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Abraham Sesshu Roth

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# Hume's Psychology of Identity Ascriptions

ABRAHAM SESSHU ROTH

## Introduction

Hume observes that we naturally believe ordinary objects to persist through time and change. The question that interests him in the *Treatise*<sup>1</sup> is, What causes such a belief to arise in the human mind? Hume's question is, of course, the naturalistic one we would expect given that the project of the *Treatise* is the construction of a "science of man."

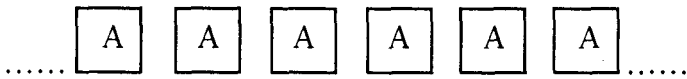
This paper seeks to clarify Hume's discussion of how we acquire the notion of persisting objects. In the first section, I note that several observations Hume makes about the actions of the mind may all come under the heading of "seeing successions as simple." These observations pose a problem for Hume's system, revealing a tension between his accounts of our ideas of time and persistence: if (as Hume believes) only successions, which are not simple, endure through time, how is it that bodies seen as simple are nevertheless thought to endure or have duration as well? In the second section I show how Hume answers this question. The third section is devoted to an interpretation of Hume's notions of the identity relation and what he calls an "object existent at a time." Identity through time is standardly treated in contemporary analytic philosophy using the notion of a *unity* relation connecting various *temporal parts or stages* of a persisting object. One interpretation of Hume takes his talk of the identity relation as signifying just such a unity relation, and "object existent at a time" as referring to a temporal part of an object. Another interpretation makes use of the notion of substance

and of qualities inhering in a substance at different times. These interpretations concentrate upon metaphysical issues, and neglect the psychological aspects of Hume's discussion of identity. I demonstrate that these interpretations are unacceptable because they cannot be reconciled with Hume's psychologically significant distinction between vulgar or commonplace views on the one hand, and those views held by philosophers on the other. Finally, I propose and defend an alternative view of Hume's account of identity. This new understanding makes use of the notion of distinctions of reason to interpret Hume's idea of an object existent at a time. It turns out that a focus upon Hume's psychology of identity ascriptions will allow us to discern an interesting metaphysical alternative to the temporal parts view of identity.

### 1. Seeing Successions as Simple

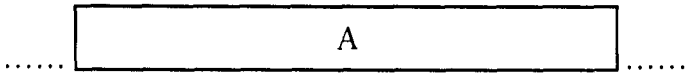
There has been some dispute in the literature about the temporal nature of Humean impressions. According to Barry Stroud, Hume holds that if one stares at an unchanging object (in unchanging conditions) for some more than minimal amount of time, one's experience takes the form of a sequence of qualitatively identical impressions, each of which occupies a temporal minimum.<sup>2</sup> Thus when I fix my gaze upon an object, I am subject to a temporal series of impressions which may be represented as follows:

(1)



Eli Hirsch and Don Baxter question Stroud's assumption that a Humean perception occupies only a temporal minimum.<sup>3</sup> Baxter holds that in Hume's view an impression will last as long as you keep looking and the conditions under which you look remain unchanged. So to stare fixedly at an object would on his view be represented in this way:

(1')



I side with Baxter and Hirsch on this matter.<sup>4</sup> But the dispute in any case has minimal ramifications for the purposes of this paper. My concern is with how Hume thinks a sequence or succession of impressions such as (1) would normally be experienced, i.e., with what idea the common person would derive from such a succession, and with how such an individual would characterize this succession. According to Hume, regardless of whether or not perceptions are extended, if a perceiver were to be presented with a succession like (1), it would be experienced or taken as (1'). Hume says,

'Tis evident, that as the ideas of the several distinct *successive* qualities of objects are united together by a very close relation, the mind, in looking along the succession, must be carry'd from one part of it to another by an easy transition, and will no more perceive the change, than if it contemplated the same unchangeable object....hence it proceeds, that any such succession of related qualities is readily consider'd as one continu'd object, existing without any variation. (T 220)

The perceptions of (1), being qualitatively identical and immediately conjoined, are related in a manner presumably most conducive for the sequence to be regarded as a single perception. Hume says that simple perceptions "admit of no distinction or separation," whereas "the complex are contrary to these, and may be distinguished into parts" (T 2). A succession is by definition complex in that it is constituted by successively arranged elements or parts. A succession therefore is to be contrasted with a temporally simple object. (There might of course be complex objects that are temporally simple. Hereafter, unless otherwise noted, by 'simple' I mean 'temporally simple'.<sup>5</sup>) Given this, we might put Hume's point about successions such as (1) as follows: the succession of perceptions which we take to be an object is complex, but regarded as simple. In seeing (1) as simple—that is, as (1')—the mind confusedly characterizes the complex succession of perceptions as a single, (temporally) simple object. And if the mind encounters a single, (temporally) simple object, it will presumably also experience it as such. Let us stipulate that a continuant is anything—be it a succession or a single (temporally) simple object—that is taken by the mind to be a single, (temporally) simple object. Thus (1) and (1') both represent continuants, since they are both experienced as (1'). Hume reserves some terminology for temporally extended perceptions/objects which are simple, i.e., not successions; he speaks of them as having an identity and continuing the same.<sup>6</sup> All continuants, as I have defined them above, are regarded by the vulgar as having an identity through time, and continuing the same. This is just to say that they are regarded as (temporally) simple. Hume says,

Thus the principle of individuation is nothing but the *invariableness* and *uninterruptedness* of any object, thro' a suppos'd variation of time, by which the mind can trace it in the different periods of its existence, without any break of the view, and without being oblig'd to form the idea of multiplicity or number. (T 201)

'Tis confest by the most judicious philosophers, that our ideas of bodies are nothing but collections form'd by the mind of the ideas of the several distinct sensible qualities, of which objects are compos'd,

and which we find to have a constant union with each other. But however these qualities may in themselves be entirely distinct, 'tis certain we commonly regard the compound, which they form, as ONE thing, and as continuing the SAME under very considerable alterations. The acknowledg'd composition is evidently contrary to this suppos'd *simplicity*, and the variation to the *identity*. (T 219)

What conditions are necessary for a succession to be a continuant? That is, when do we take a succession to be simple? The passage from T 220 to which I have already drawn attention makes it clear that Hume held that a sequence of momentary, qualitatively identical items such as in (1) would be taken as a simple as in (1'). But qualitative identity is not the only relation Hume has in mind when he speaks of "a very close relation." In addition, sequences composed of gradually changing perceptions (such that each perception has a content at most slightly differing from ones just preceding and just subsequent to it) will also provide the mind with the "easy transitions," encouraging the imagination to regard it as simple:

...supposing some very *small* or *inconsiderable* part to be added to the mass, or subtracted from it; tho' this absolutely destroys the identity of the whole, strictly speaking; yet as we seldom think so accurately, we scruple not to pronounce a mass of matter the same, where we find so trivial an alteration. The passage of the thought from the object before the change to the object after it, is so smooth and easy, that we scarce perceive the transition, and are apt to imagine, that 'tis nothing but a continu'd survey of the same object. (T 255–256)<sup>7</sup>

There is yet another kind of sequence that is taken as simple by the mind, and hence must be included as a continuant. These are interrupted successions exhibiting sufficient constancy. For example, consider the sequence of perceptions had when one looks at the furniture across the room, closes one's eyes, and then looks again. Such a succession is one where earlier and later parts are separated but so closely related (as Hume puts it at T 204, "same in appearance and situation," and "resemble perfectly") that the mind treats the succession as a simple. Thus Hume says that

An easy transition or passage of the imagination, along the ideas of these different and interrupted perceptions, is almost the same disposition of mind with that in which we consider one constant and uninterrupted perception. 'Tis therefore very natural for us to mistake the one for the other. (T204)<sup>8,9</sup>

Continuants, then, are not restricted to uninterrupted, unchanging successions. Any succession whose elements are sufficiently related to be taken

as an object is seen as a simple. Such a succession therefore is by our definition a continuant. The doctrine of continuants raises the problem of how we may recognize continuants as enduring. Why this should be a problem, and how Hume resolves it, will be the subject of the next section.<sup>10</sup>

## 2. How may simples be seen as enduring?

To understand why this question poses a problem, I must look briefly at Hume's account of time and duration. In interpreting Hume's solution to the problem, I will take some cues from Baxter,<sup>11</sup> though in the end, our interpretations differ significantly.

Space and time are analogous in important respects. Any two real or actual objects are spatially related, one being located in a certain direction and distance from the other. Similarly, any object in time is a certain temporal distance from any other, in one of two "directions," the future or the past.<sup>12</sup> In this sense time is space-like. But beside its space-like features, some claim temporal passage to be a feature of time with no spatial analogue. This distinctive feature of time was noted by thinkers familiar to Hume. For example, Newton held that absolute time "flows equally without relation to any thing external,"<sup>13</sup> and that "the flowing of absolute time is liable to no change."<sup>14</sup> As for "apparent" or "vulgar" time "commonly used instead of true time," Newton felt that this was an imperfect, "sensible and external" measure of the absolute flow.<sup>15</sup> More significantly, it seems that Locke proposed to capture this peculiar aspect of time in terms of the notion of succession. Locke notes that

There is another sort of Distance, or Length, the *Idea* whereof we get not from the permanent parts of Space, but from the fleeting and perpetually perishing parts of Succession. This we call *Duration*....<sup>16</sup>

Duration, and Time which is a part of it, is the *Idea* we have of *perishing distance*, of which no two parts exist together, but follow each other in Succession; as *Expansion* is the *Idea* of *lasting distance*, all whose parts exist together, and are not capable of Succession.<sup>17</sup>

For Locke, the distinguishing feature of duration is temporal passage, which he characterizes in terms of the idea of succession. He thinks we derive this idea from reflection on the train of ideas that constitutes our experience.

Hume also held temporal passage to be a feature of time, along with those features that have spatial analogues. He emphasizes the analogy between space and time, pointing out that both the ideas of space and time are conveyed to the mind by an array of perceptions, there being no single impression of either (T 34–35). However, Hume reserves the term 'succession' for the array

yielding the idea of time, that is, for the array Locke would have called the "train of ideas" constituting one's experience. Hume distinguishes time from space when he says that the

...parts [of time] are not coexistent: For that quality of the co-existence of parts belongs to extension, and is what distinguishes it from duration. (T 36)

The role Hume assigns to successions as the source of our belief in temporal passage has, he believes, the consequence that only successions are things to which we may properly assign duration. Thus he says,

I know there are some who pretend, that the idea of duration is applicable in a proper sense to objects, which are perfectly unchangeable; and this I take to be the common opinion of philosophers as well as of the vulgar. But to be convinc'd of its falsehood we need but reflect on the foregoing conclusion, that the idea of duration is always deriv'd from a succession of changeable objects, and can never be convey'd to the mind by any thing steadfast and unchangeable. For it inevitably follows from thence, *that since the idea of duration cannot be deriv'd from such an object, it can never in any propriety or exactness be apply'd to it, nor can any thing unchangeable be ever said to have duration.* (T 37, my emphasis)

Thus both Locke and Hume agree that a temporally simple object—an object that does not comprise a number of perceptions in succession—cannot give us the idea of duration. As the passage above indicates, Hume goes further in asserting that such steadfast objects cannot be correctly ascribed duration.<sup>18</sup>

Hume is now faced with a problem. The only things recognized to have duration are those that are seen as successions. But ordinary objects, which are not seen as successions, are nevertheless regarded as enduring. For example Hume says,

I have already observ'd, that time, in a strict sense, implies succession, and that when we apply its idea to any unchangeable object, 'tis only by a fiction of the imagination, by which the unchangeable object is suppos'd to participate of the changes of the co-existent objects, and in particular of that of our perceptions. (T 200–201)

In this passage Hume is considering the case of (1) or (1'), but he also observes that we ascribe duration to interrupted successions that we take to be simple:

But tho' it be impossible to shew the impression, from which the idea of time without a changeable existence is deriv'd; yet we can easily point out those appearances, which make us fancy we have that

idea...when we consider a steadfast object at five-a-clock, and regard the same at six; we are apt to apply to it that idea [of duration] in the same manner as if every moment were distinguish'd by a different position, or an alteration of the object. (T 65)

It is clear then that continuants are typically ascribed duration. The problem for Hume to explain is how we (the vulgar) come to do this. Continuants, after all, are taken to be simple, whereas in order for something to be regarded as having duration, it must be seen as a succession.

All continuants are taken by the vulgar to be simple. However, Hume does allow that the vulgar are in a sense aware of one sort of continuant as a succession. These are the interrupted successions that exhibit sufficient constancy.<sup>19</sup> Hume holds that the vulgar are aware of a succession whose elements consist of the object's manifestations before and after the interruption. (This awareness conflicts with the simplicity/identity the vulgar ascribe to the interrupted succession, and prompts them to posit the continued existence of the object or perception during the interruption when it is not present to the senses.) So in the case of continuants that are successions exhibiting sufficient constancy, one might think that the continuant might be ascribed a duration by the vulgar.

Even if Hume were to opt for such an explanation, it would at best provide an answer only for the case of interrupted successions. There would remain no explanation for the vulgar tendency to ascribe duration to any other sort of continuants (steadfast or temporally simple objects, successions of qualitatively identical perceptions, and successions of gradually changing perceptions). It would also remain unexplained how the vulgar ascribe duration to the part of the succession that occurs before the interruption.

It is also interesting to note that in discussing how an interrupted succession might be ascribed a duration at T 65, Hume fails to appeal to the succession consisting of the manifestation of the object before and after the interruption. In fact, it appears that he would have rejected this solution on the grounds that it would not account for the duration the vulgar are tempted to ascribe to the object during the interruption, when it is out of sight.

Let us turn now to Hume's actual explanation of the vulgar ascription of duration to continuants. The core of this explanation comes in his discussion of the principle of individuation (T 200–201). Here, Hume undertakes to show how we come to think a steadfast (unchanging and uninterrupted) object has duration. What he has to say about this should straightforwardly apply to the problem of how we come to think that an object we regard as simple nevertheless has duration. Hume notes that

...we may trace the succession of time by a like succession of ideas, and conceiving first one moment, along with the object then

existent, imagine afterwards a change in the time without any *variation or interruption* in the object.... (T 201)

Hume's remark supplies an answer to the question, how is something seen as (1') thought to have duration? There is no special single perception indicating duration or the passage of time which is associated with the object. Instead (and here I agree with Baxter's interpretation<sup>20</sup>), to imagine a passage of time, one must imagine a succession of perceptions running alongside of the continuant. The duration that is properly ascribable to the succession is (improperly) associated with the continuant. Hume describes what takes place here as a fiction and holds the imagination responsible. It should be noted that the ascribing of duration to the continuant is unjustified, even though continuants are usually successions<sup>21</sup> (steadfast objects being the exception), and even if one holds with Stroud that what constitutes a steadfast object is a succession of momentary perceptions. In such cases, the object could be said truly to endure, but the duration we see in it is nonetheless a product of the imagination. That is because the true successive nature of the object is not recognized since, as Hume observes, the succession is regarded as simple.

The succession that is run alongside of the continuant must not itself be taken as simple. One may, from reading the passage above, think that the succession that is to run alongside the continuant is composed of a number of ideas, each of a moment of time. But Hume makes it quite clear elsewhere that this cannot be the case, for he says that we cannot have any idea of a moment, or time itself:

The parts, into which the ideas of space and time resolve themselves, become at last indivisible; and these indivisible parts, being nothing in themselves, are inconceivable when not fill'd with something real and existent. The ideas of space and time are therefore no separate or distinct ideas, but merely those of the manner or order, in which objects exist.... (T 39–40)

So what is the succession that is run alongside of the continuant? Are we to entertain seriously the claim that the imagination provides something like drumbeats or ticking with which we fancy that objects endure? Fortunately, when we turn to Hume's explanation of how we come to ascribe duration to continuants whose appearances are interrupted, we find a more plausible answer. The succession the imagination draws on will most likely turn out to be quite varied. Hume notes at T 65 that "there is a continual succession of perceptions in our mind" such that we are almost always aware of time or its passage. All sorts of perceptions pass by in succession during the period of an interruption of a continuant. The duration of the succession of perceptions of this period is associated by the imagination with the interrupted continuant,

compelling us to think that the continuant endured for that period as well. I suggest that something similar happens when the continuant is before us, uninterrupted. Most likely, while I stare at an apple, I am also aware of all sorts of other things, even if marginally so. I may be noticing the noises of cars or children playing outside; wind blowing through the trees may cause shadows to flicker in my field of vision; I may become acutely aware of my hunger and imagine various ways that I could eat the apple. All this may happen while I look at the apple, and the succession of perceptions that constitutes my experience aside from the apple may be thought to have a duration. It is this succession that is run alongside the apple-continuant, and which makes us think that the apple endures.

It is left unclear why the imagination associates the duration of a succession with an object regarded as simple when they are experienced simultaneously.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps Hume simply thought that the presence of the succession gives us a sense of time's passage which we apply to everything we experience so long as the succession lasts. But I think that a little more can be said about this matter. In my discussion of the fourth interpretation in section 4, I speculate that the duration associated with a simple, steadfast object might have something to do with its being regarded as a succession of objects existent at a time. What exactly this means and how it is not at odds with seeing the succession as simple will be explained in the next section.

### **3. What does Hume mean by the identity relation and by an object existent at a time?**

The first two sections of this paper were devoted largely to the notion of regarding a succession as simple, and how something taken as a simple may nevertheless be thought to have a duration. It is to such enduring, temporally simple objects that identity, as Hume understands it, pertains. I now examine Hume's treatment of what he variously calls the "principle of individuation," the "principle of identity," the "relation of identity" or, simply, "identity." This idea is expressed in propositions that make use of the term 'same', as in "an object is the same with itself," to use Hume's example (T 200).

Hume would seem to have in mind a relation that holds between objects that must somehow be distinct enough such that a relation as he understands it could be said to hold between them, but not so distinct as to suggest to the mind that the relata cannot be said to be one and the same. The notion of identity is, to use Hume's term, "betwixt" unity and multiplicity or number. The problem is that there does not seem to be any conceptual room between unity and multiplicity into which identity might fit. We might call this the problem of finding a conceptual compromise between unity and multiplicity. (Though Hume at times invites this interpretation of how he sees the problem of identity, it is clear by the end of his discussion that he does not really view

it in this way. I will return to this point later.) In his solution to this problem, Hume appeals to the notion of *an object existent at a time*:

We cannot, in any propriety of speech, say, that an object is the same with itself, unless we mean, that the object existent at one time is the same with itself existent at another. By this means we make a difference, betwixt the idea meant by the word, *object*, and that meant by *itself*, without going the length of number, and at the same time without restraining ourselves to a strict and absolute unity. (T 201)

Now what sort of thing is an object existent at a time? I will consider several interpretations of what Hume could have had in mind.

**First interpretation: Temporal parts.** A popular approach in recent discussions of identity makes use of the concept of temporal parts in analyzing the persistence of objects and persons through time. As a consequence, it is tempting to think that by "object existent at one time," Hume means temporal part. On this view, the identity relation is analyzed in terms of a unity relation amongst distinct temporal parts in virtue of which these parts constitute a single object with duration.<sup>23</sup>

There is moreover an attractive line of interpretation that would explain what on Hume's view these temporal parts are. An important theme in Hume's discussion of identity is that many of the objects the vulgar take to be identical through time are in fact successions of changing and interrupted perceptions.<sup>24</sup> Given the fundamental status of successions in Hume's account, it is tempting to identify the succession as the object, and an element of the succession existing at some time *t* as the object existent at *t*.

Don Baxter advocates this sort of view as part of his interpretation of Hume. He says,

We hold [the conflicting aspects of one and many] together by taking the object as many or one depending on perspective. We take two views of the object, that is, look at it in two ways. Looked at one way it is a succession; it has duration. Looked at another way it is one thing; it has unity.<sup>25</sup>

On the first perspective the object is taken to be located at sub-intervals (and so have duration) by being considered to be a succession (i.e., many objects in succession).<sup>26</sup>

To see what is wrong with Baxter's view, recall that the vulgar possess the concept of identity and make judgments of identity. On Baxter's interpretation, in order to make judgments using this concept, the vulgar must see the continuant as a succession. But according to Hume, the vulgar do not

recognize this; only the philosophers do.

Some passages appear to provide a strong defense of Baxter's view. For example, in "Of the antient philosophy" (T I iv 3), Hume speaks of our tendency to regard certain successions as simples. He then goes on to say,

But when we alter our method of considering the succession, and instead of tracing it gradually thro' the successive points of time, survey at once any two distinct periods of its duration, and compare the different conditions of the successive qualities; in that case the variations, which were insensible when they arose gradually, do now appear of consequence, and seem entirely to destroy the identity. (T 220)

But this passage does not support Baxter's interpretation because Hume is talking about the philosophers here, not the vulgar or common folk. It is not without significance that the section from which the passage is drawn is entitled, "Of the antient philosophy."<sup>27</sup>

Another passage cited to support Baxter's interpretation comes at T 205, and it might appear to provide strong evidence against my view that the vulgar do not recognize continuants as successions:<sup>28</sup>

The persons, who entertain this opinion concerning the identity of our resembling perceptions, are in general all the unthinking and unphilosophical part of mankind, (that is, all of us, at one time or other)... 'tis to these interrupted images we ascribe a perfect identity. But as the interruption of the appearance seems contrary to the identity, and naturally leads us to regard these resembling perceptions as different from each other, we here find ourselves at a loss how to reconcile such opposite opinions. The smooth passage of the imagination along the ideas of the resembling perceptions makes us ascribe to them a perfect identity. The interrupted manner of their appearance makes us consider them as so many resembling, but still distinct beings, which appear after certain intervals. The perplexity arising from this contradiction produces a propensity to unite these broken appearances by the fiction of a continu'd existence.... (T 205)

But this is very incomplete support for Baxter. We can see this by distinguishing between (i) continuants that are straightforwardly taken as simple, and (ii) continuants that can be taken as simple only with the additional assumption of continued existence when not present to the senses. Continuants falling in category (i) are steadfast objects, and successions of qualitatively identical or gradually changing perceptions. The only sort of continuants falling in category (ii) are the interrupted successions. This

passage from T 205 demonstrates that the vulgar are aware of such interrupted successions as successions, but nevertheless take them as simple by means of the fiction of continued existence of the supposed simple object during the interruptions. The interrupted successions that move the vulgar to posit continued existences are different from those that move them to straightforwardly see the succession as a simple. So though the vulgar are aware of interrupted successions as successions, this is no evidence for the vulgar being aware of other sorts of successions as successions. The passage therefore provides evidence at best for a very partial solution, the inadequacy of which will become evident when we discuss the third interpretation below.

**Second Interpretation: successive qualities inhering in an underlying substance.** This interpretation may be developed from a reading of Hume offered by Daniel Flage. In his discussion of Hume on substance,<sup>29</sup> Flage seems to attribute to Hume the view that the belief in substance as a substratum was a vulgar belief, posited by the imagination in order to reconcile our belief in the identity of some object with the non-identity evident when we do not proceed smoothly through the succession in question. By taking the object to be the substratum in which the changing qualities inhere, we can maintain that the object retains its identity. Even if the qualities are changing, the substratum itself is steadfast and unchanging. This handles the unity aspect of identity. On the other hand, the multiplicity that distinguishes identity from unity involves the succession of qualities inhering in the same substance over time. On this view, an object existent at a time would be understood in terms of the qualities which at that time inhere in the relevant substance.

There is, unfortunately for this interpretation, ample evidence that the belief in a substratum is held only by philosophers, and hence unavailable to the vulgar to ground the identity relation in the way described. Not surprisingly, much of Flage's discussion here is based upon passages that are drawn from "Of the antient philosophy." Though Hume speaks of the imagination—a faculty everyone possesses—being responsible for the belief in substance as substratum, he does so in the context of how the imagination works in *the philosophers*, once they recognize the evident non-identity of the objects in a succession. The vulgar never even get to that step.

An important passage in this regard is to be found at T 217–218, where Hume clearly contrasts the "popular system" (read: that of the vulgar) from the system of the philosophers.<sup>30</sup> Only the philosophers appeal to underlying substance. The passage merits extended quotation:

'Tis a gross illusion to suppose, that our resembling perceptions are numerically the same; and 'tis this illusion, which leads us into the opinion, that these perceptions are uninterrupted, and are still existent, even when they are not present to the senses. This is the case

*with our popular system. And as to our philosophical one, 'tis liable to the same difficulties; and is over-and-above loaded with this absurdity, that it at once denies and establishes the vulgar supposition. Philosophers deny our resembling perceptions to be identically the same, and uninterrupted; and yet have so great a propensity to believe them such, that they arbitrarily invent a new set of perceptions, to which they attribute these qualities....* (my emphasis)

It is clear from the text following this passage, as well as the discussion of substance on the following page, that by "new set of perceptions," Hume means substances.

In defending the idea that the vulgar do have the notion of a substratum, Flage claims that

...if to believe in substance is to believe that objects are unities that are identical through time, the belief in substance also was held by the common person. (Flage, 68)

But Hume thinks that the belief in substance is different from the belief in the identity of objects through time. The belief that an object has an identity is the belief that it is steadfast, i.e., unchanging and uninterrupted. In the case of interrupted successions, the vulgar only go so far as to suppose the continued existence of perceptions even when not present to the senses (cf. T 209; 217) in order to reconcile the interruptions with the belief in identity. The philosophers, however, recognize that this will not do because they believe that perceptions do not possess independent existence (cf. T 210ff). Hence it is only such philosophers who have a need to posit a substratum.<sup>31</sup>

I conclude that neither of the interpretations of an object existent at a time canvassed so far can be right. Both attribute to the vulgar ideas and distinctions which Hume denies that they have.

### **Third interpretation: successive appearances of an object to the mind.**

How might we understand objects existent at times if not as temporal parts or as qualities inhering in substances? One possibility might be discerned in Hume's explanation of the vulgar posit of the continued existence of objects when they do not appear to us. The vulgar are moved to relieve the tension between seeing successions as simple (hence uninterrupted), and recognizing their interruptedness. Though the fiction of continued existence does the job of resolving the tension, it does not of course remove the interruptions altogether. It merely transfers them from the object to its appearances. Implicit in the vulgar posit of continued existence is the distinction between the event of an object appearing to us and the object itself. This raises the possibility of understanding an object existent at *t* as its appearance to one at *t*. An object with duration is a unity, but its appearances are a multiplicity.

This interpretation of objects existent at times differs from the two considered so far in that it is not at odds with what Hume attributes to the vulgar. Hume says the vulgar are aware of the interruptions, and therefore do distinguish between the various appearances of an object. This does not conflict with the simplicity the vulgar ascribe to the object, thanks to the supposition of its continued existence even when not present to the senses and the implied distinction between the object and its appearances.<sup>32</sup>

Unfortunately, there is a decisive reason to reject this interpretation. The objects existent at times are what Hume conceives as the relata of the identity relation. On this view, then, the identity relation holds only between the appearances of the perception to the mind. This is unacceptable, for it does not permit us to make identity assertions when one or both of the relata never appear to us. We cannot, on this account, identify a bed out of view for a while with it before us now. But surely we do make such assertions of identity. Such an assertion is, for example, implicit in the story of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears" when the Daddy bear exclaims, "Who's been sleeping in my bed?" Hume does recognize that the identity relation is not limited to the appearances of an object. He says in regard to two appearances of an object, one at 5 p.m. and the other at 6:

...experience shews us, that the object was susceptible of...a number of changes betwixt these appearances.... (T 65)

Moreover, we want to say in I iv 2 that the principle of individuation or the identity relation is applicable to one extended perception of an object. In fact, it is in just such a circumstance that Hume introduces the idea at the bottom of T 200. But if all we have is a single appearance of an object, the present interpretation cannot handle the aspect of identity having to do with multiplicity.

**Fourth interpretation: inseparable aspects of the enduring simple.** I believe that the resources for how best to understand the notion of an object existent at a time are to be found in Hume's discussion of the distinctions of reason. Hume asserts that even if an object or idea is simple, it may enter into various relations with other objects which serve to distinguish certain aspects of the idea in seeming contradiction to its simplicity. For example,

...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....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)

Though Hume does not explicitly say that he is introducing distinctions of reason, I hold that his talk of the identity relation and of an object existent at a time must be interpreted in this way. Just as we would say of the white sphere that the white thing is identity-related to the spherical thing, so would we say of an enduring object that that object existent at one time is identity-related to that object existent at another time.

How then should we think of an object existent at one time, say  $t$ ? I would speculate along the following lines. According to Hume, when one attends to the color of a white sphere, the idea before one's mind, that is, the image in one's head so to speak, is that of a white sphere. The token of white is not separable from the token of sphericity. Similarly, when one thinks of the temporal stage of the object existent at  $t$ , the image or perception before one's mind is that of the simple, enduring object that the vulgar take the continuant to be. In both cases, it is due to the "tacit" act of comparing the object with another that one is able to discern an aspect of the object that seemed and actually is inseparable from other aspects.

To attend to the sphere's whiteness (and not its sphericity), one compares the white sphere to a white cube and notes the resemblance in color. In attending to the object existent at  $t$ , to what shall we compare the simple we take the continuant to be? A reasonable suggestion would be other objects also enduring over a period of time that includes  $t$ . For example, when I think of a tree existent at  $t$ , I have in mind the tree as I normally would think of it, as an enduring simple object. But in addition, I have in mind, e.g., a dog that exists over a time that includes  $t$  and note the period of simultaneous existence. Of course, since both the dog and the tree exist for some time, the overlap most likely will be extended, and we may want to compare both the tree and the dog with the appropriate further objects to narrow the period of simultaneous existence around time  $t$ . (Presumably, we may also compare them with *appearances* of objects and other events that may during some time coexist with the tree.)

Note that the object existent at a time, as specified by the above technique, is not thought of as an object-part whose concatenation with other parts yields the object. Just as when one thinks of the color of the sphere one really has the idea of the whole sphere, when one thinks of an object existent at a time, one has in mind the whole, enduring, simple object. Note further that an object existent at  $t$  is not to be confused with the perception at  $t$ . Only philosophers recognize a distinct perception at that time, but all the common folk have the notion of an object existent at a time, since all the vulgar engage in practices of identifying and re-identifying objects. The perceptions are in a

sense prior to the enduring objects,<sup>33</sup> but the enduring objects are prior to objects existent at a time.

#### 4. Criticism and defense of the fourth interpretation

The four interpretations of objects existent at a time given in the preceding section are, so far as I can see, the only candidates with any degree of plausibility for what Hume may have had in mind. The first three I have rejected for the reasons outlined. That leaves the fourth, which I believe to be correct. In this section I will defend it against the following three criticisms: first, that it does not make identity something “betwixt” unity and multiplicity as Hume demands; second, that it would make unclear just how identity statements can be informative; and third, that there is a better reading of Hume’s reference at T 201 to the “multiplying” of an object than the one entailed by this fourth interpretation. I consider these charges in turn.

The first charge was that identity on this interpretation is not a concept which is, as Hume puts it, “betwixt” unity and number. An object existent at one time, and the same object existent at another time were supposed to be distinct enough so as not to be one or a unity, but not so distinct so as to be a multiplicity. If anything, the current interpretation of an object existent at a time would entail that identity is a form of unity. The charge concludes that this cannot be what Hume meant.

The criticism is mistaken. Hume did not see the problem of identity as finding something that is both a unity and multiplicity. This is of course a good thing, for one cannot hold without incoherence that something could be “betwixt” unity and number in this sense. Hume is aware of this, and clearly characterizes identity as a form of unity:

Thus the principle of individuation [i.e., identity] is nothing but the *invariableness* and *uninterruptedness* of any object, thro’ a suppos’d variation of time, by which the mind can trace it in the different periods of its existence, without any break of the view, and without being oblig’d to form the idea of multiplicity or number. (T 201)

According to Hume, to describe identity in terms of invariableness and uninterruptedness is to describe it as a unity. Consider, for example the paragraph immediately preceding, where Hume describes the unity-as-opposed-to-multiplicity aspect of identity:

...on the other hand, we may trace the succession of time by a like succession of ideas, and conceiving first one moment, along with the object then existent, imagine afterward a change in the time without any *variation* or *interruption* in the object; in which case it gives us the idea of unity. (T 201)

But if Hume does not think that there is a conceptual compromise between unity and number, just what does he mean when he says that identity is "betwixt" them? We need to distinguish between what properly pertains to some object, and what is imparted by that object to the mind in virtue of the faculty of the imagination. When Hume begins to talk of the principle of individuation, he is concerned with finding something that can, to use his term, *convey* to the mind both the idea of unity and of number.<sup>34</sup> This I take to be the problem that concerns Hume throughout T 199–201. At one point in attempting to solve this problem, Hume considers the possibility that the idea of identity is conveyed to us by an object that is both a unity and a multiplicity. But Hume rightly observes that there can be no such object.<sup>35</sup> In the end, Hume believes that something that is actually a special form or kind of unity will, depending upon the circumstances, convey to the imagination either the idea of unity or of multiplicity.<sup>36</sup>

The idea that what is conveyed by an object through the imagination might not genuinely pertain to it is very much in keeping with familiar Humean themes. Much of the discussion in the sections of the *Treatise* devoted to object and personal identity is concerned with the idea of how a succession of perceptions, which can be changing and interrupted, is nevertheless taken to be a single, uninterrupted and unchanging object. Now we see Hume making use of the same faculty to explain how a single, unified object can sometimes convey to our imagination the idea of unity, and at others the idea of number.

Once we understand that Hume is not looking for something which is both or between unity and multiplicity, it becomes less surprising when, at the end of the discussion, he characterizes identity as a form of unity, and not as a multiplicity. But why does Hume say at T 201 that "[o]ne single object conveys the idea of unity, not that of identity," and that "the view of any one object is not sufficient to convey the idea of identity"? Here we should emphasize that identity is a *form* or *type* of unity.<sup>37</sup> For something to be judged as possessing an identity, it must not only be thought to satisfy the general condition of being a unity, but also be regarded as satisfying the further condition of having duration. Thus we cannot be assured that a single object will convey identity, for many such objects do not convey duration. Those that do however will also convey the idea of identity.

We have already touched upon why simples are thought to have duration in section 2. The reason was that the succession of objects around the steadfast, simple object are associated with it, thereby imparting a sense of duration to it. But it was left unexplained just how this worked. Here is a suggestion: the successions surrounding the simple object serve to induce, by means of the mechanism alluded to in Hume's discussion of the distinctions of reason, a number of objects existent at different times. It is in virtue of a succession of such objects—that is, the simple, enduring object existent at different

times—that the simple object is thought to have duration.

I turn to the second criticism against the fourth interpretation.<sup>38</sup> In rejecting the suggestion that a simple object can convey the idea of identity, Hume says:

For in that proposition, *an object is the same with itself*, if the idea expressed by the word, *object*, were no ways distinguish'd from that meant by *itself*; we really should mean nothing.... (T 200)

Hume goes on to conclude that a single object can only convey unity. This might suggest that my interpretation of an object existent at a time as a simple, steadfast object could not account for the fact that identity statements are informative.

To take an example, consider the assertion that

- (i) This cat is the same as that cat.

According to Hume, this really means something along the lines of

- (ii) This cat existent now is the same as that cat existent then.

But according to my interpretation of objects existent at a time, 'this cat existent now' and 'that cat existent then' both refer to the same object or idea, an enduring, temporally simple cat. Let us refer to this idea as C. Then on my interpretation, (ii) is analyzed as

- (iii) C is the same as C,

and this is uninformative or, as Hume puts it, "says nothing."

One way out of this problem would be to reject my interpretation of an object existent at a time in favor construing it as a temporal part of the steadfast object. But this would mean that the relation really is a unity relation, and that we are giving up the idea that the continuant is taken to be a simple. I have already noted that this is at odds with Hume's characterization of vulgar practices when I discussed the first interpretation above.

The response I favor contends that a statement of identity such as (i) or (ii) should be understood as implying that the object—in this case the cat—existed continuously and without change for a duration between and including the times implicit in (i) or more explicitly stated in (ii). This is of course quite informative, and it is so because we have introduced the notions of time and duration. But we should emphasize that this is entirely in keeping with the idea that the cat is a simple unity, and not a "multiplicity" of cat stages strung together. After all, unity is conveyed by an object that is imagined to be fixed while time is traced through a succession of ideas/objects in the fixed object's surroundings (cf. T 201). Thus identity is fundamentally understood as a form of unity. It is the fact that it is a *temporal* unity that makes statements of identity informative.

The final charge against the fourth interpretation is based upon a passage at T 201. Hume remarks that an object "must be multiply'd, in order to be conceiv'd at once, as existent in...two different points in time...." (T 201), and adds that it is in this way that multiplicity or number is conveyed. The charge is that the most natural reading of this passage is not available on my interpretation. On my interpretation, when an object is "multiplied," the mind distinguishes different aspects of the object without disrupting its unity and simplicity, much in the way that the distinction between the whiteness and sphericity of a white sphere does not undermine its unity. But in order that we may be satisfied that this is how "multiplied" should be understood, I need to demonstrate that the so-called "natural" reading adverted to above is ultimately unsatisfactory.

The "natural" reading takes the multiplying of an object to involve the forming of multiple ideas of the object *in the imagination*. This is the multiplicity that is conveyed to us by a persisting object. On the other hand, the unity of the object presumably lies with the fact that there is only a single object from which these ideas of the imagination are derived. It might appear that this interpretation flouts the vulgar assumption under which Hume proceeds, namely, that there is no distinction between object and perception. But such an assumption is only plausibly held by the vulgar when restricted to impressions and objects of sensation, and does not extend to the ideas of the imagination and their objects.

To see what really is wrong with construing the multiplying of an object as the multiplying of ideas in the imagination, recall that the talk of multiplicity or number is in reference to objects existent at times. Hume says that "We cannot in any propriety of speech, say, that an object is the same with itself, unless we mean, that the object existent at one time is the same with itself existent at another" (T 201). If the "natural" reading is right to hold that an object existent at a time is an idea of the imagination, Hume would be saying that our identity statements are about ideas in the imagination. The problem with this is that identity statements pertain to objects, and not to the imagined ideas of objects. It cannot be replied that the vulgar do not distinguish between the object and the idea, because it was assumed that the vulgar *do* distinguish the ideas of the imagination from their objects, even if they do not distinguish impressions from their objects. Thus the standard vulgar identity statement regarding ordinary objects cannot be construed as an identity statement about ideas of the imagination. It is therefore a mistake to interpret the "multiplying of objects" as multiplying ideas in the imagination in order then to understand objects existent at times as ideas of the imagination.

## Conclusion

Hume observes that we tend to take certain successions as (temporally) simple, i.e., as possessing an identity. Hume further believes that only successions can convey to us the idea of duration. Why, then, do we ascribe duration to successions we take to be simple? In section 2, I explicated the workings of the imagination to which Hume appeals in answering this question. In sections 3 and 4, I defended an interpretation of Hume's notion of an object existent at a time, a notion that figures centrally in his account of judgments of identity. This interpretation is distinctive in characterizing our concept of an object existent at a time as resulting from a distinction of reason.

I have stressed throughout this paper the contrast between the vulgar and the philosophical. Blurring or ignoring this distinction is a significant and largely unnoticed fault of many interpretations of this part of the *Treatise*. It is important to see Hume's treatment of identity as a part of his "science of man." Hume's project is for the most part not an investigation of duration and identity *per se*, but rather a "naturalistic" or psychological explanation of the acquisition and application by the vulgar of the ideas of duration and identity. In ignoring the vulgar/philosophical distinction, one fails to keep track of the primary subject matter Hume's theories are meant to explain, namely, the vulgar or commonplace beliefs, ideas, psychology, and practices. Exclusively philosophical concepts (such as that of substance) and philosophical observations (such as recognizing a continuant as the succession it really is) therefore can play no part in a proper reconstruction of Hume's psychological theories about the common folk.<sup>39</sup>

The emphasis upon Humean psychology of identity ascriptions is not without its metaphysical dividends. By rejecting, for example, a temporal parts account of identity as an interpretation of Hume's discussion of identity, we can discern in the *Treatise* an alternative metaphysics of identity. Enduring or persisting objects are no longer seen as made up of ontologically more basic objects at a time (interpreted as temporal parts). Rather, it is from the ontologically more basic concept of an enduring object that the notion of an object at a time is derived.

## NOTES

I would like to thank Don Baxter, Lisa Downing, Eli Hirsch, Ted Morris, and Ken Winkler for very helpful conversation and/or comments.

1 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, edited by L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed. revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), cited as T in the text.

2 See Barry Stroud, *Hume* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977). Note the diagram on p. 101, and Stroud's remark that according to Hume, "Our experience is in fact nothing but a sequence of momentary, internal impressions, so even when we have an uninterrupted series of exactly similar

impressions we are not actually surveying an identical object" (p. 102).

3 Eli Hirsch, "Hume's Distinction between Genuine and Fictitious Identity," in *Midwestern Studies in Philosophy*, 8 (1983): 321-338; Donald L. M. Baxter, "A Defense of Hume on Identity Through Time," *Hume Studies* 13.2 (1987): 323-342.

4 T 203 provides convincing support for their interpretation.

5 Two remarks about the use of 'simple' are in order. First, Hume introduces the terms 'simple' and 'complex' to describe *perceptions*, not objects. But, it would be wrong to conclude from this that we cannot speak of objects as simple or complex, for Hume announces that he will use the terms 'object' and 'perception' pretty much interchangeably:

...however philosophers may distinguish betwixt the objects and perceptions of the senses...this is a distinction, which is not comprehended by the generality of mankind, who as they perceive only one being, can never assent to the opinion of a double existence and representation. Those very sensations, which enter by the eye or ear are with them the true objects, nor can they readily conceive that this pen or paper, which is immediately perceiv'd, represents another, which is different from, but resembling it. In order, therefore, to accommodate myself to their notions, I shall at first suppose; that there is only a single existence, which I shall call indifferently *object* or *perception*, according as it shall seem best to suit my purpose, understanding by both of them what any common man means by a hat, or shoe, or stone, or any other impression, convey'd to him by his senses. I shall be sure to give warning, when I return to a more philosophical way of speaking and thinking. (T 202)

Hume is, moreover, critical of the distinction between perception and object, referring to it as the doctrine of "double existence," and characterizing it as the "monstrous offspring" of the imagination and bad philosophy (T 215).

The second point about my use of 'simple' is that it departs from Hume's use of the term, which seems not to extend to temporal simplicity. But Hume's treatments of the spatial and temporal cases are very similar, and it is moreover useful to avail ourselves of a term less philosophically loaded than 'identity' (Hume's term for temporal simplicity) dccc.

6 An object that possesses an identity is uninterrupted, and undergoes no change. However, Hirsch (322) points out that in one passage, Hume attributes a genuine identity to one sort of changing object, so long as it is composed of parts that are uninterrupted and unchanging. At T 255, Hume says that "'tis plain we must attribute a perfect identity to this mass, provided all the parts continue uninterruptedly and invariably the same, whatever motion or change of place we may observe either in the whole or in any of the parts." I do not believe that this remark will make any significant difference for the points that I will make, so I will henceforth ignore it.

7 T 204 provides further evidence for this.

8 We should note that qualitative identity and constancy need not be

sufficient for a succession to have the status of a continuant. For example, a succession of drumbeats exhibits constancy and each drumbeat may for all intents and purposes be considered qualitatively identical to any other. But surely drumbeats are not perceived as simple, but as a succession.

9 An interrupted succession may be seen as simple. However, the interruptions seemingly provide a natural way of dividing it into parts, at odds with its apparent simplicity, that is, with its being a continuant. This tension is resolved by assuming the simple object the continuant is taken to be need not always appear to the mind. The interruptions are in the *appearances* of this object, not in the object itself. The object is thought to have a continued existence, even when not appearing to the mind. The (false) belief in continued existence is a natural one, had by all common people, and is used by them to resolve the tension they sense between their awareness of the interruptions, and their belief in the simplicity of the object (T 210). More on this below.

10 As I am interpreting Hume, an object is regarded as having an identity through time if it is seen as (temporally) simple; i.e., as steadfast and uninterrupted. When presented with the right sort of succession, we do not notice any change—this is what it means to see something as steadfast. Hirsch points out that while this might be the case for some successions, it is by no means always true. It would be preposterous to think that we never notice the changes in things that we take to have persistence or identity over time. For example, I think of my car as persisting through a minor accident in which its fender is dented. For Hume, this must mean that I do not notice the change—otherwise, my perception of the car is not steadfast. But surely I do notice the dent. That is, after all, why I am so upset! How, then, can Hume explain my belief that my car retains its identity over a period when it has undergone a change, if I only believe it retains its identity because I take it to be steadfast and do not notice the change?

I think that the best reply Hume could give would be in terms of the identity of parts of the object. For example, if a car becomes dented, then though we cannot say that the car is identical, we can say that much of the car (all of it except the fender) remains identical. The question then would be whether the dented fender of the car is important for the persistence of the car, that is, whether it is an essential part of the car. If not, then we might think that the car does persist—the change is not really a change in the car.

There are two things to notice about this response. First, it does not attribute to Hume any notion of stages or substances. Therefore it is not liable to the sorts of criticisms I make below of interpretations which do make use of these notions.

Second, this reply does rely on the vulgar trying to reconcile the violation of identity by positing some sort of distinction between essential and inessential parts of an object. There is some precedent for the idea that the vulgar will engage in some sort of theorizing in order to reconcile the identity they ascribe to some object with facts which seem to violate that identity. In particular, the vulgar posit the continued existence of an object unobserved, in order to reconcile the identity they attribute to it with the interruptions they perceive in it.

11 Baxter, *passim*.

12 I disregard here the implications of relativistic physics.

13 Isaac Newton, *Principia* (1687), *Scholium to Definitions*, translated by Robert Thorp (London: Dawsons of Pall Mall), 12.

14 Newton, 14.

15 Newton, 12.

16 John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, P. H. Nidditch, ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 181.

17 Locke, 204.

18 A restrained reading of Hume's discussion at this point suggests that his claim is that the *common* idea of time or duration is such that it cannot properly be applied to a steadfast object, but that in reality a steadfast object does have duration or is temporal (and that this is presupposed in the very idea of a steadfast object). The problem with such a reading is that Hume doesn't seem to be talking of a common or vulgar misconception of time or duration in these passages. My interpretation attributes to Hume a more radical position, according to which only successions have duration and wherein there is no sense in which a steadfast object has duration. Though many passages suggest that Hume believed this, one feels a reluctance to attribute such a peculiar view to him. It seems absurd not to attribute duration to steadfast objects. This thought motivates yet another interpretation (advocated by Baxter) according to which there are two possible manners in which an object may have duration. One way is for it to have duration as successions do; the other is for it to simply occupy time as steadfast objects do. Baxter's interpretation, however, does not sit well with the next passage quoted in the text. In any case, the problem to be raised shortly will confront Hume no matter which interpretation is correct.

19 See the penultimate paragraph of section 1, and note 8.

20 Baxter, 336–337.

21 Recall that by a continuant, I mean any succession or steadfast object that is taken as simple by the common folk as a result of the ordinary workings of the imagination.

22 The lack of precision and detail in Hume's description of the workings of the imagination here is in keeping with his description of the faculty's workings elsewhere, and has not gone unnoticed. Strawson, citing Hume's remarks at T 24, notes that the "...imagination...in so far as its operations are relevant to the application of the same general concept in a variety of different cases, is a concealed art of the soul, a magical faculty, something we shall never fully understand" (P. F. Strawson, "Imagination and Perception," in *Kant on Pure Reason*, edited by R. Walker [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982], 84.)

23 Useful discussion of the concepts of unity relation and temporal parts can be found in John Perry, "The Problem of Personal Identity," in *Personal Identity*, edited by Perry (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), 9–10, and David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 202–204.

24 On this vulgar activity, see T 201–208.

25 Baxter, 335.

26 *Ibid.*, 336.

27 It might be objected that though the passage is drawn from a section discussing the ancient philosophers, Hume is discussing what “we” do, and does not get around to discussing the views of the “peripatetic philosophers” until the following page (T 221). But this is not quite right. Though Hume does not explicitly refer to philosophers in the paragraph from which this passage is drawn, he does in this paragraph speak of the imagination leading us to posit a “substance, or original and first matter”—something which is done only by philosophers. (See the discussion of the second interpretation that follows.) Moreover, the section “Of the antient philosophy” is divided into parts where Hume discusses, in turn, identity (T 219–220), (spatial) simplicity of objects (T 221–222), and causality/occult qualities. Hume refers to the peripatetics by name only beginning in the second section discussion of (spatial) simplicity. If such explicit referencing is all we go on to decide whether Hume is discussing the views of philosophers, then we would have to conclude that Hume does not consider the views of philosophers regarding identity anywhere in his section on ancient philosophers, even though the first topic of this section is identity. Thus it is incorrect to think that the views of philosophers only enter the discussion at T 221 and not before.

Hume’s discussion at T 220 traces three cognitive stages: first, the taking of a succession as a simple, that is, as having an identity; second, the surveying at once two distinct parts of a succession which reveals different qualities of the parts, thereby contradicting the earlier judgment of identity (this is the passage quoted); and third, the positing of a substance in order to remove this contradiction. It is clear that the first stage characterizes the vulgar, and it will be clear from discussion of the second interpretation that the third stage characterizes the philosophical viewpoint. What is in dispute is whether the second stage is vulgar or philosophical. I deny that Hume thinks the vulgar get to this stage. It is a stage wherein one recognizes a succession as a succession and hence without identity. Only the philosophers go on to posit underlying substances to eliminate the contradiction. If the vulgar do get to the second stage, why don’t they go on to the third stage and posit substances? Note that the vulgar would not complacently accept the inconsistency in their views that getting to stage two entails. They would have to go on to stage three. We can gather this from the fact that the vulgar posit continued existence when faced with similar inconsistencies. (See the following discussion of interrupted successions).

Finally, the three cognitive stages described in the treatment of identity recur in the following two discussions of spatial simplicity of objects, and causality/occult qualities. In these discussions, especially the last on causality, the second cognitive stage is more clearly associated with the philosophers and not the vulgar. This suggests that the second cognitive stage regarding identity is also exclusively philosophical.

28 I wish to thank one of the *Hume Studies* anonymous readers for pointing out the relevance of this passage.

29 Daniel Flage, *David Hume's Theory of Mind* (London: Routledge, 1990), 61–68.

30 Another relevant passage may be found at T 213–214.

31 Robert Fogelin also makes this point in “Hume’s Scepticism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*, edited by David Fate Norton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

32 See T 205, T 209, T 217. Note that Hume is clearly speaking of the vulgar in these passages. Contrast this with his discussion of substance.

33 The perceptions are what are “out there” in the first place; they are mistakenly taken to be enduring, simple objects. In this sense, the perceptions are ontologically fundamental. But there is an epistemic sense in which the perceptions are less fundamental than enduring objects. For, we first had the idea of temporally simple enduring objects, and only afterwards did a few philosophers discover that what were thought to be simple objects were actually successions of distinct perceptions.

34 In setting up the problem, Hume says, “As to the principle of individuation; we may observe that the view of any one object is not sufficient to convey the idea of identity....One single object conveys the idea of unity, not that of identity....On the other hand, a multiplicity of objects can never convey this idea [of identity]....” (T 200).

35 This occurs towards the bottom of T 200.

36 So when Hume says at T 201, “here then is an idea, which is a medium betwixt unity and number; or more properly speaking, is either of them, according to the view, in which we take it: And this idea we call that of identity,” I must insist that the manner in which the idea is betwixt unity and number is that something taken as a unity (what I have been calling a continuant) will convey both unity and number, depending on the circumstance, or how it is viewed. Hume does not think that there is any object which is both a unity and a multiplicity.

It is interesting to note that there is more than one level at which we make fictitious ascriptions. First, continuants are very often successions, and are run together and wrongly or fictitiously regarded as simple temporal unities. Second, we sometimes add fiction upon fiction, by taking as a multiplicity what we regard as a simple temporal unity. Note that the multiplicity we end with is not the real multiplicity of perceptions with which we began (setting aside steadfast continuants). To think otherwise is to make the mistake of the temporal parts interpretation discussed above. Hume is clear when he says that we do not recognize the succession of perceptions as such.

37 In saying this, I maintain that the object is literally a (temporal) unity, and not a (temporal) multiplicity.

38 These thoughts were prompted by questions raised by Ken Winkler.

39 In a forthcoming paper, I will contend that an understanding of Hume’s treatment of our beliefs about the identity of objects along the lines defended in the present paper reveals much about Hume’s psychology of beliefs concerning *personal* identity. It not only allows us to recognize the tensions in Hume’s discussion of personal identity as he presents it in Treatise I iv 6, but

also suggests a new understanding of why Hume finds that treatment so problematic when he disavows it in the Appendix to the *Treatise*.

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