple ideas as the extracting and reconstructing hypothesis suggests jeopardize Hume's attacks on our ideas of, for example, necessary connection, substance, or the (simple) self? The answer depends on whether these ideas can be produced by a distinction (or distinctions) of reason along the lines suggested by the extracting and reconstructing account. Consider, say, the idea of necessary connection as a quality of bodies. One might wonder whether it could be created by employing distinctions of reason to imagine necessity and connection appropriately combined. Hume's answer, I think, would be *no*. He takes *necessity*, *connection*, and *power* to be "nearly synonimous" and argues that we have no impressions whatsoever of the thing to which these terms supposedly refer. Since distinctions of reason only enable us to create simple ideas whose features can be found by examining simple perceptions, if we have no perceptions at all of necessity or connection, we cannot use distinctions of reason to create a just idea of necessary connection. The same line of argument can be used to show that none of the other ideas Hume attacks can be produced in the manner the extracting and reconstructing account maintains.

Hume could have made his treatment of the contradictory phenomenon much clearer by explicitly qualifying the First Principle:

> all our simple ideas in the first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent [unless they are produced by a distinction (or distinctions) of reason]. (T 4)

and by telling us that the idea of the missing shade can be produced by such a distinction (or distinctions). Yet given that Hume thought few (if any) ideas are in fact constructed by these distinctions, that none of the ideas he later attacks can be produced by them, and that, consequently, qualifying the Principle in this way makes no difference to his actual deployment of it when

attacking these ideas, perhaps he saw no need to make the qualification explicit or to explain how (he thought) the idea of the shade would be produced.

IV. Concluding Remarks

I have argued that given Hume's theory of mind, the distinguishing and reconstructing account can explain both how the idea of the missing shade is generated and why Hume can so readily dismiss it. The contradictory phenomenon neither prevents the First Principle from serving as the fundamental principle of his theory of mind nor keeps him from deploying it as his criterion of significance. Whether the account accurately describes how an idea like that of the missing shade would actually be produced is, of course, another question.

NOTES

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1 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1978); hereafter cited as T. The *Enquiries* contains a cryptic version of the Principle: "All our ideas or more feeble perceptions are copies of our impressions or more lively ones," (David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3rd ed. revised by P. H. Nidditch [Oxford: Clarendon, 1975], 19). For this claim to be identical with the one appearing in the *Treatise*, Hume's assertion that our ideas are copies must be understood in two ways: (i) ideas are copies in the sense that each is derived or copied *from* a precedent corresponding impression, and (ii) ideas are copies in the sense that each resembles or is a faint image or copy *of* its corresponding impression. Hume does not explicitly state that only simple ideas copy their corresponding impressions in the *Enquiries*. Yet since he acknowledges that complex ideas need not copy complex impressions, this must be what he had in mind.

2 Strictly speaking, Hume challenges us to produce a simple idea not derived from a corresponding impression in the *Enquiries*, while in the *Treatise*, the challenge is to find a simple idea not constantly conjoined with its corresponding impression.

3 As should become clear from the discussion that follows, my interest lies in how Hume might account for the idea of the missing shade, given his theory of mind and the use he wants to make of his Principle. How the idea would in fact be produced, and whether Hume's account of its genesis is correct, are not here my concern.

4 Accounts that do not satisfy this requirement include the following: Bernard Rollin, "Hume's Blue Patch," *The Journal of the History of Ideas* 32

(1971): 119–128; Ronald Butler, "Hume's Impressions," in *Impressions of Empiricism*, edited by Godfrey Vesey (New York: St. Martin's, 1976); Robert Cummins, "The Missing Shade of Blue," *The Philosophical Review* 87 (October 1978): 548–565; and John Losee, "Hume's Demarcation Project," *Hume Studies* 18.1 (1992): 51–62. For a discussion of Butler's proposal, see William Williams, "Is Hume's Shade of Blue a Red Herring?" *Synthese* 92 (1992): 83–99. For a discussion of Cummins's account, see the following: Robert Fogelin, "Hume and the Missing Shade of Blue," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 65 (1984): 263–271 (hereafter cited by author's surname); and John Nelson, "Hume's Missing Shade of Blue Re-Viewed," *Hume Studies* 15.2 (1989): 353–363.

5 John Morreall discusses a variety of cases relevantly like that of the missing shade (John Morreall, "Hume's Missing Shade of Blue," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (1984): 263–271; hereafter cited by author's surname).

6 Such a series of color patches differs from an analogous series of tastes or sounds in that the color patches may be laid before the perceiver, while the notes or tastes of an analogous series can be presented only in succession. But this difference strikes me as insignificant. See Morreall and the example of the English horn below.

7 Were he to dismiss the phenomenon on this basis alone, he could still claim that *in general* simple ideas derive from precedent corresponding impressions and even that *in general* to understand an idea, we must examine the impression(s) from which it derives. But he could not use the Principle to establish that there are no innate ideas or to show that whenever we lack the corresponding simple impression, there can be no idea.

8 Fogelin thinks Hume can account for the production of the idea of the missing shade but does not adequately explain how Hume is supposed to do this; see note 16.

9 Not all commentators recognize that Hume distinguishes awareness of the gap from having a simple idea of the missing shade. Presumably, by virtue of recognizing that there is a gap, the subject has some idea of the shade that is missing, but this is not the idea in which Hume is interested.

10 Barry Stroud, *Hume* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1977); hereafter cited by author's surname.

11 Stroud mentions this account almost in passing, and it is not clear to me whether he endorses it or is merely pointing to something that looks promising and ought to be investigated. Williams also suggests that this principle of the imagination (if combined with Hume's distinctions of reason) could play a role in the production of the idea, but Williams does not discuss how the idea would be generated.

12 Some commentators maintain that the imagination would produce an *idea* rather than an impression. Hume does credit this principle of the mind with generating ideas; it is responsible for our idea of equality and helps to produce the idea of the continued existence of bodies. But he never explains just how the principle yields these ideas; whether or not they are supposed to derive from mind-generated impressions is unclear, especially given that, for

Hume, the difference between ideas and impressions is a matter of liveliness o vivacity. I think Hume's description of the missing shade case makes th proposal that, in this instance at least, the imagination would yield a impression plausible. Yet even if one thinks the principle would generate a idea rather than an impression, as I note in the text, there is an additiona reason for rejecting Stroud's proposal.

13 D. M. Johnson, "Hume's Missing Shade of Blue, Interpreted as Involvin Habitual Spectra," *Hume Studies* 10.2 (1984): 109–123; hereafter cited b author's surname.

14 In conversation, Robert Vance has suggested a similar proposal.

15 For further support of this reading of Hume, see: Simon Blackburn, "Hum and Thick Connexions," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 50 (supp. (1990): 237–250; and Kenneth P. Winkler, "The New Hume," *The Philosophica Review* 100.4 (1991): 541–579.

16 Johnson does criticize the account but on the grounds that it fails t explain accurately how ideas like that of the missing shade are produced.

17 Fogelin may have this sort of account in mind for he writes,

> We are not to think of our simple ideas of colors as an unorganized set of wholly distinct entities. The various hues are internally related to one another in degrees of resemblance. Hume also takes it for granted that these internal relations form the linear ordering of a spectrum: each hue occupies a determinate location within a color space composed of distinct (and presumably finitely many) hues. One such hue can be noticeably absent. Given these surroundings, the imagination is not faced with the insuperable task of producing a brute content *ex nihilo*. To speak metaphorically, it is asked to produce a specific peg to fit a determinate hole provided for it. To speak somewhat less metaphorically, it would only have to give substance to a formally determinate apprehension. (Fogelin 267)

But Fogelin does not discuss how, according to Hume, the imagination produces the right peg. David Pears may be moving toward something like this proposal as well, but his account is also incomplete (David Pears, *Hume's System: An Examination of the First Book of his* Treatise [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990]).

18 Some commentators (e.g., Fogelin, Williams) recognize that such distinctions play (or at least may play) a role in the production of the idea but do not discuss how they enable the idea to be produced or why an idea produced by means of them does not undercut Hume's deployment of the First Principle. Butler considers the matter at length, but his conception of the problem the contradictory phenomenon poses differs significantly from the one presented here. Don Garrett also discusses the issue in detail, and his account of how (according to Hume) the idea of the missing shade would be produced and of why the phenomenon can be dismissed is similar in several respects to the one advanced here (Garrett, "Priority and Separability in

Hume's Empiricism," *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 67 [1984]: 270–288; hereafter cited by author's surname). (I thank William Morris for bringing Garrett's paper to my attention.) See Williams for a discussion of Butler's proposal.

19 The matter becomes even more complicated if more than one blue hue is involved.

20 To be more precise, Hume takes visual perceptions to be composed of visual atoms or *minima sensibilia*, and visual perceptions are to be regarded as simple only insofar as they are thought of as sensory *minima*. A single visual atom, in itself, has no extension, but combinations of atoms do. The perception of an object composed of two or more atoms is complex, since it is a perception with more than one spatial part. For this reason, the shades of blue in Hume's series can be treated as simple perceptions just to the extent that they are regarded as simple-perception-*types*. The shades are complex in the sense that each is composed of a large (but finite) number of simple-perception-*tokens*. I set aside this point in the main body of the paper since the observation that a perception of a (uniform) shade of blue is complex in this sense does not make Hume's contradictory phenomenon insignificant. For further discussion of this distinction, and of the relationship between Hume's First Principle, his Separability Principle, and his distinctions of reason, see Garrett.

21 If the contradictory phenomenon involves a field of color patches, all the features in the idea of the missing shade will copy features found in these patches. This will not be the case if the phenomenon consists of a simple series, for the right lightness will be missing. Given that the subject has encountered this particular lightness at some point in the past, Hume can still claim (rather implausibly) that all the features in the idea of the shade copy features of patches she has seen. If she has not encountered this lightness, however, he can say only that all of the features of the idea can be found by examining her previous impressions (where such an examination includes not only the impressions themselves but also their relations to one another). Whether this final version of the case poses a serious difficulty for Hume is at present not clear to me.

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