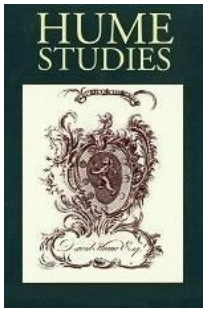

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Stefanie Rocknak's stimulating, challenging, and highly original new book, *Imagined Causes: Hume's Conception of Objects*, is helpfully summarized on its back cover as follows:

> This book provides the first comprehensive account of Hume's conception of objects in Book I of *A Treatise of Human Nature*. What, according to Hume, are objects? Ideas? Impressions? Mind-independent objects? All three? None of the above? Through a close textual analysis, Rocknak shows that Hume thought that objects are imagined ideas. But, she argues, he struggled with two accounts of how and when we imagine such ideas. On the one hand, Hume believes that we always and universally imagine that objects are the causes of our perceptions. On the other hand, he thought that we only imagine such causes when we reach a "philosophical" level of thought.

I will examine these two theses about Hume in turn: first, that he held that "objects are imagined ideas"; and second, that he "struggled with two accounts of how and when we imagine such ideas." In order to focus on these two theses, I will be forced to pass over without consideration a wealth of material on related topics that amply repays careful attention. My excuse is that, as Rocknak recognizes and as the back-cover summary goes on to proclaim, accepting even just these two central theses would involve fundamental alterations in our understanding of Hume's philosophy. I will argue that the truth of the two theses would carry major costs to the consistency of Hume's philosophy. I will also argue, however, that these are costs that we, and Hume, can avoid paying.

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I. The First Thesis: Objects as Imagined Ideas

Rocknak's first thesis, that "objects are imagined ideas" for Hume, has three main terms: "objects," "ideas," and "imagine." In order to understand the thesis, therefore, we must first understand how she uses each of these terms.

Objects. Rocknak holds that Hume employs the term "objects" in (by my count) at least five senses in the *Treatise*, but the sense she employs in the first thesis is what she regards as Hume's dominant sense of the term.[1] This sense includes within its scope what he calls "bodies" (29, 75n) and carries the entailment that objects are the causes of our sense impressions (what Hume calls "impressions of sensation"). At the same time, however, this sense of the term does *not* carry any essential implication that objects have *mind-independent existence*—since on her view, Hume asserts that there are real bodies but does not "think that objects are mind-independent things; he is not a realist" (xiv).

Ideas. Rocknak grants that Hume uses the term "ideas" to designate mental particulars (xiv) that are either "copied" from impressions or composed of simpler ideas that are each "copied" from impressions (4, 10). She denies, however, that Hume holds "the replication theory" that, she reports, James Beattie, Lorne Falkenstein, and I attribute to him. This "replication theory," as she defines it, is the doctrine that "impressions and ideas must share the exact same [intrinsic] qualities (in differing degrees of vivacity)" (25). Thus, according to Rocknak, Humean ideas that are copied from visual impressions—unlike the visual impressions themselves—do not literally have such qualities as color (23, 65).

Imagine. To "imagine" something, in Hume's typical usage, is to form a non-memory idea *of* that thing,[2] often by combining simpler ideas. To "imagine an idea," in this sense, would thus be to form *an idea of an idea*—that is, to form a second-order idea of the kind that Hume mentions in the *Treatise*[3] (T 1.3.8.16; SBN 106) as making our thought *about* ideas possible. When Rocknak writes that objects are "imagined ideas," however, she does not mean that objects are ideas *of* ideas, but rather that objects simply *are* ideas constructed by a process of imagination—specifically, of what she calls the "transcendental imagination" (84). They are also imagined *as* being the causes of sense impressions.

Hence, in saying that "objects are imagined ideas" for Hume, Rocknak is interpreting him as claiming that bodies are in fact mental particulars—specifically, ideas that are composed of simpler ideas copied from impressions but lacking some or all of the intrinsic qualities of those impressions—and that these bodies are produced by an exercise of the faculty of imagination. The costs of this interpretation to the consistency of Hume's philosophy are high, in at least four different respects. First, largely because many of Hume's uses of the term "object" clearly cannot be understood in the stipulated preferred sense, Rocknak requires that he equivocate among multiple different and largely incompatible senses of the term, switching among them seemingly without warning. Second, if we combine Rocknak's interpretive claim that *all objects are ideas* with her further interpretive claim that *all objects are causes of sense impressions*, it seems we can infer that, for Hume, *all objects are ideas that cause sense impressions*. Yet as Hume defines his terms, any impressions that are (immediately) caused by ideas will not be

impressions of sensation at all but rather "impressions of reflection" (T 1.1.2.1; SBN 7–8). Third, in denying that Hume accepts "the replication theory," Rocknak requires that Hume reject his own explicit statement that "impressions and ideas differ only in their strength and vivacity" (T 1.1.7.5; SBN 19)[4] and also that he undermine his own explanation of sympathy as transforming an idea into an impression simply by increasing its degree of vivacity (T 2.1.11.7–8; SBN 319–20). Finally, in holding that bodies are ideas *produced by the imagination* for Hume, she makes Humean bodies *causally dependent* on the mind for their existence, thus contradicting his own definition of "bodies" as things having not only [i] a "continu'd existence . . . even when they are not present to the senses" but also [ii] an existence "distinct from the mind and perception" that requires both [ii(a)] "*external* position as well as [ii(b)] the [causal] *independence* of their existence and operation" (T 1.4.2.2; SBN 188, emphasis in original).

Fortunately, I think, it is not necessary to pay these costs. First, as I read Hume, he does not use the term "object" in fundamentally different senses at all. Rather, he consistently uses it in the sense that the *Oxford English Dictionary* describes as "philosophical," traces back to 1651 (citing Hobbes), and defines as follows: "a thing [considered as] perceived, thought of, known, etc." Impressions, ideas, minds, and mind-independent (that is, "continu'd and distinct") bodies are *all* such "objects" for Hume, on my reading, although the context often limits what specific kinds of objects (for example "external objects") are under discussion in a particular passage. In accordance with this meaning, "the object of" a representational perception, whether that perception is an idea or an impression, is simply and consistently what that perception represents.[5] When Hume writes that the vulgar do not "distinguish betwixt the objects and perceptions of the senses" (T 1.4.2.31; SBN 202), he means that they do not draw a distinction between sense impressions themselves and the (mind-independent) things that the sense impressions represent and thereby allow us to perceive.

Second, it is not necessary to interpret Hume as holding, contrary to his definition of "impression of sensation," that *objects are ideas that cause sense impressions*. As just explained, he certainly holds that *some objects are ideas*, and also that *some ideas have bodies as their objects* (as is evident from the fact that we think about bodies). He also agrees that bodies are objects that cause sense impressions. It does not follow, however, and Hume nowhere implies, that any *bodies are themselves ideas*, or that any *ideas cause sense impressions*.

Third, it is not necessary to interpret Hume as rejecting the "replication theory." Rocknak postulates that Hume *must* reject it because the theory has two absurd entailments: (i) that a thought about an impression (such as one of *orange* or *sweet*) would either *be* that impression, or would *cause* that impression (26); and (ii) that merely thinking about a bodily event (such as *getting a sunburn* or *jumping off the Empire State Building*) would produce that bodily event and all of its consequences (such as *having a sunburn*, or *being dead in the morgue*), but "in a less vivacious way" (15). In fact, however, neither of these is an entailment of the replication theory at all, at least in the form in which I have attributed it to Hume.

Concerning the first proposed entailment—(i) above—Rocknak writes that "the most compromising passage for the replication theory" from the *Treatise* is this: "To give a child an idea of scarlet or orange, of sweet or bitter, I present the objects, or in other words, convey

to him these impressions; but proceed not so absurdly, as to endeavor to produce the impressions by exciting the ideas" (T 1.1.1.8; SBN 5). She continues, "Thinking *about* an impression neither is, nor causes us to have an impression. Thus, ideas are qualitatively different from impressions" (26). But this is a *non sequitur*; there is no reason why an idea need bring with it the additional vivacity required to make it into an impression. One might equally well argue that, since having an impression *does* often "cause us to have" an idea of the impression, ideas are *not* qualitatively different from impressions. It is true that, for Hume, *thinking* with ideas is not, and generally does not lead to, the kind of *feeling* that characterizes the having of impressions. But this fact in no way violates the replication theory, since Hume explains this difference between thinking and feeling precisely as a difference of vivacity (liveliness), not as a difference in some other intrinsic quality.

Concerning the second proposed entailment—(ii) above—it is entirely compatible with the replication theory that ideas be used to represent things as having qualities (such as *being one mile long, being sunburnt,* or *falling from a building*) that the impression-resembling ideas themselves do not have. Furthermore, although having an idea of a bodily event may or may not lead to an idea of the bodily consequences of that event, the idea need not and—unless it happens to incite suitable passions and volitions—generally will not produce those bodily consequences themselves in any form.

Finally, it is not necessary to interpret Hume as holding that bodies are ideas or are produced by the imagination, in violation of his definition of bodies as having an existence that is causally independent of the mind. In defense of treating Humean bodies as ideas, Rocknak cites Hume's well-known paragraph of the *Treatise* distinguishing "two systems [of] reality": "the first . . . the object of the memory and senses; the second of the judgment" (T 1.3.9.3; SBN 107–108). As I interpret her, she treats the paragraph as providing a license to systematically *conflate* ideas of bodies with the bodies that are their objects (53–58). Such a reading might be plausible if we understood the paragraph as offering a reductive definition (in the style of Berkeley) of the "reality" of bodies themselves to the "reality" of the ideas *of* them, with the latter "reality" understood in turn as the ideas' having a certain vivacity and coherence with other ideas. In fact, however, the passage is not best read as a *metaphysically reductive definition* of the "reality" of bodies to features of ideas of them. Instead, it provides a *psychological explanation* of how the mind manages to attribute (either correctly or incorrectly) real existence *to* the distinct objects that certain ideas represent, which it is said to do as a result of certain features of the ideas *with which* we represent those objects. The reductive reading greatly exceeds, while the psychological reading perfectly suits, the modest needs of the context of the paragraph, which calls only for an explanation of why the associative relations of contiguity and resemblance do not lead to inference in the way that the associative relation of cause and effect does.[6]

II. The Second Thesis: Incompatible Accounts of Objects as Causes of Impressions

Rocknak's second thesis is that Hume's *Treatise* provides two different and incompatible accounts of how we first come to distinguish "objects"—in her primary sense of the term, which encompasses bodies within its scope—as the *causes* of our sense impressions. Unsurprisingly, one of these is simply Hume's familiar and often-discussed account, in the later paragraphs of the section "Of scepticism with regard to the senses," of the origin of the "philosophical system" of "double existence" as a reflective replacement for the earlier and more natural "vulgar" system that attributes "continu'd and distinct existence" to our impressions of sensation themselves (T 1.4.2.44–56; SBN 210–18). On this account, finding by means of a few simple experiments (such as pressing one's eyeball) that our sense impressions lack this kind of existence, yet unable to give up the previous belief that there *are* "continu'd and distinct existences," we come to conceive of—and believe in—a second set of objects as continued and distinct causes of these impressions.

The distinctive and surprising element of Rocknak's thesis is her claim that Hume provides *another* account of how we come "always and universally" to conceive of bodies as continued and distinct causes of our sense impressions that is prior to, and independent of, the mental operations that give rise first to the vulgar system and then (as a replacement) to the philosophical system of bodies. On this other Humean account, Rocknak asserts, the mind "always and universally" employs "transcendental imagination" to conceive, and "transcendental probable reasoning" to believe in, a "secret" and "transcendental" cause for a set of sense impressions and memories, a cause having a "perfect identity" that cannot be possessed by any mere impressions themselves. Rocknak finds this account to be expressed in three different places in the *Treatise*—first near the beginning of the section "Of probability; and of the idea of cause and effect" (T 1.3.2) and then twice in succession in relatively early portions of "Of scepticism with regard to the senses" (T 1.4.2). According to Rocknak, Hume regards philosophers' acceptance of the philosophical system as "mistaken" (181), but he regards the belief that results from the universal and transcendental process, which is not dependent on the vulgar system, as "justified" (240).[7]

The costs of this interpretation to the consistency of Hume's philosophy are high in at least three different respects. First, as Rocknak emphasizes, it requires Hume both to affirm and to deny that it is *only after and in response to* rejecting the vulgar system that we come to conceive of bodies as continued and distinct causes of our sense impressions. Because she finds both accounts of this belief expressed within the same section of the *Treatise*, moreover, it is particularly difficult to understand how Hume could have missed the conflict.[8] Second, it requires Hume to deny that impressions can have "perfect identity" even when they *satisfy* his definition of "perfect identity" as "invariable and uninterrupt'd existence through a supposed variation of time" (T 1.4.2.30, T 1.4.6.6; SBN 201, 253). Third, it requires Hume to postulate special "transcendental" forms of probable reasoning and causation that evidently do not involve or require *constant conjunction*, contrary to his explicit accounts of probable reasoning and causation.[9]

Fortunately, it is not necessary to pay these costs either, or so I judge. For as I read the *Treatise*, none of the three passages that Rocknak identifies constitutes an account of the conception of bodies as causes of sense impressions at all. In the interests of space, I will consider in detail only the first passage, commenting somewhat more briefly on the others. The first passage reads:

> There is nothing in any objects to perswade us, that they are either always *remote* or always *contiguous*; and when from experience and observation we discover, that their relation in this particular is invariable, we always conclude there is some secret *cause*, which separates or unites them. The same reasoning extends to *identity*. We readily suppose an object may continue individually the same, tho' several times absent from and present to the senses; and ascribe to it an identity, notwithstanding the interruption of the perception, whenever we conclude, that if we had kept our eye or hand constantly upon it, it wou'd have convey'd an invariable and uninterrupted perception. But this conclusion beyond the impressions of our senses can be founded only on the connexion of *cause and effect*; nor can we otherwise have any security, that the object is not chang'd upon us, however much the new object may resemble that which was formerly present to the senses. Whenever we discover such a perfect resemblance, we consider, whether it be common in that species of objects; whether possibly or probably any cause cou'd operate in producing the change and resemblance; and according as we determine concerning these causes and effects, we form our judgment concerning the identity of the object. (T 1.3.2.2; SBN 74; emphasis in original)

On Rocknak's interpretation, this passage constitutes a different, transcendental account of the belief in bodies as causes of sense impressions that are distinct from the impressions themselves. Her defense of this interpretation depends on three crucial claims about the terminology of the passage. These may be summarized as follows:

(i) By "contiguous," Hume is referring to the unity among the parts of a single complex thing, and by "remote" he means "distinct"—that is, "causally independent of perception" (95). Moreover, the phrase "invariable and uninterrupted" is "roughly interchangeable" with "continu'd and distinct" throughout the *Treatise* (131).[10]

(ii) By "species of objects," Hume means a set of resembling sense impressions and memories.

(iii) In his references to a "secret *cause*, which separates or unites" and to "identity," Hume is proposing that the mind "always" immediately responds to resembling sense impressions and memories by postulating an unperceived cause of the sense impressions and memories that has an invariable and uninterrupted existence. Furthermore,

the mind makes this inference, on Hume's view, without reliance on experience of past constant conjunctions.

As I read the passage, however, none of these three interpretive claims is accurate. In context, Hume's purpose in the passage is to explain and vindicate his claim that *only reasoning based on the relation of cause and effect* can inform us about relations of either (a) *situation in time and place* or (b) *identity* that go beyond the information provided by our senses. Here, as everywhere else up to this point in the *Treatise*—and well beyond, until "Of scepticism with regard to the senses" (T 1.4.2)—Hume takes it entirely for granted that our senses inform us about the existence and relations of (continued and distinct) bodies; the psychological and epistemological bases for this assumption are discussed only later, in "Of scepticism with regard to the senses" itself.

Accordingly, my interpretive counter-proposals for the passage are as follows:

(i) In writing of "objects"—understood univocally, in the way I have indicated in section I—as being "contiguous" or "remote," Hume means their closeness or distance in space *to each other* (that is, their relative *situation*). His point is that we can *infer* that two objects *once* observed to be contiguous or (alternatively) remote from each other will *continue* to be so, even when unobserved, *only* if we have information about *causes of motion*. These relations of contiguity and remoteness between objects in space are entirely different from the non-relational invariableness (lack of qualitative change) and uninterruptedness (lack of a temporal gap in existence) that are required for *perfect identity*—which something may have whether it is spatially located or not, and whether it is perceived or not. Furthermore, the four characteristics just considered (contiguity, remoteness, invariableness, and uninterruptedness) are all different from the continuity (continued existence *while unperceived*) and distinctness (external position to and causal independence of the mind)—both of which are relations to the mind—that make something a "body" on either the vulgar or the philosophical view of the external world.

(ii) By "species of objects," Hume means *kinds* of objects—for example, books, or snowflakes. His point is that we can infer an *identity* between an object perceived at one time and a "perfectly resembling" object perceived at another time only on the basis of *causal* information about whether there has been a "change" or substitution of object between the two times. In judging about whether such a change has occurred—for example, in judging whether the book or snowflake I previously perceived has been replaced by another—it is highly relevant to know (on the basis of causal information) whether distinct members of that same kind of object (books, snowflakes) are often ("commonly") "perfectly resembling" with others of their kind or not.

(iii) When Hume writes of "some secret *cause*, which separates or unites" objects, he means only that when two objects are found always to be close or always to be distant in *spatial situation*, we infer that this continuing correlation in their motions has some cause (for example, glue or magnetism). In contrast, when Hume writes that

> we ascribe "an identity, notwithstanding the interruption of the perception, whenever we conclude, that if we had kept our eye or hand constantly upon it, it wou'd have convey'd an invariable and uninterrupted perception," he is simply explaining what it would have been to *perceive*, rather than to *infer*, the (perfect) identity of a single object over the period of time in question. While the capacity of that object to exist unperceived naturally presupposes that it has what he will later call a "continu'd and distinct existence," he is not here discussing or explaining that presupposition.

The second passage that Rocknak cites in defense of her thesis is Hume's discussion at T 1.4.2.20–23 (SBN 195–99) of the inference that arises "from the understanding, and from custom in an indirect and oblique manner" in response to what he calls the "coherence" of our sense impressions. As I read the passage, however, this "irregular kind of reasoning" (as he later calls it in T 1.4.5.20; SBN 242) does not lead to the belief in *causes* of sense impressions that are distinguished from the perceptions themselves. Rather, as its location in the text indicates, it is simply part—and a much lesser part, in comparison with the role played by what Hume calls the "constancy" of our sense impressions—of the mechanism by which the vulgar attribute continued and distinct existence to the bodies that they do *not* distinguish from their sense impressions.

Finally, the third passage that Rocknak cites is Hume's immediately following discussion, at T 1.4.2.26–30 (SBN 200–201), of "*invariableness and uninterruptedness*" as the "principle of individuation." Rocknak writes that having "the idea of perfect identity" requires "imagining an invariable, uninterrupted cause of a series of resembling but interrupted and changing . . . impressions and/or ideas that exactly represent impressions" (149). As I read the passage, however, it makes no mention of *imagining a cause* in order to conceive of perfect identity. Rather, an impression that does not change even while other perceptions do change fully satisfies the condition of invariableness and uninterruptedness required for perfect identity. Moreover, it is precisely the mind's tendency to mistake successions of impressions exhibiting mere interrupted "constancy" (as, for example, when one blinks) *for* such invariable and uninterrupted impressions that leads the vulgar, on Hume's account, to attribute a continued and distinct existence to their sense impressions. They do so, he explains, in order to preserve the supposed perfect identity when they subsequently become aware of the interruptions in their perception.

If I am reading Hume correctly, then, we are free to interpret him as offering only a single, consistent account of the origins of the belief in bodies that cause sense impressions; as granting perfect identity to all impressions that satisfy the definition of perfect identity (as invariableness and uninterruptedness); and as treating all probable reasoning and causal relations as requiring constant conjunction, just as he had previously required, without the need to postulate a transcendental imagination operating beyond the scope of the ordinary imagination. More generally, as I read Hume he is a mitigated skeptic but no idealist, of either a Berkeleian or proto-Kantian kind. If that seems like a cost, as it may to many, I hope the dividends in consistency are still worth the price. No matter how we balance that ledger, however, we owe Stefanie Rocknak a sincere debt of gratitude for her provocative, informa-

tive, and closely argued book. It unquestionably repays the investment of careful study with ample dividends.

NOTES

1 Following Marjorie Grene, "Objects of Hume's *Treatise*," the other senses recognized by Rocknak include: (i) a "phenomenalist sense," in which "objects are impressions"; (ii) an "intentional sense," in which "objects are the objects of thought"; and (iii) a "realist sense," in which "objects are mind-independent things" (76). Rocknak also claims to find a further "traditionally overlooked sense in which he uses the word 'objects.'" In this fourth sense, objects "are either impressions or are *ideas* that 'exactly represent' impressions"; ideas of this kind are either simple ideas or memories. Objects in this fourth sense, she goes on to call "proto-objects" (75).

2 For a few typical examples, see T 1.2.5.3, 1.3.9.18, 1.4.5.27, 2.2.3.9, 2.2.9.14, and 2.3.8.12; SBN 55, 117, 245, 351, 386, and 437.

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.

4 I leave aside as not directly relevant to the present question Hume's subsequent admission at the conclusion of his Appendix to the *Treatise* that "two ideas of the same object" may differ *from one another* in aspects other than "degrees of force and vivacity" (T App 22; SBN 637).

5 Hume states that passions do not represent, but he grants that impressions of sensation do (see Garrett, "Hume's Naturalistic Theory of Representation"). Because passions are impressions of reflection that do not represent, he is free to define "the object" of an "indirect passion" (such as pride, humility, love, or hatred) as the person or sensible creature to whom the passion "directs our view," as distinguished from the "quality" that is the "cause" of the passion (T 2.1.2.4 and T 2.2.1.2; SBN 278 and 329). Even in this technical usage, however, an "object" remains "a thing thought of."

6 It is also possible that Rocknak is motivated by an assumption that for Hume *only* mind-dependent perceptions can exist, or even be conceived to exist, so that bodies, if they are real at all, *must* either be impressions or ideas or some kind. While some of Hume's readers do still make this assumption, it depends on misinterpretations of the text (primarily of T 1.2.6.8–9, 1.4.2.56, and 1.4.5.15; SBN 67–68, 217–18, and 239) that cannot be discussed in detail here (but see Garrett, *Hume*, 97–105). Rocknak later indicates, however, that she regards Hume as agnostic about the existence of mind-independent objects (262), and agnosticism seems to allow their possibility and conceivability.

7 Rocknak defines "transcendental" as meaning both "presupposes ordinary experience" (120) and "presupposed by ordinary experience" (122). I assume that she intends the latter.

8 Rocknak does claim that Hume later became aware of the conflict, and that this helps to explain his dissatisfaction, expressed in the Appendix, with his account of personal identity.

9 Rocknak also allows that "transcendental imagination" violates the Copy Principle (152), although I am not certain whether she is required to do so.

10 Rocknak uses the qualifier "roughly" because there are complications with invariability that she finds difficult to accommodate. However, these do not affect the current analysis.

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