

III. Hume's Approach to Causation¹

DAVID HUME has described his theory of causation as the 'chief argument'² of his *Treatise of Human Nature*. The broad lines of that argument are well known, and need not be detailed here. Hume's conclusion is that causation is not a 'power' in the cause but a 'felt compulsion' in the mind—an expectation that a certain event will be followed by a certain other event of the type habitually associated with the first in our experience. Both events are perceptions; the first is an *impression*, the second a believed *idea*: and causation is the *association* of the two. Furthermore, Hume not only expresses his notion of causation *in terms* of the theory of impressions and ideas; he also argues to it *by means of* this theory.

I take the liberty of making these assertions without argument in the belief that they will be generally accepted: but I should like to argue the following propositions:

I. that the theory of impressions and ideas, which Hume utilises in his later discussion of causation, is based on that precise theory of causation which the later discussion is designed to refute.

II. that Hume's discussion of association makes appeal to a variety of causal theories.

We shall consider these in turn.

I. Impressions and Ideas

All the perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into two distinct kinds, which I shall call impressions and ideas.³

'Perception' is then a general term covering 'impressions' and 'ideas':⁴ it is also occasionally used to indicate the act of perceiving.⁵

¹ This is an excerpt from a Doctoral dissertation entitled *The Conception of Causation in the Philosophy of David Hume*, presented to the Institut Supérieur de Philosophie of the Catholic University of Louvain, May, 1960.

² A/4/c i.e., the third paragraph of page 4 of the *Abstract*. . . . I shall use this form of reference throughout. T and E refer to the Selby-Bigge editions of the *Treatise and Enquiry*.

³ T/1/-

⁴ Cf. T/2/b; 3/a; 64/b; 67/d; A/8/b; Church: *Hume's Theory of the Understanding*, p. 19; Laird: *Hume's Philosophy*. . . . p. 26.

This is the usual sense. But frequently 'perception' is used as a synonym of 'impression', e.g., T/194/b; 241/b; 252/b; 259/b. This usage is readily detectable.

⁵ Cf. T/456/b: 'Nothing is ever present to the mind but its perceptions; and . . . all the actions of seeing, hearing . . . fall under its denomination. The mind may never exert itself in any action which may not be comprehended under the term of perception'. Perception is also regarded as passive: cf. T/73/c.

Impressions are the 'perceptions which enter with most force and violence'; 'sensations, passions and emotions as they make their first appearance in the soul'. And, in general, they constitute the domain of 'feeling' rather than of 'thinking'.⁶

Hume tells us what he does *not* mean by impressions:

By the term of impression I would not be understood to express the manner in which our lively perceptions are produced in the soul, but merely the perceptions themselves, for which there is no particular name either in English or any other language that I know of.⁷

In other words, the impression is not the act of impressing a perception on the soul, but rather the 'impress', its result. Furthermore Hume, by his choice of this term, does not wish to decide anything concerning the origin of impressions.

Occasionally, he uses the term 'impression' in a loose, non-technical sense⁸, but the instances of this are few, and not likely to breed confusion.

Though Hume does call impressions 'sensations', whose examination belongs to 'Anatomists and Natural Philosophers';⁹ and though he does seem to accept a physiological theory of cognition¹⁰, this aspect of his thought is of little importance, and is only reluctantly appealed to.¹¹

There are two kinds of impression—of 'sensation' and of 'reflection'.

The first kind arises in the soul originally from unknown causes.

The second is derived in great measure from our ideas.¹²

Impressions of sensation are of various kinds:

There are three different kinds of impressions conveyed by the senses. The first are those of the figure, bulk, motion and solidity of bodies. The second those of colours, tastes, smells, sounds, heat and cold. The third are the pains and pleasures that arise from the application of objects to our bodies, as by the cutting of our flesh with steel, and such like.¹³

⁶ T/1/-

⁷ T/2/n. Mr. Salmon, *The Central Problem of David Hume's Philosophy*, p. 351, asks 'But had not Locke provided a precedent for the use of the word "idea" for "perception"?' Hume was well aware that he had: cf. A/9/b: 'Mr. Locke . . . comprehends all our perceptions under the term of idea'. Cf. also E/22/n. But, in the passage quoted in the text, 'perceptions' refers to impressions *alone*, and Hume is *distinguishing* them from ideas.

⁸ e.g., T/121/a: 'those ideas they (i.e., "liars") present to us, not being attended with belief, make no impression on the mind'. T/268/a: 'This difficulty is seldom or never thought of; and even where it has once been present to the mind, is quickly forgot, and leaves but a small impression behind it'.

⁹ T/8/a.

¹⁰ e.g., T/60-61.

¹¹ because Hume's 'first maxim' is that 'in the end we must rest content with experience' T/60/b.

¹² T/7/c.

¹³ T/192/b; cf. T/230/b.

Two points here call for some comment:

1. Impressions of sensation are 'original', yet their *causes* are unknown. The meaning Hume attaches to 'originality' here is easily discovered:

It is certain that the mind, in its perceptions, must begin somewhere. . . .¹⁴

An impression of sensation is original as a perception; it has no cognitive antecedents¹⁵, and in this differs from an impression of reflection.

2. Hume appears to admit that an impression of sensation, though 'original', may have a cause of some kind:

As to those impressions which arise from the senses, their ultimate cause is, in my opinion, perfectly inexplicable by human reason; and it will always be impossible to decide with certainty whether they arise immediately from the object, or are produced by the creative power of the mind, or are derived from the author of our being.¹⁶

He also speaks of the 'natural and physical causes' of impressions of sensation; and these are apparently knowable, for 'examination of them would lead me too far from my present subject into the sciences of Anatomy and Natural Philosophy'.¹⁷ Mr. Laird¹⁸ finds difficulty in reconciling Hume's statement that 'all our perceptions are dependent on our organs and the disposition of our nerves and animal spirits'¹⁹ with the view that impressions of sensation are 'original'. It seems to me that this difficulty is adequately solved by the point that the 'originality' which Hume has in mind is cognitional, and not causal.

There is a related problem which may be mentioned at this stage: how the impressions of pleasure and pain can be 'original' in the sense described above—for frequently they are dependent on other impressions. Thus the 'immediate pleasure or uneasiness' which the 'discourse' of the *Treatise* may occasion²⁰ is dependent on the prior impression of 'seeing'. I am not sure what Hume's position on this point is, but I suggest the key to it is to be found in the following passage:

Bodily pains and pleasures . . . arise originally in the soul, or in the body, whichever you please to call it. . . .²¹

Hume's insistence that they are original, combined with his indifference as to how their nature is to be further described, may

¹⁴ T/275/b.

¹⁵ T/275/a: 'Original impressions or impressions of sensation are such as without any antecedent perception arise in the soul'. Cf. Church: *Hume's Theory* . . . pp. 20-21.

¹⁶ T/84/c. Cf. T/175/b: certain 'views and sentiments', i.e., impressions, are 'unaccountable in their causes'.

¹⁷ T/275/b.

¹⁸ *Hume's Philosophy* . . . p. 29.

¹⁹ T/211/a.

²⁰ T/1/-

²¹ T/276/a.

be linked with his previous statement that impressions are concerned with '*feeling*'. Thus Hume speaks of a 'sentiment of pleasure or pain';²² and he says 'Pain and pleasure . . . may . . . appear in impression to the actual feeling'.²³ Though pain and pleasure will play no part in Hume's 'Logic' of the 'Understanding', '*feeling*' becomes increasingly prominent.

The impressions of 'reflection' are 'the passions and other emotions resembling them'²⁴ These are also called 'internal'²⁵ and 'secondary' impressions. This latter distinction of 'secondary' and 'primary' is introduced by Hume in Book II as a substitute for the distinction of 'sensation' and 'reflection': but he insists that the two terminologies are the same.

Hume's usual method of describing ideas is to compare them with impressions:

Faint images of (impressions)²⁶

the reflection of (impressions)²⁷

differ (from impressions) only in degree²⁸

our ideas are images of our impressions²⁹

An idea is a weaker impression³⁰

An idea is . . . weaker and fainter than an impression³¹

From these and many other passages it would appear that Hume is unable to describe ideas except by contrast with impressions. He does indeed speak of ideas as 'our fainter conceptions', but 'conceptions'—which is clearly used here as synonymous with 'perceptions'—is no more than a tag for naming our impressions and ideas; so that 'fainter perceptions' has meaning only in reference to our less faint perceptions—impressions.

We must, I think, conclude that, for Hume, impressions and ideas are not radically different classes of perceptions.³² For instance, he says:

We find by experience that when any impression has been present with the mind, it again makes its appearance there as an idea.³³

²² T/472/-. In this context at least 'sentiment' is equivalent to 'feeling'.

²³ T/118/b: cf. A/19/a: ' . . . a difference to the feeling or sentiment'.

²⁴ T/275/a.

²⁵ They are opposed to the 'external' impressions, which are those of sensation; T/33/c; 190/b. There is a comparable distinction in T/5/a: 'impressions . . . of the mind or body'.

²⁶ T/1/-

²⁷ T/2/c.

²⁸ T/3/c.

²⁹ T/6/b.

³⁰ T/19/c.

³¹ T/73/a.

³² Cf. Brown: *Observations* . . . : p. 118, n. 'Idea is thus used by (Hume) as the name, not of a class, but of an order'. Cf. Leroy: *David Hume*: p. 40: the difference is 'of degree and not of nature'.

³³ T/8/b.

As Mr. Green has expressed it:

The impression . . . is only the livelier idea, even as the idea is the fainter impression.³⁴

Nevertheless, we must not lose sight of the fact that Hume did draw a distinction between them,³⁵ although, as we shall see, it is quite difficult to determine what this distinction was.

Ideas are divided in various ways:

Simple ideas are 'such as admit of no distinction or separation': *complex* 'may be distinguished into parts'.³⁶ And, though Hume does not say so explicitly, complex ideas reduce without remainder to a collection of simple ideas.³⁷

Primary ideas are ideas in the ordinary sense: *Secondary* are 'images of the primary'³⁸ i.e., ideas of ideas, or doubly-faint impressions. As Hume points out, it is with such ideas as these that one follows the line of reasoning in the Treatise. Nevertheless Hume never again discusses secondary ideas, though I think they are involved in an important passage later in the Treatise.³⁹

Particular ideas are ideas in the ordinary sense: *General* ideas are particular ideas which are 'general in their representation':⁴⁰ they excite a 'habit' or 'custom' whereby resembling ideas to which we give the same name are evoked.⁴¹

Ideas, for Hume, are images. Of this there cannot be much doubt:

Impressions are images⁴² and ideas differ from impressions only in vivacity.

Hume speaks of ideas as images of impressions⁴³ and of objects.⁴⁴

The faculty of ideas is the imagination⁴⁵ and an imagined idea must be an image.

³⁴ Introduction . . . : p. 270. *Maréchal: Point de Départ . . . : cahier II: p. 175* makes the same point in calling Hume's 'idea' an 'impression affaiblie'.

³⁵ One could indeed make a case for the view that Hume eventually abandoned the distinction of impressions and ideas, both expressly (cf. T/320/a: certain relations 'can entirely convert an idea into an impression') and tacitly (by e.g., regarding ideas of memory as 'equivalent' to impressions). To examine this question in any adequate fashion would take us too far afield. But I would suggest that what Hume abandoned was not the *distinction* of impressions and ideas, but the attempt to find an adequate *way of distinguishing* them. The distinction is one of the main pivots of his theory of causation.

³⁶ T/2/b. 'Compound' is used as synonymous: cf. T/157/a; 366/a; and E/passim.

³⁷ Cf. Kemp Smith: *The Philosophy . . .* p. 208.

³⁸ T/6/b.

³⁹ T/169/b.

⁴⁰ T/22/b; 24/b.

⁴¹ T/17-24.

⁴² e.g., T/205/a: 'the very image which is present to the senses'.

⁴³ e.g., T/1/-

⁴⁴ e.g., T/203/a: 'to produce any new image or idea of the object . . .' cf. 20/a; 129/b; 135/a. Basson, *David Hume*; p. 27, calls Hume's idea a 'mental picture'.

⁴⁵ Imagination is 'the faculty by which we form our fainter ideas' T/118/n.

Hume sometimes corrects the term 'conceive' by the term 'imagine'.⁴⁶

This, however, does not advance us very far, as the precise nature of the image remains undetermined. However, it is only visual images that will be of importance in this study, and Hume does tell us more precisely what they are. Thus 'the general idea of a line . . . has, in its appearance in the mind, a precise degree of quantity and quality'.⁴⁷ And:

The very idea of extension is copied from nothing but an impression, and consequently must perfectly agree to it. To say the idea of extension agrees to any thing is to say that it is extended.⁴⁸

Furthermore, Hume emphatically rejects all ideas which are not images: this is particularly clear in the following passage:

It is usual with mathematicians to pretend that those ideas which are their objects are of so refined and spiritual a nature that they fall not under the conception of the fancy, but must be comprehended by a pure and intellectual view, of which the superior faculties of the soul are alone capable. The same notion runs through most parts of philosophy and is principally made use of to explain our abstract ideas and to show how we can form an idea of a triangle, for instance, which shall neither be isosceles nor scalenum, nor be confined to any particular length and proportion of sides. It is easy to see why philosophers are so fond of this notion of some spiritual and refined perceptions; since by that means they cover many of their absurdities; and may refuse to submit to the decision of clear ideas, by appealing to such as are obscure and uncertain. But to destroy this artifice, we need but reflect on that principle so oft insisted on, that all our ideas are copied from our impressions.⁴⁹

This passage seems to put the matter beyond reasonable doubt. It has, however, been contended that Hume did in fact admit ideas 'which are other than impressions and images',⁵⁰ and there is clear textual support for this view.

The mind has generally no adequate *idea* of . . . ('any great number such as a thousand') . . . but only a power of producing such an idea by its adequate idea of the decimals.⁵¹

⁴⁶ 'I ask then if upon the conception of their contact (i.e., of a circle and a straight line) he can conceive them as touching in a mathematical point, or if he must necessarily imagine them to concur for some space' T/53/a.

⁴⁷ 'There is no foundation for any conclusion *a priori* either concerning the operation or duration of any object, of which it is impossible for the human mind to form a conception. Any object may be imagined to become entirely inactive . . . and it is an evident principle that whatever we can imagine is possible' T/250/d: and cf. 27/b; 353/a; A/18/a.

⁴⁸ T/19/a.

⁴⁹ T/239/b-240/a.

⁵⁰ T/72/b.

⁵¹ Maund: *Hume's Theory of Knowledge*; pp. 165 ff. Kemp Smith: *The Philosophy . . .*; p. 267.

⁵² T/23/a.

We can form ideas which shall be no greater than the smallest atom of the animal spirits of an insect a thousand times less than a mite.⁵²

But, while these passages show that Hume speaks of 'ideas' which are not 'images', they do not, I think, prove that he *meant* to regard ideas as anything other than images. They constitute an accidental admission, not a deliberate theory. On this point we may adduce some further arguments:

(1) I think it could be contended that ideas, as anything other than particular images, are beyond the scope of the 'observation and experience' which constitute the foundation of Hume's Science of Man.⁵³

(2) If Hume is asserting—or even unwillingly, but deliberately, conceding—that there are genuine concepts or abstract ideas used side by side with images in our thinking, his whole argument up to this point scarcely makes sense. In particular the 'principle of derivation'⁵⁴ becomes a truism which should occasion no surprise and no argument: and there is no obvious reason why 'association' should have 'as extraordinary effects'⁵⁵ as Newton's 'gravitation' had in physical science.

(3) Hume affirms that animals have ideas.⁵⁶ This is not an isolated statement, for he regards it as an important test of any theory of knowledge that it should apply both to men and animals,⁵⁷ for both have the same mental equipment.⁵⁸

Thus, although Hume sometimes speaks of ideas that are not images, his explicit theory is that all ideas are images.

The Distinction of Impressions and Ideas

We have already seen that this distinction, whatever it is, must be rather slight. For each impression has an idea which is 'exactly correspondent'⁵⁹ with it. In other words, there is no difference of *content*: Hume does not use this terminology, but he does express the notion in unmistakable terms:

The component parts of impressions and ideas are precisely alike.⁶⁰

⁵² T/28/b: this 'idea' is derived from 'reason', not from 'our senses'. Cf. T/48/b; 56/c; Laird: *Hume's Philosophy* . . . p. 68. Church: *Hume's Theory* . . . pp. 59-60.

⁵³ T/xx/c.

⁵⁴ I use this term to refer to the principle that all our ideas are derived from corresponding impressions.

⁵⁵ T/12/d.

⁵⁶ T/327/b: ' . . . contiguity produces a relation among his (i.e., a dog's) ideas. . . '

⁵⁷ T/177/a: 'When any hypothesis . . . is advanced to explain a mental operation which is common to beasts and men, we must apply the same hypothesis to both; and as every true hypothesis will abide this trial, so I may venture to affirm, that no false one will ever be able to endure it'.

⁵⁸ T/176/b: 'Beasts are endowed with thought and reason as well as men'.

⁵⁹ T/4/b; et passim. Hume also uses the terms 'image', 'copy' and 'reflection'.

⁶⁰ T/319/a.

When I shut my eyes and think of my chamber, the ideas I form are exact representations of the impressions I felt: nor is there any circumstance of the one that is not to be found in the other.⁶¹

That idea of red which we form in the dark, and that impression which strikes our eyes in sunshine, differ only in degree, not in nature.⁶²

They do not differ in content: we have already seen that they do not differ in being entirely different kinds of perceptions. The question then naturally arises—how exactly *do* they differ? Hume mentions four distinct points of difference, which we shall consider in turn:

(1) An impression is transitory, but the idea persists: 'Of this impression a copy is taken by the mind, which remains after the impression ceases, and this we call an idea'.⁶³ Impressions are 'fleeting and perishing':⁶⁴ it is 'impossible to recall' them.⁶⁵ 'There is no impression constant and invariable'.⁶⁶ 'Sensations succeed each other and never all exist at the same time'.⁶⁷ Here is a manner of distinguishing impressions from ideas which is reasonably obvious and precise; yet Hume never suggests that it is important or that it *constitutes* the difference. There are, I suggest at least two reasons for this: (a) that transitoriness is not relevant to the origin of ideas from impressions—which is the question in which Hume is primarily interested: and (b) that it is of no assistance in showing how certain perceptions which appear to be impressions as Hume has described them, and which Hume wishes to regard as *ideas*, are not really impressions. We must examine this difficulty in more detail.

(2) *Vivacity*: Impressions and ideas also differ in 'vivacity'.⁶⁸ Hume frequently alleges that this is the *only* difference.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, in spite of the clear and emphatic nature of these texts, there are compelling reasons for not regarding them as representing Hume's definitive view on the matter.

(a) The following passage occurs early in the Treatise:

All the perceptions of the mind are of two kinds, viz., impressions and ideas, which differ from each other only in their different degrees of force and vivacity.⁷⁰

⁶¹ T/3/a: 'Circumstance' here probably means 'element': in Hume's usage the term has a very vague and variable meaning. Cf. T/13/c; 18/b; 88/a; 128/b; 136/a; 147/b; 174/5; 248/a.

⁶² T/3/c. 'Nature' again refers to the 'content' of perceptions in T/24/b; 189/c; 213/a; 628/c.

⁶³ T/8/a.

⁶⁴ T/195/c: cf. 194/a: 'perishing existences'.

⁶⁵ T/85/a: 'recall' here means 'reproduce' rather than 'remember'.

⁶⁶ T/251/c.

⁶⁷ T/252/a.

⁶⁸ Hume uses a whole host of synonyms: 'force' T/1/-; 144/a; 143/a; 'liveliness' 144/a; 'strength' 19/c; 'violence' 194/b; 'solidity, firmness, steadiness' 629/-; 'clear and evident' 33/b; 'clear and precise' 72/b.

⁶⁹ T/5/a; 19/c; 73/a; 96/b; 103/b; 119/b; 319/a.

⁷⁰ T/96/b.

In the Appendix to the Treatise Hume says:

The second error may be found in Book I, page 96, where I say that two ideas of the same object can only be different by their different degrees of force and vivacity. Had I said that two ideas of the same object can only be different by their different *feeling* I should have been nearer the truth.⁷¹

Unfortunately, this is not entirely conclusive, for Hume is here speaking of two ideas of the same object, whereas in the former passage he is speaking of an idea and its corresponding impression.

Messrs. Keynes and Straffa suggest that 'the correction would have been better referred to p. 1 where the original statement is made in a more definite form than on p. 96.'⁷² But the statement in T/1⁷³ is practically identical with that quoted above: and, in any case, we must surely presume that Hume had some reason for referring his correction to T/96 rather than to some other passage.

It is however possible that Hume means his retraction to apply only to the following passage, which occurs on the same page:

When you would any way vary the idea of a particular object, you can only increase or diminish its force and vivacity.

If this is the true interpretation, then Hume is saying nothing at all of the basis of the distinction between impressions and ideas. But that this is not the case will, I think, be clear from the next argument.

(b) The Appendix is concerned mostly with introducing a modification of Hume's theory of Belief. His original theory is that belief is simply the vivacity of an idea.⁷⁴ But there arises the considerable problem that there are vivid ideas which are not beliefs,⁷⁵ and beliefs to which no impression corresponds—i.e., 'Fictions'.⁷⁶ It is these 'fictions' that principally engage Hume's attention; and in order to distinguish them from genuine beliefs, he is forced to go beyond his original theory and admit that 'belief, beside the simple conception, consists in some impression or feeling'.⁷⁷ In other words, a genuine belief, though liable to error, *feels* different from a 'fiction' which is not the idea it claims to be,⁷⁸ and hence is not liable to truth.

Now the difficulty which besets Hume's distinction between impressions and ideas is almost exactly parallel. Just as he cannot distinguish beliefs from fictions on the basis of vivacity (because

⁷¹ T/636/c.

⁷² 'Introduction' to the *Abstract* . . . p. xxvii n. 1.

⁷³ 'The difference between these consists in the degree of force and vivacity with which they strike upon the mind'.

⁷⁴ T/199/b; 208/b.

⁷⁵ T/148/-

⁷⁶ e.g., belief in substance as an 'unintelligible something' T/220/b.

⁷⁷ T/629/a.

⁷⁸ This point is discussed below.

the fictions can be as vivid as the beliefs) so he cannot, or at least should not, distinguish impressions from 'illusions' on the basis of vivacity—and for the same reason. Hume admits that

It sometimes happens that our impressions are so faint and low, that we cannot distinguish them from our ideas.⁷⁹

If that is so, then it is not their vivacity that distinguishes impressions from ideas. This point has been well made by Professor Kemp Smith:

Were a difference of liveness what really constituted the difference, the mistaking of images for impressions and vice versa, owing to variations in liveness, could not occur. The difference being then identified with the difference in liveness, the lively would *as such* be impressions, and the less lively would, *as such*, be ideas.⁸⁰

This is quite true: but the interesting point is that Hume does not regard it as presenting any real difficulty. He says

Notwithstanding this near resemblance in a few instances, they (impressions and ideas) are in general so very different, that no one can make a scruple to rank them under distinct heads, and assign to each a peculiar name to mark the difference.⁸¹

But Hume's 'scruples' are rather selective. He will not admit 'fictions' as the ideas they claim to be,⁸² for these are notions which he wishes to banish: he perceives that they are not valid notions in his philosophy. And, I suggest, his tolerance with regard to impressions and ideas which are not distinguishable in the way he wishes to distinguish them is due to his not perceiving any important bearing that they could have on the main tenets which he wishes to establish.

Looked at in this way, it is, I think, possible that Hume did not intend to retract the view that impressions and ideas are distinguished only in vivacity. But the trend of his thought is certainly towards a retraction. The close connection of his original view of belief with the distinction of impressions and ideas in terms of vivacity, combined with the retraction of his original theory of belief in the Appendix, would indicate that Hume, in the Appendix, meant to retract his original view of the distinction between impressions and ideas.

⁷⁹ T/2/a: nor is this an isolated example. Hume speaks of impressions which are 'faint and obscure' T/154/a, 'feeble' T/194/b, 'implicit and obscure' T/175/b. (In this passage 'views' is another synonym of 'impression'). He also speaks of impressions of memory which are indistinguishable from the fictions of the imagination—i.e., 'Perfect ideas' T/8/b which have 'entirely lost' the vivacity of their corresponding impressions T/85/b-86/b.

⁸⁰ Kemp Smith: *The Philosophy* . . . p. 210.

⁸¹ T/2/a; cf. 6/a. Hume admits that there are some ideas to which no impressions correspond. But he regards this exception as 'so particular and singular that it is scarcely worth our observing, and does not merit that for it alone we should alter our general maxim'.

⁸² cf. *infra*.

(3) *Feeling*:⁸³ M. Leroy regards this as 'the most significant difference':⁸⁴ and Hume's regarding belief as 'feeling' rather than 'vivacity' does lend support to this view. But the really puzzling aspect of this whole question is that feeling is subject to precisely that difficulty which it is (apparently) meant to solve: if we *cannot* distinguish our impressions from our ideas, then feeling cannot be the basis of the distinction any more than vivacity can be. And this applies not only to vivacity and feeling, but also to any other possible phenomenal difference between them. If we cannot distinguish them, and they *are* distinguished, then their distinction is not phenomenal: and perceptions are something more than they appear to be.

Is this what Hume meant? A very brief examination of his usage of the term 'phenomenon' will, I think, help us to answer this question.

(a) Normally, he uses it in a very general sense, as equivalent to 'fact', 'instance' or 'event':

. . . another plain and convincing phenomenon which is that wherever, by any accident, the faculties which give rise to any impressions are obstructed in their operations . . . not only the impressions are lost but also their correspondent ideas.⁸⁵

(b) But he also uses the term in a sense which admits of some degree of inference or reasoning:

I receive a letter which, upon opening it, I *perceive* by the hand-writing to have come from a friend who says he is two hundred leagues distant. It is evident I can never account for this phenomenon, conformable to my experience in other instances, without spreading out in my mind the whole sea and continent between us. . . .⁸⁶

'Phenomenon', in this usage, includes 'recognition'.

(c) In at least one place, however, Hume seems to be endeavouring to describe a phenomenon unmixed with any element of inference, and unsynthesised with past experience:

I hear of a sudden a *noise as of a door* opening upon its hinges. . . . I have never observed that this noise could proceed from anything but the motion of a door, and therefore *conclude* that the present phenomenon is a contradiction to all past experience, unless the door . . . be still in being.⁸⁷

I suggest that Hume regards perceptions as 'pure' phenomena in this latter sense:

⁸³ Hume also refers to the sense of touch or 'tangibility' (T/237/b) as 'feeling' cf. T/230/b; 235/c. This is not the meaning in the present context.

⁸⁴ *David Hume*: p. 42.

⁸⁵ T/5/b. Cf. T/111/b; 175/b; 266/b.

⁸⁶ T/196/-. The italics in this and in the next passage are mine.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Since all actions and sensations of the mind are known to us by consciousness, they must necessarily appear in every particular what they are, and be what they appear.⁸⁸

(Impressions) appear . . . in their true colours, as impressions or perceptions.⁸⁹

All sensations are felt by the mind such as they really are.⁹⁰

There is nothing ever present to the mind but perception and ideas.⁹¹

On this basis, our problem appears absolutely insoluble. If perceptions are only phenomenal, then they cannot be distinguished into groups which are sometimes indistinguishable. We must, I think, regard Hume's thought on this point as inconsistent. But the pointing out of inconsistencies is, in itself, a fruitless task. It does not serve even to diminish the popularity of a philosophy, should its influence surpass its merits.⁹² What is important is to attempt to isolate and understand the pressures which forced a brilliant thinker into a radical inconsistency.

There are at least two such pressures:

(a) In one of his letters Hume says that in one's philosophy one must still remain a *man*. It is, I suggest, this humanist strain in his philosophy which, at least in part, forbids Hume to place illusions of the senses or imagination on a level with what we do in fact consider to be genuine impressions. Furthermore, he is unwilling to introduce an element of fiction or uncertainty into impressions.⁹³ And his refusal to regard a perception such as 'elephants walking up the wall' as an impression is forced on him by these prior convictions.

(b) One can, I think, push this analysis a little farther back. The reason why men in general do not look upon illusions as having any solidity or certainty is surely that they do not represent reality as they believe it to be. Elephants simply do not walk up walls; hence one does not *see* them doing so; one merely *imagines* it. Hence, what might seem to be impressions are really ideas.

This analysis is, of course, largely conjectural. But if it is correct even in broad outline, it would indicate that Hume may be

⁸⁸ T/190/b.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ T/189/c.

⁹¹ T/343/c: 'what is present to the mind' is Hume's definition of 'perception', cf. A/8/b.

⁹² The practice of finding contradictions in Hume's philosophy has now lasted for two centuries. Yet that philosophy is far more influential today than at the commencement of the practice. The number of contradictions alleged must run into hundreds: I do not contest the genuineness of most of them, but I think it can be shown that Hume preserves a quite remarkable degree of consistency in the broad lines of his theory of causation.

⁹³ Cf. T/83/a: '. . . an impression of the memory or senses, beyond which there is no room for doubt or enquiry'. Cf. also T/190/b; 638/b. and cf. *Kemp Smith: The Philosophy* . . . p. 455.

distinguishing impressions and ideas by their different relations to their *objects*. An examination of this point would, however, lead us too far afield.

We must next examine yet another way in which Hume distinguishes impressions and ideas.

(4) *Derivation*.—We have seen that Hume's explicit theory distinguishes impressions from ideas solely on the basis of vivacity. However, this contention is connected, in his thought, with the theory that ideas are derived from impressions:

Now since all ideas are derived from impressions, and are nothing but copies and representations of them, whatever is true of the one must be acknowledged concerning the other. Impressions and ideas differ only in their strength and vivacity.⁹⁴

In other words, it is *because ideas are derived from impressions* that they cannot differ other than in vivacity. But surely the fact that one is derived from the other *constitutes* a difference between them which is prior to and independent of any further difference which it may occasion? The really important distinction between impressions and ideas is the derivation of one from the other. But is this observable? Is it a phenomenal characteristic of perceptions?

These questions cannot yet be answered: for derivation is causation: and for that reason it demands closer investigation.

The Derivation of Ideas from Impressions

Hume states his thesis as follows:

That all our ideas in their first appearance are derived from simple impressions which are correspondent to them and which they exactly represent.⁹⁵

The meaning of this presents no difficulty. Hume admits one exception to it,⁹⁶ which is quite unimportant; and he points out that complex ideas also derive from impressions in the sense that each of their constituent simple ideas derives from a simple impression: and secondary ideas derive from impressions through the primary ideas of which they are images.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ T/19/c.

⁹⁵ T/4/c. According to Mr. Price: . . . *External World*: p. 4, this principle 'says that every universal which we are aware of has either been directly abstracted from sense-given, or can be wholly defined in terms of universals thus abstracted'. I fail to see how this can be an accurate statement of what Hume means.

⁹⁶ i.e., we can form an idea of a particular shade of a certain colour, even if we have never seen it, provided we have seen the other shades of that colour: T/6/a. M. Leroy: *David Hume*: pp. 42-43 suggests that this idea *could* be regarded as deriving from an impression of reflection—the 'jump' or 'hiatus' felt in passing from the shade before the lacuna to the one after it. But it seems impossible to regard the idea as a copy of any such impression of reflection. Cf. T/63/a: 'Impressions can give rise to no ideas, but to such as resemble them'.

⁹⁷ T/7/a.

(a) *Importance*

There can be no doubt of the importance Hume attaches to this principle:

This is the first principle I establish in the science of human nature; nor ought we to despise it because of the simplicity of its appearance.⁹⁸

And he expresses the hope that it will be 'of more use in our reasonings than it seems hitherto to have been'.⁹⁹

Its importance, then, is its use: and Hume makes very considerable use of it. It largely determines his views—or at least is given as their determinant—in at least twenty different passages of the first Book of the *Treatise*.¹⁰⁰

What we must investigate here is what precisely Hume hopes to achieve by its use. I shall contend that he uses it to eradicate certain 'metaphysical' ideas by showing that they have no correspondent impressions; therefore are not derived from impressions; and therefore do not exist.

Hume describes his purpose in using this principle as follows: it is 'for deciding all controversies concerning ideas';¹⁰¹ for banishing 'any philosophical term (that) has no idea annexed to it'.¹⁰² It is 'to cut short all disputes',¹⁰³ 'to render every dispute equally intelligible, and (to) banish all that jargon which has so long taken possession of metaphysical reasonings and drawn disgrace upon them'.¹⁰⁴ In a particular instance, its purpose is 'to destroy (the) artifice (of) refined and spiritual ideas'.¹⁰⁵ All this might mean the denial of only the relevance or legitimacy of the rejected ideas: but in fact Hume denies their existence:

We have no general ideas as ordinarily understood.¹⁰⁶

We have no idea of space which is not visible or tangible.¹⁰⁷

⁹⁸ T/7/b.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ T/8/b; 15/f; 19/c; 33/c; 65/a; 66/c; 72/b; 74/c; 77/d; 96/b; 155/b; 160/a; 161/a; 163/a; 230/b; 232/c; 239/b; 241/b; 242/a; 251/b. Cf. A/22/b; 25/a.

¹⁰² T/33/b.

¹⁰³ A/11/a.

¹⁰⁴ T/239/b: cf. his remark in T/456/b concerning the related question whether moral distinctions stem from ideas or impressions. 'This will immediately cut off all loose discourses and declamations, and reduce us to something precise and exact on the present subject'.

¹⁰⁴ E/21/b.

¹⁰⁵ T/72/b.

¹⁰⁶ T/18/a: 'It is utterly impossible to conceive any quantity or quality without forming a precise notion of its degrees' cf. T/20/a. It is because there are no general impressions that there are no general ideas.

¹⁰⁷ T/39/c: 'We have therefore no idea of space or extension but when we regard it as an object either of our sight or feeling'. On the grounds that Hume, in an unguarded moment, describes any other idea of extension as 'purely imaginary', T. H. Green (*Introduction* to GR. GR/I/238) seems to regard him as admitting that we have such an idea—since, for Hume, all ideas are imaginary. The fact that Hume is obviously denying that we have such an idea is sacrificed to the imperative necessity of 'refuting' him.

We have no idea of time without change.¹⁰⁸
 We have no idea of anything that is not a perception.¹⁰⁹
 We have no ideas that are not images.¹¹⁰
 We have no idea of power in external bodies.¹¹¹
 We have no idea of self as a principle uniting perceptions.¹¹²
 We have no idea of substance as ordinarily understood.¹¹³

Hume's confidence in his principle of derivation is such that it leads him to deny the existence of ideas which others claim to have. The passages referred to above are too numerous and too emphatic to be explained away: Hume simply denies the existence of certain ideas—and that because they are impossible. Nevertheless, he does not dispense entirely with the terms by which these notions are normally indicated. He explains that when we *think* we have one of these 'false'¹¹⁴ or 'Chimerical'¹¹⁵ ideas, we really have a *different*¹¹⁶ idea, or we use a 'word'¹¹⁷ without any idea. But Hume *does* deny the existence of certain ideas.

Professor Kemp Smith has advanced a different interpretation of Hume's thought on this point:

It can . . . be maintained as a general principle that Hume never denies the existence of any conception which has been the subject of controversy. . . . *The fact that there has been controversy with regard to an idea shows, he holds, that the idea is there to be discussed.* The question can only be as to how what is under discussion is 'ideally' constituted.¹¹⁸

¹⁰⁸ T/65/a: 'That we have no such idea ('of time without any changeable existence') is certain'.

¹⁰⁹ T/67/e: 'It is impossible for us so much as to conceive or form an idea of anything specifically different from ideas and impressions'.

¹¹⁰ T/72/b: i.e., 'refined and spiritual' ideas which 'fall not under the conception of the fancy': Hume wishes to 'destroy this artifice'.

¹¹¹ T/161/a: 'We deceive ourselves when we imagine we are possessed of any idea of this kind, after the manner we commonly understand it'.

¹¹² T/251/b.

¹¹³ T/16/a: Hume regards substance, as it is understood by the 'ancient philosophy' as an 'unintelligible something' T/220/b, or a 'chimera' T/222/b, which is identical with 'original and first matter' T/220/b.

¹¹⁴ e.g., T/229/b. The 'false' idea is one which we have not got: it is contrasted with a 'real' idea—one to which an impression corresponds T/251/c—and which therefore we may have.

¹¹⁵ T/228/c: a synonym for 'false'. Another is 'fiction' T/222/b—e.g., 'equality' in Geometry T/48/-. Similarly 'illusion' e.g., T/224/a.

¹¹⁶ T/60/a: 'Wherever there is a close relation between two ideas the mind is very apt to mistake them'.

T/61/b: 'Wherever the actions of the mind in forming any two ideas are the same or resembling, we are very apt to confound these ideas'. These texts would seem to indicate that there are two *real* ideas, but the context makes it clear that one is a 'false' idea: cf. next note.

¹¹⁷ T/61/b-62/a: 'It is usual for men to use words for ideas, and to talk instead of thinking in their reasonings. We use words for ideas because they are commonly so closely connected that the mind easily mistakes them'. The 'word' is 'a distance which is not considered either as visible or tangible' T/62/a—which Hume claims is *not* an idea: 'We have no idea of any real extension without filling it with sensible objects, and conceiving its parts as visible, tangible' T/64/c.

¹¹⁸ *The Philosophy* . . . ; p. 254.

The statement in my italics is supported by one text in the Treatise:

It is certain we have an idea of extension, for otherwise why do we talk and reason concerning it.¹¹⁹

The same point is made later, but this time in an objection which Hume proposes:

Whatever foundation there may be for a controversy concerning the things themselves, it may be *pretended*¹²⁰ that the very dispute is decisive concerning the idea, and that it is impossible men could so long reason about a vacuum, and either refute or defend it, without having a notion of what they refuted or defended.¹²¹

Hume's answer to this objection is clear and decisive:

The frequent disputes concerning a vacuum, or extension without matter, prove not the reality of the idea upon which the dispute turns; there being nothing more common than to see men deceive themselves in this particular; especially when, by means of any close relation, there is another idea presented which may be the occasion of their mistake.¹²²

Exactly the same point is made with regard to Time:

If it be a sufficient proof that we have the idea of a vacuum, because we dispute and reason concerning it, we must for the same reason have the idea of time without any changeable existence: since there is no subject of dispute more frequent and common. But that we really have no such idea is certain.¹²³

On this evidence, it is not true that Hume holds that there is always an idea of what has long been discussed.

Kemp Smith also contends that 'Hume never denies the existence of any conception that has been the subject of controversy'. In one sense, of course, this is quite true: Hume admits, for instance, an idea of substance.¹²⁴ But, in another sense, it is false: Hume denies the existence of *an* idea of substance. Certainly, the admitted idea is not the same as the idea denied. It is this fact that renders Hume's procedure intelligible: and it is the same fact that renders impossible the making of such a *rapprochement* between the two ideas as will lend support to the contention that Hume never denies the existence of ideas.

¹¹⁹ T/32/d.

¹²⁰ My italics. I think this term is used in the French rather than the English sense—as not implying that what is pretended is wrong. The Treatise was written in France.

¹²¹ T/54/b. Hume is not here concerned with the question whether there *be* a vacuum—as M. Leroy: *David Hume* p. 116 suggests: '. . . ne prouve nullement qu'il y ait reellement du vide. . . .'—but only with the question whether there *be* an *idea* of it.

¹²² T/62/b.

¹²³ T/64/d-65/a. Hume makes much the same point with regard to the idea of 'power' in E/77/n.

¹²⁴ As a 'collection of particular qualities' T/16/a.

One can say in general that Hume modifies some ideas. But, in doing so, he makes them different ideas—as both he himself,¹²⁵ and Kemp Smith¹²⁶ admit. And, incidentally, in doing so, he also denies the existence of the unmodified ideas—which he displaces and replaces.

I have laid considerable stress on this point, because it is vital to know precisely what Hume means if he denies—as it is generally believed he does—a certain notion of causation.

That then is the importance of Hume's principle of derivation. It is to be a potent instrument for the eradication of 'false ideas', 'illusions', 'fictions', 'unintelligible chimeræ'—in short, of the 'abstruse jargon'¹²⁷ of the 'ancient philosophy',¹²⁸ which he conceived, not without reason, as standing in the way of the development and appreciation of his encyclopedist, humanist philosophy.

(b) *Derivation, for Hume, is Causation*

There cannot, I think, be much doubt on this point:

(1) Hume introduces his discussion of the principle as follows:

Let us consider how they ('impressions and ideas') stand with regard to their existence, and which of the impressions and ideas are causes and which effects. The full examination of this question is the subject of the present Treatise; and here we shall content ourselves with establishing one general proposition. . . .¹²⁹ (—the principle of derivation).

In other words, this principle concerns the causal interrelations of perceptions.¹³⁰

(2) The conclusion of Hume's argument in favour of the principle is: 'our impressions are the causes of our ideas'.¹³¹

(3) Much later in the Treatise, Hume makes exactly the same point:

The true idea of the human mind is to consider it as a system of different perceptions, or different existences, which are linked together by the relations of cause and effect, and mutually produce, destroy, influence and modify each other. Our impressions give rise to their correspondent ideas.¹³²

(4) The synonyms which Hume uses for this relation of an idea to its impression have a causal sense, not only in their ordinary

¹²⁵ T/96/b: 'When you would any way vary the idea of a particular object, you can only increase or diminish its force and vivacity. If you make any other change in it, it represents a different object or impression'.

¹²⁶ 'Any variation in a perception . . . must consist in some other perception taking its place': *The Philosophy* . . . p. 500/n. 2.

¹²⁷ The phrase is Passmore's: *Hume's Intentions*, p. 66.

¹²⁸ This term refers to the 'peripatetic philosophy' T/221/b as it was known to Hume.

¹²⁹ T/4/b, c.

¹³⁰ I take it that 'stand with regard to their existence' has a causal reference. Even if this is incorrect, the next phrase, by itself, establishes the above interpretation.

¹³¹ T/5/a.

¹³² T/261/b.

meaning, but also in Hume's usage of them. The most common of all is 'derive from'.¹³³ Synonymous with it we find 'arise from',¹³⁴ and 'proceed from'.¹³⁵ And, in parallel with these, Hume uses 'produce'¹³⁶ and 'give rise to'.¹³⁷ All these terms appear again in Hume's *ex professo* discussion of causation.

We have then no option but to conclude that Hume meant to assert that the relation of 'derivation' between corresponding impressions and ideas is a causal relation: the evidence is incompatible with its being an unconsidered or tentative opinion.

Furthermore, this causal relation, as Hume here envisages it, does not hold between externally existing things that are causally related independent of perception. Whether Hume would admit a causal relation is another question. The present principle affirms that *each* idea is caused by a corresponding impression: and the affirmation is quite independent of any ulterior reference of either the impression or the idea.

We have here Hume's first notion of causation: we must now try to discover, more in detail, how he envisaged it.

(c) *Disengagement of the Elements of this Causation*

(1) *Resemblance*: The impression and idea which are causally related are resembling. We have seen that the causal relation is not between *any* idea and any impression, but between each idea and its *corresponding* impression. 'Correspondence', at least in this context, is resemblance:

Every simple idea has a simple impression which resembles it, and every simple impression a correspondent idea.¹³⁸

If anyone should deny this universal resemblance I know of no way of convincing him but by desiring him to show a simple impression which has not a correspondent idea, or a simple idea that has not a correspondent impression.¹³⁹

The causally related impression and idea, then, are resembling: that much is fairly clear. But the important question remains: how, in Hume's view, is their resemblance connected with their causal relation? Are they causally related in virtue of their resemblance? Or does their resemblance reveal their causation? Or is it irrelevant to the fact of their being causally related? To what extent, in other words, is resemblance involved as an element

¹³³ The term is used in: T/4/c; 7/a; 15/b; 19/c; 33/c; 65/b; 66/c; 74/c; 155/b; 160/a; 230/b; 232/c; 241/b; 242/a; 251/c; etc.

¹³⁴ T/33/c; 66/c; 75/a; 157/a; 163/a; etc.

¹³⁵ T/160/a.

¹³⁶ T/233/b; 261/b.

¹³⁷ T/163/a; 155/b; 251/c; 261/b.

¹³⁸ T/3/c. cf. 63/a.

¹³⁹ T/4/a: cf. also 'exactly similar' T/33/c, and the many passages where ideas are said to be 'copies of' or 'copied from' impressions—e.g., T/3/b; 72/b; 96/b; 163/b; 239/b; 241/b; etc. Hume does, however, make explicit allowance for a difference of 'force and vivacity' within this 'exact resemblance'.

in the notion of causation which Hume reveals in this context? I shall postpone this question for the moment, and treat it together with its counterparts from the other two elements of this causation yet to be considered.

(2) *Constant Conjunction*: There are a great number of instances of the 'conjunction' or 'attendance'¹⁴⁰ of an idea with its correspondent impression:

Every simple impression is attended with a correspondent idea, and every simple idea with a correspondent impression. From this constant conjunction of resembling perceptions . . .¹⁴¹

'Conjunction' then, refers to the 'attendance'—to there being an idea corresponding to every impression, and vice versa: 'constant' refers to the multiplicity and regularity of this conjunction. So much is clear; but, again, the crucial question—concerning the role of constant conjunction in causation—remains to be considered.

(3) *Connection*:

From this constant conjunction of resembling perceptions I immediately conclude that there is a great connection between our correspondent impressions and ideas, and that the existence of one has a considerable influence upon that of the other. . . . (The constant conjunction) clearly proves a dependence of the impressions on the ideas or of the ideas on the impressions.¹⁴²

We can, I think, regard 'connection', 'influence', and 'dependence' as correlative among themselves and with 'derivation'. This is clear from the conclusion to Hume's argument:

The constant conjunction of our resembling perceptions is a convincing proof that the one are the causes of the other.¹⁴³

But there is an important difference that must be noted. Derivation is causation: but causation is not limited to derivation. Derivation is the application of the wider notion of causation to the relation of corresponding perceptions. This means that our investigation of the elements of derivation as a notion of causation is, to some extent, doomed to failure: for the really important element in it—'connection'—is not explained, and its not being proper to derivation precludes our deducing anything about it.

Nevertheless we can now decide something of the role of resemblance and constant conjunction in derivation. The 'constant conjunction of resembling perceptions' 'clearly proves', is a 'convincing proof' of, and is that from which we 'conclude' that there *is* 'connection' or causation.

Thus it would seem probable that resemblance is irrelevant to causation, and is used only as a label to indicate the perceptions which are related by causation. And yet one cannot be entirely

¹⁴⁰ T/4/d.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² T/4/d-5/a.

¹⁴³ T/5/a.

sure of this, for it is precisely—and exclusively (so far as we can tell at this stage)—resembling perceptions that are related by causation. This is a problem that must remain unsolved for the present.¹⁴⁴

Constant conjunction is not to be identified with causation. If it were so identified, it would be senseless to speak of 'concluding' to causation from it. But the possibility that Hume may have regarded it as an integral part of causation, while unlikely, cannot be eliminated. In any case, it acts as an *index*, or sign, of causation.¹⁴⁴ It indicates that certain entities are causally related: but it does not indicate which is cause and which effect. To learn this, we must take account of a further factor.

(4) *Priority*:

That I may know on which side this dependence lies, I consider the order of their (i.e., 'resembling perceptions') first appearance, and find by constant experience that the simple impressions always take the precedence of their correspondent ideas but never appear in the contrary order.¹⁴⁵

This is quite straightforward: temporal priority decides the 'direction' of the causal relation. But we must note that this too is a matter of 'constant experience', just as is the 'attendance' of corresponding perceptions. But we cannot yet decide whether priority is an element of causation.¹⁴⁴ We may now draw together the threads of this discussion: the following points emerge:

I. The derivation of an idea from its correspondent impression is causation.

II. This causation is not perceived: it is inferred from constant conjunction. The respective roles of attendance, priority and resemblance are not clearly defined.

III. Derivation does not define causation: causation means something other than derivation: it is imported from outside as demanded by constant conjunction.

IV. Derivation is one realisation or exemplification of an already formed notion of causation. In other words, Hume, in writing the passage we have been discussing, has already decided, at least provisionally, what causation *is*.

V. The terms denoting this prior notion of causation are 'connection', 'influence' and 'dependence'.

I wish to suggest that the notion of causation as 'power' or 'efficacy', against which Hume argues in his explicit treatment of causation, is identically that notion of causation in terms of which Hume formulated, and by which he established, the main principle used in his later argument—that all ideas *derive* from impressions.

¹⁴⁴ Hume later decides that resemblance, constant conjunction and priority are integral elements in the notion of causation as a philosophical relation, but not in the notion of causation as necessary connection.

¹⁴⁵ T/5/a.

A full treatment of this topic would far exceed the limits of this essay, but one point should be emphasised; the acceptance of the point of view outlined above in no way determines one's decision concerning the correctness or incorrectness of Hume's criticism of the notion of causation as 'power' or 'efficacy'.

Let us now consider Hume's notion of causation as it is revealed in his initial discussion of association.

II. *The Association of Ideas*

While Hume does establish a rigid distinction between impressions and ideas, he does not divorce them completely from one another; he establishes a link between them, which is a causal relation.

Now Hume also insists on a rigorous distinction among ideas themselves. We have seen that, for him, all ideas must either be indivisible simples, or must be divisible, without remainder, into indivisible simples. But, as with impressions and ideas, he insists that the distinct ideas are not entirely isolated; but they are linked by 'associations'. It is this theory we must now examine.

Hume introduces the subject as follows:

As all simple ideas may be separated by the imagination, and may be united again in what form it pleases, nothing would be more unaccountable than the operations of that faculty, were it not guided by some universal principles, which render it, in some measure, uniform with itself in all times and places.¹⁴⁶

This is the origin of Hume's theory of association, and it stems from two sources:

(1): the contrast of memory and imagination. The ideas¹⁴⁷ of memory are 'restrained to the same order and form with the original impressions', whereas the imagination has a 'power of variation'.¹⁴⁸

(2): the theory of simple and complex ideas. Hume's original definition of a complex idea is that it 'may be distinguished into parts', the parts being simple ideas which 'admit of no distinction nor separation'.¹⁴⁹

The ideas of the imagination can therefore be extremely erratic—e.g., 'the New Jerusalem', 'winged horses', etc.¹⁵⁰—and Hume argues that, unless there were some general principles controlling them, all or most of the ideas of the imagination would be of this

¹⁴⁶ T/10/b.

¹⁴⁷ Hume never explicitly decided whether memory gives us ideas or impressions. In the present context the perception of memory is regarded as an idea or as 'intermediate between an impression and an idea' T/8/d. But, on balance, Hume regards it more as an impression than as an idea; cf. T/84/b; 123/b; 143/b; 184/b; 209/a.

¹⁴⁸ T/9/b.

¹⁴⁹ T/2/b: that the 'parts' of the complex idea are simple ideas is clear from T/3/b: '... the complex are formed from them', i.e., 'simple ideas'.

¹⁵⁰ T/3/b; 10/a.

kind. These principles are envisaged as standardising the union of simple ideas into complex ones.

Now it seems to me that these two points are the source of the extreme obscurity of Hume's theory of association. For one cannot—and Hume does not—confine association to the union of simple ideas¹⁵¹ in a complex. And one cannot divorce association from memory, for the immediate effect of association must be to make us *remember*.¹⁵²

But we must first examine Hume's explicit statement of his theory of association.

Were ideas entirely loose and unconnected chance alone would join them; and it is impossible the same simple ideas should fall regularly into complex ones (as they commonly do) without some bond of union among them, some associating quality, by which one idea naturally introduces another.¹⁵³

This text raises a number of points:

Connection: Ideas are not loose and unconnected: they are joined: one idea introduces another. That is one part of what Hume is saying, and its importance is that it helps to fix the sense which he attaches to association. For 'connection' and 'association' are here identified. The title of this section is: 'Of the Connection or Association of Ideas'. Now this must mean that Hume regards the two terms as synonymous, unless he explicitly distinguishes them in the section headed by this title. In fact, however, he implicitly identifies them throughout the section—e.g.,

Resemblance, Contiguity . . . and Cause and Effect . . . produce an association among ideas. . . . As to the connection that is made by the relation of cause and effect. . . .¹⁵⁴

However, granted that association and connection are identified in this context, we must yet ascertain what they are.

In the text quoted above, it would appear that association is the 'introduction' of one idea by another. This is a quite intelligible notion, and is paralleled in many places in the Treatise. But, in order to decide if it represents Hume's view on what association really is, we must first consider a series of texts in which Hume appears to *distinguish* association and this 'introduction':

These qualities from which this association arises, *and* by which the mind is after this manner conveyed from one idea to another. . . .¹⁵⁵

These qualities produce an association among ideas, *and* upon the appearance of one, naturally introduce another.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ : at least as Hume has defined a simple idea, i.e., that 'which cannot be diminished without a total annihilation' T/27/b.

¹⁵² This does not contradict Hume's view that associative reasoning is largely independent of reflection; T/114/b.

¹⁵³ T/10/b.

¹⁵⁴ T/11/b.

¹⁵⁵ T/11/a.

¹⁵⁶ T/11/b.

There is no relation which produces a stronger connection in the fancy and makes one idea more readily recall another. . . .¹⁵⁷

It is, I think, clear that 'conveyed', 'introduce' and 'recall' are used as equivalent terms: and they *seem* to be contrasted with 'association' or 'connection'. I think we must eliminate the possibility that this apparent distinction is merely an error or ambiguity of expression. The identity of doctrine, combined with the variation in wording, is surely decisive on this point. And yet it is, I think, possible to maintain that Hume does not here mean to draw a clear-cut distinction between association and introduction—that e.g., the phrase 'and upon the appearance of one naturally introduce another' is meant to explain more in detail the meaning of '. . . produce an association among ideas' rather than to add something new. In that case the association is the introduction.

Yet one cannot be sure of this interpretation, especially as Hume links his theory of association with the formation of complex ideas.

Complex Ideas: We have already seen that Hume regards association as binding simple ideas together in a complex idea. Hume's original example of a complex idea is the uniting of 'a particular colour, taste, and smell' in the idea of 'this apple'.¹⁵⁸ I suggest that, *a priori*, there are three sorts of association that might be involved in this: (1) there is the act of uniting, or joining, or connecting the simple ideas together, so as to constitute a complex idea; (2) there is a simple transition from one simple idea to another; and (3) there is the actual conjunction of the simple ideas which constitute the complex idea. Hume, of course, does not explicitly make these distinctions; but we can, nevertheless, disengage all three notions in his account of association.

We have already noted that Hume explicitly equates 'connection' with 'association', and 'association' with 'transition'. He has thus identified the first two of the notions listed above. From this we can, I think, determine what he means by 'complex idea' in this context. The following passage illustrates the point:

nature in a manner pointing out to every one those simple ideas which are most proper to be united into a complex one. The qualities, from which this association arises, and by which the mind is after this manner conveyed from one idea to another. . . .¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ Hume, it is true, does not here (T/2/b) speak of ideas, but of 'qualities' and 'this apple'—i.e., of objects and their qualities. But, in the early sections of the *Treatise*, Hume seems to use 'object' and 'idea' or 'impression' as interchangeable terms. Mr. Church: *Hume's Theory* . . . pp. 202-203 sums up the position: Hume displays "a carelessness that is almost perverse in the use of 'object' for 'impression', 'impression' for 'object', and 'perception' for either or both". The basis of this terminological tangle is, as Mr. Kemp Smith has pointed out; *The Philosophy* . . . : p. 247 'the deferring of all discussion of the problem of sense-perception to Part IV of Book I of the *Treatise*'.

¹⁵⁹ T/10/b-11/a.

Hume is apparently regarding as equivalent the 'uniting' of simple ideas and the 'conveying' of the mind from one to another. But there can clearly be a great difference between the results of these two processes. The mind can make a transition from the idea 'square' to the idea 'circle', or from the idea 'winged' to the idea 'horse'. But the resultant 'complex' ideas may be very different. The 'joining' of 'square' and 'circle' can give only a 'conjunction' of ideas: whereas the complex idea composed of 'winged' and 'horse' can be a 'connection' in some sense. The elements may be united, not merely conjoined. In view of the great emphasis which Hume places on the distinction of conjunction and connection in his explicit theory of causation it seems impossible to believe that he really meant to identify them at this point.

This is not just an instance of careless expression on Hume's part: the notions of 'transition' and 'joining' are confused. The result is a considerable vagueness in the notion of 'complex idea'; for it is caused by 'association':

Among the effect of this union or association of ideas, there are none more remarkable than those complex ideas. . . .¹⁶⁰

The complex idea may be a conjunction of the elements of a transition, or the conjunction of connected ideas. This is clearly different from the 'complex idea' which Hume has defined as composed of simple ideas: to mark the difference, we may refer to it henceforth as a 'complex of ideas'. It may, or may not, be a single idea. Furthermore, the elements of this complex of ideas need not be *simple ideas* as Hume has defined them, i.e., elementary, indivisible perceptions 'which cannot be diminished without a total annihilation'.¹⁶¹ It would seem that they are rather 'distinct' or 'different' ideas.¹⁶²

From what we have seen so far, it would appear that Hume's 'association of ideas' is some sort of 'dynamism' among distinct ideas. It is either a transition or a joining, but not merely a static conjunction.

Associating Quality: This is the basis of an associative transition:

It is impossible the same simple ideas should fall regularly into complex ones . . . without some . . . associating quality, by which one idea naturally introduces another.¹⁶³

From this it would seem that an associating quality is not always required for an associative transition. This is indeed Hume's view:

¹⁶⁰ T/13/b.

¹⁶¹ T/27/b.

¹⁶² Cf. A/31/c.

¹⁶³ T/10/b.

The thought has evidently a very irregular motion in running along its objects, and may leap from the heavens to the earth, from one end of the creation to the other, without any certain method or order.¹⁶⁴

The 'irregularity' of such transitions is their lacking an associating principle. But such irregularity applies to association as 'joining' no less than as 'transition':

nor yet are we to conclude that without (an associating quality) the mind cannot join two ideas.¹⁶⁵

Our imagination has a great authority over our ideas; and there are no ideas that are different from each other, which it cannot separate and join and compose into all the varieties of fiction. . . .¹⁶⁶

The mind has a faculty of joining all ideas together which involve not a contradiction.¹⁶⁷

Thus 'irregular association' as 'joining' does not extend to contradictories: but it would appear that Hume would admit the possibility of *transition* between, e.g., 'square' and 'circle'.¹⁶⁸

The 'associating qualities' are 'general principles which associate ideas':¹⁶⁹ and there are three of them: 'Resemblance, Contiguity in time or place, and Cause and Effect'.¹⁷⁰ But beyond this there is very little else about them of which we can be certain at this stage.

In his original discussion of association, Hume most frequently calls them 'qualities';¹⁷¹ but they are also referred to as 'relations',¹⁷² 'principles of union',¹⁷³ 'bond of union' and 'uniting principle':¹⁷⁴ and all of these terms are repeated in passages later in the *Treatise*.¹⁷⁵

We could enquire if Hume regarded these qualities as being of ideas or of objects: but the question simply cannot be answered at this stage, because Hume has not yet decided whether there is any difference between an idea and an object. Thus we find him saying with regard to one of these qualities, 'resemblance': 'our imagination runs easily from one idea to any other that resembles it'; whereas another of them, 'cause and effect' is a 'relation . . . between objects'.¹⁷⁶

¹⁶⁴ T/92/c.

¹⁶⁵ T/10/b.

¹⁶⁶ A/31/c.

¹⁶⁷ A/16/b.

¹⁶⁸ : if only because, as geometrical figures, they are 'resembling'.

¹⁶⁹ T/93/a.

¹⁷⁰ T/11/a.

¹⁷¹ T/10/b; 11/a, b.

¹⁷² T/11/b, c; 12/b, d.

¹⁷³ T/12/d; 13/b.

¹⁷⁴ T/10/b.

¹⁷⁵ e.g., 'qualities': T/260/a; 305/b. 'principles' and 'relations': T/92/b.

¹⁷⁶ T/11/b.

We shall also find that Hume later resumes the discussion of these qualities, but under a different name—natural relations. And we shall find too that he seems to identify these qualities with 'association'.

I do not think it is possible to discuss these points either adequately or accurately within the limits of this study. We must then be content with the following rather meagre conclusions:

1. Association is either transition or joining. Of these two, transition seems to be dominant in Hume's thought.¹⁷⁷
2. All ideas are susceptible of associative transition. All compatible ideas can be joined.
3. Association, in either sense, results in a complex of distinct ideas.¹⁷⁸

Although this is a very inadequate statement of Hume's theory of association, it is, I hope, accurate so far as it goes. And it may prove adequate for our immediate purpose—which is to discover the nature and role of causation in association as Hume envisaged it.

Causation in the Associative Process

'Causation' is one of Hume's 'associating qualities'; but, leaving this aside for the moment, it would seem that his theory of association contains, at first sight, three causal assertions:

- : Association causes a complex of ideas.¹⁷⁹
- : The causes of association are unknown.¹⁸⁰
- : The associating qualities cause association.¹⁸¹

The last two are incompatible: and the very clarity of the incompatibility is an indication that our interpretation of Hume's views on association is not yet adequate. We must first try to clear up this problem.

There is, I think, in Hume's exposition of the theory of association, a suggestion that he identifies association and associating quality:

The uniting principle among ideas is not to be considered as an inseparable connection.¹⁸²

We have seen that this 'uniting principle' is the associating quality; and that 'connection' is association. Now, if he clearly

¹⁷⁷ Cf. the large number of terms with which Hume refers to the associative transition: 'introduce', 'convey', 'fall regularly', 'leap', 'run along', 'run easily', 'recall', 'pass from', 'transition', 'produce': all of these are drawn from T/10-13; 92-93; 99/a; 100/b; 107/b; 260; 283/a; 305: A/18/c; 31/c: E/23/-.

¹⁷⁸ Hume also uses the term 'union of ideas' T/10/b; 12/d; 92-93 *passim*; 260/a: A/31/c.: and this refers to both 'regular' and 'irregular' association T/92/c.

¹⁷⁹ T/13/b: 'among the effects of this union or association of ideas, there are none more remarkable than those complex ideas. . . .'

¹⁸⁰ T/13/a: 'its causes . . . are mostly unknown. . . .'

¹⁸¹ T/11/b: 'these qualities produce an association among ideas'.

¹⁸² T/10/b.

distinguishes association and associating quality, there is no obvious reason why the associating quality should be thought to be an association of any kind. The same point seems to emerge from the following series of remarks:

These (i.e., Resemblance, Contiguity and Cause and Effect) are therefore the principles of union or cohesion among our simple ideas. . . . Here is a kind of Attraction. . . . Its effects are everywhere conspicuous. . . . Among the effects of this union or association of ideas. . . .¹⁸³

Now, admittedly, this is no more than a suggestion; but it does reveal, I think, a certain tension in Hume's thought. He seems to be drawn in two different directions—towards identifying association and associating quality, but also towards keeping them distinct. We can, I think, discover the viewpoint which is basic to each of these tendencies.

Hume had ambitions to establish a general principle for the moral sciences along the lines of that which Newton had recently established for the physical sciences:¹⁸⁴

Here is a kind of attraction which in the mental world will be found to have as extraordinary effects as in the natural, and to show itself in as many and as various forms.¹⁸⁵

But for Newton, attraction is a principle of movement rather than movement itself: and it is one single principle, and not several different ones. This leaves Hume with a dilemma. He can propose association as parallel to Newton's attraction: this has the advantage that both are single phenomena; but it has the disadvantage that it compares a movement to a principle of movement. Alternatively he can propose his associating quality as parallel to 'attraction': this has the advantage that both are principles of movement; but it also has the disadvantage that 'associating quality' is really three distinct qualities, which Hume is apparently unwilling to unify, whereas 'attraction' is single. It is, I think, this dilemma which tends to make Hume identify association and associating quality; to combine the singleness of association—for it is either transition or joining—with the 'principle' element of the associating quality—for it is a principle of transition or joining.

Now this identification never becomes explicit in Hume's writings: and the reason for this is, I suggest, Hume's maintaining a causal relation between associating qualities and association. Hume's famous and sustained 'attack' on causation has, I think, tended to obscure the very central position which causation, as he himself

¹⁸³ T/12/d: 13/a, b.

¹⁸⁴ Cf. A/31/c: 'If anything can entitle the author to so glorious a name as that of an *inventor*, it is the use he makes of the principle of the association of ideas, which enters into most of his philosophy'. And we know that, at Edinburgh, Hume studied under Robert Stewart who was a 'convinced Newtonian'; Leroy: *David Hume*: p. 5. cf. Greig: *David Hume*: p. 59.

¹⁸⁵ T/12/d-13/a.

conceives it, occupies in his system. Humean criticism has now advanced from regarding Hume as having merely brought the false presuppositions of Berkeley and Locke to their logical, and unacceptable, conclusions: it has come to regard Hume as a brilliant and largely original thinker who was influenced in his philosophy by other writers—French, Roman, Greek and English—just as much as by Locke and Berkeley. In the last twenty years, the work of Maund, Kemp Smith, Passmore, etc., has emphasised the central role of association in Hume's philosophy. I would tentatively suggest that, in elaborating his theory of association, Hume is being influenced by a theory of causation anterior to it.

But, whatever be the judgement on this more general point, we can, I think, be reasonably certain that the appeal of establishing, in the moral sciences, a counterpart of Newton's 'attraction' in the physical sciences, combined with the desire to establish causal links in the associative process¹⁸⁶ is the basis of the confusion of association and associating quality in Hume's thought.

We may now consider in more detail the three causal assertions listed at the beginning of this section.

1. Association causes a complex of ideas.
2. The causes of association are unknown.
3. The associating qualities cause association.

There is, as we have seen, *prima facie* evidence for each of these, yet their precise meaning is far from clear. We can make some further progress by considering the following passage:

Its effects are everywhere conspicuous; but as to its causes, they are mostly unknown, and must be resolved into the original qualities of human nature, which I pretend not to explain. . . . Amongst the effects of this union or association of ideas . . . are . . . complex ideas. . . .¹⁸⁷

From this it would appear that those whose causes are unknown is precisely that which causes complex ideas; and it is called a 'union or association of ideas'. This must be the 'joining' or 'transition' that we have encountered already. For, as we have seen, it is this which effects the collecting of ideas into a complex. This is assertion (1) above; and it occasions no further difficulty.

But how are we to understand Hume's statement that the causes of this association or transition are unknown, especially in view of assertion (3) which says that association is caused by the associating qualities? The answer, I think, lies in the word 'mostly'. Hume does not say that the causes of association are entirely unknown: he seems to be making allowance for the fact that its immediate or proximate causes are known, but he is also insisting

¹⁸⁶ This term is rather vague: by it I mean the emergence of a complex of ideas by means of association and the associating qualities.

¹⁸⁷ T/13/a, b.

that one must 'restrain the *intemperate* desire of searching into causes'.¹⁸⁸ Having reached a certain point in an investigation—i.e., 'having established any doctrine upon a sufficient number of experiments'—one must 'rest contented with that'. One must be content to 'resolve' the *further* causes into 'original qualities of human nature'. The 'doctrine' in question in the present context is, I believe, that certain associating qualities cause association. Once this is 'established', any attempt to find the cause of this *established fact* is an 'intemperate desire'. In other words, the causes of association are said to be 'mostly unknown' because, although there is a known cause—associating qualities—the cause why these associating qualities do cause association—why e.g., resemblance associates ideas—this is not known: one must simply accept it as a fact.¹⁸⁹ This is, I think, the point of Hume's reference to original *qualities* of human nature. *These* qualities are not regarded as causes *why* certain associating qualities cause the association of ideas: rather the fact that they *do* cause association is an original quality of human nature.

But, though Hume regards the causes of our associating ideas in virtue of associating qualities as unknown, he is nevertheless asserting that the unknown causes, *though* unknown, are still causes.

This point is important: for it is the first indication which Hume gives that his theory of causation is *composite*. There is a causation which he subjects to analysis, and a causation which, though it admits of no analysis, Hume refuses to deny.

There is one further aspect of Hume's thought on this point which deserves to be mentioned. Although he is endeavouring to establish a parallel for the moral sciences to Newton's 'attraction' in the physical sciences, he does not follow Newton in seeking to give a causal explanation of the attraction itself. Newton did try to do this: 'Causa attractionis est aliquod principium actuosum'.¹⁹⁰ And the interesting point in Hume's denial of the possibility of knowing the ultimate causes of association is that he links this denial with his conception of the science of human nature. 'The only solid foundation we can give to this science must be laid on experience and observation'.¹⁹¹ It is because this experience—or 'experiments', as he says in the present context—is lacking, that the search for causes of association beyond the associating qualities cannot pertain to the science of human nature. This is the vague

¹⁸⁸ T/13/a: my italics.

¹⁸⁹ This interpretation is, I think, preferable to that advanced by Professor Kemp Smith: *The Philosophy* . . . : p. 240/n. 1 "But why 'mostly unknown'? Is he taking 'human nature' as including the physical organism among its constituents; and so, to that extent, allowing that *some* of the conditions of association, viz., the physiological, are in some degree known, if only conjecturally?"

¹⁹⁰ *Optica*: lib. III: q. 28.

¹⁹¹ T/xx/c.

foreshadowing of another aspect of Hume's theory of causation—that only *observable* causation is admissible in his systematic philosophy. And later in the *Treatise* it becomes clear that Hume regards the associating qualities which cause association—resemblance, contiguity and causation—as observable.

The third of the causal assertions given at the beginning of this section—that associating qualities cause association—has yet to be considered; but, before coming to that, we should take note of what is, in effect, a fourth causal assertion in Hume's initial theory of association.

Were ideas entirely loose and unconnected, chance alone would join them; and it is impossible the same simple ideas should fall regularly into complex ones (as they commonly do) without . . . some associating quality.¹⁹²

This text, as I understand it, asserts the impossibility of regularity on the basis of chance, and the consequent necessity of postulating a cause for this regularity. Now if we examine this notion of 'regularity'—'. . . fall regularly into complex ones . . .'—it will, I think, appear that it is really the 'constant conjunction' which we have already encountered. Thus when Hume says that if there were no associating qualities 'chance alone would join' the distinct ideas, he is clearly presuming that they *are* joined, or conjoined—or, more accurately¹⁹³—that there are conjunctions of ideas. And furthermore, he affirms that these conjunctions are 'regular'. Without going into the question in detail, we can, I think, affirm that this *regular conjunction* of simple ideas in a complex is the same notion as the *constant conjunction* of corresponding perceptions which we encountered previously. There, we saw that constant conjunction is the index of causation. And here it has exactly the same role. Hume affirms the impossibility of this regular conjunction on the basis of chance; it demands the associating quality as a cause.

As previously, the nature of this causation which is indicated by constant conjunction remains mysterious. Nevertheless we have here two hints which may serve to give us a further insight into Hume's notion of it:

(1) Causation is envisaged as the alternative to chance *and chaos*. The associating qualities, as the causes of association, introduce an element of regularity into the operations of the imagination: 'Nothing would be more unaccountable than the operations of that faculty were it not guided by some universal principles. . .' There is here at least a hint that a cause is demanded as *accounting*

¹⁹² T/10/b.

¹⁹³ 'Conjunction' is the term Hume employs to describe elements which are together, when he does not wish to imply that they have been *brought* together, that their being together has been caused. On the other hand, he seems to use the term 'connection' with an intentional causal signification.

for an observed phenomenon. This notion—which is really a vague principle of intelligibility—reappears in later passages of the Treatise.¹⁹⁴

(2) Constant conjunction not only indicates that there *is* causation, but *demand*s it: if there is constant conjunction there *must* be causation. It would appear probable that the basis of this necessity is the view that only a cause can *account* for the observed phenomenon in question: but we cannot be certain of this point. What may be regarded as quite certain, however, is that, in the passage last quoted, Hume is *using* the principle 'if there is constant conjunction, there must be causation'.

I am conscious of the fact that this does seem a very loose interpretation. Yet it is based on the clear fact that in this text Hume infers a cause from the alleged *impossibility* of the facts being such as they are if there is no cause. My contention is that such an argument is sheer nonsense unless it includes as an implicit premiss the causal principle I have indicated above. I mean this quite literally. Not only might the logical structure of the argument be weak, but, *as an argument*, it is meaningless—a mere collection of assertions—unless the principle in question is a premiss.

This point might be illustrated as follows: To give $2 \times 2 = 4$; $4 \times 2 = 8$ as a proof of $(2)^3 = 8$ makes no sense, and is a mere collection of symbols, unless the principle $(2)^3 = 2 \times 2 \times 2$ is admitted as a premiss: and, quite apart from the awareness or unawareness of the author, that principle is a premiss in $2 \times 2 = 4$; $4 \times 2 = 8$ if this latter is a proof of $(2)^3 = 8$. I think it will be agreed that, in the same way, the principle 'if there is constant conjunction there must be causation' is an implicit premiss in the argument by which Hume satisfies himself that we must admit certain associating qualities of ideas. It is therefore part of Hume's view of causation.

We must now turn our attention to the final kind of causation mentioned by Hume as involved in the associative process. This is expressed by assertion (3) given at the beginning of this section—'associating qualities cause association'. That Hume regards this relation as causal is clear from the fact that it is precisely the causal activity of the associative qualities that is the conclusion from his argument which we have just been considering.

It is clear too from a number of explicit statements, e.g.,

The qualities from which this association *arises*

These qualities *produce* an association among ideas.

There is no relation which *produces* a stronger connection in the fancy.

The very essence of these relations consists in their *producing* an easy transition of ideas.

¹⁹⁴ Cf. T/69-70; 160/a; 175/b; 422/d; 504/n. par. 2.

The mind is '*influenced*' and '*determined*' by these qualities to '*make a transition*'.

These principles I allow to be neither the infallible nor the sole *causes* of a union among ideas.¹⁹⁵

That these are all causal terms needs no emphasis.

A third argument would be Hume's statement, which we have already examined, that the causes of association are '*mostly unknown*'. The known causes are the associating qualities.

We can therefore be quite sure that Hume does assert the causation of association by associating qualities. But it is more difficult to find out exactly what he means by this causation. We may approach the question as follows: The causation of association by associating qualities is demanded by constant conjunction. But the constant conjunction is not *of* association and associating qualities, but of the *ideas* that are associated. This point is, I think, significant. For we saw that Hume regards the constant conjunction of corresponding impressions and ideas as establishing that the impressions and ideas are *respectively* cause and effect:

The constant conjunction of our resembling perceptions is a convincing proof that *the one are the causes of the other*.

In the present case, however, the cause and effect are other than the perceptions constantly conjoined.

Although Hume does not say that an idea *causes* another idea with which it is associated, he *does* say that an impression causes an idea:

The impression is to be considered as the cause and the lively idea as the effect.¹⁹⁶

It is the present impression which is to be considered as the true and real cause of the idea, and of the belief which attends it.¹⁹⁷

Here, there is no question of '*derivation*'; for the impression and the idea are not '*correspondent*'. Hume is asserting a causal relation between an impression and a *different* idea.

This marks an important development in Hume's theory of association.¹⁹⁸ One element of the association has become an impression; the second has become a belief; and the transition, accordingly, has become an inference.

Now what does Hume mean by the causation of association by an associating quality? The following passage suggests the answer:

I would willingly establish it as a general maxim in the science of human nature, that when any impression becomes present to us, it not only transports the mind to such ideas as are related to it, but likewise communicates to them a share of its force and vivacity.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ In the order in which they are given above, these texts are to be found in T/11/a, 11/b, *Ibid.*, 260/a, 92/b, 92/c. The italics are mine.

¹⁹⁶ T/169/b.

¹⁹⁷ T/102/a.

¹⁹⁸ Hume's original exposition of the theory gives no hint of this development. Cf. *Salmon: The Central Problem* . . . pp. 355-359.

¹⁹⁹ T/98/c.

Association *as transition* ('transports') is the communication of vivacity—i.e., inference. And we have seen above that Hume describes this inference as a causal relation between the terms of the inference. Hence associative transition is the causation of an idea by a different impression.

But if association *is* causation, Hume's statement that 'associating qualities cause association' would appear to mean 'associating qualities cause causation'. And, if we recall that 'causation' is one of the three 'associating qualities', we are left with the remarkable statement 'causation causes causation'.

In most philosophies, such a statement would inevitably imply that there had been some misunderstanding. But with Hume, I do not think one can argue like that. For we can arrive at exactly the same statement in another and much more certain way:—causation is an associating quality; associating qualities cause complex ideas; relation is a complex idea, and causation is a relation; hence *causation* as an associating quality *causes causation* as a relation. Hume certainly said that: and we must presume that he meant it. For the statement 'causation as an associating quality causes causation as associative transition' is not absurd. If we leave the 'associating quality' out of account for the moment, there remain two apparently distinct notions of causation:

- : the relationship of an associating quality and associative transition.
- : the associative transition.

This duality persists in Hume's causal theory, and is never fully resolved.

In addition to these two notions, we have also found that Hume's account of the associative process appeals to certain other notions of causation:

- : unknown causation.
- : 'accounting for' a constant conjunction by a cause.
- : the relation of causation and a complex of ideas. It would seem that this is the 'already-formed' or 'conventional' notion of causation as 'production' or 'influence' which we have already encountered.

Causation as an Associating Quality

What we already know of associating qualities is merely that they induce a transition among perceptions.²⁰⁰ But not any associating quality will induce a transition among any two perceptions. It is only among those ideas that are characterised by the associating quality in question that we make a transition in virtue of it. What we must now investigate is the *causation* which characterises certain perceptions so as to induce a transition among them.

²⁰⁰ This term is used throughout this section in its generic sense. The transition is from either an impression or an idea to a different idea.

It is at this point in Hume's explicit theory that we first meet causation which is beyond perceptions. The instances of causation which Hume has mentioned up to this point are all of perceptions—impressions cause their correspondent ideas, and impressions or ideas cause other ideas. In neither case is there any discrimination: *each* impression causes its correspondent idea, and *any* idea can cause or be caused by any other impression or idea.²⁰¹

The perceptions have these causal relations as perceptions. But, in the context of general associating qualities, perceptions are causally related in virtue of some quality or characteristic over and above their nature as perceptions. They have the characteristic of Resemblance, or Contiguity, or *Causation*. This causation cannot therefore be that which *is* association. Hence the perceptions associated by causation must either *be* causes or be perceptions *of* things which are causes. The following passage seems to leave little room for doubt:

There is no relation which produces a stronger connection in the fancy, and makes one idea more readily recall another than the relation of cause and effect between their objects.²⁰²

If we are to take this at its face value, the causation is of one *thing* by another thing. And this point of view finds further confirmation in Hume's list of causal situations which follows the passage quoted above.²⁰³ Here it is always objects or things that are causally related. Thus he says that (a) causal relations with several intermediaries,²⁰⁴ (b) the causing not only of existence but also of action and motion, and (c) even the power of causing the action or motion of another being—all of these are examples of the associating quality of causation.

It would appear then that we must interpret this causation as the fact that the perceptions associated in virtue of it are *of* an object we regard as a cause and *of* an object we regard as its effect. This is the minimum demanded. It does not necessarily imply that in Hume's view the causation holds between the objects; but merely that, *if* it be envisaged as holding between the perceptions, it be something different from the causation which *is* the transition between these particular perceptions.

²⁰¹ This is the 'irregular association' mentioned above. It too is causal: cf. T/92/c: the general associating qualities are 'neither the infallible nor the sole causes of a union among our ideas'.

²⁰² T/11/b It would appear that Hume's use of the term 'cause and effect' rather than 'causation' is dictated by the fact that this is not, like resemblance and contiguity, a symmetrical relation. But 'causation' is used in later passages—e.g., T/93/c.

²⁰³ T/11/c + 12/a, b, c.

²⁰⁴ The example given is 'Cousins in the fourth degree are connected by *causation*, if I may be allowed to use that term'. This latter phrase is *not* relevant to Hume's theory of causation. It is occasioned, not by any doubt as to whether the relationship is causal, but by a doubt as to whether politeness would allow of the term 'causation' instead of the usual term 'generation'. It is a question of etiquette.

There are two apparent objections to according the associating quality of causation even this minimum of objectivity:

(1) I have already accepted the view that Hume, in the early sections of the Treatise, uses the terms 'object' and 'perception' without discrimination. If that is so, no argument can be drawn from the use of one rather than the other. But of course, this is only a presumption, and must yield to contrary proof. In the present case it must certainly yield to the extent I have indicated above; for otherwise it is impossible to find any distinction between association *by* the associating quality and association *simpliciter*. As these are themselves causally related, they must be distinguished in some way. Thus the perceptions qualified by causation as an associating quality must have some causal reference beyond that which belongs to them as perceptions, i.e., association or transition.

(2) It might also be objected that, since causation is an associating quality of *perceptions*, the causation should be a relation between perceptions. This simply does not follow: it is quite conceivable that a known objective relation among things should induce the association of their perceptions. And, in any case, the interpretation I have given does not demand that the causation pertain to things independently of their ideas, but merely that these ideas have a causal reference other than their association: it does not preclude the eventual identification of the causally related objects and their perceptions.

From the very limited amount of information which Hume gives us about this associating quality of causation, we cannot, at the moment, draw any further conclusions concerning its nature. Nor will this appear surprising when it is considered that the problem here encountered is one of the central problems of Hume's philosophy—does he regard causation as being in the mind, in things, in both, or in neither?

There remains one further passage which we should consider—that in which Hume shows that the associating qualities are more extensive than might appear, and that 'causation' is 'the most extensive'.²⁰⁵

This passage contains a number of clear and emphatic statements about causation; but there are, I think, good reasons why these should not be taken very seriously.

1. The whole passage is, I believe, a later addition. It breaks the thread of Hume's argument: T/12/d seems the natural continuation from T/11/b. The style too seems different; it is less casual and hurried than the remainder of the section.

2. Hume here says that one object is the cause of another if it causes its 'existence' or 'action' or 'motion' or even if it has the 'power of producing' any of these. In the light of Hume's later criticism of all of these notions (except 'motion'), it seems

²⁰⁵ T/12/b.

quite incomprehensible that he should invoke them here in complete seriousness. If the tone of the passage were ironic, we should not be surprised; but it is not. I would suggest the following partial explanation: this entire passage seems to be designed to meet the objection that the three associating qualities which Hume has proposed are hardly extensive enough to account for even the majority of associations. So Hume sets out to show that these qualities or relations are more extensive than might appear at first sight: cf. the opening phrase of the passage 'That we may understand the full *extent* of these relations. . . .'

If this suggestion is correct it would indicate that Hume's concern is to carry the reader along with him, to persuade him to accept the basic theory of association which he has proposed, by answering an apparent objection. If this is correct, it is not unlikely that Hume is here speaking in popular fashion rather than stating his own philosophical position on causation. The notion of causation involved is the 'already-formed' one which he brought to the writing of the Treatise. It is not a notion of causation integral to the philosophical system which Hume is expounding in the Treatise.

We may now enumerate the various causal notions which we have encountered in Hume's theory of association.

1. Association: a causal relation between perceptions as such, very similar to the causal relation of an impression and its correspondent idea.
2. The causal relation between an associating quality and association.
3. The associating quality called causation: a causal relation among certain ideas with a certain objective reference or, more probably, among external objects.
4. The necessity that there be causation of type 1 or type 2 to 'account for' a constant conjunction.
5. Unknown causation: Hume seems to affirm that there is such, and that it is not observable.
6. The relationship between association and a complex of ideas.

The *first three* are integral to Hume's philosophical system. The *last two* are adventitious: they pertain to the already-formed notion of causation. The *fourth* seems to occupy an intermediate position.

The conclusion of this study may be summarised as follows: that an understanding of the large and largely implicit part played by various causal notions and theories in the establishment and formulation of Hume's basic philosophical principles is prerequisite to a balanced estimation of the criticism of the accepted notion of causation which Hume conducted by means of these principles.