

MINDS, COMPOSITION, AND HUME'S SKEPTICISM IN THE APPENDIX*

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In the *Treatise* section “Of personal identity,” Hume argued for two main claims. First, a *qualified metaphysical claim*: as far as we can conceive it, a mind is a bundle, collection,

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or system of perceptions¹ that lacks “strict and proper identity and simplicity” (T 1.4.6.4, 1.4.6.19, Abs 28, App 10; SBN 253, 261, 657–58, 633).² Second, a *psychological claim*: due to misleading associations among her ideas, each of us believes—or, at least, is prone to believe—that her mind has strict and proper identity and simplicity (T 1.4.6.5–22; SBN 253–63).³ Less than two years later, Hume published an appendix, where he confesses to finding a “very considerable mistake” in this section (T App 1, App 10; SBN 623, 633). “I find myself involv’d in such a labyrinth,” he writes, “that I neither know how to correct my former opinions, nor how to render them consistent” (T App 10; SBN 633). He therefore retreats to skepticism about minds: “I must plead the privilege of a sceptic, and confess, that this difficulty is too hard for my understanding” (T App 21; SBN 636). But Hume says little to explain this retreat, and what he says is cryptic. What “labyrinth” had he come to see? I will give a new answer to this vexed question, based on a new interpretation of Hume’s view of composition, or the part-whole relation.

¹ Some commentators think Hume would accept that, as far as we can conceive it, a mind is a “system,” but not that it is a “bundle” or “collection,” of perceptions. For example, see Allison 2008, 296. Nothing in my paper turns on this issue.

² Hume’s works are cited as follows. References to ‘T’ are to Hume 2007, followed by book, part, section, and, where appropriate, paragraph numbers (references to paragraphs of the Appendix to the *Treatise* and of Hume’s “Abstract of a Book Lately Published” are preceded by ‘App’ and ‘Abs,’ respectively). Each of these citations is followed by the corresponding page numbers in Hume 1978, set off by ‘SBN.’ References to ‘E’ are to Hume 2000, followed by section and paragraph numbers, and the corresponding page numbers in Hume 1975, set off by ‘SBN.’ References to ‘DNR’ are to Hume 1947, followed by page number.

³ Donald Ainslie (2001, 2008) argues that Hume’s psychological claim applies only to philosophers who reflect on their perceptions, and not to “vulgar” or ordinary folk. For a counterargument, see Pitson 2002, 75–80. I take no stand on this issue here.

I proceed as follows. Section 1 clarifies the interpretive challenge that the Appendix poses. I highlight an aspect of the text that most commentators overlook or dismiss: Hume's hint that his retreat to skepticism is motivated by counterbalancing "arguments on both sides" of an issue (T App 10; SBN 633). On one side are his previous arguments that a mind lacks strict and proper identity and simplicity (T App 10–19; SBN 633–35). I argue that, for Hume, this amounts to saying that a mind is a composite thing, whose parts are all its perceptions. To understand his retreat to skepticism in the Appendix, we must identify the argument that he thinks counterbalances this claim—hereafter, his *counterbalancing argument*. The next two sections take up this challenge.

One premise of Hume's counterbalancing argument seems to be that "if perceptions are distinct existences, they form a whole only by being connected together" (T App 20; SBN 635). Therefore, section 2 examines his account of composition. How must several distinct perceptions be connected, if they are to form a whole? I argue that, for Hume, several of a mind's perceptions form a whole only if that mind supplies a connection among them; and that, in order to do so, it must contain a further perception or perceptions. I compare this with an interpretation due to Donald Baxter.

In light of this, section 3 returns to the Appendix and reconstructs Hume's counterbalancing argument. The core of the argument is that, when the perceptions in question are all of those belonging to a given mind, there cannot be a further perception in that mind. So, it cannot supply a connection among them. So, they do not compose a whole. It follows that a mind is not a composite thing, whose parts are all its perceptions. This argument counterbalances those that Hume had previously given in support of his qualified metaphysical claim about minds. I propose that discovering this

counterbalancing argument is what led him to skepticism in the Appendix. I compare this interpretation with one proposed by Donald Ainslie and tentatively endorsed by Terence Penelhum.

Hume's skeptical conclusion is only provisional. He hopes that he, or another philosopher, may find some way to disarm one of the counterbalancing sets of arguments that he has presented (T App 21; SBN 636). In section 4, I consider evidence from his *Dialogues* that he eventually did so, by enriching his view of a mind.

In the *Treatise* sections that I will discuss, Hume uses the terms 'mind', 'thinking being', 'self', 'person', 'soul', and 'thinking principle' to pick out the same thing—something that, as far as we can conceive it, is a whole composed by its perceptions.⁴ I will stick to the term 'mind' throughout, both for terminological consistency and because Hume is working with a purely mentalistic conception of selves or persons in these sections.

1. The Interpretive Challenge of the Appendix

Hume's second thoughts about minds take up twelve Appendix paragraphs (T App 10–21; SBN 633–36). Commentators have focused on the last two, which are notoriously cryptic. In the second-to-last paragraph, Hume claims to see a problem for his account of “the principle of connexion, which binds [all our particular perceptions] together, and makes us attribute to them a real simplicity and identity” or “the principles, that unite our

⁴ Some commentators say that Hume uses the terms 'self,' 'person' and 'mind' interchangeably in these sections: for example, see Strawson 2011, 35 and Swain 2006, 134. Talia Mae Bettcher (2009, 208) argues that Hume regards 'self' and 'mind' as co-extensive, but not as interchangeable, since they express different “notion[s].” I take no stand on this issue.

successive perceptions in our thought or consciousness” (T App 20; SBN 635–36). As Barry Stroud observes, these descriptions are ambiguous. Hume might mean that he sees a problem with his account of “what actually unites our successive perceptions into one mind or one consciousness—what actually ties them together to make up one mind” (Stroud 1977, 135); in other words, he might mean that he sees a problem with his account of “the metaphysics of bundling” (Garrett 2011, 24). In that case, his second thoughts would concern his qualified metaphysical claim from the section “Of personal identity”—his claim that, as far as we can conceive it, a mind is a bundle of perceptions without strict and proper identity and simplicity. Alternatively, Stroud points out, Hume might mean “that he has no hope of explaining what features of our perceptions and what principles of the mind combine to produce in us the thought or belief that we are individual minds” (Stroud 1977, 135).⁵ In that case, his second thoughts would concern his psychological claim from the section “Of personal identity”—his claim that, due to misleading associations among her ideas, each of us believes that her mind has strict and proper identity and simplicity.⁶ Interpretations of the Appendix therefore divide into two main groups,⁷ based on how they resolve this ambiguity.⁸

⁵ Stroud (2013, E5–E6) now seems to think that this second interpretation is correct.

⁶ Ellis (2006, 201–10) argues that Hume’s footnote to the first of these ambiguous sentences settles the issue in favor of this second interpretation, on which Hume’s second thoughts concern his psychological claim from “Of personal identity.” For a convincing reply, see Garrett 2011, 26–28.

⁷ For finer-grained typologies of interpretations, see Ainslie 2008, Baxter 2008, chap. 5, Ellis 2006, and Garrett 2011.

⁸ In this century, commentators who think that Hume’s second thoughts concern his qualified metaphysical claim from “Of personal identity” include Allison 2008, chap. 11, Garrett 2011, Kail 2007, chap. 6, Pears

In the last paragraph, Hume writes, “In short there are two principles, which I cannot render consistent; nor is it in my power to renounce either of them, viz. *that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences*, and *that the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences*” (T App 21; SBN 636). But these two “Unrenounceable Principles”⁹ clearly are consistent with each other. When Hume says that he “cannot render [them] consistent,” he must mean that they belong to an inconsistent set of propositions that he accepts—but he does not tell us what this set’s other members are.

2004, and Strawson 2011. For critical discussion of Strawson’s interpretation, see Stroud 2013; for critical discussion of Kail’s, see Garrett 2010, and, for a response, Kail 2010, 100–103. Commentators who think that Hume’s second thoughts concern his psychological claim from “Of personal identity” include Ainslie 2001 and 2008, Baier 2008, Butler 2015, Ellis 2006, McIntyre 2009, Penelhum 2000, Pitson 2002, chap. 4, Roth 2000, Thiel 2011, chap. 12, Winkler 2000, and Wright 2009, 163–66. I understand Donald Baxter (2008, chap. 5) to give a hybrid interpretation. He says, in effect, that Hume is committed to an inconsistent triad, involving: i) an element of his qualified metaphysical claim (specifically, his claim that a mind lacks identity); ii) an element of his psychological claim (specifically, that each of us mentally represents her mind as having identity, by means of “consciousness’s ideas”); and iii) his claim that “consciousness never deceives” (E 7.13; SBN 66; see also T 1.4.2.7; SBN 190). Hence, on Baxter’s interpretation, Hume’s second thoughts concern both his qualified metaphysical claim and his psychological claim. See Garrett 2009, for critical discussion of this interpretation, and Baxter 2009, 453–54, for a reply. According to a third, smaller group of commentators, the Appendix raises no problem for either of Hume’s two main claims in “Of personal identity”: Bettcher 2009 and Swain 2006 are recent examples. For helpful surveys and attempted refutations of older interpretations, see Ainslie 2008, Baxter 2008, chap. 5, Ellis 2006, and Garrett 1981 and 1997, chap. 8.

⁹ I owe the term ‘Unrenounceable Principles’ to Don Garrett (2011, 22).

We cannot hope to decipher these two paragraphs apart from the ten that precede them.¹⁰ Hume introduces the whole, twelve-paragraph discussion as follows:

I had entertain'd some hopes, that however deficient our theory of the intellectual world might be, it wou'd be free from those contradictions, and absurdities, which seem to attend every explication, that human reason can give of the material world. But upon a more strict review of the section concerning *personal identity*, I find myself involv'd in such a labyrinth, that, I must confess, I neither know how to correct my former opinions, nor how to render them consistent. If this be not a good *general* reason for scepticism, 'tis at least a sufficient one (if I were not already abundantly supply'd) for me to entertain a diffidence and modesty in all my decisions. I shall propose the arguments on both sides, beginning with those that induc'd me to deny the strict and proper identity and simplicity of a self or thinking being. (T App 10; SBN 633)

In the section “Of personal identity,” Hume had argued for the qualified metaphysical claim that, as far as we can conceive it, a mind lacks “strict and proper identity and simplicity.” He now suggests that he has found an equally compelling argument, or arguments, on the other “side”—that is, against this qualified metaphysical claim. He therefore accepts a form of skepticism: finding compelling arguments on both sides of the issue, he suspends his “former opinions” about minds (or, at least, lowers his degree of confidence in them).

¹⁰ McIntyre 2009 and Swain 2006 emphasize the importance of T App 10, in particular, for understanding Hume's second thoughts in T App 20 and 21.

Accordingly, the following eleven paragraphs fall into two groups. First, T App 11–19 present a mixture of old and new arguments for Hume’s qualified metaphysical claim. Second, T App 20 and 21 (the two paragraphs on which commentators focus) report that Hume now finds his former account “very defective” and try to explain why. They conclude with the skeptical upshot that T App 10 had advertised: Hume says that he “must plead the privilege of a sceptic”—one who has suspended or lowered his confidence in his judgment about the matter—“and confess, that this difficulty is too hard for my understanding” (T App 21; SBN 636).

This suggests that, in T App 20 and 21, Hume means to give an argument against his qualified metaphysical claim. Before we can understand these paragraphs, we need to understand the claim against which they are arguing. What did Hume mean when he said that, as far as we can conceive it, a mind lacks “strict and proper identity and simplicity”? To answer this question, we must turn to the *Treatise* and its “Abstract.”

By “strict and proper” (or, as he sometimes says, “perfect”) simplicity, Hume means the lack of “co-existent parts” (T 1.4.3.5, 1.4.6.22; SBN 221, 263).¹¹ For him, then, to say that a mind lacks strict and proper *simplicity* is to make a claim about

¹¹ This is arguably not Hume’s only way of using the term ‘simplicity.’ When explaining distinctions of reason, he seems to attribute a kind of “simplicity” to a globe of white marble (T 1.1.7.18; SBN 25), which is extended and therefore has parts; here, then, ‘simplicity’ cannot mean indivisibility or partlessness. Jani Hakkarainen (2012, 68) suggests that ‘simplicity’ here means *identity* (in our contemporary sense of ‘identity’). In the section “Of personal identity,” however, Hume contrasts an object that is “perfectly simple and indivisible” with one that has “different co-existent parts” (T 1.4.6.22). In this section, then, the relevant sense of ‘simplicity’ is indivisibility or the lack of composition by co-existent parts.

composition: namely, that, at every moment when it exists, a mind has parts.¹² (I mean to remain neutral about whether Hume thinks that a composite thing is a genuine individual, or that “it” is a plurality of things—“its” parts—which we characterize in a misleading way, when we apply grammatically singular terms like ‘it’ and ‘a whole’ to them.¹³ For further discussion of this issue, see section 2, below.)

Hume’s claim that a mind lacks strict and proper *identity* also amounts to a claim about composition. This may surprise today’s readers, who do not share his idiosyncratic conception of identity. Let me therefore explain. For him, “identity” is just identity through time (T 1.4.2.26–30; SBN 200–201). He distinguishes two kinds of objects that can exist in time (T 1.2.3.11; SBN 37): a “steadfast,” or “unchangeable” object, whose existence is momentary, and which therefore has no temporal parts; and a “succession,” which is composed of several objects that succeed each other, and which therefore does have temporal parts.¹⁴ He later explains that an object with “perfect” or “strict and proper” identity is unchangeable, yet coexists with each temporal part of a succession (T 1.4.2.29–30; SBN 200–201).¹⁵ (For a limited analogy, think of a still photograph with a

¹² Hume does not seem to think that this is a necessary truth: in the Appendix, he invites us to suppose a mind “to be reduc’d even below the life of an oyster,” and to have “only one perception, as of thirst or hunger” (T App 16; SBN 634). As Garrett in effect notes (1997, 180), this does not imply that there could be a mind with no temporal parts, in Hume’s view.

¹³ Thanks to Jani Hakkarainen for pressing me to clarify this.

¹⁴ For a helpful discussion of this distinction, see Baxter 2008, chap. 3.

¹⁵ In T 1.4.2.29–30, Hume speaks only of “identity,” not of “perfect” or “strict and proper” identity. He introduces these terms later, to express what he had previously called “identity” (T 1.4.6.8, App 10; SBN 255, 633).

movie reel running alongside it: the “unchangeable” photograph, coexisting with each successive movie frame, is akin to an identical object, as Hume conceives it.) There are therefore two ways for something to lack what Hume calls “strict and proper identity.” First, something lacks this property if it is “unchangeable” or temporally partless and does not coexist with each member of a succession. Second, something lacks this property if it is itself a succession, rather than an “unchangeable” object. In the section “Of personal identity,” Hume did not think that a mind is “unchangeable” or temporally partless: he likened it to “a republic or commonwealth, in which the several members are united by the reciprocal ties of government and subordination, and give rise to other persons, who propagate the same republic in the incessant changes of its parts” (T 1.4.6.19; SBN 261). When Hume writes that a mind lacks “strict and proper identity,” he must therefore mean that it is a succession—that is, a temporally composite thing made up of successive parts.

For Hume, then, saying that a mind lacks strict and proper, or perfect, identity and simplicity amounts to saying that it exhibits composition, both at each moment (since it lacks perfect simplicity) and over time (since it lacks perfect identity).¹⁶ This seems to be a straightforwardly metaphysical claim. As we have seen, however, Hume qualifies this claim, by writing “as far as we can conceive it” (T Abs 28; SBN 657).¹⁷ There are different ways of interpreting this qualification. On one interpretation, it is Hume’s way

¹⁶ Swain 2006 also emphasizes Hume’s view that a mind is composite.

¹⁷ Similarly, in the Appendix, Hume qualifies his metaphysical claim by saying that “*we have no notion of [the mind], distinct from the particular perceptions*” (T App 19; SBN 635, italics in original)

of expressing caution or modesty about his metaphysical claim.¹⁸ On another interpretation, it suggests that he does not mean to make a straightforwardly metaphysical claim: for example, Galen Strawson (2011, 48 and 46) cites it as evidence that Hume means to make only the “epistemological . . . or epistemologically qualified ontological” claim that “the mind . . . *so far as we have any distinct or empirically warranted or philosophically legitimate conception of it*, is just a collection of [perceptions]” (italics in original).¹⁹ For my purposes here, I need not take a stand on this issue. I will continue to write of Hume’s ‘qualified metaphysical claim,’ remaining neutral about how to interpret the qualification.

Hume’s anonymous “Abstract” of *Treatise* Books 1 and 2 gives the clearest statement of his qualified metaphysical claim. This is an important document for our purposes, because Hume published it after “Of personal identity,” but before the Appendix. So, it gives his last public statement of his views about minds, before he

¹⁸ Presumably, all commentators who think that Hume means to make a metaphysical claim about minds—for example, Kail (2007, chap. 6) and Garrett (2011)—interpret the qualification in this way.

¹⁹ Hume’s claim that “the true idea” of a human mind represents it as a “system of different perceptions” (T 1.4.6.19; SBN 261) might seem to settle this issue: assuming that the relevant sense of ‘true’ is “agreement . . . to *real* existence and matter of fact” (T 3.1.1.9; SBN 458, italics in original), Hume seems to be saying here that, as a real matter of fact, a mind is a composite thing—hence, he seems to be making a metaphysical claim, not an epistemologically qualified one. But Strawson will reply that, by “true idea,” Hume means “the idea of the mind that is clear and distinct, and that therefore has fully legitimate employment in philosophy,” and so means to express a “properly sceptical epistemological . . . or epistemologically qualified ontological” claim, even in this passage (2011, 48). For similar interpretations to Strawson’s, see Craig 1987, 111–20 and Thiel 2011, 388 and 418–22.

reported having second thoughts about them. Summarizing these views in the third person, he writes:

This author . . . asserts, that the soul, as far as we can conceive it, is nothing but a system or train of different perceptions, those of heat and cold, love and anger, thoughts and sensations; all united together, but without any perfect simplicity or identity. . . . It must be our several particular perceptions, that *compose* the mind. I say, *compose* the mind, not *belong* to it. The mind is not a substance, in which the perceptions inhere. (T Abs 28; SBN 657–58, italics in original)

As this passage shows, Hume’s qualified metaphysical claim about minds is supposed to answer two questions: What is a mind, as far as we can conceive it? And what is the relation between a mind and its perceptions?²⁰ According to Hume’s opponents, a mind is a substance with perfect simplicity and identity (T 1.4.6.1; SBN 251), and the relation between a mind and its perceptions is that of a substance to its modes or accidents (T 1.4.5.5–6, 1.4.6.3; SBN 233–4, 252). Hume rejects each of these answers. Instead, he proposes, a mind is composite, both at each time and over time; and the relation of a mind to its perceptions is that of a whole to its parts—to have a perception is to be a whole whose parts include that perception. This implies that *all* of a mind’s perceptions are among its parts.

Let us now return to the Appendix. I have given evidence that, in the twelve paragraphs that contain Hume’s second thoughts, he intends to motivate skepticism by

²⁰ For the point that Hume is “trying to account for the relationship between perceptions and self,” see also Bettcher 2009, 214.

means of equipollent or counterbalancing arguments.²¹ And that, in the crucial paragraphs on which commentators focus—T App 20 and 21—he means to give a counterbalancing argument against his qualified metaphysical claim that, as far as we can conceive it, a mind lacks perfect identity and simplicity. I have argued that, for Hume, this claim means that a mind is a composite thing, whose parts are all of its perceptions. So, the interpretive challenge of the Appendix is to identify an argument against this former opinion, whose premises Hume is committed to accepting (otherwise, he would have no reason to accept its conclusion, hence no reason for retreating to skepticism).

If these points are correct, then many recent interpretations of T App 20 and 21 are, at best, incomplete. Most recent commentators think that these paragraphs present a problem for Hume’s psychological claim from the section “Of personal identity”—his claim that misleading associations among our ideas cause us to believe that our minds have perfect identity and simplicity. But an argument against this psychological claim would not counterbalance the arguments of T App 11–19, which concern Hume’s

²¹ I claim only that Hume motivates skepticism by means of counterbalancing arguments *in the Appendix*. Some commentators argue that this is also how he motivates skepticism in *Treatise* Book I’s discussion of the material world: for example, see Fieser 1989, 102–4. If these commentators are correct, then I can give a further argument in favor of my interpretation. In the Appendix, Hume likens the “contradictions” that he now sees in his account of minds to those that infect “every explication, that human reason can give of the material world” (T App 10; SBN 633). If the “contradictions” that he sees in theories of the material world are skepticism-inducing conflicts between counterbalancing sets of arguments, then so must be the “contradictions” that he now sees in his theory of minds.

qualified metaphysical claim.²² Unless these commentators can show that the problems they raise for Hume’s psychological claim also afford him an argument against his qualified metaphysical claim, then we should reject their interpretations.²³

The points I have raised in this section are not widely recognized in the secondary literature. Commentators often overlook Hume’s promise to “propose arguments on both sides” of an issue.²⁴ Others dismiss it, saying that T App 11–19 give arguments for Hume’s qualified metaphysical claim, but that T App 20 and 21 give no counterbalancing argument against it.²⁵ For example, Don Garrett (2011, 21) writes, “It is left to the next paragraph, [T App 20], to present the promised other “side.” That paragraph, however,

²² This criticism also applies to commentators, such as Bettcher (2009) and Swain (2006), who think that T App 20 and 21 present no problem for either Hume’s qualified metaphysical claim or his psychological claim from the section “Of personal identity.”

²³ Kenneth Winkler suggests that T App 20 and 21 raise a problem with Hume’s psychological claim, but notes that “his metaphysics leaves him with” this problem and that “in the end he may have to face the possibility that his metaphysics is after all mistaken” (2000, 37 n.36). Based on the evidence that I have presented in this section, I think that Winkler’s interpretation is correct only if a counterbalancing argument against Hume’s qualified metaphysical claim can be constructed from the problem that Winkler raises for the psychological claim.

²⁴ A few recent examples: Ainslie 2001 and 2008, Baier 2008, Bettcher 2009, Butler 2015, Ellis 2006, Kail 2007, chap. 6, Penelhum 2000, Strawson 2011, pt. 3, Swain 2006, Thiel 2011, chap. 12, and Wright 2009, 163–6 neither quote nor mention Hume’s promise to give “arguments on both sides” (T App 10; SBN 633). McIntyre (2009, 196) quotes the promise, but her interpretation of Hume’s second thoughts does not seem to explain it.

²⁵ There are two important exceptions: Baxter 2008, chap. 5 and Fieser 1989, 105–7 both note Hume’s promise to give “arguments on both sides” and give interpretations that explain it. However, their interpretations differ significantly from the one that I will give.

contains no argument that the mind *does* have strict and proper (i.e., perfect) identity and simplicity.”²⁶ Certainly, T App 20 and 21 do not express a complete argument against Hume’s qualified metaphysical claim. But they may still “contain” such an argument, albeit one with some suppressed premises. If Garrett and others are right that they do not, then Hume must have forgotten his promise to “propose arguments on both sides” (T App 10; SBN 633) by the time he came to write T App 20 and 21, and must have overlooked this when proofreading the Appendix (otherwise, he presumably would have removed the unfulfilled promise from T App 10). Of course, he could have made this combination of errors. But we should not accept that he did so without first trying to find an interpretation on which T App 20 and 21 do express an argument that counterbalances those of T App 11–19. In the next two sections, I take up this challenge.

2. Hume on Composition

When he comes to give his counterbalancing argument, Hume says that “if perceptions are distinct existences, they form a whole only by being connected together” (T App 20; SBN 635). This section aims to illuminate the argument by examining his account of composition, or the part-whole relation. How must several distinct perceptions be connected, if they are to form a whole? I will argue that, for Hume, several of a mind’s perceptions form a whole only if that mind supplies a connection among them, and that, in order to do so, it must contain a further perception or perceptions.

To see this, let us start with the Appendix. After stating that distinct perceptions “form a whole only by being connected together,” Hume continues: “But no connexions

²⁶ For a similar dismissal, see Allison 2008, 306.

among distinct existences are ever discoverable by human understanding” (T App 20; SBN 635). This recalls his earlier claim that we do not observe any “real bond” or “real connexion” among distinct perceptions (T 1.4.6.16; SBN 259–60). By repeating this claim here in the Appendix, Hume suggests that, if there were a real connection among several distinct perceptions, this would enable them to form a whole. He tells us elsewhere that a real connection would involve “absolute” inseparability: if two perceptions were really connected, then it would be an “absolute impossibility” for one to exist apart from the other (T 1.3.14.13; SBN 161–62).²⁷ So, when he says that distinct perceptions form a whole “only by being connected together,” and suggests that they would satisfy this condition if they were really connected, he seems to be adopting the commonsense thought that parts form a whole only if they are stuck together in a suitable way—for example, that four legs and a tabletop form a whole only when we have stuck them to each other.²⁸ Perceptions that were really connected would be stuck together by the strongest possible kind of glue.

But Hume cannot accept that a real connection among perceptions enables them to form a whole. This is because “the understanding never observes any real connexion among objects” (T 1.4.6.16; SBN 259–60), or—as he reminds us in the Appendix—“the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences” (T App 21; SBN 636). Hume thinks that a mind’s perceptions cannot have hidden properties or relations to each other: he writes that our perceptions are “known to us by consciousness” and so

²⁷ For helpful discussions of what a “real connexion” is, see Garrett 1997, 181 and 254 n.7, Hakkarainen 2012, 74–75, and Loeb 1992, 220–22. As Garrett notes, Hume may have adopted the term ‘real connexion’ in deliberate contrast with Descartes’s concept of a real distinction.

²⁸ For a critical discussion of this type of view, see van Inwagen 1990, 56–71.

“must necessarily appear in every particular what they are, and be what they appear,” and he extends this claim to their “situation and relations,” as well as to their “nature” (T 1.4.2.7; SBN 190; see also T 2.2.6.2; SBN 366).²⁹ It follows that, if a mind observes no real connection among its perceptions, then there is no such connection. So, however our perceptions form a whole, it is not thanks to a real connection among them.³⁰

Hume then suggests an alternative: “We only *feel* a connexion or a determination of the thought, to pass from one object to another” (T App 20; SBN 635). Without any real connections to explain composition, a mind must supply the glue—the “connexion”—that binds perceptions into a whole. But how exactly can it do this? To see Hume’s answer, we must turn back to the *Treatise* and its “Abstract.”

²⁹ In the quoted passage, Hume writes only that our senses cannot deceive us “in the situation and relations, [more] than in the nature of our **impressions**” (T 1.4.2.7; SBN 190, boldface added). But he supports this with a claim about perceptions in general: “Since all actions and sensations of the mind are known to us by consciousness, they must necessarily appear in every particular what they are, and be what they appear. Every thing that enters the mind, being in *reality* a perception, ’tis impossible any thing shou’d to *feeling* appear different” (T 1.4.2.7; SBN 190, italics in original). I infer that, for Hume, no perception of any kind—impression or idea—can have any hidden property, or any hidden relation to another perception in the same mind. This thesis would be more plausible were it restricted to *internal relations* among perceptions (that is, relations in which two or more perceptions stand, or fail to stand, just in virtue of their intrinsic properties): we cannot know “by consciousness” that two perceptions stand in an external relation like that of *resembling each other in being similar to at least one perception in another person’s mind*. (Thanks to Don Garrett for raising this point.) Restricting Hume’s thesis in this way would not affect the point that “consciousness” shows us that there are no real connections among distinct perceptions: a real connection would be an internal relation; see Loeb 1992, 221.

³⁰ For a different argument that distinct perceptions are not really connected, in Hume’s view, see Kail 2007, 136–38.

In the “Abstract,” after explaining his “principles of association”—that ideas come to be associated if and only if their objects stand in a “natural relation” of resemblance, contiguity or causation^{31,32}—Hume writes, “’Twill be easy to conceive of what vast consequence these principles must be in the science of human nature, if we consider, that so far as regards the mind, these are the only links that bind the parts of the universe together. . . . As these are the only ties of our thoughts, they really are *to us* the cement of the universe” (T Abs 35; SBN 662, italics in original). Here, Hume seems to make another qualified metaphysical claim: much as the section “Of personal identity” aims to say what a mind is, “as far as we can conceive it,” this “Abstract” passage aims to say what “bind[s]” or “cement[s]” parts into a whole, “so far as regards the mind,” or “*to us*.” Hume may mean to allow that the universe contains kinds of “cement” other than the one that he describes here—kinds of which we cannot conceive or know, hence that cannot serve to bind parts “*to us*.” However, he cannot consistently allow that *our perceptions* are bound into wholes by any inconceivable or unknowable kind of cement. As we have just seen, he holds that all of our perceptions are “known to us by

³¹ In the *Treatise*, Hume seems to vacillate between saying: i) ideas are associated when *they themselves* are resembling, contiguous or causally related; and ii) ideas are associated when *their objects* stand in these relations. For example, compare T 1.1.4.2, which says that *resembling ideas* are associated, with T 1.1.4.3, which says that *resembling objects* are “connected together in the imagination,” which I take to mean: represented by ideas that are associated. For discussion, see Bennett 2001, chap. 34. In the “Abstract” and first *Enquiry*, Hume is more careful: these works make it clear that (ii) is his considered view (T Abs 35; SBN 662 and E 3.3; SBN 24).

³² A “natural relation” is one that “produces an union among our ideas” (T 1.3.6.16; SBN 94). Resemblance, contiguity and causation are the only three natural relations, in Hume’s view (T 1.1.4.1, Abs 35; SBN 11, 662; see also E 3.2; SBN 24).

consciousness”: as regards their “situation and relations,” as well as their “nature,” they “must necessarily appear in every particular what they are and be what they appear” (T 1.4.2.7; SBN 190). It follows that several of one’s perceptions are bound together, period, if and only if it is apparent to one, by consciousness, that they are so bound—hence, if and only if they are bound together “so far as regards [one’s] mind” or “*to [one].*” Because we are interested, specifically, in Hume’s view of how *our perceptions* form wholes, we can safely drop the qualifications “so far as regards the mind” and “*to us*” in what follows.³³

What, then, serves to “bind” or “cement” perceptions into a whole, according to Hume? In this “Abstract” passage, he seems to say that association among ideas is, “*to us,*” the only available binding agent among the things that those ideas represent. If this is his view, then he will say that several *perceptions* form a whole only if someone has *associated ideas of those perceptions*. Hume holds that an idea represents a perception by being “deriv’d” from it: a “primary” idea derives from and represents an impression; a “secondary” idea derives from and represents another idea (T 1.1.1.11; SBN 6–7; see also T 1.2.3.11, 1.3.14.6; SBN 37, 157). He also holds that a mind can “derive” ideas only from its own perceptions (T Abs 6; SBN 647–48). So far, then, Hume seems committed to saying that several of a mind’s perceptions form a whole only if that very mind contains associated ideas of them.

But further evidence shows that this cannot be his view. The “Abstract” also tells us that the imagination is free to “join” or “compose” any of its ideas into a whole: “Our

³³ Many thanks to an anonymous referee for highlighting the importance of the qualifications “so far as regards the mind” and “*to us,*” and for suggesting this way of handling them.

imagination has a great authority over our ideas; and there are no ideas that are different from each other, which it cannot separate, and join, and compose into all the varieties of fiction” (T Abs 35; SBN 662). This recalls Hume’s discussion, in the *Treatise*, of how the imagination forms complex ideas, which are wholes made up of simple ones (T 1.1.1.2; SBN 2). Again, he writes that the imagination is “free” to “unite” or “join” “all simple ideas . . . in what form it pleases” (T 1.1.4.1; SBN 10). By exercising this authority of her imagination, someone can act on several of her simple ideas, so as to unite them into a complex one, regardless of whether they are naturally related—hence, regardless of whether her *ideas of these ideas* are associated.

Other passages suggest that Hume extends this view to parts and wholes of all kinds, not just ideas. For example, he writes, “Twenty men *may be consider’d as an unite*. The whole globe of the earth, nay the whole universe, *may be consider’d as an unite*. That term of unity is merely a fictitious denomination, which the mind may apply to any quantity of objects it collects together” (T 1.2.2.3; SBN 30). The whole earth, this seems to say, is a “quantity of objects” that a mind has “collect[ed] together”—that is, a quantity on which a mind has acted in a certain way, rather than a quantity of which that mind has associated ideas.³⁴ This interpretation may be challenged: perhaps Hume thinks that collecting objects consists in having associated ideas of them. But in the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, if not in the *Treatise*, he seems to hold that a mental action

³⁴ Some readers may doubt whether the whole earth exists, in Hume’s view, given that he calls its “unity” or oneness a “fictitious denomination.” It is hard to tell what he means by ‘fictitious’; for discussion, see Traiger 1987 and 2010. But even if he means that the whole earth *lacks* unity, he may still hold that ‘it exists,’ meaning by this that a plurality of things—the many parts of the earth—exist and are collected together by a mind.

of “uniting” can form a whole from parts of any kind, regardless of whether anyone’s ideas of those parts are associated. When Demea claims that the whole chain of events comprising the history of the universe must have a cause—namely, God—Cleanthes replies: “The WHOLE, you say, wants a cause. I answer, that the uniting of these parts into a whole, like the uniting of several distinct counties into a kingdom, or several distinct members into one body, is performed merely by an arbitrary act of the mind, and has no influence on the nature of things” (DNR 190). By calling this act of the mind “arbitrary,” Cleanthes suggests that it can take place even if there are no natural relations among the parts that it unites, hence no association among our ideas of those parts. Hume would likely endorse Cleanthes’s criticisms of Demea’s argument for the existence of God.³⁵ In the *Dialogues*, then, he seems to hold that a mental action of “uniting” can connect parts of any kind into a whole, without anyone’s having associated ideas of them.

Based on these passages, then, Hume seems to see two ways for perceptions to be connected into a whole. First, they are so connected if they are represented by associated ideas in the mind to which they belong. Second, they are so connected if that mind acts on them, so as to unite, join, or collect them.

Are these the only two ways for perceptions to be so connected, in Hume’s view? He may seem to allow a third way, when he calls the principles of association the “ties of

³⁵ The scholarly consensus is that, in general, Philo speaks for Hume in the *Dialogues*. But this does not prevent Cleanthes from speaking for him on occasion; I assume that Hume lets each of the three characters speak for him, when criticizing arguments for theism that another character has presented. But I need not insist on this point. (Some commentators might insist that only Philo speaks for Hume in the *Dialogues*, in light of Hume’s remark that “in every Dialogue, no more than one person can be supposed to represent the author” [1932, 173].)

our thoughts” (T Abs 35; SBN 662). It may seem that, if several things are tied together, then they are thereby connected into a whole; hence that, if several of a mind’s perceptions are tied together by being associated with each other,³⁶ then they are so connected, whether or not that mind contains associated ideas that represent them or acts so as to unite them.³⁷ However, I will now argue that Hume would not accept this as a third way for perceptions to be connected into a whole. I will then propose a different interpretation of his remark that the principles of association are the ties of our thoughts.

Association is a causal relation among perceptions,³⁸ akin to attraction among bodies (T 1.1.4.6; SBN 12–13). Simplifying slightly, but harmlessly: to say that two

³⁶ In the “Abstract,” Hume writes only of “thoughts” being tied together by association (T Abs 35; SBN 662). This suggests that association is a way for *ideas* to form a whole. Elsewhere, however, Hume indicates that *impressions* can stand in associative relations. For example, he argues that the transition from an impression to an idea involved in probable reasoning is an associative one (T 1.3.6.12; SBN 92); here, he seems to posit an association between an impression and an idea. And in *Treatise* Book 2, he observes that passions—a species of impression—can be associated with each other, due to their resemblance (T 2.1.4.3; SBN 283). If Hume held that an association between two ideas is a way for them to be connected, so as to form a whole, then he would presumably also hold that an association between an impression and an idea, or between two impressions, is a way for those perceptions to be so connected. Hence, I write of *perceptions*, and not just of *ideas*, being tied together by association.

³⁷ Many thanks to an anonymous referee for suggesting this.

³⁸ We may use the language of ‘association’ to express a relation among *types of perception*, as when we say that ideas of Labradors are associated with ideas of Golden Retrievers. Alternatively, we may use it to express a relation among *particular tokens of these types*, as when we say that, at noon today, Abbie formed an idea of Spot (a particular Labrador) that associatively caused her to form an idea of Rover (a particular Golden Retriever). We are currently asking how particular token perceptions can be connected

perceptions are associated is to say that one of them causes the other to exist in the mind to which it belongs.³⁹ Hume holds that causation consists in contiguity, succession, and a “necessary connexion” between the cause and its effect (T 1.3.2.6–11; SBN 75–77). And concerning causal necessity, he writes, “I define necessity two ways, conformable to the two definitions of *cause*, of which it makes an essential part. I place it either in the constant union and conjunction of like objects, or in the inference of the mind from the one to the other” (T 2.3.2.4; SBN 409, italics in original). It follows that an association between two perceptions consists in their contiguity and succession, together with either a “constant union and conjunction” of like perceptions or a certain “inference of the mind” about the two associated perceptions, or both.

Suppose that an association between two perceptions consists in their contiguity and succession, together with a constant conjunction of like perceptions, and does not involve an inference of the mind. Hume allows that, in addition to perceptions, there may

into a whole. Therefore, here and through my discussion, I use the language of ‘association’ to express a relation among particular token perceptions.

³⁹ This is a simplification because Hume sees association as a “gentle force” that “commonly,” but not invariably, prevails (T 1.1.4.1; SBN 10). In other words, he holds that there may be an association between two particular perceptions, p_1 and p_2 , even though there is not a constant conjunction among perceptions like them. Given Hume’s first definition of *cause* (T 1.3.14.31; SBN 170), it follows that p_1 is not the whole cause of p_2 . Still, it will be a part of the cause: that is, there will be a particular cause and effect, c and e , such that p_1 is a part of c ; p_2 is a part (perhaps an improper part) of e ; and everything like c is closely followed by something like e . Introducing this complication would not affect the argument that I will go on to make; see nn.42 and 44, below.

exist external objects.⁴⁰ However, he holds that we cannot conceive of anything “specifically different” from a perception (T 1.2.6.8, 1.4.5.19; SBN 67, 241); hence, we can only conceive external objects to be “a new set of perceptions” (T 1.4.2.56; SBN 218). If external objects, as far as we can conceive them, are a new set of perceptions, and if the relations of contiguity, succession and constant conjunction serve to connect perceptions into a whole—hence, serve to connect them “so far as regards the mind”⁴¹—then we should expect that the same relations would serve to connect external objects into a whole, so far as regards the mind. But Hume does not allow that these relations would do so. On the contrary, we have seen him say that, so far as regards the mind, “the parts of the universe”—which presumably include any external objects that exist—are bound together only by associations among ideas that represent these parts (T Abs 35; SBN 662). I infer Hume would deny that the relations of contiguity, succession and constant

⁴⁰ Hume distinguishes two conceptions of external objects or bodies: the “vulgar” conception, which attributes the defining properties of a body to certain sensory impressions (T 1.4.2.31–43; SBN 201–10); and the “philosophical” conception, which posits external causes of our sensory impressions, and attributes the defining properties of a body to them (T 1.4.2.46–55; SBN 211–17). He argues that there are no external objects as the “vulgar” conceive them, because none of our impressions have the defining properties of a body (T 1.4.2.44–45; SBN 210–11). But, while he argues that reason cannot support the belief in external objects as “philosophical” people conceive them (T 1.4.2.47; SBN 212), he does not argue that this belief is false; for this point, see Garrett 2006, 306. Thus, Hume leaves open the epistemic possibility that there are external objects or bodies, conceived as external causes of impressions that are themselves perception-like (a “new set of perceptions,” T 1.4.2.56; SBN 218).

⁴¹ As I argued above, Hume is committed to saying that several of one’s perceptions are bound together, period, if and only if it is apparent to one, by consciousness, that they are so bound—hence, if and only if they are bound together “so far as regards [one’s] mind” or “to [one].”

conjunction serve to connect perceptions into a whole, so far as regards the mind; and so would deny that these relations serve to connect perceptions into a whole, period. Therefore—supposing that association consists merely in these relations—he would deny that an association between perceptions so connects them.⁴²

Now suppose, instead, that an association between two perceptions does not consist merely in contiguity, succession, and constant conjunction but also involves a certain “inference of the mind” about the two associated perceptions. Elsewhere, Hume calls this inference a “determination of the mind to pass from one object to its usual attendant” (T 1.3.14.20; SBN 165) and a “transition from the idea of one object to that of its usual attendant, and from the impression of one to a more lively idea of the other” (T 1.3.14.31; SBN 170). He explains that this inference, determination or transition is an example of association among perceptions of a cause and its effect (T 1.3.6.12; SBN 92). And he says explicitly that, when the cause and effect are themselves perceptions—as in

⁴² Strictly speaking, where there is an association between two particular perceptions, p_1 and p_2 , the causal relation holds not between these perceptions themselves, but between two particular things—call them c and e —such that p_1 is a part of c and p_2 is a part of e (see n.39, above). This does not affect my argument. Suppose that two external objects, o_1 and o_2 , are related by contiguity, succession and a constant conjunction of like objects. If external objects, as far as we can conceive them, are a new set of perceptions; and if the relations of contiguity, succession and constant conjunction between c and e serve to connect p_1 and p_2 into a whole, so far as regards the mind; then we should expect that the same relations among o_1 and o_2 would serve to connect *some part of* o_1 and *some part of* o_2 into a whole, so far as regards the mind. But Hume does not allow that these relations would serve to connect any parts of external objects into a whole, so far as regards the mind, in the absence of associated ideas representing these parts (T Abs 35; SBN 662). I infer that he would not allow that the relations of contiguity, succession and constant conjunction between c and e serve to connect p_1 and p_2 into a whole.

the case of association that we are now considering—the inference about them is a transition or determination to pass between ideas of these perceptions (T 1.3.14.29; SBN 169).⁴³ On our present supposition, then, two perceptions are associated only if the mind to which they belong contains associated ideas of these associated perceptions.⁴⁴ On this

⁴³ Given other commitments of Hume's—that one perception represents another by being derived from it (T 1.1.1.11; SBN 6–7), that derivation involves causation (T 1.1.1.8; SBN 4–5), and that nothing is both the cause and effect of itself (T 1.3.6.7; SBN 90)—the view of association that we are now considering will lead to a regress: no perceptions will be associated, except in a mind that contains infinitely many perceptions. Since Hume holds that no human mind contains infinitely many perceptions (T 1.2.1.2; SBN 26–27), he will reject this view of association. I discuss it here for completeness's sake.

⁴⁴ More strictly (see nn. 39 and 42, above): on our present supposition, two particular perceptions, p_1 and p_2 , are associated only if there are two things, c and e , such that p_1 is a part of c , p_2 is a part of e , and the mind to which p_1 and p_2 belong contains associated ideas of c and e . Again, introducing this complication would not affect my argument. (Why must the associated ideas of c and e be in the mind to which p_1 and p_2 belong? Any idea of c must represent at least some of c 's parts. So, it must represent either 1) p_1 itself or 2) some part of c other than p_1 . I assume that the other parts of c will be either 2a) other perceptions in the mind to which p_1 belongs or 2b) states of some background mechanism responsible for mediating the associative transitions among perceptions in that mind; Hume speculates that this background mechanism may involve animal spirits in the brain (T 1.2.5.20; SBN 60–61). Given Hume's views that one perception represents another by being derived from it (T 1.1.1.11; SBN 6–7) and that a mind can derive ideas only from its own perceptions (T Abs 6; SBN 647–48), he is committed to saying that a mind can form ideas only of its own perceptions. So, if (1) or (2a) is true, only the mind to which p_1 belongs can form an idea of c . If (2b) is true, then we can think about c by thinking about certain states of the background mechanism responsible for the associative transition from p_1 to p_2 . But because this background mechanism is not itself a perception, it is not present to anyone's mind (T 1.4.2.21; SBN 197); so, presumably, we can think about it only under a relational description, like 'the brain-states responsible for the transition between p_1 and p_2 .' This relational description can be grasped only by a mind that has ideas of p_1 and p_2 —hence, again, only by

supposition, then, Hume would allow that being associated is a way for perceptions to be connected into a whole—but not that it is a *third* way for them to be so connected. It is just a special case of the first way that we have already identified, whereby perceptions are connected into a whole thanks to associated ideas that represent them.

If this argument is correct, then Hume would not allow that two perceptions' being associated is a third way for them to be connected into a whole. How else, then, should we interpret his remark that the principles of association are the “ties of our thoughts” (T Abs 35; SBN 662)? In the *Treatise*, he says that associations among simple ideas are nature's way of “pointing out to every one those simple ideas, which are most proper to be united into a complex one” (T 1.1.4.1; SBN 10–11), and calls complex ideas “effects of this union or association of ideas” (T 1.1.4.7; SBN 13). Similarly, in the “Abstract,” he says that association is “a secret tie or union among particular ideas, which causes the mind to conjoin them more frequently together” (T Abs 35; SBN 662). These passages suggest that, in Hume's view, an association among perceptions “ties” them together not by *being* a connection that forms a whole from them, but by *causing* the mind to supply such a connection in one of the two ways that we have already identified. Specifically, these passages suggest that an association among perceptions causes the mind to act so as to “unite” or “conjoin” them. Presumably, Hume would allow that the mind could also supply a connection among these perceptions by forming associated ideas that represent them.

the mind to which p_1 belongs. Similar reasoning will show that only the mind to which p_2 belongs can form an idea of e ; hence, that any associated ideas of c and e must be in the mind to which p_1 and p_2 belong.)

I conclude that Hume sees *only* two ways for perceptions to be connected into a whole: perceptions are so connected only if *either* they are represented by associated ideas in the mind to which they belong *or* that mind acts on them, so as to unite, join or collect them. It is hard to tell whether Hume means to stop here and settle for a disjunctive account, or instead sees some common explanatory factor between these two ways of being connected.⁴⁵ But this does not matter for my purposes. What matters is that—as I will now argue—in whichever way several perceptions are connected, there must be a *further* perception, or perceptions, in the mind to which they belong.

This is easy to see when several of a mind’s perceptions are connected thanks to its containing associated ideas of them. We have seen that an idea represents another perception by being derived from it (T 1.1.1.11, 1.2.3.11, 1.3.14.6; SBN 6–7, 37, 157). Derivation involves causation (T 1.1.1.8; SBN 4–5) and, since Hume holds that causes exist before their effects (T 1.3.2.7; SBN 76), he must accept that no idea represents itself.⁴⁶ So, if several of a mind’s perceptions are connected thanks to its containing associated ideas of them, these ideas must be *further* perceptions in that mind.

⁴⁵ Hume sometimes suggests that, when our ideas of several things are associated, we consider those things by a distinctive kind of mental action (T 1.4.3.5, 1.4.6.6; SBN 221, 253–54). So, perhaps he holds a non-disjunctive account, which says that several things are connected if and only if a mind acts on them in a certain distinctive way.

⁴⁶ More precisely, he must accept that no idea is a particular, or singular representation of itself. Hume thinks that ideas are not limited to singular representation: if an idea is suitably associated with a general term and with other ideas, it serves as an “abstract” or “general” representation that picks out all individuals of a certain kind (T 1.1.7.7–10; SBN 20–22). The abstract ideas *of ideas* and *of perceptions* do, in a sense, represent themselves: each has an extension that includes itself.

Suppose, instead, that several of a mind's perceptions are connected thanks to that mind's acting on them, so as to "unite" or "join" them. Hume holds that every "action" or "operation" of a mind is itself a perception: "It has been observ'd, that nothing is ever present to the mind but its perceptions; and that all the actions of seeing, hearing, judging, loving, hating, and thinking, fall under this denomination. The mind can never exert itself in any action, which we may not comprehend under the term of *perception*; and consequently that term is no less applicable to those judgments, by which we distinguish moral good and evil, than to every other operation of the mind" (T 3.1.1.2; SBN 456). Hence, the action of uniting or joining perceptions is itself a perception. Two considerations suggest that it must be a *further* perception that exists in addition to those that it unites or joins. First, as we have seen, Hume says that an association among several simple ideas plays a role in causing the action of uniting or joining them: it "point[s] out" to us that they are "proper to be united into a complex one" (T 1.1.4.1; SBN 10–11), or "causes the mind to conjoin them" (T Abs 35; SBN 662). Again, Hume holds that causes exist before their effects (T 1.3.2.7; SBN 76). So, he must accept that these associated simple ideas exist before the action that unites them. And so, this action must be a further perception that exists in addition to the simples that it unites into a whole.

Second, the action of uniting—or, at least, the volition that accompanies it⁴⁷—presumably exhibits intentionality: it is *of*, *about*, or *directed at* the simple ideas that it

⁴⁷ Hume holds that will or volition is an "*internal impression we feel and are conscious of, when we knowingly give rise to any new motion of our body, or new perception of our mind*" (T 2.3.1.2; SBN 399, italics in original). Hence, when we knowingly form a complex idea from several simple ones by uniting or joining them, this action will be accompanied by a volition.

serves to unite. Hume allows two ways for a perception to be of, about, or directed at something. First, it can *represent* the thing in question, paradigmatically by being copied from it; this is the sense in which an idea is “of” something.⁴⁸ Second, some perceptions that are not themselves representations can have an “object”—that is, can be directed at something—by being associated with an idea that represents the thing in question. For example, the passions of pride and humility are not themselves representations (T 2.3.3.5; SBN 415) but nonetheless have the self as their “object” (T 2.1.2.2; SBN 277) because they “turn our view to another idea, which is that of self” (T 2.1.2.4; SBN 278).⁴⁹ So, a mind can act to unite several perceptions only if it contains an idea that represents them—and this idea, as we have seen, must be a *further* perception in that mind. It follows that if several of a mind’s perceptions are connected thanks to a mental action of uniting or joining, then that mind contains a further perception—the mental action itself—and, if that action is not a representation, a further perception again—an idea that accompanies the mental action and represents the perceptions united by this action.

This section asked how several of a mind’s distinct perceptions must be “connected,” if they are to “form a whole” (T App 20; SBN 635). We have seen Hume suggest that a “real connexion” would enable them to do so, but since there are no real connections among distinct perceptions, the mind to which they belong must supply a connection among them. I have argued that this can happen in two ways: the perceptions can be represented by associated ideas, or they can be united by a mental action. When

⁴⁸ For the role of copying in representation, see, for example, T 1.3.14.16; SBN 163 and T 2.3.3.5; SBN 415. For the interchangeability of “idea of” and “idea that represents,” see, for example, T 1.1.6.1, 1.1.6.3, 1.2.1.3 and 1.4.5.3; SBN 15–16, 17, 27, 232–33.

⁴⁹ Here, I follow Garrett 2006’s account of the intentionality of Humean passions.

several distinct perceptions are connected in either of these ways, let us say that there is an *ideal connection* among them, in contrast with a real connection. I have argued that several distinct perceptions are ideally connected only if there is a further perception, or perceptions, in the mind to which they belong.

On the interpretation that I am proposing, Hume holds that perceptions form a whole only if they are *actually* ideally connected—that is, only if a mind actually forms associated ideas of them, or actually unites or joins them by the authority of its imagination. It follows that every whole made up of perceptions is actually conceived or thought of. Some readers may balk at this, given Hume’s view that the only objects that we can conceive are perceptions or, at least, are “specifically” like perceptions (T 1.2.6.8, 1.4.2.31, 1.4.2.36, 1.4.2.54, 1.4.2.56; SBN 67–68, 202, 205, 217, 218). Can he really think that there are no conceivable hats, shoes or stones—which would be wholes made up of perceptions, if they exist at all—that are not actually conceived? If not, then the reader may object that, for reasons of charity, we should offer Hume a different view of composition, on which several perceptions form a whole only if they *have the power to produce* an ideal connection in a mind that observes them, but on which they need not exercise this power. On this view, composition is akin to a secondary quality, as Locke often seems to conceive them: a power to affect minds in a certain way (ECHU 2.8.10).⁵⁰ Let us therefore call it *the secondary quality view* of composition.⁵¹

⁵⁰ References to ‘ECHU’ are to Locke 1975, followed by book, chapter and section numbers. Although Locke officially defines secondary qualities as “Powers to produce various Sensations in us” (ECHU 2.8.10), he sometimes suggests that a body has a secondary quality only if it actually produces a suitable idea in us (for example, ECHU 2.8.19); if this is his view, it closely resembles the view of composition that I have ascribed to Hume. For discussion, see Stuart 2003 and Downing 2009.

I answer that, whatever its independent merits, Hume cannot regard the secondary quality view as a genuine alternative to the view that I have ascribed to him. From his account of causation, he infers that the “distinction, which we often make betwixt *power* and the *exercise* of it” is “without foundation” (T 1.3.14.34; SBN 171); “strictly” or “philosophically” speaking, there are no unexercised powers (T 2.1.10.4, 2.1.10.7; SBN 311, 313). Admittedly, Hume sometimes talks as if there were unexercised powers.⁵² For example, he says that a miser “receives delight from his money; that is, from the *power* it affords him of procuring all the pleasures and conveniencies of life, tho’ he knows he has enjoy’d his riches for forty years without ever employing them” (T 2.1.10.9; SBN 314, italics in original). But we need to read this and similar passages in light of this preceding one:

It has been observ’d in treating of the understanding, that the distinction, which we sometimes make betwixt a *power* and the *exercise* of it, is entirely frivolous, and that neither man nor any other being ought ever to be thought possess’d of any ability, unless it be exerted and put in action. But tho’ this be strictly true in a just and *philosophical* way of thinking, ’tis certain it is not the *philosophy* of our passions; but that many things operate upon them by means of the idea and supposition of power, independent of its actual exercise. (T 2.1.10.4; SBN 311–12, italics in original)

This passage cautions us that, when Hume later talks as if unexercised powers—like the “power” of the miser’s money—cause passions, he is adopting a form of shorthand that he thinks is not “strictly true in a just and philosophical way of thinking.” What is strictly

⁵¹ For a contemporary defense of the view that composition is a secondary quality, see Kriegel 2008.

⁵² Many thanks to an anonymous referee for recommending that I address this here.

true is that the miser's false "idea and supposition of [unexercised] power" causes his passion of delight.

According to Hume, then, several distinct perceptions have the power to produce an ideal connection only if they actually produce one. Hence, by Hume's lights, the secondary quality view of composition collapses into the view that several of a mind's perceptions form a whole only if they are actually ideally connected—the view that I have ascribed to him.

The interpretation that I have proposed here is new to the literature; most other commentators pass over Hume's views on composition. But Donald Baxter is an important exception. Before moving on, I will compare our interpretations.

Baxter (2008, 25) argues that, for Hume, "anything with parts is many things, not a single thing."⁵³ For example, what we call 'a crowd of twenty people' is not a twenty-first thing that exists in addition to each of the people who compose it. Rather, when we talk about "it," we are talking about the twenty people, collectively—not about any one thing. Our use of grammatically singular terms like 'it' and 'a crowd' is convenient and harmless in ordinary life, but it is metaphysically misleading. Baxter claims that Hume applies this view of crowds to all composite things: "A crowd just is many people close together" (Baxter 2008, 26); likewise, "something with parts . . . is just the many parts connected somehow" (*ibid.*).

⁵³ Baxter (2008, 25–26) supports this claim with reference to T 1.2.2.3; SBN 30 and T 1.4.5.7; SBN 234. The "Abstract" and Appendix give further support to the more specific claim that *the mind* is many perceptions, in Hume's view: "Our idea of any mind is only that of particular perceptions" (T Abs 28; SBN 658); "*we have no notion of [the mind], distinct from the particular perceptions*" (T App 19; SBN 635, italics in original).

This is consistent with the view that several perceptions form a whole only if they are ideally connected, which allows, but does not require, that “the whole” is just the ideally connected perceptions themselves. So Baxter (2008, 26) can accept my interpretation as a supplement to his claim that “something with parts . . . is just the many parts connected somehow.”

3. Hume's Counterbalancing Argument

In section 1, I argued that the crucial paragraphs of the Appendix (T App 20 and 21) present a counterbalancing argument against Hume's qualified metaphysical claim from the section "Of personal identity"—his claim that, as far as we can conceive it, a mind is a composite thing, whose parts are all its perceptions. This argument seems to have the premise that, if our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, then they form a whole only by being connected together. Therefore, in section 2, I examined Hume's view of composition. In light of this, I will now reconstruct his counterbalancing argument. I will then argue that my reconstruction meets various criteria for success when interpreting the Appendix.

Before I present my reconstruction in detail, here is its central thought. As I argued in section 2, Hume thinks that several perceptions form a whole only if they are ideally connected, hence, only if there is a further perception, or perceptions, in the mind to which they belong. But, when he says that, as far as we can conceive it, a mind is a composite of perceptions (a "bundle," "collection," or "system"), the perceptions in question are all of those belonging to that mind: as he says in the Appendix, he is now concerned with "all our particular perceptions" (T App 20; SBN 635) or "all our distinct perceptions" (T App 21; SBN 636). In this case, there cannot be a further perception in the mind to which they belong. So, he must accept that all of a mind's perceptions do not form a whole, contrary to his former opinion that they do.

My reconstruction of Hume's counterbalancing argument has six premises. The first two are his Unrenounceable Principles:

[1] All of a mind's distinct perceptions are distinct existences.

[2] No mind perceives a real connection among any distinct existences.

(I have slightly recast these principles, to display the argument's logic more clearly. This does not affect their meaning in any important way.) Next, we have Hume's view that a mind's perceptions have no hidden properties or relations to each other (T 1.4.2.7; SBN 190), which we saw in section 2. This implies a third premise:

[3] If any distinct perceptions of a mind stand in an R-type relation, then that mind perceives an R-type relation among them.⁵⁴

In section 2, we also saw Hume say:

[4] If perceptions are distinct existences, they form a whole only if they are connected together. (T App 20; SBN 635)

He goes on to say: "But no connexions among distinct existences are ever discoverable by human understanding. We only *feel* a connexion or a determination of the thought, to pass from one object to another" (T App 20; SBN 635). The role of the first sentence here, I suggested, is to raise and dismiss the possibility that perceptions form a whole thanks to a real connection among them. The role of the second is to point out the alternative, as Hume sees it: that perceptions form a whole thanks to an ideal connection, one variety of which is an association among ideas of those perceptions, or a "determination of the thought, to pass from one object [that is, perception] to another."

This suggests that Hume accepts:

⁵⁴ As I have noted (n.29, above), premise [3] would be more plausible were it restricted to internal relations; but, since a real connection would be an internal relation, this restriction would not affect the counterbalancing argument.

[5] Perceptions are connected together only if they are really connected or ideally connected.

The sixth and last premise follows from the central thought that there cannot be an ideal connection among all of a mind's distinct perceptions, because there cannot be a further perception in that mind. Hence, Hume must accept:

[6] It is not the case that all of a mind's distinct perceptions are ideally connected.

From these premises, Hume can infer:

[7] No mind perceives a real connection among any of its distinct perceptions.

(From 1, 2)

[8] None of a mind's distinct perceptions are really connected. (From 3, 7)

[9] All of a mind's distinct perceptions form a whole only if they are connected together. (From 1, 4)

[10] All of a mind's distinct perceptions form a whole only if they are really connected or ideally connected. (From 5, 9)

[11] All of a mind's distinct perceptions form a whole only if they are ideally connected. (From 8, 10)

[12] It is not the case that all of a mind's distinct perceptions form a whole. (From 6, 11)

Hume's qualified metaphysical claim in the section "Of personal identity" said that, as far as we can conceive it, a mind *is* a whole formed by all of its distinct perceptions. So, the argument made up of propositions [1]–[12] counterbalances this former opinion.

This reconstruction of Hume's counterbalancing argument invites two objections. First, when Hume says that he will "propose the arguments on both sides," he says that he

will start with “those that induc’d me to deny the strict and proper identity and simplicity of a self or thinking being” (T App 10; SBN 633). This suggests that his counterbalancing argument will conclude that a mind has strict and proper identity and simplicity. Because my reconstruction has a different conclusion—that all of a mind’s distinct perceptions do not form a whole—I cannot have reconstructed Hume’s counterbalancing argument correctly.⁵⁵

I reply: In section 1, I argued that, for Hume, denying the mind’s “strict and proper identity and simplicity” amounts to saying that a mind is a whole composed at each moment of coexistent parts (since it lacks strict and proper simplicity) and composed over time of successive temporal parts (since it lacks strict and proper identity). I also argued that Hume wants to account for the relation of ownership between a mind and its perceptions by saying that this relation is an instance of that between a whole and its parts (T Abs 28; SBN 658). He must therefore say that, as far as we can conceive it, a mind’s parts include all of its perceptions. For Hume, then, the only viable alternative to saying that a mind has strict and proper identity and simplicity is to say that, as far as we can conceive it, a mind is a whole composed by all of its perceptions. But my reconstruction of Hume’s counterbalancing argument implies that this last claim is false. By Hume’s lights, then, this argument counts in favor of the view that a mind has strict and proper identity and simplicity, by ruling out what he sees as the only viable alternative to it. Hence, by his lights, my reconstruction does counterbalance his arguments for denying the strict and proper identity and simplicity of a mind.

I now turn to the second objection that my reconstruction invites. In section 1, I noted that some commentators think Hume’s qualification of his claim about what a mind

⁵⁵ Many thanks to an anonymous referee for recommending that I consider this objection.

is—“as far as we can conceive it”—shows that he did not mean to claim that a mind is a whole formed by all its distinct perceptions. Instead, they say, he means only that our “distinct or empirically warranted or philosophically legitimate conception of a mind” represents it as such a composite (Strawson 2011, 46). These commentators will say that, for Hume, ‘as far as we can conceive it, *p*’ does not imply ‘*p*’. Therefore, they might object that proposition [12], above, is consistent with Hume’s qualified metaphysical claim and so the argument that I have reconstructed does not really counterbalance his arguments for that claim.

I reply: Even if Hume does not mean to insist that his proposed metaphysics of mind is true, he must at least think that it is in better standing than the view he rejects, on which a mind has perfect simplicity and identity. But I have presented a valid argument whose conclusion is inconsistent with Hume’s proposal that a mind is a whole, whose parts are all its perceptions. Since Hume accepts this argument’s premises, it commits him to rejecting his own proposed metaphysics of mind as false—hence, as in no better standing than his opponents’ view. So, however we interpret Hume’s qualified metaphysical claim, the argument that I have presented conflicts with it. Hence, this argument does counterbalance those that Hume gave in “Of personal identity” and recapitulates in T App 11–19.

Therefore, my interpretation meets the challenge that I laid out in section 1. It explains why Hume promises to “propose the arguments on both sides,” that is, arguments for and against his qualified metaphysical claim from the section “Of personal identity” (T App 10; SBN 633). Paragraphs T App 11–19 propose arguments in favor of this claim. As I have interpreted them, paragraphs T App 20 and 21 then present (albeit

incompletely) an argument against it. Because my interpretation explains this feature of the text, it also explains why Hume concludes by “plead[ing] the privilege of a sceptic” (T App 21; SBN 636). Finding compelling arguments both for and against his qualified metaphysical claim, he can no longer confidently assert it—nor, of course, can he confidently deny it.

My interpretation also meets various criteria that other commentators have proposed.⁵⁶ First, it fits Hume’s descriptions of when his second thoughts about minds have arisen: namely, when he “proceed[s] to explain the principle of connexion, which binds [all our particular perceptions] together,”⁵⁷ and when he “come[s] to explain the principles, that unite our successive perceptions in our thought or consciousness” (T App 20; SBN 635–36). The counterbalancing argument that I have presented concerns Hume’s account of how the mind’s successive perceptions are bound together, or united, into a temporally extended whole, thanks to an ideal connection among them.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ The criteria that follow are based on those proposed by Ainslie 2001, 567–77 and Garrett 2011, 23.

⁵⁷ Hume also says that this “principle” is one that “makes us attribute to [all our particular perceptions] a real simplicity and identity” (T App 20; SBN 635). In the section “Of personal identity,” he argued that associations among our ideas of our perceptions cause this mistake (T 1.4.6.5–22; SBN 253–63). So, in Hume’s view when writing this section, the association of ideas was the principle that “binds [all our particular perceptions] together” (T App 20; SBN 635). This suggests that, when writing “Of personal identity,” Hume thought that all of a mind’s perceptions are ideally connected in the first way that we distinguished, above—that is, by associated ideas (Swain 2006 takes this view). But I need not insist on this point.

⁵⁸ As I have reconstructed it, Hume’s counterbalancing argument also concerns his account of how a mind’s co-existent perceptions are bound together into a momentary whole. The section “Of personal identity” concerns both the diachronic issue mentioned in the main text and this synchronic issue, but it

Second, my interpretation explains why Hume should say that he cannot “render” his two Unrenounceable Principles “consistent,” when they clearly are consistent with each other. These principles are among the premises of the counterbalancing argument that I have presented. Since this argument is valid, these premises and Hume’s qualified metaphysical claim make up an inconsistent set.

Third, my interpretation explains why Hume should say, “Did our perceptions either inhere in something simple and individual, or did the mind perceive some real connexion among them, there wou’d be no difficulty in the case” (T App 21; SBN 636). If Hume could take the first of these options and say that our perceptions inhere in something “simple and individual,” then he would reject his qualified metaphysical claim that a mind is a composite thing. He could then safely accept the counterbalancing argument that I have presented. If he could take the other option, and say that the mind perceives some real connection among its perceptions, he would reject proposition [7], and hence either premise [1] or [2], in the counterbalancing argument. He could then safely accept his arguments in favor of his qualified metaphysical claim (T App 11–19; SBN 633–35). Either way, he would avoid his skeptical predicament.

Fourth, my interpretation allows me to explain why Hume should think that his second thoughts in the Appendix apply only to the section “Of personal identity” and not to other of his views—for example, it allows me to explain why the problem does not extend to his account of all composite perceptions, or of all composite things. Hume’s focuses almost exclusively on the diachronic issue (T 1.4.6.5–21; SBN 253–62), addressing the synchronic issue only in its penultimate paragraph (T 1.4.6.22; SBN 263). I propose that Hume’s counterbalancing argument concerns both issues, too, but that—in keeping with his discussion in the section “Of personal identity”—the Appendix focuses on the diachronic issue.

account breaks down only when he applies his view of composition to all of the perceptions within a given mind: as he says in the Appendix, the counterbalancing argument concerns “all our particular perceptions” (T App 20; SBN 635), or “all our distinct perceptions” (T App 21; SBN 636).⁵⁹

Fifth and finally, my interpretation allows me to explain why Hume sees his discovery of the counterbalancing argument as a genuine crisis—a “labyrinth,” involving “contradictions and absurdities” (T App 10; SBN 633). In *Treatise* Book 1, he rejected the view that a mind has “perfect” or “strict” identity and simplicity. One of his arguments was that this view cannot account for the relation between a mind and the many perceptions that belong to it: “What must become of all our particular perceptions upon this hypothesis? . . . After what manner . . . do they belong to self; and how are they connected with it?” (T 1.4.6.3; SBN 252; cf. T Abs 28, T App 12–13; SBN 657–58, 634). As we have seen, he thought that his own qualified metaphysical claim allowed him to account for this relation as a special case of the relation between a whole and its parts (T

⁵⁹ Ainslie (2001, 575–76) claims that, if Hume saw a problem with his qualified metaphysical claim about minds, he should also see a problem in the section “Of scepticism with regard to the senses,” because it seems to rely on that claim at an important point (T 1.4.2.39; SBN 207). Since Hume does not seem to see any problem with this section, Ainslie infers that he must not see a problem with his qualified metaphysical claim about minds. I reply that Ainslie’s argument has a false premise. The only claim on which Hume relies, in T 1.4.2.39, is that each particular perception can exist apart from any other perception and from any mind. This claim does not imply that a mind is a composite thing, whose parts are all its perceptions: it is consistent with the view that no mind exists; it is also consistent with the view that a mind is a composite thing, whose parts include entities other than its perceptions (for discussion, see section 4). So, on my interpretation of the Appendix, Hume need not have seen a problem with “Of scepticism with regard to the senses.”

Abs 28; SBN 658). But the counterbalancing argument shows that this account is inconsistent with Hume's view of composition, which implies that all of a mind's perceptions do not compose a whole. So Hume has failed to improve on his opponents' view of minds in an important way: like them, he has failed to account satisfactorily for the relation of perception ownership.

In a certain respect, my interpretation of T App 20 and 21 resembles one proposed by Donald Ainslie (2001, 2008) and tentatively endorsed by Terence Penelhum (2000). In the section "Of personal identity," Hume explains why someone believes that her perceptions belong to a simple, identical mind⁶⁰ by appealing to associative relations among *her ideas of those perceptions*, or *secondary ideas* (Ainslie 2001, 560, 563–66). But this approach does not allow him to explain why the person believes that her *secondary ideas* belong to this simple, identical mind; hence, it does not allow him to explain her belief that *all* her perceptions so belong (Ainslie 2001, 566). Of course, Hume could posit *tertiary ideas*—that is, ideas of secondary ideas—to explain why a person believes that her secondary ideas belong to a simple, identical mind. But this would not solve the problem: it would still not explain why she believes that *all* her perceptions belong to a simple, identical mind, because it would not explain why she believes that her tertiary ideas do (Ainslie 2001, 570).

Like Ainslie, I claim that Hume fails to explain a feature of *all* a mind's perceptions because—in order to explain this feature—his account posits a further

⁶⁰ As I have noted (n.3, above), Ainslie (2001, 561–63) argues that the persons who form this belief are exclusively philosophers, according to Hume; the "vulgar," or non-philosophical, do not reflect on their perceptions using secondary ideas, and so do not form the belief that Hume aims to explain. I set this part of Ainslie's interpretation aside here.

perception, or perceptions, to which that account does not extend. According to Ainslie, Hume's account of our belief in a simple, identical mind does not extend to the secondary ideas that it posits. According to me, Hume's account of composition does not extend to the further perception, or perceptions, that a mind must contain in order to supply an ideal connection among all its other perceptions.

However, Ainslie holds that T App 20 and 21 raise a problem for Hume's *psychological claim* from the section "Of personal identity": his claim that each of us believes her mind to be a simple, identical owner of perceptions. In contrast, I have argued that these paragraphs contain an argument against Hume's *qualified metaphysical claim* from that section: his claim that, as far as we can conceive it, a mind is a whole, whose parts are all its perceptions. This difference matters, because Hume sees his argument in T App 20 and 21 as counterbalancing those of T App 11–19, so as to induce skepticism. T App 11–19 give arguments in support of his qualified metaphysical claim, not his psychological claim. Because Ainslie raises a problem that applies only to Hume's psychological claim,⁶¹ he does not identify an argument that would counterbalance those of T App 11–19. So, his interpretation does not meet the interpretive challenge that I have argued the Appendix poses (section 1, above).

Ainslie's interpretation is often thought vulnerable to this objection: Hume can easily respond to the problem that it raises, by giving up the claim (if he ever made it) that anyone has a belief that represents *all* her perceptions.⁶² He can say that, when

⁶¹ Ainslie (2001, 575–76) stresses that, on his interpretation, T App 20 and 21 leave Hume's qualified metaphysical claim untouched.

⁶² One often encounters versions of this objection in conversation; for published versions, see Ellis 2006, 212–13 and Penelhum 2000, 117–19 and 125. When he first presented his interpretation, Ainslie replied

someone reflects on her perceptions by means of secondary ideas, this leads her to believe that *all the perceptions on which she reflects*—that is, all her perceptions except for her secondary ideas—belong to a simple, identical mind. If she were later to reflect on those secondary ideas, by forming tertiary ideas that represent them, this would induce the further belief that those secondary ideas also belong to that simple, identical mind. Hume need not say that anyone ever has a belief that represents all her perceptions.

My interpretation may seem to face a parallel objection, which would say: Hume can easily respond to the counterbalancing argument that I have presented, by giving up the claim that anyone's mind has *all* of her perceptions among its parts. But this objection fails. As we have seen, Hume wants to account for the relation of ownership between a mind and its perceptions as a special case of the relation between a whole and its parts; and this implies that all of a mind's perceptions are among its parts. If Hume were to deny this last claim, he would be left with no account of the relation of ownership. This would be a significant defeat, because—as we have also seen—he criticized his opponents precisely because they cannot account for this relation (T 1.4.6.3; SBN 252). So, my interpretation is not vulnerable to the kind of objection that Ainslie's invites.

that Hume would wish to explain why a person *now* believes that her *present* secondary ideas belong to her simple, identical mind—not just why she later (by means of a subsequent, tertiary idea) comes to form the belief that these secondary ideas belonged to her mind (2001, 570). He now seems to prefer a different reply: that Hume cannot explain *his own* belief, formed in the course of philosophical theorizing, that his mind is a bundle whose parts are all of its perceptions, including all of the secondary ideas, tertiary ideas, and so forth, with which he reflects on his other perceptions (2008, 153–54). If Ainslie can defend this claim, then he will have raised a serious problem for Hume, but—if my argument in section 1 is correct—not the one that Hume means to raise in T App 20 and 21.

Robert Fogelin (1985, 108) observes that one objection applies to every interpretation of Hume's second thoughts in the Appendix: if his worries took this form, "why didn't he say so?"⁶³ Hume does not completely spell out any problem for any of his "former opinions" about minds. So every interpretation of his second thoughts must be speculative, to some extent. But my reconstruction of Hume's counterbalancing argument uses only premises that Hume explicitly states in the Appendix (premises 1, 2 and 4), a premise that follows from things he explicitly states (premise 3), and two premises whose attribution to Hume I have defended, based on what he says in the Appendix and elsewhere (premises 5 and 6). This seems to involve no more speculation than any interpretation must. And even if I have not captured the second thoughts that Hume intended to express, I have still presented a problem with his overall view in *Treatise* Book 1 that would have inspired his retreat to skepticism about minds, had he seen it.

4. Beyond Hume's Skeptical Impasse: The Mind in the *Dialogues*

At the end of the Appendix paragraphs that concern us, Hume suggests that his retreat to skepticism is only provisional. He expresses hope that he, or another philosopher, may yet find some way to disarm one of the opposing sets of arguments that he has presented:

I pretend not, however, to pronounce [this difficulty] absolutely insuperable.

Others, perhaps, or myself, upon more mature reflection, may discover some hypothesis, that will reconcile those contradictions. (T App 21; SBN 636)

How might Hume revise his views, to escape his skeptical impasse? If my interpretation is correct, then he has two options, broadly speaking: he might revise his view of

⁶³ For this point, see also Ellis 2006, 211.

composition, or he might revise his view of minds. His *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* suggests that he came to think that he could take one of these options.

In Part IV of the *Dialogues*, Demea says, “What is the soul of man? A composition of various faculties, passions, sentiments, ideas; united, indeed, into one self or person, but still distinct from each other” (DNR 159). Cleanthes accepts this view (DNR 159) and Philo says nothing to challenge it. Therefore, Hume likely accepted it himself. Some commentators present this as evidence that he maintained his qualified metaphysical claim from the section “Of personal identity” until the end of his life and infer that his second thoughts about minds in the Appendix must not concern that claim, contrary to what I have argued.⁶⁴ But notice that he has revised his view in an important way. He now says (assuming he shares Demea’s view) that a mind’s parts include not just its perceptions (its “passions, sentiments, [and] ideas”) but also its *faculties*. This suggests that he came to see either of two solutions to his problem in the Appendix.

First, Hume may have adopted a more robust ontology, which includes real faculties or powers and thus allows him to accept that there is a genuine distinction between a power and its exercise. If so, then he can give up the view that a mind’s perceptions form a whole only if they are actually ideally connected and instead take the secondary quality view of composition: that is, he can say that a mind’s perceptions form a whole only if they have a faculty of, or power to, produce an ideal connection among them in a mind that observes them, but they need not exercise this power. Revising his view of composition in this way would allow Hume to say that all of a mind’s perceptions and their faculties, together, compose that mind as a whole.

⁶⁴ For example, see Ainslie 2001, 576 n.30.

However, we do not find the secondary quality view of composition in the *Dialogues*. Instead, as we saw in section 2, Cleanthes takes a view much like Hume's in the *Treatise*: several parts form a whole only if a mind acts on them, so as to "unite" them (DNR 190). But there is a second solution to the Appendix problem that Hume may have come to see. A faculty can act on itself—as, for example, when I exercise my faculty of thought by thinking about that very faculty. So, Hume may have come to think that a mind can act so as to unite all its parts, provided that these parts include a faculty for performing such actions. When this faculty acts on itself, as well as on all the other parts of the mind to which it belongs, it thereby supplies an ideal connection among all of that mind's parts. By enriching his conception of a mind so as to include faculties among its parts, then, Hume allows himself to explain how all of those parts come to form that mind as a whole.

5. Conclusion

I have presented a new interpretation of Hume's second thoughts in the Appendix, based on a new interpretation of his views on composition. My interpretation of the Appendix meets an important criterion that most other commentators have overlooked or dismissed: it explains Hume's promise that he will "propose the arguments on both sides" (T App 10; SBN 633)—that is, arguments both for and against his qualified metaphysical claim about minds in the *Treatise* section "Of personal identity"—and it thereby explains his retreat to skepticism. My interpretation also meets various criteria that other commentators have proposed.

Hume says that discovering his counterbalancing argument, if “not a good *general* reason for scepticism,” is “at least a sufficient one . . . for me to entertain a diffidence and modesty in all my decisions” (T App 10; SBN 633). Given the astonishing range of conflicting readings that the Appendix has received, I have sufficient reason to entertain a diffidence and modesty about my interpretation. I do not claim complete confidence in it. But I do claim that the texts support it at least as well as any other of which I am aware. My interpretation also has the distinction of not (yet) having been refuted.

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