

David Hume, a Scottish philosopher, historian, & essayist, is customarily classified, along with Locke & Berkeley as one of the leading figures of 18th century British Empiricism. Though he did not consider himself an enemy of metaphysics, Hume has often been characterized, esp. by logical positivists seeking a forerunner, as an implacable enemy of metaphysics. "When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion" [Inquiry concerning Human Understanding]. He understood metaphysics to consist simply of "all abstract and profound reasoning"-a definition broad enough to include much of his own philosophy. But he did say in *Enquiry* (Sect. I) that the "justest and most plausible objection against a considerable part of metaphysics" is that it is "not properly a science; but arise [s] either from the fruitless efforts of human vanity, which would penetrate into subjects utterly inaccessible to the understanding, or from the craft or popular superstitions" (by which he meant organized religion). His proposed response to this objection, however, was not to abandon all metaphysics, but rather to "cultivate true metaphysics with some care, in order to destroy the false and adulterate." Such cultivation requires a serious enquiry into the nature of human understanding (or we call cognitive psychology) based on experimental method. **Key themes:** (1) In *Treatise and Reasoning* [Treatise, Book 1, Section 1]. (2) He says our perceptions are of 2 kinds: impressions "which all our sensations, passions, and emotions as they make their first appearance in the soul; and ideas, which are the faint images of these impressions in thinking and reasoning" [Treatise, Book 1, Section 1]. (3) Impressions & ideas may be either simple or complex. (4) Impressions cause ideas, but ideas do not cause impressions. (5) We have a faculty of memory which retains ideas in the order in which they occur and a faculty of imagination which is able to rearrange ideas already derived from impressions. (6) Thus, imagination might combine the ideas already derived from impressions of "gold" and "mountain" to form the complex idea of a "golden mountain." (7) New, simple ideas are derived only from ideas. (8) The major difference between impressions & ideas is a difference of degree of forcefulness, impressions being more vivid of the 2 kinds of perceptions. (8). In Appendix of *Treatise* he states that he is unable to explain how perceptions become connected to each to constitute a "bundle."

I. Experimental Method & Mitigated Skepticism:

A. Cultivate True Metaphysics by Means of Experimental Method:

1. *Enquiry must be based on experimental method. His method was to deploy "experience and observation."*

2. One of the conclusions of his enquiry into human cognitive psychology was that all genuine substantive reasoning is either experimental reasoning concerning matters of fact & science, or abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number. 3. Thus, he rejected works of divinity and "school" metaphysics whose arguments were neither. 4. Because of the limitations of our representational & inferential faculties, he recommended "mitigated skepticism".

Mitigated skepticism involves both a degree of modest diffidence(hesitation) about all of one's conclusions & a restriction of philosophy to topics of "common life." This mitigated skepticism which is the natural outcome of the conflict between Pyrrhonian skeptical arguments & our natural irresistible mechanisms of belief-was *intended to forestall positive theorizing both about the ultimate nature of the universe beyond our experience of it, & about matters of speculative theology*. 5. In the broad sense of metaphysics, there is no contradiction in stating that his own philosophy was metaphysical as well as experimental.

II. Representation & Imagination:

Is Imagination Distinct from Intellect?

A. Rationalists Emphasized a distinction between Intellect & Imagination.

1. Rationalists like Descartes, Spinoza, & Leibniz emphasized a distinction between 2 radically different representational faculties of the mind: imagination & intellect. 2. Imagination is a faculty of image-like ideas & intellect is a faculty of non-imagistic ideas, far richer in content than that of imagination.

B. Hume rejected the distinction between intellect & imagination:

1. He treated the imagination as the only representational faculty beyond sensation and memory for he *construed all human cognition processes as operations with image-like ideas*.

C. The rejection of above distinction had 3 metaphysical consequences:

1. *It allowed Hume to try to explicate (make clear the meaning) the content of main concepts employed in metaphysics-such concepts as "cause", "real existence", & "self", for example, that would consistent with status as ideas in the imagination.* How? Since he held on empirical grounds that the simple elements of all ideas are always copied from the simple elements of the "impressions" perceived in experience by seeking the experiences from which "cause", "real existence," & "self" are derived. These metaphysical concepts were facilitated by his theory of abstract ideas: **Abstract ideas: determinate image-like ideas that acquire a more general signification by their association with a general term of a language, a term that in turn serves to excite a disposition to call up other related determinate ideas in the mind as needed.**

2. *It encouraged Hume to deny the validity of many a priori arguments for specific metaphysic theses* such as ontological arguments for God's existence, alleged demonstrations of a need for an underlying *substratum* to support qualities of objects, & alleged a priori proofs of the necessity of a cause for every beginning of existence.

3. *It radically expanded the realm of the metaphysically possible.* By accepting the use of *conceivability as a criterion of possibility in the imagination, i.e., imaginability*, he regarded a wide range of things metaphysically possible, such as causal laws of nature other than actual laws. Since laws of nature can only be discovered by experience & can't be explained as the only possible laws, the actual laws for him what we might call "*brute facts*."

II. CAUSATION:

Hume's most famous & original metaphysical concept:

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

A. Q: What impression gives us idea of causality?

1. 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). 2. 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?**

B. 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:

1. **Relation of Contiguity:** A & B are always close together;
2. **Priority in Time:** For A, the "cause," always precedes B, the "effect";
3. **Constant Conjunction:** For we always see A followed by B.
4. **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.

God: We can't infer from the empirical fact of the universe that God exists.

He was not necessarily an atheist. But by testing our ideas of self and substance to the rigorous principle of empiricism, he ends, to be sure, as a skeptic; it lies entirely beyond the reach of human experience. His rejection of necessary connections of causality undermines traditional proofs for God's existence. Thus, we are not justified in claiming knowledge of God [or even soul, or absolute moral values].

III. WHAT IS EXTERNAL TO US?

A. There is no rational justification for saying that bodies of things

have a continued & independent existence external to us.

1. Our ordinary experience suggests that things do exist external to us, but if we take seriously that our ideas are copies of impressions, then the conclusion must be that all we know are impressions. 2. **Impressions are internal subjective states & are not a clear proof of an external reality** (gap problem). Hume says we always act as though there is a real external world of things, & was willing "*to take for granted in all our reasonings*" that things do exist. 3. But he inquired into the reason why we think there is an external world? (a) Consider: *Our senses don't tell us that things exist independent of us*, (a1) for how do we know that our senses continue to exist if we were to interrupt our sensation of them? (b) & even when we sense something, we are never given a double of view of it whereby we can distinguish it from our impression of it; *we have only impressions*. 5. **Thus, there is no way for the mind to reach beyond impressions or the ideas they make possible.**

B. From our Impressions Imagination becomes Aware of Constancy & Coherence:

1. Our belief that things exist external to us is the product of our imagination as it deals with constancy & coherence. Constancy, for ex., is seen in the arrangement of backyard. Every time I look at the same arrangement of my fruit tree my imagination concludes that when I turn my head away that it will be the same. 2. Coherence is seen, for example, in the changes that takes place when I put a log on the fire. My imagination leads me to believe that the log will become ashes. **Thus, imagination leads me to believe that certain things continue to have an independent existence external to me. But this is a belief and not a rational proof, for the assumption that our impressions are connected with things is "without any foundation in reasoning." Hume extends this skeptical line of reasoning beyond objects or things to consider the existence of self, substance, and God.**

C. Self: Denies we have any Idea of Self:

1. From what impression could idea of self be derived? is there any continuous & identical reality which forms our ideas of the self? Do we have any one impression that is invariably associated with our idea of self? Hume states, "*When I enter most intimately into what I call myself I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception and never can observe anything but the perception.*"

2. **Hume denies the existence of a continuous self-identity & says that the rest of humanity "are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions."** How then do we account for what we think is the self? **It is our power of memory that gives the impression of our continuous identity.** Hume compares the mind to a "*kind of theatre where several perceptions successively make their appearance*" but adds that "*we have not the most distant notion of the place where these scenes are represented.*"

D. Denies of Existence of Any Form of Substance:

1. While Locke retained the idea of substance as that "something we know not what [which has color or shape, & other qualities]," & Berkeley denies the existence of material substance in favor of spiritual substances, Hume denies that substance in any form exists or has any coherent meaning. 2. If what is meant by "*self*" is some form of substance, Hume argues that no such substance can be derived from our impressions of sensation. If the idea of substance is conveyed to our senses, "*which of them, and after what manner? If it be perceived by the eyes, it must be a color; if by the ears, a sound; if by the palate, a taste...*" Therefore if we have no idea of substance, distinct from that of a collection of particular qualities.