

LOCKE, HUME, AND REID ON THE OBJECTS OF BELIEF

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INTRODUCTION

The goal of this paper is show how an initially appealing objection to David Hume's account of judgment can only be put forward by philosophers who accept an account of judgment that has its own sizable share of problems. To demonstrate this, I situate the views of John Locke, David Hume, and Thomas Reid with respect to each other, so as to illustrate how the appealing objection is linked to unappealing features of Locke's account of judgment.

One of the more curious features of David Hume's account of the understanding is his explicit insistence that beliefs can lack predicative structure. This view runs counter to the orthodoxy of Hume's day, as well as to contemporary orthodoxy. The orthodox position attributes a certain sort of parallel between the structure of sentences we use to express judgments and the structure of the judgments that are expressed.¹ Since a sentence like "Sandy barks" has a structure that differentiates the subject of the sentence from the predicate, the orthodox position would attribute more or less the same level of structure to the judgment that Sandy barks. In other words, the psychological state of judging that Sandy barks would have at least two components (for example, the idea of Sandy and the idea of barking), and combine them in a structured fashion, reflecting the difference in roles for the idea of Sandy and the idea of barking.

In the *Treatise*, Hume not only allows for cases where the parallel does not obtain, but such cases form the core of his explanation of belief and are the only sorts of beliefs for which he gives us a robust account. Specifically, Hume maintains that there are judgments with *less* structure than the sentences that express them: existence judgments. For Hume, the judgment that the sun exists, for example, has only a single component: the idea of the sun.²

This view is *prima facie* unappealing. The parallelism has been seen as appealing in part because there is work being done by the posited structures, and it is hard to see how that same work could possibly be accomplished without that kind of structure. Thus, we seem to be licensed in a fair degree of pessimism about the prospects for Hume's view.³ If Hume is committed to these unstructured judgments and does not offer a robust account of any other sort of judgment, that would seem to be a very large thorn in the side of his overarching project, particularly since so many of the examples of belief he employs invoke cases that are simply not straightforwardly covered by the official account as stated in *Treatise* 1.3.7.5. In this paper, I aim to undermine some of that pessimism, by relating Hume's views to those of John Locke and Thomas Reid. One of the natural motivations for preferring a theory with structured judgments is the relationship between such structures and the aptness of these judgments for truth and falsity. In my discussion, I show how Locke's view of judgment is uniquely positioned to take advantage of a structural argument for explaining truth-assessment, while Thomas Reid's view (which most closely matches contemporary orthodoxy) does not have any substantial advantage over Hume's for the purposes of explaining how judgments can be subject to truth and falsity.

OVERVIEW: AN INCONSISTENT TRIAD

Consider the following inconsistent triad, which will help to situate the three thinkers under consideration with each other:

1. The objects of belief always have predicative structure.
2. The objects of conception never have predicative structure.
3. Whatever can be an object of belief may also be an object of conception.

It is easy to see why this triad of claims is inconsistent: the first and second claims determine the objects of belief and the objects of conception to be disjoint sets. The third requires that the object of belief be a subset of the objects of conception. So, no one can consistently endorse all three claims. At this stage, I am simply going to state my assessment of how Locke, Hume, and Reid avoid this inconsistency, delaying the defense of these attributions to later sections of the paper. Thomas Reid, according with our contemporary orthodoxy, rejects (2). According to Reid (and to most of us nowadays), propositions can be merely conceived, without their being judged, permitting him to endorse both (1) and (3). Locke, on the other hand, rejects (3). Conception and judgment are acts that, by their natures, take different objects. Consequently, he can embrace the disjointedness required by accepting (1) and (2). David

Hume avoids this inconsistency by rejecting (1). This maneuver is both *prima facie* perplexing and extremely heterodox (both in his day and our own). But it does permit one to maintain (3) and (2), by allowing that the objects of belief are not always propositions (and, on my view, are never genuine propositions).⁴

Using this triad, I can give a clearer statement of the central thesis of this paper: one of the primary concerns about Hume's view relates to how nonpropositional beliefs can be subject to assessment as truth and falsity; thus, positions that reject (1) are taken to be nonstarters. I argue that it is taken for granted in these objections that those who accept (1) and (2) and those who accept (1) and (3) are equally positioned with advantage over someone like Hume who rejects (1). However, it is only the Lockean picture, by denying (3), that can claim a distinctive advantage over Hume in explaining the truth-assessability of belief by reference to propositions. In the following sections of the paper, I defend the interpretive claims asserted above and argue for the uniqueness of the Lockean position in levying propositions as a way to criticize Hume's capacity for explaining the truth-assessability of belief.

HUME'S REISTIC JUDGMENTS

The specific commitment of Hume's that prompts concern is best conveyed in the following passage from the *Treatise of Human Nature* (and given much additional support by T 1.2.6.4 and a footnote in T 1.3.7):⁵

But I go farther; and not content with asserting, that the conception of the existence of any object is no addition to the simple conception of it, I likewise maintain, that the belief of the existence joins no new ideas to those which compose the idea of the object. When I think of God, when I think of him as existent, and when I believe him to be existent, my idea of him neither encreases nor diminishes. But as 'tis certain there is a great difference betwixt the simple conception of the existence of an object, and the belief of it, and as this difference lies not in the parts or composition of the idea, which we conceive; it follows, that it must lie in the manner, in which we conceive it. (T 1.3.7.2, p. 66)

Here, Hume tells us that belief and conception do not differ in kind and, importantly, that an existential belief does not require a separate predicative idea; it requires only the idea of the subject term. The argument that Hume offers here is surprisingly compelling, especially given the unappealing nature of its conclusion, so I will present it:

- H1. The ideational content of conceiving of O is just the idea of O.
- H2. Conceiving of O is the same as conceiving that O exists.

H3. Conceiving that O exists has the same ideational content as believing that O exists.

H4. So, the ideational content of believing that O exists is just the idea of O.

Premise H1 starts with a commitment to the orthodox theory of conception (which is in the background of Hume's discussion in this passage): conceiving is an operation of the mind that can be performed on individual ideas. Premise H2 of Hume's argument in the passage above is Hume's opening contention that conceiving of something *as existing* is no different from simply conceiving of it. His position is that *imagining the sun* and *imagining the sun as existing* simply are the same act of imagining (unlike, say, *imagining the sun* and *imagining the sun as a giraffe*). I suspect this is the most controversial premise of Hume's argument here, though, as noted, I do find it somewhat compelling. Premise H3 involves Hume's assertion that the content of *conceiving of the sun as existing* and *believing that the sun exists* are the same. And since Hume takes the content of a mental state to be determined by the ideas composing it, states with the same content have to be composed out of the same ideas. But if the simple conception of the sun has the same content as the belief that the sun exists and the only idea involved in the simple conception of the sun is the idea of the sun, it follows that the only idea involved in the belief that the sun exists is the idea of the sun. Hence, Hume concludes that your belief that the sun exists is something you do with just your idea of the sun and that no further ideas are required.⁶

At this juncture, it may be difficult to wrap one's head around Hume's proposal. I think there is a way of speaking that can be helpful for getting our minds around Hume's proposal, however and that allows us to make more sense of what Hume is proposing. Consider the following pair of sentences:

1. Annie believes that ghosts exist.
2. Annie believes in ghosts.

While we can use the phrase "believe in" in a few different ways, the sort of meaning that is typically behind a sentence like (2) is more or less the same one as would be behind sentence (1).⁷ A pretty standard treatment of (2) would be that it is some sort of abbreviation of (1) but that both of them ultimately attribute to Annie a belief in the proposition that ghosts exist. On that standard treatment, the structure of the complement clause in sentence (1) matches up reasonably well with the structure of Annie's mental state. So, while both sentences are true in the same circumstances, we might say that (1) does a better job of

putting the underlying psychological facts on display. To make sense of Hume's proposal, we need only reverse the relationship between (1) and (2). Hume also would agree that both of those sentences say the same thing but that sentence (2) does a better job of putting the underlying psychological facts on display, by showing that the mental state in question relates Annie just to (the idea of) ghosts.

So, to torture a metaphor, instead of having a *belief-that* box in one's mind where one puts mental sentences or mental propositions, Hume would be positing a *belief-in* box where one puts ideas of the entities whose existence one is committed to. These ways of talking may help us feel less at sea in our understanding of Hume's view, but it does not resolve all the potential worries about the view. First and foremost is the worry that, while propositions can be assessed as true or false, mere ideas of objects cannot, so such a view is unable to explain how our judgments are assessable as true or false.

LOCKE ON IDEAS, JUDGMENT, AND TRUTH

If we want a succinct statement of this concern, it is easy to locate in the writings of John Locke. Locke concludes Book Two of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* with a series of chapters canvassing contrasting pairs of features that we might apply to ideas, including, importantly, the chapter "Of True and False Ideas."⁸ The chapter is, perhaps, misleadingly named because the immediate thesis of Locke's discussion is that "True" and "False" are never, in strict propriety, applicable to individual ideas. Truth and falsity belong to *judgments*, not to ideas. Locke then spends a decent portion of the chapter attempting to explicate the implicit reference to a judgment that is intended any time an idea is labeled "true" or "false," in order to reconcile common ways of speaking with his theory of truth (explained in detail in Book Four), which applies only to propositions.

§1 THOUGH Truth and Falshood belong, in Propriety of Speech, only to Propositions; yet *Ideas* are oftentimes termed *true or false* (as what Words are there, that are not used with great Latitude, and with some deviation from their strict and proper Significations?) Though, I think, that when *Ideas* themselves are termed true or false, there is still some secret or tacit Proposition, which is the Foundation of that Denomination: as we shall see, if we examine the particular Occasions, wherein they come to be called true or false. In all which, we shall find some kind of Affirmation, or Negation, which is the Reason of that Denomination. For our *Ideas*, being nothing but bare Appearances or Perceptions in our Minds, cannot properly and simply in themselves be said to be *true or false*, no more than a single Name of any thing, can be said to be *true or false*. (*Essay*, 2.32.1, p. 384)

As we can see here, Locke takes the relatively natural position that my idea of the sun (or of a minotaur or of a giraffe) is not the sort of thing that is assessed as true or false. In the case of the minotaur, we might say that I have a false idea, but the circumstance in which we would say that is when I think that the minotaur exists, and it does not. So, Locke says, what is actually false in that situation is not my idea of the minotaur but my judgment that it exists. Another case where I might say that my idea of the minotaur is false is if my idea that I signify with the term “minotaur” is radically different from what other English speakers signify with the term “minotaur.” In that case, what is false is my tacit judgment that my idea corresponds to the rest of society’s. In both cases, to attribute falsity to my idea, we have to locate a proposition that I judge that is going to be labeled the genuine bearer of that falsity (and likewise for truth).

This makes sense given Locke’s account of truth, which, apart from depending on some particular features of his mental apparatus, is more or less a standard account of truth:

When Ideas are so put together, or separated in the Mind, as they, or the Things they stand for do agree, or not, that is, as I may call it, mental Truth. But *Truth of Words* is something more, and that is the affirming or denying of Words one of another, as the *Ideas* they stand for agree or disagree: And this again is twofold. Either *purely Verbal*, and trifling, which I shall speak of, *Chap. 10.* or *Real* and instructive; which is the Object of that real Knowledge, which we have spoken of already. (*Essay* 4.5.6 p. 576)

Judgments are true, for Locke, when the ideas involved in those judgments are joined or separated in accordance with the agreements or disagreements of those ideas, and this produces a proposition, which is the object of that judgment.⁹ This is a Lockean version of a fairly standard correspondence theory of truth. The judgment that Annie is red-headed is true in case the ideas it combines (my idea of Annie and my idea of being red-headed) agree, which in this case will depend on the actual coexistence of a certain Annie with the quality of having red hair.¹⁰ Note that the theory as outlined here simply cannot be applied to a mental state with only one idea involved because then there is no way to bring this notion of agreement to bear on such a mental state.¹¹ Consequently it is easy to see how this Lockean outlook helps frame an objection against Hume’s view:

Locke’s Objection:

1. A mental state is assessable as true or false in virtue of having an object that is assessable as true or false.
2. An idea is not assessable as true or false.

3. So, if the object of a mental state is an idea, that mental state is not assessable as true or false.
4. Beliefs are assessable as true or false.
5. So, it is not the case that the object of a belief is an idea.

The conclusion of this argument is the denial of Hume's view. And we will take for granted that all parties to the dispute accept (4) as uncontroversial. This leaves two places where Hume could consider resisting the argument: premise (1), which suggests that truth assessability of a mental state is inherited from truth-assessability of its object, or premise (2), which suggests that ideas are not truth-assessable. The strategy I pursue for Hume is one that denies premise (1), though, due to the nature of Hume's view on the relationship between ideas and the mental states they compose, he would also take issue with (2) as written.¹²

For Hume, the truth assessment of the belief comes from the nature of the attitude itself. Mere conceivings are not the sort of mental state that we can assess as true or false. Locke obviously agrees on this point, that the simple apprehension of something would not be evaluable as true or false. Marina's conception of the sun is neither true nor false. While Hume and Locke agree on how to assess this case, they diverge on the explanation for why. Locke says mental states that just have an idea of the sun as their object do not have the right sort of object to be true or false. For Hume, the explanation is more that the mere conception of the sun does not involve the sort of cognitive commitment that allows you to be assessed as correct or incorrect. You are not taking a stand, so you cannot be wrong. We are simply dealing with free play of the imagination.

This is an important difference in the explanatory strategies. To appreciate why it works for Locke, it is important to observe that Locke accepts the disjointedness of the objects of belief and conception.

Hence, mere conceptions do not involve propositions, while judgments do. In essence, for Locke, one cannot have the proposition in one's mind without a judgment of the proposition. While a number of scholars reject this interpretation of Locke, Jennifer Marušić (2014) has compellingly defended this natural way of reading Locke on judgment and proposition formation. This interpretation does leave Locke susceptible to Frege–Geach-style worries about logically complex contents or belief attributions, though Marušić helpfully articulates a wide variety of strategies whereby the Lockean can attempt to mitigate or overcome these concerns. I do not have the space here to fully defend my agreement with Marušić's interpretation. Importantly, however, if one rejects the Marušić line of interpretation and regards Locke as offering a view on which propositions can be formed in the mind without a fully fledged

act of cognitive commitment—such as Ott (2003)—the larger point of this section remains: the objection outlined here to a Hume-style view depends on a rejection of the overlap between objects of conception and objects of judgment. If one believes Locke does not have such a view, then Locke is not positioned to offer this objection. So, while this may be a compelling objection, it presupposes that the object of the attitude is doing all of the work in explaining the truth-assessability of a mental state and can only be put forward by someone who rejects the overlap of objects between belief and conception.

One way to understand the view I am attributing to Locke is this: mental states simply inherit features like truth-assessability from their objects. Judgments have truth assessable objects, *and so* they are truth assessable. Conceptions do not, *and so* they are not. That is the entire story, and we have an account of how the objects can have or lack the capacity for truth assessment solely in virtue of the sorts of objects the state has. In fact, the differences in the objects may even help explain what makes the states themselves different.

Hume obviously cannot embrace this sort of explanation since he thinks mere imaginings and beliefs can have the very same objects yet differ on whether they can be assessed as true or false. His story cannot just be that the state inherits the feature from the object. Instead, he has to draw on the nature of the activity you are doing with the object to explain truth-assessability. We will return to Hume's positive story about this at the conclusion of this paper, but, for now, the important thing to observe is that, unless one offloads *all* of this work to the objects of the attitudes, as the Lockean view outlined above does, one cannot count Hume's view out merely in virtue of its objects not being truth-assessable.

And, of course, worries for this Lockean position are easy to come by: it seems as if I can merely imagine that the sun is blue. But Locke (as we are understanding him) cannot countenance propositional conceivings. This, along with the Frege–Geach problem, is perhaps the strongest case against accepting the Lockean picture. My point here is not to conclusively argue against the sort of Lockean position described here (as noted above, Marušić [2014] does excellent work rehabilitating the prospects for making this a compelling interpretation of Locke), but merely to point out that it is a fairly substantive and controversial stance to adopt, especially if one's primary interest is offering this objection to Hume.

REID ON JUDGMENT, CONCEPTION, AND THEIR OBJECTS

In his *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, Thomas Reid offers a view that avoids the worrisome pitfall of Hume's account (he rejects that beliefs have nonpredicative objects) and of Locke's (he allows for

us to conceive of and believe the same sorts of contents). In fact, Reid's overall position on this issue is more or less in line with contemporary orthodoxy about attitudes and their contents. Judgment/belief for him is a propositional attitude. Its objects are always predicative in structure. In the midst of a different complaint about Hume's theory of judgment, Reid states clearly "propositions, not ideas, are the objects of belief" (EIP 6.5, p. 471).¹³

Elsewhere in the *Essays*, however, Reid makes it clear that he thinks the objects of belief—propositions—can also be the objects of mere conception/apprehension:

Yet it may be observed that even a proposition may be simply apprehended without forming any judgment of its truth or falsehood: For it is one thing to conceive the meaning of a proposition; it is another thing to judge it to be true or false. (EIP 1.1, p. 25)

Note that this is in contrast to the Lockean view discussed in the previous section, though in fairly straightforward accord with our contemporary treatment of such matters. The proposition that Fido is a dog, for instance, is something that can be the object of imagining or belief, and it is the same object in either case.

So, Reid's view sides with Locke over Hume when it comes to the objects of belief (in that the objects of belief are always propositions) and with Hume over Locke when it comes to the overlap in objects between belief and conception (in that Hume and Reid both think the same things we believe can be merely conceived). What makes Reid unique among the three is that he thinks the objects of simple apprehension can have predicative structure.

There is much to recommend Reid's view on its own merits (this is part of why the view retains such popularity today). But it is important to observe that Reid is not in a position to offer the same objection to Hume that Locke offered. Recall that Locke's objection depended on the premise that "a mental state is assessable as true or false in virtue of having an object that is assessable as true or false." For Locke, mental states straightforwardly inherit their capacity for assessment as true or false from having objects that are assessable as true or false. But since Reid allows that we can merely conceive propositions as well as believe them, he runs into the following problem taking such a position:

B: Isaac believes that the sun is blue.

I: Mira imagines that the sun is blue.

It is typical for us to assess the truth or falsity of the belief ascribed to Isaac in (B), but it is unusual at best to assess the truth or falsity

of the imagining ascribed to Mira in (I). Both states, however, for Reid, have propositional objects. So, if truth-assessment of the state is simply inherited from the object of the state, then we should think that Mira's imagining is false. This, however, seems to be a category error. Note, importantly, that it is perfectly fine to say that *what Mira imagines* is false. After all, what Mira imagines in this case is a proposition, and that proposition is false. But the act of imagining is not false or incorrect. The belief, on the other hand, does exhibit a parallel here: what Mira believes is false, and the belief is false as well. That is, the state is false or incorrect, in addition to its object.

The point to be made here is not that Reid is unable to draw on the proposition in his explanation of the incorrectness or falsity of the belief. He certainly can rely on the proposition and its features in his explanation. It is rather this: for Reid, sometimes when a state has a propositional object, the state itself becomes subject to truth-conditions, and, at other times, it does not. This point is easier to see if we consider something that many contemporary theorists regard as a propositional attitude: *desire*.

If Mira desired that the sun is (or were) blue, we would not call the desire false. But the proposition that is the object of that desire might well be false. Some propositional attitudes inherit truth/falsity from having propositional objects, and others do not. But if this is the case, we cannot simply say that having a proposition as its object is doing all of the work.

Locke, in contrast, *can* offer this single-factor account of the truth/falsity of beliefs. Propositions do the work, and they do all of the work. For Reid, however, we need to have a two-factor explanation: some of the work is done by the proposition: a propositional object will be necessary for a state to be true/false, but there is something further, something about the nature of the state or activity that is also necessary to account for why the state can be assessed as true or false. Whether this is attributed to a primitive feature of certain cognitive activities, given a naturalistic explanation in terms of the role of perception and belief in our lives, an account in terms of direction of fit, a pragmatist account, or the like, the important constraint is that, if beliefs and imaginings (and desires and so on) overlap in their objects, it will need to be something about the nature of the activities themselves that explains why some of them are truth-evaluable and others are not.

To be clear, this is not intended as an objection to Reid. I am not offering any criticism of a two-factor account over a one-factor account; indeed, since there is much to recommend accounts that allow for conception, desire, and the like to be propositional attitudes, a two-factor account

seems fairly appealing. It is important, though, to appreciate it as a point of departure from Locke that emerges due to their disagreement on whether mere conceptions can have propositional objects. And this departure deprives Reid of the capacity to offer the specific objection to Hume that we saw as implicit in Locke's discussion of truth.

REHABILITATING HUME

So far, I take myself to have shown the following: first, the seemingly appealing objection from Locke presupposes a very unappealing view of the nature of mental states and their objects, one that few people today find very credible. Second, the form of explanation for the truth-assessability of belief that Reid (and those of us who share his general framework) is offering is more complex than the one that Locke offers. What I will now show is that it is also *structurally parallel* to the form of explanation offered by Hume. I do not take myself to have argued that Hume's view is equally appealing to Reid's or that Hume's view is without problems. Rather, I think that we need to work harder if we are to uncover an understanding of where the problems lie with Hume's view.

For Locke, propositions wind up having truth-conditions, and a state is truth assessable if and only if its object has truth-conditions. This is a simple, clean explanation, but the cost we pay for this simplicity is that we cannot capture the appeal of propositional conception, or propositional desires, hopes, intentions, and such. Reid, on the other hand, keeps the necessary condition in place: propositions have truth-conditions, and a state is truth assessable only if its object has truth-conditions. To make room for a broader range of propositional attitudes, however, he has to give a story about the nature of belief (and other truth-assessable attitudes) that explains why the truth-conditions of its object are inherited by the state itself, when the truth-conditions of a proposition are not inherited by a mere apprehension (or by other non-truth-assessable attitudes).¹⁴

I am stressing that only Locke is in a position to offload all of the work from the nature of the attitude to the object and that Reid has to give an account that appeals both to the object and to what is being done with it, because, once we see that a two-factor account can be an appealing form of explanation, it is far easier to see how to offer a Humean account of the truth-assessability of belief. There is a thing to be explained, and, unless we appreciate the importance of there being two integral aspects of Reid's explanation, we cannot appreciate the extent to which Hume is fundamentally offering the same sort of explanation as Reid.

Recall that Reid and Hume agree that the things we merely conceive can also be believed. So, in essence, they face the same challenge to ex-

plain why “Isaac’s belief that Pegasus exists is false” seems perfectly fine, while “Mira’s imagining that Pegasus exists is false” seems bizarre. And both of them, I maintain, explain this difference by appeal to a two-factor account, appealing to both the object of the attitude *and* the nature of the attitude itself. For Reid, the object supplies truth-conditions, and (to put the point very schematically) the attitude is either one that has truth-condition uptake or not. Belief does, but imagining does not. Presumably, we will want a fuller story about why belief does, but that is, in some sense, a story about what the purpose or role of belief is in our mental lives.

For Hume, the object of those attitudes does not really have predicative or propositional structure. It is simply the idea of Pegasus. What the idea of Pegasus does have, however, is existence-conditions. It is some sort of mental picture built out of sensory ideas (or perhaps a collection of such mental pictures to reflect the temporal and perspectival complications of a sensory idea for a persisting three-dimensional being). That mental picture has or lacks correspondence with reality.¹⁵ These existence-conditions are possessed by ideas across the board, the same way truth-conditions are simply possessed by propositions. But just as some attitudes have uptake of truth-conditions for Reid, some attitudes have uptake of existence-conditions. We do not call an imagining true or false because the object of the idea imagined does or does not exist, but we do call a belief true or false because the object of the idea believed does or does not exist. The explanation here lies primarily in the nature of belief, not in the nature of the object of belief. All that is required on the part of the objects is a system of existence-conditions that get us the right assessments of the beliefs as true or false, assuming beliefs have uptake of those conditions. Since my idea of Pegasus does not correspond to anything, a belief that Pegasus exists turns out false. Since my idea of the sun does correspond to something, my belief that the sun exists turns out true.¹⁶

You could grant me everything I have argued thus far and still be worried that Hume’s position is distinctly more troubled than Reid’s, because there are truths that Reid can capture as propositions, which Hume cannot translate into objects. This is a legitimate concern; however, it is one that requires detailed investigation of particular claims about the limits of Hume’s system. In some cases, it may be a substantive philosophical disagreement about whether some content is meaningful; in others, creative use of resources may enable Hume to capture the expressive range that Reid has available. Supposing, then, that one can address those worries, have we then conquered the pessimism for Hume’s view?

Thus far, my rehabilitation of Hume’s position has been *formal*. I have established that the sort of explanation he can offer of the difference

between believing and imagining has the same structure or complexity as the sort of explanation that Thomas Reid is able to offer. Sketching out how existence-conditions will play a role gives us slightly more of a sense of the substance the account will take, but we still, I think, need a bit more of a story about what the difference will be between what we do with an idea when we imagine it, and what we do with an idea when we believe it, in order to be satisfied that there is any sort of story to be optimistic about available to Hume (or, more modestly, to undermine extant pessimism). What is more, Hume's available resources for explaining this difference are fairly limited. As I have argued elsewhere (Powell 2013), Hume's project involves a very sparse array of explanatory resources, especially for distinguishing among operations of the understanding. In this case, his main tool is variations in a feature he calls force and vivacity, which he does not take to be definable but which gives the difference between feeling and thinking, and within thinking, between belief, memory and mere imagining.

I am not about to end this paper by attempting to defend a robust interpretation of what Hume means by "force and vivacity" and in some passages "liveliness."¹⁷ His appendix remarks on the subject include the suggestion that he might just as easily have used any number of other terms, including some that are, to my ear, antonyms with these.¹⁸ What is clear, at any rate, is this: the phrase "force and vivacity" is treated as a scalar feature of our perceptions (that is, impression or ideas), such that a perception occurs to a mind with an attendant force and vivacity. Above a certain threshold, it is an impression; below it, it is an idea. Within the realm of ideas, there is another threshold, which is the threshold of assent. Above this threshold sit memories and beliefs; below it, mere imaginings.

Variations in this scalar feature are described as having both phenomenological and causal consequences. Perceptions with greater force and vivacity are said to be less subject to the voluntary exertions of the will and, as having a different feeling to the mind, being more vivid (or perhaps brighter and clearer).

So, Hume's primary tool, and only tool, really, for distinguishing a belief from a mere conception is increased force and vivacity. Regardless of whatever else we want to say about force and vivacity, we know this much: as the force and vivacity of an idea increases, the mental state composed of your idea of that object just is a closer approximation of an impression of that object, or a literal sense perception of that object. What this means is that, when you hit the relevant threshold, your thought about the object is impression-like *enough* to influence your mental life (and other behaviors) the way impressions do:

The effect, then, of belief is to raise up a simple idea to an equality with our impressions, and bestow on it a like influence on the passions. This effect it can only have by making an idea approach an impression in force and vivacity. (T, 1.3.10, p. 119)

As outlined above, the formal story simply makes use of the fact that there are two factors to appeal to in order to explain the capacity for belief to be assessed as true or false: the objects of belief and the activity itself. A compelling substantive story, on the other hand, needs to explain what it is about the objects and attitudes that could plausibly do this work.¹⁹ The objects of belief, being ideas of objects, provide us with *existence-conditions*. As we have already noted, this is not sufficient, since mere imaginings are not assessable as true or false but share the same objects and, thus, also possess existence-conditions. However, mere imaginings differ from beliefs because beliefs are sufficiently close simulations of impressions to influence our passions and behaviors. In effect, for your idea of the sun to have this force and vivacity means that you will simply behave in ways similar to your having actually perceived the sun. In other words, you are committed to treating the sun as though it exists. This is a striking difference between believing and mere imagining, on Hume's account. And the explanation for this difference rests principally in the nature of belief as an activity.

I do not take myself to have quelled all or even most concerns that one might have about Hume's nonpredicative account of judgment. This is, at best, the beginnings of a more robust defense of Hume's project. At the same time, it is important not to undersell the value of responding to component elements of the pessimistic case against Hume's account of cognition. If the foregoing interpretation of Hume is correct, he offers an account on which the basic mechanism of belief is the simulation or approximation of perception. The relevant features of belief that render it suitable to assess for truth or correctness arise, principally, from this feature of belief. As long as all the belief contents that we need to account for can be reduced or analyzed into a model of *existence-conditions*, rather than predicatively structured *truth-conditions*, then Hume has a *prima facie* interesting, and potentially viable, account of belief worth investigating. As alluded to above, there are reasons to be concerned that the lack of predicative structure will cause trouble for logically complex contents, quantified claims, modals, and indirect discourse.²⁰ Getting clear on how Hume's resources come into play in the most basic elements of his account of belief is crucial for understanding the prospects for answering any of those challenges with Hume's resources.²¹

Keywords: David Hume, John Locke, Thomas Reid, belief, conception, propositions

NOTES

1. It is not uncommon to further posit a parallel between those structures and the structure of something extramental, such as a fact, state of affairs, or (Russellian) proposition. This further commitment is less widespread than the one I am calling the orthodox position. For our purposes, we will not need to concern ourselves with any issues about the nature or structure of extramental entities (if any) represented by language and thought.

2. This contrasts markedly with, for instance, Gottlob Frege's and Bertrand Russell's treatments of existence claims, both of which reject the parallel of structure, but do so by positing as much structure or more than the parallelism would require (Nelson 2016).

3. See, in particular, Stroud (1977, chapter 4) for an explicit statement that this is a major source of concern for Hume's account of judgment. The concern is also discussed in Owen (1999 and 2003).

4. One complication that I am setting to the side here is that some interpreters might seek to allow Hume an account on which nonexistential beliefs are propositionally structured, in which case, Hume would also be regarded as potentially rejecting (2), since there is nothing to prevent those propositions from being merely conceived on his view. Garrett (1997) provides some resources that help for this. To avoid this complication, one can implicitly restrict the entire conversation here to existential beliefs, for which Hume's account is explicitly nonpropositional.

5. Here and in what follows, "T" will indicate citations to Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*, with the subsequent numbers identifying the book, part, section, and paragraph of the passage cited or referenced. Page references provided will be to Hume (2011), the Clarendon edition, Norton and Norton, editors.

6. One might consider the possibility that Hume simply thinks that the idea of existence is an ingredient part of all our ideas of objects, so, while no *further* idea is needed, the idea of the sun itself contains that other ingredient already. Hume considers and explicitly denies this possibility in his discussion of the idea of existence (*Treatise* 1.2.6), and it would cause trouble for Hume's views about simple ideas.

7. For philosophers of a Meinongian bent, the proposed synonymy does not precisely work because there are things they might believe in that they do not believe to exist, but we need not worry about this complication here.

8. Here and in what follows, *E* will indicate citations to Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, with the subsequent numbers identifying the book, chapter, and section of the passage quoted or referenced. Page references are to Locke (1975).

9. Because Locke has propositions as the objects of judgments, rather than the ideas that are ingredients in those propositions, his view differs significantly from Hume's in a structural sense, even though he also requires an activity or attitude in order for truth-aptness to come about.

10. Not all agreement between ideas is a matter of the intrinsic features of those ideas, for Locke.

11. There is a fairly major concern to be raised here about Locke's account of sensitive knowledge (4.1.7, 4.11). In some places, Locke appears to commit himself to a stance on sensitive knowledge whereby the agreement in question is between a sensible idea gotten through perception and something external in reality. This has vexed any number of Locke commentators, as can be seen in recent work from Allen (2013), Marušić (2016), Nagel (2016), Rickless (2015), Rockwood (2013), Soles (2014), and Stapleford (2009). This is further complicated by Locke's treatment of "knowledge" and "judgment" as disjoint categories. I do not intend to untangle this thorny issue of Locke interpretation here, and it may be that Locke has to go in for unstructured but truth-evaluable mental states, as a result of these pronouncements, in which case, not even he is situated to genuinely pose the objection to the sort of Humean view that I outline here. Nevertheless, a Locke who avoids these pronouncements on sensitive knowledge could offer them, so they are still worth considering here.

12. Simply put, a belief just is a lively idea for Hume, so any feature a given belief has will be possessed by *some* idea. However, we can make sense of Locke's objection as asking whether the idea *considered as a mere conception* is assessable as true or false. In that case, Hume need only deny (1) on the strategy I advocate.

13. Here and in what follows, "EIP" will indicate citations to Reid's *Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man*, with the subsequent numbers indicating essay and chapter. Page references are to Reid (2002).

14. Though I have avoided discussing them in order to keep the discussion less complex, attitudes like supposition, conjecture, and suspicion are plausible candidates, distinct from belief, that may well be truth assessable.

15. I write here as though Hume is a straightforward realist about the external world, but disputes about whether Hume's "reality" bottoms out in impressions or something extramental are entirely orthogonal to my point here.

16. There is a terminological choice reflected here, in that, given Hume's identification of belief with a lively idea, one can rightly ask whether it might not be correct to say that some ideas are true for Hume. After all, my belief in the sun is an idea, and that is true, so it seems that it has truth-conditions. I have no real objection to speaking that way, though I opted not to in this paper, because I think it is clarifying to view Hume as having to construct truth-conditions out of existence-conditions. I have no objection to ultimately describing Hume as taking ideas of sensation to possess truth-conditions, provided it is understood that Hume has effectively built ersatz propositions out of subject terms, rather than including primitive predication in his story. Thanks to an anonymous referee for helping me clarify this point.

17. I generally seek to remain as neutral as possible on the matter of what Hume has in mind here. For an especially thorough exploration that takes a substantive position on this matter, see Loeb (2002). See also Chapter 1 of Garrett (1997). For a treatment of liveliness in terms of dispositions, see Marušić (2010).

18. In the appendix to the *Treatise* (1.3.7.7, p. 68), Hume attempts to clarify his meaning thus: “an idea assented to *feels* different from a fictitious idea, that the fancy alone presents to us: And this different feeling I endeavour to explain by calling it a superior *force*, or *vivacity*, or *solidity*, or *firmness*, or *steadiness*.”

19. An anonymous referee correctly points out that one virtue of a two-factor account is that it divides the explanation so that the normativity of assessing beliefs as true or false is explained by the nature of the attitude, not by the nature of its object. What makes it a mistake to believe something false has to do with what belief is, not something that would apply when we simply imagine a false content. I lack the space here to adequately explore the normativity of belief, but, for some valuable discussions of the normativity of belief in Hume, see Boehm (2013), Falkenstein (1997), and Morris (2006).

20. Some resources for addressing these issues are explored in Powell (2014), though there is much work that remains to attempt to establish anything like parity of expressive capacity between Hume’s framework and a standard predicative picture.

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