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ARTICLE

HUME'S ACCOUNT OF MEMORY

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Hume's commentators have traditionally been highly critical of his account of memory in the *Treatise*.[1] D. G. C. MacNabb simply states as a matter of fact that 'the subject of memory is one on which Hume is notoriously weak'. And after suggesting that 'Hume's whole account of memory is infected with the confusion between mental images and "ideas" considered as units of thought,' the kindest thing he can find to say on Hume's behalf is that in failing to give an intelligible account of memory Hume 'was no worse . . . than other philosophers of his own time and earlier times'.[2]

John Passmore agrees that with regards to memory, 'Hume's inconsistencies reach epic proportions'. Locating Hume's difficulties in his postivist method in general and his theory of belief in particular, Passemore suggests that Hume's inconsistencies also threaten other parts of his system. So, for example, Passmore reports that 'Unless memory presents us with actual impressions, Hume's theory of belief collapses; and yet, if it does, impressions are no longer "original existences", with the comforting solidity and actuality that that phrase suggests'.[3]

Adding a note of finality, James Noxon, after citing both MacNabb and Passmore, concludes simply that

> This judgment against Hume's perplexed analyses of memory and imagination has been upheld by epistemologists recently concerned with these concepts, and there is no more hope of reversing the judgement now than there is point in adding new arguments to sustain it.[4]

Noxon's conviction notwithstanding, in a series of influential papers, Daniel Flage has recently defended Hume's account of memory. According to

[1] David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. by L. A. Selby-Bigge, second edn revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1978). Hereafter cited parenthetically as '*Treatise*'. The distinction between ideas of memory and ideas of imagination is not taken up in the *Enquiries*.

[2] D. G. C. MacNabb, *David Hume: His Theory of Knowledge and Morality* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1966) pp. 41f.

[3] John Passmore, *Hume's Intentions* (London, Gerald Duckworth & Co., 1968) p. 94.

[4] James Noxon, 'Remembering and Imagining the Past', in *David Hume: A Re-evaluation*, ed. by Donald W. Livingston and James T. King (New York, Fordham University Press, 1976) p. 271.

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Flage, Hume's ideas of memory are 'relative ideas corresponding to the definite descriptions of the general form, "the complex impression that is the (original) cause of a particular positive idea *m* and which exactly (or closely) resembles *m*", where *m* is a variable ranging over positive ideas (mental images)'.[5] Since Hume never says that his memory ideas are relative ideas, Flage's suggestion that they are is clearly the most striking feature of his reading. The hope of defending Hume's account of memory is not, however, grounded in that striking feature, but rather in a thesis which Hume would be committed to by the content of Flage's definite descriptions. That thesis – let's call it the 'causal thesis' – is that it is a necessary condition for a representation's being a memorial representation that it be causally connected with whatever it represents.

The causal thesis is, of course, almost universally accepted by contemporary philosophers, and it is therefore tempting to defend Hume's account of memory by reading it back into his work. Nonetheless I think that if we wish to sympathetically understand Hume's work on memory – and not merely assimilate it to contemporary views – we would do well to resist that temptation.

The following essay divides into three main sections. The first section isolates three puzzles in Hume's account of memory. The second section argues that while Hume's difficulties are exacerbated on the assumption that Hume held the causal thesis, they are reduced on the hypothesis that Hume did not fully appreciate the analytic connection between memory and causation. The third section then shows how the reading of Hume's account of memory offered here fits into the larger context of Hume's work by considering the roles Hume assigns to memory in his famous account of personal identity.

THREE PUZZLES IN HUME'S ACCOUNT OF MEMORY

Although it has often been pointed out that Hume's account of memory is variously tangled, surprisingly little has been done by way of identifying its particular knots. It should be worth our while then to get a clear view of exactly what stands in need of explanation before we go pulling hard at its strings.

[5] Daniel Flage, 'Hume on Memory and Causation', *Hume Studies Tenth Anniversary Issue*, Supplement (1985) p. 168. For Flage's reading of Hume's account of memory, see, also his 'Perchance to Dream: A Reply to Traiger', *Hume Studies* 11 (2) (November): 173–82, and 'Remembering the Past', *Hume Studies* 15 (1) (April), 236–46.

Two questions about memory and a first puzzle

Many kinds of memory fall outside the ambit of Hume's attention. He is not in general concerned with the kinds of memory one might display in riding a bike, recalling multiplication tables, or constructing grammatical sentences. Rather, his discussion focuses paradigmatically on remembering sensory experiences.

Within this restricted scope of cases, Hume further focuses on what he considers to be the central question an account of memory must answer: how are ideas of memory distinguished from ideas of imagination? That central question is, however, ambiguous. It might ask either (a) What constitutes the difference between an idea of memory and an idea of imagination? or (b) What are the marks which we, in practice, use to distinguish (what we take to be) ideas of memory from (what we take to be) ideas of imagination? 'What makes my current state one of remembering turning off the stove rather than imagining turning off the stove?' is an instance of (a). 'What is it about my current state which makes me *think* that I am remembering turning off the stove rather than imagining doing so?' is an instance of (b).

Hume, as we will see, offers plausible responses to both sorts of questions. Unfortunately, however, those responses are in glaring tension with one another: His answer to (a) seems to intimate that there can be no answer to (b) at all; and his answer to (b) appears to completely undermine his response to (a). Our first puzzle then is simply this: Why did Hume, after giving plausible answers to both (a) and (b), fail to resolve the obvious tensions between them?

The constitutive criterion and a second puzzle[6]

Although Hume begins his discussion of memory by suggesting that ideas of memory are more 'lively and strong' than ideas of imagination, he also notes a constitutive difference between the two putative kinds of ideas:

[6] Unfortunately Hume's two criteria have been given many different names. I follow Kemp Smith's terminology, opposing the 'constitutive criterion' to the 'phenomenal criterion'. (See Kemp Smith, *The Philosophy of David Hume* (London, Macmillan, first edn 1940; second edn 1949) p. 232.) James Noxon uses the titles 'epistemic' and 'phenomenal'. (See his 'Remembering and Imagining the Past', in *David Hume: A Re-evaluation*, ed. by Donald W. Livingston and James T. King (New York, Fordham University Press, 1976) p. 271.) Daniel Flage uses 'formal' and 'phenomenal'. (See his 'Hume on Memory and Causation' *Hume Studies Tenth Anniversary Issue*, Supplement (1985) p. 168. Lesley Friedman calls the pair of criteria the 'external difference' and the 'internal difference'. (See her 'Another Look at Flage's Hume' *Hume Studies* 19 (1) (April): 178.)

> There is another difference betwixt these two kinds of ideas . . . the imagination is not restrain'd to the same order and form with the original impressions; while the memory is in a manner ty'd down in that respect, without any power of variation.
>
> (*Treatise*, 9)

Hume is, of course, suggesting that memory must get something right that the imagination need not. We might say that for an idea to be an idea of memory it must be isomorphic in important respects with what it represents. If I am to *remember* last year's Christmas party, I must correctly represent certain features of it, say, that the University Marching Band was not there, that at least some people attended, and so on. If I am simply to *imagine* a Christmas party happening last year, I am less constrained in my representing. I may, for example, imagine that the band played 'Blue Christmas' in the background as everyone unwrapped presents under the Caribbean sun.

Although Hume is surely right in suggesting that the faculty of memory is in a sense more 'tied down' in its manner of representing, it would be easy to make too much of this point. After all, my memory need not get the whole arrangement of what it represents exactly right. Clearly, I may remember last year's party even if I cannot recall the brand of wine served, or whether I sat down before or after the madrigal singers performed. Hume, as we might expect, also recognizes that we may have such imperfect memories. He writes: 'Tis evident, that the memory preserves the original form, in which its objects were presented, and that where-ever we depart from it in recollecting any thing, it proceeds from some defect or imperfection in that faculty' (*Treatise*, 9). Importantly, while Hume correctly notes that complete isomorphism is not a necessary condition for a representational state's being a memorial state, he neglects to point out that it is not a sufficient condition either. The point can easily be brought out with the following example:

> A musician somewhere in Siberia hums a simple tune that happens to be isomorphic with the Beatles's 'Yesterday'. Surprisingly enough, however, the tune she is humming is in no other way related to the famous song with which it is isomorphic. The tune, as it were, just popped into her head one day.

In such a case we may be tempted to say that the musician reinvented, or perhaps even rediscovered 'Yesterday,' but what we cannot say is that she *remembers* 'Yesterday'. For although her representation is isomorphic with the Beatles's song, it is not *causally* related to it in an appropriate way for it to be a memory of that song.[7]

[7] To the best of my knowledge, the analytic connection between memory and causation was first made explicit in C. B. Martin and Max Deutscher, 'Remembering' *The Philosophical Review*, 75 (1966) pp. 161–96.

Hume's constitutive criterion nonetheless does suggest that remembering might be an epistemically basic practice, where an epistemically basic practice is one for which there can be no absolutely non-circular justification for its reliability.[8] Hume, again as we might expect, sees the important point:

> For tho' it be a peculiar property of the memory to preserve the original order and position of its ideas, while the imagination transposes and changes them, as it pleases; yet this difference is not sufficient to distinguish them in their operation, or make us know the one from the other; it being impossible to recall the past impressions, in order to compare them with our present ideas, and see whether their arrangement be exactly similar.
>
> (*Treatise*, 85)

If memory is an epistemically basic practice, we might reasonably expect Hume to sound what is perhaps the most pervasive message of the *Treatise*, namely that nature often compels us to simply trust some of our most basic epistemological practices in the absence of any further (rational) justification. Just that point is, of course, made most famously in Hume's discussion of induction. We also find it, for example, in 'Of skepticism with regards to the senses' where Hume writes:

> Thus the skeptic still continues to reason and believe, even tho' he asserts, that he cannot defend his reason by reason; and by the same rule he must assent to the principle concerning the existence of body, tho' he cannot pretend by any arguments of philosophy to maintain its veracity. Nature has not left this to his choice, and has doubtless esteem'd it an affair of too great importance to be trusted to our uncertain reasonings and speculations.
>
> (*Treatise*, 187)

Although nothing obliges Hume to pursue his skeptical-naturalist line wherever possible, it is nonetheless, I suggest, surprising that he does not in the relatively straightforward and obvious case of memory. Our second puzzle then is simply this: Why, after broaching skepticism with regards to memory, does Hume fail to pursue it in his customary fashion?

The phenomenal criterion and a third puzzle

In the first sub-section, it was suggested that Hume is concerned to not only answer (a) what constitutes the difference between an idea of memory and an idea of imagination, but also (b) what marks do we use, in practice, to distinguish between the two? In answering the second question, Hume

[8] See William P. Alston's 'Epistemic Circularity', *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 47 (1) (1986); reprinted in his, *Epistemic Justification: Essays in the Theory of Knowledge* (Ithaca, New York, Cornell University Press, 1989).

suggests that our judgments are based on sensible properties of our ideas to which we have immediate epistemic access. He states:

> 'Tis evident at first sight, that the ideas of memory are much more lively and strong than those of the imagination, and that the former faculty paints its objects in more distinct colours, than any which are employ'd by the latter.
>
> (*Treatise*, 9)

Elsewhere he identifies the sensible properties in question as 'forcefulness', 'steadiness', and 'feeling' (*Treatise*, 9, 628).

The same properties are, of course, also used by Hume to distinguish belief from non-belief. In the *Appendix*, he writes:

> An idea assented to feels different from a fictitious idea, that the fancy alone presents to us: And this different feeling I endeavour to explain by calling it a superior *force*, or *vivacity*, or *solidity*, or *firmness*, or *steadiness* . . . I confess, that 'tis impossible to explain perfectly this feeling or manner of conception. We may make use of words, that express something near it. But its true and proper name is *belief*, which is a term that every one sufficiently understands in common life.
>
> (*Treatise*, 629)

The sensible properties which Hume identifies in giving his phenomenal criterion strongly suggest that, in practice, ideas of memory are distinguished from ideas of imagination on the basis of belief. Given that Hume approaches the problem of classifying ideas egocentrically, that is a plausible suggestion. We are likely to think that our own ideas are memories only if we believe that what they represent actually occurred in the past. For this reason, we would have a hard time understanding someone who claims that she remembers going to last year's Christmas party, but does not believe that she went to it.

A criterion based on belief could not, of course, be completely sufficient, if for no other reason than the fact that we do not always approach Hume's questions about memory egocentrically. We may judge that Bob's belief that Martians attended last year's Christmas party is due to his – perhaps eggnog-induced – imagination and not his memory. As a defeasible guide entering into our evaluations of our own representational states, however, Hume's proposal is a reasonable suggestion. And there are passages which suggest that Hume offers his phenomenal criterion as a reliable (internal) heuristic and nothing more:

> We are frequently in doubt concerning the ideas of memory, as they become very weak and feeble; and are at a loss to determine whether any image proceeds from the fancy or the memory, when it is not drawn in lively colours as distinguish that latter faculty
>
> (*Treatise*, 85)

> And as an idea of the memory, by losing its force and vivacity, may degenerate to such a degree, as to be taken for an idea of the imagination; so on the other hand an idea of the imagination may acquire such a force and vivacity, as to pass for an idea of the memory, and counterfeit its effects on the belief and judgement.
>
> (*Treatise*, 86)

Intertwined with these passages, however, is evidence that Hume is tempted to abandon the formal criterion altogether, and to allow 'vivacity' to mark both the phenomenal and the constitutive differences between memory and imagination. The following passages, among others, suggest this alternative strategy:

> Since therefore the memory is known neither by the order of its complex ideas, nor the nature of its simple ones; it follows, that *the difference betwixt it and the imagination lies in its superior force and vivacity*.
>
> (*Treatise*, 85, italics added)

> Thus it appears, that the *belief* or *assent*, which *always* attends the memory and senses, is nothing but the vivacity of those perceptions they present; and that *this alone* distinguishes them from the imagination.
>
> (*Treatise*, 86, italics added)

> It frequently happens, that when two men have been engag'd in any scene of action, the one shall remember it much better than the other, and shall have all the difficulty in the world to make his companion recollect it. He runs over several circumstances in vain . . . till at last he hits on some lucky circumstance, that revives the whole, and gives his friend a perfect memory of every thing . . . as the circumstance is mention'd, that touches the memory, the very same ideas now appear in a new light, and have, in a manner, a different feeling from what they had before. *Without any other alteration, beside that of the feeling, they become immediately ideas of the memory*, and are assented to.
>
> (*Treatise*, 628, italics added)

It is fairly easy to see why Hume should have offered a phenomenal criterion in attempting to explain how, in practice, we decide whether an idea is a memory or an imagination. And although the sensible properties he selects are clearly not exhaustive, his focus is also perfectly understandable. What is genuinely perplexing is Hume's temptation to abandon his earlier constitutive criterion altogether in favor of allowing the entire distinction between ideas of memory and ideas of imagination to rest on introspective features of our ideas alone. That is our third puzzle. Such a move would not only leave Hume with a radically implausible distinction, but would also ignore his insight that memory is in some important sense 'tied down' in a manner in which the imagination is not.

Carefully untangling Hume's discussion of memory may itself go a long way towards ameliorating some of the worries Hume's commentators have

had. Certainly we need not suppose that his difficulties reach 'epic proportions'. Nonetheless it must be admitted that something seems to be afoot here. In a lesser philosopher we might suppose that the manifest tangle itself flows from philosophical carelessness, poor exposition, or both. With regard to Hume, however, I think we have to take seriously the possibility that the puzzles we find on the surface of Hume's text track a philosophically deeper issue. In the next section, I argue that the difficulties with Hume's account which have so exercised his commentators result from an important dissonance between Hume's concept of memory and our own.

THE CAUSAL THESIS AND HUME'S ACCOUNT OF MEMORY

Philosophers and historians of science have grown accustomed to the idea of revolutions in the development of the sciences. Such revolutions often change the way a problem, or set of problems, appears to scientists by adding or removing but a few key assumptions. Understanding the work of earlier scientists therefore often involves first recognizing how those key assumptions have changed. So, for example, in order to understand Aristotle's work on motion we have to bear in mind that he did not take the principle of inertia for granted as we do today. To understand early work on the circulation of blood, we have to understand that it was long assumed that the chief action of the heart occurred during expansion rather than contraction. Similarly, I suggest that to understand Hume's account of memory we must recognize that Hume did not – as Flage's recent reading would suggest – assume that memory is *necessarily* causal.

The causal thesis – that it is a necessary condition for a representation's being a memorial representation that it be causally connected with whatever it represents – is, of course, widely assumed by contemporary philosophers. It is therefore natural that we should be tempted to presume that Hume also took the causal thesis for granted. Doing so, however, would not only introduce a new puzzle into Hume's account of memory, but would also exacerbate the puzzles we have already considered as well as undermine a promising explanation of them.

The biggest new difficulty in supposing that Hume held the causal thesis, is almost too obvious to mention, namely, that Hume nowhere explicitly endorses that thesis. Perhaps less obvious is that if Hume did hold the causal thesis, it is extremely remarkable that he would not mention it. Consider three points.

First, the causal thesis would not be a minor or tangential point with respect to Hume's account of memory. Indeed, as we have seen, the most serious defect in Hume's account of the constitutive difference between ideas of memory and ideas of imagination results from his neglecting just that thesis. Although we might sometimes be entitled to attribute to Hume

theses for which there is no textual evidence, surely we should be hesitant to do so where they are in direct tension with theses for which we do have textual evidence.

Second, unlike a philosopher today, Hume could not have supposed that the causal thesis would simply be assumed by his contemporaries. John Locke, for example, in his own masterpiece suggests that memorial ideas need be nothing more than replicas of ideas held previously together with the thought that one has had those ideas before.[9] Hume's readers probably did assume that memories are usually causally related to past events. But, like Locke, they probably saw resemblance, not causation, as the most important feature of memories, and consequently stopped short of ever recognizing a *necessary connection* between memory and causation. (In the last section, we will see some evidence from Hume's account of personal identity that the same is true of Hume himself.)

Third, the wide acceptance of the causal thesis today should not trick us into supposing that it must have been obvious to Hume.[10] Clearly it was not obvious to Locke. Nor does the inference rule from 'obvious to us' to 'obvious to earlier generations' have an impressive track record. With regards to the causal thesis, however, we should be even more careful. For although the causal thesis may be inescapable, it is not, I suggest, at all *obvious*. Consider the seemingly similar phenomenon of referring to past historical figures and events. Many contemporary philosophers now endorse the view that causal chains may play an important role in referring to, say, Napoleon.[11] None that I know of, however, wishes to suggest that a causal link is a *necessary* condition for referring to Napoleon. Even staunch advocates of the causal theory of reference will allow that a suitable definite description might in itself be sufficient to fix a particular referent. Given that a causal link is not a necessary condition for speaking or thinking about a past event, I suggest that it is far from obvious – even if inescapably true – that a causal link is a necessary condition for remembering a past event.

Attributing the causal thesis to Hume not only introduces a particularly troublesome new difficulty, it also exacerbates the difficulties we have already considered. First, on the supposition that Hume thought that a causal connection is a necessary condition for a representation's being a memory, it is even more difficult to see why he should have muddled together (a) and (b). For such a causal connection would be as clearly applicable in answering the constitutive question as it would be inapplicable in

[9] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975) II.x.2. Locke also struggles with memory. II.x.7 not only appears to flatly contradict his statement at II.x.2, but also seems to contradict his repeated claim that ideas cannot exist unperceived.

[10] I am indebted to Galen Strawson for forcing me to pay more attention to this concern.

[11] See, for example, Kripke's classic discussion in 'Lecture II', *Naming and Necessity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1972).

answering the phenomenal question. Second, because a causal criterion would not be introspectable, the prospects for skepticism with regards to memory would only be enhanced for Hume, and thus his failure to pursue it all the more perplexing. Third, given that Hume famously thought that we cannot read off causal connections from introspectable features of our ideas, his embracing a causal criterion would make inexplicable his suggestion that the whole difference between ideas of memory and ideas of imagination might be constituted by such features.

Given the difficulties which flow from the supposition that Hume held the causal thesis, we ought at least to consider the possibility that Hume did not fully appreciate the analytic connection between memory and causation. It may well turn out that if Hume's account seems inexplicable, it is only because we have failed to appreciate the sorts of difficulties the *absence* of the causal thesis presented for Hume in marking the distinction between ideas of memory and ideas of imagination.

Recall that Hume is concerned with sorting three different kinds of ideas: (a) accurate memories, (b) inaccurate memories, and (c) mere imaginings. These three kinds of ideas could be intuitively sorted in either of two different ways:

1 (accurate memories and inaccurate memories) vs. (mere imaginations)
2 (accurate memories) vs. (inaccurate memories and mere imaginations)[12]

(1) would distinguish my remembering (right or wrong) my chili taking fifth place in last year's cook-off from my simply (perhaps wistfully) imagining it taking first place. (2) would distinguish my *correctly* remembering my chili taking fifth place from either my misremembering it taking first or my merely imagining it doing so.

In our day-to-day affairs, we often fail to fully distinguish between (1) and (2). I might tell Nicole that she is 'imagining things' when she reports that she won first prize at last year's contest, without pausing to consider whether I think she is inaccurately remembering the event, or, as it were, imagining her victory from scratch.

In providing a philosophical account of the differences between memorial representations and imaginative representations, however, it will be important to have either (1) or (2) clearly in mind. Assuming that a perspicuous grasp of the difference between (1) and (2) involves having the conceptual resources to (at least in principle) sort (a), (b) and (c) into at least one of

[12] Due to Hume's views on truth, the language here of 'accurate' vs. 'inaccurate' might worry some readers. Although I think the points here are mostly clearly expressed with those terms together with their full connotations, they need not be taken to suggest anything more than the notion of isomorphism Hume himself suggests with his claim that memory is more 'ty'd down' and for which variation is a defect.

the groupings which they respectively designate, we have good evidence that Hume could not have had either (1) or (2) clearly in mind.[13]

We saw earlier with the 'Yesterday' example that without the analytic connection, Hume did not have the resources to fully sort memories (accurate or inaccurate) from mere imagininations. Without a causal criterion the musician's 'Yesterday'-isomorphic representation must be incorrectly treated as a memory rather than a mere imagination.

That, by itself, however, need not be terribly important. After all, it is natural to assume that if one's understanding of one of the two groupings should be parasitic upon an antecedent grasp of the other, an understanding of (2) should be dependent upon an understanding of (1). So, for example, one might reasonably suppose that a full understanding of (2) consists merely in a perspicuous grasp of (1) together with a further criterion for distinguishing between accurate and inaccurate memories. Or more explicitly still, one might think that the ability to distinguish between accurate memories and either inaccurate memories or mere imagininations is a conceptual task parasitic upon the more basic conceptual ability to distinguish between memories (accurate or inaccurate) and mere imagininations.

Furthermore, one might think that Hume does have the conceptual resources necessary to fully grasp the (1) distinction. Indeed, David Pears specifically criticizes Hume for not recognizing that no special criterion is necessary to divide ideas along the lines of (1). Pears writes:

> Then how do you know whether you are engaged in imagining rather than remembering? You do not need any criterion for that. You just *mean* your mental image in one way rather than the other. This is the point Hume misses completely.[14]

We might think, however, that it is not a point that Hume misses completely. For Hume does at some stage suggest that we might be able to determine whether we are having a memorial representation or an imaginative representation by immediate introspection. We might nonetheless think that it is a point which Hume would have been better off missing completely, for it is false as is shown by a lovely example from C. B. Martin and Max Deutscher:

[13] As should become clear later, such an assumption appears entirely justified in this case. Which is not to say that it might not be thought to be unjustified – either because it is too strong or too weak – in other cases. So, for example, one might think that the assumption is too strong if one is impressed by borderline cases which do not clearly fall inside or outside the scope of a categorial concept. Conversely, one might think that the assumption is too weak, suggesting that mastery of a categorial concept involves not just grasping a principle for deciding what falls under it, but also of what falls outside of it. So, for example, one might think that a perspicuous grasp of 'bear' involves not only being able to recognize that Smokey and Grizzly are bears but that Toaster and Blender are not. Neither of these sorts of subtleties will be important to the present discussion.

[14] David Pears, *Hume's System*, (Oxford University Press, 1990) p. 42.

> Suppose that someone asks a painter to paint an imaginary scene. The painter agrees to do this and, taking himself to be painting some purely imaginary scene, paints a detailed picture of a farmyard, including a certain colored and shaped house, various people with detailed features, particular items of clothing, and so on. His parents then recognize the picture as a very accurate representation of a scene which the painter saw just once in his childhood. The figures and colors are as the painter saw them only once on the farm which he now depicts. . . . Although the painter sincerely believes that his work is purely imaginary, and represents no real scene, the amazed observers have all the evidence needed to establish that in fact he is remembering a scene from childhood.[15]

Without a grasp of the analytic connection between memory and causation, Hume could not – even in principle – have fully sorted his three candidate kinds of ideas into either of the groupings suggested by (1) and (2) respectively. On the assumption then that a perspicuous grasp of the difference between (1) and (2) requires a full understanding of at least (1) or (2), we may draw the conclusion that in his discussion of memory Hume could not have had either (1) or (2) clearly in mind.

Hume's text supports that suspicion. In some passages, he appears primarily concerned with distinguishing accurate and inaccurate memories from mere imaginations, as when he offers as an example of the products of the imagination 'The fables we meet with in poems and romances' where Nature is 'totally confounded, and nothing [is] mentioned but winged horses, fiery dragons, and monstrous giants' (*Treatise*, 10). He likewise appears to have the (1) distinction in mind when he suggests that a (presumably inaccurate) idea repeated often enough by a liar, might shift from being an idea of the imagination to being a memory without, as it were, improving upon its accuracy. (*Treatise*, 86).

Other passages suggest that Hume is concerned with distinguishing accurate memories from either inaccurate memories or mere imaginations, as when he claims that

> the imagination is not restrain'd to the same order and form with the original impressions; while the memory is in a manner ty'd down in that respect, without *any* power of variation

and that it is

> impossible to recal the past impressions, in order to compare them with our present ideas, and see whether their arrangement be *exactly* similar.[16]
>
> (*Treatise*, 9, 85, emphasis added in both)

Once we recognize that Hume did not have either (1) or (2) clearly in mind, a solution to our first puzzle is readily forthcoming. Hume fails to resolve

[15] C. B. Martin and Max Deutscher, 'Remembering' *The Philosophical Review*, 75 (1966) 168.
[16] Most passages, as we would expect, are, however, indifferent between the two groupings.

the tension between his two proffered criteria not because of a naïve conflation concerning how memories and imaginations are distinguished in practice with what in fact the distinction is between them, but rather from his attempting to mark two different, intuitive, distinctions between (a) accurate memories, (b) inaccurate memories, and (c) mere imaginings. His failure to reconcile the two criteria must not – implausibly – be supposed to result from careless oversight, but rather from his finding the phenomenal criterion compelling when thinking broadly in terms of (1), and finding the constitutive criterion compelling when thinking broadly in terms of (2). The first puzzle arises because Hume did not have a clear grasp of the distinction between (1) and (2); his failure to appreciate the causal thesis explains why he did not have a clear grasp of that distinction.

The origin of the second puzzle now emerges naturally from the first. Given that Hume sometimes thought (at least roughly) of the goal of his project as distinguishing between accurate memories on the one hand and inaccurate memories (as well as mere imaginations) on the other, the need for a non-introspectable criterion would have been obvious. Without such a criterion Hume would commit himself to the untenable view that the faultiness of an idea of memory might always be read off from its introspectable features – something that Hume explicitly denies in the story of habitual liars who come to believe their own tall tales. Given Hume's keen eye for gateways to skepticism, his recognition of a non-introspectable criterion is sufficient to explain why he should have raised the possibility of skepticism with regards to memory.

Solutions to both the second and third puzzles now fit snugly into place. We might reasonably suppose that in shifting from (roughly) the (1) distinction to the (2) distinction, Hume would have no longer found the need for a non-introspectable criterion necessary. That is, like Pears, he might have thought that we can simply tell from the inside (as it were) whether we are remembering (correctly or incorrectly) or imagining. Indeed without the causal thesis that thought might well seem inescapable. That explains Hume's temptation to shelve the constitutive criterion featured in (1). Abandoning the non-introspectable criterion, however, would have also closed, for Hume, the door to skepticism with regards to memory. For although Hume was willing to press hard for justification in a wide variety of areas, he did not call into question the reliability of introspection itself. Given that he was understandably unwilling to take that step, Hume would have been forced to give up the sort of skepticism he first entertained while thinking broadly in terms of (1).[17]

[17] Should we be worried that this explanation requires us to both suppose that Hume did not have a clear grasp of the difference between two criteria, and yet sometimes thought broadly in terms of one and sometimes broadly in terms of the other? I don't think so. Consider the structurally similar suggestion that, before the work of Dedekind and Cantor, mathematicians did not have a perspicuous grasp of the difference between finite and infinite sets. Making that claim seems entirely consistent with also suggesting that Leibniz, for example, sometimes thought broadly in terms of finite sets and sometimes broadly in terms of infinite sets.

Refraining from the assumption that Hume held the causal thesis may therefore help to explain his otherwise strange performance with regards to memory. Without that thesis, Hume would not have had the conceptual resources to fully distinguish between two different – and easily confused – goals for his project. His constitutive criterion plausibly marks the distinction between accurate memories on the one hand and inaccurate memories and mere imaginations on the other. As an 'external' principle, the constitutive criterion would have led Hume into the topic of skepticism with regards to memory. His sensible criterion plausibly attempts to mark the distinction between accurate and inaccurate memories on the one hand, and mere imaginations on the other. Since it appeals only to introspectable features of our own mental states, it would have led Hume to abandon not only his constitutive criterion, but also the topic of skepticism that the constitutive criterion suggests.

MEMORY IN HUME'S ACCOUNT OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

So far it has been argued that the key to understanding the difficult passages in which Hume distinguishes ideas of memory from ideas of imagination is to recognize that he did not think of memory as essentially causal. Further support for this novel reading of Hume may be found in considering the roles that Hume assigns to memory in his famous account of personal identity.

The suggestion that memory should play a central role in understanding diachronic identity statements involving persons is not, of course, new with Hume. In the *Essay*, Locke explicitly features memory as a defining criterion of the self:

> For since consciousness always accompanies thinking, and 'tis that, that makes every one to be, what he calls *self*; and thereby distinguishes himself from all other thinking things, in this alone consists *personal Identity*, *i.e.* the sameness of a rational Being: And as far as this consciousness can be extended backwards to any past Action or Thought, so far reaches the Identity of that *Person*; it is the same *self* now it was then; and 'tis by the same *self* with this present one that now reflects on it, that that Action was done.[18]

Memory is important in Locke's account because it is what makes diachronic identity statements about persons *true*. Very roughly, 'Bob at T_1 is the same person as Bob at T_2' is true for Locke if and only if Bob at T_2 can recall the experiences of Bob at T_1.

While agreeing with Locke that memory is central to our understanding of diachronic identity statements involving persons, Hume suggests that,

[18] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975) II.xxvii.9.

strictly speaking, all such statements are false. After first attacking the notion of an impression of the self, he writes:

> I may venture to affirm . . . of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in perpetual flux and movement . . . The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance; pass, re-pass, glide away, and mingle in an infinite variety of postures and situations. There is properly no *simplicity* in it at one time, nor *identity* in different;
> (*Treatise*, 252–3)

Hume is not therefore concerned to explain the conditions under which diachronic identity statements involving persons are true. Rather he is concerned with two other, related, tasks: (a) spelling out the conditions under which we (mistakenly) think such identity statements are true; (b) explaining how memory is involved in those conditions.

Hume's answer to (a) ingeniously dovetails with his account of our (according to Hume equally false) belief in the endurance of objects.[19] In both cases, Hume argues that our belief in a continued existence is the result of a smooth transition from one idea (perception/impression) to the next. That transition, Hume claims, is determined by the relations of resemblance, causation, and contiguity in the case of objects; and (because he believes that not all ideas have a spatial position) resemblance and causation alone in the case of the self.[20]

According to Hume, memory is important to personal identity because it is importantly caught up in both the relations of resemblance and causation. Through resemblance memory plays its most important role in *contributing* to the relation of identity. Hume writes:

> To begin with resemblance; suppose we could see clearly into the breast of another, and observe that succession of perceptions, which constitutes his mind or thinking principle, and suppose that he always preserves the memory of a considerable part of past perceptions; 'tis evident that nothing could more contribute to the bestowing a relation on this succession amidst all its variations. For what is memory but a faculty, by which we raise up the images of past perceptions? And as an image necessarily resembles its object, must not the frequent placing of these resembling perceptions in the chain of thought, convey

[19] Hume, for example, writes:

> The identity which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one, and of a like kind with that which we ascribe to vegetables and animal bodies. It cannot, therefore, have a different origin, but must proceed from a like operation of the imagination upon like objects.
> (*Treatise*, 259)

[20] See *Treatise*, 260.

> the imagination more easily from one link to another, and make the whole seem like the continuance of one object? In this particular, then, the memory . . . contributes to its production, by producing the relation of resemblance among the perceptions. The case is the same whether we consider ourselves or others.
>
> (*Treatise*, 260)

On the most natural reading of the causal thesis, memory essentially forges causal links between perceptions, and non-essentially creates what we might call 'resemblance links'. Hume's account of how memory contributes to the relation of personal identity, however, would appear to reverse those commitments. First, Hume would make resemblance links essential to memory, and thus squander the resources of the causal thesis to account for non-isomorphic memories. Second, Hume not only emphasizes the resemblance of memorial representations, but does so to the exclusion of causal links. Memory and causation are both important in Hume's account of personal identity, but not, it would seem, because memory is itself essentially causal.

Hume nonetheless does point out an important connection between memory and the causal relations that bind together our various perceptions. It is not, however, the connection we would expect a proponent of the causal thesis to emphasize. Hume writes:

> As memory alone aquaints us with the continuance and extent of this succession of perceptions, 'tis to be considered upon that account chiefly, as the source of personal identity. Had we no memory, we never should have any notion of causation, nor consequently of that chain of causes and effects, which constitute our self or person . . . *memory does not so much produce as discover personal identity, by shewing us the relation of cause and effect among our different perceptions*.
>
> (*Treatise*, 261–2; italics added)

If Hume held the causal thesis we should expect him to emphasize that memory is not merely important for discovering the relations of cause and effect among our different perceptions, but that memory is crucial to personal identity precisely because it *produces* the causal links which tie our perceptions together. Again, however, Hume suggests just the opposite. Although causal relations are central to personal identity, Hume is at pains to make clear that memory's role with regards to causal ties is first and foremost *epistemic* and not *constitutive* – memory is central to personal identity not because it is itself essentially causal, but because it provides our only epistemic window to causal relations holding between perceptions.

The roles which Hume assigns to memory in his account of personal identity are, of course, logically consistent with his holding the causal thesis. His emphasis on the necessary resemblance of memorial ideas, and the epistemic function they serve in discovering causal relations rather than in forging them, however, only make reasonable sense if we suppose that Hume did not embrace the causal thesis with regards to memory. That, of

course, not only gives us further reason to hesitate in simply assuming that Hume held the causal thesis, but also shows how such an assumption may infect more than just our understanding of Hume's account of memory.

CONCLUSION

Hume's account of memory has come in for heavy criticism from his commentators. If the reading offered here, however, is on the right track, much of the fault lies not with Hume, but with our own tendency to misunderstand the difficulties he confronted. The hypothesis that Hume did not hold the causal thesis, not only does more explanatory work than its contrary, but also opens the way to a more sympathetic understanding of important, if difficult, parts of the *Treatise*.[21]

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