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The Vulgar Conception of Objects in “Of Skepticism with Regard to the Senses”

STEFANIE ROCKNAK

Abstract: In this paper, we see that contrary to most readings of T 1.4.2 in the *Treatise* (“Of Skepticism with Regard to the Senses”), Hume does not think that objects are sense impressions. This means that Hume’s position on objects (whatever that may be) is not to be conflated with the vulgar perspective. Moreover, the vulgar perspective undergoes a marked transition in T 1.4.2, evolving from what we may call vulgar perspective I into vulgar perspective II. This paper presents the first detailed analysis of this evolution, which includes an explanation of T 1.4.2’s four-part system.

1. Introduction

What, exactly, does Hume think an object is in 1.4.2 of the *Treatise*?¹ Are they to be identified with impressions? Are they mind-independent things? Instrumental constructions? I certainly can’t give a comprehensive answer to all these questions here—space does not permit. But I *can* answer “no” to the second question: Hume does *not* think that objects are sense impressions. And so, his position is *not* to be conflated with what he refers to as the “vulgar” (i.e., the everyday person’s) perspective on objects. However, by his own admission, he, like everyone else, did entertain the vulgar view at one point in his thought process, although very briefly.

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To show that this is the case, I present a careful analysis of T 1.4.2.31–41 (SBN 201–8)²—the passages in T 1.4.2 where Hume explains the vulgar perspective at length. Moreover, and equally importantly, in the course of showing that Hume clearly distanced himself from the vulgar perspective, I show that Hume thought that it is actually split into *two* parts, where the first, or what I call vulgar perspective I, *evolves* into the second, or what I call vulgar perspective II. This evolution occurs because, as we will see, vulgar perspective I falls prey to a *reductio*. Additionally, and not coincidentally, we see that the distinction between vulgar perspective I and II directly corresponds to, respectively, part 2 and part 3 of Hume’s “four-part” system on the nature of identity (T 1.4.2.26–32; SBN 199–209), offering further evidence that he distinguished between two different ways in which the vulgar (but not Hume) conceived of objects.

In short, I think that this paper breaks new ground in Hume scholarship by showing that, 1) Hume’s position on objects must not be conflated with the vulgar perspective, 2) Hume clearly thought that the vulgar entertained *two* approaches to understanding objects, and 3) To properly understand Hume’s account of the vulgar, we must explicitly expose the structure of Hume’s four-part system, particularly parts two and three. To my knowledge, no scholar has effectively shown 1), 2), nor carefully addressed 3).³

2. General Overview of T 1.4.2

Before we delve into the analysis of Hume’s account of the vulgar, it would be helpful if I begin with a general sketch of T 1.4.2. Although space does not allow me to defend the following outline in detail, it is, for the most part, not overly controversial, and so, I think, may stand on its own.

The general structure of 1.4.2 may be parsed as follows: **[1]** Hume first establishes that his project in this section is not metaphysical, assuring us that he will not attempt to give an argument for or against the *existence* of objects, or what he refers to here as “bod[ies]” (T 1.4.2.1; SBN 187). He immediately begins by outlining what he thinks a properly conceived-of object is—or in other words, an object that Hume refers to elsewhere as having a “perfect identity”⁴—and then proceeds to explain why and how we might believe in such a thing. In particular, in T 1.4.2.2 (SBN 187–8) Hume claims that a properly conceived-of object must have the properties of continuity and distinctness,⁵ where, he claims, if we think that continuity obtains of an object we will naturally think that distinctness obtains of the same object and *vice versa* (T 1.4.2.2; SBN 188). **[2]** Hume then asks: What could be responsible for our belief in objects that admit of continuity and distinctness? Is it a) the senses, b) reason, or c) the imagination? Or as Hume puts it: “[we] shall consider, whether it be the *senses*, *reason*, or the *imagination*, that produces, the opinion of a *continu’d* or distinct existence” (T 1.4.2.2; SBN 188). **[3]**

Hume proceeds to dismiss a) the senses in the course of T 1.4.2.3–13 (SBN 188–93) and b) reason on T 1.4.2.14 (SBN 193). By default, Hume immediately concludes that the *imagination* must be responsible for our notion of objects that admit of continuity and distinctness (T 1.4.2.11; SBN 192). [4] Accordingly, in the course of T 1.4.2.15–24 (SBN 194–9), Hume discusses how the imagination is responsible for objects that admit of continuity and distinctness in terms of a discussion of “constancy and coherence.” [5] Immediately following, Hume launches into his four-part system, where this system serves to elaborate not only why and how the imagination is responsible for giving us our ideas of objects that admit of continuity and distinctness, but also to explain two attempts to attribute these properties to objects that either a) *fail* (i.e., the vulgar perspective) or b) come to the *wrong* conclusion about objects; particularly, that they are not imagined, but are mind-independent (i.e., the philosophical perspective). More specifically, part 1 consists of a discussion of his *principium individuationis* (T 1.4.2.26–30; SBN 200–1). Here, Hume moves from discussing a properly conceived-of object in terms of admitting of continuity and distinctness to an object that must admit of invariability and uninterruptedness.⁶ In part 2, he dismisses, as I explain below, one aspect of the vulgar perspective (T 1.4.2.31–6; SBN 201–5), that is, what we may refer to as vulgar perspective I. Meanwhile, as I also explain below, part 3 consists of a dismissal of still another aspect of the vulgar perspective (T 1.4.2.36–40; SBN 205–8), that is, what we may refer to as vulgar perspective II. Part 4 consists of a discussion of how and why we might believe in the vulgar perspective (T 1.4.2.41–2; SBN 208–9). [6] Finally, the remainder of 1.4.2 consists of a somewhat lengthy discussion of the philosophical reaction to the vulgar (T 1.4.2.43–57; SBN 209–18).⁷

3. A General Overview of the Vulgar Perspective: Evidence that this Is not Hume’s Position

With the general structure of T 1.4.2 in mind, we may now turn to a more detailed discussion of Hume’s account of the vulgar perspective, particularly, parts 2 and 3 of his system, noted above in [5].

According to Hume, the every-day human being—namely, the *non-philosopher*, which includes all of us at least some of the time (T 1.4.2.36, 38; SBN 205, 207)—is consistently duped into thinking that certain resembling sense-impressions may be identified *with* each other such that when taken as respective wholes, they constitute the objects of the world. This somewhat pedestrian way of thinking may be understood as follows: If I look at, say, a motorcycle, at time T_1 , then again at time T_2 , and still again at time T_3 – T_n , my current sense perceptions and my past impressions⁸ of the motorcycle would all appear to significantly *resemble* each other. As such, they appear to be what Hume also has occasion to refer to as “constant” (T 1.4.2.31; SBN 201), or “invariable” (T 1.4.2.31; SBN 202). As a

direct result, Hume claims that I would naturally (albeit mistakenly) be inclined to believe that all of these resembling sense impressions are, in fact, not only “identical” with each other, but in fact, they constitute the motorcycle. They *are* the “object” motorcycle. So, according to the vulgar perspective, the motorcycle is *what I see*, or alternatively, *what I touch*, or *what I smell*, or *what I hear*, or perhaps even *what I taste*, or finally, any combination of what I might sense. But this is not to say that the vulgar acknowledge, or even recognize their claim that objects are sense impressions. Rather, the vulgar simply do not *distinguish* between perceptions and mind-independent objects. In this respect, the vulgar perspective comes about *reflexively*, that is, without much, if any, *reflection*.⁹

Having explained that mistakenly identifying sets of sense impressions as objects constitutes our most natural, and so, most unreflective and vulgar attempt to understand the world, Hume announces: “I now proceed to . . . shew why the constancy of our perceptions makes us ascribe to them a perfect numerical identity, tho’ there be very long intervals betwixt their appearance, *and they have only one of the essential qualities of identity, viz. invariableness*” (T 1.4.2.31; SBN 201–2; my emphases). Our natural but prosaic attempt to understand the world is bound to fail. This is because it produces a notion of an object that lacks one of the “essential qualities of identity” that must be associated with what Hume takes to be a properly-conceived of (imagined) object (recall section 2[5] above). This missing “essential quality of identity” is the property of “uninterruptedness” or continuity (T 1.4.2.30, 37; SBN 201, 205–6).

To best explain how and why this phenomenon is so naturally pervasive, Hume finds it appropriate to “adopt” the vulgar perspective for approximately the next seven pages (up to T 1.4.2.43; SBN 209). As a result, the reader must be extremely careful *not* to confuse Hume’s position with the vulgar perspective here. Rather, it is clear that he is merely *pretending* to appropriate the vulgar perspective to present it in as accurate a fashion as possible—if only to show why the vulgar are compelled to adopt it in the first place and why it amounts to a *reductio*. In fact, he could not be much clearer in this regard: “That I may avoid all ambiguity and confusion on this head, I shall observe, that I here account for the opinions and belief of the vulgar with regard to the existence of body; and *therefore must entirely conform myself to their manner of thinking of expressing themselves*” (T 1.4.2.31; SBN 202; my emphases).

Hume immediately proceeds to explain that as part of his vulgar charade, he will assume that sets of resembling sense impressions are indeed, to be identified with objects, giving himself pedestrian license to use the words “object” and “perception” interchangeably. Doing this underlines the vulgar assumption that there is no distinction to be made between objects and perceptions where, as noted above, according to the vulgar perspective, the latter consist of sense impressions (T 1.4.2.31; SBN 202). Moreover, reminding us still again that he is merely *pretending*

to adopt the vulgar's perspective, he assures us that he will tell us when he *stops* doing so; making it still clearer that we should not confuse Hume's characterization of the vulgar perspective with Hume's actual position, regardless of how we might interpret the latter: "*I shall be sure to give warning, when I return to a more philosophical way of speaking and thinking*" (T 1.4.2.31; SBN 202; my emphases). Already then, contrary to many scholars, including, at least, H.H. Price, Jonathan Bennett, Barry Stroud, Fred Wilson, Marjorie Grene, and to some degree, Norman Kemp Smith and Eric Steinberg,¹⁰ I think that I have justified the *first* claim of this paper: Hume is clearly not presenting his *own* position here (regardless of what the reader may take that to be), but instead, the vulgar perspective. Having established this, let us now turn to examining exactly how Hume defines the vulgar perspective, beginning with what I characterize as vulgar perspective I.

4. Vulgar Perspective I: Seduced by Resemblance

4.1. Dispositions



4.1.1 A General Overview

Immediately after distancing himself from the vulgar perspective, Hume turns his attention to the relation of resemblance. As already suggested above, he is certain that it is *this* relation that so endemically lures the unthinking lot of us into identifying sense impressions with objects. Naturally then, the question that Hume wants to answer is: How and why could resemblance have such a profound and far-reaching effect on the unreflecting mind? (T 1.4.2.32; SBN 203). To answer this, Hume immediately proceeds to introduce the notion of a "disposition," a notion that has, I think, been conspicuously absent in most commentaries on T 1.4.2 (T 1.4.2.32; SBN 203).¹¹ In particular, he begins by explaining that the tendency to mistakenly identify the causes of resembling *dispositions* is behind our propensity to mistakenly identify resembling *perceptions*. And so, as far as the vulgar conception of objects is concerned, we are, Hume tells us, actually dealing with *two* kinds of resemblances, leading him to write in a footnote, "there are *two* relations, and both of them resemblances which contribute in our mistaking the succession of our interrupted perceptions for an identical object" (T 1.4.2.39; SBN 205n1; [my emphasis]). In particular, he continues: "The *first* is the resemblance of the perceptions; the *second* is the resemblance, which the act of the mind in *surveying* a succession of resembling objects bears to that in *surveying* an identical object" (T 1.4.2.39; SBN 205n1; my emphases).

However, to be precise, we must realize that Hume is actually dealing with *three* kinds of resemblance here, where the first two that I list below are, respectively, the two that Hume notes above. As far as the third is concerned, we will examine it at length in the next section. However, it will be helpful to give an overview here,

for as Hume admits at the beginning of the footnote cited above, “[t]his reasoning [regarding dispositions and the relation of resemblance], it must be confest, is somewhat abstruse, and difficult to be comprehended”: **[1]** the resemblance that obtains *between each perception in a set* of successive and similar perceptions, for instance the resemblance that obtains between each perception in a set of similar and successive motorcycle perceptions. For ease of reference, we may refer to this kind of resemblance as R_p . **[2]** The resemblance that obtains *between resembling dispositions*—where, at this point in our analysis, we may simply understand a “disposition” as the way in which we “conceive” (T 1.4.2.32; SBN 203) of an idea or a set of ideas. A disposition is an “act of the mind” that “survey[s]” the idea or ideas at hand (T 1.4.2.39; SBN 205n1). We may refer to this kind of resemblance as R_d . **[3]** The resemblance between a set of similar and successive perceptions (that is, a set consisting of perceptions that admit of R_p) with an idea that admits of “perfect identity” (T 1.4.2.33; SBN 203). However, important to note, this set and this idea *resemble each other in virtue of the similar effect that they have on the mind*. In particular, each “place[s]” (T 1.4.2.32; SBN 203) the mind in similar, if not the *same*¹² dispositions (namely, dispositions admitting of R_d). In turn, Hume explains, because the given set of (R_p) resembling perceptions and the idea of an object that admits of perfect identity place the mind in (R_d) resembling dispositions, we tend to “confound” (T 1.4.2.34; SBN 203–4) the set of successive, resembling perceptions *with* the idea of an object that admits of “perfect identity.”¹³ This means that while in a vulgar state of mind, we *confuse* a set of resembling, successive perceptions with an idea that has “perfect identity” *in virtue of* the similar effects that they have on the mind. Or as Hume puts it: “whatever ideas¹⁴ place the mind in the *same* disposition or in *similar* ones are apt to be confounded” (T 1.4.2.32; SBN 203; my emphases). We may refer to this third kind of resemblance as R_e (where “e” stands for effect). A chart might help to illustrate this admittedly “difficult” and “abstruse” reasoning:

Figure 1: Three Kinds of Resemblance

Disposition (caused by a set of resembling perceptions)	←	R_d Resemblance obtains between these two dispositions	→	Disposition (caused by idea that admits of perfect identity)
				
Set of Resembling Perceptions (R_p Re- semblance obtains between each perception)	←	<i>Re</i> Resemblance obtains between this set of resembling perceptions and an idea that admits of perfect identity <i>in virtue</i> of the similar dispositions they cause	→	Idea that admits of perfect identity

4.1.2 Perfect Identity

With this general overview of the role of dispositions in place, let's dig a bit deeper in the text—carefully analyzing this somewhat complex epistemological/psychological process in the order that Hume presents it to us in the *Treatise*. Not only will doing so fill in the general outline of dispositions that I sketched above, but it will also clarify *another* notion that has been almost completely overlooked in Hume scholarship regarding T 1.4.2: "perfect identity."¹⁵

Following Hume's lead, "we must first examine the disposition of the mind in viewing any object¹⁶ which preserves a *perfect identity*, and then find some other object, that is confounded with it, by causing a *similar* disposition" (T 1.4.2.33; SBN 203; my emphases). But what, exactly, does Hume mean by "perfect identity?" For the purposes of this paper, we needn't look very far. Rather, recall that according to Hume, an idea of an object that admits of the imagined properties of invariability *and* uninterruptedness has both of the "essential qualities" of identity. Not surprisingly, this is precisely what Hume means by perfect identity: it is an idea of object which is imagined to be *both* invariable and uninterrupted. In fact, this is exactly how Hume defines perfect identity in T 1.4.6. (T 1.4.6.6; SBN 254).

So it would seem that simply by definition, perfect identity must apply to some *non-vulgar* way of looking at the world. After all, the vulgar are only capable of conceiving of an invariable object, *not* an invariable *and* uninterrupted object. But maddeningly enough, Hume tells us that the vulgar are, in fact, capable of grasping perfect identity! Recall the passage that we began this section with: "we must first examine the disposition of the mind in viewing any object which preserves a *perfect identity*, and then find some other object, that is confounded with it, by causing a *similar* disposition" (T 1.4.2.33; SBN 203; my emphases). Here, Hume is discussing the *vulgar* perspective, where recall, he is looking for a disposition that is caused when the vulgar "view" an "object"¹⁷ that "preserves a perfect identity." But how is it possible that the vulgar could have an idea of perfect identity?

Hume's answer is, I think, rather clever, although somewhat obscure: He presents an instance of perfect identity that does not contradict the vulgar opinion that "[our] very sensations . . . are . . . the true objects" (T 1.4.2.31; SBN 202), and which fits with his view that we identify our perceptions merely based on their "constancy" (T 1.4.2.31; SBN 201). According to Hume, when in a vulgar state of mind, we may grasp perfect identity *only* when we *uninterruptedly* observe what we take to be an object.¹⁸ This occurs when "we fix our thought on any object" (T 1.4.2.33; SBN 203). For instance, we might just *stare* at a violet for some length of time without looking away. As a result, our impression of the violet, is, it seems, virtually invariable and uninterrupted.

However, this does not *quite* give us an idea of perfect identity. For although it would *seem* to follow that any impression or corresponding idea that we have of the

violet while we are “fix[ing] our thought on it,” is invariable and uninterrupted, this is *not* the case (at least initially). Rather, Hume claims, simply due to the *passage of time*, a certain discreteness obtains of the impression we “fix our thought” on *and* the idea we have of it. This occurs as time passes from “one moment to another” (T 1.4.2.33; SBN 203). As a result, time injects a certain *interruptedness* into the impression and the idea at hand. For example, although one might initially assume that the impression and the corresponding idea of the violet are uninterrupted and invariable, they are *not*; the passage of time ruins everything.¹⁹

But the imagination saves the day: “When we fix our thought on any object, and *suppose* it to continue the same for some time; ‘tis evident we *suppose* the change to lie only in the time, and never exert ourselves to produce any new image or idea of the object” (T 1.4.2.33; SBN 203; my emphases). In these rare vulgar cases where we “fix” our attention on an object without any apparent interruption (e.g., looking away), we naturally “suppose,” or in other words, *imagine* that the “object” is continuous, thanks to the *prima facie* continuity, that is, the uninterruptedness of the sense perception at hand. This means, consistent with the vulgar perspective that *what we sense* is indistinguishable from the objects of the world, the *prima facie* continuity (uninterruptedness) of the sense perception at hand is, we “*suppose*,” identifiable with the continuity (uninterruptedness) of the “object.” Or, as Hume puts it immediately after the passage cited above: “The faculties of the mind repose themselves in a manner, and take no more exercise, than what is necessary to *continue* that idea, of which we were formerly possess, and which [as such, thanks to these faculties] subsists without variation or interruption” (T 1.4.2.33; SBN 203; my emphasis). That is, the “faculties” of the mind, namely, the imagination *processing* the idea at hand,²⁰ “continue[s]” that idea, for example, of the violet.

In short, the imagination makes the idea that is [a] caused by what *seems* to be an uninterrupted and invariable sense perception but is actually [b] interrupted by the passage of time, *uninterrupted* by “continu[ing]” the idea that corresponds to the sense impression. Or as Hume puts it, immediately after the sentence cited above: “*The passage from one moment to another is scarce felt*, and distinguishes not itself by a different perception or idea, which may require a different direction of the spirits, in order to its conception” (T 1.4.2.33; SBN 203; my emphases). Thanks to the imagination’s power to “continue” an idea that is otherwise made discrete by the “passage from moment to moment,” the vulgar *are* given an idea of an object that is *both* interrupted and invariable, and so, admits of “perfect identity.” In turn, we may conclude, contrary to most scholarly readings of T 1.4.2 (including, for instance, Price²¹), that thanks to the imagination, the vulgar *may* entertain an idea that is both invariable and uninterrupted, and so, in the end, does admit of a perfect identity. Why else would Hume refer to the vulgar as “viewing [an] object which preserves a perfect identity” (T 1.4.2.33; SBN 203)?

This means that Hume is actually operating with *three* kinds of uninterruptedness when it comes to his presentation of the vulgar idea of perfect identity: **[i]** An impression that, at least on the face of it, *seems* uninterrupted, for example, the uninterrupted violet impression. **[ii]** As Hume puts it, the "*uninterrupted passage of the imagination* from one idea to another" (T 1.4.2.34; SBN 203; my emphases). **[iii]** The uninterrupted violet *idea* of the impression, "which [thanks to the 'uninterrupted passage of the imagination'] subsists without variation or interruption" (T 1.4.2.33; SBN 203), and so, admits of perfect identity.

However, the implication is—for Hume is not entirely explicit in this regard—that this instance of perfect identity proves to be such a limited case, it does not give the vulgar any kind of *comprehensive sense* of objects that are both invariable and uninterrupted.²² Rather, our impressions seem to be constantly changing in light of the fact that we seem to be constantly moving through the world—we don't "fix our thought" very often. We may conclude then, that according to Hume, the *vulgar* notion of perfect identity provides the vulgar with a standard of identity that legitimately applies to only a very *limited* number of cases, but is, nevertheless, mistakenly applied to the *bulk* of their experience by way of the disposition that it causes.²³ This is the case simply because as noted in section 4.1.1 of this paper, the disposition caused by the idea of perfect identity is very similar to, if not the same as, the disposition that is caused when we apprehend a set of resembling perceptions.

4.1.3 The Conflation: Vulgar Perspective I Continued

Having established a benchmark case for vulgarly-conceived-of "perfect identity," where, as just noted, *three* kinds of uninterruptedness obtain, Hume immediately claims that sets of successive and resembling perceptions "place" (T 1.4.2.34; SBN 203) us in dispositions that are (R_d) similar, if not in fact the *same* as, those dispositions that occur in cases of vulgarly-conceived-of perfect identity: "a *succession of related objects places the mind in this disposition*, and is consider'd with the *same* smooth and uninterrupted progress of the imagination, as attends the view of the same [uninterrupted²⁴ and] invariable object" (T 1.4.2.34; SBN 204; my emphasis). As a result, we are—when in a vulgar state of mind—prompted to "confound" (T 1.4.2.33–4, SBN 203–4) ideas that admit of vulgarly-conceived-of perfect identity with such sets of resembling, successive, and, crucial to note, *interrupted* perceptions.

In particular, when we experience a successive, *interrupted* series of similar perceptions (e.g., a series of resembling motorcycle perceptions) while in a vulgar state of mind, we are, Hume claims, naturally placed in a disposition that prompts us to conceive of these perceptions with "the *same* smooth and *uninterrupted* progress of the *imagination*, as attends the view of the same [uninterrupted, and]

invariable object” (T 1.4.2.34; SBN 204; my emphasis). As a result, these collections of resembling and successive perceptions are capable of putting us in a state of mind—a *disposition*—where, as is exactly the case with perfect identity, the imagination, “considers” (T 1.4.2.34; SBN 203) these ideas in a decisively uninterrupted fashion. As a result, thanks to the imagination, a series of interrupted, resembling perceptions (e.g., our set of motorcycle perceptions) are “consider[ed]” in an uninterrupted way (T 1.4.2.34; SBN 204).

And so, although Hume is not as explicit as he could be in this regard, we might say that the “uninterruptedness” of the disposition (i.e., the way in which the imagination conceives of this set of interrupted, resembling perceptions) seems to be *transposed* onto the set, making us conceive of *it* as uninterrupted. This means that our “view” of the set of interrupted, successive and resembling motorcycle perceptions is “attended” with the “same smooth and uninterrupted progress of the imagination” that “attends” our idea of say, the violet, when we “fix” our attention on it. For just as the interruptions of time seem to be erased by the uninterrupted imagination in the case of vulgarly-conceived-of perfect identity, the interruptions in perceiving the impressions at hand (e.g., looking away from the motorcycle and looking back) are erased by the uninterrupted imagination. As a result, cases where we “fix our thought” and cases where we apprehend a series of similar, but interrupted perceptions put us into very similar, if not the (R_d) same dispositions. We are put into a state of mind where the imagination is prone to “smooth over” any interruptions. So, we might say that experiencing a series of interrupted, resembling perceptions *feels* just like “fix[ing]” our thought on a single uninterrupted impression.

As a further result, when in a disposition caused by a set of resembling, interrupted perceptions (e.g., the motorcycle perceptions) we mistakenly think that it must have been *caused* by an idea of perfect identity due to its striking (R_c) resemblance to those dispositions caused when we “fix our thought” (recall figure 1). Accordingly Hume explains, as noted above, what we ultimately do in such vulgar states of mind is “confound” the two distinct although (R_c) *similar* causes (that is, an idea of perfect identity and a set of resembling perceptions) of the same (R_d) effect (a disposition where the imagination “considers” the ideas at hand in an uninterrupted fashion) with each other. And so, Hume writes:

as the *continuation of the same action* is the **effect** of the continu’d view of the same²⁵ object, ‘tis for this reason we attribute *sameness* to every succession of the related objects. The thought slides along the succession with equal facility, as if it consider’d only one object; and therefore confounds the succession with the [perfect] identity. (T 1.4.2.34; SBN 204; my emphases)

That is, as I already suggested in my general overview of dispositions, we mistakenly identity two *sufficient* causes of a given effect with each other. Analogously, I might hastily conclude that because my computer may be turned off by either a) following the proper shut-down procedure or, alternatively, b) yanking the plug out of the wall, that therefore, following the proper shut-down procedure and yanking the plug out of the wall are identical procedures.²⁶

However, this vulgar confusion between sufficient causes of similar effects, inspired by the projection of the imagination's "uninterruptedness" onto the set of successive, resembling perceptions, does not provide the vulgar with a lasting sense of perfect identity. And so, what I refer to as vulgar perspective I falls apart—but at the hands of the vulgar themselves. For, as we will see in a moment, the vulgar realize with just a small amount of reflection, that such "uninterruptedness" *cannot* be applied to sets of R_p resembling interrupted perceptions. Indeed, they realize that it is a *contradiction* to think of this set as both interrupted and uninterrupted. Concomitantly, the vulgar tendency to "confound" sets of resembling interrupted perceptions with ideas of perfect identity in virtue of the similar effects they have on the mind is effectively cut short. As a result, the vulgar make a somewhat desperate move to come up with *another*, seemingly more applicable notion of perfect identity—one that does *not* just apply to those rare situations where we "fix our thought." In particular, they adopt what I call vulgar perspective II.

However, we should realize that Hume ends his account of vulgar perspective I by reminding the reader that *none* of us is immune to making this kind of mistake. We are all, at one point or another, compelled to apprehend the world in a decisively "unthinking" manner (T 1.4.2.36; SBN 205).

5. Why the Vulgar Ascribe a Continued Existence to Broken Appearances. An Attempt to Introduce Uninterruptedness by way of Reason: Vulgar Perspective II

5.1. The Transition from Vulgar Perspective I to Vulgar Perspective II

As explained above, at one point or another we all naturally (albeit mistakenly) "ascribe . . . a perfect identity" (T 1.4.2.36; SBN 205) to sets of resembling, interrupted perceptions. In particular, thanks to the influence of imagination-inspired dispositions, we tend to "confound" the idea of perfect identity with that of a set of resembling perceptions. Yet, if we proceed to reflect just a bit about this identification—while in a vulgar state of mind—we are led to an inevitable contradiction. For how, despite how our dispositions compel us, could a set of *interrupted* perceptions simultaneously be an *uninterrupted* thing, a "body" (T 1.4.2.36; SBN 205)? Note how Hume puts this phenomenon, where the following passage comprises his lead-in to part 3 of his 4-part system, and so effectively signals, I think, a clear

break from his discussion of vulgar perspective I and his transition into vulgar perspective II²⁷ (a transition that is widely overlooked in Hume scholarship).²⁸

[According to the vulgar] [t]he very image, which is present to the senses, is with us the real body; and '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 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*, which is the *third* part of the hypothesis I propos'd to explain. (T 1.4.2.36; SBN 205; my emphases)

In light of this contradiction, Hume explains, the vulgar are driven to try again, but, crucially, with a *different* approach. This second approach, consisting of what I call vulgar perspective II, does not turn on the ability of the imagination to “smooth over” interruptions, nor relatedly, dispositions and the confusion that inevitably occurs regarding their origins. Rather, as a direct result of vulgar perspective I, a *new* propensity arises, consisting of the construction of “the fiction of a continu'd existence.” Hume’s discussion of this “propensity” comprises part 3 of his system, to which we now turn.

Here, Hume gives still another account of the transition from vulgar perspective I to vulgar perspective II, which initially proceeds as follows:

Now there being here an opposition betwixt the notion of the identity of resembling perceptions, and the interruption of their appearance, the mind must be uneasy in that situation, and will naturally seek relief from the uneasiness. Since the uneasiness arises from the opposition of two contrary principles, it must look for relief by sacrificing the one for the other. But as the smooth passage of our thought along our resembling perceptions makes us ascribe to them an identity, *we can never without reluctance yield up that opinion*. (T 1.4.2.37; SBN 206; my emphases)

That is: [1] The vulgar have a clear contradiction on their hands, putting them in a very uncomfortable state. This contradiction is: a) our impressions are interrupted and b) our impressions are *not* interrupted. As noted above, this contradiction is a consequence of the vulgar inability to distinguish between perceptions and objects.

[2] It seems that the vulgar's problem would be over if they simply rejected either a) or b), or, of course, overcame their inability to distinguish between objects and impressions. But this is not what happens.

Rather, Hume immediately continues:

We [while in this vulgar quandary] must therefore, turn to the other side, and suppose that our perceptions are no longer *interrupted* [my emphasis], but [instead] preserve a *continu'd as well as an invariable existence* [my emphasis], and are by that means entirely the same. But here the interruptions in the appearance of these perceptions are so long and frequent, that 'tis impossible to overlook them; and as the *appearance* of a perception in the mind and its *existence* seem at first sight entirely the same, it may be doubted, whether we can ever assent to so palpable a contradiction, *and suppose a perception to exist without being present to the mind* [my emphasis]. (T 1.4.2.37; SBN 206)

That is, picking up where we left off above: [3] Although the vulgar are extremely reluctant to turn their backs on the seductive influence of dispositions, they can't deny that their perceptions are nevertheless, interrupted. [4] Thus, when faced with a very uncomfortable contradiction, the vulgar are forced to come up with a *new* idea, but *without* surmounting their inability to distinguish between impressions and objects. This means that at this point in their thought, the vulgar are not only engaged in reflexive thought, but reflective thought as well. On the one hand they continue to unthinkingly conflate their perceptions with objects. Yet on the other hand, upon reflection, they realize that they have a contradiction on their hands and so, they come up with the idea that impressions may exist independently of our sensing them.

But this new idea *does* seem rather absurd: "and as the *appearance* of a perception in the mind and its *existence* seem at first sight entirely the same it may be doubted, whether we can ever assent to so palpable a contradiction, *and suppose a perception to exist without being present to the mind.*" However, before we can carefully examine how Hume explains how the vulgar could possibly entertain the idea that a perception (namely, an impression) could exist *without* being perceived on T 1.4.2.37–40 (SBN 205–8), we should first note two other instances in Book 1 where Hume gives separate, although brief accounts of the transition from vulgar perspective I to vulgar perspective II. The first is given just before he begins to discuss his 4-part system in T 1.4.2:

When we [in a vulgar state of mind] have been accustom'd to observe a constancy in certain impressions, and have found, that the perception of the sun or ocean, for instance, returns upon us after an absence or

annihilation with like parts and in a like order, as at its first appearance, we are not apt to regard these interrupted perceptions as different (which they really are) but on the contrary consider them as individually the same upon account of their resemblance. But as this interruption of their existence is contrary to their **perfect identity**, and makes us regard the first impression as annihilated, and the second as newly created, *we find ourselves somewhat at a loss, and are involv'd in a kind of contradiction*. In order to free ourselves from this difficulty, we disguise, as much as possible, the interruption, or rather remove it entirely, by supposing that these interrupted perceptions are connected by a real existence, of which we are insensible. (T 1.4.2.24; SBN199; my emphases)

Later, Hume gives another summary of the vulgar perspective in 1.4.6, in the context of his discussion of personal identity:

However at one instant we may consider the related succession as variable or interrupted, we are sure the next to ascribe to it a **perfect identity**, and regard it as invariable and interrupted. Our propensity to this mistake is so great from the resemblance above-mention'd, that we fall into it before we are aware; and tho' we incessantly correct ourselves by reflexion, and return to a more accurate method of thinking, yet we cannot long sustain our philosophy, or take off this bias from the imagination. Our last resource is to yield to it, and boldly assert that these different related objects are in effect the same, however interrupted and variable. In order to justify to ourselves this absurdity, we often feign some new and unintelligible principle, that connects the objects together, and prevents their interruption or variation. Thus, we feign the continu'd existence of the perceptions of our senses, to remove the interruption (T 1.4.6.6; SBN 254; my emphases)

Thus, entirely consistently with what we saw to be the case with the summary of the vulgar perspective presented on T 1.4.2.36 (SBN 205), T 1.4.2.37 (SBN 206), as well as T 1.4.2.24 (SBN 199), the vulgar are forced to come up with the idea of an *unperceived, continuous sensation*, which Hume clearly states here, is "*new*." As a result, it is *not* to be confused with the vulgar's first, more impulsive ascription of perfect identity to sets of resembling perceptions, although this *new* perspective certainly seems to *emerge* from vulgar perspective I, if only to alleviate the contradiction it generates.

With these four passages in mind, it now becomes clearer, I think, why Hume dedicated part 2 of his system to a discussion of the vulgar perspective derivative of certain dispositions, while he devotes part 3 to a discussion of the vulgar idea

that continuous, unperceived impressions exist. Moreover, we need to constantly remind ourselves that although these are two *distinct* approaches, both must be seen as attempts—reflective or not—to grasp objects *qua* sense impressions as *both* invariable and uninterrupted, or in other words, as admitting of perfect identity. And these attempts are both the result of the vulgar inability to distinguish between perceptions and objects.

5.2 Unperceived Impressions: Vulgar Perspective II

With these summaries of the transition from vulgar perspective I to vulgar perspective II in mind, let us now return to our explication of part 3 of Hume's 4-part system in T 1.4.2.36–40 (SBN 205–8). Immediately after his summary of what I characterize as the transition from vulgar perspective I to vulgar perspective II on T 1.4.2.37; SBN 206, Hume proceeds to explain how the vulgar could possibly entertain the idea that although our impressions may be interrupted in that we are not always *perceiving* them, this "not-perceiving-them" does not necessarily imply that simultaneously, they do not *exist*. For on the face of it, this claim might seem absurd. What ordinary (i.e., "vulgar") person would think that a sense impression exists without actually sensing it? In fact, this seems like an obvious contradiction in terms. In what appears to be a move to obviate the absurdity of this perspective, Hume momentarily steps out of his explication of explaining how the *vulgar* might justify their perspective. In its stead, he explains why, according to *his* non-vulgar perspective (particularly, according to his own theory of mind) the vulgar's new supposition is not entirely absurd (T 1.4.2.37; SBN 206).

In particular, Hume invokes the idea that the mind is a "heap or collections of different perceptions" (T 1.4.2.39; SBN 207), a position that we find discussed at length in T 1.4.6 in the context of his account of personal identity. We may conclude as much, because i) Hume explicitly refers to T 1.4.6 in regard to his discussion of an unperceived perception (see footnote 1, T 1.4.2.37; SBN 206), and ii) Hume could not be paraphrasing the vulgar perspective here, if only because according to Hume, the vulgar think that the self/mind is *simple and indivisible* (see T 1.4.6, particularly, T 1.4.6.6). Yet here, Hume explicitly refers to the mind as a "heap or collection of different perceptions" (T 1.4.2.39; SBN 207).²⁹

In an effort to make his account of this second, more reflective vulgar approach to objects more plausible, Hume proceeds to ask two questions. These questions may be paraphrased as follows: [a] How is it the case that the vulgar could possibly assume that a sense impression has a continu'd existence? [b] Assume that an object is a collection of resembling sense-impressions, P_1 – P_n . What happens when we stop perceiving an object, then perceive it again, where in the latter case we would generate a *new* resembling sense impression, namely, P_{n+1} ? Does doing this cause the object to grow (T 1.4.2.38; SBN 207)?³⁰

Hume answers the first question by telling us, in so many words that the “mind” is nothing but a “heap or collection of different perceptions” (T 1.4.2.39; SBN 207). As a result, “the mind” has no genuine “simplicity and identity” (T 1.4.2.39; SBN 207), although we mistakenly attribute it with both. Rather, each perception exists independently of the heap, although when put together, they compose the heap. Consequently, just as we could, say, take one apple from a “heap or collection of different” apples and say that such an apple continues to exist on its own, we may separate a sense-impression from that “heap or collection of different perceptions” that constitutes the mind. Analogously, this separated sense-impression would, it seems, continue to exist on its own; it does not need to be a part of the heap to exist. Thus, in regard to the vulgar supposition that sense impressions must continue to exist when we are not sensing them, he writes: “there is no absurdity in separating any particular perception from the mind; that is, in breaking off all its relations, with that connected mass of perceptions, which constitute a thinking being” (T 1.4.2.39; SBN 207). In this respect, the vulgar (*qua* Hume’s theory of mind) may entertain the idea that a sense impression continues to exist without being perceived, while Hume may avoid being accused of setting up a straw-man.³¹

To answer question [b] regarding how an object can consist of a non-fixed collection of sense impressions, Hume explains that it is not contradictory (thanks to the answer given to question [a] above) to conclude that sense impressions exist independently of being perceived. Thus, if we identify objects with sense impressions, it is not contradictory to claim that objects exist independently of the mind. As a result, when such externally existing perceptions interact with our minds—where our minds are nothing but heaps of perceptions—new sense impressions become present to the mind. However, they are, evidently, added to the “heap” and not to the object itself. As a result, the object/impression does not grow with each new impression of it (T 1.4.2.40; SBN 207).

Thus, Hume concludes on behalf of the vulgar in terms of their *second* perspective:

[According to the vulgar,] [t]he same continu’d and uninterrupted Being [i.e., an unperceived impression] may, therefore, be sometimes present to the mind, and sometimes absent from it, without any real or essential change in the Being itself. An interrupted appearance of the senses implies not necessarily an interruption in the existence. [Thus, according to this more advanced vulgar line of thought], [t]he supposition of the continu’d existence of sensible objects or perceptions involves no contradiction. We may easily indulge our inclination to that supposition. When the exact resemblance of our perceptions makes us ascribe to them an identity, we may remove the seeming interruption by feigning a continu’d being,

which may fill those intervals, and preserve a perfect and entire identity to our perceptions. (T 1.4.2.40; SBN 208)

Here Hume clearly explains that the vulgar do not posit—contrary to at least Price's, Bennett's and Collier's³² reading—*particular* impressions in series P_1 – P_n , say P_5 and P_7 , where P_5 and P_7 were never actually perceived. Rather, according to Hume, the vulgar appear to posit one continuous and uninterrupted impression in the case of each respective "object" at hand. In other words, they posit "[t]he same and continu'd Being" (my emphases). This "Being" continues to exist even when we are not perceiving it, and in *that* respect, it "may fill in those intervals" when we are not perceiving it. For instance, if, in the spirit of vulgar perspective II, I posit the existence of a continuous and uninterrupted impression of, say, an apple, because it allegedly exists when I am not perceiving it, it may, as an entity that resembles all my impressions of it, "fill in" any "intervals" (e.g., P_5 and P_7) when I am not actually having specific apple-impressions.³³ As such, it seems that the vulgar, adopting this "new" (T 1.4.6.6; SBN 254) perspective, come up with a notion of an object that is i) a sense impression, and ii) is not only invariable, but also, is uninterrupted, that is, is continuous.

However, despite their best efforts, with just a bit more reflection—that is, philosophical reflection—vulgar perspective II may *also* be shown to contradict itself in the form of a *second reductio*, although space does not allow for a discussion of that matter here. However, at this point, I do think that we can safely conclude that 1) Hume does not embrace the vulgar perspective as his own position, regardless of what we may take Hume's position to be; 2) Hume splits the vulgar perspective into *two* parts in "Of Skepticism with regard to the senses," where, although the first evolves into the second by way of a *reductio*, each consists of a *distinct* attempt to make what certainly seems to be interrupted—sense impressions—uninterrupted; and 3) To properly understand Hume's account of the vulgar perspective, we must pay particular attention to the divisions that he makes in his 4-part system, particularly, the distinctions he makes between parts 2 and 3, where in part 2, we must focus on Hume's notion of a "disposition" and "perfect identity," and in part 3, on the notion of an "uninterrupted Being."

NOTES

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1 Whether or not Hume's position on objects in 1.4.2 applies to the rest of *Treatise* is left as an open question, too large to take on here.

2 David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed., revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), referred to as "SBN" and cited by page number, and David Hume, *A Treatise of Hume Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), referred to as "T" and cited by Book, part, section, and paragraph number.

3 Kemp Smith does, very briefly, explicate steps 1–4 of Hume's system. Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume: A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines* (New York: Macmillan, 1941), 474–87. However, in the course of doing so, he does not clearly distinguish between Hume's position and the vulgar perspective.

4 We examine perfect identity at length in section 4.1.2 of this paper.

5 Note—for reasons that are not relevant to our present discussion—that Hume has occasion to include externality and independence under the category of distinctness (T 1.4.2.2; SBN 188). As a result, on occasion, "distinct" must be read as being elliptical for "distinct," "external," and "independent." See, for instance, T 1.4.2.2 (SBN 188) and T 1.4.2.11 (SBN 192).

6 Throughout Book 1, Hume uses the properties of continuity and distinctness *interchangeably* with the property of uninterruptedness. This is the case because if an object is conceived of as uninterrupted, then it is, by definition, conceived of as continuous and so (see [1] above) as distinct. The reverse is also true: if an object is conceived of as distinct, it is conceived of as continuous, and so, by definition, it is conceived of as uninterrupted. Note however, that Hume does *not* think that invariability implies uninterruptedness, although it might be argued that he seems to assume that uninterruptedness implies invariability, and so, a continuous and distinct object, which as such, is also uninterrupted, is also invariable. Regardless, the fact that invariability does *not* imply uninterruptedness might explain why Hume moves from a discussion of continuity and distinctness to a discussion of invariability and uninterruptedness in his four-part system. For as will be explained in detail in sections 3–5 above, the vulgar may only entertain the idea of an invariable object, but not an invariable AND uninterrupted (i.e., continuous and distinct) object. As a result, to discuss the vulgar perspective in parts 2 and 3 of his system, he must explicitly introduce the property of invariability.

7 Unfortunately, space does not permit a discussion of the philosophical position here, particularly, how it relates to the vulgar position.

8 There is a flaw with the vulgar theory presented on T 1.4.2.31 (SBN 202) that Hume does not point out until T 1.4.2.43 (SBN 209–10). One could not, according to Hume, compare a set of resembling sense impressions if all were not

immediately present to the senses. For, keep in mind that according to Hume, we do not remember sense *impressions*, but instead, ideas of sense impressions (see at least T 1.1.1–3; SBN 8–9). As a result, in the course of his explanation of the vulgar perspective, Hume implicitly assumes (T 1.4.2.32; SBN 203) and then somewhat explicitly states (T 1.4.2; SBN 209–10), that although the vulgar think that they are identifying sense impressions, they are actually relating either a set of *ideas* with each other or are relating a set of ideas with a *current* sense impression or impressions. For instance, I might relate all of my *memories* of my impressions of a motorcycle with my current sense impressions of the motorcycle, and *then* proceed to mistakenly identify this set of ideas and impressions with the “object” motorcycle. Oddly enough, commentators have tended to overlook this somewhat fundamental detail. See for example, H. H. Price, *Hume’s Theory of the External World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), 33–44: “Let us now try to state Hume’s meaning more clearly. As before, we must describe the situation *entirely in terms of impressions*. . . . [H]ere again we find that there is an interrupted series of *impressions*, a series with a gap in it” (35; my emphasis). However, some might argue that what we remember is having had *impressions* that resembled one another, and it is to those *impressions* that we remember having had that we attribute continuity. In response, I would have to say that I agree, but regardless, a memory of an impression is an idea (namely, an idea of an impression, as opposed to an idea of an idea; cf. T 1.3.8.15–7 (SBN 105).

9 However, some reflection is clearly involved in what I call vulgar perspective II. But this reflection does not concern the vulgar’s seemingly instinctive inability to distinguish between objects and impressions. Rather, it concerns their attempt to alleviate the contradiction that results from this inability. See section 5 above for more detail.

10 Price, *Hume’s Theory of the External World*; Jonathan Bennett, *Locke, Berkeley and Hume: Central Themes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); Barry Stroud, *Hume* (London and New York: Routledge, 1977); Fred Wilson, “Is Hume a Skeptic with Regard to the Senses?” *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 27.1 (1989): 49–73, Marjorie Grene, “The Objects of Hume’s *Treatise*,” *Hume Studies* 20.2 (1994):163–77, Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume*; Eric Steinberg, “Hume on the Continued Existence and the Identity of Changing Things,” *Hume Studies* 7 (1981):105–20.

11 Stroud however, does mention dispositions, but only in passing (103), as does Kemp Smith (477–8) and D. F. and M. J. Norton in their annotations to the *Treatise* (476). Moreover, all four mention dispositions without, I think, making it absolutely clear that Hume is speaking for the *vulgar* here and not himself.

12 To be precise, we should note that initially, Hume tells us that he is looking for dispositions that are either similar *or* the same as those caused by ideas of perfect identity: “not only [does the relation of resemblance cause] an association

of ideas, but also of dispositions, and makes us conceive the one idea by an act or operation of the mind, *similar* to that by which we conceive the other. This circumstance I have observ'd to be of great moment; and we may establish it for a general rule, that whatever ideas place the mind in the *same* disposition or *in similar* ones are very apt to be confounded" (T 1.4.2.32; SBN 203; my emphases). However, shortly after this passage, he seems to restrict his discussion to dispositions that are not just similar, but in fact, are the *same*: "Now what other objects, besides identical ones [namely, ones that admit of perfect identity], are capable of placing the mind in the *same* disposition, when it considers them, and of causing the same uninterrupted passage of the imagination from one idea to another?" (T 1.4.2.34; SBN 203; my emphasis). And finally, in his last remark regarding dispositions at this juncture in the *Treatise*, he retreats to characterizing them as *almost* the same, and so it would seem, as merely similar: "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 [namely, a perception that enables us to think of an idea as admitting of a perfect identity]" (T 1.4.2.35; SBN 204; my emphasis, cf. above, section 4.1.2). However, although I think that we should, at least, be aware of Hume's oscillation on this point, I don't think it substantively affects his position regarding the distinction between what I call vulgar perspective I versus vulgar perspective II. As a result, we need not pursue its implications any further here.

13 We examine "perfect identity" at length in the next section.

14 Where here, Hume appears to be using "ideas" quite loosely. For given the context of this sentence, it could mean a set of resembling perceptions (which, as explained in footnote 8, could entail impressions and ideas), or it could mean an idea of an object that admits of "perfect identity."

15 The reader need only survey the most extensive and most well-known accounts of T 1.4.2 to see that this is the case, for example, Price, *Hume's Theory of the External World*, Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume*, Bennett, *Locke, Berkeley and Hume*, and Stroud, *Hume*. Nor can I find an extensive account of perfect identity elsewhere.

16 As noted earlier, Hume warned us that he might, after the vulgar, use the word "object" interchangeably with the word "perception." (T 1.4.2.31; SBN 202). Here is a case where he seems to be doing so. For as explained in section 4.1.1 of this paper, Hume is clear that sets of resembling *perceptions* cause dispositions that are similar to, if not the same as, dispositions caused by the *ideas* of perfect identity. So, in both cases, *perceptions* cause these dispositions, not mind-independent "objects," as Hume seems to imply in the passage noted above. But it may have just been easier for Hume to use the word "object" here—in the spirit of the vulgar—however misleading it might be.

17 Keep in mind that Hume is using the word "object" here interchangeably with "perception."

18 Again, Hume seems to be using the word "object" interchangeably with the word "perception" here—for at no point does he suggest that the vulgar may somehow apprehend mind-independent "objects" such that they may "fix" their thoughts on them. Rather, the implication is that the vulgar simply focus on one kind of impression for an extended period of time, e.g., a violet impression, without entertaining any interruptions, e.g., looking away, at say, a chair. This point brings to mind the "act/object" distinction in Hume, where the question is: Are impressions mental "states" or are they "objects" of mental states (see for instance Stroud, *Hume*, J.P. Wright, *The Sceptical Realism of David Hume* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), Grene, "The Objects of Hume's *Treatise*" and Don Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997). Although we don't have space to address this problem in regard to all of the *Treatise* here, or even in regard to all of T 1.4.2, we might note that in the passages cited above, Hume does seem to indicate that perceptions are *objects*. Certain dispositions (states of mind) survey resembling *objects*, where, as I have explained throughout, these "objects" are perceptions. One might argue that this usage is just an artifact of his attempt to adopt the vulgar position (where he uses the word "object" interchangeably with "perception"). However, in this case, although perceptions are not mind-independent things, they are discrete, interrupted "things" that are "surveyed" by the mind. In this very general respect, perceptions appear to be objects of the mind rather than being states of mind. However, it could be argued that regardless, they are discrete *experiences* that, as such, are the "objects" of dispositions. And so, in this case, generally speaking, perceptions would be states of mind *and* objects. However, further discussion of this matter takes us well beyond the scope of this paper.

19 Earlier in T 1.4.2 Hume claims that we do not have an *impression* of continuity, i.e., uninterruptedness (T 1.4.2.11–2; SBN 192–5). He does not go back on this claim here.

20 Although Hume is not entirely explicit in this regard, we may conclude that by "faculties of mind," he is referring to the *imagination* simply because in the next paragraph (T 1.4.2.34; SBN 203–4), he explicitly tells us that the *imagination* is responsible for moving in an uninterrupted passage from one idea to another as time passes. And so, he is implicitly identifying the "faculties" that "continue" the idea at hand with the imagination: "Now what other objects, besides identical ones, are capable of placing the mind in the same disposition, when it considers them, and causing the same uninterrupted passage of the imagination from one idea to another?" (T 1.4.2.34; SBN 203) See also section 4.1.3 of this paper, where I discuss this line in more detail.

21 Price, *Hume's Theory of the External World*, 46–7.

22 But what other instances of perfect identity are there? Answering this question takes us well beyond the scope of this paper, but the reader might consider cases where we imagine a “medium betwixt unity [uninterruptedness] and number [invariability]” (T 1.4.2.29; SBN 201). In fact, it may be argued that in part I of Hume’s 4-part system, he presents an alternative account of perfect identity; noting, however, that he does not always refer to such identity as “perfect,” but as identity, *simpliciter* (e.g., T 1.4.2.29; SBN 201).

23 At least initially, for as shown in section 5 of this paper, the vulgar ultimately abandon this approach and engage in what I characterize as vulgar perspective II.

24 Hume uses the word “same” interchangeably with the word “uninterrupted” here. We may conclude that this is the case because previous to this passage, he compares dispositions caused by ideas of *perfect identity* with dispositions caused by sets of resembling, successive and interrupted perceptions. Concomitantly, given our definition of “perfect identity,” he is comparing dispositions caused by ideas of objects that are *both* uninterrupted and invariable, with dispositions caused by ideas of objects that are merely invariable. In the passage noted above, he is, as explained above, *still* comparing these two kinds of dispositions. As a result, it simply follows that the comparison he makes here must be between an idea that is invariable and uninterrupted (and so, admits of perfect identity) with a set of interrupted, resembling and successive perceptions. Thus, when he refers to the object in the passage cited above as the “same invariable object,” he must have meant the “[uninterrupted and] invariable object;” namely, the idea of an object with a perfect identity. Note that for similar reasons, Hume also uses “same” to mean “uninterrupted” on T 1.4.2.34 (SBN 204), which is cited and explained above.

25 As noted in footnote 24, here is another instance where Hume uses “same” (as well as, in this case, “sameness”) interchangeably with “uninterrupted.”

26 Or, as Hume puts it: “We find by experience, that there is such a *constancy* [namely, a resemblance] in almost all the impressions of the senses, that their interruption produces no alteration on them, and hinders them not from returning the same in appearance and in situation as at their first existence. I survey the furniture in chamber; I shut my eyes, and afterwards open them; and find the new perceptions to resemble perfectly those, which formerly struck my senses. This [R_p] resemblance is observ’d in a thousand instances, and naturally connects together our ideas of these interrupted perceptions by the strongest relation, and conveys the mind with *an easy transition from one to another. An easy transition or passage of the imagination, along with 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 one for the other” (T 1.4.2.35; SBN 204; my emphases). Also recall that Hume makes a very

similar point just before he launches into his discussion of vulgarly-conceived-of perfect identity, as noted in section 4.1.1 of this paper: "This circumstance I have observ'd to be of great moment; and we may establish it for a general rule, that whatever ideas place the mind in the same disposition or in similar ones, are very apt to be confounded" (T 1.4.2.32; SBN 203). And still elsewhere: "objects [that place us in the same uninterrupted disposition] are very naturally confounded with [perfectly] identical ones" (T 1.4.2.34; SBN 203).

27 To further support my claim that part 2 of Hume's 4-part system is meant to be an explication of vulgar perspective I, while part 3 is an explication of vulgar perspective II, note that Hume initially explains the distinction between parts 2 and 3 as follows: "*Secondly*, Give a reason, why the resemblance of our broken and interrupted perceptions induces us to attribute an identity to them. *Thirdly*, Account for that propensity, which this illusion gives, to unite these broken appearances by a continu'd existence" (T 1.4.2.25; SBN 200). Notice that even according to this very brief summary, it is clear that each part consists of a *separate* attempt to account for identity, where part 2 directly turns on "the resemblance of our broken and interrupted perceptions," and part 3 explains a "propensity" that seems to *fall out* of the illusory content of the first attempt, particularly, the contradiction it generates. Moreover, if parts 2 and 3 were *not* meant to be separate accounts, why would Hume divide them as such?

28 However, Price does *gesture* towards this distinction between vulgar perspective I and vulgar perspective II, loosely identifying them as two "stages" in Hume's account of identity (see Price, *Hume's Theory of the External World*, 49). But in the course of doing so, Price does not acknowledge that Hume is speaking for the *vulgar* here, not himself. And so, Price does not distinguish between *vulgar* perspective I and *vulgar* perspective II, but instead, between two stages in *Hume's* position on objects. Moreover, Price does not explicitly acknowledge the role of dispositions or perfect identity. Nor does he think that the unperceived perception that the vulgar are forced to posit in light of the contradiction that falls out of vulgar perspective I is a meant to be a *continuous* "Being" (see section 5.2 above for more detail on this last problem). Kemp Smith also *gestures* towards this distinction in the course of his brief explanation of Hume's four-part system (*The Philosophy of David Hume*, 474–87). However, he does not think that part 3 of Hume's system is an analysis of the vulgar point of view (479–81). Meanwhile, more recent scholarship seems to overlook the distinction between the two vulgar perspectives altogether.

29 I am grateful to Abe Roth for suggesting i) and ii) to me at a recent Hume conference.

30 Or, as Hume puts it: "When we are present [in a vulgar state of mind], we say we feel, or see it. Here then may arise two questions; *First*, How we can satisfy ourselves in supposing a perception to be absent from the mind without being

annihilated. *Secondly*, After what manner we conceive an object to become present to the mind, without some new creation of a perception or image; and what we mean by this *seeing*, and *feeling*, and *perceiving*” (T 1.4.2.38; SBN 207).

31 Or, as Roth puts it: “[By invoking his own theory of mind] Hume can feel free to attribute to the vulgar a belief in perceptions unperceived, and not worry that he’s violating some principle of charity by attributing to them some obvious contradiction.” Abraham Roth, “Comments on ‘The Vulgar Conception of Objects in ‘Of Skepticism with regard to the Senses’,” presented at the 2005 Hume Conference, Toronto, Canada. But this is not say that Hume actually thinks that sense impressions *do* exist independently of being perceived (T 1.42.45; SBN 210–1). Rather, his point is, because it’s a logically possible idea, it is not entirely absurd.

32 See Price, *Hume’s Theory of the External World*, Bennett, *Locke, Berkeley and Hume: Central Themes*, and Mark Collier, “Filling in the Gaps: Hume and Connectionism on the Continued Existence of Unperceived Objects,” *Hume Studies* 25.1–2 (1999): 155–70.

33 Cf. Wright, *The Sceptical Realism of David Hume*, 65–6, and Harold Noonan, *Hume on Knowledge* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 181, in support of the claim that (on behalf of the vulgar) Hume has a singular, not-necessarily-perceived impression in mind here. However, although Wright initially claims that indeed, such impressions are singular, and thus, constitute the whole object at hand, without explanation he suggests that such not-necessarily-perceived impressions are (in the spirit of Price et al.), *particular* “gap fillers.” Note: “[Hume] claims that the source of our belief in the unperceived and independent existence of our resembling impressions lies in our tendency to *image* (form an idea of) a single temporally continuous perception when what we actually *sense* (have an impression of) are two or more temporally discontinuous resembling perceptions. The natural propensity of the imagination leads us to think of our resembling impressions as one continuous appearance . . . through a kind of ‘confused reasoning’ we combine the contradictory perceptions of imagination and sense, and so judge the unperceived existence of our resembling impressions. We are then forced to think of *them* [my emphasis] as existing in the gap between their appearances” (66).