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Abstract: Hume argues that the difference between belief and mere conception consists in a difference in the manner of conception. His argument assumes that the difference between belief and mere conception must be a function of either the content conceived or of the manner of conception; however, it is unclear what justifies this assumption. I argue that the assumption depends on Hume's confidence that we can know immediately that we believe when we believe, and that we can only have such knowledge of intrinsic features of our perceptions. I then claim that Hume's argument against the view that the difference between belief and mere conception is a function of the content conceived faces a difficulty, because it relies on an apparently implausible view about mental representation. I propose an interpretation of the argument that avoids the difficulty and explains Hume's puzzling claim that his account of belief answers "a new question unthought of by philosophers."

Introduction

In *Treatise* 1.3.7 Hume offers two distinct arguments for the view that the difference between believing a matter of fact and simply conceiving of it consists in a difference in the manner of conception.[1] For convenience, I will call the two arguments in *Treatise* 1.3.7 the "No-new-idea Argument" and the "Argument from Disagreement." Both arguments have an eliminative structure: Hume argues against other possible accounts of belief and concludes that the only hypothesis

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left standing is the view that the difference between believing and conceiving is a difference in the manner of conception. He goes on to argue that since belief is a manner of conception, this manner of conception must be a function of the force and vivacity of an idea.[2]

Hume treats the arguments of *Treatise* 1.3.7 as some of his most important and as establishing one of his most novel and significant philosophical conclusions. For example, in the Abstract he devotes approximately eleven paragraphs to summarizing the main argument of *Treatise* 1.3.6—the famous argument about the cause of inductive inferences—and ten paragraphs to summarizing the argument of *Treatise* 1.3.7. He also claims that the conclusion of *Treatise* 1.3.6—that custom, and not reason, is "the guide of life"—is not only "a very curious discovery" itself, but it also "leads us to other [discoveries] that are still more curious" (T Abstract 16–17; SBN 652). The account of the nature of belief is Hume's prime example of a discovery that is "still more curious."

Despite their importance, the success of the arguments of *Treatise* 1.3.7 remains a matter of controversy. For example, a number of commentators approve of Hume's rejection of the view that belief consists in an idea but take a dim view of his conclusion that belief consists in a "manner of conception," if this is understood to be an introspectible, phenomenal feature or aspect of an idea.[3] To them, it seems that something has gone awry in Hume's argument. A common diagnosis is that Hume begins with an important insight, but trying to incorporate that insight into an excessively restrictive system leads him to an unpalatable conclusion. Yet commentators disagree about what the insight is and about exactly which features of Hume's system lead him to this unpalatable conclusion.[4]

In this paper, I focus on the first of the two arguments Hume gives for the claim that belief is a manner of conception, the No-new-idea Argument. The eliminative structure of the argument is explicit in the Abstract to the *Treatise*, where Hume writes, "To account for [the difference between belief in a matter of fact and the simple conception of it], there are only two hypotheses" (T Abstract 19; SBN 653). The first hypothesis is that "belief joins some new idea to those we may conceive without assenting to them" (T Abstract 19; SBN 653). The other hypothesis is that belief is a manner of conception. Since the first hypothesis is shown to be false, Hume takes the other hypothesis to be established. What is conspicuously missing is a defense of the claim that these are the *only* two possible accounts.

Similarly, it is unclear in the text of the *Treatise* itself why Hume takes himself to have eliminated all other possible accounts of belief in order to establish his own claim. Here is the core of Hume's argument:

> 'Tis evident, that all reasonings from causes or effects terminate in conclusions, concerning matter of fact; that is, concerning the existence of objects or of their qualities. 'Tis also evident, that the idea of existence

> is nothing different from the idea of any object, and that when after the simple conception of any thing we wou'd conceive it as existent, we in reality make no addition to or alteration on our first idea. . . . But I go farther; . . . I maintain, that the belief of the existence joins no new ideas to those, which compose the idea of the object. . . . But as 'tis certain there is a great difference betwixt the simple conception of the existence of an object, and the belief of it, and as this difference lies not in the parts or composition of the idea, which we conceive; it follows, that [the difference betwixt the simple conception of the existence of an object and the belief of it] must lie in the manner, in which we conceive it. (T 1.3.7.2; SBN 94–95)

Hume's conclusion, that the difference between belief and the simple conception of an object "must lie in the manner in which we conceive" the object, follows only if we make the following assumption:

> *Eliminative Assumption*: Either the difference between belief and the simple conception of something lies in the parts or composition of the idea, or it lies in the manner in which we conceive it.

I will be concerned with two questions about the No-new-idea Argument. First, what reason does Hume have for accepting the Eliminative Assumption? Second, how exactly does Hume eliminate the possibility that believing something differs from merely conceiving of it in the "parts or composition of the idea"?

It might seem that the Eliminative Assumption follows either from the theory of ideas or from other aspects of Hume's account of the mind. The thought is that within the confines of Hume's system, there is room for only two different accounts of the nature of belief, so that eliminating one suffices to establish the other. Yet it is not clear exactly which parts of Hume's system are supposed to do this work. I will argue that careful consideration of the text suggests that Hume's argument relies on an assumption about the kind of introspective knowledge we have of the occurrences in our own minds. In particular, Hume presupposes that we have immediate, or non-inferential, introspective knowledge of our beliefs, and that we have this knowledge in virtue of whatever it is that distinguishes beliefs from mere conceivings. This assumption plays a crucial role in establishing Hume's account of belief. If some feature of our mental lives is introspectively available to us in such a way that it must be as it appears to us to be, then we can have immediate knowledge that our mental life has that feature. Among the things that Hume believes are introspectively available to us in this way are whatever it is that constitutes the difference between "feeling and thinking" (T 1.1.1.1; SBN 2), whatever constitutes the difference between seeming to remember something and merely imagining it (T 1.3.5.3; SBN 85), and, I will argue, whatever constitutes the difference between believing something and simply conceiving it.[5]

I proceed in two stages. In stage one, I consider why Hume embraces the Eliminative Assumption that the only plausible alternative to his own view—namely that belief is a manner of conception—is that belief differs from the simple conception of an object in virtue of a difference in the "parts or composition" of the ideas conceived. Call the latter the "alternative view." In stage two, I move on to consider how Hume eliminates the alternative view.

Stage One: Justifying the Eliminative Assumption

Hume's No-new-idea Argument relies on the following Eliminative Assumption: Either the difference between belief and the simple conception of something lies in the parts or composition of the idea, or it lies in the manner in which we conceive it. What reason could Hume have for holding the Eliminative Assumption? Moreover, why would he not explicitly give his reasons for holding it? On the face of it, the Eliminative Assumption seems patently false. Setting aside the alternative view for the moment, the following is a list of possible accounts of the difference between believing that something exists and simply conceiving that it exists. The difference might lie in any of the following:

(a) in the phenomenal character of the perception;

(b) in the relation between the subject and the perception;

(c) in the relation between the perception and some (or all) of the subject's other perceptions;

(d) in the kind of act performed, perhaps in the mental faculty responsible for the act;

(e) in the cause of the belief, or in the effects of the belief on the subject or the subject's other perceptions;

(f) in the kind of state; for example, believing might be a dispositional state, and conceiving, an occurrent one.

If (a)–(f) are all possible differences between belief and mere conception that are not differences in the parts or composition of the ideas, are they all to be counted as differences in the "manner of conception"? If so, Hume's conclusion that belief is a manner of conception is highly uninformative. Moreover, this would pose a problem for the inference from the claim that belief is a manner of conception to the claim that the difference between belief and mere conception is a difference in force and vivacity, or at least in feeling, since it would require him to eliminate (b)–(f). On the other hand, if the truth of the Eliminative Assumption is incompatible with any of (b)–(f) being genuine possibilities, why does Hume think he is entitled to the Eliminative Assumption?

To answer this question, I begin by considering what exactly the alternative view is. What would it be for a belief to differ from the simple conception

of an object in virtue of a difference in the "parts or composition" of the ideas involved? I take the parts and composition of an idea to comprise two things: first, the collection of simple ideas that compose a complex idea, and second, the order or arrangement of those simple ideas. Two complex ideas of Paris might have all of the same simple parts, but they might be arranged differently, and, as a result, one might be veridical and the other, not. Two ideas that differ in "parts or composition" will have different intrinsic features, and as a result, they will have different content. However, Hume holds that there are some intrinsic features, such as the degree of force and vivacity, that do not determine a perception's content. Two perceptions that differ in terms of these features differ in their "manner of conception." Thus, we can distinguish two kinds of intrinsic features of perceptions, those that determine the perception's content, which I will call "content-determining features," and those features that determine the manner of conception. Two perceptions with different parts or composition have different content-determining features.

The Eliminative Assumption, then, amounts to the assumption that the difference between belief and the simple conception of something has to consist in an intrinsic difference between the perceptions involved in believing and conceiving. Jonathan Bennett recognizes this when he writes, "for some reason or none, Hume does assume that whatever makes an idea a belief must be something intrinsic to it."[6] The challenge, then, is to suggest what Hume's reason is.

One might rightly suspect that the Eliminative Assumption follows from Hume's other commitments, especially the theory of ideas or his theory of mind, but it is not obvious which commitments entail it. David Owen claims not only that "Hume's main argument [for his account of belief] is the unacceptability of any alternative" but also that the No-new-idea Argument "is a good argument within Hume's system."[7] Owen, however, also holds that Hume's system presupposes that "at the level of ideas, there are only associations and relations."[8] However, this seems to leave open the possibility that the difference consists in the way beliefs are related to other perceptions, that is (c) or (e). Barry Stroud remarks, "Hume claims that the question of the nature of belief had not been seriously considered by philosophers before his time. But he tries to answer it within the confines of an impossibly narrow theory."[9] Both Owen and Stroud seem to hold that the problematic Eliminative Assumption is supported by some controversial aspect of Hume's account of mind. This would explain both why Hume takes the assumption to be so obvious that it needs no explicit defense and why we might think that it is not obvious at all. But is the Eliminative Assumption obvious even within Hume's system? Which of Hume's commitments entails it?

One answer to this question might be that it follows from Hume's views about the role perceptions play in explaining various kinds of mental activity. One might think that Hume is committed to the following principle:

> *Distinctness of Mental Acts*: Two mental acts are distinct if and only if there is some difference in the perceptions involved in those acts.

Perceiving something and merely thinking about it are distinct mental acts because there is a difference in the perceptions involved in each act, since the former has the force and vivacity characteristic of an impression and the latter has the lack of force characteristic of an idea. However, the Distinctness of Mental Acts Principle is too weak to secure the Eliminative Assumption, because there could be differences between two perceptions that are neither differences in the parts or composition of the ideas nor differences in manner of conception. In particular, external or relational properties could be the relevant difference between two perceptions. If perception A stands in some relation, R, to something that perception B does not stand in, then this could be a difference between A and B that is not a difference in either the parts or composition of the ideas or their manner of conception. For example, Hume claims that memory preserves the order and position of impressions, but preserving the order of the perceptions involves a relational property of the remembered ideas, not an intrinsic property of ideas that are remembered.[10] To secure the Eliminative Assumption, Hume would need a stronger principle, like the following:

> *Strengthened Distinctness of Mental Acts*: Two mental acts are distinct if and only if there is some *intrinsic* difference in the perceptions involved in those acts.

Yet this principle is too strong: it is clearly incompatible with Hume's other commitments, particularly with his account of how ideas can be general in their representation. Thinking of triangles in general and thinking of isosceles triangles in general are surely different mental acts. Yet, on Hume's view, one can have the very same perception of a particular isosceles triangle when one thinks either of triangles in general or of isosceles triangles in general. The difference between the thoughts is a matter of one's being disposed to call to mind other ideas of non-isosceles triangles or merely of isosceles triangles. This is not an intrinsic difference in the perceptions one has.

A second possibility is that Hume is committed to the Eliminative Assumption because of a commitment to the bundle theory of the mind, roughly the view that the mind is nothing more than a collection of perceptions and the associations among them. If the mind just is a bundle of perceptions, we might think that it follows that any two distinct acts of the mind must differ in the perceptions involved or in the relations of those perceptions to others in the bundle (including to the bundle as a whole). There are two reasons to worry about this. First, in *Treatise* 1.3.7 Hume has not yet argued for the bundle theory of the mind, so it would be misleading for him to give an argument that relies implicitly on the Eliminative Assumption, which is entailed by a commitment he has not yet mentioned, much less defended. For this reason, the bundle theory of the mind cannot explain why Hume would take the Eliminative Assumption to be obvious enough not to need explicit defense.

The second worry is that Hume's commitment to the bundle theory of the mind does not commit him to the Eliminative Assumption. Even if we assume that the mind is a bundle of perceptions and that natural relations among perceptions do the bundling, we still cannot rule out the possibility that the difference between a belief and the simple conception of something is a matter of its place in the bundle, that is, its relations to other perceptions in the bundle or to the bundle as a whole. A bundle theorist could claim that beliefs just are perceptions that are integrated into the bundle in a way that mere ideas are not. But if this is right, then the Eliminative Assumption does not follow from the bundle theory of the mind, and Hume's argument would fail to eliminate the possibility that the difference between belief and mere conception is a difference in the way beliefs are related to other perceptions in the bundle.

Fortunately, there is a better way of motivating the Eliminative Assumption. Hume's reasons for holding the Eliminative Assumption stem from two commitments: first, that we have introspective knowledge of our own beliefs, in Hume's sense of "knowledge," and, second, that only intrinsic features of perceptions are introspectively available to us in a way that yields knowledge. Only a difference in some intrinsic feature of the ideas involved in believing and merely conceiving that some object exists yields the introspective availability that Hume takes beliefs to have. Differences in the parts or composition of the ideas or in the manner of conception exhaust the ways in which perceptions can differ in their intrinsic features, and this explains why Hume is entitled to the Eliminative Assumption.

Hume holds that we can have non-inferential, introspective knowledge of our own beliefs. Specifically, I will argue that he is committed to the following principle, which explains Hume's commitment to the Eliminative Assumption:

> *Accessibility of Belief*: If someone believes that a perception, P, is a belief, then she knows that P is a belief, and, conversely, if someone believes that a perception, P, is not a belief, then she knows that P is not a belief.[11]

The most compelling evidence that the Accessibility of Belief Principle plays an important role in the No-new-idea Argument comes from an analogous argument in *Treatise* 1.3.5 that memories are ideas with a high degree of force and vivacity. Here is that argument:

> When we search for the characteristic, which distinguishes the memory from the imagination, we must *immediately* perceive, that it cannot lie in the simple ideas it presents to us; since both these faculties borrow their simple ideas from the impressions, and can never go beyond these original perceptions. These faculties are as little distinguish'd from each other by the arrangement of their complex ideas. For tho' it be a peculiar property of the memory to preserve the original order and position of its ideas,

> while the imagination transposes and changes them, as it pleases; yet this difference is not sufficient to distinguish them in their operation, or *make us know the one from the other*; it being impossible to recal the past impressions, in order to compare them with our present ideas, and see whether their arrangement be exactly similar. Since therefore the memory is *known*, neither by the order of its complex ideas, nor the nature of its simple ones; it follows, that the difference betwixt it and the imagination lies in its superior force and vivacity. (T 1.3.5.3; SBN 59–60, emphases added)

This argument is similar to the No-new-idea Argument in form. Hume is looking for something that distinguishes memories from mere imaginings. He explicitly eliminates two possible accounts of memory: that the difference lies in "the simple ideas [memory] presents to us" and that the difference lies in "the arrangement of their complex ideas." The use of the simple/complex distinction here is potentially misleading. The first view seems to be that a memory is distinguished from a mere imagining by the content remembered or imagined. The second view seems to be that a memory is distinguished from a mere imagining solely by the order or arrangement of ideas. In a memory, the order or arrangement of ideas is the same as the order of impressions from which the ideas are copied. In a mere imagining, the order may not be the same. Hume thinks that this counts as a difference between a memory and a mere imagining, but he claims that it cannot be the only difference. The reason he thinks this cannot be the only difference is epistemic. If this were the only difference between a memory and an imagining, we could never *know* whether we are remembering something or merely imagining it. Thus, Hume seems to think that we could only know that we are remembering something if the difference between remembering and imagining is either a difference in the content conceived (the simple ideas) or a difference in the force and vivacity of the ideas. This appears to be an assumption analogous to the Eliminative Assumption, except that in this case, unlike in the case of the No-new-idea Argument, Hume is explicit that the assumption is driven by epistemological considerations. In this argument Hume seems to assume a principle analogous to the Accessibility of Belief:

> *Accessibility of Memory*: If someone believes that she seems to remember that *p*, she knows that she seems to remember that *p*.[12]

Because of the factivity of remembering, it is implausible to claim that if someone believes she remembers something, she knows she remembers it, since this would entail that believing one remembers something entails that it actually occurred. But it is plausible that Hume holds that believing that one seems to remember something suffices for knowing that one seems to remember it.

Returning, then, to *Treatise* 1.3.7, we can see hints, at least, that Hume holds that beliefs are knowable in a way that is analogous to memories. Both arguments

are peppered with suggestive epistemic language: the phrase "'Tis evident" appears twice in the No-new-idea Argument, the phrase "'tis certain" once. Hume also claims that "'tis certain there is a great difference betwixt the simple conception of the existence of an object, and the belief of it" (T 1.3.7.2; SBN 94–95). We might think that the phrase "'tis certain" is purely stylistic and should not be taken too seriously. However, the striking similarities between this argument and the argument of *Treatise* 1.3.5, which explicitly concerns our *knowledge* of the difference between memory and imagination, should lead us to reconsider.

If Hume holds that belief is knowable in the sense described, we can appreciate why he holds that the difference between a belief and a mere conception must be an intrinsic difference between the ideas involved, and thus, why he is entitled to the Eliminative Assumption. I submit that Hume's view is that only the intrinsic features of perceptions are introspectively available to us in a way that can yield knowledge.

There is textual evidence that Hume holds that only intrinsic features of perceptions are introspectively available to us in the way that is required for us to have non-inferential knowledge of them. In *Treatise* 1.4.2, Hume considers whether the senses seem to present objects to us that are distinct from ourselves and claims, "all sensations are felt by the mind, such as they really are, and . . . when we doubt, whether they present themselves as distinct objects, or as mere impressions, the difficulty is not concerning their nature, but concerning their relations and situation" (T 1.4.2.5; SBN 189).[13] This suggests that some features of some perceptions are introspectively available to us in a way that guarantees that if they appear to us to have such a feature, we cannot doubt that they really do have that feature. The claim is here limited to sensations, but this is because Hume is discussing sensations in this context, not because he thinks only sensations are introspectively available in this sense. (To suppose otherwise would seem to conflict with the Copy Principle.) Hume contrasts the "nature" of a sensation with its "relations and situation" and suggests that the latter are not introspectively available to us in the same way. The contrast, moreover, indicates that a perception's "nature" is meant to include all of its intrinsic features, including those qualitative or sensory features that would be copied by a corresponding idea, as well as its phenomenal character, such as its degree of force and vivacity. A perception's "relations and situation" would be extrinsic, relational features. If Hume holds that only intrinsic features of a perception are introspectively available to us in a way that can yield knowledge of them and that we can know that we believe when we believe, then he has reason to suppose that the only two possible accounts of the difference between belief and mere conception are a difference in the parts or composition of the ideas involved and a difference in the manner of conception.[14]

To see more clearly why Hume holds that only an intrinsic difference between the ideas involved in believing and merely conceiving could yield knowledge of

our own beliefs, it will be helpful to consider what might justify dismissing the alternatives (b)–(f). I will proceed in reverse order, since the later possibilities are easier to discount.

First, consider (f), the view that the difference involves a different kind of state; for instance, believing is a dispositional state, while conceiving is an occurrent one. Here Hume's attention to a particular kind of belief is important.[15] Hume is focusing on causal inferences, particularly, our coming to expect that some event will occur upon witnessing its cause. This is an occurrent state, so the fact that conceiving of something is occurrent cannot explain the difference between belief and mere conception. Moreover, the first sentence of the section claims that "the idea of an object is an essential part of the belief in it, but not the whole." Hume takes this to be established by the argument of *Treatise* 1.3.6, and this is one of the ways in which the No-new-idea Argument depends on the argument of *Treatise* 1.3.6. Thus, it is a premise of the No-new-idea Argument that beliefs of the kind Hume is interested in and mere conceptions both involve having ideas. This allows Hume to dismiss the possibility that believing is a fundamentally different kind of state than conceiving. Thus, (f) is not a live option.[16]

Now turn to (e), the possibility that the difference between belief and simple conception is a difference in the causes or the effects of the belief.[17] Given what Hume has just established in the *Treatise* concerning causal reasoning, it is clear that a difference in the causal relations a belief stands in would not yield knowledge that we believe. Suppose that there are two perceptions, A and B, with exactly the same intrinsic features. Suppose, further, that the difference between them consists in a difference in their effects, and in virtue of this, B is a belief and A is a mere conception. Would this explain why it would be the case that if one believes that B is a belief, then one knows that B is a belief? Here it is important to consider what kind of evidence one could have for the belief that B is a belief. The evidence must be causal, such as that B has some effect that mere conceptions, like A, do not have. Any such evidence is probabilistic, such that one can only have probable evidence that B has some effect that A does not have. But then one will not know that B is a belief but merely have a probable belief that B is a belief.[18]

The possibility (d), that belief is a distinct kind of act, perhaps performed by a distinct mental faculty, can also be dismissed. Suppose that there are two perceptions, A and B, and B is a belief in virtue of the fact that our having B involves a different kind of act than our having A. Either this act makes a difference to the intrinsic features of the ideas conceived, or it does not. If it does, then this possibility is covered by Hume's argument. If it does not, how could it be the case that if we believe that B is a belief, then we know that B is a belief? What kind of evidence could one have that B is a belief? If one has non-inferential, introspective evidence that one believes, then it seems that there must be a difference between believing and merely conceiving to which we have immediate, introspectible

access. If this is not a difference in either the parts or composition of the ideas or their phenomenal character, then it is hard to see what it would be. If the evidence that B is a belief is inferential, then it seems it must be causal, since, Hume claims, only causal inferences allow us to form beliefs about things we do not immediately perceive. However, if the evidence is causal, then, as we saw, it must be probabilistic and cannot yield knowledge.

Turn now to (c), the possibility that the difference consists in a difference in the relation between the ideas conceived and some (or all) of the subject's other perceptions. Possibility (e) is a version of (c), but we might wonder whether the difference might consist in some other, non-causal relation. Hume's definition of belief does seem to give some role to (c), since a belief is defined as a lively idea *related to* a memory or impression (T 1.3.7.5; SBN 96). Our question, then, is why Hume thinks that the difference between believing and conceiving does not consist *solely* in a difference in their relations to other perceptions.

Suppose, then, we have two perceptions, A and B, that have exactly the same content; that B stands in some relation, R, to some other perception (or group of perceptions), C, but A does not; and that B is a belief in virtue of standing in R to C. The kind of evidence one could have that B stands in R to C will depend on the kind of relation R is. If R is a relation that holds between B and C but not between A and C, then this must be in virtue of some difference between A and B. The relevant difference between A and B must either be a difference in some intrinsic or extrinsic feature. If R holds in virtue of an intrinsic difference, then there must be a difference between the content or phenomenal character of A and B. If, however, R holds in virtue of some extrinsic difference, such as some temporal or causal relation, could we know that B is a belief?

To answer this question it will be helpful to recall the exact wording of the No-new-idea Argument. Hume claims, "'tis certain there is a great difference betwixt the simple conception of the existence of an object, and the belief of it" (T 1.3.7.2; SBN 94–95). This suggests that Hume holds that we can know *that there is a difference between a mere conception and a belief*. Why does he hold that we can know this? A plausible answer is that knowing that B is a belief requires knowing that B is not a mere conception, since a mere conception is simply a thought toward which one has no doxastic attitude, and knowing that B is a belief and not a mere conception requires knowing *that B is different from A*, since A is, by supposition, a mere conception.[19]

Knowing that one thing differs from another involves comparing the ideas of them. Thus, to know that there is a difference between a belief, B, and a mere conception, A, we would have to compare the idea of the belief and the idea of the conception. Notice that such a comparison involves having ideas of ideas.[20] In order for one to have intuitive or demonstrative knowledge that B differs from A, the difference between A and B would have to fall under one of the four philosophical

relations (resemblance, contrariety, degrees in quality, and proportions in quantity and number) because these relations are the foundation of intuitive and demonstrative knowledge according to Hume (T 1.3.1.2; SBN 70). For there to be such a difference, the content of the idea of A must differ from the content of the idea of B. However, since the difference between A and B is, by hypothesis, extrinsic, and only intrinsic differences are copied by ideas, there is no such difference in content. At best, we could have evidence that A and B differ in virtue of one of the three philosophical relations that do not depend entirely on the content of our ideas, namely identity, relations of time and place, and causation. However, Hume claims that we cannot have intuitive or demonstrative knowledge of such relations. Thus, we could not know that B is different from A, and therefore, we could not know that B is not a mere conception and we could not know that B is a belief.[21]

Finally consider (b), the possibility that the difference lies in the relation between the subject and the perception. For example, we might understand an attitude to be a relation between a subject and some content. Here the arguments against (c) also apply. Nothing in the argument against (c) relies on the supposition that the relevant relation holds between perceptions and not between a perception and a subject. Thus, we can run exactly the same argument against (b). Suppose that A and B have the same content, and B stands in some relation to the subject that A does not. If there is an intrinsic difference between A and B, then it is covered by Hume's argument. If it is an extrinsic difference, then one could not know that B is different from A, and one could not know that B is a belief and not a mere conception.

So, we are left with (a) as the only viable alternative to a difference in the content of the ideas, and we seem to have offered support for the Eliminative Assumption. Does (a) explain why it is the case that if one believes that B is a belief, then one knows that B is a belief? Yes: one immediately perceives the feature in virtue of which B is a belief.[22]

A slightly harder question is whether (a) explains how one can know that a belief, B, is different from a mere conception, A. If we compare our idea of A with our idea of B, is there some difference in content that can ground our knowledge? This will depend on how higher-order perceptions represent. An idea of, say, a red ball is copied from an impression of a red ball, but the idea does not copy all the intrinsic features of the impression, since the idea does not have a high degree of force and vivacity, while the impression does. If we recognize higher-order perceptions, it is natural to think that an idea of a belief will represent the phenomenal character of the belief as well as its content. In order for this to be the case, it would have to be possible for perceptions to have feelings, like force and vivacity, in two different ways. First, there is the ordinary way in which impressions and beliefs have force and vivacity. Second, higher-order perceptions must be capable of representing the force and vivacity of other perceptions. (The belief that a perception, P, is a belief would have force and vivacity in both ways.) If this is how Hume thinks of higher-

order perceptions, then the idea of A and the idea of B will have different content, and so we could know, by comparing the two ideas, that B is different from A.

This reading explains why Hume does not explicitly argue for the Eliminative Assumption: the No-new-idea Argument and the argument about memory in *Treatise* 1.3.5 are both motivated by the thought that only an intrinsic difference between a belief and a mere conception, and between a memory and a mere imagining, could put us in a position to know what kind of mental occurrence we have when we have it. This is clearer in the argument of *Treatise* 1.3.5 than in the No-new-idea Argument, but Hume may have thought that the similarity between the two arguments is sufficiently clear that the point would be appreciated in reading *Treatise* 1.3.7.

Stage Two: Eliminating the Alternative View

Our second task is to consider the part of the No-new-idea Argument that eliminates the alternative view, that the difference between belief and the simple conception of something is a difference in the parts or composition of the ideas involved. Hume claims that "the idea of existence is nothing different from the idea of any object, and that when after the simple conception of any thing we wou'd conceive it as existent, we in reality make no addition to or alteration on our first idea" (T 1.3.7.2; SBN 94). This alludes to the argument of *Treatise* 1.2.6, which purports to show that thinking about something just is thinking about that thing as existing, or that "to reflect on any thing simply, and to reflect on it as existent, are nothing different from each other" (T 1.2.6.4; SBN 66–67).[23] Yet it is not obvious how the conclusion of that argument supports the No-new-idea Argument. On the one hand, it might seem that the No-new-idea Argument really follows from the conclusion of the argument of *Treatise* 1.2.6, and not from the argument of *Treatise* 1.3.6 as Hume tells us it does.[24] But on closer inspection, it is not clear that the conclusion of *Treatise* 1.2.6 really does the work Hume needs to do in advancing the No-new-idea Argument. This is for two reasons. First, the claim that "belief of the existence joins no new ideas to those, which compose the idea of the object," does not follow from the claim that there is no difference between conceiving of something and conceiving of it as existent. Indeed, Hume himself notes that he "goes farther" when he advances the claim about belief, suggesting that the conclusion of the No-new-idea Argument is not simply a consequence of the argument of *Treatise* 1.2.6. Second, the claim that belief joins no new ideas to the idea of the object does not secure the conclusion that there is no difference *in the parts or composition* of the ideas involved in the belief and those involved in the simple conception.

What role do Hume's claims about existence in *Treatise* 1.2.6 play in eliminating the alternative view? One suggestion is that the claim that "when after the simple conception of any thing we wou'd conceive it as existent, we in reality make

no addition to or alteration on our first idea" is important because it shows that there is no distinct idea of existence.[25] That there is no distinct idea of existence is important, according to this suggestion, because the No-new-idea Argument purports to rule out a *specific version* of the view that belief consists in an idea added to the content conceived. This specific version is the view that believing that something exists consists in adding the idea of existence to the content conceived.[26] If there is no such idea of existence that could be added, then this specific proposal will not get off the ground.

This suggestion is unsatisfying for two reasons. First, the claim that there is no distinct idea of existence is hardly the easiest or least controversial argument against the specific proposal; a much easier argument is simply to point out that we can conceive of things as existing without believing them to exist. Second, the argument purports to establish that the difference between believing that something exists and merely conceiving of its existence cannot be a difference in the "parts or composition of the idea," which I take to mean that it is a not a difference in the content conceived *at all*. But to show this, Hume would have to argue that the idea of existence is the only idea in which believing could plausibly be thought to consist. It is hard to see how such an argument might go, and on the face of it, there are other candidate ideas, such as a primitive "belief" idea or an idea of truth or actuality. These possibilities would at least deserve consideration.

Nevertheless, we can reconstruct a connection between the argument of *Treatise* 1.2.6 and the No-new-idea Argument that is plausibly something Hume might have had in mind. On the reading I propose, the conclusions from *Treatise* 1.2.6—that there is no distinct idea of existence and that "to reflect on any thing simply, and to reflect on it as existent, are nothing different from each other"—play a relatively minor role in the No-new-idea Argument (T 1.2.6.4; SBN 66–67). Instead, Hume's eliminating the alternative view depends on a controversial principle about representation.

Hume says remarkably little about intentionality or representation, but one of his most explicit claims about the nature of representation comes in *Treatise* 1.3.7.5. In this paragraph, Hume moves from the claim that belief must be a manner of conception to the conclusion that belief is a function of the force and vivacity of the ideas involved in believing. Here is what Hume says about representation: "Our ideas are copy'd from our impressions, and represent them in all their parts. When you wou'd any way vary the idea of a particular object, you can only encrease or diminish its force and vivacity. If you make any other change on it, it represents a different object or impression" (T 1.3.7.5; SBN 96). Hume goes on to compare force and vivacity to the brightness of a color, a comparison that has struck some commentators as unfortunate and misleading.[27] Significantly, in the Appendix to the *Treatise*, Hume confesses that the claim that two ideas of the same object can only vary in force and vivacity is erroneous, and he adds, "Had I said, that two

ideas of the same object can only be different by their different *feeling*, I shou'd have been nearer the truth" (T Appendix 22; SBN 636).

We can distinguish two different claims in Hume's remarks about representation. The first claim is that there are some intrinsic features of ideas that do not contribute to their content; Hume limits these features to force and vivacity in the main text of the *Treatise* but then seems to suggest in the Appendix that there may be other differences in *feeling* that do not contribute to content.[28] This is particularly important to Hume's attempt to establish that belief is a function of the force and vivacity of ideas. The second claim is crucial to the No-new-idea Argument. The second claim is that any other alteration to an idea, setting aside changes to its force and vivacity or feeling, makes it represent a "different object or impression." Hume seems to accept the following principle:

> *Representation Principle*: Any two ideas with different content-determining features represent different objects.

On the face of it, the Representation Principle seems *wildly* implausible. The principle suggests that it is impossible to represent the same object in two different ways. But why should that be? Surely I can, for example, represent the very same cat in a number of different ways, for example, as seen from the side and as seen from above. This would also seem to make it impossible to represent an object as changing or as having changed. If Hume were really committed to the Representation Principle, he would seem to have to deny that two ideas can represent the same thing at all differently, even from different perspectives.[29]

Of course, Hume claims that the altered idea represents a different *object or impression*. If ideas represent impressions by copying them *exactly*, any alteration to the content-determining features of an idea changes what *impression* the idea represents. However, if we keep in mind Hume's views about the origins of the belief in body in *Treatise* 1.4.2, it seems that he must allow that ideas with different content can still represent the same object, since, for example, the idea of a blazing fire and the idea of a pile of glowing coals can be taken to represent the same fire at different times. One thing that the explanation of the belief in body makes clear is that the individuation of *objects or bodies* does not map on perfectly to the individuation of *impressions*. However, the Representation Principle seems to presuppose just such a correspondence: two ideas represent different impressions if and only if they represent different objects.

I submit that Hume here employs a simplifying assumption, namely that there is a one-to-one correspondence between types of impressions—qualitatively identical impressions—and objects.[30] Hume allows himself to speak about impressions and objects interchangeably until *Treatise* 1.4.2, when it becomes clear that qualitatively distinct impressions can be taken to constitute (or represent, if one is philosophically minded) a single object.[31]

If we grant the truth of Hume's Representation Principle, thus implicitly making use of the simplifying assumption, we can give a plausible reconstruction of Hume's argument that belief cannot differ from mere conception in the parts or composition of the ideas. *Treatise* 1.3.6 concludes, "we may establish this as one part of the definition of an opinion or belief, that *'tis an idea related to or associated with a present impression*" (T 1.3.6.15; SBN 93). Then *Treatise* 1.3.7 begins by summarizing this point, "The idea of an object is an essential part of the belief of it" (T 1.3.7.1; SBN 94). The next sentence is the beginning of the No-new-idea Argument. Therefore, the No-new-idea Argument is implicitly restricted to beliefs about the existence of objects or their qualities.

We can reconstruct the argument eliminating the alternative view as follows, focusing for simplicity on beliefs about the existence of objects:[32]

1. Believing that an object, *o*, exists essentially involves having an idea that represents *o*. (T 1.3.6.15; SBN 93, T 1.3.7.1; SBN 94)
2. Conceiving that an object, *o*, exists essentially involves having an idea that represents *o*. (T 1.2.6.4; SBN 66–67)
3. The ideas essentially involved in believing that *o* exists and conceiving that *o* exists represent the same object, *o*. (From 1, 2)
4. Two ideas that differ in their parts or composition have different content-determining features.
5. Two ideas with different content-determining features represent different objects. (Representation Principle)
6. Two ideas that differ in their parts or composition represent different objects. (From 4, 5)
7. The idea essentially involved in believing that an object, *o*, exists has the same parts and composition as the idea involved in conceiving that *o* exists. (From 3, 6)[33]

Hume considers a particular kind of belief and argues that the difference between beliefs and mere conceivings of this kind cannot consist in a difference in the parts or composition of the ideas involved. He then generalizes the conclusion to all beliefs. The example that Hume actually uses in *Treatise* 1.3.7.2 (SBN 94–95) is the belief that God exists; however, this example is problematic.[34] In the Abstract to the *Treatise*, Hume chooses an example that is both simpler and less controversial: the belief that a billiard ball will move which one forms when one sees a cue ball approaching it. Since believing that the ball will move and conceiving of the ball's moving must both involve ideas that represent the ball moving, the Representation Principle entails that the ideas involved in believing that the ball will move and conceiving that the ball will move have the same parts and composition.

If we grant Hume the Representation Principle, the argument appears sound. But this depends on the simplifying assumption that there is a one-to-one

correspondence between types of impressions and objects. Will the argument go through without relying on this assumption? It seems not to. Hume is committed to holding that the coherence of our perceptions is one source of our beliefs in bodies or mind-independent, enduring objects. But coherence does not require exact resemblance. Thus, I take the impression of a blazing fire and the impression of a pile of glowing coals an hour later to constitute a single object (or, if I am more philosophically minded, to represent a single object). But this means that whether or not two ideas represent the same object depends on more than simply whether they have exactly the same content-determining features. Two qualitatively identical ideas may be taken to represent distinct objects, and two qualitatively distinct ideas may be taken to represent the same object, as in the case of the changing fire. When we consider ideas of mind-independent, enduring objects, the Representation Principle simply will not hold. But if Hume's argument turns on the thought that both believing that something exists and merely conceiving of its existence must involve an idea of the same object, it seems open to the defender of the alternative view to claim that a belief has different content than a mere conception and yet represents the very same object.

At this point, Hume's No-new-idea Argument seems to be in deep trouble. It relies on a controversial principle about representation that is both implausible on its face and in tension with the position Hume goes on to develop in *Treatise* 1.4.2. The argument no longer seems merely to turn on controversial aspects of Hume's own system, but on claims that Hume *himself* cannot consistently endorse. Can Hume's argument be successfully defended here?

We can defend the argument against this charge. Hume is, at this point in the *Treatise*, treating objects and impressions largely interchangeably and assuming, for simplicity, that distinct ideas represent distinct objects and distinct impressions.[35] Once he tackles the difficult topic of our belief in body, this assumption has to be revised. Beliefs in the existence of mind-independent, enduring objects and their properties cannot be used as the best case for the argument, since qualitatively distinct ideas can represent the same object.

However, Hume assumes there is a more basic kind of existential belief, and a belief of this kind could be treated as our best case. To see this, let us briefly consider Hume's explanation of how the coherence of our perceptions gives rise to the belief in body. Hume claims that we infer the continued existence of "objects of sense" from their coherence "in order to bestow on the objects a greater regularity than what is observed in our mere perceptions" (T 1.4.2.21; SBN 197). Hume then concludes that this inference is not a species of causal reasoning, but rather serves to preserve our causal beliefs from apparent counterexamples and extend their scope. For example, we infer that a fire continues to exist in the time it is not observed in order to preserve our causal belief that burning fires are gradually reduced to ashes. One might worry that Hume's explanation here is circular. Causal beliefs are

typically about relations holding between mind-independent, enduring objects or events involving such objects. This suggests that we need to be able to think about mind-independent, enduring objects before we can form beliefs about the causal relations they stand in. At the same time, Hume appeals to causal beliefs in order to explain how we come to believe in mind-independent, enduring objects. The circle can be avoided, however, if Hume allows that there is a kind of causal belief that is explanatorily prior to the belief in body. Thus, the "objects" on which we bestow a greater regularity are not conceived of as mind-independent, enduring objects. Rather, these objects just are sensible qualities or collections of sensible qualities, which are not conceived of as having a continued or distinct existence. (Of course, they also need not be conceived of *as perishing, mental existences*.) Our most basic causal beliefs hold between objects of this kind. Call these "objects of sense." This is the kind of causal belief that those who have not yet mastered object permanence, such as some animals and perhaps very small children, would likely have. If we restrict our attention to beliefs of this basic kind, the Representation Principle holds, and the argument will go through.

Thus, Hume is committed to holding that two qualitatively different ideas represent different objects of sense, or collections of sensible qualities. This follows fairly straightforwardly from the Copy Principle. If we restrict our attention to beliefs about the existence of objects of this kind, then we get the conclusion that believing that such an object exists and conceiving of its existence cannot be a difference in the parts or composition of the ideas.[36] Hume can then leverage this conclusion to establish that believing generally consists in a manner of conception. Unless one is willing to claim that beliefs in the existence of objects of sense are of a fundamentally different nature than other beliefs, a claim that appears ad hoc, Hume can move from the claim that the alternative view cannot account for existential beliefs about objects of sense to the claim that the alternative view cannot be right about any beliefs.

Hume seems to understand the No-new-idea Argument in just this way. As we saw above, he suggests in the Abstract that the reflections about causal reasoning lead to the conclusions about the nature of belief. Moreoever, he begins the No-new-idea Argument by pointing out that reasoning about cause and effect concludes in one's forming an existential belief. One of the strengths of the interpretation I propose is that it helps clarify how and why the No-new-idea Argument depends on the conclusions of *Treatise* 1.3.6. The argument of *Treatise* 1.3.6, which establishes that the idea of something is an essential part of the belief that it exists, provides the No-new-idea Argument's starting point. If my reconstruction of the argument is correct, then it also depends on considering beliefs about the existence of collections of sensible qualities. Hume does not emphasize this in *Treatise* 1.3.7 because it is not until *Treatise* 1.4.2 that it becomes clear that the individuation conditions for objects of sense are not the same as those for mind-independent,

enduring objects. Once we see that the alternative view cannot account for the most basic causal beliefs, we can dismiss it as a plausible account of the nature of belief altogether.

This reading helps explain a puzzling feature of Hume's own assessment of his account of the nature of belief. Hume's pride in his account of belief is quite apparent, and he claims that he is not only offering a novel theory of the nature of belief but that he is also answering a whole new question:

> This . . . discovery [that custom alone determines the mind to suppose that the future will be conformable to the past] . . . leads us to others that are still more curious. When *I see a billiard ball moving towards another, my mind is immediately carried by habit to the usual effect, and anticipates my sight by conceiving the second ball in motion*. But is this all? Do I nothing but *conceive* the motion of the second ball? No, surely. I also *believe* that it will move. What then is this *belief*? And how does it differ from the simple conception of anything? Here is a new question unthought of by philosophers. (T Abstract 17; SBN 652)

What exactly is the "new question unthought of by philosophers?" If the question is simply "What does believing consist in?" it seems that Hume is hardly justified in claiming to be the first to ask and answer this question! A number of earlier philosophers considered the nature of belief, assent, and judgment.[37] Several commentators have taken this to be Hume's new question and tried to understand why Hume thinks it is a new question.[38] At the other extreme, if the question is "What does *this* belief, that is, that the second ball will move, consist in?" the question is so specific that it seems trivial. Why would it matter that philosophers have not asked *this* question? I propose that my reconstruction of the argument offers an answer to the question. It is only by attending to beliefs of a fairly specific kind that we are able to see that believing must be a manner of conception. It is Hume's exploration of the causes of our making causal inferences in *Treatise* 1.3.6 that leads him to consider beliefs of this kind, namely beliefs about the existence of objects and their qualities. This is why Hume's account of belief is a "still more curious" consequence of the argument of *Treatise* 1.3.6. This is also why the question, "What is *this* belief?" is both novel and philosophically important.

Hume's conclusion that the difference between believing something and merely conceiving of it consists in a difference in the manner of conception depends on two different considerations about the nature of the mind. First, Hume's conviction that we can know introspectively that we believe when we do believe, and that we can only have introspective knowledge of intrinsic features of our perceptions, leads him to assume that the difference between belief and mere conception must be either a difference in the parts or composition of the ideas involved or a

difference in the manner of conception. Second, Hume eliminates the possibility that the difference consists in a difference in the parts or composition of the ideas involved by relying on a fairly controversial principle about the nature of mental representation. While the Representation Principle is implausible as a claim about all mental representation, it is much more plausible as a claim about how ideas represent objects of sense, or collections of sensible qualities. By showing that beliefs in the existence of objects of this kind differ from mere conceptions in virtue of their manner of conception, Hume arrives at his curious discovery that believing, in general, differs from merely conceiving in virtue of its manner of conception.

NOTES

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1 References to the *Treatise* are to David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), hereafter cited as "T" followed by Book, part, section, and paragraph numbers; and to *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P. H. Nidditch, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), hereafter cited as "SBN" followed by page number. References to the first *Enquiry* are to David Hume, *An Enquiry concerning the Human Understanding*, ed. Tom L. Beauchamp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), hereafter cited as "EHU" followed by section and paragraph; and to *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P. H. Nidditch, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), hereafter "SBN" followed by page number.

2 This argument seems to be the subject of some doubt in the Appendix. In the *Enquiry*, Hume does not claim that a belief is an idea with a high degree of force and vivacity, but that it is an idea characterized by a particular feeling. See EHU 5; SBN 47–55.

3 See, for example, D. M. Armstrong, *Belief, Truth, and Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 70–71; Jonathan Bennett, *Learning from Six Philosophers*, vol. 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), 223–31; Jonathan Bennett, *Locke, Berkeley, Hume: Central Themes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 294–95; and Barry Stroud, *Hume* (New York: Routledge, 1977), 70–76.

4 In addition to the works cited in the previous note, see Louis Loeb, *Stability and Justification in Hume's* Treatise (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 66–67, 224–25; David Owen, *Hume's Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 155–57; and David Pears, *Hume's System* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 47–59.

5 See Stephen Everson, "The Difference Between Feeling and Thinking," *Mind* 97 (1988): 401–13.

6 Bennett, *Learning from Six Philosophers*, 229.

7 Owen, *Hume's Reason*, 155.

8 Ibid. 156.

9 Stroud, *Hume*, 74.

10 Of course, Hume also claims that remembering something and merely imagining it also involve an intrinsic difference in the perceptions involved, namely the degree of force and vivacity. More about this shortly.

11 An additional question, which I will not try to settle here, is whether Hume thinks the content of our beliefs is accessible in the same way. That is, the question is whether we are in a position to know not only that we believe but also *what* we believe. I think there is reason to doubt that Hume holds this stronger claim, stemming primarily from his account of how particular ideas can be general in their representation, but I shall not argue for this here. I will, therefore, avoid attributing to Hume the view that we can always know the *contents* of our mental states.

12 To allow for the possibility that one might make mistakes about the content of one's memories, one could weaken the accessibility principle: If one believes that a perception, P, is a memory, then one knows that it seems to be a memory.

13 See also T 1.4.2.7; SBN 190, T 2.2.6.2; SBN 366, and EHU 7.13; SBN 66. Compare Donald L. M. Baxter, *Hume's Difficulty: Time and Identity in the* Treatise (New York: Routledge, 2008), 68–77.

14 Hume seems to retract this claim two paragraphs later, when he writes, "And indeed, if we consider the matter aright . . . , nor is it conceivable that our senses shou'd be more capable of deceiving us in the situation and relations, than in the nature of our impressions. For since all actions and sensations of the mind are known to us by consciousness, they must necessarily appear in every particular what they are, and be what they appear" (T 1.4.2.7; SBN 190). Hume's point here is that we cannot be deceived about the "situation and relations" of our own perceptions insofar as the situation and relations of our perceptions are immediately available to consciousness. I submit that some extrinsic or relational features of our perceptions are introspectively available in the way required to yield knowledge because they depend solely on the intrinsic features of our perceptions. For example, that one perception resembles another might be an extrinsic or relational feature that is introspectively available because it depends solely on intrinsic features of our perceptions. However, this is compatible with there being some extrinsic or relational features of our perceptions, such as causal relations, that do not depend solely on intrinsic features of our perceptions and so which are not introspectively available in a way that can yield knowledge.

15 Hume's focusing on a particular kind of belief turns out to be crucial to his eliminating the alternative view. More about this in stage two of this paper.

16 See Jennifer Smalligan Marušić, "Does Hume Hold a Dispositional Account of Belief?" *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 40 (2010): 155–83, for additional reasons why a dispositional theory of belief is not a live option for Hume.

17 Note that Hume does hold that beliefs have different causes and effects than mere conceptions, but he rejects the view that the difference between a belief and a mere conception might consist in a difference in its cause or effects alone. See *Treatise* 1.3.10.

18 One might wonder why Hume holds that we know that B is a belief, rather than merely that our belief that B is a belief amounts to a *proof*, a causal belief that approaches the certainty of knowledge. Suppose we could have a proof that a perception has effects of a particular kind. One reason to think that a proof is not enough and that knowledge is required is that the language Hume uses in the argument suggests that we can be certain that a perception is a belief and that a proof can approach, but never reach, complete certainty. This is an instance of a more general principle: Hume holds, in general, that we can have knowledge that we are having a particular kind of mental occurrence, whether believing, remembering, imagining, or perceiving something, when we have that kind of occurrence. The kind of introspective availability that Hume takes beliefs to have, on my reading, yields such knowledge. Moreover, I suspect that Hume would not allow that we *could* have a proof that a belief stands in different causal relations than a mere conception, if the difference between the belief and mere conception were *solely* a difference in the causal relations the perceptions stand in. See Marušić, "Does Hume Hold a Dispositional Account of Belief?" for more about the way Hume's account of causal reasoning bears on his account of the nature of belief. I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for raising this objection.

19 One way of explaining why knowing that B is a belief requires knowing that B is not a mere conception and that B differs from A is by appealing to some sort of closure principle such that knowing that *p* requires knowing some of *p*'s implications, for instance, *p*'s known implications, or the things that one believes to be *p*'s implications. I do not, however, see any way of identifying a specific closure principle that might motivate Hume here. The important point, for my purposes, is that Hume claims that we know there is a difference between a belief and a mere conception.

20 Hume briefly discusses higher-order ideas at T 1.1.1.11; SBN 6. See Donald C. Ainslie "Hume's Reflections on the Identity and Simplicity of Mind" *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 62.3 (2001): 557–78, and Baxter, *Hume's Difficulty*, 68–77 for discussion of the significance of such perceptions in the *Treatise*.

21 One might object on the grounds that Hume's treatment of knowledge changes significantly from the *Treatise* to the *Enquiry*. In the *Enquiry*, Hume explains knowledge in terms of the distinction between relations of ideas and matters of fact, not in terms of the seven philosophical relations (EHU 4.1–2; SBN 25–26). However, it is possible to run a similar argument cast in these terms. A proposition expresses a relation of ideas if and only if its negation is contradictory and inconceivable. A proposition expresses a matter of fact if and only if it and its negation are both consistent and conceivable. Our question becomes whether the proposition that B is different from A expresses a relation of ideas. If it did express a relation of ideas, then it would have to be inconceivable that B is not different from A, that is, that B is the same as A. However, if the idea of A and the idea of B have the same content, then it is surely conceivable that B is the same as A. For this reason, if (c) were correct, the proposition that B is different from A would not express a relation of ideas.

22 One might object that there may be cases in which immediately perceiving the feature in virtue of which a perception is a belief is not sufficient to yield knowledge that a perception is a belief. For example, if believing is a function of some feeling that comes in degrees, it may be possible for there to be borderline cases in which we cannot determine introspectively whether a perception is a belief. See, for example,

T 1.3.12.24; SBN 141. However, even if Hume allows that there could be such borderline cases, it is plausible that he still holds that there must be normal or paradigm cases in which believing that a perception is a belief suffices for knowing it. This weaker claim would be enough to eliminate (b)–(f).

23 This argument has also been interpreted in a variety of different ways. See John Bricke, "Hume's Argument Concerning the Idea of Existence," *Hume Studies* 17.2 (1991): 161–66; Phillip D. Cummins, "Hume on the Idea of Existence," *Hume Studies* 17.1 (1991): 61–82; and Stanley Tweyman, "Some Reflections on Hume on Existence," *Hume Studies* 18.2 (1992): 137–50.

24 For example, on Pears's account, the No-new-idea Argument seems to follow straightforwardly from the conclusion of the argument of *Treatise* 1.2.6. See Pears, *Hume's System*, 55–56.

25 Hume claims, "The idea of existence, then, is the very same with the idea of what we conceive to be existent" (T 1.2.6.4; SBN 66). In other words, Hume's view seems to be that any particular idea can serve as the idea of existence; no idea has a particular title to being treated as an idea of existence.

26 Pears reads this argument in this way. See Pears, *Hume's System*, 55–56.

27 Pears claims, "the use of the word 'brightness' is unfortunate here." See Pears, *Hume's System*, 49, and Bennett, *Learning from Six Philosophers*, 229. For a more sympathetic reading of this analogy, see Kaveh Kamooneh, "Hume's Beliefs," *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 11 (2003): 41–56, esp. 53–54.

28 For more on the significance of Hume's remarks about belief in the Appendix, see Marušić, "Does Hume Hold a Dispositional Account of Belief?"

29 Don Garrett attributes to Hume a naturalistic account of representation that is in tension with this principle. See Don Garrett, "Hume's Naturalistic Theory of Representation," *Synthese* 152 (2006): 301–19. Owen, in *Hume's Reason*, claims that the argument of *Treatise* 1.3.7 relies on this principle, but he does not point out that the principle is at least apparently implausible. This might be because Owen holds that ideas for Hume always represent impressions, and the problem arises most clearly when one considers how ideas represent objects other than impressions. See David Owen and Rachel Cohon, "Hume on Representation, Reason and Motivation" *Manuscrito* 20.2 (1997): 47–76.

30 One can also see hints of the simplifying assumption in the argument of *Treatise* 1.3.6. Hume claims that when we experience a constant conjunction of exactly resembling objects, we infer the existence of one object upon witnessing the other. When Hume explains this in terms of the association of ideas, he seems to assume that a constant conjunction of perceptions of exactly resembling objects *just is* a constant conjunction of exactly resembling perceptions. But this is only the case if qualitatively distinct perceptions represent distinct objects.

31 Hume thinks that the vulgar typically conflate impressions and objects and thus take impressions, or the very things they perceive, to constitute mind-independent objects. Philosophers, at least those who ascribe to the doctrine of double-existence, hold that impressions are mind-dependent entities that are caused by, and represent, mind-independent objects. See *Treatise* 1.4.2.

32 The argument can be straightforwardly expanded to include believing that an object, *o*, has some quality, F. Premise 1, for example, would then read, "Believing that an object, *o*, exists or has some quality, F, essentially involves having an idea that represents *o* or that represents *o* as F."

33 Owen offers a somewhat similar reconstruction of the argument, with an important difference. Owen's reconstruction of the argument seems to assume that conceiving of the very same thing requires conceiving of it in the very same way, which strikes me as an implausible assumption. Owen does not consider whether the argument can be made to work without relying on this assumption. See Owen, *Hume's Reason*, 155.

34 The example is problematic for at least two reasons. First, it is controversial what the content of the idea of God is, and, of course, the ontological argument suggests that God's existence is part of the content of the idea of God. The conclusion of *Treatise* 1.2.6, that there is no difference between conceiving of something and conceiving of it as existing, blocks this objection, by suggesting that existence is no more—and no less—part of the content of the idea of God than of any other idea; but this conclusion does not settle other controversial questions about the idea of God, such as whether the idea must be innate. Second, given that Hume claims that his account of the nature of belief depends on his account of causal inferences in *Treatise* 1.3.6, one would expect an example of a belief that is clearly a result of the kind of causal inference explained there, but many philosophers would deny that the belief that God exists is the result of such an inference and even Hume must admit that the belief in God—if it is the result of a causal inference—is the result of a much more complex kind of causal reasoning than the basic sort of causal inference explained in *Treatise* 1.3.6. Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion* and *Natural History of Religion* make this clear. See David Hume, *Dialogues and Natural History of Religion*, ed. J. A. C. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

35 H. H. Price claims that Hume's running together constant conjunctions of impressions and constant conjunctions of objects in *Treatise* 1.3.6 needs to be reinterpreted in light of the conclusions of *Treatise* 1.4.2. See H. H. Price, *Hume's Theory of the External World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), 7–9.

36 One might object that beliefs about the existence of such objects of sense are problematic, or even incoherent, because they amount to beliefs in the existence of unobserved or unsensed sensations. However, when one forms the belief, say, that a fire will emit heat, the expectation of heat need not be thought of as the existence of an unsensed sensation of heat. It is just the belief that there is heat, and heat is an object of sense. Moreover, Hume explicitly claims that it is not absurd to think that there is a perception, including an impression of sensation, that is not felt by any mind (T 1.4.2.39; SBN 207). So, even if one were to think that there is an unsensed sensation of heat, Hume could claim that this is, at least, a coherent thought.

37 Descartes's account of judgment, in the Fourth Meditation, is perhaps the most prominent earlier answer to something very close to this question.

38 See David Owen, "Locke and Hume on Belief, Judgment and Assent" *Topoi* 22 (2003): 15–28; Lewis Powell, "What is Hume's 'New Question'?" (unpublished manuscript); and Stroud, *Hume*, 74.