Hans Vaihinger's Hume: Real fictions and semi-fictions in the *Treatise*

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Abstract: Hans Vaihinger prefaces the English edition of his seminal text, *The Philosophy of As If*, by drawing attention to his philosophical predecessors. While Hobbes and Berkeley are afforded due credit in the development of philosophical fictionalism, Hume is conspicuously absent. I argue that Hume's early theory of fiction, which he abandoned after publishing the *Treatise*, prefigures Vaihinger's central distinction between two types of fiction: real fictions and semi-fictions. To that end, Hume's philosophy offers a significant contribution to the history of early modern fictionalism.

Keywords: David Hume, Hans Vaihinger, Fiction, Fictionalism, Natural Belief

In 1911, Hans Vaihinger published his *Die Philosophie des Als Ob*, a work translated into English by C.K. Ogden as *The Philosophy of 'As if': A System of the Theoretical, Practical and Religious Fictions of Mankind*. Based on his dissertation completed in 1877, the systematic philosophical account presents a general theory of fiction. Specifically, Vaihinger offers a comprehensive analysis of the instruments of thought in so far as thought is considered a purposive organic function of the psyche. Although Vaihinger's system received less attention after the Second World War, his philosophy of 'Critical Positivism' has become deeply relevant to contemporary research in the last forty years. Most notably, several recent species of philosophical fictionalism may be traced to seminal ideas in Vaihinger's text, namely, scientific, religious, moral, mathematical, and metaphysical fictionalism.

In the Preface to the English edition of *The Philosophy of As If*, Vaihinger surveys a list of philosophers he believes to be his forerunners. First, he draws attention to the movement of English Nominalism, which, he says, represents an initial understanding of fictions. Specifically, he mentions the skeptical philosophical approach of John Duns Scotus, followed by the theory of *ficta* developed by William of Occam. For Vaihinger, Occam offers the first "clear and definite treatment of the fictional nature of general ideas, developed in a

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manner which is still a model for to-day" (*PAI*: vii).[1] Occam's account introduces the thesis that *ficta* ought to be regarded as practically necessary ideas despite their theoretical non-existence.

Second, while Vaihinger acknowledges George Berkeley to have had a minimal understanding of fictions, it is Hobbes, he argues, who demonstrated "considerable knowledge both of Fictions themselves and of the theory of their use. Empty space, the idea of a *bellum omnium contra omens*, and of an 'original contract' are for Hobbes conscious Fictions" (*PAI*: vii). Vaihinger also names Jeremy Bentham and Adam Smith as noteworthy predecessors.

The main source of inspiration for Vaihinger is, not surprisingly, Immanuel Kant. Vaihinger remains an important figure in the Neo-Kantian tradition – he founded the academic journals, *Kant-Studien* and *Kant Gesellschaft* in 1896 and 1901, respectively. Vaihinger maintains that Kant devoted "100 pages" of his work to outlining a theory of fiction in which he proved "a large number of ideas, not only in metaphysics but also in mathematics, physics and jurisprudence, were Fictions" (*PAI*: viii).

The only additional English philosophers that Vaihinger mentions in his Preface are David Hume and Francis Bacon. He claims that both Bacon and Hume failed to understand fictions as practical necessities of thought. However, Vaihinger concedes that his first major influence was, in fact, Hume: "it was David Hume and still more J.S. Mill whose influence on my thought was paramount" (*PAI*: vii). He then reiterates that his "private studies were devoted mostly to David Hume and John Stuart Mill, whose exact knowledge was decisive for [his] philosophic attitude" (*PAI*: xxxv).

Now, given that Hume specifically refers to the concept of 'fiction' on fifty separate occasions in the *Treatise*, it is odd why Vaihinger does not credit him with even a minimal understanding of pragmatic fictions. Even more curious is why Vaihinger singled out Hobbes for praise and not Hume, considering Hobbes' plausible influence on Hume. Paul Russell has drawn attention to "significant affinities between" Hume's theory of spatial representation and Hobbes' (Russell 2008).[2] Jonathan Cottrell agrees, suggesting that when

[1] '*PAI*' are to *The Philosophy of As If* (Vaihinger 1935), followed by the page number. References to Hume are cited as follows: '*T*' are to *A Treatise of Human Nature*; followed by Book, part, section, paragraph (Norton and Norton 2007), and then corresponding page number in the 1978 Selby-Bigge edition revised by Nidditch: 'SBN'. '*E*' are to *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, followed by section, paragraph (Millican 2007), and then corresponding page number in the 1975 Selby-Bigge edition revised by Nidditch: 'SBN'; '*D*' are to *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, followed by section and paragraph (Coleman 2007).

[2] Russell specifically writes: "Hobbes and Spinoza are rarely, if ever, associated with Hume's position on space – which is especially surprising in the case of Hobbes, as there are significant affinities between their views" (2008: 110).

"Hobbes claims that the 'place' (*locus*) of a body is 'feigned' (*ficta*)… he seems to mean that being located involves a relation between a body and our minds… [that] a body has 'feigned' location means that it is related to our minds in a certain way: namely, that it produces a certain effect in our imagination" (2016: 69-70). For Cottrell, Hobbes' treatment of feigned location shares important similarities with Hume's rendering of fictitious duration and distance. Likewise, there seems to be a further point of contact between Hobbes' rendering of the state of nature and Hume's recognition of it as a philosophical *fiction*. In view of these salient connections, why does Vaihinger not acknowledge any tie between the two philosophers, especially when he cites Hobbes' empty space, the war of all against all, and the original contract *as* fictions?

As is well known, Hume was also influenced by George Berkeley, and while it is unclear to what extent Hume was influenced by Berkeley's criticisms of mathematics specifically, it is at least plausible that Hume's mathematical views were minimally informed by Berkeley's controversial critique of the discipline. Vaihinger says of Berkeley that he "proved, quite correctly and with wonderful insight, that practically all the fundamental principles of mathematics were contradictory. From this he drew the conclusion that the mathematicians had no right whatsoever to scoff at the incomprehensible elements and mysteries of Christianity, since their own subject had the same defects" (*PAI*: 117). Hume equally reveals the contradictory nature of important mathematical concepts, namely, equality, unity, infinite divisibility, and identity.[3] As a consequence, Berkeley's *The Analyst*, published only five years before the *Treatise*, may have been a source of influence for Hume's theory of fiction. Vaihinger, though, fails to notice the potential connection between them.

Not only that, in several instances Vaihinger appears to deny Hume a charitable reading. For instance, Vaihinger argues that "when Hume called the categories fictions, he was right *in fact*, though his idea of a fiction was very different from ours. His idea of the 'fiction of thought' was that of a merely subjective fancy, while ours (borrowed from the usage of mathematics and jurisprudence) includes the idea of utility. This is really the kernel of our position, which distinguishes it fundamentally from previous views" (*PAI*: 99). Vaihinger is, of course, incorrect here, for while Hume does believe some fictions are subjective fancies, he believes that other fictions are naturally constitutive of human nature, and

[3] Compare Vaihinger's chapter "The Fiction of the Infinitely Small" (*PAI*: 236-245) with Hume's treatment of infinite divisibility. Hume argues, for instance, that "'tis evident, that as no idea of quantity is infinitely divisible, there cannot be imagin'd a more glaring absurdity…And as this absurdity is very glaring in itself, so there is no argument founded on it, which is not attended with a new absurdity, and involves not an evident contradiction" (*T* 1.2.4.32, SBN 52).

that they are necessarily tied to the idea of utility.[4] Contra Vaihinger, Saul Traiger argues Hume's understanding of fictions may have indeed been influenced by the notion of a legal fiction. Because Hume had studied law, he was "well versed in legal fictions. He explicitly refers to and describes legal fictions in *The History of England*…The notion of legal fiction in Hume's time was, and remains today, a fundamental concept in the law. Its application to Hume's metaphysics and epistemology is natural and fitting, and the former can be further applied to making sense of the latter" (Traiger 2010: 52-3).[5]

On the whole, it appears that Vaihinger gleaned more from his early study of Hume regarding the nature of fictions than he readily admits in the preface to his *The Philosophy of As If*. At the very least, it is clear that Vaihinger's claim about Hume's understanding of fiction is mistaken. In fact, in my view, Hume's extensive examination of cognitive fictions – though largely obscure and unsystematic – is comprehensive, and often reaches similar conclusions to Vaihinger. In this discussion, I aim to redress Hume's absence from the history of fictionalism, as recapitulated by Vaihinger. To do so, I first provide a brief overview of Vaihinger's primary philosophical distinction, namely, that fictions may be divided into two kinds: (1) real fictions and (2) semi-fictions. I then illustrate how various Humean fictions fit the criteria of each kind. Subsequently, I argue that Vaihinger's philosophy follows Hume in several other related areas: (a) cognitive fictions are identified as remedies for psychological instability, (b) fictions are tied to contradictions embedded in human nature, and (c) fictions are reified as dogmas over time. Finally, I assess the aims of Vaihinger's critical positivism against Hume's mitigated skepticism. As a consequence, I hope to show that Hume's historical contribution to contemporary fictionalist discourse is significant and ought to be regarded as such.

1. *Hypothetical and Self-Contradictory Fictions*

I now turn to demonstrating that Hume's theory of fiction anticipates several of Vaihinger's arguments in *The Philosophy of As If*. Although Hume does not classify or define his use of fiction in any systematic or technical sense, a careful reading suggests that Humean fictions share several isomorphic features with Vaihingerian fictions. In this section, I begin by highlighting the

[4] Vaihinger subsequently seems to contradict himself when he makes the claim: "it is the particular merit of Kant to have shown that most ideational constructs are purely subjective. That they are fictions in our sense, i.e. fictions as a means for attaining certain purposes, he no more realised than Hume" (*PAI*: 107).

[5] For a complementary discussion of Hobbes' application of legal fictions to natural philosophy and politics, see Foisneau 2010.

main contours of Vaihinger's theory of fiction, and thereafter I discuss how Hume's fictions may be understood in light of Vaihinger's twofold distinction.

In Chapter XIX, Vaihinger unpacks his foundational division between two kinds of fiction: (1) Real Fictions (Self-Contradictory) and (2) Semi-Fictions (Hypothetical). Real Fictions are fictions identified by an internal contradiction. They serve the mind in so far as they act as expedients for the operation of thought. Once their service is complete, they drop out like the middle term of a syllogism. As Vaihinger argues, "the discarding of true fictions in *the course of a given mental operation* follows necessarily from their contradictory character – for, after all, our aim is to obtain non-contradictory results" (*PAI*: 98).

Real fictions are essentially artificial. They blend the given with the unthinkable. That is to say, they assume the impossible and make reality incomprehensible, in order to make it comprehensible. While that may seem paradoxical, real fictions behave in contradiction of the facts and interpolate impossible elements for reality such that they, in fact, make it more complicated than it appears to be. Some examples may serve to illustrate the thought. For Vaihinger, the Absolute and the Infinite are both examples of real fictions: he argues that "self-contradiction discloses itself particularly in the antinomies to which they give rise (cf. Kant's antinomies of the infinite, by means of which he proved that the idea of infinite space was subjective, or, in our terminology, fictional)" (*PAI*: 97). Real fictions, in other words, are most easily recognized by internal contradictions or antinomies.

Semi-Fictions, on the other hand, are a second kind of fiction in Vaihinger's taxonomy. These fictions are historically provisional and disappear in the course of time. Instead of assuming the impossible, semi-fictions assume the unreal. In other words, they are hypotheses. In attempting to discover the truth, they deviate or falsify reality as simpler than it appears to be. Semi-fictions establish natural laws, while real fictions act as scaffolding to be demolished after their intended use: "to the *verification* of the hypothesis corresponds the *justification* of the fiction" (*PAI*: 88-9). Vaihinger, quoting Hermann Lotze, argues "'every hypothesis claims to be not only a figure of thought, or a means of making thought concrete, but a statement of fact.' 'Everyone who sets up a hypothesis believes that he has extended the series of real facts by a happy divination of facts not less real though falling outside the range of his observation'" (*PAI*: 90). Thus, hypotheses seem to reify future contingents by virtue of the epistemic attitude involved.[6] Let us now

[6] For Hume, what I call 'reifying future contingents' refers to the process of completing the union or adding 'new' relations. Timothy Costelloe discusses a similar process of 'reification' and its relationship to metaphysical fictions (2018: 92-3). As Hume remarks, "when we turn our thought to a future object, our fancy flows along the stream of time, and arrives at the object by an order, which seems most natural, passing always from one point of time to that which is immediately posterior to it.

consider both types of fiction in, what I believe to be, their Humean manifestations.

2. *Hume's Real Fictions*

In the *Treatise*, Hume did not classify his use of fiction in an unambiguous manner. The lack of conceptual clarity poses an interpretive difficulty: are there different *types* of Humean fictions? While an exhaustive typology is outside the scope of the present discussion, I suggest that several Humean fictions anticipate Vaihinger's twofold classification. I first focus my discussion on real fictions. I argue that Hume's construal of (1) the fiction of identity and (2) fictitious unity represents two paradigm cases of Vaihinger's real fictions.[7]

The essential quality of real fictions is that they possess an internal contradiction. In Hume's investigation of the origin and content of several natural and philosophical relations, he discovers that both identity and unity (of a specific sort) are self-contradictory.[8] Consider Hume's analysis of fictitious unity first, namely, that "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

This *easy* progression of ideas favours the imagination, and makes it conceive its object in a stronger and fuller light" (*T* 2.3.7.8, SBN 430-1). The stronger and fuller light produces a stronger belief in certain hypotheses such that, in Costelloe's terms, we are apt to confer on them "a real existence they do not possess" (2018: 93). I pursue a more detailed discussion of the matter in the next section.

[7] It might be doubted here whether Hume considers identity a fiction. On my reading, Hume clearly suggests that it is: if identity is a *relation* of an object through time, then it must be a *fictitious* relation in so far as it is relating two incompatible ideas, namely, unity and number. Moreover, when Hume says that "[t]his fiction of the imagination almost universally takes place," he is referring to fictitious duration, which is the incompatible *relation* or *union* of an unchangeable object and changing perceptions (*T* 1.4.2.29, SBN 201). Thus, fictitious duration is synonymous with the relation of identity. Otherwise, what *exactly* distinguishes fictitious duration from identity? Finally, that identity is classified as a 'fiction' is well-supported in the literature; for scholars who refer explicitly to Hume's "fiction of identity," see Coventry 2007: 159; Landy 2018: 248; Waxman 1994: 206; Green 1968: 258; Ross 1991: 352; Traiger 1987: 389.

[8] Norman Kemp Smith, for instance, interprets the self-contradictory nature of these fictions in the following passage: "Hume is…insistent that the idea of identity, on examination, turns out to be a fiction, and so, like all fictions, to be due to the imagination. In employing this idea we profess to be travelling upon a path between unity and number, as impossible a path as any between existence and non-existence. We both do and do not assert unity; that is to say, we refuse to go to the length of number or diversity, and yet restrain ourselves from asserting a strict and absolute unity. *Every alleged instance of such identity is an illustration of this self-contradictory procedure*; a body is, we believe, both diverse and a unity, a self we believe to be individual and yet also complex, the same with itself and yet in never-ceasing change. For imagination, and therefore belief, there is no difficulty. Nature, in and through our natural beliefs, imposes the fiction upon us; and this notwithstanding its having no sanction in the data of sense, and though the problems which it raises are irresolvable for the understanding and reason" (Kemp Smith 1941: 475-6, italics added).

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). When the mind unites the idea of unity with any collection (i.e., number), it creates a self-contradictory fiction. Unity and number cannot both describe the same thing in the same respect; and yet, when twenty men are taken as a *single* unit, we seem to generate a self-contradictory fiction.

Keep in mind that I am specifically referring to a psychological contradiction, not a logical contradiction consisting of propositions. Real fictions, in light of Hume's empirical commitment to the Copy Principle, are contradictory in so far as a single fiction is the relational *union* of incompatible ideas. Indeed, it is crucial to remember that Hume's logic is predicated on his theory of ideas, in which each atomistic idea is derived from an impression of sensation or reflection. Therefore, when the *idea* of number and the *idea* of unity are united in the imagination, it forms a self-contradictory union of individuated ideas. Humean fictions are thus *relations* and not to be understood as ideas themselves. Fictions are not resolvable into simple impressions because they are imaginative constructions; they are not perceived via sensation or reflection. Nevertheless, is it plausible to say that Hume's concept of fictitious unity is a 'Real Fiction' in Vaihinger's sense? I consider three criteria in the following examination: (a) is there an internal contradiction? (b) is it an expedient for the operation of thought? (c) does the fictional aspect drop out in the course of reasoning?

First, the attribution of an internal contradiction to Hume's rendering of fictitious unity seems uncontroversial. Consider that "in our most familiar way of thinking," we suppose that "a thing is in a certain place, and yet is not there" or, in other words, "*of totum in toto & totum in qualibet parte*" (*T* 1.4.5.13, SBN 238). Naturally, our imagination unites, for example, ideas of extension with ideas of taste, where "upon reflection we must observe in this union something altogether unintelligible and contradictory" (*T* 1.4.5.13, SBN 238). In this respect, Hume subsequently refers to the symmetry between identity and unity:

> What I have said concerning the first origin and uncertainty of our notion of identity, as apply'd to the human mind, may be extended with little or no variation to that of *simplicity*. An object, whose different co-existent parts are bound together by a close relation, operates upon the imagination after much the same manner as one perfectly simple and indivisible, and requires not a much greater stretch of thought in order to its conception. From this similarity of operation we attribute a simplicity to it, and feign a principle of union as the support of this simplicity, and the center of all the different parts and qualities of the object (*T* 1.4.6.22, SBN 263).

Note that a feigned simplicity is united with the ideas of different parts to produce the fiction of unity. The unavoidable imaginative process is fundamental to human nature; real fictions are constitutive of the way in which humans perceive (via our senses) and generate (via our imagination) the world around us. For Hume:

> [O]ur ideas of bodies are nothing but collections form'd by the mind of the ideas of the several distinct sensible qualities… however these qualities may in themselves be entirely distinct, 'tis certain we commonly regard the compound, which they form, as One thing, and as continuing the Same under very considerable alterations. The acknowledg'd composition is evidently contrary to this suppos'd *simplicity*, and the variation to the *identity* (*T* 1.4.3.2, SBN 219).

In the case of both identity and unity, self-contradiction is involved. In the former case, there is a contradiction between sameness and alteration; in the latter case, there is a contradiction between one and the many.[9] For these reasons, I take it that fictitious unity satisfies the first criterion of Vaihingerian real fictions.

Second, to say Hume's concept of fictitious unity serves as an 'expedient for the operation of thought' ought to be granted. It is useful to think in aggregates, despite the fact that, on Hume's picture, aggregates are associated by the imagination, mind-dependent, and empirically unverifiable. That nations or sports teams are fictional unities, for instance, does not affect their utility. The perspective that, say, a chair is made up of smaller particles does not alter the idea of the chair as a unity; instead, it provides an alternative, though contradictory, perspective of the chair. It is *one* and *many* at the same time and in the same respect. Remember that 'in the same respect' is not to be understood in Aristotelian terms, but in terms of Hume's theory of ideas.

Finally, when we think in aggregates, the contradictory or fictional nature of the aggregate drops out of our reasoning. If we take 'England,' for instance, we may use it in our reasoning without acknowledging – or even being aware of – its self-contradictory *a priori* structure. Somehow, despite their logical incomprehensibility, self-contradictory fictions perform an essential role in the operation of thought. In referring to a nation, for instance, we may employ the fiction in our reasoning and arrive at truth, despite its fictionality. England, say, is above Spain (a true proposition) even though the relata involved (England and Spain, or the map, for that matter) are fictional aggregates of spatial unities.

[9] Observe that in *T* 1.4.3.2, Hume specifically says 'contrary' as opposed to 'contradictory.' In his explicit definition of contrariety, however, Hume seems to think that contrary ideas do form a kind of contradiction: "no two ideas are in themselves contrary, except those of existence and non-existence" (*T* 1.1.5.8, SBN 15). The exact definition of contradiction for Hume, however, presents a number of interpretive difficulties.

For Vaihinger, the ability to attain consistency via contradictory conceptual constructs is what defines real fictions. Logic is therefore a technology crafted for the *art* of thought. In the cognitive sphere, Hume appears to uncover an analogous distinction, such that some of our unions of ideas are plainly fictional – e.g., winged horses or fiery dragons – but other fictions are constructed as tools for pragmatic purposes (e.g., within logic, mathematics, and language). Identity and unity are fictional in the latter sense, with the important caveat that they are primarily constructed naturally and unavoidably by the imagination. It is not that humans have intentionally created these logical tools; rather, they emerge in our cognitive development – for, as Vaihinger reminds us, "[i]t must be remembered that the object of the world of ideas as a whole is not the portrayal of reality – this would be an utterly impossible task – but rather to provide us with an *instrument for finding our way about more easily in this world*" (*PAI*: 15).

The obvious parallel here is 'object permanence'. The concept drawn from contemporary psychology shares important features with Hume's fiction of continued existence. Object permanence also seems to involve the fiction of identity. That is, before some identical object can exist across time, there first needs to be a fictitious union of identity. Identity is thus prior in our cognitive development, and its self-contradictory nature drops out to yield a non-contradictory result: the vulgar supposition of enduring objects. Indeed, Hume directly tells us that identity is contradictory, but the vulgar supposition is non-contradictory (*T* 1.4.2.40, SBN 208). On the ground of the non-contradictory supposition, a new self-contradictory fiction arises: the *belief* in the feigned continued existence of all sensible objects (*T* 1.4.2.42, SBN 209).[10]

In Vaihinger's terminology, Hume's fictitious unities may be understood to blend the unthinkable with the given. The fiction of unity is *unthinkable* in so far as it is contradictory, but the constituents of the unity are *given* in our experience in the form of simple or complex ideas and impressions. It is thus an act of assuming the impossible (a contradiction) in order to make reality comprehensible, since, in these particular cases, the comprehension of things (other than simple unities) is dependent upon grouping together particulars for various reasons. For instance, we make sense of a basket of fruit – as a monadic

[10] Robert McRae, for instance, argues that fictitious duration (which is used to explain Hume's fiction of identity) has extensive implications in the *Treatise*, namely, that "out of this fiction are generated in a logically ordered series the basic metaphysical categories in terms of which the mind thinks, and all of them are fictitious" (1980: 124). John Passmore's claims that: "By the application of the same methods we gradually construct an entire system of fictions... The system rests on nothing more solid than 'trivial propensities of the imagination': our tendency to 'overcome' contradictions by constructing imaginary entities" (1968: 71).

collection – by collecting together various fruit in the basket and applying the fictitious denomination 'fruit' to them. Notice here the similarity between fictitious unity and Hume's account of abstract ideas. Although Hume's theory of general terms denies legitimate abstract ideas, it might be plausible to think that, in the specific case of abstract ideas being taken *as if* they represent more than one particular idea, the same analysis of fiction applies.[11]

An objection to the preceding account might seek recourse in Hume's rejection of contradictions, namely, "'tis in vain to search for a contradiction in any thing that is distinctly conceiv'd by the mind. Did it imply any contradiction, 'tis impossible it cou'd ever be conceiv'd" (*T* 1.2.4.11, SBN 43). There are two approaches that may obviate the difficulty. First, Hume's distinction between *conceiving* and *supposing* might indicate that real fictions are not in fact conceived; instead, they are only supposed. I return to this possibility in the next section. Second, it might be thought that Hume's perspectivism resolves the concern. That is, while unity and number form a self-contradictory union, only one side of the union may be conceived at any one time – even though the contradiction is always present upon reflection. Thus, the solution might be to treat identity and unity as fictions capable of being viewed under different, incompatible lights.

Robert Fogelin, for example, argues that Hume is committed to a kind of doxastic perspectivism. Specifically, he says that "Hume attempts to explain th[e] fiction of an unchanging object existing in time by using one of his favorite devices: placing things in *different lights*, or viewing them from *different perspectives*" (2009: 71). Or, in another example, "[t]he fiction of identity over time is the result of flip-flopping back and forth between these two perspectives [of unity and number]" (2009: 73). Indeed, as Hume remarks, identity "is an idea, which is a medium betwixt unity and number; or more properly speaking, is either of them, according to the view, in which we take it" (*T* 1.4.2.29, SBN 201). In my view, the same perspectivism that Hume appeals to in his analysis of identity may be applied to fictitious unity. Fictitious unity is both simplicity or oneness and multiplicity or number at the same time in the same respect *as* a single and individuated fiction. Although the contradiction is inconceivable or unthinkable in one sense, it is clearly explicable in another. The paradox might be construed like this: we are able to understand or explain what a contradiction is, at the same time we are somehow incapable of legitimately cognizing a contradiction. Therefore, how can we understand something that we cannot actually think? How, in other words, do we *know*

[11] Hume even deploys Vaihinger's 'as if' formulation in his discussion of abstract ideas: "The image in the mind is only that of a particular object, tho' the application of it in our reasoning be the same, *as if it were universal*" (*T* 1.1.7.6, SBN 20, italics added).

contradictions exist at all if we have never conceived them? Hume and Vaihinger seem to think that, despite their inherent unintelligibility, fictions are instrumental to the cognitive operations within human nature.[12]

For Hume, more broadly, while reason, or the embodiment of reason in the form of a philosopher, might find these conclusions repugnant, the vulgar pays them no mind – we will continue to think and act according to the principles of human nature – contradictory or not. Skeptics and rationalists alike are apt to resist the thought that contradictions are embedded in our cognitive architecture, but no matter the skeptical challenges against contradictions or the rational attempts to explain away contradictions, human nature is stronger than the normative force of reason. The authority of reason may indeed motivate the philosopher to root out all self-contradictory fictions wherever she or he may find them – but to no avail: the priorities of reason are subordinate to human nature's pragmatic concerns.

Again, in the *Treatise*, self-contradictory fictions ought to be understood as psychological phenomena. The same is true of Vaihinger's concept of fictions: "The fictive activity of the mind is an expression of the fundamental psychical forces; *fictions* are *mental structures*. The psyche weaves this aid to thought out of itself; for the mind is inventive; under the compulsion of necessity, stimulated by the outer world, it discovers the store of contrivances that lie hidden within itself" (*PAI*: 12).[13] Fictions, such as object permanence, are thus generated in virtue of circumstantial necessity.[14]

To conclude, I briefly review the three criteria of real fictions in so far as they pertain to the fiction of identity. Identity, as mentioned, involves, at the same time and in the same respect, both unity and number, such that it contains an

[12] For example, Hume reasons upon several ideas or principles he construes as unintelligible: (a) "the uniting principle among internal impressions" (*T* 1.3.14.29, SBN 169); (b) the "unintelligible instinct in our souls" (*T* 1.3.16.9, SBN 179); (c) in our familiar way of thinking, we employ 'confus'd notions' that, upon reflection, are observed to be "unintelligible and contradictory" (*T* 1.4.5.13, SBN 238). Unintelligibility, therefore, does not preclude a certain kind of understanding or utility.

[13] Compare Hume: "Mankind is an inventive species; and where an invention is obvious and absolutely necessary, it may as properly be said to be natural as any thing that proceeds immediately from original principles, without the intervention of thought or reflection" (*T* 3.2.1.19, SBN 484).

[14] While outside the scope of this paper, the same analysis may apply to Hume's discussion of justice, property, promises, and government in Book III of the *Treatise* in so far as these artifices are constructed for the stability of social circumstances. For an excellent comparison of epistemic fictions and social artifices in Hume's *Treatise*, see Sokolowski 1968. In G. R. S. Mead's interpretation of Vaihinger, logic and ethics are tied together in the following way: "in the beginning the natural man knows neither logical contradictions nor ethical conflicts; only in the course of evolution do these logical and ethical struggles arise out of the ground of the soul itself. And yet it is only in this strife that progress lies, so that the idea, or rather feeling, of sin is as much the principle of ethical improvement as contradiction the motive of logical perfection" (1913: 263).

internal contradiction. The fiction of identity is an expedient to thought in several domains, including logic and mathematics (the law of identity), morality and politics (personal identity), science (taxonomical identity or object identity), language (terminological identity), etc. The fictional or artificial aspect of identity, however, drops out in all of these domains. That is to say, there is no need to acknowledge the constructed or contradictory nature of any given identity relation, since reasoning upon these fictions provides genuine insight into the world. That a class or genus of animals is *fictional* in one sense, for instance, does not imply that it is arbitrary or fantastical. Similarly, object permanence may be fictional in the sense that our cognitive mechanisms generate it, but that does not imply that it is arbitrary or unreal.

3. *Hume's Semi-Fictions*

The second type of fiction in Vaihinger's account is the semi-fiction or hypothesis. This type of fiction is essential to scientific inquiry, especially theoretical science. In the course of science, we must treat hypotheses *as if* they are true in order to develop theoretical systems. But simply because a hypothesis turns out true does not make the hypothesis itself true. The problem of the ontological status of hypotheses in Hume's philosophy is particularly troubling, for, on his view, we seem to only have access to that which we have already experienced, namely, impressions or ideas. For instance, how might hypotheses be *copied* from impressions if hypotheses have not been perceived? Indeed, it appears contradictory to say that hypotheses about the *future*, are 'correspondent' and 'exactly represent' *past* impressions. Consider Hume's admonition:

> We must endeavour to render all our principles as universal as possible, by tracing up our experiments to the utmost, and explaining all effects from the simplest and fewest causes, 'tis still certain we cannot go beyond experience; and *any hypothesis, that pretends to discover the ultimate original qualities of human nature, ought at first to be rejected as presumptuous and chimerical* (*T* 0.8, SBN xvii, italics added).[15]

The difficulty in interpreting this passage is that hypotheses *by definition* go beyond experience.[16] Therefore, if we cannot go beyond experience, what kind of ontological or epistemic status attends hypotheses? Though Hume's use of

[15] Consider two additional principles: "That there is nothing in any object, consider'd in itself, which can afford us a reason for drawing a conclusion beyond it"; and, "that even after the observation of the frequent or constant conjunction of objects, we have no reason to draw any inference concerning any object beyond those of which we have had experience" (*T* 1.3.12.20, SBN 139).

[16] For Hobbes: "The *present* only has a being in nature; things *past* have a being in the memory only; but things *to come* have no being at all, the *future* being but a fiction of the mind" (1994: 14).

hypothesis is not univocal, I define Humean hypothetical fictions specifically as fictions that go beyond past relations or constant conjunctions to imagine or suppose 'new' constant conjunctions or relations; in other words, they are instances of 'completing of the union'.[17] Note that hypothetical fictions, on this interpretation, are not *ideas*, but relations. Thus, these kinds of hypotheses are not resolvable into simple impressions or ideas because they are imaginatively generated.

At first blush, there are several examples in the *Treatise* that may be characterized as hypothetical *fictions*. For instance, the "hideous hypothesis" of the immateriality of the soul or the universal substance in which all configurations of matter are supposed to inhere (*T* 1.4.5.19, SBN 241). Similarly, extension, conceived as perfectly simple and indivisible, is an untenable hypothesis (*T* 1.2.3.14, SBN 38). Another supposition that Hume explicitly designates a fiction is a kind of fictitious distance, in which "a body interpos'd betwixt two others may be suppos'd to be annihilated" (*T* 1.2.5.23, SBN 62-3). While the latter is most relevant here in so far as it is a vulgar hypothesis – i.e., a supposition that all of us hold at one time or another – there is a further hypothetical fiction that I will focus my discussion on: the vulgar supposition of enduring objects.

In this particular hypothetical fiction, "the vulgar *suppose* their perceptions to be their only objects, and at the same time *believe* the continu'd existence of matter" (*T* 1.4.2.43, SBN 209). Two claims are involved here: (a) the vulgar supposition and (b) the belief in the continued existence of matter. While I take the *belief* in the continued existence of objects to be a real fiction in the Vaihingerian sense, it is the vulgar *supposition* that, I submit, fulfills the criteria of the hypothetical fiction. Indeed, though it is likely that the belief in the continued existence of objects involves a contradiction so far as it involves the fiction of identity, the vulgar supposition seems to avoid it (though it is unclear whether it, in fact, succeeds). Still, Hume equivocates on the supposition/belief distinction, making it difficult to discern his exact view; for instance, he claims that "[t]he *supposition* of the continu'd existence of sensible objects or perceptions involves no contradiction" and that we have a "common *hypothesis* of the identity and continuance of our interrupted perceptions" (*T* 1.4.2.40, SBN 208, italics added; *T* 1.4.2.46, SBN 211, italics added).

To clarify Hume's position, then, I follow his distinction between supposition and belief. Therefore, the *supposition* is the common hypothesis of the

[17] I also include Humean 'suppositions' that meet this definition as hypothetical fictions. For Don Garrett: "To 'suppose' something, in Hume's usage, is to act in at least many respects as though one believed something, but without necessarily forming a lively idea of it. This also occurs, for example, when human beings and even animals suppose the uniformity of nature without formulating it as a belief" (2015: 52). Note Garrett's formulation of 'as though' in relation to Vaihinger's 'as if'.

vulgar involving no contradiction. The *belief* in the continued existence of objects, on the other hand, involves the contradiction of uniting object identity with the gaps among interrupted perceptions. It is the former that meets the definition of the hypothetical fiction, in as much as it goes beyond past relations or constant conjunctions to imagine or suppose 'new' constant conjunctions or relations. In other words, "we may easily indulge our inclination to that supposition. When [1] the exact resemblance of our perceptions makes us ascribe to them an identity, we may remove the seeming interruption by [2] feigning a continu'd being, which may fill those intervals, and preserve a perfect and entire identity to our perceptions" (*T* 1.4.2.40, SBN 208, numbers added). The first step is the supposition which goes beyond the exact resemblance relations in the memory to imagine a 'new' identity relation in order to complete the union; the second step is that a continued being is feigned to preserve the new relation and remove the interruption. Therefore, the supposition of a new relation leads the imagination to feign a continued being that confers existence on the relation. The former is a semi-fiction; the latter is a real fiction.

For Vaihinger, hypothetical semi-fictions intrinsically seek verification: "[t]he hypothesis has ultimately only a theoretical object, that of connecting facts and filling up the gaps in the connection, which experience shows to be numerous; and of establishing what is ultimately and primarily unalterable" (*PAI*: 88). Hume's description of generating the belief in continued existence seems to share this feature:

> [R]esemblance gives us a propension to consider these interrupted perceptions as the same; and also a propension to connect them by a continu'd existence, in order to justify this identity, and avoid the contradiction, in which the interrupted appearance of these perceptions seems necessarily to involve us. Here then we have a propensity to feign the continu'd existence of all sensible objects; and as this propensity arises from some lively impressions of the memory, it bestows a vivacity on that fiction; or in other words, makes us believe the continu'd existence of body (*T* 1.4.2.42, SBN 208-9). All sensible objects continue in existence via hypothetical fictions or suppositions that fill in unperceived gaps across interrupted perceptions.[18]

The repeated relations of resemblance prompt the imagination to complete the union by adding a new relation of identity, to which a feigned continued being is generated to confer existence on the relation. In other words, the sup-

[18] H.H. Price, in his *Hume's Theory of the External World* (1940), suggests that Hume may appeal to an 'As-if Theory' to possibly ground what he calls *unsensed sensibilia*. He believes, however, that such an appeal ultimately fails. It is unfortunate that Price does not genuinely engage with Vaihinger's actual work.

position "substitutes something conceived [or, in Hume's case, supposed] for what is actually given" and "avoid[s] difficulties by deviating from reality" (*PAI*: 80). By assuming the unreal, we may seek to verify the given, but whether the given is possible to conceive *without* fictional constructs is where Vaihinger and Hume must both face the ouroboros of self-reference. Wayne Waxman interprets Hume's self-referential paradox in this way:

> Hume's intention, in my view, was to conclude his analysis of human understanding by declaring his own theory of ideas – employed throughout the *Treatise* I to explicate relation, abstraction, space and time, necessary connection, and identity – to be itself a mere fiction of associative 'imagination, or the vivacity of our ideas' (*T*265). When the dragon thus swallows itself up from the tail, the stage is finally set for the skeptical denouement of *Treatise* I/iv/§7 (1994: 202).

Nevertheless, as Vaihinger notes, "the realization that imagination… plays a great part in science is one of the main advances of modern epistemology. In this respect Kant was quite correct and circumspect when he spoke of a 'transcendental imaginative faculty'" (*PAI*: 55). Subsequently, he adds the qualification that the discovery "of the whole conceptual world as mere products of the imaginative faculty was originally accomplished by Hume and Kant" (*PAI*: 63). Indeed, Hume's recognition of the 'empire of the imagination' within our cognitive landscape is a significant development in early modern philosophy. Unfortunately, due to the absence of his theory of fiction from the *Enquiries*, Hume's early and more radical views – those that specifically anticipate Vaihinger's philosophy of fictionalism – have generally been neglected.[19]

4. *Fiction and Psychological Stability*

That several of Hume's fictions fit the criteria of Vaihingerian fictions is only one part of the story. There are, in fact, several other areas where Hume's thought may have influenced Vaihinger, and therefore the history of philosophical fictionalism. Consider that Vaihinger and Hume both point to a psychological reason behind the mind's generation of fiction. Indeed, while Vaihinger does not mention Hume's appeal to psychological stability, he makes some strikingly complementary remarks. For instance, he argues that "[a]n idea that has once been accepted as objective has a stable equilibrium, the hypothesis an unstable one. The psyche tends to make every psychical content more stable and to extend this stability. The condition of unstable equilibrium

[19] For notable exceptions, see Costelloe 2018; Cottrell 2012; Hollinger 1977; Iser 1993; McRae 1980; Sokolowski 1968; Thielke 2003; Traiger 1987; Varzi 2013; Whelan 1985.

is as uncomfortable psychically as it is physically" (*PAI*: 125). The idea that the mind is more comfortable when its ideas are stable is a recurring theme in Hume's philosophy.[20] The imagination in particular appears to be manifestly hedonistic; it acts according to ease and pleasure.[21] Ideas that resemble each other make transitions *easier* and *smoother*, while completing unions of relations produces mental *pleasure*.

> Nothing is more certain from experience, than that any contradiction either to the sentiments or passions gives a sensible uneasiness, whether it proceeds from without or from within; from the opposition of external objects, or from the combat of internal principles. On the contrary, whatever strikes in with the natural propensities, and either externally forwards their satisfaction, or internally concurs with their movements, is sure to give a sensible pleasure (*T* 1.4.2.37, SBN 205-6).

The imagination naturally attempts to resolve uncertainty and instability among its ideas. To do so, it creates fictions. These solutions, however, turn out to be mere placebos – or, in Robert Fogelin's words, "an empty placeholder for a solution to a problem masquerading as a solution" (2009: 89). Instead of fictions resolving contradictions and uncertainties inherent in human nature, they disguise our cognitive infirmities. Thus, when philosophers open the hood to examine the mechanics of the mind, they notice contradictions built atop contradictions and hypotheses built atop hypotheses – in other words, a scene of pure terror for those committed to the dictates of reason and logical consistency. Some philosophers take the situation as incentive to construct even more fictions to escape the contradictions and unjustified suppositions they discover. But, for Hume, these fictions and contradictions are constitutive of how the mind operates. The task of the true skeptic is to accept the mind as it is – flaws and all – and humbly acknowledge our limitations.[22]

In *The Philosophy of As If*, the human mind designs fictions expressly for resolving psychical tension. Ironically, however, fictions cannot be discovered to *be* fictions, otherwise one of the main pragmatic reasons for their existence

[20] See Loeb 2002 for a detailed account of the relevance of stability in Hume's philosophy.

[21] I follow Timothy Costelloe's description here: "Hume identifies a hedonistic tendency that inclines the imagination always to seek and make an easy and smooth transition among ideas in order to form a union or complete a whole, from which it derives pleasure" (2018: 1).

[22] Dorothy Coleman makes the argument that: "True philosophy is sceptical concerning the natural illusions of the imagination just because it properly recognizes their illusory character. However, since detecting an illusion does not destroy it, even the experience of true philosophers continues to be shaped by the illusion. Consequently, true philosophers continue to experience a psychological opposition between natural beliefs about perceptions, even after the epistemic status of these beliefs has been determined. True philosophers free themselves from the psychological opposition between natural beliefs by mitigating their scepticism when engaged in practical activity" (1984: 150).

disappears. For instance, though the fiction of identity possesses an internal contradiction, the fiction drops out, making it seem as if the contradiction has disappeared. Vaihinger argues:

> If then we first compare the dogma with the hypothesis, we notice that the latter involves a condition of tension which must be exceedingly disagreeable to the mind. The mind has a tendency to bring all ideational contents into equilibrium and to establish an unbroken connection between them. An hypothesis is inimical to this tendency in so far as it involves the idea that it is not to be placed on an equality with the other objective ideas (*PAI*: 125).

Moreover, Vaihinger indicates that dogmas are more satisfying to the mind, whereas hypotheses and, even more so, fictions are disagreeable. The inequality among the statuses of our ideas is psychologically uncomfortable as opposed to having all of our ideas accepted as real and certain. The imagination then naturally constructs expedient fictions (that drop out) and connective hypotheses (that may be reified) to prop up a stable and real psychological experience. By undergoing reification or dropping out, fictions are like unseen stagehands moving around the wings of the mind, never once making an appearance on stage. It is only when fictions are no longer needed or when philosophers reflect on our mental processes that the grand production is revealed as artifice. And, while the philosopher's awareness of cognitive or perceptual contradictions might prove uncomfortable for *them*, for the vulgar, who are embedded in common life, fictions perform their role invisibly.

If all this is accurate, it stands to reason that philosophical schools of realism or idealism will inherently be more appealing than fictionalism for purely psychological reasons. Hume and Vaihinger, however, do not follow up that potentially rich line of reasoning. What we can say is that the two philosophers both think contradictions and unproven hypotheses are destabilizing to the mind. And yet, fictions are only successful if they are believed, the same as an audience must buy into the premise of a film or novel to experience its rewards.

That is perhaps the reason why Hume and Vaihinger alike provoke such strong reactions. The through line of our perceptual story is broken by their conclusions. To reveal that central concepts in human nature, like infinity and identity, are, so to speak, 'wearing no clothes,' is bound to stir up ire, especially among those who truly believe those concepts to be real. To claim that God is fictional among the devout or that identity is fictitious among the logicians is to commit doctrinal heresy. Though Hume and Vaihinger had noble aims in mind upon unveiling the artificiality of our conceptual structures, contemporaneous philosophers who nurtured dogmas of the day faced far less criticism. Indeed, Hume's early philosophy precluded him from ever receiving an academic post.

Vaihinger, on the other hand, waited more than thirty years to publish his seminal work, for he said it was not ripe at the time (Fine 1993).[23] While Vaihinger subsequently garnered a large following (likely affected by his already established fame as an interpreter of Kant), the logical positivists were hostile to his teaching. Others like H.L. Mencken criticized Vaihinger's philosophy as "not a system of philosophy, in any sense; it is simply a foot-note to all existing systems. Moreover, it is not a foot-note of much solid value. It is curious, but it is unimportant" (1924: 255).

Notably, for Vaihinger, the *main result* of his investigation "is that *contradiction* is the driving force of thought and that without it thought could not attain its goal at all; that it is immanent in discursive thought and is one of its constituent elements" (*PAI*: 108). Hume's natural fictions are likewise irresistible and unavoidable in human nature. Consider that Hume never ends up resolving many of the contradictions he discovers in human nature, let alone the manifest contradiction between causal reasoning and the continued existence of objects. Instead, he despairs, deciding to relax his bent of mind and engage in some amusing activity. Vaihinger, however, takes the cause of Hume's despair and revels in it, extolling it as the main discovery of his investigation. The contradictory nature of real fictions is the foundation of all discursive thought for Vaihinger, whether that be logic, science, mathematics, or religion. Contradictory fictions are natural to the operation of human thinking. In that sense, there is no reason to despair, for there is nothing inherently wrong with contradiction.

In this respect, Hume and Vaihinger received similar attacks by interpreters who mistook them for extreme skeptics – though neither philosopher accepted the attacks as valid.[24] On one hand, Hume's critics took his philosophy to be primarily skeptical and self-defeating. T.H. Green, for instance, claimed that Hume's "method, which began with professing to explain knowledge, showed knowledge to be impossible. Hume himself was perfectly cognisant of this result" (1997: vii). Vaihinger's critics attacked him on similar grounds. Morris R. Cohen bemoaned the fact that "since the publication of Vaihinger's *Philoso-*

[23] Note that Fine interprets Vaihinger's philosophy to exhibit "a strong British influence – especially due to Berkeley on the philosophy of mathematics and Hume on impressions and the imagination" (1993: 4).

[24] In particular, Vaihinger claims that the "term 'Scepticism' has occasionally been applied to the Philosophy of 'As if' and its systematic doctrines; but this is not correct, for scepticism implies a theory which raises doubt or questioning to the dignity of a principle. The Philosophy of 'As if', however, has never had a trace of this attitude" (*PAI*: xlii). Instead, he says that "'Relativism' would be more applicable to the Philosophy of 'As if', in so far as it denies all absolute points (in mathematics just as in metaphysics) and shows a natural affinity with the theory of relativity both of the past and the present" (*PAI*: xlii).

phie des Als Ob, there has been an increased general recognition of the importance of fiction as construction in science. But the subject has been beclouded by the monistic mania. By trying to show that everything is a mental construction, the distinction between fact and fiction is really obliterated" (1923: 484). Vaihinger, however, does not subscribe to such a view, since he announces that his investigation aims to introduce fiction as a third member in a system of logical science, alongside induction and deduction. According to Vaihinger:

Thought conducts us automatically to certain illusory concepts just as in vision there are certain unavoidable optical errors. If we recognise this logical illusion as necessary, if we accept the fictions established thereby with a full realisation of their significance and, at the same time, see through them (e.g. God, liberty, etc.) then we can cope with the logical resultant contradictions as necessary products of our thinking, by recognising that they are the inevitable consequences of the inner mechanism of thought itself (*PAI*: 133-4).

Contradiction therefore need not be seen as destructive to epistemic belief; it may be constitutive of epistemic belief. On such an account, ancient and modern philosophers, whose theories attempt to escape contradiction, are pursuing the impossible. It is only when we accept contradiction as part of human nature that we may formulate a proper science of man.[25] Thus,

true philosophy approaches nearer to the sentiments of the vulgar, than to those of a mistaken knowledge. 'Tis natural for men, in their common and careless way of thinking, to imagine they perceive a connexion betwixt such objects as they have constantly found united together… But philosophers… have sufficient force of genius to free them from the vulgar error… but not sufficient to keep them from ever seeking for this connexion in matter, or causes. Had they fallen upon the just conclusion, they wou'd have return'd back to the situation of the vulgar, and wou'd have regarded all these disquisitions with indolence and indifference. At present they seem to be in a very lamentable condition, and such as the poets have given us but a faint notion of in their descriptions of the punishment of *Sisyphus* and *Tantalus*. For what can be

[25] Manfred Kuehn's approach to Humean contradictions is influential here. Particularly, he argues that "Hume believed that he had, by means of what he called the 'experimental method of reasoning,' manifest contradictions that are symptomatic of conflicting principles of the mind. The contradictions should, therefore, not be excused or explained away, but they should be fully acknowledged. Hume needs no defense here. For he might actually have considered this discovery of the antinomical character of the human mind one of his most important achievements. In any case, I believe that Hume's metaphysics can be understood correctly only if we take into account very carefully all the consequences of the antinomical dimension of his thought" (1983: 36-7). In my interpretation, I resist using Kantian language, and instead use Hume's preferred term: contradiction.

imagin'd more tormenting, than to seek with eagerness, what for ever flies us; and seek for it in a place, where 'tis impossible it can ever exist? (*T* 1.4.3.9, SBN 222-3).

5. *Hume's True Philosophy and Vaihinger's True Criticism*

Vaihinger's penchant for legislating philosophical laws is conspicuous across his work. Most well-known is his 'Law of the Preponderance of the Means over the End.' Based on his reading of Schopenhauer – in which thought is originally a means to the will's end – he expands the idea to capture the tendency for an "original means working towards a definite end… to acquire independence and to become an end in itself" (*PAI*: xxx). Fictions and hypotheses, therefore, often originate as means to achieve some cognitive end, but after time, they transform into ends themselves. A once practical purpose is forgotten, leaving in its place a theoretical thought shorn of its origins.[26] Taking the thought as theoretically meaningful subsequently generates a number of insoluble, even unintelligible, questions – for instance, what is the square root of -1?

Less well-known, however, is Vaihinger's 'Law of Ideational Shifts'. This law describes three developmental stages, in which ideas either pass from fictions to hypotheses to dogmas or the reverse. Across history, Vaihinger cites various examples of the law at work. For instance, Newton and Leibniz' fictitious fluxions and differentials, which "became hypothetical entities, and later, dogmas. After that there was regression" (*PAI*: 131). Vaihinger adds to this a number of other examples from Platonic myths to Kant's categories to the social contract.[27] The reason for these shifts is, again, psychological tension. Take hypotheses: the only legitimate way to support a hypothesis is via probability or, what Vaihinger calls, 'repeated confirmation'. For some ideas, though, to achieve any sort of stabilizing probability may "involve centuries of labour [or] in many cases be quite impossible. So the psyche circumvents it by simply transforming the hypothesis into a dogma by illegitimate methods" (*PAI*: 125).

Unlike Comte's law of three stages – i.e., (1) Theological (fictitious), (2) Metaphysical (Abstract), and (3) Scientific (positive) – Vaihinger claims that his law "stresses the *formal* change of the ideas themselves, whose content remains

[26] The thought is reminiscent of Nietzsche's "On Truth and Lie in a Nonmoral Sense." Vaihinger dedicates his final chapter to an examination of Nietzsche's 'Doctrine of Conscious Illusion'. See *PAI*: 341-362.

[27] Vaihinger's interpretation of Kant is unorthodox in this respect, for, as he says, "[t]he law of ideational shifts can be very clearly demonstrated from the fate that befell the Kantian concepts among his disciples. The fictive device tends more and more to become a (false) hypothesis. The maintenance of the pure result is, after all, quite difficult; for man has an inclination towards dogmatism. The study of Hume and Comte has proved a corrective to the errors of Kant and his successors" (*PAI*: 153).

always the same, whereas according to Comte it changes" (*PAI*: 132). In other words, it is primarily an epistemic theory of fiction rather than a metaphysical theory. The same holds true for Hume. Traiger argues that "[a]lthough there are different fictions, Hume has a core notion of fiction which is fundamentally epistemological rather than ontological" (1987: 382). Fictions, as a completion of the union of relations, are formal configurations *of* ideas; thus, fictions are consistent with Hume's commitment to empiricism and rejection of abstract ideas.

Recall Hume's true philosophy, as expressed in the passage at the end of the previous section: notice there is another triadic shift with respect to epistemic judgment. In human nature, everyone begins with a vulgar conception of the world, a conception that, for most, remains unexamined. For the few who do venture into philosophical reflection, they soon discover that the vulgar conception is rife with contradictions and unverifiable fictions.[28] The experience is unsettling, ultimately motivating them to search for answers and resolutions. Satisfaction is soon found in the dogma of false philosophy, where most philosophers remain, unaware of the ideological cave that protects them. The true philosopher, however, ends up recognizing false philosophy for what it is, and thereafter descends back to vulgar condition, but now with knowledge that natural illusions are both cognitively irresistible and pragmatically useful despite their violation of reason's decrees. In Hume's words, there is "a gradation of three opinions, that rise above each other, according as the persons, who form them, acquire new degrees of reason and knowledge. These opinions are that of the vulgar, that of a false philosophy, and that of the true" (*T* 1.4.3.9, SBN 222).

The construal of identity in 'Of scepticism with regard to the senses' presents an archetypal case of both Vaihinger's Law of Ideational Shift and Hume's True Philosophy. At first, there is a fiction: in this case, the real fiction of identity. It contains an internal contradiction; unity and number are both present at the same time and in the same respect. The contradiction goes unnoticed by the vulgar, since, according to the view in which we take it, only one side of the conjunct is ever apparent. The identity relation is consequently applied to various objects, which gives rise to a new hypothesis: the vulgar supposition of enduring objects. The initial fiction then becomes a hypothesis by virtue of,

[28] Annette Baier claims that certain fictions are not false but "are unverifiable, and so unverified" (1991: 103). Baier further argues that they "are not empirically verifiable or falsifiable, so they are '*a priori*'… [A]nd this is quite different from calling them false. What is provably false is to deny that they are fictions, and Hume does think that we are prone to such falsehoods. Fictions are plausible stories we tell ourselves to organize our experience… Fictions structure our version of ourselves and our environment, making us and it 'real and durable'… Like the poets Hume discusses at T. 121-122, we start from what is familiar to us, our perceptions, and build from that a 'system' that goes beyond what we strictly know to be true" (1991: 103-4).

say, the law of ideational shift.[29] Third, and finally, the supposition is reified into a dogmatic belief in the continued existence of objects – that is, a real fiction taken to exist externally and mind-independently. Hence, the origin of how external objects came to be believed – and all the mental scaffolding used in the construction – drop out in order to achieve broader cognitive aims: psychological stability and pragmatic utility.

For the philosopher, the psychological stability is short-lived: upon philosophical reflection, the relation of identity is discovered to be self-contradictory, and the vulgar supposition in enduring objects is discovered to be mere hypothesis. As Vaihinger says, "when experience and reflection have gradually made these dogmas doubtful… [t]he psyche still tries to adhere to them… when this is no longer possible with a stable equilibrium, when the position has been too much shaken, then it contents itself with the unstable equilibrium of the hypothesis. The dogma becomes an hypothesis and the idea is reduced in value by one degree" (*PAI*: 127). The philosopher still does not let the matter go; instead with "sufficient force of genius to free them from the vulgar error… but not sufficient to keep them from ever seeking for this connexion in matter, or causes," the philosopher constructs a new fiction: the double existence of objects and perceptions (*T* 1.4.3.9, SBN 223). It is only "by passing thro' the common hypothesis of the identity and continuance of our interrupted perceptions" that we are led to this new opinion (*T* 1.4.2.46, SBN 211). The fiction of double existence, which also Hume calls a philosophical hypothesis, shares the same contradictory nature as the original fiction of identity; though, this time, it is the monstrous offspring of two contrary principles: that our resembling perceptions are continued and uninterrupted (via the imagination) and that our resembling perceptions are interrupted and distinct (via reason). Similar to the fiction of identity, we elude this new contradiction by constructing the fiction of double existence, which justifies and illusively renders the two contrary principles consistent (*T* 1.4.2.52, SBN 215).

The true philosopher must therefore rise above the false philosophy of double existence by realizing that she or he has simply been building fictions and hypotheses entirely in the air.[30] There is no recourse and no resolution, for "reason

[29] Note that Vaihinger is unclear on exactly how the law of ideational shift operates. In another place, he says that "[t]hought begins with slight initial deviations from reality (half-fictions) [i.e., semi-fictions], and, becoming bolder and bolder, ends by operating with constructs that are not only opposed to the facts but are self-contradictory" (*PAI*: 16). In this case, Hume's continued existence would be the initiating hypothesis that would then lead to the self-contradictory fiction of identity. Part of the reason for Vaihinger's equivocation on this point may be the continuous revisions he made to his theory over the course of his life.

[30] Compare *D* 10.30.

is incapable of dispelling these clouds" (*T* 1.4.7.9, SBN 269). Instead, the true philosopher returns "to live, and talk, and act like other people in the common affairs of life" (*T* 1.4.7.10, SBN 269). While philosophy may not be able to cure the mind of its contradictory fictions and hypotheses, it nonetheless serves a useful function. It enables us to recognize fictions *as* fictions. By doing so, it encourages "mild and moderate sentiments" and prevents dogma – indeed, philosophy is more harmless than theology in this very respect, since theological dogma and superstition "seizes more strongly on the mind, and is often able to disturb us in the conduct of our lives and actions" (*T* 1.4.7.13, SBN 271-2). Philosophical dogmas, on the other hand, are only ridiculous. Of course, here we have yet another contradiction in human nature: dogmas provide the mind with the most satisfaction and yet dogmatic belief poses the most danger. For Vaihinger:

> Dogmatism is a form of logical optimism which approaches the logical functions and their products with unbounded confidence, regards thought with an admiration and satisfaction so exaggerated that doubts are not raised at any point. The logical infallibility of thought is adhered to by the logical optimist as though it were a Gospel in which he blindly believed; and with the same intolerance that accompanies religious superstitions he regards the logical form in which he happens to think as better than any other. This logical optimism is harmless and innocent enough when found among primitive people, but it is a questionable attitude and becomes definitely dangerous and disastrous when encountered in men of a more advanced type (*PAI*: 162).

Though the final claim is perhaps the inverse of Hume's position, the prevention of dogmatic belief is the root of Vaihinger's concern here. Skepticism, on the other hand, is not dangerous but 'barren' for Vaihinger; and, for Hume, it is 'impossible' in the case of *antecedent* skepticism. Both philosophers, however, sanction skepticism in preparing the way to what Vaihinger calls the "critical attitude which we ought to adopt" (*PAI*: 163). Hume likewise prescribes excessive skepticism as a plausible path for dogmatists to realize their epistemic limitations, and thereby adopt a general attitude of moderate or mitigated skepticism (*E* 12.24, SBN 161-2). Vaihinger endorses a rough equivalent, a position he identifies as True Criticism or Logical Positivism.[31] The aim of his position is to navigate between skepticism, which he calls logical pessimism, and dogmatism, which he calls logical optimism. In so doing, we may examine our thought technologies in a dispassionate and unprejudiced manner.

[31] It is claimed that Vaihinger may have been the first to use the phrase 'logical positivism'; see Stoll 2020. Note that Vaihinger's use of logical positivism is considerably different from later usages. In his autobiographical introduction, Vaihinger alternatively titles his philosophy "Idealistic Positivism" or "Positivist Idealism" (*PAI*: xli). He also denominates his philosophical position as 'Critical Positivism'.

> With logical pessimism it frees itself from childish beliefs in the power and unlimited validity of thought, and with optimism it holds firmly to the fact of the ultimate practical coincidence of thought and existence. The valuable outcome of pessimism is the habit of seeing in these conceptual constructs primarily nothing more than subjective products. Instead, therefore, of demanding with the dogmatist that we accept their reality until their unreality is proved – a thesis that from a practical point of view is the only useful one – it reverses the process and *mutatis mutandis* applies the juristic formula 'Quisque praesumatur malus, donec probetur bonus,' demanding that every logical product and every logical function be taken for what it actually is, a mere logical construct; and insisting on a special proof before the reality of any given mental construct or logical form is assumed. Theoretically this is the only valid and useful principle (*PAI*: 163).

To that end, true philosophy for Hume and Vaihinger is the recognition of the human mind as unavoidably embedded in nature and its processes. While Vaihinger understands logic as cognitive technology within a broader strategy for evolutionary success, Hume, without Darwin's influence, holds a strikingly complementary position. For Hume, "[t]he sole end of logic is to explain the principles and operations of our reasoning faculty, and the nature of our ideas" (*T* 0.5, SBN xv). Our ideas are ultimately derivative of impressions, but the source of our impressions we do not know and, presumably, "must be resolv'd into *original* qualities of human nature" (*T* 1.1.4.6, SBN 13). Our reasoning faculty is likewise tied to natural processes; indeed, as a mental colony subservient to the empire of the imagination, reason is fundamentally dependent upon the principle of the association of ideas. Consequently, logic cannot detach from the baseness of nature's operations; its purpose is to explain and discover fictions and hypotheses, not remove, or resolve them. Though it is within reason's jurisdiction to correct and modify our natural propensities via reflective practices, there remains a persistent danger of reason attempting to usurp authority by pretending to replace our natural and imaginative illusions with purported 'truths' of the understanding.

Vaihinger and Hume's mutual prescription to recognize fiction *as* fiction and artifice *as* artifice is applicable to the individual and the collective alike. In both cases, it requires the capacity to contend with the psychological or social tension that necessarily arises from such a recognition. Consider, for example, the Kuhnian paradigm shift: the dogma of normal science is disrupted by the observation of anomalies. Anomalies are akin to contradictions in so far as they are discrepant with established theories and lawlike regularities of science. The recognition of the anomalies leads to a crisis or tension, where scientists develop a range of competing alternatives. When one of the alternatives is select-

ed, a revolution occurs such that the entire scientific domain adopts the new dogma, much to the (psychological) satisfaction of the scientific community.

Philosophical theories appear to undergo similar revolutions in an ongoing attempt to account for contradictions and unverified hypotheses. New philosophical theories are accepted as 'progress,' despite the fact that, if the past resembles the future, another revolution is surely waiting around the corner. For Vaihinger and Hume, I suspect, many of the paradigm shifts that have taken place are merely the advent of false philosophies, the fate of which is to be scraped from our cultural palimpsest to make space for new dogma. For Vaihinger, that is not progress: progress is the collective acknowledgement of our natural condition, one that is governed by self-contradictory fictions and hypotheses at the core of human cognition. He puts it like this:

> Progress can be discerned not only in the logical conscience of mankind in that the contradictions in fictions are noticed, but also in the logical capacity. For to maintain a fiction as a fiction implies a highly developed logical mind, one that does not surrender too precipitately to the equilibratory impulse but carefully distinguishes between means and end. To maintain the purely critical standpoint as represented by Hume and Kant, considerable mental energy is required. All attempts subsequent to Kant are nothing but attempts, and very premature attempts, to resolve that condition of tension which though uncomfortable at least disturbs mental slumber (*PAI*: 132).

The challenge then in maintaining this kind of global fallibilism is that it requires a highly developed logical mind or theoretical domain. Whether on the individual or collective level, it is exceedingly difficult to walk the tightrope of the purely critical standpoint. But difficulty should not prevent the inquirer or inquiry from pursuing this epistemic aim. In recent decades, the proliferation of fictionalist theories suggest that Vaihinger's prescription is starting to be taken more seriously – even though the majority of philosophers still subscribe to various forms of realism.[32] At the very least, it is promising that the concept of fiction is being treated with more concern in contemporary philosophical literature. Indeed, as G. R. S. Mead said, 'fiction' is "perhaps the most provocative epithet in the vocabulary of philosophy" (1913: 264). And, whether or not his claim remains true, it nevertheless ought to remind us of a longstanding polemical strategy employed by philosophers in wielding fiction as a weapon – a tactic that, in the history of philosophy, traces back to Plato's self-serving demarcation between *muthos* and *logos*. In Vaihinger's systematic rendering of

[32] In Chalmers and Bourget's now-famous study, over 80% of philosophers either accept or lean toward realism about the external world, while over 55% either accept or lean toward moral realism. See Bourget *et al.* 2014.

philosophical fictionalism, prefigured by Hume's early philosophy, the character of fiction is recast as protagonist instead of villain, preparing the way for the current epistemic shift. Away from dogma and back to hypothesis, the hero of truth is thrown into doubt, and philosophers begin to wonder: what if 'truth' all along has simply been the most expedient type of error?

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