Hume Studies
Volume 37, Number 2, 2011, pp. 189–210

Perceptions and Objects: Hume's Radical Empiricism

YUMIKO INUKAI

Abstract: In *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume seems to use the term "object" to refer to different things in different contexts, including impressions, ideas, perceptions, and bodies. Does he ever use the term "external bodies" to refer to things in the extra-mental world? I argue that what Hume means by external bodies when he affirms their existence is not externally existing, material objects that are somehow presented to the mind or presented in impressions. Rather, the bodies that Hume affirms are, at bottom, no different from perceptions, but they can be distinguished from merely internal perceptions like pain or pleasure in terms of their "different relations, connexions, and durations" (T 1.2.6.9; SBN 68). I conclude that in order to be consistent, given the various statements he makes throughout Book One of the *Treatise*, Hume must reject the philosopher's doctrine of double existence of perceptions and objects and affirm only the existence of perceptions, sometimes conceived as internally existing and mind-dependent and sometimes conceived as existing outside and independent of the mind.

In Book One of the *Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume seems to acknowledge the existence of both internal and external worlds, in which perceptions, objects, and bodies, exist. In particular, Hume seems directly to affirm the existence of extra-mental bodies, when he says at the beginning of the section "Of scepticism with regard to the senses," "We may well ask, *What causes induce us to believe in the*

Yumiko Inukai is Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, 100 Morrissey Blvd., Boston, MA 02125, USA.
E-mail: yumiko.inukai@umb.edu.

existence of body? but 'tis in vain to ask, *whether there be body or not?* That is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasonings" (T 1.4.2.1; SBN 187).[1] Furthermore, he thinks that the existence of body must be taken for granted because it is "an affair of too great importance to be trusted to our uncertain reasonings and speculations" (T 1.4.2.1; SBN 187).

Hume's position on the existence of external bodies becomes problematic, however, in light of his clear statement at 1.2.6.8 of the impossibility of our even conceiving of external existences specifically different from perceptions.[2] He writes:

> Now since nothing is ever present to the mind but perceptions, and since all ideas are deriv'd from something antecedently present to the mind; it follows, that 'tis impossible for us so much as to conceive or form an idea of any thing specifically different from ideas and impressions. Let us fix our attention out of ourselves as much as possible . . . ; we never really advance a step beyond ourselves, nor can conceive any kind of existence, but those perceptions, which have appear'd in that narrow compass. (T 1.2.6.8; SBN 67–68)[3]

If it is Hume's contention that we could not even conceive any kind of existence but that of perceptions, how could he take it for granted that external bodies exist?[4] Is Hume just inconsistent here?[5]

Two distinct interpretations have been offered to either reconcile or resolve Hume's seemingly inconsistent statements about bodies. One group of commentators, including Donald Baxter, Richard Popkin, and Annett Baier, suggests that Hume makes those different statements when he adopts different attitudes for different purposes or in different moods. Hence, on this view, Hume is not, strictly speaking, guilty of being inconsistent with regard to his position on the existence of external bodies: his differing views do not conflict with one another once the different attitudes and circumstances in which those statements are made are considered.[6] Another group of commentators, including Don Garrett and Norman Kemp-Smith, resolves the inconsistency by dismissing Hume's skeptical attitude, thereby preserving Hume's belief in the existence of bodies.[7] This interpretation holds that Hume's skepticism does not extend to the belief in the existence of bodies, although Hume may express some doubt about it in the process of his investigation, which is notably seen at 1.2.6.8. Both interpretations attribute an inconsistency to Hume because they take his affirmation of the existence of body and his denial of our ability to conceive of objects that are specifically different from perceptions to be affirmations and denials of the same things: external bodies. If Hume meant the same thing by 'body' and 'external existence specifically different from perceptions,' then there would be an inconsistency that might need to be reconciled. However, if he did not mean the same

thing by them, there would be no inconsistency in Hume's position: he would be denying one thing and affirming another. In this paper, I pursue the idea that Hume means different things in order to show that he is not inconsistent. A close look at Hume's uses of the term 'object' throughout Book One will prove to be crucial, as it will show that the external bodies whose existence Hume claims to be inconceivable (at 1.2.6.8) are not the same thing as the bodies, the existence of which he urges us to take for granted at 1.4.2.1; therefore, there is no conflict that has to be reconciled in his system.

What Hume means by external bodies when he affirms them is not the same as what ordinary people (or "the vulgar") and some philosophers of his time (or "the philosopher") think they are. The vulgar and the philosopher agree that bodies are material objects presented to the mind from without, but they disagree with each other about the way in which material objects are presented to us: the vulgar think they are presented directly, while the philosopher thinks they are presented indirectly. For Hume, bodies could not really be material objects presented to the mind from without. Rather, bodies are at bottom no different from perceptions, but they can be differentiated from merely internal perceptions once the mind has attributed "different relations, connexions, and durations" (T 1.2.6.9; SBN 68) to certain perceptions.[8]

One implication of this view is that Hume does not subscribe to the philosopher's theory of double existence of mental objects (i.e., perceptions) and material objects (i.e., bodies); instead, he affirms *only* the existence of perceptions, sometimes taken as internally existing (i.e., as perceptions) and sometimes taken as externally existing (i.e., as bodies).[9] Hume thus never doubts that there are bodies in *our* world; he just thinks that they are not what we ordinarily take them to be. I call Hume's position on perceptions and bodies *radical* empiricism.[10] It is *radical* because it limits not only our explanatory resources but also the elements of *our* world to the experienced and observable. While both the philosopher and the vulgar posit the existence of something beyond sensible perceptions, Hume, as a radical empiricist, does not explain our experiences, including our belief in "bodies," by positing the existence of something other than perceptions.

1. Objects as Perceptions and Objects as External Bodies

Hume's use of the term 'object' to refer to perceptions is perhaps the most conspicuous one.[11] He explicitly says that the "objects of the mind are ideas" (T 1.3.8.5; SBN 100). Moreover, he speaks of "objects or impressions" as equivalent, saying "[i]deas always represent their *objects or impressions*" (T 1.3.14.6; SBN 157, my emphasis) and "[i]deas always represent the *objects or impressions* from which they are deriv'd" (T 1.2.3.11; SBN 37, my emphasis). We are told right at the beginning of the *Treatise* that "all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from

simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent" (T 1.1.1.7; SBN 4). Thus, the "objects" that "give rise to every idea" and that "ideas always represent" are their corresponding impressions. In his initial introduction of the difference between impressions and ideas, Hume says that ideas are less vivid, yet exact, copies of correspondent impressions, *re*-presenting to the mind the same content as the originals in the absence of them.[12] ('Representation' here means nothing more than image or copy.) In this usage, an impression is a separate *object* that an idea represents.

Unlike the above sense of 'object' as in mental *objects*, Hume also uses the word 'object' to refer to things like hats and apples, which he equates with perceptions when describing the vulgar's experience. In discussing our belief in the continued and distinct existence of body, he says that "I shall at first suppose, that there is only a single existence, which I shall call indifferently *objects* or *perceptions*, . . . understanding by both of them what any common man means by a hat or shoe, or stone, or any other impression, convey'd to him by his senses" (T 1.4.2.31; SBN 202). Hats, stones, and other objects are taken by the vulgar to be objects whose existence is the same as our perceptions of them; that is, the vulgar do not make any distinction between such objects and perceptions of them. Thus, Hume warns the reader that when he speaks with the vulgar's understanding in mind, he uses the terms 'object' and 'perception' interchangeably, referring to things like hats and stones.[13] This sense of 'object' is different from the sense of 'object' as impression or mental object, and yet Hume still explicitly equates objects with perceptions.

Objects like hats and stones are ordinarily regarded as externally existing bodily objects, yet, in the *Treatise*, Hume, in describing the vulgar's experience, often takes such objects just to *be* collections of perceptions. However, some passages in Book 1 suggest that Hume himself thinks of objects as external bodies that are specifically different from perceptions. For example, although Hume is careful not to make a definitive claim about the causes of impressions of sensation,[14] he does not rule out the possibility that external objects are their causes. He says, "As to those *impressions*, which arise from the *senses*, their ultimate cause is, in my opinion, perfectly inexplicable by human reason, and 'twill always be impossible to decide with certainty, whether they arise immediately from the object, or are produc'd by the creative power of the mind, or are deriv'd from the author of our being" (T 1.3.5.2; SBN 84).

Hume sometimes seems to go even further by actually presupposing the existence of objects that are distinct from the perceptions they cause, as when he says, "'tis universally allow'd by philosophers, and is besides pretty obvious of itself, that nothing is ever really present with the mind but its perceptions or impressions and ideas, and that external objects become known to us only by those perceptions they occasion" (T 1.2.6.7; SBN 67). While the distinct existence of perceptions and external objects is introduced in this passage as what

philosophers "universally" assume in accounting for our idea of external objects that are not immediately present to the mind, Hume says that this doctrine is "pretty obvious of itself," which suggests that he also presupposes that there is a causal relation between perceptions and external objects. External objects are those which "occasion" the internal impressions of sensation through which we come to be aware of such objects.[15]

Similarly, Hume elsewhere says, "'Tis a common observation, that the mind has a great propensity to spread itself on *external* objects, and to conjoin with them any *internal* impressions, which they occasion, and which always make their appearance at the same time that these objects discover themselves to the senses" (T 1.3.14.25; SBN 167, my emphasis). The latter part of this passage seems to imply that objects are *external* to the senses, and once the senses come in contact with them, they cause impressions to appear *internally*, which are then projected or "spread" on the external objects. Objects that "affect our senses" (T 1.2.5.12; SBN 58) and "occasion" internal impressions must be distinct from the impressions they cause, and they must exist externally to the senses in order to "affect" them. They must also be distinct from the internal impressions that are spread back onto them.

Finally, although the term 'object' is not specifically used in some passages, Hume seems to have externally existing objects in mind. For example, as has already been quoted above, Hume famously starts the section titled *Of scepticism with regard to the senses* by asking what induces us to believe in "the existence of body" (T 1.4.2.1; SBN 187). Here, he seems to refer to bodily objects existing in the extra-mental world, as he goes on to explain how we come to believe in objects that are distinct from, independent of, and external to the mind and its perceptions. Objects with these characteristics are here called "body," and Hume claims that the existence of such things must be taken for granted.

The Inconceivability of External Bodies

It thus appears that there are two different referents of 'object' in Book One of the *Treatise*: (1) external, mind-independent bodily objects and (2) impressions and ideas that exist only as mental objects. We might conclude from this observation that Hume endorses the philosopher's doctrine of double existence after all: there are, for Hume, two worlds, "an external and internal world" (T 1.4.2.57; SBN 218), and they are specifically different. However, this would be a hasty conclusion.

The philosopher's doctrine of double existence posits external bodily objects as things that exist outside the mind and affect the senses in such a way that an impression is occasioned. They are related to impressions as their causes. Seemingly, then, external bodies are a different kind of object from perceptions, which are mental objects. Does Hume think that we have an idea of such external bodies? His considered answer is no. Hume, more than once, forcefully states that we do

not have an idea of external existence as something specifically different from perceptions. In his discussion of space and time, he says,

> Now since nothing is ever present to the mind but perceptions, and since all ideas are deriv'd from something antecedently present to the mind; it follows, that 'tis impossible for us so much as to conceive or form an idea of any thing specifically different from ideas and impressions. Let us fix our attention out of ourselves as much as possible: Let us chace our imagination to the heavens, or to the utmost limits of the universe; we never really advance a step beyond ourselves, nor can conceive any kind of existence, but those perceptions, which have appear'd in that narrow compass. (T 1.2.6.8; SBN 67–68)

If Hume meant by 'body' an external bodily object that is *specifically different* from perceptions, then his affirmation of bodies would be in conflict with this passage. For he is saying *here* that we cannot possibly form an idea of external objects taken as entities of a different species than perceptions: we cannot even conceive of an entity with kinds of properties and qualities that are not found in perceptions. He later reiterates the point: "we may well suppose in general, but 'tis impossible for us distinctly to conceive, objects to be in their nature anything but exactly the same with perceptions" (T 1.4.2.56; SBN 218).

In speaking of an object as an external existence, therefore, Hume could not be saying that objects are of a different *species* from perceptions. He grounds this point on his methodological directive that he uses to discern whether ideas are legitimate,[16] the Copy Principle, according to which every simple idea is derived from a past corresponding impression.[17] He says, "as every idea is deriv'd from a preceding perception, 'tis impossible our idea of a perception, and that of an object or external existence can ever represent what are specifically different from each other" (T 1.4.5.19; SBN 241).

Hume strengthens his claim about the impossibility of our forming ideas of external existences specifically different from perceptions by pointing out what impressions do *not* present to us. He maintains that the senses do not present impressions as "the images of something distinct, or independent, and external . . . because they convey to us nothing but a single perception, and never give us the least intimation of any thing beyond" (T 1.4.2.4; SBN 189). He then makes a further claim about a specific sense modality that seems to be responsible for our idea of externality, namely, sight: "Even our sight informs us not of distance or outness" (T 1.4.2.9; SBN 191). Ascribing this view to some "rational philosophers," Hume also subscribes to it himself, maintaining that it is "commonly allow'd by philosophers, that all bodies, which discover themselves to the eye, appear as if painted on a plane surface, and that their different degrees of remoteness from

ourselves are discover'd more by reason than by the senses" (T 1.2.5.8; SBN 56).[18] In Hume's view, impressions of sensation present only colored points spread "on a plane surface," or two-dimensionally, and do not present anything as distinct from us; therefore, we can never have an idea of external existence.[19]

If it is Hume's contention that we cannot even conceive of an external existence that is specifically different from perceptions, as various passages seem to suggest, then external bodily objects cannot be understood as the material causal ground for impressions, since such objects would be specifically different from perceptions.[20] How, then, should they be understood? Hume answers as follows: "The farthest we can go towards a conception of external objects, when suppos'd specifically different from our perceptions, is to form a relative idea of them, without pretending to comprehend the related objects. Generally speaking we do not suppose them specifically different; but only attribute to them different relations, connexions and durations. But of this more fully hereafter" (T 1.2.6.9; SBN 68). He later adds, "Whatever difference we may suppose betwixt [a perception and external existence], 'tis still incomprehensible to us; and we are oblig'd either to conceive an external object merely as a relation without a relative, or to make it the very same with a perception or impression" (T 1.4.5.19; SBN 241).

In these passages, Hume introduces two ways in which we could think of external objects: either (1) we conceive of them as specifically different from perceptions by thinking of them in terms of "a relation without a relative" or (2) we conceive of them as *not* specifically different from perceptions by attributing to them different relations, connections, and durations. The first is how the philosopher thinks of external objects: perceptions are considered effects of external objects, which are, in turn, conceived of abstractly as causes that are different in kind from their effects (that is, perceptions), although we can only comprehend them in relation to the effect and have no idea what they are in themselves. This conception of external objects is closely related, if not identical, to a conception of an object as an extra-mental, material ground of perceptions. The passages quoted above suggest that Hume is using the term 'object' to speak of the occasions or causes of perceptions; they are the objects causally related to perceptions. However, even though we may in this way be able to *suppose* that there is something that is specifically different from perceptions, it is merely as "a relation without a relative": we conceive of the cause of our impressions without "pretending to comprehend the related objects." Furthermore, Hume is clear about the incomprehensibility of objects that are supposed to be specifically different from perceptions, as I have discussed above. Hence, this way of thinking of an object does not give us an idea of an externally existing material object with which we are supposed to be acquainted by means of the perceptions that it causes. The relatum is merely an empty placeholder of which we have no idea. An object thought of in this way still remains quite incomprehensible to us. Hume argues again, at 1.4.2.47 (SBN 212),

that the causal relation between perceptions and external objects posited by "the philosopher" is unintelligible. Therefore, Hume does not embrace the existence of such objects.

What is left for Hume then? At the end of the first quotation above, Hume refers the reader to section 1.4.2, in which he discusses how we come to believe in the continued existence of objects that are distinct from the mind and perceptions. This reference strongly suggests that the "different relations, connexions and duration" by means of which we distinguish external objects from internal perceptions are those discussed in that section, namely, continuity, mind-independence, externality, and identity. These relations and connections are different from the relations, connections, and durations that we attribute to "internal and perishing" perceptions, which are characterized by discontinuity, interruptedness, internality, and diversity. Hence, objects that we conceive as external bodily objects and yet not as specifically different from perceptions are perceptions to which relations of continuity, mind-independence, externality and identity are attributed. On this reading, the objects Hume refers to as *external* bodies would not be specifically different from *internal* perceptions. Both refer to one and the same species: *perceptions*.

2. Perceptions and Objects

Impressions of Objects

The key to understanding Hume's notion of an *external* object lies in a proper grasp of the relationship between perceptions and the objects of which they are perceptions. Hume sometimes speaks of perceptions *as of* some objects other than perceptions themselves. However, impressions are not supposed to have any "extraneous" referential relation to anything else in the mind, since they "arise in the soul originally" (T 1.1.2.1; SBN 7). Moreover, the mind "can never go beyond these original perceptions" (T 1.3.5.3; SBN 85). Hence, impressions taken alone do not seem to get the mind to anything other than impressions. Nonetheless, Hume often speaks of *objects* which impressions are *of*: for example, "an impression of a white colour" (T 1.1.7.18; SBN 25); "any impression of the surrounding objects" (T 1.2.5.8; SBN 56); and "impression of any object" (T 1.3.6.13; SBN 92). What relation does "of" bear between an impression and an object here? Does an object after "of" indicate a separate object that an impression presents to the mind or does it merely describe the kind of impression that it is?[21]

One reading is to consider the object named after "of" in the description of an impression as something distinct from the impression. An impression of an apple, for instance, could be taken as a mental presentation that is *about* an apple and that presents various sensible properties of the apple; for example, it is red, round, sweet, juicy, and crunchy. In this case, there is a distinction between an

impression of an apple and an apple, in that the impression is an awareness and the apple is a separate object of that awareness. An impression of an apple would be a mental state which is "internal and perishing" (T 1.4.2.15; SBN 194); on the other hand, the apple is presented as something we could bite into. An impression of an apple and an apple are not identical things, although an apple may be said to be "present in its impression" (T 1.3.6.7; SBN 90). In whatever way and wherever an apple may be, to say that it is present in the impression is to say that the impression is an awareness of such a separate object. If this is what Hume means by "an impression of an apple," then the apple would be an object of an impression distinct from the impression itself. However, distinct objects of impressions would conflict with Hume's contention that impressions bear no extraneous referential relation to anything else, and they are also not presented "as the images of something *distinct*" (T 1.4.2.4; SBN 189). Impressions are not directed toward anything separate from themselves. Therefore, this reading should be rejected.

Another, better, reading is to take the object (and its substitutes) after the word 'of' to specify what kind of impression it is. An impression of an apple is an apple-type impression, and an impression of a white color is a white-color-type impression. On this reading, an object of an impression and an impression are identical in that the perceived object constitutes the impression. Hence, although Hume's phrasing, "an impression of an object," might seem to imply that the object is distinct from the impression, it is not: the object only indicates what qualities an impression has.

Some passages in Book 1 of the *Treatise* lend support to this reading. Speaking of the distinction between simple and complex perceptions, Hume describes the complex perception of an apple as consisting of several distinguishable sensible qualities: "Tho' a particular colour, taste, and smell are qualities all united together in this apple, 'tis easy to perceive they are not the same, but are at least distinguishable from each other" (T 1.1.1.2; SBN 2). He also says that the ideas of substances like apples and trees are "nothing but a collection of simple ideas, that are united by the imagination, and have a particular name assign'd them" (T 1.1.6.2; SBN 16). These passages, among others, strongly suggest that Hume thinks a perception of an object like the complex perception of "this apple" is composed of particular sensible qualities; it is a unified "collection" of simple perceptions themselves.[22] Importantly, however, there still is *some* difference between an impression, as such, and an object of an impression, because the complex impression presents to the mind something we call an "apple," not a mental impression of an apple, although the object, the apple, is not different from the impression itself. This reading does not undermine Hume's claim that impressions do not refer to anything beyond themselves, and yet it also allows us to preserve an important distinction between impressions as discrete and momentary mental states and unified objects without affirming the separate existence of those objects.[23]

Perceptions Taken as External Bodies

The conjunction of two Humean tenets makes it puzzling that we believe in body as something that exists even when we are not perceiving it and independently of the mind. The first is that only "internal and perishing" *perceptions* are present to the mind. The second is that we cannot even conceive of anything specifically different from perceptions. Thus, a question arises for Hume as to how we believe in the continued existence of bodies. Hume's question is this: what makes us attribute continued, independent, and distinct existence to what is available to us, namely, interrupted perceptions? Hume's strategy is to account for our belief in the *continued* existence of bodies "when they are not present to the senses," since "if the objects of our senses continue to exist, even when they are not perceiv'd, their existence is of course independent of and distinct from the perception" (T 1.4.2.2; SBN 187–88). In other words, they exist outside the mind. His answers shed light on how, according to Hume, unified, continuing, external objects come into being for us.

Since "all impressions are internal and perishing existences, and appear as such" (T 1.4.2.15; SBN 194), our attribution of *distinct* and *continued* existence to perceptions cannot result from the senses finding such qualities in impressions. Hume claims that "as far as the senses are judges, all perceptions are the same in the manner of their existence" (T 1.4.2.13; SBN 193): they are "internal and perishing existences." Nor is reason capable of inferring the existence of body from that of perceptions (T 1.4.2.14; SBN 193). What is left for Hume is the *imagination*. Moreover, Hume says that the qualities that ground our idea of distinct and continued existence must be those which are found in some impressions, namely those to which the notion of distinct and continued existence applies, but not in all: "Since all impressions are internal and perishing existences, and appear as such, the notion of their distinct and continued existence must arise from a concurrence of some of their qualities with the qualities of the imagination; and since this notion does not extend to all of them, it must arise from certain qualities peculiar to some impressions" (T 1.4.2.15; SBN 194). Clearly, we do not think that such impressions as pain, pleasure, love, hatred, and other affections exist outside from our minds. Thus, the relevant qualities must distinguish impressions to which we do ascribe a distinct and continued existence from those to which we do not. The qualities Hume identifies are *constancy* and *coherence* (T 1.4.2.18–19; SBN 194–95). Due to the constancy and coherence of some impressions, the imagination *naturally* comes to ignore the relations of interruption and diversity among impressions, making us attribute a continued existence to them.

The psychological mechanism underlying our attribution of a continued existence on the basis of *constancy* is that the imagination removes an interruption of perceptions by supposing the continued existence of one of them, of which we

are not sensible, in order to reconcile a contradiction between the observed interruption and diversity of perceptions and our tendency to take them as *constant* or *identical*. Hume explains that our natural propensity to take, or rather mistake, resembling perceptions for a single perception even after an interruption is due to an error on the imagination's part: since the mind makes a smooth transition among resembling perceptions, the mind mistakes the consideration of those perceptions for the contemplation of a "constant and uninterrupted perception" (T 1.4.2.35; SBN 204).

The imagination's working facilitated by *coherence* is similar to the activity of the imagination involved in our causal reasoning: it is due to past experience of a regularity in some phenomena. In the case of coherence, however, the imagination is naturally led to supply something that is not, in fact, observed in order to reconcile a contradiction between past common experiences and a present experience. In the case of our causal reasoning, on the other hand, what the imagination supplies is an idea of an object or event of the same type as that which has regularly been observed with an object or event of the same type as a presently perceived one. In causal inferences, a regularity between two types of perceptions has been presented to the mind in the past. This regularity, Hume thinks, is sufficient for the imagination to produce an idea of a particular object or event on the presence of its usual attendant. The mind posits a present idea on the basis of past constant conjunctions in making causal inferences, but it does not "fill in" to make the experience more regular.

With coherence, a regularity leads the imagination to fill in, inventing a continued existence or an unperceived perception, even though what has been observed could never directly warrant that invention. The imagination's attribution of a continued existence to perceptions that are no longer perceived, that is, the supposition of an unperceived perception is, like causal reasoning, based on a regularity observed in the past: we have observed the fire to be diminished after a period of absence on many occasions before. However, to believe in the continued existence of a perception on the basis of the usual attendant perceptions is not just to forge a connection between two actual perceptions on the basis of the regularity or "the frequency of their union" (T 1.4.2.21; SBN 197). To unite interrupted perceptions on the basis of past regularities, the imagination, as it were, concocts something that has not been and can never be observed, namely an unperceived perception of the fire while we are away. Such an invention cannot be the result of a merely habitual associative operation of the imagination alone. To explain the invention of an unperceived perception, Hume, therefore, introduces a new, more robust tendency of the imagination, that "when set into any train of thinking, [it] is apt to continue, even when its object fails it, and like a galley put in motion by the oars, carries on its course without any new impulse" (T 1.4.2.22; SBN 198). Thus, when the imagination is "once in the train of observing an uniformity

among objects, it naturally continues, till it renders the uniformity as compleat as possible" (T 1.4.2.22; SBN 198) by attributing a continued existence to the object even when they are not perceived.

Hume introduces coherence as a crucial supplement to constancy in his identification of the qualities that distinguish mind-independent from mind-dependent perceptions (T 1.4.2.18–19; SBN 194–95), a supplement that is required because "constancy . . . is not so perfect as not to admit of very considerable exceptions" (T 1.4.2.19; SBN 195). Coherence itself is also "too weak to support *alone* so vast an edifice, as is that of the continu'd existence of all external bodies" (T 1.4.2.23; SBN 198–99, my emphasis). To give rise to our belief in the continued existence of bodies, constancy is needed as well.[24]

To see how the mechanism works, consider Hume's own example: "I am here seated in my chamber with my face to the fire; and all the objects, that strike my senses, are contain'd in a few yards around me. . . . I hear on a sudden a noise as of a door turning upon its hinges; and a little after see a porter" (T 1.4.2.20; SBN 196). Suppose further that among the objects I see is a vase on the fireplace mantle. After seeing the porter walking toward me, I turn my head and look at the opened door, then turn my head back to the fire and see the vase once again. Hume describes the situation in ordinary terms in this example, but let us describe it in terms of impressions. There are multiple impressions, some occurring in succession and some occurring simultaneously. I have visual impressions of a fire (I_1) and a vase (I_2), along with a simultaneous auditory impression of a creaking noise (I_3), and then successive visual impressions of a fire (I_4), a vase (I_5), a porter (I_6), an opened door (I_7), a fire (I_8), and a vase (I_9). It is important to remember that these impressions are not yet to be taken as impressions of continuously existing objects like a vase and a door, since this is supposed to be an illustration of *how*, given only these impressions, objects such as a vase and a door would be believed to exist continuously even when they are not perceived.

I limit my discussion to the nine impressions (I_1–I_9) above. In this succession, I_2, I_5, and I_9 are all vase-type impressions that exhibit constancy, on account of which the mind makes a "smooth and easy transition" through I_2, I_5, and I_9, despite the fact that they are interrupted by I_3, I_6, and I_7. Since the smooth progression of the mind among I_2, I_5, and I_9 feels the same as viewing one continuous object, the imagination confounds the mere succession of interrupted vase-impressions with a constant impression of a vase, thereby attributing an identity to I_2, I_5, and I_9. The same cannot be done with the three distinct impressions of the fire, since the appearance of the fire constantly changes, so the impressions do not exhibit sufficient constancy. However, the three impressions of the vase, I_2, I_5, and I_9, are obviously interrupted by other impressions, so, on reflection, they would be considered distinct, which is contrary to the imagination's natural verdict on them. To reconcile this contradiction, the imagination performs another feat: it tacitly

invents vase-type ideas to "unite these broken appearances" (T 1.4.2.36; SBN 205), thus preserving an invariable existence of it throughout the succession from I_2 to I_9.

Recall that coherence works differently. In the past, a creaking-noise-type of impression has always been observed in conjunction with a door-opening-type of impression; this time, however, only a creaking-noise-type of impression (I_3) occurs in the succession. In order to reconcile a "contradiction" between the present single occurrence of I_3 without a door-opening-type of impression and past experiences where both were present, the imagination fictitiously creates a door-opening type of idea (which Hume calls a "supposition"), even if no actual door-opening type of impression occurs at the moment. In so doing, the imagination maintains the coherence of the present experience, in which only the creaking-noise impression occurs, with past experiences, in which creaking-noise and door-opening impressions regularly went together, by supposing that a door has been existent the whole time and was opened when the creaking sound was heard.

By these operations of the imagination, a continued existence is attributed to "internal and perishing" vase-type impressions (via constancy) and door-type ideas (via coherence), as a result of which the vase and door come to be considered distinct and independent from the mind. But the distinct and continued existence ascribed to those perceptions is just a "fiction" and "is really false" (T 1.4.2.43; SBN 209), as an analysis of the underlying psychological mechanism shows.[25] Yet they are still *believed* to be continued even when they are not perceived, because the ideas are enlivened by past resembling perceptions and a present impression. Consequently, the impressions and ideas become something "real and durable" (T 1.4.2.20; SBN 197) like a vase and a door that are believed to exist externally to the mind.

The operations of the imagination to which Hume appeals in explaining the generation of our belief in the distinct and continued existence of bodies could not be found at the level of experience that the vulgar are aware of, for the vulgar already take the immediate objects of their awareness to be external objects. Therefore, Hume's explanation must be about the psychological underpinnings that a scientist of human nature investigates in order to account for our ordinary natural beliefs. From the perspective of such a scientist, the immediate objects presented to the senses are various types of internal and perishing impressions of sensation, whereas to the vulgar they are "real body or material existence" (T 1.4.2.38; SBN 206). Although Hume thinks that the vulgar are wrong in assuming that the immediate objects present to the mind are real, material bodies with sensible qualities, he grants that the objects that they consider "real" bodies, such as mountains, houses, and trees, do exist, but with an important qualification: those *objects* are in fact sensible perceptions that are only taken to exist continuously and externally by the imagination. Despite this difference between Hume's views and the vulgar's, Hume's discussion is consistent not only with the vulgar's talk

of external objects but also with his own use of the terms 'object' and 'perception' interchangeably.

Finally, we can now see how, according to Hume, external, mind-independent objects come into being *for us*. An impression taken as an external, continuing object (for example, an apple, hat, or tree) is distinguished from an impression taken as a fleeting mental state by the imagination's attribution of "different relations, connexions and durations" to the relevant impressions and ideas (T 1.2.6.9; SBN 68), the mechanism by means of which this is done has been explained above. The activity of the imagination involved in attributing a continued existence to perishing perceptions is complex: where coherence or, especially, constancy has been exhibited in the interrupted sequence, the imagination, seeking "relief from the uneasiness" caused by "an opposition betwixt the notion of the identity of resembling perceptions, and the interruption of their appearance" (T 1.4.2.37; SBN 206), posits *unperceived* perceptions to fill out the interrupted sequence, which is "regulated by past experience" (T 1.4.2.21; SBN 197); it connects interrupted, *perceived* perceptions together by attributing the continued and independent existence to them; and it takes the compound as a unified object that is believed to exist continuously and externally. These three activities are not separate activities of the imagination occurring one after another. They comprise *one* activity of the imagination in which mere impressions that are immediately present in the mind become external objects *for us*. For the imagination to fill out the interrupted yet either coherent or constant sequence of perceptions by feigning unperceived perceptions *is* to attribute continued and independent existence to them, which *is* to form a unified object-content, which *is* for us to conceive it as a continuously and independently existing external object.

Three things should be noted here. First, Hume does not think it is absurd to suppose that unperceived perceptions exist. For him, unperceived perceptions are those which exist separately from "a heap or collection of different perceptions" (T.1.4.2.39; SBN 207). Since Hume maintains that "every perception is distinguished from another, and may be consider'd as separately existent" (T 1.4.2.39; SBN 207), he thinks there is no absurdity or contradiction involved in positing unperceived perceptions, that is, perceptions that are "separately existent" and not part of a particular sequence of perceptions. Unperceived perceptions would just be those which do not belong to a particular bundle or sequence of perceptions. What the imagination posits is not some "specifically different" object like the unknown causal relatum the philosophers postulate in their doctrine of double existence; the imagination supposes only *the sensible*, that is, sensible perceptions. An unperceived perception is within the scope of the sensible that is available to the imagination, although, strictly speaking, it is merely a product of the imagination's feigning activity (T 1.4.2.40; SBN 208).

Second, the imagination's positing unperceived perceptions to remove an interruption in otherwise constant or coherent impressions just *is* its 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). Coherence and constancy *are* observed among perceptions, but identity and mind-independence are not. Moreover, there is no connection between coherence and constancy, on the one hand, and identity and independence, on the other, yet belief in the latter is produced due to observation of the former qualities of perceptions. Hume says, "They are the coherence and constancy of our perceptions, which produce the opinion of their continu'd existence; tho' these qualities of perceptions have no perceivable connexion with such an existence" (T 1.4.2.56; SBN 217). It is the mere working of the imagination by "false suppositions" that leads us to believe in external objects "even when they are not present to the senses" (T 1.4.2.56; SBN 217). Accordingly, it is actually "a gross illusion" for the imagination to attribute a continued and independent existence to a set of interrupted perceptions. Hence, a skeptical doubt may arise as to external objects after all. Nonetheless, Hume's analysis reveals that we do attribute a continued and independent existence to interrupted perceptions, and "carelessness and in-attention" are the only remedy for such a skeptical doubt. Hume relies "entirely upon them" (T 1.4.2.57; SBN 218).

Finally, what distinguishes a complex impression that is believed to be an externally existing object from a mere heap of impressions is how the impression influences other perceptions in the succession.[26] Impressions believed to be external objects that are present *to me*, that is, to "a bundle of perceptions," influence succeeding perceptions in the bundle (that is, in me) differently from perceptions taken simply as mental items. Hume makes this point by saying, "[e]xternal objects are seen, and felt, and become present to the mind; that is, they acquire such a relation to a connected heap of perceptions, as to influence them very considerably in augmenting their number by present reflections and passions, and in storing the memory with ideas" (T 1.4.2.40; SBN 207).[27] Thus, an apple-type perception that is now "present to the mind" as an external object may raise aversion or desire in a succeeding sequence, while the same apply-type perception considered as a merely internal perception would not.[28]

Perceptions taken as external objects are not conceived as perishing, mind-dependent entities. However, they are not conceived as specifically different from perceptions themselves either. *External objects* are, strictly speaking, still perceptions; nonetheless, they come to be apples and hats, seen as *externally* existing objects, because they are taken to continue to exist when not perceived and thus to be independent and distinct from the mind. *Our* external objects, like apples and hats, just *are* unified bundles of perceptions: nothing more, nothing less.

3. Conclusion: Hume's Radical Empiricism

I have argued that although there seem to be two different referents of 'object' in Book One of the *Treatise* (i.e., external bodies and internal perceptions), there is only one kind of object in Hume's system: perceptions. Hence, even though Hume agrees with the philosopher that it is evident and obvious that the only things present in the mind are perceptions and that there are external bodies, Hume does not endorse the philosopher's doctrine of double existence of "internal and external, representing and represented" (T 1.4.2.36; SBN 205). Toward the end of 1.4.2 when discussing the philosopher's theory of double existence, Hume calls the external objects to which the philosopher attributes continuity and identity "a new set of perceptions." He continues, "we may well suppose in general, but 'tis impossible for us distinctly to conceive, objects to be in their nature any thing but exactly the same with perceptions" (T 1.4.2.56; SBN 218). When he reflects on the reasoning that led philosophers to posit this double existence, he asks, "What then can we look for from this confusion of groundless and extraordinary opinions but error and falsehood? And how can we justify to ourselves any belief we repose in them?" (T 1.4.2.56; SBN 218). When describing the philosopher's doctrine of double existence, Hume refuses to characterize the represented objects as external, material objects, as the philosopher typically describes them. Since he does not allow himself to speak of objects that are specifically different from perceptions even when he describes someone else's view, it is very unlikely that he subscribes to the philosopher's doctrine of double existence himself.

Perceptions are momentary, internal, mental objects which are all that there is in Hume's system. Nonetheless, perceptions are taken as internally existing mental objects in one context, and conceived of as externally existing bodily objects in another, depending on whether the relations of continuity, identity, independence, and externality are attributed to them. If those relations were not attributed to perceptions, we would not conceive of them as external objects, because a single perception does not give us "anything beyond" itself and "conveys to us nothing but a single perception" (T 1.4.2.4; SBN 189). Hence, in Hume's view, external objects *are* immediately perceived as the vulgar think. But Hume does not fully agree with the vulgar's view either, since he holds that it cannot be the case that "the very being, which is intimately present to the mind, is real body or material existence" (T 1.4.2.38; SBN 206) understood to exist independently of the mind and to actually have sensible qualities, as the vulgar typically assume.

Hume, therefore, both agrees and disagrees with the philosopher and the vulgar. Hume agrees with the philosopher that perceptions are the only objects present to the mind, and agreeing with the vulgar, he argues that we are immediately aware of external bodily objects. However, disagreeing with the philosopher, Hume maintains that external bodily objects are not a different kind of object from

the objects we are immediately aware of, namely, perceptions, and thus we do not come to be aware of external objects with the aid of perceptions as media. He argues, against the vulgar, that the objects which we are aware of are not external bodily, material objects that exist independently of us. The external bodies that could be affirmed consistently in Hume's system are no different from perceptions. For Hume, strictly speaking, only perceptions exist, constituting both the internal and external worlds *for us*, and these worlds are known to us in our experience. I call this aspect of Hume's empiricism "*radical* empiricism." It is radical because Hume does not move from what is available in sensible perceptions to what bodies are in the extramental world in the way that Locke sometimes does.[29] Rather, he affirms only what perceptions present to the mind, the sensible and intelligible, and never goes beyond perceptions in his assertions about anything, including the nature of body and self. Hume goes further to maintain that "we never really advance a step beyond ourselves, nor can conceive any kind of existence, but those perceptions which have appear'd in that narrow compass" (T 1.2.6.8; SBN 67–68), so the "bodies" that we must take for granted in all our reasonings are not, strictly speaking, material, external existences that we cannot even conceive of but those perceptions which only are ever present to the mind. Hume's empiricism is, therefore, quite radical, in that he restricts not only his explanatory resources but also his systematic affirmations of things to experienced objects, perceptions, and the sensible qualities that are presented in (some of) them. Hence, there is no conflict between Hume's assertion that external objects are not even conceivable and his affirmation of the existence of bodies, since he is denying and affirming different things: the former are objects that are supposed to be specifically different from perceptions, and the latter are the sensible objects of experience—that is, bundles of perceptions.[30]

NOTES

I would like to thank Gary Hatfield, David Owen, Jennifer Dobe, Jeffrey Scarborough, the editors of *Hume Studies*, and several anonymous referees for their valuable comments on earlier versions of this article.

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.

2 Because of this claim, Hume is often seen as a phenomenalist who maintains that objects that we can possibly know are only appearances, that is, in Humean terms, sensible qualities present in impressions. This is an epistemological phenomenalism.

See John Passmore, Chapter V, "The Phenomenalist," in *Hume's Intention* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1952), 84–104. H. H. Price, on the other hand, attributes ontological phenomenalism to Hume: as Hume says, "a particular colour, taste, and smell are qualities all united together in this apple" (T 1.1.1.2; SBN 2). Price offers two theories of knowledge, "the As-if theory" and "the Expressive theory," on the basis of what he sees as Hume's contentions, one of which is that "by 'a material object,' we must mean an ordered and continuous complex of perceptions," *Hume's Theory of the External World* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1940), 225.

3 Following this passage, Hume introduces the notion of a "relative idea," which may be used to think of external objects specifically different from perceptions. However, Hume is careful not to say that we can or do conceive external objects in this way: he only says that "*the farthest we can go* towards a conception of external objects, when suppos'd specifically different from our perceptions is to form a relative idea of them" (T 1.2.6.9; SBN 68, my emphasis). Furthermore, he adds that we do not pretend "to comprehend the related objects" by forming relative ideas of objects.

4 An interpretive problem posed here is one that arises if we attribute both epistemological phenomenalism and realism concerning external, material objects to Hume. Given epistemological phenomenalism, which is clearly held by Hume, it becomes difficult to see how Hume could actively hold that external, material objects exist.

5 Some commentators have suggested that Hume is plainly inconsistent. For instance, Barry Stroud argues that Hume is "in an unstable, perhaps paradoxical position," *Hume* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 247. Passmore begins *Hume's Intentions* by remarking that inconsistencies found in Hume's philosophy have led to different interpretive strands, and having gone through them, he concludes, "Rigour and consistency were not [Hume's] strong point" (152).

6 For this reason, a straight yes-or-no answer to the question concerning Hume's inconsistency would not be given on this line of interpretation. Donald Baxter, for instance, argues that, following Pyrrhonian skepticism, Hume does not actively assent to the existence of external bodies, although he also irresistibly assents to it under force of appearances. See "Identity, Continued Existence, and the External World," in *The Blackwell Guide to Hume's Treatise*, ed. Saul Traiger (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 116–17. Richard Popkin describes Hume's attitude as a "split personality": "In one mood, the difficulties overcome him, in another, the necessities do. Only by being both can one be a philosopher and live according to nature. " See Richard Poppin, "David Hume: His Pyrrhonism and His Critique of Pyrrhonism," in *Hume: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Vere Chappell (Garden City: Doubleday, 1966), 98. See also Robert Fogelin, *Hume's Skepticism in the Treatise of Human Nature* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), 75–79. Another strategy seems to appeal to Hume's practical, pragmatic attitude, which we take to live and survive in our world. See Annette Baier, *A Progress of Sentiments* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 101–28.

7 Some commentators have attempted to show that Hume is not inconsistent by somehow subduing his skepticism with regard to our belief in the existence of external objects. Don Garrett argues that even though skepticism arises with respect to our belief, because it is not grounded on reason but generated by the imagination, such skepticism is subdued by what he calls the "Title Principle," according to which "Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented

to. Where it does not, it can have no title to operate on us" (T 1.4.7.11; SBN 270). See Don Garrett "Hume's Conclusions," in *The Blackwell Guide to Hume's Treatise*, 151–75; and his *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press 1997), 232–37. Norman Kemp-Smith famously argues that Hume is not a skeptic but a naturalist who is concerned about accounting for the operations of the mind that lead to some beliefs that humans naturally come to have in the course of their lives. So, according to Kemp-Smith, Hume takes some of our beliefs, including our belief in the existence of external objects, to be "'natural', 'inevitable', 'indispensable', and are thus removed beyond the reach of our skeptical doubts." See Norman Kemp-Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume* (London: Macmillan, 1966), 85–87.

8 Robert McCrae makes a similar point in his article, "Perceptions, Objects and the Nature of the Mind," *Hume Studies*, 10th anniversary issue (1984): 150–67. John W. Yolton also acknowledges that for Hume the imagination makes us think of perceptions as objects by leading us to believe in their continued and independent existence and that this belief is the closest to the "basic truth" that "objects are as they appear to us." See *Perceptual Acquaintance from Descartes to Reid* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 162. However, my position departs from them on whether Hume endorses the double existence of perceptions and external bodies. They both claim that Hume does, and I argue that he does not. See McCrae, "Perceptions, Objects and the Nature of the Mind," 152–53; Yolton, *Perceptual Acquaintance from Descartes to Reid*, 150.

9 Wayne Waxman may have a similar view, as he argues that we should understand vivacity for Hume as verisimilitude; that is, to say that impressions are vivid is to say that we regard them as real. Thus, he maintains that "[g]ains and losses of vivacity . . . merely alter the way we *regard* those [perceptions] we already have." See Wayne Waxman, *Hume's Theory of Consciousness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 33–42; "Impressions and Ideas: Vivacity as Verisimilitude," *Hume Studies* 19 (1993): 75–88. Moreover, Waxman also forcefully argues against those commentators who attribute the philosopher's theory of double existence to Hume. See *Kant and the Empiricists: Understanding Understanding* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 419–22, 454–55n3, 462–63.

10 William James introduces the term "radical empiricism" to distinguish his empiricism from Hume's in "A World of Pure Experience," which is reprinted in his *Essays in Radical Empiricism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), 39–91. James's conception of his own empiricism is similar to the position I attribute to Hume in this paper, as he sees it as one that "must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, nor exclude from them any element that is directly experienced" (see 42). James thinks that Hume's empiricism is not radical enough since it neglects some elements, like relations, that *are* directly experienced and thereby rejects (mistakenly as James sees it) the continuity and unity of experience. I am only using James's term to describe my reading of Hume; however, it will turn out that there are interesting similarities and connections between Hume and James.

11 For a comprehensive survey of Hume's uses of the term 'object' in the *Treatise*, see Marjorie Grene, "The Objects of Hume's *Treatise*," *Hume Studies* 20 (1994): 163–77. Grene identifies three different usages: (1) as non-mental, external body; (2) as perception; and (3) as intentional object.

12 Strictly speaking, however, the exact correspondence between impressions and ideas holds universally only in the case of *simple* perceptions. Hume himself qualifies this point, at T 1.1.1.4–T1.1.1.6, by considering his idea of Paris. He experienced Paris yet admits that his idea of it can in no way be an exact copy of the city. However, since complex perceptions are after all composed of simple ones, Hume affirms "in general, that these two species of perception are exactly correspondent" (T 1.1.1.6; SBN 4).

13 Hume is speaking here from the viewpoint of a scientist of human nature not from that of the vulgar, since the vulgar do not actively identify objects with perceptions. Equating objects with perceptions is not the same as making no distinction between objects and perceptions, which is what the vulgar do.

14 It is Hume's intention not to make any speculations about things that are not observable. In a footnote to his discussion of the distinction between impressions and ideas, Hume makes it clear that he does not consider the manner in which impressions are produced in the mind (T 1.1.1.2n; SBN 2).

15 Although Hume does not limit perceptions to impressions of sensation in this passage, it must be impressions of sensation rather than impressions of reflexion that are relevant to the question of a relation of external objects to impressions. As Hume's initial distinction between impressions of sensation and those of reflexion indicates, impressions of reflexion are "passions, desires, and emotions, which . . . arise mostly from ideas" (T 1.1.2.1; SBN 8). Hence, if Hume is concerned with the relation between *external* objects and the internal impressions that they "occasion," the impressions at issue here must be those of sensation.

16 The relation between legitimate and fictitious ideas and what exactly fictitious ideas are in Hume are both problematic and complicated issues, beyond the scope of this paper. See Saul Traiger, "Impressions, Ideas, and Fictions," *Hume Studies* 13 (1987): 381–99 and "Experience and Testimony in Hume's Philosophy," *Episteme* 7 (2010): 42–57.

17 The Copy Principle, strictly speaking, applies only to simple ideas. Some complex ideas could also be derived from past corresponding complex impressions, but not all could, since complex ideas can be produced by the imagination by combining various ideas. However, the simple ideas constituting a complex idea that is produced by the imagination are all derived from past corresponding simple impressions.

18 It is not entirely clear how, exactly, the distance of a body from us is "discover'd by reason" and what sort of "reason" Hume has in mind here. What is clear is that the distance of a presented body from us is not immediately given in impressions of sensation.

19 Hume's point here is consistent with the so-called Conceivability Principle, which is about possible existence. Hume states it as follows: "that whatever the mind clearly conceives includes the idea of possible existence, or in other words, that nothing we imagine is absolutely impossible" (T 1.2.2.8; SBN 32) and "Whatever can be conceiv'd by a clear and distinct idea necessarily implies the possibility of existence" (T 1.2.4.11; SBN 43). Conceivability for Hume is a matter of imaginability, that is, whether imagination can form an idea. The only materials for the imagination to produce an idea of body are past perceptions; thus, only those things which have been "discovered to the senses" (namely, the sensible) are originally available to the imagination. Therefore,

the above point from T 1.2.6.8 is a negative version of this imaginability: whatever is not in an impression of sensation is not imaginable, precisely because it is not available to the imagination; hence an object with a feature like externality that is not present in an impression of sensation cannot even be imagined to exist.

20 Hume famously denies that we could ensure the existence of unobserved objects by causal inferences; see T 1.4.2.14; SBN 193 and T 1.4.2.47; SBN 212.

21 In his *Languages of Art*, Nelson Goodman discusses the difference between what a picture represents and what kind of picture it is. He gives an example of a picture of a unicorn, which does not represent anything, since there is no unicorn. He points out that the phrase "picture of" has the appearance of a two-place predicate, so that it is often interpreted as a relation between the picture and what it represents. However, as the example of a picture of a unicorn demonstrates, a picture may just be of a certain kind and need not denote anything separate. See *Languages of Art* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1976), 21–26.

22 Another place where he clearly equates an object with a "collection of sensible qualities" is T 1.3.6.10; SBN 90, where he is searching for "power" in an object like "flame." See also T 1.3.14.10; SBN 160; T 1.4.4.11; SBN 229–30; T 1.4.4.15; SBN 231.

23 Some complex ideas also present "objects" in this sense since they are exact copies of corresponding complex impressions and since a difference between them is only a degree of force and vivacity. Therefore, whatever is said of impressions must also be said of ideas.

24 Hume devotes considerably more space to the discussion of constancy than to that of coherence, although he himself states that each one of them *alone* is either "not so perfect as not to admit of very considerable exceptions" (T 1.4.2.19; SBN 195) or "too weak to support alone so vast an edifice, as is that of the continu'd existence of all bodies" (T 1.4.2.23; SBN 198–99). For this reason, it might be thought that, for Hume, constancy is the only relevant quality for the generation of our belief in the existence of external object, as Don Baxter seems to think. See his "Identity, Continued Existence, and the External World," in *The Blackwell Guide to Hume's Treatise*, 119. Conversely, some might focus only on Hume's discussion of the effect of constancy, not on that of coherence, as Stroud explicitly does. See his *Hume*, 100. It is important to ask (1) whether these two qualities, coherence and constancy, play different or related roles in generating our belief in external bodies and (2) why Hume seems to place more weight on constancy than coherence. However, despite the disproportionate discussions of the two qualities, Hume does not dismiss one or the other in the text; moreover, he clearly says that both qualities of impressions produce our belief in external bodies (T 1.4.2.20; SBN 195; T 1.4.2.56; SBN 217). I will discuss the two qualities without asking these deeper questions.

25 Hume also argues, on the basis of some "experiments" (like pressing an eye with a finger), that our impressions of sensation depend on the sense organs, so they do not have a distinct or independent existence at all (T 1.4.2.45; SBN 210–11).

26 The aspect of belief involved here seems to play a role in distinguishing impressions as external objects from impressions as mental items. It is Hume's contention that a belief does not add anything additional to a perception; belief "in general consists in nothing, but the vivacity of an idea" (T 1.4.2.41; SBN 208) and "makes no addition to

our precedent ideas" (T 1.3.7.4; SBN 96). In the Appendix to the *Treatise*, he explains that this vivacity, or "a peculiar feeling" that belief-ideas possess but simple conceptions do not, consists in "more force" with which they "strike upon us," that is, "they are more present to us, the mind has a firmer hold of them, and is more actuated and mov'd by them" (T App. 3; SBN 624). Belief affects the mind's process more and has "a superior influence on the passions and imagination" (T 1.3.7.7; SBN 629).

27 William Morris provides a nice discussion of Hume's notion of "realities." It involves what Morris calls "the systemic elements" that distinguish between beliefs that enter into "the system of interconnected perceptions that form my picture of the world" and merely imagined ideas. See William Morris, "Belief, Probability, Normativity," in *The Blackwell Guide to Hume's Treatise*, 83–85. Hume's explanation of the presence of external objects to the mind at T 1.4.2.40 (SBN 207) follows the same line of thought as what Morris describes as Hume's notion of realities. See also Passmore, *Hume's Intentions*, 100.

28 Yolton initially drew my attention to this crucial passage at T 1.4.2.40 (SBN 207), which he introduces in his discussion of Hume's views on the presence of an object to the mind, *Perceptual Acquaintance from Descartes to Reid*, 154–55. Yolton takes it as Hume's giving an "epistemic analysis" of the presence of an external object to the mind, that is, an answer to the question of how we conceive an object to become present to the mind. An object's becoming present to the mind is also understood as seeing, feeling, and perceiving the external object. In Humean terms, then, it must be the question of how it is that an impression of an object, along with a belief in its external existence, is present in a bundle of perceptions that is the mind. Thus, Yolton connects this account to Hume's general theory of belief and emphasizes a similarity between that and his account of our belief in external objects in T 1.4.2.40 (SBN 207). I agree with Yolton that a belief in the external existence of an object does not add any perception to a perception of an object. Also, Yolton explains T 1.4.2.40 (SBN 207) as Hume's saying that the "*external object*" influences "the heap by augmenting the member of perceptions" (154, my emphasis), not as his saying that an *impression* of an object influences the heap. Yolton seems to equate the external object with an impression of an object here. Yet he claims that Hume nonetheless accepts the doctrine of double existence.

29 Thus, for example, the distinction for Hume between primary and secondary qualities would be untenable, and there is no room for substance as a "you know not what" in Hume's system, even if positing such a substance would explain the unity of some qualities that we seem to experience sensibly.

30 There is one significant implication of my reading of Hume's view of external objects for his skepticism with regard to the existence of bodies. On my reading, Hume could not be said to be skeptical about the existence of bodies that are ordinarily taken as material objects existing in the extra-mental world independently of us; for he could not be said to deny or even doubt the existence of such objects unless he could at least conceive of them. Furthermore, Hume clearly affirms the existence of "bodies" at the beginning of T 1.4.2, but, as I have argued, the "bodies" affirmed here are perceptions to which "different relations, connexions and durations" (T 1.2.6.9; SBN 68) are attributed and which are thereby taken as "bodies." Various issues regarding Hume's skepticism that may have an important bearing on my reading are beyond the scope of this paper.