

I. Epistemology: The Copy Principle:

The only ways, says Hume, to solve the problems of disagreements & speculations regarding "abstruse questions" is to "enquire seriously into the nature of human understanding, and show from an exact analysis of it powers and capacities, that it is by no means fitted for such remote and abstruse objects."

A. Starting point is the Content of the Mind: Perceptions of the mind take two forms: impressions & ideas The Copy Principle:

1. The contents of the mind can all be reduced to materials given to us by the senses and experience, & those materials Hume calls perceptions. Thus, perceptions of the mind take two forms: impressions & ideas. 2. Hume's epistemology starts from the distinction between impressions & ideas. a. An "impression" is the original stuff of thought; b. An "idea" is merely a copy of an impression. This is called the "copy principle." *This is his general maxim & first principle in his science of human nature.* 3. Difference between an impression & idea is only the degree of their vividness. Thus, the original impression is an impression, as when we hear, see, feel, love, hate, desire, or will. *These impressions are "lively" & clear when we have them. When we reflect upon these impressions, we have ideas of them, & those ideas are less-lively versions of the original impressions.* For ex., to feel pain is an impression, whereas the memory of this sensation is an idea. Thus, in every particular, impressions & their corresponding ideas are alike, differing only in their degree of vivacity. 4. Though ideas are copies of impressions (not quite so vivid & compelling) they are accurate duplications of impressions. 5. This difference between impressions & ideas is crucial because when faced w/ obscure & confused ideas, we can, on the basis of copy principle, trace them back to their more vivid & clearer originals, thus, sorting out all difficulties & exposing fictions, which due to our natural inclination to relish far-fetched ideas that we take for genuine ideas. 6. **Without impressions there would be no ideas.** Why? An idea is a copy of an impression. Thus, it follows that for every idea there must be a prior impression.

B. Faculty of Imagination Joins Two or More Ideas:

1. Not every idea reflects a corresponding impression. For example, we've never seen a unicorn even though we have ideas of them. Hume explains that these ideas as being the product of the mind's "*faculty of compounding, transposing, or diminishing the material afforded to use by the senses and experience.*" For ex. our imagination joins two ideas, "horse" & "horn," which we originally acquired as impressions through our senses.

C. Association of Ideas:

Though there is no special faculty of the mind that associates one idea with another, Hume believed that by *observing actual patterns of our thinking & analyzing the groups of our ideas, he had discovered an explanation for the association of ideas.* 1. **Individual ideas become related to each other whenever they possess the following 3 qualities:** (a) resemblance, (b) contiguity [being so near as to be touching] in time or place, & (c) cause & effect. Hume believed that the connection of all ideas to each other could be explained by these qualities & gave the following examples of how they work: [a.] "A picture naturally leads our thoughts to the original [resemblance]; [b]. The mention of one apartment in the building naturally introduces an inquiry... concerning the others [contiguity]; [c] and if we think of a wound, we can scarcely forbear reflecting on the pain which follows it [cause and effect]."3. There must be, says, Hume, "*some bond of union, some associative quality, which commonly prevails... pointing out to every one those simple ideas, which are most proper to be united in a complex one.*" 4. To be sure, there are no operations of the mind that differ in principle from one of these three examples of the association of ideas. 5. The notion of cause and effect was considered to be the central element in knowledge. He took the position that the causal principle is the foundation upon which the validity of all knowledge depends: **The idea of causality arises in the mind when experience certain relations between objects.**

D. Causation:

Hume's most famous & original metaphysical concept:

Treatise of Human Nature, Bk I, pt.iii, & Enquiry, VI-VIII:

1. Q: What impression gives us idea of causality?
a. Locke nor Berkeley challenged basic principle of Causality (though Berkeley did say that we can't discover efficient causes in things, his intention was to look for the cause of phenomena & thus, the predictable order of nature in God's activity). b. For Hume, the very idea of causality is suspect & approached the problem by asking the question: "*What is the origin of causality?*" Since ideas are copies of impressions, Hume asks what impression gives us the idea of causality?

2. Answer: idea of causality arises in mind when we experience certain relations between object. For ex.: When we speak of cause and effect, we mean to say that A causes B. But what kind of relation does this indicate between A & B? Experience offers 3 relations:

- Relation of Contiguity:** A & B are always close together;
- Priority in Time:** For A, the "cause," always precedes B, the "effect";
- Constant Conjunction:** For we always see A followed by B.
- Necessary Connection:** Between A & B there is a necessary connection. Hume observes that relation of contiguity, priority in time, & constant conjunction do not imply a "necessary" connection between objects.

Thus, there is no object that implies the existence of another when we consider objects individually.

For example, no amount of observation of oxygen can ever tell us that when mixed with hydrogen it will give us water. We only know this when we can infer the existence of one object from another.

"It is therefore by experience only that we can infer the existence of one object from another." While we do have impressions of contiguity, priority, and constant conjunction, **we do not have any impression of necessary connections.** **Therefore, causality is not a quality in the objects we observe, but is rather a "habit of association" in the mind produced by the repetition of instanced of A & B.**

Why is this important? By assuming that the causal principle is central to all kinds of knowledge, his attack on this principle undermined the validity of all knowledge. He sees no reason for accepting the principle that whatever beings to exist must have a cause of existence as either intuitive or capable of demonstration. Thus, Hume considered reasoning or thinking a "*species of sensation*" and as such our thinking can't extend beyond our immediate existence.

The Principle of Necessary Causation is not a Matter of Fact. We never actually experience one event's causing another. Our experiences of an event always immediately followed by another, i. e. a constant conjunction of events. However, we never actually experience the 1st event's bringing about the second event; we merely assume that the 1st event brought about the 2nd. There is no logically necessary connection between the 1st event's happening & the second's happening because we can imagine the 1st event's happening w/out the 2nd's happening. Since we never actually experience one event's causing another, the Principle of Necessary Causation is not a Matter of Fact. Since it is neither a Relation of Ideas nor a Matter of Fact, the Principle of Universal Causation is not a genuine truth.

The Principle of Universal Causation, like the concepts of material objects and of the mind, is, false.

E. 2 Types of Truth: Relation Ideas & Matters of

Fact:

1. **Relations of Ideas:** Truths that are true because of the meanings of & the logical relationships between the ideas involved (All bachelors are unmarried) 2. **Matters of Fact:** Truths that are true because they correspond to a direct sense experience (This book is red). **All the things we can think or believe or reason about are either "relations of ideas"**

or "matters of fact."a. **Relation of ideas (ex. 3 x 3 = 9) holds necessarily; its negation implies a contradiction.** Such truths are discoverable by the operation of pure thought, without dependence on what is anywhere existent in the universe. 2. **Each matter of fact is contingent:** its negation is distinct conceivable & represents a possibility. *For ex., the sun will not rise tomorrow is no less intelligible and no more implies a contradiction than the proposition that it will rise.* Thus, thought alone is never sufficient to assure of us the truth of any matter of fact. Sense experience is needed.

3. What turns a thought of something into the belief that it is so is the presence of an impression, not just an idea, of something associated with that things in the past: **A belief is a "lively idea" related to or associated with a present impression.** It is in following out connections established in our minds by past experience that we are led by a present impression to believe in a matter of fact.

4. **Not reason alone, but experience is the source of inference.** a. But reason, even in combination with past experience can't be what lead us from an observed correlation between things of two kinds to the belief that a correlation will continue in the future. b. All inferences from past or present experience to an unobserved matter of fact "*proceed upon*" that principle. c. But no assurance can be given to that principle from reason alone. d. But reason, even when combined with experience can't be what leads us to believe that the future will resemble the past.

5. **Imagination is responsible for making the empirical inferences we do.** a. There are certain general "*principles of the imagination*" according to which ideas naturally come & go in the mind under certain condition. b. It is the task of the "*science of human nature*" to discover such principles, but without itself going beyond experience.

6. **It is certain "principles of the imagination" that explains our belief in a world of enduring objects.** Experience alone can't produce that belief because everything we directly perceive is "*momentary & fleeting.*" & no reasoning could assure us of the existence of something independent of our impressions which continues to exist when they cease.

G. The series of our constantly changing sense impressions presents us with observable features which Hume calls "*constancy and coherence*", and these naturally operate on the mind in such a way as eventually to produce "*the opinion of a continu'd and distinct existence.*" The explanation is complicated, but it is meant to appeal only to psychological mechanisms which can be discovered by "careful and exact experiments, and the observation of those particular effects, which result from [the mind's] different circumstances & situations.

Hume's policy, both in the *Treatise* & in the *Enquiries*, was to apply the Newtonian experimental method to the British empiricists' investigations into the powers & principles of the human mind. The intended result was to be a truly experimental science of human nature. Main purpose of Bk. 1 *Treatise* is to est. empiricism as an empirical fact & thus, examine several metaphysical systems & philosophical problems.

Hume's interest is not metaphysical or epistemological, but moral. Hume's philosophy is first & foremost, a style of life. **Responses:** 1. T. Reid thought that Hume reduced Locke's empiricism & whole "way of ideas" to absurdity; 2. Kant claimed that Hume's thought had "woken him up from his dogmatic slumber; 3. James Beattie & several other Scottish contemporaries found Hume's skepticism was "intolerably irreligious"; 4. Hegelian Thomas Green regarded Hume's philosophy as the Pyrrhonian outcome of Locke's & Berkeley's empiricism; 5. Leslie Stephen thought of him as a "systematic sceptic"; 6. Thomas Huxley, made him, together with Kant, into a founding father of agnosticism. Hume was recognized as "ancestors" by positivists, a founding father by the phenomenologists; similarities have been expressed by postmodernists and antifunctionalists; 7 A tradition comparing aspects of Humean philosophy with aspects of Buddhism (Stafford Betty). **Problems with copy principle:** (1) It is not difficult to imagine an idea that may be more "lively" than an impression from which it is copied. But perhaps the difference is that these 2 kinds of perceptions that impressions are the originals of which ideas are the copies; there is also the case of complicated or complex ideas: For ex., I can't honestly say that my idea of Dallas, Tx, is an accurate copy of any particular impression or set of impressions. But the basic principle remains: All simple ideas re copies of simple impressions. The only exception Hume acknowledged is that of a continuous gradation of qa quality-his example is the color blue-which is only miss one particular grade. But in his view, our mind would be able to fill the gap, and produce an idea without copying it from a former impression. Is Hume right to suggest that all exceptions to the copy principle are far-fetched? Does it not mean that the copy principle is to be regarded an empirical generalization, rather than an a priori principle? But if so, how is Hume entitled to use the copy principle to vet, so to speak, our ideas, as he seems enthusiastically & often rather aggressively inclined to do [Treatise, "Of modes and substances", opening section]. Also, all the ideas Hume sets out to investigate through the copy principle turn out to be, for a variety of reasons, recalcitrant to it. Ideas of space and time, ideas of empty space and changeless time, the idea of substance, the idea of our own self, the idea of virtue, and the idea of the necessary connexion between cause and effect. The use of the copy principle produces a taxonomy of these odd ideas. Some of them Hume openly admits he does not know how to solve, while others are indeed found to copy some impression, but not of the sort one would have expected [A Companion to Early Modern Philosophy, ed. Steven Nadler, "David Hume" by Marina Frasca-Spada, pp. 483-504.