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Impressions, Ideas, and Ontological Type

PETER LOPTSON

Abstract: This paper explores the ontological categories in which Hume’s texts seem to justify placing his central terms of art, impression, and idea. The options of impressions/ideas as “acts” (or “states”) and as “objects” (inner mental particulars) are discussed, with reference to interpretations forwarded in the secondary literature as well as to Hume’s texts. Variants of both these options are explored and assessed, as are relations between the categorial type for impressions and ideas and Hume’s views on the “external world.” I argue as well that there is an interesting, though elusive, alternative which most commentators neglect, but which appears in later empiricist philosophy, viz., that Hume intends impressions/ideas to be a new category of item, intermediate between act and object. I conclude that while some Humean texts suggest such a view, the likeliest interpretation is a version of the “act” or “state” construal.

Although a substantive part of the immense Hume literature explores one aspect or other of Hume’s foundational terms of art, *impression*, and *idea*, only some of it has focused sharply, or in detail, on precisely what Hume intends as the *ontological categories* of these central terms, and whether what Hume says, and means, concerning the pair is (or can be made) consistent.¹ The present paper aims to explore these categorial issues in a fresh and clear way. As the concept of an *impression*, especially, typically intended in a more or less Humean way, has figured broadly in philosophical work since Hume’s time, doing so may serve more than

purely interpretive or textual purposes. I will identify three primary options for interpreting Hume's conceptions of impressions and ideas. Two of these options (namely, *ideas* and *impressions* as states, or *ideas* and *impressions* as objects) have figured in the secondary literature, but, as we will see, their articulation has commonly involved a striking divergence, or imprecision of view, about what exactly impressions and ideas are supposed to be for Hume. The third interpretive option I identify (*ideas* and *impressions* as an amalgam of state and object) is an exciting, though elusive one, anticipatory of some later empiricist philosophy (much of it citing Hume in its ancestry). I will argue that although there is textual evidence for all three interpretations (and very many passages where it would be impossible to decide between at least two among them), on the whole just one of the three emerges as the most plausible interpretive candidate. Where textual passages (and the interpretations of scholars) may appear to conflict, a presumptive nod should be accorded to what we find not only in significant passages of the *Treatise* itself, but also, critically, in the Abstract of the *Treatise* which Hume wrote, because it represents Hume as standing back from, and summarizing features of, the work's completed Books 1 and 2, and their conceptions and theses. This will be particularly salient, if not decisive, where formulations in the Abstract find reinforcement from the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. As much as reaching a final preferred interpretive option, my aim is to differentiate and explore categorial structures and possibilities in Hume, and their implications: Humean *conceptual geography*, as it may be said.² The goal then is to locate impressions and ideas (as Hume conceives them) in *logical space*. Doing so will include aiming to identify the *ontic* (or *categorial*) *type* of impressions and ideas. That is, what *sorts*, or *kinds*, of things are they supposed to be, ontologically speaking?

The structure of the paper will be as follows. I will first present a number of passages from Hume which introduce and characterize *perceptions*. I will then discuss categorial *options* which have suggested themselves to many scholars who read and try to interpret Hume, providing argumentative commentary as the examination goes forward. This discussion will include some consideration of the Humean mentalistic vocabulary as it appears in some of his predecessors. I then turn to the secondary literature, noting apparent declarations, or leanings, to one or other of the interpretive options. Here, the gist of much of what I will have to say is that this is an area where many Hume scholars seem to take inconsistent interpretive positions, or to show indecision (possibly made as indecisive as I argue that they are by the ambivalences in Hume's texts themselves). I then give consideration to what I call the exciting third interpretive choice, and some of its role in later theory of mind. I conclude with a summation of these perambulations, and its (somewhat cautious) outcome: namely, that Hume is probably not strictly or wholly consistent, but that nonetheless just one of the categorial

options set out at the beginning (namely, “act” or “state”) captures the greatest part, or the central core, of what he thinks and means.

I

The opening paragraph of the *Treatise* (following the work’s Introduction) provides the foundational exposition of what Hume means by impressions and ideas. However familiar, it deserves quotation in full, together with the footnote which accompanies it.

All the perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into two distinct kinds, which I shall call IMPRESSIONS and IDEAS. The difference betwixt these consists in the degrees of force and liveliness, with which they strike upon the mind, and make their way into our thought or consciousness. Those perceptions, which enter with most force and violence, we may name *impressions*; and under this name I comprehend all our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul. By *ideas* I mean the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning; such as, for instance, are all the perceptions excited by the present discourse, excepting only, those which arise from the sight and touch, and excepting the immediate pleasure or uneasiness it may occasion. I believe it will not be very necessary to employ many words in explaining this distinction. Every one of himself will readily perceive the difference betwixt feeling and thinking. The common degrees of these are easily distinguish’d; tho’ it is not impossible but in particular instances they may very nearly approach to each other. Thus in sleep, in a fever, in madness, or in any very violent emotions of our soul, our ideas may approach to our impressions: As on the other hand it sometimes happens, that our impressions are so faint and low, that we cannot distinguish them from our ideas. But notwithstanding this near resemblance in a few instances, they are in general so very different, that no one can make a scruple to rank them under distinct heads, and assign to each a peculiar name to mark the difference.” [fn.:] “I here make use of these terms, *impression* and *idea*, in a sense different from what is usual, and I hope this liberty will be allow’d me. Perhaps I rather restore the word, *idea*, to its original sense, from which Mr. *Locke* had perverted it, in making it stand for all our perceptions. By the term of *impression* I wou’d not be understood to express the manner, in which our lively perceptions are produc’d in the soul, but merely the perceptions themselves; for which there is no particular name either in the *English* or any other language, that I know of. (T 1.1.1; SBN 1–2)³

Hume begins Book 2 of the *Treatise* with a recapitulation of his earlier stage-setting, and it is often valuable to compare the two pieces of foundational discourse, for the mutual illumination they may afford, as well as for what are sometimes discovered to be differences. This “second start,” then (it summarizes what appears in the remainder of T 1.1.1 as well as what is in 1.1.2):

As all the perceptions of the mind may be divided into *impressions* and *ideas*, so the impressions admit of another division into *original* and *secondary*. This division of the impressions is the same with that which I formerly made use of when I distinguish’d them into impressions of *sensation* and *reflection*. Original impressions or impressions of sensation are such as without any antecedent perception arise in the soul, from the constitution of the body, from the animal spirits, or from the application of objects to the external organs. [N.B.: T 1.1.2 had said that impressions of sensation arise “in the soul originally, from unknown causes.” At T.1.3.5.2 (SBN 84), to which we will turn more fully subsequently, Hume seems to say that their ultimate cause is due to unknown causes, but perhaps from the object, “the creative power of the mind,” or God.] Secondary, or reflective impressions are such as proceed from some of these original ones, either immediately or by the interposition of its idea. Of the first kind are all the impressions of the senses, and all bodily pains and pleasures: Of the second are the passions, and other emotions resembling them. (T 2.1.1.2; SBN 275)

There is, in addition, a “third start” for the *Treatise*, where impressions and ideas are introduced once more, at the beginning of Book 3. Hume in fact presents, as a preamble before Book 3 proper gets underway, an Advertisement, in which we are told, among other things, that “I continue to make use of the terms, *impressions* and *ideas*, in the same sense as formerly; an . . . by *impressions* I mean our stronger perceptions, such as our sensations, affections and sentiments; and by *ideas* the fainter perceptions, or the copies of these in the memory and imagination.” In the second paragraph of the text proper, Hume goes on:

It has been observ’d, that nothing is ever present to the mind but its perceptions; and that all the actions of seeing, hearing, judging, loving, hating, and thinking, fall under this denomination. The mind can never exert itself in any action, which we may not comprehend under the term of *perception*; and consequently that term is no less applicable to those judgments, by which we distinguish moral good and evil, than to every other operation of the mind. To approve of one character, to condemn another, are only so many different perceptions. Now . . . perceptions resolve themselves

into two kinds, viz. *impressions* and *ideas* (T 3.1.1.2–3; SBN 455–56; the italicized sequence provided is mine).

We may add to these passages what Hume says in the Abstract of the *Treatise* (writing as he does, in the third person, about his views):

He calls a *perception* whatever can be present to the mind, whether we employ our senses, or are actuated with passion, or exercise our thought and reflection. He divides our perceptions into two kinds, viz. *impressions* and *ideas*. When we feel a passion or emotion of any kind, or have the images of external objects conveyed by our senses; the perception of the mind is what he calls an *impression*, which is a word that he employs in a new sense. When we reflect on a passion or an object which is not present, this perception is an *idea*. (Abs 5; SBN 647)

As signalled earlier, I think a special importance is to be attached to the formulations of the Abstract; at this stage however I will proceed with all textual data as on all fours with each other.

Ia

There appear, prima facie, to be two candidate cases for the locations of impressions and ideas in logical space. First: impressions and ideas might be *states*—or *processes*, or *events*, or *acts*—I will not particularly differentiate among these four kinds of things, nor specially focus on cases which may be viewed as *active*, or *passive*, respectively.⁴ That is, although acts and states, for example, are no doubt distinct kinds of entities, they seem appropriately grouped with processes and events, in a single categorial taxon; and I will, often as not, use the term *state* for any of the members of that kind. I will also not, at least initially, be concerned with whether, if states, they will, or must, be *veridical*, that is, have a really existing object or a necessarily obtaining independent fact, corresponding to or implied by them, if they have obtained or occurred. On the other hand, many if not in fact all, of the states which impressions and ideas would be if they *were* states will be held to have what is usually called *intentional structure*. If ψ is taken to stand for such a state, it will be supposed that when ψ -ing occurs, this will (invariably, typically, or quite often) have the form ψ -ing y (where the “ y ” item may or may not be real). So, on the first way of conceiving them, they would be individual episodes of *seeing*, or *appearing to see*, *hearing*, or *appearing to hear*, *tasting*, or *appearing to taste*, *fearing*, *appearing to fear*, and so on; or individual episodes of *seeing y* , *appearing to see y* , and so on, for suitable y . We might perhaps see two sub-categories of cases on the “state” interpretive alternative: one which *includes* an “intentional object” (where

there is an intentional object), and one which does not. So, if one favoured the second option, one would regard the impression (and the idea) as just the *seeing*, or the *remembering*, and so on, and the item seen or remembered as something else, additional to the impression or idea as such. And if one favoured the first “state” interpretive option, one would regard the impression (and the idea) as including the intentional object (if there were one; some of course will hold that there always is).

The second presumptive candidate case for the location of Humean impressions and ideas in logical space will assert that impressions and ideas are some sort or other of *object*. If we were to think of them by reference to our first identified interpretation, perceptions, on this interpretation, might be said to be items which are *sensed*, *felt*, or *apprehended*, in the sorts of states (processes, and so on) identified as the first candidate, under its second (“intentional”) option.⁵ If impressions/ideas were “items sensed, apprehended, etc.,” a further question would be whether all, or some of them, are physical objects, or literal sensory objects in the brain,⁶ or qualities, or relations, or, perhaps, a sort of mentally dependent or parasitic thing, a mental particular, of the kind termed, in twentieth-century philosophy, *sense data*. For the present investigation, *that* question, while in the end quite an important one, is secondary. It is more important, initially, to try to decide whether impressions/ideas are some sort, or sorts, of object at all, than whether, if they are, what type of object they are.⁷

We should note, though, that a variant of this general conception will take the *objects* that impressions/ideas might be to be *complex objects*, which might include objects that would be themselves of diverse kinds. Thus, if one version of the *object* view would take impressions to be sensory qualities, for example, *blue*, a more complex impression might be *blue-next-to-orange*, *blue-triangular-shape-next-to-orange*, *moving blue shape concurrent with loud sound*, and so on. These latter would be complex “objects” of the sort intended.⁸

It should be clear that it will make a considerable difference whether Hume is thinking of perceptions (impressions and ideas) as states or as objects of states. The matter will be ontological, and not merely semantical. If perceptions were states, or events, this would contribute significantly to seeing Hume as an *event ontologist*; likely, in fact, one of the first. If on the other hand perceptions were entirely of object type, there would appear to be no special reason to view Hume’s system in this way.

There is another respect in which coming to conclusions about the ontic type of Humean perceptions would seem to make a considerable difference. This may be seen in most straightforward terms by reference to a simple question. Does Hume think that there are impressions that are literally *blue*, say? Is an impression a thing that is blue, square, loud, and so on? Or is the idea rather that an impression may

be of blue, but this will not make the impression itself a blue thing? If the first view is adopted, we seem to have an object interpretation; if the second, a *state* one.

Hume tells us, as well, “that ’tis impossible for us so much as to conceive or form an idea of any thing specifically different from ideas and impressions” (T 1.2.6.8; SBN 67). This appears to imply that we are unable to form an idea that would be of anything (real or unreal) that would be of a different *species* of entity than an impression or idea. This is one of the relatively few passages where Hume seems to utilize a conception of something resembling what I have been calling *ontic type*. One will very reasonably want to know what Hume thinks the *species* of a perception is. If impressions/ideas were *psychological states*, then, Hume in this passage seems to be claiming that we can form no idea of anything that was not of psychological state type; this in turn might be thought to imply that alternatives to *idealism* are not even thinkable.⁹ But perhaps the species of a perception is to be a state, or event, whether mental or otherwise. In that case, it might be alternatives to event ontology that are being declared unthinkable, hence, presumably, impossible. On the other hand, if impressions/ideas were objects (of one sort or other), then—it would appear—alternatives to idealism, and to event ontology, might at least be thinkable; and depending on what sort of object an impression or idea was, it might be that theories about the nature of (at least some of) the things that there are, including possibilities of non-mental kinds of things, might be developed from the Humean base in impressions and ideas.

Impressions/ideas interpreted according to the first conception we have noted may be identified as “-ings”; according to the second, as “-eds.” We will be wanting then to address the question: are impressions/ideas “ings” or “eds”? Or are they neither? Or both? (Perhaps, in some textual contexts, one, in others, the other.) If impressions/ideas were “ings,” it will be natural to suppose that they are *psychological* or *mental* “ings.”¹⁰ If so, our central query may be taken to be asking: are impressions/ideas *experiences* (that is, *individual experiencings*; possibly including an object of such an experiencing); or are they *objects* of experiencings (alone)—where we are being careful to remember that an object, in the relevant sense, need not be a physical object. (It bears reminder that “object” has diffuse and general meanings, appearing for example in quite-ordinary locutions of the form “the object of so-and-so’s attention.” Hume himself uses the term “object” in a rich variety of distinct ways.¹¹

A wholly distinct possibility, also to have in view, is that both of these construals of impressions and ideas might be mistaken. Rather than “ings” or “eds,” impressions/ideas might, perhaps, be an amalgam (of some sort) of the two; or a replacement for both that more adequately or perspicuously comprises what one or other, or both, fail adequately to be. According to a conception along these lines, it might be held that more or less familiar categories of thing do not do justice to needs of theory and analysis, and *impression/idea* might be held to

represent a terminological or conceptual innovation, which may be suggested by some familiar notions, but needs to be taken as *sui generis*. This possibility will be explored below, in section VI.

We should also not neglect the possibility that, Hume's claims (and most of his interpreters' assumptions) notwithstanding, the "logic" of Hume's two terms may be found at least in some respects to diverge. That is, although Hume does clearly initially signal that impressions and ideas are to be thought of as items of the same *sort* (whatever that sort is), it needs to be considered at least as an interpretive option that ideas turn out to have an importantly different character, or to be of a distinct categorial kind, from impressions. Maybe, for example, impressions are uniformly and persistingly states, but ideas can be both echoing copies of those states *or* individual non-state entities (concepts, images, and so on) to which states can give rise.¹²

We will want also to take seriously the possibility that, as some of Hume's critics maintain, he is confused about impressions and ideas, or at any rate says things in some contexts about them which are irreconcilably inconsistent with things he says in others. According to these observers and critics, impressions and ideas are one sort of thing at one stage, or in some investigative contexts, and another in another, and Hume seems not to notice this.¹³ If this were accurate, there will then be the subsidiary question whether, Hume's words (in some contexts) notwithstanding, there may still be assembled a coherent overall view which may be taken to represent what he really thinks and would have meant to say, even if he did not altogether succeed in saying it.

There is still another dimension to situating our topic in logical space. Most, though not all, Hume interpreters see him as advocating a (so-called) bundle-theory of the self. According to it, there is no such thing as a person-substance. Persons, or selves, insofar as they exist, are (*only* are) aggregations of impressions and ideas. *If* impressions and ideas were objects—"eds"—then a bundle of them would be an aggregation of such objects. Such an aggregation *conceived as corresponding to a self* may seem difficult to picture;¹⁴ and all by itself to provide at least some prima facie support for a state or "ing" view. We will aim not to rush to judgment on this. At any rate, on an "ing" or state interpretation of impressions and ideas, it may seem natural to understand the bundle thesis as implying that, for Hume, mental/psychological/sensory states are *without subject*, or *subjectless*. There would appear on the surface to be relational facts, of form xRy , where x is a self or subject, R is the psychological/mental/sensory state, and y the "object"—the "ed" (which might or might not be a physical object, or an item of the "external world," which would be real whether or not the "x" (the self) was). But below or behind the surface, these facts would not have relational form; for otherwise, it would appear, we would have to take Hume to suppose that a cluster of experiencings experiences something, which appears either redundant or incoherent. There

are issues as to whether we might still want to see an xRy structure, understanding the x as replaceable by (a name of) a huge aggregation of all of the states in the bundle. Questions may pose themselves whether the result would not threaten to make every xRy case analytic, or analytic where x is exemplified. At any rate, issues posed by whether Hume is a bundle theorist, and what follows from that if he is (including consequences for the “logical space(s)” in which impressions and ideas belong), should also be put into a secondary location for the present purpose, at least at the initial stages of investigation.

IIb

We may begin to draw inferences, and to forward, tentatively, some preliminary interpretations, from the passages quoted above. First, impressions and ideas are *perceptions*, indeed, all of the perceptions that there are. So—it would seem—although it might sometimes be the case that the mind *perceives impressions*, this would be a case of reflection upon a perception; if perceptions are of one thing or other, they will more usually be of such things as *blue*, or *Paris*. Perhaps the same point may be made by noting, or noticing, that when Hume refers to impressions of sensation (and reflection), his meaning is not that a sensation (or reflection) in such a case is some sort of object of the impression; rather that these are types, or taxa, of impression, identified (here) by their content, or kind, not by reference to something they are directed towards. Hume tells us also that we are not to confuse or identify impressions with how it is that they (the impressions) are produced. (Perhaps hardly anyone would in fact be inclined to do that.)

We do need also to note that Hume’s characterizations of impressions and ideas are regularly in terms where the “of” locution is used, and where it does not seem to signify a taxon, but rather a representational or intentional notion of one sort or other.¹⁵ There might or might not be grounds for assigning Hume developed *theories* in this region. At the same time, the “*ofness*” of at least very large numbers of perceptions—if we can put the matter in this ungainly fashion—simply cannot be ignored. Hume refers to ideas of one sort or other of object on an immense number of the pages of the *Treatise* and first *Enquiry*; and while *impressions* of one sort or other of specific thing are less frequent, there are a great number of those as well. Thus, we have references to an impression or impressions of a white colour, minute objects, a curve or right line, extension without matter, solid and tangible objects; Book 2 includes impressions of ourselves, of someone’s sorrow, of pain or pleasure, pride or humility, joy or sorrow, and so on. Some of Hume’s interpreters, as we will see, want to collapse, or reduce, this nearly ubiquitous apparent intentionality, to something not in any way intentional or representational—to something “*ofless*,” so to speak. At this stage, it will be appropriate simply to register that the textual data supply a considerable abundance of indications of Humean

locutions, according to which ideas, and other perceptions, are very frequently of specific individual items, many of which Hume himself calls objects.¹⁶

Some of the terminology used just in the Abstract passage quoted also deserves comment. Hume says there that there are two varieties of perceptions of the mind which are impressions, one of them occurring when we feel a passion or emotion, the other when we “have the images of external objects conveyed by our senses.” References to images begin to occur in the *Treatise* not until 1.1.7.6 (SBN 20), where Hume tells us that “[t]he image in the mind is . . . that of a particular object”; a considerable number of comparable references appear thereafter.

Among the passages quoted above was the “third beginning” of the *Treatise*, where impressions and ideas are introduced anew. This passage, as will be evident, will constitute an extremely strong piece of textual evidence for an “ing” interpretation of perceptions, Hume explicitly using “ing” locutions, calling impressions/ideas *actions*, and explicitly including the actions of seeing and hearing—moreover, *all* of them—as instances of what he means by perceptions.

Going beyond the *Treatise*, however, in section 12, part 1 of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume sets out his restatement of Berkeley’s argument against the possibility of knowledge of supposed external physical objects. As part of the preamble to the argument Hume says:

[T]he slightest philosoph . . . teaches us, that nothing can ever be present to the mind but an image or perception, and that the senses are only the inlets, through which these images are conveyed, without being able to produce any immediate intercourse between the mind and the object. The table, which we see, seems to diminish, as we remove farther from it: but the real table, which exists independent of us, suffers no alteration: it was, therefore, nothing but its image, which was present to the mind . . . [T]he existences, which we consider, when we say, *this house* and *that tree*, are nothing but perceptions in the mind, and fleeting copies or representations of other existences, which remain uniform and independent. (EHU 12.1.9; SBN 152)

Hume proceeds in the same context to refer to “perceptions of the mind . . . caused by external objects, entirely different from them, though resembling them (if that be possible),” and to body conveying “an image of itself to a substance” and to “perceptions of the senses” allegedly “produced by external objects, resembling them” (EHU 12.1.10; SBN 153). Since Hume speaks of the images as (allegedly) *resembling* the external objects, and not merely of them as having been *caused* by the objects, there would seem to be little doubt that *these* images, and therefore, these perceptions, are of object categorical type (whether or not the object putatively represented is a physical object or a quality-cluster). It is accordingly

difficult not to suppose that Hume has forgotten that earlier, in section 1, he has used the term “perception” to refer to the broadest genus of what is to be found in the mind; or alternatively, perhaps, to suppose that he is using the term, in the later context, with a different, narrower sense (just as, we know, he uses the term “object” in a multiplicity of ways, without comment or explanation). Notably absent in the section 12 context is any presence of the term “impression.” We look then to have, at least here, an ontology, or a structure, consisting of mind or self, *perhaps* a mental state, an image or perception which is before the mind, and an external object (literal physical object or cluster of qualities), at least usually or putatively, which the image or perception resembles, at least to some degree. This will evidently be an affirmation of a so-called “double existence” theory, which, of course, Hume seems elsewhere to repudiate.¹⁷ At any rate, the fact that Hume does *not* employ his otherwise ubiquitous term “impression” as a synonym or alternate for “image” or “perception,” in this passage, looks to be at least negative evidence of some importance: the impression may well (cautiously, to be sure) be taken to be *the sensing of the image* which Hume has here described.¹⁸

Returning to the passages cited from the *Treatise*, we must note also things Hume says which do not patently disclose themselves as to what he, Hume, means by them. Impressions and ideas “strike upon” the mind, “make their way” into consciousness, “enter” it. The more neutral “appear” also is utilized. But Hume’s other verbs do suggest that impressions and ideas have been *in motion*. They “arise” in the soul, having entered it (it seems) *from* somewhere—unknown places or causes, the constitution of the body, the animal spirits, the operation or action of some external object upon the sense organs. *Perhaps* we can take the motility image, or model, to be merely picturesque or metaphorical, just a way of referring to instances of *encounter* and *causality*. Maybe Hume just means that we *find* (better, perhaps, *observe* or *discern*) impressions and ideas in our minds, and they have been produced (caused) by some of our bodily states or characteristics, specifically our so-called animal spirits, among them, or by the causal effects of external objects upon our eyes, ears, and so on, or, possibly, by wholly unknown causes. And not also, or rather, that impressions/ideas were once at certain locations, and then got into motion (by one instrumentality or other), thereafter *lodging themselves* in our minds. We may nonetheless find the motile connotations of Hume’s language puzzling, if not disquieting.¹⁹ (It is to be noted, that the same—at least apparent—motility attaches to the characterizations of impressions (or the items they refer to with this term) in Hume’s predecessors.) Such reactions may be augmented by the *word* Hume has chosen for his first term of art: one may well think that for an impression to exist, some *impressing* needs to have gone on.²⁰ Metaphors or models of wax and the impress of a signet ring, or a pond and the ripples a rock thrown into it will leave, may readily come to mind. Yet, it may be observed, *perceptions*, if they are “ings,” are *perceivings*; but impressions, if they are “ings,” are not *impress-*

ings. The human being, or the mind, will be on the receiving end of impressings (so to speak), if we are going to say that some impressing has taken place; more or less the reverse of what happens when perceivings occur.

I do not suggest that these semantical niceties should be pressed over-far. In this regard we need to note that Hume explicitly says that he is using the terms *impression* and *idea* “in a sense different from what is usual.” He qualifies that claim in the case of *idea*, suggesting that *perhaps* he has restored it to its original meaning, before it was “perverted” by Locke.

We may note also that the “degree of force and liveliness” notion, contrary to what may at first seem natural to suppose from Hume’s opening phrasings, does not in fact appear to be something *definitional*. Hume *looks* to be making empirical comments or observations. We can discern, evidently, from familiar experience, that *feeling* (something?) is one sort of experience, and *thinking* (something?) is another. We know first-hand what each is, and although (as we might say, on Hume’s behalf) the matter could be in doubt (on radically sceptical sorts of grounds, say) the matter *is not* in doubt. The familiar and readiness-to-hand character each of these items has, and the sorts of experiences in which they occur, can be appealed to as a component of argument, evidence, analysis, and the articulation of theory. Then, separately—it seems—the fact may be noted that, *as a matter of fact*, impressions are usually and characteristically (much) more vivid and lively and forceful than ideas. But that is a matter of fact, and not something definitional (or otherwise necessary, a priori, true in all possible worlds, or the like), and this is confirmed by the fact that impressions are sometimes so dull as hardly to be distinguishable from ideas, and ideas likewise sometimes so vivid that there will be little discernible difference from an impression. Hume *is*, no doubt, helping himself here to some features or assumptions of common sense or common life; but there would appear to be no reason, pertinent to the psychological theory he means to be developing, that he should not.

It may also be useful to ask whether impressions should be thought to be by definition, or otherwise necessarily, had only where perception is *veridical*, or whether they must occur where external objects are being perceived more or less accurately. The matter is tied up in complicated ways with other issues of Hume interpretation. Historically, Hume was frequently understood either as a kind of Berkeleyan, for whom the familiar objects of the common-sense world are numerically identical to objects of sense perception, these items being *mental* in kind and type; or as a sceptic about the external world, for whom nothing can be concluded one way or the other as to what there may be, or a supposed character it may have, independent of sense perception. It has become common in recent Hume scholarship to reject both of the preceding options, taking Hume instead either to be a so-called sceptical or agnostic realist (we know that there are external objects, but don’t know what they are like), or as a common-sense realist, either

(as well) a direct perceptual realist or an indirect perceptual realist with a position close to the one usually accorded Locke.²¹

Whichever view on Hume and the (nature of possible) objects of an external world is preferred, there is one passage, at least, which seems reasonably decisively to tell us that for Hume the epistemic victim of dreams or a Cartesian evil demon *can* have impressions; hence that impressions *need* not be veridical. At T.1.3.5.2 (SBN 84) Hume 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. We may draw inferences from the coherence of our perceptions, whether they be true or false; whether they represent nature justly, or be mere illusions of the senses.”²² It may be noted that this passage, which expands upon the passage in T 1.1.2 cited above, may shed light, but not decisive light, on our “ing/ed” problem. The “object” to which Hume refers in the passage is presumably the external physical object; it might equally be cause of a state of perceiving, or of an inner “mental particular.” It may also be thought that this passage will contradict the one from Book 2, also quoted above, which gives us a disjunction of three candidate causes of impressions of sense. *Perhaps* it does. A more charitable, and I think quite reasonable alternative, is to observe that at T 1.3.5.2 Hume is talking about what may be decided with complete *certainty*. Hume should be allowed also to affirm, in appropriate contexts, what he takes to be actual empirical facts, even if they are not demonstrably certain.

In that spirit, we should conclude, as with the first case, that the likeliest view is that Hume is again, in this context, thinking empirically, and of what occurs in normal circumstances. Normally, typically, characteristically, at least if we take some variety of realist view of Hume, when we have impressions, there are real objects present which have been involved in their causation (or perhaps in some instances the cause will have been some bodily state of ours—something happening in our “animal spirits,” or elsewhere or otherwise in our bodies). And normally, typically, these impressions will be livelier and more vivid than ideas commonly are. Still, in unusual circumstances impressions can be quite dull and ideas amazingly vivid; and in what we will suppose are extraordinarily unusual and improbable circumstances we might have impressions that were non-veridical, even wholly non-veridical. Nonetheless, the normal, even, perhaps, the “paradigm,” case of an impression will occur where perception is veridical, at any rate has had a real external non-mental object causing the impression (whatever we may know with any confidence about that object). So at least we may choose to view the matter. Be that as it may, being veridical will not be “definitional” for impressions; and Hume undeniably takes claims to perceptual veridicality as open to serious doubt or challenge.

The copy principle itself, one of the central pillars of Hume's analysis of mind and its operations, seems not to be definitional or strongly modal for Hume (as the missing shade of blue case implies), which will reinforce these conclusions; we *can* have ideas without antecedent impressions, though we hardly ever do in actual fact.

Ideas are images of impressions (T 2.1.1; SBN 275); they may also be images of objects, just as impressions may be (T 1.3.5.2; SBN 84; Abs 5; SBN 647). As already noted, when an impression or idea is an image of an object, "[t]he image in the mind is . . . that of a particular object" (T 1.1.7.6; SBN 20). And yet—the latter notwithstanding—"to form the idea of an object, and to form an idea simply is the same thing; the reference of the idea to an object being an extraneous denomination, of which in itself it bears no mark or character" (T 1.1.7.6; SBN 20).

In the sense in which ideas are images of impressions, Hume evidently means just that they are *copies* of those impressions. With regard to the *forming an idea of an object=forming an idea* claim: Hume seems above all, in this context, to be making what would now be called a version of an *internalist* claim. Our immediate mental states, whatever their structure or character be, do not reach out to, or validate, or include, external objects. They are themselves, as themselves; if there is a case for the independent reality of exterior objects, it will need to be made elsewhere and otherwise than by examining *them*. The claim *may* in addition *seem* to point to an "ed" view of perceptions (if the supposed collapse of the object into the idea were held somehow to make that idea be that object); or it might be taken to be affirming the intentionality of thought (since identity is symmetrical, it may be noted that what Hume says will licence the conclusion that to form an idea is to form an idea of an object—that is, of a something-or-other, real or unreal, that the idea will be *of*). But both will be bold construals to advance; and Hume may not be meaning to affirm either.

Other subtleties, and modifications or qualifications of what may first be thought, suggest themselves. Hume has not necessarily said that the images which ideas are are items of (individual) object type, sensory particulars before the mind. In the "copy" sense of "image," they are images *of impressions*—whatever (precisely) the latter are. If an impression were an event-like thing (say), then an idea would be an image of an event-like thing—some sort of mirroring or (paler) re-production of that event-like thing. If we (can) have mental images at all, we can presumably have a mental image of an entire event we have witnessed, and are subsequently remembering, just as we can have one of a dog, or of a sound. (And, of course, if an impression were an object-like thing, then an idea *would* also be one; it would be a sensory image in that sense.)

II

From the textual data adduced so far just from Hume we can, I think, see evidence, and a case, for viewing impressions/ideas as objects. Hume sometimes says that the sensory cases among them are images that represent, or are of, external objects, or, as he sometimes says, of qualities which we regularly take to be qualities of independently existing exterior objects. Images in, or before, the mind would appear to be entities of object type; just as we would regard photographic images, or other pictures. These Humean *images* are produced by the action of the objects (or qualities) on our senses, and they are *present to* the mind, and nothing else besides them is so.

However, it will seem natural to reflect on something the latter claim might seem to imply. If impressions and ideas *were* items of object type—if they literally *were* images and no more than that, that is, if *perceptions* exhausted the contents or ontology of the mind, and they were images *tout court*, there would be—it would seem—a gap or lack in Hume’s account, and his categorial terminology, for states or processes which apprehend those items of object type. The mind, one may well think, cannot consist *just* of sensory qualities (still less of external physical objects, if one were to assign Hume a direct perceptual object-realist view); or just of “mental particulars” (sense-data-type entities) *of* sensory qualities (or of external bodies), or for that matter, of (so-called) “brain impressions.” Hume will have to mean to include in his picture of how we work the sensing, feeling, or apprehending of the items (of object type), as well as the latter. Otherwise, it would seem, the theory would not be a theory *of* anything mental, or psychological, it would not be a theory of *mind*. (It would be, at best, a theory like later Russell-Carnap-type theories of quality clusters at spatio-temporal coordinates, making up the physical world.²³) And if impressions and ideas simply were, *tout court*, images or qualities or objects, there would be no terminology in the system Hume sets up for the sensing, feeling, and apprehending. That is, we may say, he needs (psychological) “ings” somewhere in his taxonomy (even if he may also need “eds”)—and if they are not to be found in *impressions* and *ideas*, where *are* they to be found? No other candidate terms of art appearing, some presumptive evidence, at least, is given—so it will be natural to reflect—for the “ing” construal.²⁴

At any rate, it will appear significant to find that Hume *does*, at least occasionally, actually use “ing” locutions in characterizing operations of the mind. For example, at T 1.1.4.2 (SBN 11) he says that “the imagination must by long custom acquire the same method of *thinking*, and run along the parts of space and time in *conceiving* its objects” (my emphases).²⁵ This seems absolutely to require that there *are* for Hume states of thinking, whether or not ideas or impressions were among such states.

As we have noted, the account of impressions and ideas at the beginning of Book 3 seems to imply that they are states, or “ings.” Another passage which appears explicitly to require that perceptions be understood as “ings” appears at T 1.4.2.38 (SBN 207). Hume is discussing perceptions as hypothetically present to and absent from the mind. He asks “*First*, How we can satisfy ourselves in supposing a perception to be absent from the mind without being annihilated? *Secondly*, After what manner we conceive an object to become present to the mind, without some new creation of a perception or image; and what we mean by this *seeing*, and *feeling*, and *perceiving*?” (Hume’s emphases) Now, Hume’s questions *might* turn out to have answers which would turn “ings” into “eds”—that is, it might be argued that what we *should* mean by the relevant seeing, feeling, and perceiving is an aggregate of inner images. Hume provides his answers to his questions at T 1.4.2.39–40 (SBN 207), affirming there the bundle theory of the mind (in 39) and, in 40, a slightly complex or convoluted affirmation of object-perception relations. “External 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 reflexions and passions, and in storing the memory with ideas. The same continu’d and uninterrupted being may, therefore, be sometimes present to the mind, and sometimes absent from it, without any real or essential change in the being itself.” However precisely this is parsed, the formulation of Hume’s second question looks plainly to imply that Hume’s *psychic ontology*, if we may put it that way, includes a category for mental operations—states, acts—as well as one for objects, and specifically, and explicitly, for *seeing*, and *perceiving*.

A later passage in Book 1 of the *Treatise* also appears to have significance for determining the ontological category of impressions and ideas. In part 4, section 5 (“Of the immateriality of the soul”), Hume tells us that “a thought or perception . . . is a being altogether inseparable and indivisible” (T 1.4.5.7; SBN 234). It is true that the perceptions Hume primarily names in this context as lacking divisibility and, as well, location, are passions. At any rate, he goes on to say: “The first notion of space and extension is deriv’d solely from the senses of sight and feeling; nor is there any thing, but what is colour’d or tangible, that has parts dispos’d after such a manner, as to convey that idea” (T 1.4.5.9; SBN 234). There *are* then senses of sight and feeling. Because of the bundle theory of the self or mind we want to be leery, certainly careful, in saying that for Hume this will be a matter of *us*, or our minds, literally seeing or feeling anything, at any rate when we are speaking “*philosophically*.” But—it seems plain—for Hume individual instances of seeing and feeling (and comparable states) happen. The picture looks to be one of (at least in many cases) exterior objects acting so as to produce states of feeling, and of seeing images. And—returning to Hume’s initial (and repeated) characterizations of impressions and ideas—this—the happening, or its being copied—is what an

impression or idea—a perception—is. And so, we see the grounding for an “ing” construal of perceptions. Perceptions, then, impressions among them, will not have parts (just as Hume says explicitly, at least of one category of perceptions). Things that *do* have parts include things that are coloured or tangible. The latter need not be external physical objects. Certainly, internal mental images would have parts and be divisible. If there were such a thing as a red sense datum there would be such a thing as its upper half and its lower half.²⁶ Accordingly, it looks to be the case that, independently of whether Hume is a direct perceptual realist, holding that the immediate objects of sensory experiences are physical objects or, possibly, clusters of their qualities, or a “double existence” theorist of approximately Lockean type, for whom there are inner sensory particulars which the mind directly experiences, and which may partly, or wholly, resemble or correspond to external physical objects (or their qualities), either way those “objects” will be divisible things.

We do not of course want to be constructing a picture, or a case for one, that would consist merely of what Hume ought to have said, or meant. And we have not, I think, done so. Hume definitely thinks there are mental images, and he thinks there are states of sensing them. And he sometimes says that the images *are* (among) the impressions and ideas which we have. And he sometimes says that the impressions and ideas are had, or exist, when we feel something or have the images. The two claims appear, formally, at least, to be inconsistent, the first implying that a perception is the whole of what the second says is a proper part of it—even if, to be sure, the only object-like proper part it contains. The first will be of course, the central or primary object or “ed” interpretation of perceptions; the second will be the “ing” view.

It is to be noted that some interpreters (Falkenstein, for example) have seen especially strong warrant for taking an “object” or “ed” view in the section—T 1.4.5—to which we have been giving special attention. The section significantly prefigures the first *Enquiry*’s section 12, part 1, from which we quoted above, and which couples or disjoins *images* and *perceptions* in what seem indisputably *object* ways. T 1.4.5 looks as well to affirm that there are extended ideas. “To say the idea of extension agrees to any thing, is to say it is extended,” Hume says (T 1.4.5.10; SBN 240).

In fact, though section 5 read as a whole seems to be much more emphatically “ing-affirming,”²⁷ Hume undermines the concept of a substance, by deflating the prospects of deriving it from an impression. He asks whether the supposed impression from which the idea of a substance stems is “an impression of sensation or of reflection? Is it pleasant, or painful, or indifferent?” No one would suppose that a physical object, or a sense datum, or a “brain impression,” is literally pleasant, painful, or indifferent, though an *experiencing* of one might be so. Hume repeatedly affirms, here as elsewhere, that perceptions can exist apart from each other,

or anything else; a strange saying, no doubt, but no stranger than saying that a mental particular or “brain impression” could exist apart from anything else. Hume goes on in the section to say that “a thought or perception . . . is a being altogether inseparable and indivisible” (T 1.4.5.7; SBN 234); repeatedly in the section, a perception is called a thought. Such an item as the latter is not easily called (literally) blue, or extended, or hard.

This section of the *Treatise* is complex, and deserves a more intensive commentary than can be provided here. Yolton takes its subsections, which appear at least superficially to imply that there are extended perceptions (actually or “phenomenologically”), as *satirical* in intent. Anderson, and other “object” readers, dispute this, persuasively, I believe. I would say, rather, that Hume provides in the section a series of *reductio* arguments, whose explicit aim is to sabotage immaterialist views of the character, or etiology, of mental life, as well as to reinforce his rejection of the intelligibility of the concept of substance. One needs to be cautious in attempting to extract from the interiors of these *reductio* arguments clear Humean affirmations of his own unqualified views.

III

Some interpreters do straightforwardly adopt an “ing” view of impressions and ideas. Janet Broughton very notably explicitly adopts the view, in her paper “Impressions and Ideas.” She says: “Hume’s term for our mental states is “perceptions”: they are the states we are in as something “strike[s] upon the mind” and enters “our thought or consciousness” (T 1.1.1.1; SBN 1). So “perceptions” are conscious states.”²⁸ She subsequently characterizes impressions and ideas explicitly as *experiences*. Georges Dicker, as well, in *Hume’s Epistemology and Metaphysics*,²⁹ says (page 5) that “[b]y a *perception*, Hume means any conscious state whatsoever. . . . By an *impression*, he means any experience, such as a visual experience, an auditory experience, or a pain. Hume further subdivides impressions into two classes: sense experiences, such as visual, tactual, auditory, gustatory, olfactory, and kinaesthetic experiences; and “inner” or introspectible experiences, such as joy, sadness, anger, and desire. . . . By an *idea*, Hume means any conscious state other than an impression.” An experience is evidently an “ing”—a state, process, event, or act. However, in the very next sentence following the one just quoted, Dicker introduces complication, which may perhaps serve to exemplify the issues I am seeking to address in this paper. Dicker says: “Ideas include especially concepts, but also mental images, such as those that occur when one imagines something or, sometimes, when one remembers something.”³⁰ Now, *concepts* are not “ings”—they are “eds.” It is the same with mental images. A mental image, or for that matter, a concept, may be *of* a state, process, act, or event (though it need not be—it will depend on the case); but neither the image nor the concept will itself *be* a state,

process, act, or event. *Having* a concept or image will of course be an “ing”—an experience; but the concept or image itself will be an “ed.” The concept of a concept is essentially Platonistic, and it has been understood in that way by philosophers long preceding Hume, but including Hume.

Considerably later in his book Dicker does appear to opt for a clear, or declared, “object” (or “ed”) construal of impressions and ideas. He ascribes to Hume the view that when looking at, say, a table, “what one sees is not really the table, but only a visual image, or rather a series of different images—impressions of sense, “sensations or ideas;” or, to use the twentieth-century term, ‘sense-data.’”³¹ Dicker is drawing on the same passage from *Enquiry* section 12 quoted above, where it *does* look to be the case that Hume is affirming a “double existence” thesis, and taking the immediate objects of sensory experiences to be what in the twentieth century were called sense-data. I noted that—for whatever reason—Hume does not actually call the interior subjective sensory particulars he here seems to reify *impressions*—rather, “images” or “perceptions.” (*Perceptions* do of course *include* impressions.) I note as well that Dicker, like many other commentators, does not remark upon any shift in meaning on Hume’s part from “ings” to “eds,” or appear to notice that Hume’s theory, or usage, appear to pose any issue of this kind. (He does raise objections to “sense-data theory,” similar to those raised by Hume’s eighteenth-century critic Thomas Reid. Evidently those objections would not attach to impressions/ideas interpreted uniformly as “ings”—as *conscious states*, or *experiences*, as Dicker had earlier said that they were.)

Janet Broughton too, although she uniformly characterizes impressions and ideas as states—“ings”—also appears to advert, without comment, to an “ed” or object construal, at least at one point. “Original impressions include the impressions *conveyed* by our five senses, of course, and they also clearly include bodily pains and pleasures.”³² To illustrate this, she says that “a painful bite” is an original impression. Although one may plausibly regard a state of sensing as caused by (operations of) the senses, it is difficult to see how one could be literally conveyed by them (even though Hume himself, to be sure, says precisely that). More problematically, a *painful bite* will not be an “ing”—a state. It will be something that is *felt* or *experienced*.³³

We may contrast what is presented, at least initially, and straightforwardly, as an interpretation of perceptions as states, with a comparably clear and straightforward account of them as objects (of states). Kenneth R. Merrill says: “Hume defines *perception* as ‘whatever can be present to the mind, whether we employ our senses, or are actuated with passion, or exercise our thought and reflection’ (THN, 647; 408.5)—a color seen, a sound heard, an odor smelled, a pleasure enjoyed, a pain suffered, an emotion felt, and so on (as well as all these things remembered or imagined). Perceptions, then, comprise absolutely every object that the mind can be aware of.”³⁴ The passage Merrill quotes *can* in fact be interpreted in the “ing”

way—as Broughton and Dicker would explicate it. At any rate, as we see, Merrill understands Hume emphatically as having an “ed”—object—view.

Part at least of what looks to introduce complexity, and then to raise questions, at least for some interpreters, as to whether Hume is not just confused, or at least sense-shifting as his account of mental life advances, is that the word “idea” is a word of “object” type—just like “concept” and “image.” You can be *told* that an idea is supposed to be an experience—an “ing”—but it will be rather easy to shift toward thinking of one as something apprehended in, or produced by, an experience. Indeed, in ordinary usage, “idea,” “concept,” and “image” do look to be in a common family—a family of object-like items. It is at least unhelpful to appropriate the term “idea” and give it a technical sense where it is to stand for a state or experience, if Hume has done that. Whether or not *Locke* perverted the term “idea,” Hume surely has, his claimed restoration to common usage notwithstanding. At any rate, he can be allowed his terminological innovation—if that is, in fact, his intention. Convictions of confusion on Hume’s part, though, may be found in the secondary literature, with respect both to impressions and ideas. Wilfrid Sellars, for example, sees Hume as “characterizing the initial elements of experience as impressions of, e.g., *red*”; he adds that he, Sellars, “would be the last to deny that not only Hume, but perhaps Berkeley and Locke as well, often treat impressions or ideas of *red* as though they were *red particulars*”) (*Science, Perception and Reality*, 160). More globally, to be sure, Sellars sees Hume’s account as “impossibly crude and inadequate as an account of the simplest concept” (161).

I referred at the beginning to what I called divergence, or imprecision, in the secondary literature with regard to the interpretation of impressions and ideas in Hume. This may be illustrated further with David Fate Norton’s “An introduction to Hume’s thought” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*³⁵ which Norton edited. Norton says that “the ‘elements of [Hume’s] philosophy’ are, in the most literal sense, the immediate objects of thought and the relations between or among these objects of the ‘mental world.’ The elements themselves are called *perceptions* and are divided into two kinds, *impressions* and *ideas*” (6). Norton immediately goes on to assert that Hume is not denying “that there are causes, objects, or minds—his concern is not to make the case for scepticism about objects, causes, or minds” (7). So, does Norton think that perceptions—impressions and ideas—are states, or that they are objects? Even granting, as we have been stressing, that “objects” *can* be, for some purposes and contexts, such things as states, processes, and events, it is difficult to interpret Norton otherwise than as falling on the “ed” side of the line we have drawn. (And of course, for some he would be completely right so to fall.) This seems further confirmed when we find Norton going on (8) to talk of Humean ideas of time, space, and so on. If an idea were an “ing”—a state of thinking—an idea of space should be, one would suppose, an individual episode of thinking-of-space (or, perhaps, an aggregation of such individual episodes).

But *that* would not be something that anyone would come to believe, as Norton puts it, represents external existences or realities—not, at least, if we are to think of *represents* as signifying *corresponds to*. It is the *concept* of space, not a thinking-of-space event, which we suppose represents something external. (The *thinking* part would be missing—would fail to have a counterpart—in the external reality allegedly corresponding to the idea.) So, one will suppose, Norton is taking ideas to be “eds,” not “ings.” Yet, one may feel there is simply an imprecision in the characterization he has given, even if “the most literal sense” is claimed for it.³⁶

A sense of that imprecision, ambivalence, or a straight ambiguity in Hume’s account, is expressed well by Barry Stroud, in *The Quest for Reality*.³⁷ Discussing what he takes to be Hume’s account of colours, he takes it to be the view that “colours are nothing but impressions or features of impressions in the mind. [my emphasis] We are said to “transfer” something we find only in our “internal impressions” or “sensations,” but we presumably do not “transfer” the internal impression itself to the object. We do not suppose that a pin that pricks us has a sensation of pain, and we do not think that a lemon we see has an impression of yellow. That really is nonsense. . . . It is not much better to say that what we “spread” onto the object and so mistakenly think belongs to it is not an impression but a feature or quality of an impression” (109). Stroud’s readiness to be disjunctive about Humean impressions is instructive, and may point to options for a plausible, and appropriately charitable, account of what Hume means.

We do need to note though that there are interpreters of Hume for whom impressions (and ideas) do seem unequivocally to be (mental) *objects*—“eds.” H. H. Price and A. J. Ayer are two such commentators. In the former’s *Hume’s Theory of the External World* (1940)³⁸ impressions are *sensibilia*. Ayer, in his 1980 book on Hume (reissued in 2000 as *Hume: A Very Short Introduction*) explicitly follows suit, referring (page 58) to “sense-impressions, or percepts, as, following Russell, I prefer to call them” and going on, for example, to discuss “a sensibillum which is elliptical from one point of view [and which] may be spatio-temporally coincident with a sensibillum, or an actual impression, which is round from a different point of view” (59).³⁹

Donald Ainslie says without qualification that “most of Hume’s interpreters attribute the object theory to him,”⁴⁰ citing passages from Jonathan Bennett, Barry Stroud, Robert Fogelin, Wayne Waxman, and Don Garrett,⁴¹ as well as the Norton passage discussed earlier. I myself find a degree of ambivalence, or imprecision, in most of this secondary literature—at any rate a non-confrontation with what the categorial options, and their respective implications, pose—even if (as with the Norton passage) one gets on the whole a sense that the commentator appears to lean toward, or favour, an *impressions/ideas as inner mental objects* interpretation.⁴² One prominent contemporary commentator who clearly does lean in this direction is Don Garrett. That at least looks to be the plain implication of Garrett’s claim

that “on Hume’s view, unlike the views of most of his predecessors, the familiar sensible qualities such as size, shape, color, taste, smell, and heat are all literally qualities of impressions themselves.”⁴³ It will be evident that⁴⁴ no instance of a seeing, a tasting, a smelling, and so on, will itself be literally red, sweet, triangular, or ice-cold. Only an object (of *some* kind or other, not necessarily a physical object of the “external” world, of course) can have qualities of these sorts. We noted earlier, and dismissed, an option according to which for Hume there might turn out to be no “ing” items at all in the ontological or structural analysis of impressions and ideas, just “eds.” It may perhaps be that Garrett would advocate that dismissed interpretation; if so, it may be held to deserve further consideration, though it is difficult to see how a theory of “eds” without “*inging*” going on *at all* could be a theory of anything *mental* or *mind-like*.

In addition to the “ing” and “ed” interpretations (the first in a form which would also include an “ed,” and also in a form which would not), I mentioned also the possibilities that Hume’s usage is ambiguous, shifting between the two in different contexts; and by implication the possibilities, if the latter were what was going on, that Hume does that masterfully, or that he is simply confused. Whether the one or the other, the textual evidence points to the idea that impressions/ideas do become clearly and unequivocally “eds,” in at least some later contexts in the *Treatise*, earlier contexts sometimes looking more to point to “ing” options, or to be ambivalent or equivocal between the two. For example, at T 1.4.2.9 (SBN 191) Hume says that “properly speaking, ’tis not our body we perceive, when we regard our limbs and members, but certain impressions, which enter by the senses.” The passage is “challenging” in more ways than one. Hume seems to be saying that *perceiving* is something that we *do*, and that when we do it, what we perceive are impressions; and putting it this way is how we should phrase things when we speak properly. But, as this is a case which common sense describes as one of regarding our limbs and members, the perceiving involved will itself be a case of an impression; which may seem to give rise to an infinite regress. Even if a regress might be avoidable, there is a more “charitable” reading of the passage—if charity it is. Hume may be saying, a little clumsily, that when we “regard our limbs and members,” the experience we are actually having, *stricto sensu*, is an impression-perception of *qualities* of limbs and members (or, perhaps, of sense data—impressions in an “object” sense, of such qualities), rather than of those limbs and members themselves.

IV

In addition to straightforward (or at least somewhat straightforward) *ing/ed* options, I signalled also the possibility that something rather different in kind might be intended by Hume, namely, that he thinks that there is a need for a conception of an item which no current taxon captures or locates precisely, something neither

precisely an “ing” nor an “ed.” Why might someone see something along these lines? One reason would be Hume’s saying, more than once, that he is using the term “impression” in a novel way (he repeats the claim in the first *Enquiry*, EHU 2; SBN 18), and that despite the fact that we see that earlier philosophers at least *seem* to be using “impression” much as Hume does. Another reason would be grounded in Hume’s claiming (T 1.2.6.8; SBN 67) that “’tis impossible for us so much as to conceive or form an idea of any thing specifically different from ideas and impressions.” As was noted earlier, with reference to this passage, taken strictly, and literally, this appears to be saying that impressions/ideas, and anything they might allegedly be *of*, are of the same conceptual species—of, that is to say, the same ontological category or *ontic type*. If Hume *were* understood as conceiving of a blurring or submersion of experience-states and objects of them—*ings* and *eds*—into a single categorial kind, he might be thought thereby to make room for a very much larger, more diverse world than an entirely or merely mental world. (It will be noted, of course, T 1.2.6 notwithstanding, that Hume will proceed on, in the *Treatise*, to talk of mental phenomena—*ings* or *eds*—and external objects of the world as being just as “specifically different” as everyone else does.) Still a further reason may be found in the argumentation in “Of scepticism with regard to the senses.” Hume at least appears to argue there that 1) the vulgar believe that what is perceived is in the mind, 2) the vulgar believe that what is perceived is independent of the mind, 3) the (modern) philosophers believe a “double existence” theory, according to which there are interior mental objects which we directly perceive which, in some respects, resemble exterior physical objects, and in other respects do not, 4) the modern philosophers’ theory is mistaken, and 5) at least a version of the vulgar conviction is correct. *Ergo* (it may be inferred) *what we experience* (it—experiencing—itself, and alleged objects it has) is a single item, both “independent” and, at the same time, “mental.” The conclusion of this argument seems to say that the state/object of state distinction—the -ing/-ed distinction—is erroneous, in the case of the mind’s perceptions; that the “ing” is actually *identical* to the “ed.”

A degree of caution in the vicinity of this proposed idea is warranted. On a general plane, Hume, in the sceptical part of the *Treatise* where the option we are now investigating appears, *can* be read as forwarding sceptical arguments which, while he thinks they are unanswerable, he—because no one can—does not accept them. (As he was to put it in the first *Enquiry*, such arguments “*admit of no answer and produce no conviction*” (EHU 12.15n1; SBN 155; emphasis in original).) Hume’s formulations, or utilizations, of what we have been calling ontic or ontological type or category are somewhat rare. One of his uses of the term “species” seems sometimes to correspond to this notion, particularly in the formulation “specifically different,” as we have remarked. It is in these terms that he says (in “Of the immateriality of the soul”—that is, within the “radical sceptical” sections of the *Treatise*), as well, that “’tis impossible our idea of a perception, and that of an ob-

ject or external existence can ever represent what are specifically different from each other. Whatever difference we may suppose betwixt them, '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). Some of Hume's language notwithstanding, it is not clear whether the claims about objects and perceptions, in the last passage quoted, may not be *epistemological*, rather than *categorial*. That is, Hume may chiefly be meaning to claim (even if the claim will itself, in the larger context, be repudiated) that we are utterly in the dark as to the supposed reality of a supposed external object, which might as well, as far as anything we can *justify* would warrant, be taken to be nothing other than a perception—which, here, seems, *prima facie*, only able to be a perception of object type (that is, rather than making a claim about what the *concept* of a perception (*ergo*, an impression and an idea) is, or may be, by category or type). Still, it is suggestive, at least, and interesting, to consider whether Hume may possibly be at least gesturing toward the idea of a category that would collapse "ing" and "ed."

Many regard the very idea intended with the latter as not just unclear, but of doubtful coherence. It is found prominently nonetheless in the work of later empiricist philosophers, to one degree or other consciously stemming from, and modelled on, Hume, notably, William James, Hans Vaihinger, and Bertrand Russell.⁴⁵

A motivating *prompt* for the intended idea might be seen in the case of sensations of *pain*. In common parlance we speak of *feeling a pain*, with an implied conception of the feeling as one thing, and what-is-felt as a distinct other. But this seems artificial, indeed, fictional. We would more accurately depict, and rephrase, (an instance of) *feeling a pain* as, we might say, a *hurting*.⁴⁶ Even if *prima facie* plausible in this case, the challenge, of course, and it appears to be a formidable one, is elaborating an account of all sensings (indeed, all feelings and thinkings of every sort) as operating comparably to "hurtings."

Carnap, in the *Aufbau*, develops the idea of a theoretical concept that gets *motivated* from ordinary familiar contexts, and then when launched, kicks away that source.⁴⁷ His primary example is very close to our own present concern. For Carnap we start with the idea of a first-person psychological observation or report. *I see something yellow*, maybe. We are to reach—Carnap, of course, thinks successfully do reach—the theoretical conception of an *elementary experience* (which Carnap in fact calls a "total impression"); but we are enjoined not to think of this as involving, or retaining roots in, a (supposed) metaphysical ego, or self-substance, and one of its spiritual/psychological states. Perhaps we got some imaginative prompting from something like such items. But the latter and their alleged components, for Carnap—perhaps also for Hume—are conceptually and theoretically bogus. *They* are not part of any defensible or correct view of things. But the elementary

experience—which they may have *helped* us to attain, but if so, only informally and pragmatically—is.

The suggestion in the instance with which we are concerned, Hume's theory of impressions and ideas, would be that he is gesturing, or groping, towards something similar: a theory that would be (in fact) a cousin (at least) of Carnap's elementary experience theory, conceived as conceptually *sui generis*, though close not quite able to be fit to one of the existing categories—and specifically, not quite an “ing” or an “ed,” though sharing features of each.

This is an interesting, and in many ways attractive interpretive idea; and Hume *might*, possibly, have been gesturing, or groping, in something like the way indicated.⁴⁸ If he were, this might help remove the appearance of clumsy inconsistency in textual passages, some of which look especially *ing*-like, and others of which strikingly *ed*-like. Hume might not only be rescued from inconsistency, confusion, and naïveté, but elevated to magisterial conceptual innovation. Unfortunately, the textual evidence seems not sufficiently compelling, for a conclusion in this direction that could be mounted with real confidence. Hume's claims of terminological innovation, for instance, seem most plausibly taken merely as marking his supposed taxonomical independence from his predecessors, especially Locke. And his remarks on impressions and ideas otherwise seem either to admit of *object*, or of *state*, interpretation, or to be ambiguous between them.

V

The most likely view, at least on the evidence of the many textual passages on impressions and ideas—infuriatingly many of which *can*, as noted, be read with either *ing* or *ed* construal—is, I believe, that Hume's intent and resolve is that impressions/ideas are *ings*—experiencings—which typically, in sensory cases, include intentional objects, those objects typically being internal mental images, the images typically images *of* qualities of objects (usually ordinary physical objects) in the world. The succinct formulation in the Abstract (T Abs 5; SBN 647), quoted above, may very reasonably be taken as having a specially determinative status. It represents Hume standing back from the *Treatise*, self-consciously identifying his own terminology as he understands and intends it. A perception—an impression or idea—is, to repeat, “whatever can be present to the mind, whether we employ our senses, or are actuated with passion, or exercise our thought and reflection. . . . When we feel a passion or emotion of any kind, or have the images of external objects conveyed by our senses, the perception of the mind is . . . an *impression*. . . . When we reflect on a passion or an object which is not present, this perception is an *idea*” (T Abs.5; SBN 647). It is exceedingly difficult, and implausible, I suggest, to understand these characterizations as representing impressions and ideas as anything other than states, or acts—as *ings*. *Feeling passions or emotions of any kind*

looks to have to signify an “ing”; and if sensory cases are of common type with feeling passions, they should be also. Moreover, Hume seems to be saying that the impression or idea (perception) is *the whole ensemble*: what obtains or exists whenever we feel a passion, have a sensory image, and so on. Sensory impressions, at least, will have an “inner” or “intentional” object—an *image*—which he here *says* is of an external object. If we understand Hume in this way, we *will* see him as endorsing, at least “at the end of the day,” a “double existence” theory, not altogether unlike Locke’s (though, as Hume supposes, a corrected and more sophisticated version of the latter). This view, or at least a key part of it, is particularly clearly expressed in *Enquiry* section 12. At any rate, given that impressions and ideas are not literally themselves non-mental independent external objects, it seems evident that what Hume intends as their *categorical kind*—what sorts of entities they are supposed to be—is independent of what he believes about the external world, and what knowledge, if any, we have of it. We have seen appeal in, but have finally concluded that it is necessary to reject, the idea of Hume’s masterfully gesturing toward a conceptual-innovation act-merged-with-object theory. The right interpretation then is an *ing* interpretation. But though it is primary, we should also see Hume as occasionally stumbling, without recognizing that he is, between *ing* and *ed*, probably led to do so by the linguistic facts, of act/object verbal noun ambiguities and *idea* being normally, unambiguously, an object-type count noun. We can *add* to this interpretation, as a way of making sense of some of what Hume says, for example in the argumentation of T 1.4.5, that where an impression (or resulting idea) has intentional structure—is of ψ -ing x type, where the x is a sensory image—that Hume sometimes allows himself, or finds himself, *by a kind of synecdoche*, assigning to the whole perception properties true just of its intentional object.⁴⁹

Summing up, this paper has argued that (1) aiming to identify the *ontological type* of the fundamental entities of an important and influential philosophical theory is natural, and important for understanding that theory adequately; (2) the immense secondary literature on Hume notwithstanding, relatively little of it addresses itself directly, explicitly, or satisfactorily, to what Hume thinks of as the ontological types of impressions and ideas; (3) the evidence from Humean text provides some support for each of three incompatible interpretations of the categorical or ontological types of impressions and ideas, *viz.*, a *state* interpretation, an *object* interpretation, and a conceptually innovating interpretation which sees impressions and ideas as intermediate between states and objects or an amalgam of them; while there is some reason to view Hume as confused about his key terms, and persuasive reason to think that he occasionally *is* confused, or inconsistent, or uses a construal of these concepts for polemical, heuristic, or similar purposes, the concepts are so fundamental for his philosophy that it is reasonable to aim at a single consistent understanding of them, which (what we may call) a weighted

majority of his texts support; (5) while the *amalgam* conception is interesting, and has an important place in later empiricist philosophy, much of it claiming to derive from Hume, it cannot adequately be justified from Hume's texts; (6) Hume definitely affirms the existence of *mental states and operations*; any adequate account of the ontology and the logic of his theory of mind must, accordingly, include and locate these; (7) textual weighting favours the Abstract of the *Treatise*, particularly where this finds direct support both from the body of the *Treatise* and the first *Enquiry*; hence (8) a *state* interpretation of impressions and ideas is the one most plausible to adopt.

It may be noted finally that, if we have the *items* right, in Hume's basic picture of the mind and its operations—viz., that there is a state of experiencing, and an item (in sensory cases, of “object” type, normally an *image*, of qualities or clusters of them) experienced—then it may matter less which gets the label of perception. The perception—impression or idea—is either the experiencing, the experienced item, or the ensemble or package of both. I have argued that Hume most often, or usually, thinks of either the first or the third of these as the perception. And I accept that occasionally he writes as though it is the second. My “synecdoche” construal is supposed to account for the latter cases, though I accept that in a small number of instances (pretty much entirely to be found in T 1.4.2 and 1.4.5) it may not convincingly do so, and that we should think in those cases of Hume having misled himself. Even so, as between thoughts which are literally extended or coloured, and thoughts which include or contain as structural parts things which are so, there may not seem in the end to be a great or important difference.

NOTES

1 Probably the most thorough, and important, discussion in this earlier literature is John W. Yolton, “Hume's Ideas.” I will be defending a position that is, with qualifications, close to the one advanced by Yolton. Yolton has more to say about *ideas* than about *impressions*, perhaps unsurprisingly from the author of the classic *John Locke and the Way of Ideas*. There is nonetheless an account of both impressions and ideas in Yolton's paper. Although there is a certain opacity in some parts of that account, which will be noted below, and although Yolton takes a view on an important part of the evidence provided by the *Treatise* which I do not find persuasive, the general interpretive line he advocates seems to me correct.

2 Cf. Gilbert Ryle's phrase “the logical geography of concepts.” Ryle states, “The logical type or category to which a concept belongs is the set of ways in which it is logically legitimate to operate with it” (*Concept of Mind*, 10). Hume himself uses the phrase “mental geography” with reference to the “delineation of the distinct parts and powers of the mind” (EHU 1. 8; SBN 13). References to the first *Enquiry* are to Hume, *An*

Enquiry concerning Human Understanding, ed. Beauchamp, hereafter cited in the text as “EHU” followed by section and paragraph number, and to Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Selby-Bigge, rev. by Nidditch, hereafter cited in the text as “SBN” followed by page numbers.

3 References to the *Treatise* are to Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Norton and Norton, hereafter cited in the text as “T” followed by Book, part, section, and paragraph number, and to Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. Selby-Bigge, rev. by Nidditch, cited in the text as “SBN” followed by the page number. The Introduction of impressions and ideas in the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* is similar: “[W]e may divide all the perceptions of the mind into two classes or species, which are distinguished by their different degrees of force and vivacity. The less forcible and lively are commonly denominated *Thoughts* or *Ideas*. The other species want a name in our language, and in most others: I suppose, because it was not requisite for any, but philosophical purposes, to rank them under a general term or appellation. Let us, therefore, use a little freedom, and call them *Impressions*; employing that word in a sense somewhat different from the usual. By the term *impression*, then, I mean all our more lively perceptions, when we hear, or see, or feel, or love, or hate, or desire, or will. And impressions are distinguished from ideas, which are the less lively perceptions, of which we are conscious, when we reflect on any of those sensations or movements above mentioned” (EHU 1.3; SBN 18).

4 Cf. Derek Parfit’s employment of the term “events in the sense that includes acts, processes, and states of affairs” (*On What Matters*, I:43). Many other philosophers use this terminology similarly.

5 The “object” interpretation of perceptions in Hume is not to be understood as *defined* in terms of, or by reference to, the “state” interpretation. The aim here is to convey as clearly as possible the intended idea. For the “object” view, perceptions—impressions and ideas—stand alone, as we might put it. They will be such things as a certain shape, or colour, or stab of pain, or item in physical space, or in the brain, etc. It can be noted as well that if the first—the state or event—alternative were the actually correct one, and if it were understood as including the intentional structure previously referred to, the class of intentional objects that might be concerned would be wider than the objects intended under the second interpretive option. Thus, if we think that (an event or state of) *experiencing something* is categorically distinct from colours, shapes, sounds, mental particulars, physical objects, etc., we may still think that among the *somethings* which can be experienced are not only colours, shapes, etc., but also events or states of affairs. Thanks to the editors, and to one of the referees on a previous version of the paper, for suggestions and comments which led me to bringing this out clearly.

6 Robert F. Anderson advocates the view that Humean impressions and ideas are “brain impressions” in *Hume’s First Principles*, “The Location, Extension, Shape, and Size of Hume’s Perception,” and “In Defense of Section V: A Reply to Professor Yolton.” Although there are a few passages in Hume which admit construal along the lines Anderson advocates, they are relatively scarce; and the thesis is contrary to Hume’s repeated claim that he is setting issues of physiology aside in his investigations.

7 Yolton identifies as the candidates for what Hume’s ideas—hence, with suitable adaptation, also his impressions—are “images, brain impressions, and cognitive contents” (“Hume’s Ideas,” 2). Both images and brain impressions will be varieties of “object” in the typology employed here. The phrase “cognitive contents” seems not to

be an optimal choice for—what appears to be intended by Yolton—mental states or acts. *Cognitive contents* easily put one in mind of abstract *propositions*, or informational units, which could, one would think, be shared, numerically, by more than one cognizer.

8 Writing without special reference to Hume, Josiah Royce captures the unity of the overall “object” view. “The object of a perception is a datum of some sort, a thing, or perhaps, as Bergson insists, a change, or whatever else we may be able immediately to apprehend” (*The Problem of Christianity*, 281).

9 Taken strictly, it might also imply that nothing other than a state is thinkable.

10 It would seem desirable to resist calling the intended states *representings*, and the alternative “object” interpretive items *represented*s. On more or less any theory or analysis, some impressions—pains, for example—do not seem to be representational in character. On the positions under review, a pain will either be a *hurting* or it will be a felt pain (some particular sensory stab). Although either might be held in some sense to point to the cause of the pain, they do not appear to represent that cause, or anything else. A characterization of impressions and ideas should have application to all of them. To the extent to which Hume is interpreted either as a (somewhat) radical skeptic, or as an idealist, it will also be problematic whether any impression or idea can be viewed as representational, since on those views there will either be nothing or it will be doubtful whether there is anything that impressions or ideas (whether they are states or objects) represent. The basic ontological distinction between a *state* and something of *object* type seems wholly independent of whether there is such a thing as representation, and if there is, what its proper analysis is. With Garrett, and others, I think that Hume’s perceptions *are* typically representational. But they need not have been so, in order to be occurrences, experiences, or other entities of “-ing” type; and *some* perceptions do seem not to be representational. Hume’s perceptions, if they are of object type, likewise might or might not be representational. A spark appearing in the visual field when the head has suffered a blow would not appear to represent anything; but a (token) blue sense datum (if that was what some impression was) might be held to represent an instance of blue in the world. And if Hume were a metaphysical idealist, no perceptions would represent. It remains to add that being a representer of something does not of course make the representer an “ing” or state. A photograph might represent a table, say, but this does not make the photograph a *representing*, i.e., an occurrence or event.

11 The matter is explored very systematically, and usefully, in Marjorie Grene, “The Objects of Hume’s Treatise.”

12 Still another “divergent” interpretation—advocated, for example, by Lorne Falkenstein, “Hume and Reid on the Perception of Hardness”; “Hume’s Reply to the Achilles Argument”—sees bifurcation among impressions (hence, also, ideas which copy them). Falkenstein holds that some impressions are, if not precisely of object type, items which have properties which it would be usual to assign to objects that were; while other impressions are, evidently, states or occurrences. The first group, according to Falkenstein, are spatial, extended, and may be coloured, hard, etc., where the second are not.

13 Janet Broughton’s valuable paper “Impressions and Ideas” raises a number of difficulties, unclarities or seeming divergences in his terms of art, and real or apparent

inconsistencies in Hume's account of perceptions. Wilfrid Sellars, in *Science, Perception and Reality*, thought that Hume's account of impressions was confused and inadequate, certainly as a basis for understanding conceptual thinking.

14 If, for example, the supposed object which an impression was were a sense datum, or something similar, it would seem impossible that such a thing be able to experience anything. A blue sense datum, or sense datum of blue, could not itself have visual experiences, or other sensations. The matter would not seem to be able to alter if an aggregation or cluster of such objects were involved. If blue—type or token—could not see or feel, neither could blue-aggregated-with-square-shaped, etc.

15 I do not mean to imply that representational and intentional notions will turn out to be much the same, or even closely similar. A philosophical idealist may hold, for example, that mental states, and their supposed merely private and subjective contents or objects, do not represent anything; but still assert that the states have intentional structure (a thinking is always, or regularly, of something—the something never other than something unreal or mental).

16 Don Garrett's "Hume's naturalistic theory of representation" explores a number of facets of topics investigated in the present paper. Garrett is particularly concerned to argue that Hume's psychological picture is both representationalist and naturalist. I share both views, though neither comes in a primary way into the ontological type issue with which I am concerned. At a later stage, I identify Garrett, in this paper, as affirming what I see as an "object" view of perceptions, and take issue with part of what he says.

17 John Wright interprets Hume as certainly holding the double existence theory, or "indirect (perceptual) realism," in spite of the "skeptical critique" which he mounts against it (*Hume's "A Treatise of Human Nature,"* 152–53). I also am inclined, on the whole, to think that this view is correct, though I see Hume as vacillating, or more hesitant, about the matter. (Hume does, after all, call the double existence theory "monstrous.") It may be salutary to say explicitly that, unless Hume is an idealist, the only possible views that can be attributed to him in this area (apart from complete agnosticism) are either direct realism—the mind immediately perceives objects or qualities (i.e., the Thomas Reid view)—or indirect realism, which is by definition a double existence position of one sort or other.

18 The caution indicated is certainly warranted. At T 1.2.1.4 (SBN 27), Hume refers to "the image or impression" which is seen in a visual experience. This is clearly an "object" usage of impression. There is no question that there are a number of textual passages which seem unable to warrant any other interpretation. The goal in the present account is to achieve as consistent an overall interpretation of impressions and ideas as may be justified.

19 Wright takes the motile connotations of Hume's account seriously, and literally, interpreting impressions for Hume as involving two "aspects." Under one of these, the impression is "a physical motion which exists before we can be conscious of it"; "As perceptions, impressions appear to have a double aspect, both as movements of the body which makes us conscious or aware, and as the consciousness content itself" (Wright, *Hume's "A Treatise of Human Nature,"* 62.) (Wright does not indicate whether he thinks the "motions/movements" or "the consciousness content" he here assigns

to Hume are “ings” or “eds”; they could, it would seem, be either.) Although, as I have noted above, it is certainly true that Hume characterizes impressions, several times, as though they were in motion, he nowhere differentiates “aspects” of impressions, nor literally or explicitly says that they are physical. Hume gives no reason anywhere to suppose or infer that impressions are other than of a single ontological kind or type—whatever that kind or type be. And it seems to be important for the purposes and project of the *Treatise* that impressions and ideas be introduced, and be able to be understood, without reference to the body—even if Hume will later characterize some of them, at least, as having had bodily causes. Nonetheless, the motility phraseology is certainly there.

20 Cf. Russell’s comment: “Consider how Hume, in spite of his desire to be skeptical, allows himself, from the start, to use the word ‘impression.’ An ‘impression’ should be something that presses in on one, which is a purely causal conception” (*Human Knowledge*, 455–56).

21 The preceding four broad options noted, it may in fact not be unreasonable to view Hume, on “the external world” question, in the *Treatise*, as poised between Locke and Berkeley—or perhaps also as partly prefiguring Kant—unable, or unwilling, to decide between (or among) them. Locke is sure that there is an external (non-mental) object which we know partly to resemble or correspond to what we sense. Berkeley is sure that there is not. (And Kant, later, will be sure that there is indeed an external object, as Locke holds, but one whose nature is entirely unknown to us.) In some passages Hume seems to be “Lockean” (with revisions or qualifications), in others Berkeleyan, and in still others “proto-Kantian.” As I will suggest below, I am inclined to think that, at the end of the day, Hume favours Locke—at any rate, not Berkeley—though without conviction (on Hume’s part) that this position can be justified.

22 The passage is echoed at EHU 12.1.11 (SBN 152–53).

23 To make the matter concrete, what, on a purely “object” interpretation, would differentiate a concurrent occasion of motion and extension at a place and time from an occasion of a sensing motion and extension concurrently at that place and time? An occurrence is simply not the same as an experience. Every experience is an occurrence, but not every occurrence is an experience. An occurrence can happen where there are no persons or animals around; an experience cannot. There is no good reason to believe that Hume would have supposed that every occurrence of qualities jointly manifested will have been an experience of those qualities, or a perception. One might hope to specify a perception as an occurrence of a quality set at spatio-temporal coordinates which coincided with the presence of a human being or other sentient animal at those coordinates. But it would appear that there might always be merely bodily cases of such quality clusters that were not appropriately psychological. In any case, there is no textual indication that Hume thought in anything like such terms. Further, for what it may be worth, the term “occurrence(s)” occurs only once in the whole course of the *Treatise*—at 3.2.10.4 (SBN 553), well beyond Hume’s Book 1 discussions of impressions and ideas.

24 In fact, the problem for the “pure” object interpreter of perceptions is still worse than indicated already. I have argued that Hume will need, and does avail himself of, psychological “ings” in his account of the ontology of the mind. But even if he did not, and some such notion as one of occurrences were held to suffice, this will not evade the

“ing”/“ed” issue, since occurrences are themselves “ings”—they are individual cases of “occurrences,” particular states or events taking place.

25 We must note as well, though, that Hume sometimes seems explicitly to characterize ideas (at least) in object mode. Thus, for example: “Blue and green are different simple ideas” (T 1.1.7.5, Appendix; SBN 637; Hume’s emphases).

26 In parallel fashion, we may note that just as a visual sense datum—if there were such a thing—would be coloured and extended, so too would there be tactile sense data, and they would be hard, etc. It seems useful to call these phenomenological features, and to speak of phenomenological colour, extension, hardness, etc. (It is in virtue of such a conception, and mode of expressing it, that we grasp clearly the fact that Samuel Johnson, contrary to his suppositions, did not refute Berkeley by kicking a stone.)

27 This may be seen most emphatically and unequivocally in T 1.4.5.7 (SBN 234).

28 Broughton, “Impressions and Ideas,” 43.

29 Dicker, *Hume’s Epistemology and Metaphysics*.

30 Copleston, *A History of Philosophy*, 5:72 also notes that ideas for Hume can be concepts as well as images.

31 Dicker, *Hume’s Epistemology and Metaphysics*, 156.

32 Broughton, “Impressions and Ideas,” 47, my emphasis.

33 It is to be noted that Broughton’s paper explicitly aims to raise a number of difficulties for Hume’s account, as well as to offer exposition. She does not, among these difficulties, bring forward “ing”/“ed” complexities.

34 Merrill, *Historical Dictionary of Hume’s Philosophy*, 206–207.

35 David Fate Norton, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Hume*.

36 Imprecision or ambiguity will be found even in Lorne Falkenstein’s generally clear interpretation of Humean sensory impressions as literally having sensory qualities. “On Hume’s account . . . simultaneously experience a great number of impressions of some tangible quality, such as felt solidity . . . or smoothness or coldness” (Falkenstein, “Hume and Reid on Hardness,” 34; my emphasis) Compare this with remarks that might be made about a canvas painting depicting a brick building. The painting is canvas, the building depicted is not; the painting is not brick, the building is. Taken by itself, one would suppose that an assertion that there has occurred an impression of solidity (or smoothness or coldness) should no more imply that the impression itself is solid, smooth, or cold, than would an assertion that there is a painting of a brick building imply that the painting itself is brick.

37 Stroud, *The Quest for Reality*.

38 Price, *Hume’s Theory of the External World*.

39 Copleston, likewise, in his account of Hume, refers without qualification to “impressions or sense-data” (*A History of Philosophy*, 5:72).

40 Ainslie, “Hume’s Perceptions,” forthcoming, 2. With, as well, a number of significant divergences, Ainslie’s important paper reaches conclusions about impressions and ideas in Hume which are similar to those defended in the present account.

41 Bennett, *Locke, Berkeley, Hume*, 22; Stroud, *Hume*, chap. 2; Fogelin, *Hume's Scepticism in A Treatise of Human Nature*, chap. 6; Waxman, *Hume's Theory of Consciousness*, 10, 18; Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy*, 14.

42 Scrutiny of the secondary literature reinforces a conclusion that clear and unequivocal articulation of either the "act" or "object" interpretation is somewhat rare. Most Hume scholars seem to proceed as though the tacit truth condition for an impression might be expressed (in contemporary parlance) as: "x is an impression if x is a sense datum (or other interior particular) or an experiencing of a sense datum (or interior particular)," the interpreter either non-committal between the disjuncts, or favouring one for one context, the other in another, usually without commenting on or appearing to notice the difference. As the examples of Dicker and Broughton cited above show, the "act" reading is sometimes explicitly affirmed; even if, as we saw, Dicker at least appears subsequently to adopt the "object" interpretation. Another interpreter of Hume's impressions and ideas who explicitly takes an "ing" view is Cass Weller. In "Why Hume is a Direct Realist," Weller says that "impressions of sense and their inferentially produced ideas are assertoric truth-valued-representings" (263).

43 Don Garrett, "Hume's naturalistic theory of representation," 305.

44 Barring, perhaps, a psychophysical reductive identity theory, for which a mental state, being concurrently a brain state, might be said to have some observable sensory quality. There will be little reason to assign a theory of this kind to thinkers before the twentieth century.

45 "The dualistic view of perception, as a relation of a subject to an object, is one which, following the leadership of William James, empiricists have now for the most part abandoned. The distinction between 'seeing the sun' as a mental event and the immediate object of my seeing is now generally rejected as invalid, and in this view I concur." (Russell, *Human Knowledge: Its Scope and Limits*, 205. James develops his idea of the collapse of the act/object distinction for perceptual experiences in *Essays in Radical Empiricism*. Vaihinger argues, in *The Philosophy of As If*, that the division of an occasion of primary (sensory or affective) experience into subject, state, and object, is a fiction, in the technical sense he develops in the book; Vaihinger explicitly attributes this (supposed) insight to Hume (59). Many would add Ernst Mach to the ranks of those who identify perceivings with what is perceived. Armstrong briefly discusses this identifying thesis in *Perception and the Physical World* (72–73), remarking that "[t]his partial identity between the mind and the thing that is perceived is a strange doctrine. . . . Nevertheless, certain thinkers were prepared to swallow the paradox and to combine Phenomenalism with the 'bundle' theory of the mind. We find such a doctrine in Ernst Mach and in Bertrand Russell. (Russell bases his position to some extent on William James and the American 'Neutral Monists' who were influenced by James.)"

46 There is a certain irony that this idea is found in Hume's great opponent Thomas Reid. "The form of the expression, I feel pain, might seem to imply, that the feeling is something distinct from the pain felt; yet, in reality, there is no distinction. As thinking a thought is an expression which could signify no more than thinking, so feeling a pain signifies no more than being pained. What we have said of pain is applicable to every other mere sensation." (*An Inquiry into the Human Mind*, 168). Reid of course differentiates sensations from perceptions, and his critique of Hume makes much of his failure to do the same thing.

47 Carnap, *The Logical Structure of the World*, 98–110.

48 Although he does not explicitly present or identify his view in this way, Lorne Falkenstein's interpretation of at least one category of perceptions might be construed as advocating an amalgam, or "ing-ed" identification, view, at least for sensory cases.

49 The alternative view, attributed to Falkenstein and perhaps to Garrett, according to which some perceptions really do themselves have the relevant sensory qualities, faces the problem of explaining why non-sensory perceptions are of such different types, according to Hume, but yet both sorts of them a single kind of thing, perceptions; with Hume nowhere appearing to notice or comment on this. Different kinds of perceptions can have different properties, obviously—seeings have properties which hearings do not, just as items-seen have properties lacked by items-heard, etc. But the problem seems more acute. On the interpretation in question, some perceptions are literally extended, coloured, moving, etc., and others have no location. It will be difficult not to see these as different kinds of entities. The position is nonetheless consistent, logically possible, and arguably encouraged by some of the things which Hume says in T 1.4.2 and 1.4.5, even if nowhere else. But this interpretive line is avoidable, easily in the rest of the corpus, and, with a modicum of care, in these sections also. If we regard Hume's view as strictly the position that all perceptions are "ings," some of them (at least)—the straightforward sensory ones among them—with intentional structure—they are of items (subjective phenomenological qualities, most likely)—then we can think of him as, a little confusingly, but not weirdly, sometimes assigning to some of those perceptions properties true strictly just of those intentional items. (Rather as, as we noted above, Sellars saw Hume doing.) It is less weird, or odd, given that the intentional items are just as mental, private, interior, and subjective, as the states are whose objects they are.

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