

Hume, Distinctions of Reason, and Differential Resemblance

1. Hume presents his theory of abstract ideas and general thinking, then proposes to “employ the same principles to explain that *distinction of reason*, which is so much talk’d of, and is so little understood, in the schools” (1.1.7.17).¹ His purpose is to explain our distinguishing things that are in fact inseparable, and that therefore, by Hume’s lights, are numerically identical--for instance, the color and figure of a globe of white marble. His explanation is that we distinguish the globe’s color and figure by noting that the globe itself stands in different resemblances. We note how it is similar to a white cube and dissimilar to a black sphere, then note how it is similar to the black sphere and dissimilar to the white cube. Making the distinction of reason between the globe’s color and figure amounts just to viewing the globe first in the light of the one partial resemblance and then in the light of the other. So the globe’s color and figure are nothing other than the globe itself. Our talking as if they are distinct things is just a way of acknowledging the underlying differential resemblance of the same thing.

Hume’s main concern is to resolve an apparent tension with some of his principles entailing that we can only distinguish things that are separable and distinct. However, his solution overlooks a difficulty in his appeal to the contrasting partial resemblances that make up the differential resemblance--a situation in which a respect of similarity to one thing is a respect of dissimilarity to a second thing, and a respect of similarity to the second thing is a respect of dissimilarity to the first. Hume willingly embraces the view that the same thing, even a simple, uncomposed, thing, can be similar to something in one respect and be dissimilar to it in another. For example, a simple idea of blue and a simple idea of scarlet will “resemble each other in their simplicity” while being dissimilar in their colors. Additionally, though, Hume thinks that the respects of

¹ David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), cited by (Book.Part.Section.Paragraph). The Appendix and the Abstract of the *Treatise* are cited by (App.Paragraph) and (Abs.Paragraph) respectively.

resemblance are numerically identical with the thing itself (1.1.7.7 note 5App). Unfortunately, it follows that in the identical respect of resemblance, the same thing is both similar and dissimilar to something else. Partial resemblance in the context of differential resemblance thus yields a contradiction.² It may seem that the putative contradiction is merely a result of failing to appreciate the logical subtleties of the situation. I will show that the reverse is true, and that the natural ways to attempt resolution fail. The contradiction undermines not only his account of distinctions of reason, but also his account of abstract ideas, and so his Empiricist program of deriving all ideas from inner and outer sense.

What makes the problem harder is that Hume seems right in what he says about the structures of differential resemblance, partial resemblance, and respects of resemblance. Further, Hume seems right that the respects of resemblance are not numerically distinct things, since they can be unshared properties of utterly simple things. The contradiction in differential resemblance underlying his account of the distinction of reason, seems to result from Hume expressing important truths, without finding a way to express them consistently. Reneging on one of his claims seems to be sacrificing truth for an artificial consistency. New conceptual resources may be necessary to resolve the problem so as to allow for a genuine kind of intrinsic complexity in a simple thing.

I.

2. Discussions of the distinction of reason as it appears in Hume, generally address other concerns. Husserl critiques Hume's version of the distinction, saying that if distinguishing qualities in something simple requires noting the different ways it resembles different things, and if, like qualities, ways of resembling are nothing in addition to individuals, then distinguishing the ways something resembles different things requires making a higher distinction of reason. That is, distinguishing the ways something resembles different things requires noting the different ways the resemblances between some things resemble the resemblances between others. But then, distinguishing these higher ways of resembling requires another even higher distinction of reason, and then

² Phillip D. Cummins gives an insightful sketch of the problem in his "Hume on Qualities," *Hume Studies* 22 (1996), pp. 68, 77. See also Fred Wilson, *Body, Mind and Self in Hume's Critical Realism* (Frankfurt: Ontos, 2008), pp. 159, 166-167.

another, and so on. In other words, given Hume's view, making a distinction of reason entails a vicious regress.³ Weinberg makes a similar criticism, though without casting it as a regress.⁴ Kemp Smith thinks that recognizing resemblances requires having genuinely abstract, general ideas--albeit inseparable from particular ideas--contrary to Hume's contentions.⁵ In a similar vein, Laird, following Stout, argues that association (including especially association by resemblance) "marries only universals."⁶ Kemp Smith also thinks that the distinction of reason is incompatible with, or requires a qualification of, Hume's separability principle, as do Mandelbaum and Bricke.⁷ Bracken takes for granted that the distinction of reason is just incompatible with Hume's inseparability principle, and could be made to work only in an account enriched by "constructed continuants."⁸ Garrett defends Hume against the charge that the distinction of reason is incompatible with his separability principle.⁹ Russow points out that Hume's account of the missing shade of blue requires distinguishing aspects of a simple idea of blue--one in which it resembles nearby simple ideas and one in which it differs from them--and uses Hume's discussion of the distinction of reason to explain why these aspects are not simplicity-threatening parts.¹⁰ Durland reinforces this approach.¹¹ Both R. Butler and Tweyman take the distinction of reason as unproblematic and discuss further applications of it in interpreting Hume's philosophy. They may well be right that Hume depended on it more than is recognized.¹² Wilson argues that Hume's nominalism about

³ See Robert E. Butts, "Husserl's Critique of Hume's Notion of *Distinctions of Reason*," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* (1949), pp. 213-221, esp. 216-217.

⁴ Julius Weinberg, *Abstraction, Relation, and Induction* (Madison & Milwaukee: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1965), pp. 39-40.

⁵ Norman Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume* (London: Macmillan, 1941), p. 266.

⁶ John Laird, *Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature* (New York: Dutton, 1931), pp. 44 and 63.

⁷ Kemp Smith, p. 266, esp. note 1. Maurice Mandelbaum, "The Distinguishable and the Separable: A Note on Hume and Causation," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 12 (1974), p. 242-247. John Bricke, *Hume's Philosophy of Mind* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 71. Laird in effect agrees (p. 83).

⁸ Harry Bracken, "Hume on the 'Distinction of Reason'," *Hume Studies* 10 (1984), especially pp. 89-108. I can't yet say that I follow the reasoning here.

⁹ Don Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume's Philosophy* (Oxford: University Press, 1997), pp. 58-64.

¹⁰ Lilly-Marlene Russow, "Simple Ideas and Resemblance," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 30 (1980), pp. 342-50.

¹¹ Karánn Durland, "Hume's First Principle, His Missing Shade, and His Distinctions of Reason," *Hume Studies* 22 (1996), pp. 105-121.

¹² Ronald J. Butler, "*Distinctiones Rationis*, or The Cheshire Cat Which Left Its Smile Behind It," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 76 (1976), pp. 165-176. Stanley Tweyman, "Hume on Separating

relations--that they are reducible to foundations in the relata--and his account of abstract ideas as based on resemblances, are inconsistent with his account of distinctions of reason, in which distinct abstract ideas apply to a simple impression.¹³ Cummins contends that distinctions of reason are conceptual distinctions mediated by words, rather than being ontological distinctions.¹⁴

The root of the concept lies in Aristotle. In *Physics* III, ch. 3, 202^a12-^b22, Aristotle explains that things that differ in definition can be numerically the same thing. For instance when something moves something else, Aristotle thinks that one and the same motion is both the actualization of the mover's potential to cause motion and also is the actualization of the moved's potential to be put in motion.

Hence there is a single actuality of both alike, just as one to two and two to one are the same interval, and the steep ascent and the steep descent are one -- for these are one and the same, although their definitions are not one.¹⁵

Aristotle illustrates his point with the following "dialectical difficulty" concerning the motion that is both the actualization of the teacher's potential to teach and the actualization of the student's potential to learn:

- (i) The learning is by the student.
- (ii) The teaching is by the teacher.
- (iii) The learning and the teaching are one and the same motion.
- (iv) So, the teaching is by the student.

Aristotle's solution, though he doesn't put it quite this way, is to say:

- (i') The motion as teaching is by the teacher.
- (ii') The motion as learning is by the student.

He holds that these plus (iii) do not yield (iv). To generalize, Aristotle recommends that in such cases we distinguish something in the respect in which it falls under one definition, from itself in the respect in which it falls under another.

the Inseparable," in William B. Todd, ed., *Hume and the Enlightenment* (Edinburgh: The University Press, 1974), pp. 30-42.

¹³ Wilson, pp. 154-174.

¹⁴ Cummins, "Hume on Qualities," p. 71.

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. R.P. Hardie and R.K. Gaye, in Jonathan Barnes, ed., *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), vol. I, p. 344.

Aristotle's discussion bred various sorts of distinctions in medieval philosophy. At the end of that vast era, the great scholastic metaphysician Suarez summarized and contributed to the discussion of these. The distinction of interest here is the one Suarez says is often called "a distinction of the reasoned reason (*distinctio rationis ratiocinatae*)."¹⁶ As he says,

The other kind of mental distinction arises from inadequate concepts of one and the same thing. Although the same object is apprehended in each concept, the whole reality contained in the object is not adequately represented, nor is its entire essence and objective notion exhausted, by either of them. This occurs frequently when we conceive an object in terms of its bearing on different things, or when we represent it in the way we conceive these different things. Hence such a distinction invariably has a foundation in fact, even though formally it will be said to spring from inadequate concepts of the same thing. Thus in God we distinguish His justice from His mercy, because we do not conceive the sublimely simple virtue of God as it is in itself and according to the full range of its energy. We partition it into concepts in line with the various effects of which that eminent virtue is the principle, or by analogy with various virtues which we find distinct in man, but which in an ineffably eminent manner are found united in the absolutely simple virtue of God.¹⁷

Thus 'God's justice' expresses an inadequate concept of God's virtue, as does 'God's mercy.' When we distinguish God's justice from God's mercy we are, loosely speaking, distinguishing His virtue from itself. What we are really distinguishing is one inadequate concept of God's virtue from another, on the basis of distinguishing some analogues of God's virtue from some others or some effects of God's virtue from some others. These provide the "foundation in fact" for the distinction. The foundation is certainly not provided by any distinction in God Himself who is absolutely simple. Thus the so-called distinction is only a distinction in God in a loose sense. Strictly it is a distinction between concepts based on a distinction between analogues or effects.

3. Hume's treatment of the distinction of reason occurs at the end of the section, "Of abstract ideas," and begins with that bit of overconfidence seen above.

¹⁶ Francis Suarez, *On the Various Kinds of Distinctions*, trans. Cyril Vollert (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1947), p. 18.

¹⁷ Suarez, p. 19.

Before I leave this subject I shall employ the same principles to explain that *distinction of reason*, which is so much talk'd of, and is so little understood, in the schools. Of this kind is the distinction betwixt figure and the body figur'd; motion and the body mov'd. The difficulty of explaining this distinction arises from the principle above-explain'd, *that all ideas, which are different, are separable*. For it follows from thence, that if the figure be different from the body, their ideas must be separable as well as distinguishable; if they be not different, their ideas can neither be separable nor distinguishable. What then is meant by a distinction of reason, since it implies neither a difference nor separation? (1.1.7.17)

What is at issue is how to distinguish, whether loosely or strictly, something from itself. The problem is, that Hume has committed himself to some principles that entail that things can be distinguished only if they are separable. However, in the case of a distinction of reason he has to explain how things can be distinguished that are *not* separable.

The first of the trouble-making principles is one that helps undergird Hume's whole discussion of abstract ideas. Call it the *mental separability principle*.

First, We have observ'd, that whatever objects are different are distinguishable, and that whatever objects are distinguishable are separable by the thought and imagination. And we may here add, that these propositions are equally true in the *inverse*, and that whatever objects are separable are also distinguishable, and that whatever objects are distinguishable are also different. (1.1.7.3)

So let the *mental separability principle* be: *for any objects, if they are different then they are distinguishable and if they are distinguishable then they are separable by the thought and imagination*. Assuming from context that by "in the *inverse*" Hume means what we mean by 'conversely', then he holds the converse as well.¹⁸

When Hume says 'different' he means numerically distinct. For instance, in discussing time, he argues that the impression of time that one has in hearing five musical notes is not "different" from the impressions of the notes themselves, which is to say it is

¹⁸ Garrett calls the first sentence in the Hume quotation simply the Separability Principle and says it and its converse are new with Hume, (p. 58). See also John Bricke, *Hume's Philosophy of Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 68. However, see Descartes's discussion of distinctions in *Principles*, Part I, Principles LX-LXII, as well as medieval and ancient antecedents such as those cited in Bosley. Rene Descartes, *Principles of Philosophy*, in John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, and Dugald Murdoch, eds., *Descartes: Selected Writings* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 160-212. Richard N. Bosley, *Two Distinct Division None: Essays in the History of Philosophy concerning Principles of Separabilism* (2006) at <http://www.themean.ca/two_distincts_div.pdf>. See Laird against the mental separability principle (pp. 82-83). Hume's many mentions or uses of separability principles include those at 1.1.3.4, 1.1.7.3, 1.1.7.17-18, 1.2.1.3, 1.2.3.10, 1.2.3.13, 1.3.3.3, 1.3.6.1, 1.4.2.39, 1.4.5.5, 1.4.6.3, App.12.

“not a sixth impression” (1.2.3.10). Were it different, it would be a sixth impression, i.e., numerically distinct.

When Hume says that things are “distinguishable” I assume he means that we can tell them apart. Certainly he doesn’t mean that we infallibly can tell them apart. We often confuse distinguishable things, for instance related ideas, adjacent minima, and closely related things in succession (1.2.5.21, 1.2.4.19, 1.4.2.34). However in principle we can tell such things apart. When Hume assumes that things are numerically distinct if and only if distinguishable, he is endorsing the *identity of indiscernibles* and the *indiscernibility of identicals*, with their labels taken literally. (We nowadays use the labels loosely; we say ‘indiscernible’ but mean having all the same properties and relations, independently of any discerner.) However two questions arise. First, what is the connection between the numerical distinctness of things and our ability to tell them apart? Second, why assume that for any distinct things we are able to think them at all, much less tell them apart? The answer to the first question is that Hume, because he is a skeptic, is concerned only with things as they appear.¹⁹ Things that cannot in principle be told apart are to all appearances one and the same, and vice-versa. The answer to the second question is similar. Whatever appears to us, we can think of.²⁰

When Hume says objects are “separable by the thought and imagination” he means that it is possible to think of one without thinking of the other. Presumably we would do this by having an idea of the one without having an idea of the other. When things are *inseparable* by the thought and imagination it is not possible to think of one without thinking of the other. “A person, who desires us to consider the figure of a globe of white marble without thinking on its colour, desires an impossibility” (1.1.7.18).²¹

In sum, Hume takes as a principle that objects are numerically distinct only if we can tell them apart, and we can tell them apart only if we can think of one without thinking of the other, and conversely.

The next principle that helps make trouble can be called the *conceivability principle*. Hume says that “nothing of which we can form a clear and distinct idea is

¹⁹ See my *Hume’s Difficulty: Time and Identity in the Treatise* (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 7-14.

²⁰ This appeal to appearance answers Laird’s challenge to Hume’s contention that “all differents are distinguishable” (Laird, pp. 82-83).

²¹ Cf. Descartes who uses the phrases “only distinct. . .by thought” and “differ only in thought.” (*Principles*, Part I, Principle LXII ‘Of the distinction created by thought’.)

absurd and impossible” (1.1.7.6). Here Hume uses a principle tracing back to Bishop Tempier’s condemnations in 1277, that the clearly conceivable is possible. He reasons that if things are distinct, then we can think of one without thinking of the other; so we can clearly conceive of one existing without the other; the clearly conceivable is possible; so one can exist without the other. In other words, he uses the *conceivability principle* to infer from the *mental separability principle* a result about real separability—viz., that *any numerically distinct things are really separable*.²² Call this result the *real separability principle* although strictly speaking for Hume it is not a principle itself, being derived from the other two.²³ Note that the converse of the *real separability principle* seems unobjectionable: *if things are really separable then they are numerically distinct*. The *real separability principle* conjoined with its converse was the scholastic test of the real distinction.²⁴

With the principles in place, we can see to the problem Hume means to address. The problem is that in making a distinction of reason we distinguish things that are really inseparable. But distinguishing them entails thinking of one without thinking of the other, by the *mental separability principle*. Yet since they are inseparable, they are identical, by the *real separability principle*. But that means that we must be able to think of something without thinking of something identical—in other words we must be able to think of something without thinking of it. So making a distinction of reason seems impossible.

4. Before discussing Hume’s solution, I need to make two digressions: first, to sort out a possible confusion concerning mental separability, and second, to make plausible the real inseparability Hume relies on, in order to explain the force of the problem.

Having distinguished the principles, we can see that Hume introduces a possible

²² See Bosley and Tweedale, editors’ introductions, pp. xx-xxi, 440-441. Bosley, Richard N. and Tweedale, Martin. *Basic Issues in Medieval Philosophy*. Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 1997. See also Grant, Edward. “The Effect of the Condemnation of 1277.” in Norman Kretzmann, Anthony Kenny, and Jan Pinborg. *The Cambridge History of Later Medieval Philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

²³ Garrett does not distinguish the mental separability principle from the real separability principle. I think he is concerned with both. By the way, despite the use of the words ‘real’ and ‘really,’ I am on Hume’s behalf still talking about the world of appearance. See *Hume’s Difficulty*, pp. 12-13.

²⁴ Suarez, p. 40.

confusion when he uses phrases like ‘their ideas are separable’ as variants of phrases like ‘they are separable by the thought and imagination.’ In the distinction of reason passage, when talking about separating ideas, he means to be talking about separating their objects by the thought and imagination -- in other words, mentally separating the objects. What makes this confusing, is that other places in the *Treatise* he talks of separating ideas themselves, regardless of their objects. In “Of the immateriality of the soul” Hume is arguing that perceptions meet a definition of ‘substance.’ He says

Whatever is clearly conceived may exist; and whatever is clearly conceiv’d, after any manner, may exist after the same manner. This is one principle which has been already acknowledg’d. Again, every thing, which is different, is distinguishable, and every thing which is distinguishable, is separable by the imagination. This is another principle. My conclusion from both is, that since all our perceptions are different from each other, and from every thing else in the universe, they are also distinct and separable, and may be consider’d as separately existent, and may exist separately, and have no need for any thing else to support their existence. (1.4.5.5)

Here Hume uses the *mental separability* and *conceivability* principles to argue that numerically distinct perceptions, including ideas, are really separable.

Thus in some places in the *Treatise*, Hume uses talk of separating ideas to mean mentally separating their objects, whereas in other places, he uses similar talk to mean really separating the ideas themselves. We need to be careful about the ambiguity even though mentally separating objects -- thinking of one without thinking of the other -- does require really separating their ideas. However the entailment does not go the other way: it is possible really to separate ideas without mentally separating their objects, when they have the same object. Thus when Hume says of some objects, “. . . if they be not different, their ideas can neither be separable nor distinguishable,” he must mean that if the objects are not distinct then we cannot mentally separate the objects. He cannot mean to preclude our having numerically distinct, and therefore really separable, ideas of the same object. So, proper understanding of Hume’s discussion of the distinction of reason requires that we be scrupulous about the usages. In that discussion, all talk of ideas being separable is about the mental separability of the objects of the ideas.

5. It is hard to appreciate the force of the problem that Hume addresses before

understanding why he thinks the objects are inseparable, and therefore identical, in the first place. Why, for example, does he think that, when distinguishing a body from its figure, we are in some way distinguishing something from itself? Why would he think that a figure is numerically identical with the body figured, or a motion with the body moved, or a globe's color with its figure? On the contrary, it seems easy to show these are not identical. We need only show their separability.

For example, take figure and the body figured. To show their separability we must show that at least one of them can exist without the other. But what could be easier? It seems obvious, at first, that *each* can exist without the other. The figure can exist in another body even if the first body is destroyed, and the first body can continue to exist even if it alters in its figure. Note, however, that our counterexamples require two assumptions: (i) that the body's figure is a universal that can exist in a body distinct from the original, and (ii) that the body is a particular that can exist with its figure altered. These are not assumptions Hume would grant, and he is not alone. First, according to Hume, there are no universals. He says that "every thing in nature is individual" (1.1.7.6) and "every thing, that exists, is particular" (Abs.28). Whether or not he is right, this assumption has enjoyed widespread support at various times.²⁵ Second, according to Hume, alteration is contrary to identity.

'Tis confessed by the most judicious philosophers, that our ideas of bodies are nothing but collections form'd by the mind of the ideas of the several distinct sensible qualities, of which objects are compos'd, and which we find to have a constant union with each other. But however these qualities may in themselves be entirely distinct, 'tis certain we commonly regard the compound, which they form, as ONE thing, and as continuing the SAME under very considerable alterations. The acknowledg'd composition is evidently contrary to this suppos'd *simplicity*, and the variation to the *identity*. (1.4.3.2)

Hume's talk of variation is talk of intrinsic change, not merely change of relations (see 1.3.1.1). Something with a different intrinsic figure, is a different thing. Whether or not he is right, there are weighty endorsements of such a view even in recent philosophy, as for instance by Lewis and Armstrong.²⁶ Rejecting assumptions (i) and (ii), then, the

²⁵ For example: Descartes, *Principles*, I, LXIII, LXIX, and Locke, 3.3.1, 3.3.6, 3.3.11. John Locke, *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

²⁶ David Lewis, *On the Plurality of Worlds* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), pp. 202-204, 210. David M. Armstrong, *A World of States of Affairs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 101.

figure of the body is not the sort of thing that can exist without configuring that body. Likewise the body is not the sort of thing that can exist without that figure. So figure and body figured are inseparable. So by *modus tollens* on the real separability principle, they are identical.

In the same way, color and body colored are inseparable and so identical, as well as color and figure of the same body.

Hume's example of motion and body moved complicates the foregoing explanation, however. Change that is motion is not an identity-destroying case of intrinsic alteration.

On the contrary, the relations of *contiguity* and *distance* betwixt two objects may be chang'd merely by an alteration of their place, without any change on the objects themselves or on their ideas. (1.3.1.1)

So even if the motion cannot be separated from the body, the body, evidently, can be separated from the motion. So they are separable, contrary to Hume's indication that they are not. One easy interpretive move to save Hume from this difficulty would be to say that he is simply using examples of inseparability provided by others without necessarily agreeing with them. In any event, the problem must be addressed for the other examples.

6. To return to the problem that Hume is addressing: how can it be that, in making a distinction of reason, we are able to think of something without thinking of it?

When faced with a contradiction, make a distinction. Hume, following the tradition, suggests that there are two ways to think of something: (1) simply having present to mind an idea of an object; and (2) having present to mind an idea of an object and, further, attending to a certain resemblance the object stands in. At 1.1.7.18 Hume uses the word 'consider' for both these ways. However it would make things clearer to use different expressions. Let me just use '*have present to mind*' for way (1), letting an object be present to mind in virtue of its idea being present to mind, and let me use '*consider*' for way (2). That way I can follow traditional usage and say that when we consider an object's color we partially consider the object. When thinking of something just in way (1), it is impossible to think of it without thinking of it. It cannot be present to mind without being present to mind. However, there is a sense in which it is possible to

think of something in a way (2) without thinking of it in another way (2) as follows: by considering the object in the light of a certain resemblance and not considering it in the light of certain others.²⁷

Take for example a globe of white marble. One cannot have the color of the globe present to mind without having the figure present to mind. Anyone who desires to do this “desires an impossibility.” The figure and color are “perfectly inseparable,” which is to say that they are “in effect the same and undistinguishable” (1.1.7.18). (The ‘in effect’ is, I assume, a way of saying that the identity is a consequence of the inseparability.) Nonetheless, while having both present to mind, one can pay attention to the color and not the figure by attending to the resemblance of the globe to a white thing and not attending to its resemblance to a spherical thing. In this way, one can consider the color without considering the figure.²⁸

With the problem solved, the account is in place to explain how in making a distinction of reason we, loosely speaking, distinguish something from itself. We have the same idea of the same object viewed with an eye to just one, then just another, of different resemblances it stands in. For instance in making a distinction of reason between the color and the figure of a globe of white marble, we can, with the very same idea, consider the globe in the respect in which it resembles a white thing, then consider the globe in the respect in which it resembles a spherical thing.

Notice that Hume’s account concerns making a distinction of reason, in other words, it concerns a distinguishing of reason. What makes this distinguishing possible is the different resemblances the white globe, say, stands in. There must be a resemblance that the globe bears to the white cube, which it does not bear to the black sphere. Likewise there must be a resemblance that the globe bears to the black sphere, which it does not bear to the white cube. This situation is an example of what I am calling

²⁷ It is also possible to think of something in way (1) without thinking of it in way (2), but this is of no help in explaining the distinction of reason.

²⁸ Such a distinction would be required to explain Arnauld and Nicole’s discussion of attending to some attributes of a thing while ignoring others. Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole, *Logic or the Art of Thinking*, trans. Jill Vance Buroker (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), First part, Chapter 5, p. 38. Making such a distinction also constitutes Hume’s answer to Laird’s charge that in claiming “all different are separable” Hume is ignoring “inseparable companions which are intellectually, not impressionistically or pictorially, separable” (Laird, pp. 82-83).

differential resemblance. I will argue that what Hume says about the differential resemblance underlying a distinguishing of reason is contradictory.

II.

7. One might be tempted to try to head off trouble by understanding Hume's distinction (i.e. distinguishing) as a conceptual distinction--the guise in which the distinction of reason has survived to the present day. Surely, one might think this distinction can be made sense of without appeal to an underlying differential resemblance. We see a conceptual distinction as, strictly speaking, a distinction between ways of referring to the same thing, whether by different concepts, or by different descriptions, or by referring expressions with different Fregean senses.²⁹ Loosely speaking, however, we see it as a distinction between the thing referred to in one way and itself referred to in another.³⁰ It might seem that a conceptual distinction can be explained without any appeal to an underlying differential resemblance.

I myself doubt that an account of how we form and apply concepts can be given that does not appeal at some point to differential resemblance. So I doubt that the conceptual distinction can ultimately be explained independently after all. Be that as it may, Hume's account of concepts, i.e. abstract ideas, certainly relies on differential resemblance.

When we have found a resemblance among several objects, that often occur to us, we apply the same name to all of them, whatever differences we may observe in the degrees of their quantity and quality, and whatever other differences may appear among them. (1.1.7.7)

Note that the differences among the several objects will be in respects in which they resemble things other than each other. Note also that Hume is here giving the foundation of his account of abstract ideas. Once we have become accustomed to applying the name in this way, it happens that hearing the name brings the idea of one of the objects to mind

²⁹ Gottlob Frege, "On Sense and Meaning," in *Translations from the Philosophical Writings of Gottlob Frege*, edited by Max Black and Peter Geach (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980).

³⁰ It is this innocuous, well-understood version that Roth has in mind when he uses the distinction of reason to help understand Hume on identity through time. Abraham Roth, "Hume's Psychology of Identity Ascriptions," *Hume Studies* 12 (1996), pp. 273-298. I don't know of any other commentators that explicitly take Hume's distinction of reason this way, but it is a way that would be familiar and acceptable to many contemporary readers. It is certainly consonant with Cummins' approach.

as a proxy for the rest, and engages a custom to bring others to mind as needed. When used in this way, the idea present to mind is an abstract idea. Thus, there must be differential resemblance which we respond to, in order to form our abstract ideas. Therefore, a Humean conceptual distinction depends on there being differential resemblance.

So, in forming abstract ideas, as well as in making distinctions of reason, we respond to differential resemblances between things. This part of Hume's account has led to a common, but erroneous, criticism of him as in Kemp Smith.³¹ If the criticism succeeds, then perhaps the dependence can be rejected and the conceptual distinction preserved unstained by the problems with resemblance. The critics charge that (i) we have to have the abstract ideas to notice the resemblances, (ii) we have to notice the resemblances to form the abstract ideas, so (iii) Hume's account is circular. This charge neglects, however, that Hume is giving a purely causal account of the workings of the mind. All he needs to say is that resemblances between their objects cause ideas to attract one another to mind. There is no sort of noticing that already requires abstract ideas. Different resemblances between objects cause different clusters of ideas. The fact that certain ideas cluster, causes us to assign the same general name to their objects. Since the same idea can be in various clusters, different general names can be assigned to the same object. Use of the name causes the readiness to be attracted to mind of other ideas in the appropriate cluster. There is no circularity here. The process has a foundation. That foundation is resemblance.

Hume seems to encourage the charge with his manner of expressing himself: "we find two separate resemblances," "we turn our view," "we accompany our ideas with a kind of reflection" (1.1.7.18).³² We must keep in mind, however, that such expressions cannot be what Hume literally means. Otherwise, his account of the acquisition of the idea of personal identity is blatantly contradictory. In the midst of arguing that the self is

³¹ Kemp Smith, p. 266. See also paragraph 259 of T. H. Green's General Introduction to Hume's *Treatise* (London, 1878).

³² I'm indebted to Gareth Matthews for reminding me how much Hume's phrasing aids his critics.

nothing but the many perceptions, he seems to introduce an observer of the perceptions (1.4.6.4-6). Such talk of an additional observer must be taken as figurative.³³

So differential resemblance precedes our response. It moves us to form abstract ideas and to make distinctions of reason. But, again, what Hume says about differential resemblance is contradictory, as I will argue next.

8. What allows us to make distinctions of reason is that a single thing can stand in different resemblances. Hume speaks of noting “two separate resemblances” in what is “perfectly inseparable,” and says, “...even in this simplicity there might be contain’d many different resemblances and relations” (1.1.7.18). Note that the so-called simplicity Hume speaks of is the identity at a time of the inseparables. He has to speak of identity at a time as simplicity because he generally reserves ‘identity’ for identity through time (1.1.5.4; 1.4.2.29; see also 1.4.3.5). Thus he says things like, “their perfect simplicity excludes all possibility of separation or distinction,”--that is, excludes the opposites of identity (1.1.7.7, n. 5App; see also 1.1.1.2). In any event, the subsequent claim, “we consider the figure and colour together, since they are in effect the same and undistinguishable,” establishes my point that the simplicity Hume is referring to here is what we call numerical identity (1.1.7.18). So, for Hume the thing that stands in one resemblance is the same thing as the thing that stands in the other.

Thus the thing displaying differential resemblance need not be simple in the sense of partless. As Tweyman and Garrett point out, the globe in Hume’s example is not really simple--it is a multitude of minima. Nonetheless the most striking example of differential resemblance of the same thing is that of a simple thing. Hume turns to such an example in the Appendix note to the earlier phrase “When we have found a resemblance among several objects.”³⁴

’Tis evident, that even different simple ideas may have a similarity or resemblance to each other; nor is it necessary, that the point or

³³ See Nelson Pike, “Hume’s Bundle Theory of the Self: A Limited Defense,” *American Philosophical Quarterly* 4 (1967), pp. 159-65. Kemp Smith (p. 73) and others take the blatant contradiction to be the one Hume discovered only in the Appendix to the *Treatise*, but I don’t see how it could have been so easy for him initially to overlook it and so difficult for him subsequently to express it.

³⁴ See also 1.2.6.6, where Hume says that the distinction of reason “is founded on the different resemblances, which the same simple idea may have to several different ideas.”

circumstance of resemblance shou'd be distinct or separable from that in which they differ. (1.1.7.7 note5App)

Thus it is Hume's view that simple, uncomposed, things can resemble in one point and differ in another point not numerically distinct from the first. For example things can resemble in quality and differ in degree, as in the case of two reds of different hue. In each simple instance of red, the redness and the particular hue are not distinct, but identical.

'Tis the same case with all the degrees in any quality. They are all resembling, and yet the quality, in any individual, is not distinct from the degree. (1.1.7.7 note 5App)

Not only are quality and degree identical with each other, they are identical with the simple individual that has them. It couldn't be otherwise. In its simplicity, its very nature "excludes all composition" (1.1.7.7 note 5App).³⁵ Thus the same thing can resemble something in one "point or circumstance," differ from it in another, and yet the point or circumstance of resemblance is identical with the point or circumstance of difference, and both are identical with the thing itself.

Regard in the light of these remarks Hume's example of the globe of white marble. In one point -- its color -- it resembles a white cube and differs from a black sphere. In another point -- its shape -- it resembles a black sphere and differs from a white cube. Here is the problem: Its color and shape are identical, so in one point (color) it resembles the white cube and in the same point (shape) it differs from the white cube. So in the same point the white globe resembles the white cube and it does not. Hume's account is contradictory.

9. It might be thought that Hume has unnecessarily tripped himself up here with his talk of point of resemblance and point of difference. A little more care about what a point of difference really is, could have prevented the problem. There is no harm in identifying the point of resemblance with the white globe, if Hume has metaphysical reasons for doing so. However, to identify the point of difference with the white globe is to be

³⁵ See also the antecedent of this note in Hume's March 16, 1740 letter to Francis Hutcheson in *The Letters of David Hume*, ed. J.Y.T. Greig, Vol.1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932), p. 39.

confused about the logic of the situation. Let me use ‘respect’ instead of ‘point’ in order to put things more idiomatically. Hume is making a logical confusion, concerning the scope of the negation, between ‘There is a respect such that it is not the case that in that respect the white globe resembles the white cube,’ and ‘There is a respect such that in that respect the white globe is dissimilar to the white cube.’ Granted if a respect of resemblance and a respect of dissimilarity were numerically the same, as Hume seems to indicate, then there would be a contradiction. But the partial resemblance of the globe and cube requires no point of dissimilarity. It is just a matter of the white globe having one respect of resemblance (its color) and lacking a numerically distinct one (the cube’s shape), which avoids contradiction.

However, the case of differential resemblance shows that this attempted dissolution of the problem facing Hume is of no avail. There is a respect in which the white globe resembles the white cube. That respect fails to be a respect in which the white globe resembles the black sphere. Likewise there is a respect in which the white globe resembles the black sphere. The respect in which it fails to resemble the black sphere cannot be identical to the respect in which it resembles the black sphere, on pain of contradiction.

Were all partial resemblance a matter of having one point of resemblance and lacking another, the contradiction Hume gets himself into would be just a matter of carelessness. But there being differential resemblance shows that not all partial resemblance is like this. Some cases of partial resemblance are a matter of having one respect of resemblance that is a respect of resemblance to some particular thing, and having another respect of resemblance (to some things) that fails to be a respect of resemblance to that particular thing.

A respect of resemblance (to some things) that fails to be a respect of resemblance to a particular thing, is a respect of dissimilarity to that particular thing. So Hume is right to discern both respects of resemblance and respects of dissimilarity in cases of differential resemblance.³⁶ So the contradiction that faces him does not result from confusion about the logic of partial resemblance.

³⁶ This conclusion is consistent with Hume’s claim that difference is “a negation of relation,” including difference “of *kind*,” which is difference “as oppos’d . . . to . . . resemblance” (1.1.5.10).

Since I need to use ‘dissimilar’ to keep the scope of the negation clear, I will often contrast it with ‘similar.’ The form of the contradiction is: In the same respect, the white globe is both similar to the white cube and dissimilar to it.

One might have a sense that even a sentence of this form is not a contradiction. But that is true only in a special situation not relevant here, as I will show. Consider the role of appeal to respects in the first place. Take the claim

(1) A is similar to B and is dissimilar to B.

It is possible to understand this claim as a contradiction, and possible to understand it as not a contradiction. Normally we make the difference explicit by appealing to respects of resemblance. The contradiction is, ‘In some respect A is similar to B and in no respect is A similar to B.’ The non-contradiction is ‘In some respect A is similar to B and in some other respect A is dissimilar to B.’ Note that avoiding contradiction requires distinguishing respects. The contradiction remains if we say,

(2) In some respect A is similar to B and is dissimilar to B.

Let me qualify this observation slightly to acknowledge the special situation in which one might make the claim (2). In order for this not to be a claim, in effect, that in some respect a contradiction is true, it must be that that the claim implicitly conveys that in some respect, there is a respect in which A is similar to B and another respect in which A is dissimilar to B. In other words, nested respects are left implicit. In normal conversation people don’t indicate nested respects, whether explicitly or implicitly, but philosophers might conceivably find reason to. Even so, if the claim is not a contradiction, then it makes some appeal, at least implicitly, to different respects.

So, for each of claims (1) and (2) not to be a contradiction, A must be similar to B and dissimilar to B in different respects.

Now it would be extraordinary, even for a philosopher, to say that A is similar to B in one respect, dissimilar to B in another respect, and yet leave implicit the respect in which they are similar and also the respect in which they are dissimilar. It would be more than extraordinary; it wouldn’t make sense. The claim purports to be making those very respects explicit. Thus when Hume says that with respect to its color the white globe is similar to the white cube and with respect to its figure the white globe is dissimilar to the white cube, we have every reason to believe that he is telling us the respect in which they

resemble and the respect in which they differ such that these are the different respects that make Hume's claim not a contradiction.

Yet Hume has said that the white globe's color is inseparable from its figure. So they are numerically identical. So they are not different respects. So the different respects are not different. Hume has contradicted himself.

There is another example of the same sort of contradiction in the explanatory footnote from the Appendix. Hume is talking about "circumstances or points of resemblance," in other words, as I have presumed, respects of resemblance. Hume says that a blue simple resembles a green one more than a scarlet one. Given his concern here with respects, it must be that this claim is true with respect to their colors. Yet he also says that with respect to their simplicity, it is false that the blue simple resembles the green one more than the scarlet one. He must be referring to the different respects that prevent contradiction, and yet he says that for each simple the respects are not "distinct or separable." So they are numerically identical. So different respects are not different.

Another way to bring out the contradiction is to substitute expressions referring to what Hume says are numerically identical respects. With respect to its color the white globe is similar to the white cube. With respect to its figure the white globe is dissimilar to the white cube. Color and figure are inseparable and so numerically identical. Therefore, with respect to its color, the white globe is dissimilar to the white cube. Therefore with respect to its color the white globe is similar to and dissimilar to the white cube. Since color and figure were to be the respects appeal to which prevents contradiction, this conclusion is a contradiction.

10. Before considering various possible ways to try to defend Hume from the claimed contradiction, I want to suggest that Hume is right about the claims that lead to contradiction. Full justification is a separate project, but here is an outline: He is right that there is differential resemblance, and right about its structure as partial resemblances such that a respect of similarity to the first thing is a respect of dissimilarity to the second, and vice-versa. He is right that we respond to differential resemblance by distinguishing respects of resemblance. And he is right, as I will argue next, that these respects of resemblance are not numerically distinct things from the resembling objects. Where he

may be wrong is in thinking that the respects of resemblance are simply a result of our distinguishing--that they are distinguished merely by a distinction of reason. But I doubt that he makes this mistake, either. More likely he just thinks that it is the ideas of the respects that are simply a result of our distinguishing, and he explicitly says that the distinguishing is a response to the different resemblances. For there to be differential resemblance in the first place, in a way that can be characterized without contradiction, there must be differing respects of resemblance underlying our distinguishing of them.

And yet these underlying respects of resemblance should not be thought to be numerically distinct from the resembling things. First, it is qualities had individually, with respect to which some things are similar and dissimilar, as opposed to qualities the things have in common with each other. For example, the blue simple with respect to its particular color is more similar to the green simple with respect to *its* particular color, than to the scarlet simple with respect to *its* particular color. Second, the individual with its qualities is a single thing--not distinct things amalgamated somehow. This unitariness is emphasized by his insistence that simple things can be similar and dissimilar with respect to such qualities. In other words, even a simple can be similar in one respect and dissimilar in another respect to something else. If these qualities are numerically distinct respects of resemblance, then the resembling things are complexes with these qualities as parts. But simples are not complexes. So these qualities are respects of resemblance, but are not numerically distinct respects of resemblance. Hume is right to presuppose differential resemblance without numerically distinct respects of resemblance. It's just that he has no way to make sense of it. Not that we do, either.

11. There may seem to be a number of ways to save Hume from this alleged contradiction. One might take respects of resemblance to be distinct qualities or distinct relations. Or one might take talk that seems to mention respects merely to be a manner of speaking about other things entirely, say different groups or different social practices of comparing. (After all distinctions of reason are meant to be supplied by the mind on the foundation of the distinction between some other things, as Suarez explains.) Or one might even think that resemblance itself is just a result of such social practices. I will

show that none of these maneuvers can account for differential resemblance as Hume rightly characterizes it.

There would be no contradiction if respects of resemblance were distinct qualities that the individual is related to. However this option is not open to Hume. The view that the respects of resemblance are universals, is ruled out by his nominalism--“everything in nature is individual”--and by Hume’s claim that his examples resemble “without having any common circumstance the same.” The view that they are tropes or abstract particulars composing the individual, is ruled out by his examples of differential resemblance in individuals that are simple, uncomposed--examples that he uses to illustrate strikingly his point that the respects of resemblance are identical (1.1.7.6 & 7 note 5App). There is no provision in Hume’s ontology for respects of resemblance that are qualities numerically distinct from the resembling things themselves. Beyond that, distinct respects of resemblance would be separable, and Hume has explicitly said that they are inseparable.

12. Another way to try to avoid the contradiction is to take the respects of resemblance to be distinct relations. One can say that Hume’s explicit talk of respects (“points or circumstances”) of similarity and dissimilarity does no work in preventing the threatened contradiction (1.1.7.7 note 5App). That work is done solely by implicit respects, and those are the “separate resemblances” themselves (1.1.7.18). ‘Separate’ would seem to imply for Hume ‘distinct.’ Thus there are numerically distinct ways of resembling, and their distinction prevents contradiction in Hume’s account of differential resemblance. Thus with respect to its white-sphericity the white globe is whitely-similar to the white cube and is not spherically-similar to the white cube. This interpretation allows Hume to say that the color of the globe is numerically identical to its figure--both are its white-sphericity--without entailing any contradiction that the globe is both similar and dissimilar to the white cube.³⁷

This proposal goes a long way toward defending Hume, by incorporating much of what he says. The trouble, though, is that it disregards Hume’s explicit contrast of “the point or circumstance of resemblance” from “that in which they differ” (1.1.7.7 note

³⁷ Lorne Falkenstein, in correspondence, has given a vigorous and carefully argued defense of a proposal like this one.

5App). We speak this way when we are making *explicit* the respects of similarity and dissimilarity that prevent contradiction. It is these that Hume claims are identical. That claim is what Hume would think needed to be said, since the normal assumption would be that because they are contrasted, they are distinct. Were Hume simply saying, as the proposal would have it, that there are some respects in which something (in virtue of other respects left implicit) both is similar and is dissimilar to something else, he would be talking both strangely and contrary to the clear aim of the passage. That aim is to say that in simples, there are *no* distinct respects of similarity or dissimilarity. “These resemble each other in their simplicity. And yet from their very nature, which excludes all composition, this circumstance, in which they resemble, is not distinguishable or separable from the rest” (1.1.7.7. note 5App).

One might try to contend that one can tell from context in the footnote that Hume is distinguishing respects of resemblance that are qualities--and so what are inseparable and not distinct from the individuals in question--from respects of resemblance that are the ways of resembling--and which perforce must be distinct from the individuals in question. However, there seems to be no explicit textual support anywhere for Hume’s thinking of relations as such numerically distinct entities. In fact, it would be odd if there were, for then Hume’s real separability principle would commit him to thinking that relations could exist in the world without their relata. Further, Hume, in his discussion of relations, uses “quality” and “circumstance” to characterize them (1.1.5.1). The fact that he uses these words also for the inseparable respects of resemblance makes it less likely that he has any hidden distinction in mind between respects as qualities and respects as ways of resembling.

One might counter by saying the proposal is what Hume should have meant. It gives a theory better metaphysically than the one I attribute to Hume, and fits with much of what Hume says, even if not with all. However, that it is a better theory metaphysically is not even clear. The proposal impoverishes our talk of respects of similarity and dissimilarity, and, if enriched, removes the ability to say something true. First, let me show the impoverishment, then turn to the truth that an enriched proposal cannot capture.

The proposal, as it stands, does not enable a distinction between ‘It is not the case that in respect R, A is similar to B’ and ‘In respect R, A is dissimilar to B.’ The following

case shows that these must be distinguished: ‘It is not the case that with respect to its color, the number four is similar to the number five’ is true. However, ‘With respect to its color the number four is dissimilar to the number five’ is false. The number four has no color. The proposal only provides for something lacking a way of being similar, without providing for something having a way of being dissimilar.

Supply the lack. One might add to the proposal ways of being dissimilar in addition to ways of being similar. However, then the proposal can no longer capture a truth. It is true that in respect of its color and not in respect of its figure, the white globe is similar and not dissimilar to the white cube as well as dissimilar and not similar to the black sphere. On the proposal there is no one respect in which this is true. Take the identical explicitly mentioned respects. With respect to its color-figure, the white globe is similar to and dissimilar to the white cube and similar to and dissimilar to the black sphere. Take the distinct implicit ways of resembling. The white globe’s being whitely-similar to the white cube is not the same respect as its being whitely-dissimilar to the black sphere. The truth of the original claim cannot be replicated in the proposal.

Sometimes it is better to say that a philosopher saw important truths, but didn’t find a way to express them consistently, than it is to enforce consistency at the cost of some truth.

13. Another approach would be to follow Garrett in contending that “aspects of resemblance are not themselves things or ‘objects,’” so not subject to the real separability principle. On this approach, talk of the different aspects of resemblance that something has, is at root just a manner of speaking of the different classes of resembling things to which that thing belongs. In making a distinction of reason we associate the object with one class of resembling things, or with another, given “our fundamental capacity to associate resembling objects.”³⁸ So, for example, to say that A resembles B with respect to whiteness, is just to say that both A and B are in the class of white things. Garrett’s proposal can serve its intended purpose--to show that Hume’s account of a distinguishing of reason does not contravene the real separability principle. However, the proposal cannot help in resolving the underlying problem of differential resemblance. If the

³⁸ Garrett, p. 64

proposal were taken as a way to understand the respects of resemblance that make differential resemblance non-contradictory, it would be wrong on two counts.

First, a respect of resemblance is certainly an object for Hume, since it is identical with the object that stands in the various resemblances. Hume is clear that, for instance, “figure and the body figur’d” are inseparable and therefore identical (1.1.7.18). The body figured is an object. So, the figure is that same object. So it is an object. Garrett may have conflated the truth that “aspects of resemblance” are not *additional* objects, with the falsehood that aspects of resemblance are not objects.

Second, talk of respects cannot be merely a manner of speaking of classes of resembling objects. It is in virtue of their similarities, their dissimilarities, and which respects of similarity to some things are respects of dissimilarity to others, that objects are in the classes that they are, and not in the classes that they are not. This is an important point, which requires some attention.

It might appear that as long as the white globe resembles other white things and resembles other spherical things, it is in both the class of white things and in the class of spherical things, and there is no call to mention dissimilarity, and so no problem of differential resemblance. However the white globe must be dissimilar to some of the white things. For example, it must be dissimilar to the white cube. If not, the white globe would be in the class of cubic things as well. So, in order to be in a class it is in and not be in a class it is not in, the white globe must be both similar to and dissimilar from the white cube. This would be a contradiction, as we have seen, unless it were similar and dissimilar in different respects. So the presence of respects is prior to the sorting into classes.

Nor can there be merely respects of similarity that are either had or lacked. There must be respects of dissimilarity as well. For consider: with respect to its figure, the white globe is similar to the black sphere. If with respect to its figure the white globe were similar to the white cube, then there would be complete resemblance between them instead of partial resemblance. So it must be that with respect to its figure, the white globe is dissimilar to the white cube.

Thus it is because the white globe with respect to its color is similar to the white cube and dissimilar to the black sphere, that the white globe is in the class of white things

and not in the class of black things. And it is because the white globe with respect to its figure is similar to the black sphere and dissimilar to the white cube, that the white globe is in the class of spherical things and not in the class of cubic things.

Since which classes the white globe belongs to depends on its similarities and dissimilarities--namely the ones Hume noted in characterizing its differential resemblance--and those similarities and dissimilarities require genuine respects, talk of the respects cannot simply be a manner of speaking about class membership. The classes depend on the respects, not vice-versa.

One might try to insist that there is no more to resemblance than class membership, but it seems to me that this is overreaching. Look at the white globe and the white cube. One notices their resemblance immediately, with no attention at all to the class of white things, most of which one has never seen. In any event, this talk of classes is found nowhere in Hume's discussion of the distinction of reason. It is enough for Hume to notice the separate resemblances between the white globe, the white cube, and the black sphere, on Hume's account, with no attention to any other members of the classes.

It is true that, when discussing abstract ideas, Hume appeals to ideas present in power of all (or sufficiently many) members of a class of resembling things (though he does not put it that way). However, there he is discussing general thinking by using particular ideas in a way that gives them general representation. General thinking is not involved in making distinctions of reason, where the concern is just with an individual, the idea of which retains particular representation.

If general thinking is not involved, one might wonder what Hume means when he says he will use "the same principles to explain that *distinction of reason*" as he used in explaining abstract ideas (1.1.7.17). The footnote at 1.1.7.7 that links the two discussions is appended to the phrase that refers to the role of resemblance. What the explanations have in common is the use of an idea with an eye to the resemblance of its object with some other thing or things. In the case of abstract ideas, we do so to apply ideas "beyond their nature" in order to think generally (1.1.7.7). In the case of a distinction of reason, we do so to apply an idea "less than its nature," as it were, in order to think of an aspect of an individual. Both discussions serve Hume's resistance to positing qualities as distinct

things from the individuals that have them. The discussion of abstract ideas removes the need for qualities shared by individuals. There is just resemblance in a certain respect among a group of things. The discussion of distinctions of reason is supposed to remove the need for distinct qualities within an individual. There is just resemblance in different respects to one thing and to another.

14. One might try to augment Garrett's approach, by giving a roughly Wittgensteinian account of resemblance: talk of resemblance and of respects of resemblance is at root just talk about our practice of comparing things and taking some to resemble and some not.³⁹ To say that things resemble is just to say that we regard them as resembling. To say that things resemble in one respect and not another is just to say that we regard them as resembling but not completely resembling. Hume, the objector might conclude, makes no ontological commitment to resemblances and respects of resemblance, and so can face no contradiction concerning them.

However, to take there to be no resemblance independent of comparison is to misread Hume.⁴⁰ He is clear that there can be resemblances without comparison. Comparison can be either an association (when the resemblance is a natural relation) or "the arbitrary union of two ideas in the fancy" (when the resemblance is a philosophical relation) (1.1.5.1). Hume says that very general resemblance presents "too great a choice" which serves to "prevent the imagination from fixing on any single object." Thus, even if the mind lights upon two things resembling in that general way, for the rest of the potential choices there is no union of two ideas in the fancy at all, much less an association. So in those cases there is resemblance without comparison.

Rather than resemblance requiring comparison, Hume makes the point that comparison requires resemblance. He says, "no objects will admit of comparison, but what have some degree of resemblance" (1.1.5.3). Resemblance is required for comparison, and so is prior to our *taking* things to resemble. Additionally, he says, "When any objects *resemble* each other, the resemblance will at first strike the eye, or rather the mind; and seldom requires a second examination" (1.3.1.2). That discerning

³⁹ I'm indebted to Francis Dauer and Lili Alanen for the suggestion. Cf. Russow, p. 347.

⁴⁰ For a useful discussion of resemblance in Hume, see Steven Gamboa, "Hume on Resemblance, Relevance, and Representation," *Hume Studies* 33 (2007), pp. 23-27.

resemblance sometimes (if seldom) does require a second examination, shows again that a resemblance between things can precede our taking them to resemble. Last, he says that “every simple idea has a simple impression, which resembles it; and every simple impression a correspondent idea.” It is not plausible that a comparison has been made in every case of this “universal resemblance” (1.1.1.5). The roughly Wittgensteinian account is not Hume’s.

The same sort of reply can be given to the suggestion that our talk of resemblance and respects is merely a way of saying that the white globe is a member of partially disjoint extensions of predicates.⁴¹ A general word comes to be used of a thing in virtue of something about the thing *other than* the fact that the word is used of it. It is in virtue of its different similarities and dissimilarities that the white globe is in these extensions. As before, the resemblances are independent of, and required for, being in the partially disjoint extensions. The problem of differential resemblance must be resolved prior to appeals to extensions.

15. Thus Hume’s characterization of the differential resemblance underlying the distinction of reason leads to contradiction. Since the account of distinctions of reason relies on the same basis as “the foregoing explication of abstract ideas”--that is, using an idea with an eye to some resemblances of its object--that explication is threatened as well (1.1.7.18). Hume there also explains how a particular idea present to mind can be used to generally represent a number of objects that resemble in a certain respect, by means of association with a word that invokes a habit of holding present in power the ideas of objects that resemble *in that respect* the object of the present idea. The ideas present in power bring, as needed, examples of, or counterexamples to, the general claim being made. The same present idea can serve to represent objects in different levels of generality, because the object of the present idea is similar and dissimilar to various other objects in various respects. “Thus the idea of an equilateral triangle of an inch perpendicular, may serve us in talking of a *figure*, of a *rectilinear figure*, of a *regular figure*, of a *triangle*, and of an *equilateral triangle*” (1.1.7.7-9). There is a respect in which the object of the present idea is similar to all equilateral triangles and dissimilar to

⁴¹ As suggested by Thomas Bontly.

all the rest. Also, there is a respect in which the object of the present idea is similar to a given isosceles triangle and a respect in which it is dissimilar. This structure of underlying respects of resemblance is thus required for Hume's account of abstract ideas, but is what is problematic. Thus Hume's Empiricist program of deriving all ideas--especially abstract ones--from inner and outer sense is undermined.

To conclude, Hume has committed himself to a thing's differential resemblance with respect to qualities identical to it. The differential resemblance entails that the respects of resemblance differ. Yet they are numerically identical to the thing standing in the resemblance. So the numerically same thing differs from itself, in a strict sense. To keep this commitment, Hume's only hope would seem to be some new conceptual resource on the model of Scotus's formal distinction: something intermediate between a "real" distinction between numerically distinct things, on the one hand, and a mere conceptual distinction on the other. Such a distinction would somehow allow numerically identical aspects of something to differ qualitatively, the way the persons of the Trinity are supposed to be numerically identical while differing in their characteristic relations.⁴² In this way there could be genuine kind of intrinsic complexity in a simple thing. If we want to avoid repudiating details concerning resemblance that Hume is right about, we are pushed in the direction of the Subtle Doctor's distinction.⁴³

⁴² Scotus, *Ordinatio* II, d. 3, part 1, q. 6, in Paul Vincent Spade, *Five Texts on the Mediaeval Problem of universals: Porphyry, Boethius, Abelard, Duns Scotus, Ockham* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994), p. 107 See also Maurice J. Grajewski, *The Formal Distinction of Duns Scotus* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1944), and John F. Boler, *Charles Pierce and Scholastic Realism* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963), pp. 53-55. See also my "The Discernibility of Identicals" and "Instantiation as Partial Identity," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 79 (2001), pp. 449-64.

⁴³ I'm grateful for discussion of earlier versions of this paper with audiences at the University of Connecticut, the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, the 33rd International Hume Conference, the 2007 Pacific Division American Philosophical Association Meetings, Harvard University, the University of Western Ontario, the University of Quebec at Montreal, and Smith College.