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HUME'S THEORY OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

PERSONAL IDENTITY
IN THE
PHILOSOPHY OF DAVID HUME

By
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SCOPE AND CONTENTS: A critical study of the theory
of Personal Identity which Hume develops in Book I
of A Treatise of Human Nature, together with an
evaluation of the adequacy of this theory for some
of the doctrines of Book II, and a brief assessment
of Hume's later attitude to the theory.

"The march of mind - has marched in through my back-parlour shutters, and out again with my silver spoons, in the dead of night. The policeman, who was sent down to examine, says my house has been broken open on the most scientific principles."

(Thomas Love Peacock:
Crotchet Castle, Chapter 17)

PREFACE

Briefly stated the aim of this paper is to examine the relationship between the theory of personal identity which Hume evolves in Book I of his Treatise of Human Nature and the concept of the self which is utilised in the development of the doctrines of sympathy and the passions in Book II of the Treatise. Several leading commentators, notably Norman Kemp-Smith, have claimed that Hume's doctrines of Book II require a concept of personality which is contrary to that presented in Book I. We hope to demonstrate here that this claim is unfounded.

Hume arrives at his theory of personal identity via a two-fold approach which characterises the whole of Book I. In the first place he carries out a programme of logical analysis whereby he seeks to invalidate rationalistic concepts traditionally advanced to justify common-sense beliefs and assumptions. Secondly, he gives his own psychological explanation for these common-sense beliefs and assumptions.

Among the concepts eliminated in his logical enquiries are those of 'substance' and of a 'simple, identical self' which are often utilised to explain the origin of the awareness of personal identity. In place of these, Hume substitutes a complex psychological mechanism with which

he explains the origin of the awareness of identity of personality in terms of discrete perceptions which are united by the brute force of the imagination.

In short, Hume asserts that the identity of self is a mere fiction. The concept has no application to reality, because reality, as he defines it, nowhere manifests a simple, identical self. His whole awareness is permeated exclusively with perceptions "which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement." (T.252) The fiction of personal identity arises solely as the result of the operations of the imagination upon perceptions, and has no other basis or justification.

In Book II of the Treatise this concept of the personality appears to be forsaken. There Hume speaks as though the self, immutable and enduring, were directly apprehended in some way, and as though it were not merely a fabrication of the imagination: "'Tis evident, that the idea, or rather impression of ourselves is always intimately present with us, and that our consciousness gives us so lively a conception of our own person, that 'tis not possible to imagine, that any thing can in this particular go beyond it." (T.317)

Kemp-Smith contends that Hume has not slipped into a careless way of speaking here. Instead he believes that Hume was aware that the doctrines of Book II actually require the latter sort of concept of the self. In opposition to Kemp-Smith, we will argue here that Hume's original theory of the

personality is both adequate for, and consistent with the doctrine of Book II.

It is a matter of some debate as to how far Hume himself was afflicted with a sense of the inadequacy of his early theory of personal identity. Kemp-Smith and Charles Hendel both believe that Hume was forced into his later manner of speaking because he realised that his original theory of personal identity simply would not do.

This claim is worthy of examination as a postscript to this paper. For this reason Chapter V is devoted to an evaluation of the evidence advanced for it. We shall argue, that while there is some justification for the belief that Hume did reject his doctrine of personal identity as expressed in Book I, conclusive proof for the view is not forthcoming. It will be seen, perhaps, that it is equally possible to hold that Hume omitted his theory from his later works in obedience to the dictates of literary expediency.

The present paper is developed in the following way: Chapter I deals with Hume's definition and classification of the elements of experience, together with the evolution of his theory of meaning; Chapter II is concerned with his semantic and logical attacks on the concepts of 'self' and 'substance', his denial that the external world is knowable, and the development of his doctrine of natural belief as an explanation of the origin of these concepts; Chapter III

contains a critical examination of his analysis of the conditions for numerical identity and its alleged inapplicability to the world of experience, together with a detailed account of the conditions necessary for the awareness of personal identity; in Chapter IV an analysis is made of the relationship between the concept of personal identity advanced in Book I, and presented in Chapter III of this paper, and the concept of the self which Hume appears to require in Book II; finally, in Chapter V an attempt is made to reveal the impossibility of attributing with any certainty a specific motive to Hume for his later omission of his theory of personal identity.

I should like to express my thanks to my thesis supervisor Dr. J. Noxon for his helpful criticism and encouraging advice, and to the second reader Mr. J. Bristol.

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CHAPTER I

HUME'S THEORY OF MEANING

Hume has two main aims in Book I of the Treatise. The first is to offer a critical appraisal of rationalistic explanations of the problems which arise when common-sense assumptions, beliefs and habits are made the subjects of philosophical reflection. His second aim is to provide a naturalistic explanation of these problems. The critical and explanatory aims will be the subjects of Chapters II and III respectively. The present Chapter will be devoted to an outline of the basis of Hume's philosophy as it appears in the opening passages of Book I.

In the opening passages Hume outlines the scope of his investigations. He is to be concerned entirely with perceptions and with the operations of the mind upon perceptions. His approach is fundamentally psychological, and the psychological principles which he evolves here will provide the bases of his explanatory work later in Book I.

At the same time, however, he evolves a theory of meaning which is best described as logical. It springs from what passes as a piece of psychological reasoning, but is itself essentially a general criterion of meaningfulness. This criterion plays an important part in Hume's critical passages

and the course of its evolution will be examined in some detail in this Chapter.

Hume's procedure throughout Book I is a curious mixture of the psychological and the logical. The conflicting aims of these two modes of investigation give rise to a great deal of discord, at least on the verbal surface, and a careful examination of the opening passages of Book I is essential to a fuller understanding of the construction which Hume places upon personal identity.

Hume begins the Treatise with a definition of the limits of human experience: "All the perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into two distinct kinds which I shall call IMPRESSIONS and IDEAS." (T.1)¹ The implication here is that human experience is limited to what is perceived. This initial assumption will have important repercussions in Hume's discussion of personal identity.

Subsumed under the genus 'perception' are the two species 'impressions' and 'ideas'. Their differentia are 'force' and 'liveliness':

The difference between these consists in the degrees of force and liveliness with which they strike upon the mind, and make their way into our thought and consciousness. Those perceptions, which enter with most force and violence, we may name impressions; and under this name I comprehend all our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first

I

David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888). All references in this paper to the Treatise are to this edition, and are acknowledged by the use of the letter 'T' and the appropriate page numbers placed in brackets .

appearance. in the soul. By ideas I mean the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning; such as, for instance, are all the perceptions excited by the present discourse, excepting only, those which arise from the sight and touch, and excepting the immediate pleasure or uneasiness it may occasion. (T.1)

These differentia have a distinctly psychological flavour and are eloquent testimonials to the empirical aspect of Book I, for its first major distinction rests upon the description of mental phenomena. The use of such terminology need not, of course, detract from the philosophical value of the work. Descartes, after all, saw fit to allow the description of mental images to play a crucial part in his philosophy, as witness his use of the terms 'clear' and 'distinct' as applied to ideas. Indeed, Hume's differentia highlight a feature of great philosophical importance in his work, namely its solipsistic orientation.

It seems to be understood in the opening passages of Book I that perceptions are privy to the individual perceiver. Hume acknowledges from the outset that he is hedged about, as it were, by his own sense data which he chooses to call perceptions. It follows that reality can be catalogued only in terms of impressions and ideas which are the species of perceptions. Hume's position is one of isolation from what we normally call the external world and from what we commonly regard as being other minds. In this position he is faced with accounting for the differences we draw between 'actual' objects and the representations of these provided

by the memory and by the imagination. Since the sum total of Humean experience is perceptions, the difference must lie between the perceptions themselves, for they are the only possible source of such differentiation. This difference Hume attributes to the varying degrees of force and liveliness manifested by perceptions. Impressions correspond to what we normally call perceptions of the senses, and ideas correspond to the products of the memory or of the imagination, and the latter differ from the former in being less vivid or forceful.

There is, too, yet another class of impressions. Its members are those perceptions which we normally describe as internal sensations, such as fear, anger or love, and these are produced only on the prior appearance of impressions of the senses or on the prior appearance of ideas. Even so they are differentiated from ideas by their superior force or liveliness.

Hume is well aware that the differentia 'force' and 'liveliness' do not always enable us to distinguish between our impressions and our ideas. On some occasions our imagination can produce perceptions whose intensity approaches that of impressions:

Every one of himself will readily perceive the difference betwixt feeling and thinking. The common degrees of these are easily distinguished; tho' it is not impossible but in particular instances they may very nearly approach to each other. Thus in sleep, in a fever, in madness, or in any very violent emotions of soul, our ideas may approach to our impressions: As on the other hand it sometimes happ-

ens, that our impressions are so faint and low, that we cannot distinguish them from our ideas. (T.1-2)

There would be a problem here in any philosophy, solipsist or otherwise. It is ~~always~~ difficult to differentiate between the products of sensation and vivid dreams or persistent hallucinations when the latter are actually being experienced. The most we can say is that we generally know when we are not dreaming or when we are not the victims of hallucinations. However, the fact that we do differentiate between 'feeling' and 'thinking', or between sensing and imagining, shows that the problem is not insuperable, and that there are criteria which can be applied with great expectation of success. Hume chooses 'force' and 'liveliness', but is prepared to concede that they have only a general application:

But notwithstanding this near resemblance in a few instances, they are in general so very different, that no-one can scruple to rank them under distinct heads, and assign to each a peculiar name to mark the difference. (T.2)

The investigation proceeds on a psychological level, and Hume further subdivides perceptions into simple and complex: "Simple perceptions or impressions and ideas are such as admit of no distinction nor separation. The complex are the contrary of these, and may be distinguished into parts." (T.2)

Hume is not saying here that we perceive only simples and later combine them into complexes. He is merely saying

that all complex perceptions can be analysed into discrete, simple perceptions: "Tho' a particular colour, taste, and smell are qualities all united together in this apple, 'tis easy to perceive they are not the same, but are at least distinguishable from each other." (T.2)

At first sight this passage looks very much like a piece of psychological analysis. By 'psychological' we mean here the description of mental phenomena, the classification of mental phenomena into various groups, and the derivation of general laws from the observed behaviour of such phenomena. Hume appears to be saying that the perception 'apple' is composed of several constituent simple perceptions. If complex perceptions are so constructed then the constituent simples can be perceived apart from the complex as perceptions in their own right. This form of distinguishing would be merely a matter of observation, on the same level as the observation of the varying forcefulness or vivacity of perceptions.

However, in the section on abstract ideas Hume appears to indicate that this interpretation is not strictly correct. There is the suggestion that simples are the products of logical as opposed to psychological analysis:

A person who desires us to consider the figure of a globe of white marble without thinking on its colour, desires an impossibility; but his meaning is, that we shou'd consider the colour and figure together but still keep in our eye the resemblance to the globe of black marble, or that to any other globe of whatever colour or substance. (T.25)

The term 'logical analysis' would be a more apt description of this process than 'psychological analysis', for it is clear that the complex perception has not actually been broken up into discrete perceptions. The complex perception remains as a whole, but one aspect of it is compared with a resembling aspect of yet another complex. For this process Hume adopts the title 'distinction of reason': "We consider the figure and colour together, since they are in effect the same and undistinguishable; but still view them in different aspects, according to the resemblances, of which they are susceptible." (T.25)

Now the account he has given of this procedure conflicts with an earlier account he has given of the role played by the imagination: "All simple ideas may be separated by the imagination, and may be united again in what form it pleases." (T.10) In this passage Hume explicitly states that simples are perceptually discrete. That is, simple perceptions can be separated off from complex perceptions and can become individual perceptions. The two accounts he gives of the power of the imagination and of abstract ideas are obviously in conflict. This makes for a great deal of difficulty in the interpretation of Hume's doctrine of simple ideas. Laird asks somewhere, "Is the simple supposed to be analytically simple or visibly simple?", and Maund laments the fact that Hume "never realised that what is logically

simple is not necessarily psychologically simple."¹

Whether Hume realised that the problem existed or not, he never offers any solution for it. In the absence of a solution of his own making it would not, perhaps, be amiss to construct one using the following passage as a guide:

Since all ideas are deriv'd from impressions, and are nothing but copies and representations of them, whatever is true of the one must be acknowledg'd concerning the other. Impressions and ideas differ only in their strength and vivacity. It cannot therefore be affected by any variation in that particular. An idea is a weaker impression; and as a strong impression must necessarily have a determinate quantity and quality, the case must be the same with its copy or representative. (T.19)

Hume holds that all ideas are merely copies of impressions, and that there exist no ideas in the mind which have not been preceded by impressions which they resemble in every respect except their vivacity. The origins of this principle will be examined in the following pages of this Chapter. For the present it is sufficient to note that since every idea is preceded by a resembling impression, the sine qua non of every simple, unanalysable idea must be the prior occurrence of a simple, unanalysable impression. If this interpretation is adopted it must follow that the imagination does not have the power to separate out the simple components of a complex perception. However, the imagination would still have the

1

Constance Maund, "Hume's Treatment of Simples", Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, N.S. 35, (1934-35). The quotation from Laird appears in Maund's article.

ability to separate complexes one from another and to unite simples which were originally presented as simple impressions.

Kemp-Smith is in sympathy with this interpretation. His comment on the above passage is: "Negatively stated, this means that no abstraction is capable of real existence, that none therefore can be sensibly perceived, and that there being no sense-impression of the abstract, there can be no image of it."¹ That is, unless simples are given in experience, they can have no real existence but are distinguishable only by means of the distinction of reason. Hume's analysis of the apple must therefore be a logical one, and the fruits of such an analysis must be logical and not psychological entities.

Having attempted, not altogether successfully, to divide perceptions into simple and complex, Hume sets about constructing a general theory of meaning. Hume's theory of meaning is a typical child of the Treatise, manifesting as it does both psychological and logical aspects. It appears to be born of psychological analysis, but it more likely that it is the logical outcome of the initial postulates of Book I. Its function appears to be that of a psychological yardstick, but it can and does function as a most potent logical weapon when wielded against the concepts of rationalism. Certainly

¹
Norman Kemp-Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume, (Macmillan: London, 1964), p. 258.

it has profound consequences for the doctrine of personal identity.

The genesis of Hume's theory of meaning comes about in the following way. He observes that his impressions and ideas bear a strong resemblance to one another. When he shuts his eyes after surveying his chamber, he finds that the images of his chamber and of its contents are still present. These differ from the images previously experienced only in their force and vivacity. It would not be true, however, to say that all ideas resemble impressions. Although it is possible to imagine a city such as the New Jerusalem, no one can claim that he has seen it.

While it is not always true that ideas have resembling impressions, in the case of simple impressions and ideas "the rule here holds without any exception, and . . . every simple idea has a simple impression which resembles it; and every simple impression a correspondent idea." (T.3) Simple ideas and impressions attend one another constantly, and "Such a constant conjunction, in such an infinite number of instances, can never arise from chance; but clearly proves a dependence of the impressions on the ideas, or of the ideas on the impressions." (T.4-5) Not only is there a simple impression corresponding to every simple idea, but their constant conjunction proves that one is dependent on on the other.

To prove that impressions always precede the ideas which they resemble Hume offers two demonstrations. The

first of these is as follows: "To give a child an idea of scarlet or orange, of sweet or bitter, I present the objects, or in other words, convey to him these impressions; but proceed not so absurdly, as to endeavour to produce the impressions by exciting the ideas." (T.5) We do not proceed so absurdly simply because no impression is ever seen to follow an idea in these circumstances, while on the other hand, "any impressions either of the mind or body is constantly followed by an idea, which resembles it, and is only different in the degrees of force and liveliness." (T.5)

The second demonstration makes the point that those who have been blind from birth cannot have any ideas of colour, while those who have been deaf from birth are likewise devoid of any idea of sound. "Nor is this only true, where the organs of sensation are entirely destroy'd, but likewise where they have never been put in action to produce a particular impression. We cannot form to ourselves a just idea of the taste of a pine-apple, without having actually tasted it." (T.5)

From both proofs it follows: "That all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent." (T.4)¹

Hume uncovers a contrary instance "which may prove,

¹
Italicised in the text.

that 'tis not absolutely impossible for ideas to go before their correspondent impressions." (T.5) The contrary instance can arise when a man is confronted with a chart containing all the shades of blue except one in order of intensity. Hume contends that, although the man may never have seen the missing shade of blue, he can tell, from the gap in the gradations of intensity of the colours, the intensity of the missing shade and the place from which it is missing. This experiment does not shake Hume's faith in his newly discovered principle, that all ideas are copies of preceding impressions which they exactly resemble in all respects but their vivacity. The contrary instance "is so particular and singular, that 'tis scarce worth our observing, and does not merit that for it alone we should alter our general maxim." (T.6)

Hendel takes the view that Hume's experiment with the shade of blue is a sure indication that he has no intention of universalising his maxim. In other words he believes that Hume has developed a purely psychological theory by a process of inductive generalisation:

It is a "general maxim" that holds for the phenomena or the conjunctions of experience so far observed, but then the possibility always remains open for the appearance of something new and different which as a contrary instance may serve as a proof that the principle must not be treated as a universal one. It is not a principle of reason; nor does it express a "relation of ideas" where there can be "insight into

the necessity of the relation. It is, in sum, an "experimental principle".¹

In the Introduction to the Treatise Hume does speak as though it is his intention to become a practical psychologist. He says that his aim is to "explain the principles of human nature" (T.xx), and he proposes to do this by means of "careful and exact experiments". (T.xxi) By experimentation he appears to mean the observation of the human mind in "different circumstances and situations". (T.xxi) From these experiments he hopes to derive principles, or laws of human conduct. He emphasises that his principles will be derived solely from experience, and that, "although we must endeavour to render all our principles as universal as possible" (T.xxi), we cannot go beyond experience. Among other things, this obviously means that Hume cannot claim universality for any of his principles because he would be unable to carry out sufficient experiments. There is always the possibility that a contrary instance will present itself in the very next experiment:

The sum of what has been said about this experiment with the shade of blue as it bears on the principle is simply that the principle is the first result of Hume's experimental method of reasoning. The "limitation" upon the principle required by the fact that there is a real objection to it is that

1

C.W. Hendel, *Studies in the Philosophy of David Hume*, (Bobbs-Merrill: New York, 1963), p. 430.

it has the value only of probability and not that of knowledge.¹

H.H. Price, while endorsing Hendel's interpretation, claims that its psychologism is not the most important feature of Hume's first principle. As far as Price is concerned "the doctrine that all mental images are derived from impressions, whether it is true or false, is not of the faintest philosophical interest. It is a psychological doctrine, not a philosophical one".² Of real significance for philosophy is Hume's insistence that "all our understanding of general symbols rests ultimately on ostensive definition".³

In clarification of this comment Price divides symbols into two classes, namely primary and secondary:

A secondary symbol is one which is definable in terms of other general symbols; for example, murder is defined in terms of malice, killing, and human being, and dragon is defined in terms of winged, fire-breathing, and reptile. Eventually, perhaps, after a number of stages, we shall come down to certain primary symbols which cannot be defined in terms of other symbols at all.⁴

Using this new distinction, Price reformulates Hume's first principle in the following way: "The meaning of a primary general symbol is given, and can only be given, by pointing to a particular which we are acquainted with in

¹

Ibid., p. 432.

²H.H. Price, "The Permanent Significance of Hume's Philosophy", Philosophy, (1940), p. 10.

³

Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 11.

sense or introspection, and saying 'That is an instance of what I mean by the term "so-and-so".'¹

Price offers two reasons for his preference for this reformulation. The first is that it avoids Hume's "idea-terminology". By this Price refers to Hume's preoccupation with perceptions and his attempts to classify them into impressions and ideas and into simple and complex. It is Price's belief that "The word 'idea' is one of the most pernicious sources of confusion in the whole history of philosophy", and that even Hume, "perhaps the cleverest man who ever used it", falls foul of its "baneful influence".²

We have already experienced the baneful influence of Hume's terminology in our examination of his doctrine of simple ideas. There we saw that Hume's distinction between simple and complex breaks down on the psychological level. The solution then suggested was that we should regard the analysis of complex ideas into simple ideas as an example of logical analysis.

According to Price the simple-complex distinction is part of Hume's attempt to show in psychological terms how concepts are constructed. The meaning of the word 'apple', for example, is provided by the sum total of the simple ideas which make up the complex idea 'apple'. However, in

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

view of the difficulties which arise from a doctrine of psychological simples, Price would prefer to regard all simples as merely logical simples. Hume's first principle could then operate as a logical criterion of meaning unencumbered by the caprices of mental phenomena. This would be a very useful extension of the interpretation already advanced by us of the doctrine of simples.

Price's second reason for the reformulation of Hume's first principle is that, as derived by Hume, it is nothing more than an inductive generalisation. Hendel, of course, has amply expanded this comment. As an inductive generalisation only, says Price, it is of very little value to philosophy:

We are all familiar with the universal greenness, but who of us can recall the particulars from which he originally abstracted it? But even if we could recall them, it would not mend the matter. For if this is the right way to test the principle, it follows that the Principle - whether it survives the test or not - can be nothing but an inductive generalisation . . . and it would be a psychological proposition, not a philosophical one.¹

Whether Hume thought of his first principle as a psychological one or as a logical one, and all the evidence tends to show that he held the former view, his commentators tend to believe that its true worth lies in its utility as an instrument for logical analysis. Only as a logical tool can it have universal application to philosophical problems.

¹Ibid.

Whatever the opinions present day psychologists have of Hume's theories, Kemp-Smith sums up the judgement of philosophers in these words: "Hume's tendency to substitute psychological for logical analysis is the more to be regretted that it is in his logic that his genius shines most brightly."¹

We have several times in this Chapter referred to Hume as a psychologist. However, it is important to point out that however much he may resemble one he is not a psychologist in the modern sense of the term. In the first place he believes that there are four sciences which are essential to the investigation of human nature. These are logic, morals, criticism and politics:

The sole end of logic is to explain the principles and operations of our reasoning faculty, and the nature of our ideas: morals and criticism regard our tastes and sentiments: and politics consider men as united in society, and dependent on each other. In these four sciences of Logic, Morals, Criticism, and Politics, is comprehended almost every thing, which it can in any way import us to be acquainted with, or which can tend either to the improvement or ornament of the human mind. (T.xix-xx)

As Basson points out² this passage shows that Hume is not restricting himself to the science of psychology as we understand it today. Hume is rather examining the foundations of human knowledge. Hume, says Basson, wishes to do this in order to limit the scope of the human understanding. The

¹Kemp-Smith, op. cit., p. 561

²A.H. Basson, David Hume, (London: Penguin, 1958), pp. 20-32.

force of Hume's first principle is that nothing can be conceived which has not been experienced. Consequently, since impressions are prior to all other experience on them must rest the foundation of all human knowledge. Modern psychologists do not make statements like this. Generally they confine themselves to cataloguing human reactions to certain situations and to deriving laws of human behaviour from large numbers of observations of human behaviour in controlled situations.

In the second place Hume's experiments bear little resemblance to modern psychological experiments. Basson is quite explicit on this point:

It looks as if Hume is bound to establish the limits of the human understanding by a process of cautious generalisation from a large number of individual observations and experiments. One pictures the careful examination of a large and fair sample of mankind, the noting of some features common to all the men in the sample, and the extension of these features to all men in general by induction. This is our average picture of scientific procedure, and perhaps Hume really believed at times that he was using some such procedure. But the arguments he¹ actually uses do not follow this simple pattern.

Hume does not prove his principles as a modern psychologist would. He rather chooses to persuade his readers to adopt them.² The way he does this is by challenging them to

¹Ibid., p. 25.

²Q.v. Basson, op. cit., pp. 25-26.

experiment upon themselves:

The proof of universal correspondence between simple impressions and simple ideas falls into three parts: a report, a request, and a challenge. Hume first reports that when he examines the ideas in his own mind, he finds that as a matter of fact in his case every idea is a copy of an impression. He then requests the reader to satisfy himself in a like manner that all his ideas are copies of impressions. Then he challenges anyone who disagrees to produce an idea which does not correspond to any possible impression. Since no one answers his challenge, he regards his conclusion as established.¹

Further it is interesting to note that Hume's 'experiments' appear to provide him with immediate acquaintance with the principles of the human mind. It almost seems that Hume intuits his principles in some way, but he himself believed that they were directly experienced together with the situations under scrutiny. Kemp-Smith brings out this latter feature of Hume's method when he compares it with Newton's:

The term 'principle', as he Newton already uses it in his early work² (and as Hume also frequently employs it), does not mean what we are accustomed to mean by 'principle'. [Newton] usually means by it a character which happens to be for us an ultimate character, and which is learned directly from sense-experience. As instances of such 'principles' he cites mass, gravity, and cohesion in bodies. They are sensible qualities and have the manifest character proper to all sensible qualities. The other

¹Ibid., pp. 35-36.

²Kemp-Smith is referring to the Queries which Newton appended to his Opticks.

term which he favours, in addition to 'manifest' quality, and which allows of more general use, is 'phaenomenon' - the Greek term being taken in its positive and complimentary (not in its denigratory, Kantian) sense as signifying what does, beyond all question, actually present itself to us in experience. In contrast to phenomena he sets the occult, meaning thereby what is not manifest, the secret or hidden.¹

What, then, is Hume's relation to the modern logician? Modern logicians purport to be searching for a body of universal, necessary truths. Hume denies that there are any such truths, or at least if there are they are not evident to the human understanding. Human knowledge, he says, is limited to experience, and if experience does not furnish universality, there can be no universal truths as far as mankind is concerned: "And tho' we must endeavour to render all our principles as universal as possible, by tracing up our experiments to the utmost, and explaining all effects from the simplest and fewest causes, 'tis still certain we cannot go beyond experience." (T.xxi) Similarly if necessity is not experienced as belonging to things, then it must be construed that it is imposed on the world by the mind. Hume, in fact, later tries to show that necessity is not a part of the order of things, but is merely a construction placed upon the world by the imagination (T. 165).

This is a direct challenge to Price's proposed amendments. He would have Hume formulate logical laws, but Hume

¹Op. cit., p. 55.

is actually telling us that no such laws can be formulated, or at least no one would know whether or not any such laws were universal and necessary.

In effect, of course, both men have formulated metaphysical propositions. Hume states categorically that experience cannot furnish knowledge of universality, and he denies that there is any experience of necessity in things. Price simply chooses to believe that universal and necessary principles can be formulated. Hume offers no normally acceptable proof of his denial that such truths can ever be known, for he arrives at it neither by induction nor by a process of deduction.

Probably the strongest proof which either Price or Hume can offer is the utility of their respective beliefs. Price recommends his on the grounds that it is more efficacious than Hume's, while Hume announces that, although his theory is no more nor less certain than many others, it will in the end prove to be more valuable: "Where experiments of this kind are judiciously collected and compared, we may hope to establish on them a science, which will not be inferior in certainty, and will be much superior in utility to any other of human comprehension." (T.xxiii)

Basson argues that the only grounds for accepting or rejecting Hume's theory lie in an assessment of its value. However, he believes, as Price appears to do, that Hume's theory of impressions and ideas is only one of many poss-

ible frames of reference which can be used to talk about human knowledge. First and foremost Basson, like Price, claims that Hume's first principle is no more than a part of a system which has been especially designed for the analysis of human understanding. Whatever Hume thought of his theory, this is how it appears to work. Basson points out that it is the usefulness of Hume's theory, and not its psychological overtones, that many other philosophers have been concerned to deprecate:

Hume's theory of impressions and ideas, and . . . the connexion between them, is not so much a psychological theory to be verified by observation, as an attempt to provide a framework for analysis. It is more like a system of measurement than a physical theory. And there cannot be any question of the truth of a system of measurement, but only a question of its value or usefulness for some purpose. This is independent of any opinion Hume himself may have had about the absolute validity of his scheme. Cartesian coordinates do not provide the only possible frame of reference for events in physical space, although Descartes may have thought they did. In a like manner, Hume's impressions and ideas do not provide the only possible frame of reference for events in the mental world; and, indeed, attacks on Hume, although they have often had the outward appearance of questioning the psychological validity of his scheme, have invariably been directed at its alleged explanatory inadequacy.¹

Hume himself is delighted with his first principle and heralds it as a major discovery: "No discovery cou'd have been made more happily for deciding all controversies conc-

¹Basson, op. cit., p. 44.

erning ideas, than that above mention'd, that impressions always take the precedency of them, and that every idea, with which the imagination is furnish'd, first makes its appearance in a correspondent impression." (T.33)

In the application of his principle in Book I of the Treatise to the concepts of rationalism Hume displays a ruthlessness which ill becomes his statement that the first principle is an inductive generalisation. It does seem that Basson is correct when he says: "No matter how he purports to prove his principle, the use he makes of it shows that for him an idea is by definition a copy of an impression."¹

The principle is applied with devastating effect to contemporary notions of necessity, space and time, matter, immaterial substance, and the self. Reid calls it the 'principle of Inquisition', and illustrates in whimsical language the auto-da-fé of the terminology of the rationalists which takes place in Book I:

The articles of inquisition are few indeed but very dreadful in their consequences; Is the prisoner an impression or an idea? If an idea, from what impression copied? And if it appears that the prisoner is neither an impression, nor an idea copied from some impression, immediately, without being allowed to offer anything in arrest of judgement, he is sentenced to pass out of existence and to be, in all time to come, an empty unmeaning sound or the ghost of a departed entity. Before this dreadful tribunal, cause and effect, time and place,

¹Ibid., p. 37.

matter and spirit, have been tried and cast.¹

In this Chapter we have explored the opening sections of the first Book of the Treatise and have observed the tangle of psychological and logical avenues of investigation which Hume is pursuing. We have seen that Hume appears to be attempting a quasi-psychological description of human behaviour. The second is that he has evolved what is to all outward appearances a tool for psychological enquiries, but which with only a slight modification of interpretation can be seen to be a tool for logical analysis. These developments are crucial to the evolution of his theory of personal identity. He uses logical analysis to unseat established notions, and reverts to his role as an eighteenth century psychologist to explain how it is that we come to believe in a simple, identical self when no such entity is ever experienced. These critical and explanatory aspects of his work will be the subjects of the following Chapters.

¹Thomas Reid, The Works of Thomas Reid, ed. Hamilton, (Edinburgh, 1863), I. Quoted from J. Laird, "Impressions and Ideas: A Note on Hume", Mind, 52, 1943, p. 171.

CHAPTER II

HUME'S CRITIQUE OF METAPHYSICS

In the previous Chapter it was observed that Book I of the Treatise has two major aspects, namely the logical and the psychological. Throughout the Book Hume continues to confuse the two modes of enquiry. At the same time, however, a different pattern of enquiry arises. Hume undertakes an investigation of those major contemporary metaphysical concepts which had been evolved to solve problems raised by the analysis of common-sense assumptions, beliefs and habits. He exposes these concepts as fictions and seeks to give his own explanation of common-sense beliefs.

His criticism of metaphysical concepts takes place on a logical level. He applies his theory of meaning to them and finds that they are, in fact, meaningless, and he reinforces this conclusion by showing that they give rise to more problems than they solve.

The explanatory aim takes place on a psychological level. Hume tries to show that common-sense belief is a result of the operations of the human mind upon phenomena. Having demolished rationalistic modes of explanation, he substitutes his own naturalistic explanation which is a purely descriptive account of the workings of human psycho-

logy.

The relevance to this paper of an examination of Hume's critical and explanatory aims stems from the fact that these aims are very much concerned with contemporary theories of mind, the self and personal identity. Since the ancient and honourable notion of substance is closely linked with these theories and bears the brunt of much of Hume's criticism, it is fitting to begin this Chapter with an account of his attack on substance.

To open the attack on substance Hume invokes his first principle: "That all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent." (T.4) In other words, if a term is to be meaningful it must be applicable to an idea which has been derived from an actual impression. Hume discovers that he has had no experience of an impression of substance. He therefore declares that he has no idea of substance:

I wou'd fain ask those philosophers, who found so much of their reasonings on the distinction of substance and accident, and imagine we have a clear idea of each, whether the idea of substance be deriv'd from the impressions of sensation or reflexion? If it be convey'd to us by our senses, I ask, which of them; and after what manner? If it be perceiv'd by the eyes, it must be a colour; if by the ears, a sound; if by the palate, a taste; and so of the other senses. But I believe that none will assert, that substance is either a colour, or sound, or a taste. The idea of substance must therefore be deriv'd from an impression of reflexion, if it really exist. But the impressions of reflexion resolve themselves into our passions and emotions; none of which can possibly

represent a substance. We have therefore no idea of substance, distinct from that of a collection of particular qualities, nor have we any other meaning when we either talk or reason concerning it. (T.15-16)

Hume appears to be carrying out a piece of psychological investigation. That is, he gives the impression that he has hunted around in his world of perceptions for an impression of substance, but has been quite unable to find one. However, this may not be a correct interpretation of what he has done. The refutation of substance is, perhaps, a logical one, and not a psychological one.

Hume himself points out that our having an impression of substance is something which is "very difficult, if not impossible, to be conceiv'd", (T.233), for "how can an impression represent a substance, otherwise than by resembling it? And how can an impression resemble a substance, since, according to this philosophy,¹ it is not a substance, and has none of the peculiar qualities or characteristics of a substance?" (T.233) These statements imply that the rejection of substance is not so much a matter of empirical investigation, but is rather one of definition.

It is clear that Hume is attacking an entity which is 'known' only by a definition. He himself refers to it in the Treatise as "something which may exist by itself" (T.233),

¹'This philosophy' refers to a doctrine which Hume has outlined on the previous page, T.232.

as that in which qualities are supposed to inhere (T.222), as that which is the principle of union among qualities such that it gives the compound object thus united "a title to be call'd one thing, notwithstanding its diversity and composition" (T.221), that which remains the same under all variations of its qualities (T.220), and as that which is simple and perfectly identical (T.219 & T.251). Now the most common feature of all definitions of substance, including those referred to here, is that it is something which is different from qualities, or from perceptions, because it is that which is the support of, or the principle of union between qualities or perceptions. But according to the opening pages of the Treatise, Hume claims that we only ever experience perceptions, or the qualities of objects. It follows that substance cannot possibly form an element of our experience because it is not the sort of thing which can be experienced.

R.W. Church comments that Hume has really begged the question, for "what is ex hypothesi 'represented' cannot itself be present in its alleged representation".¹ Lazerowitz points out that it is Hume the psychologist who has begged the question. The psychological analysis, he says, is really a sham for the matter has already been settled

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R.W. Church, Hume's Theory of the Understanding, (London: Allen, 1935), p. 103.

by definition. In other words it is logically impossible for substance to be a perception:

When it is claimed that none of our senses acquaints us with substance, that they all fail to reveal to us a support of such experienced qualities as shape, colour, and taste, what this claim has to be construed as coming to is that it is logically impossible to perceive in any way the subject of attributes.¹

The fact that it is logically impossible for substance to be an impression does not necessarily mean, as Church seems to suggest, that Hume has not said something important for philosophy. In the previous Chapter it was agreed, with Price and Basson, that Hume's first principle could be a useful logical tool. The function for which it is best suited is that of a criterion of meaningfulness, and it is in that capacity which Hume appears to employ it in the present situation. As we noted in Chapter I, it is unfortunate that Hume should have chosen to clothe his philosophical principles in psychological garb, for it does lay him open to the sort of charge which Church makes against him. Had he used his first principle as a logical principle and not attempted to claim that he was taking an inventory of his perceptions, his case against substance would have gained some strength. However, it must be borne in mind that, as was pointed out in the previous Chapter, Hume's brand of psychology is very different from that

¹M. Lazerowitz, The Structure of Metaphysics, (London: Routledge, 1932), pp. 150-4.

which is generally practised today. He feels justified in asking questions about the foundations of human knowledge, whereas the modern psychologist usually shies away from such issues. Because his aims are different, Hume's approach, too, is different from that of the present day psychologist. Hume is trying to forge a useful theory of meaning, but at the same time he wants to show that as a matter of empirical fact human knowledge is limited in a certain way. These aims are intimately related in the Treatise and perhaps they should not be, but they indicate the sort of reply which Hume would give to both Church and Lazerowitz. He would say that if it is logically impossible to experience substance or not the fact of the matter remains that such a thing cannot be done because human beings are constituted in such a way that they cannot experience substance.

Hume, as Basson says¹, may have deluded himself that he was stating a matter of empirical fact when he said that substance cannot be perceived. Perhaps all that Hume has done is to set up a framework by definition. Ultimately, however, as was pointed out in the previous Chapter, Hume can justify his system by its utility. He may have been mistaken as to what he was in fact doing, in so far as he appears to have confused logic and psychology, but if his

¹Vide supra, p. 22.

hybrid system works, its worth would be indisputable.

Meanwhile it is understandable that philosophers like Church should accuse Hume of begging the question, and that others, such as Price and Lazerowitz, and even Basson, should try to force him into one camp or the other. In Hume's time logic and psychology were subtly intertwined. Were he writing today he could not fail to be either a logician or a psychologist. The temper of the times would not permit a liaison betwixt the two fields.

Hume uses the same form of attack against the concept of substance as self. The crux of the matter, once again, is that he cannot find an impression which answers to traditional definitions of the self, namely one which is both simple and possessed of an uninterrupted existence:

For my part, when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception. . . . [Someone else] may, perhaps, perceive something simple and continu'd which he calls himself; tho' I am certain there is no such principle in me. (T.252)

It really is of little importance whether Hume has taken the trouble to search for a 'simple and continu'd' impression of himself. The important point is that he cannot have an impression which answers to this description. In spite of Hume's claim that his first principle is derived from empirical experience, it does seem that it is a matter of definition that no perception can convey the idea of a

simple entity which endures throughout the course of mental life:

If any impression gives rise to the idea of self, that impression must continue invariably the same, thro' the whole course of our lives; since self is suppos'd to exist after that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable. (T.251)

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Our eyes cannot turn in their sockets without varying our perceptions. Our thought is still more variable than our sight; and all our other senses and faculties contribute to this change; nor is there any single power of the soul, which remains unalterably the same, perhaps for one moment. 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; whatever natural propensity we may have to imagine that simplicity and identity. (T.252-3)

Having disposed of substance by means of his first principle, Hume sets out to show that the concept is really unnecessary. His argument rests on two premises. The first of these is as follows: "Whatever is clearly conceiv'd may exist; and whatever is clearly conceiv'd after any manner, may exist after the same manner." (T.233) In other words, if we can form a clear idea of a horse, then there is no reason why just such a horse should not exist.

The second premise asserts that: "Every thing, which is different, is distinguishable, and every thing which is distinguishable, is separable by the imagination." (T.233) This premise follows from what he has said earlier about the imagination. The second major principle of the Treatise concerns "the liberty of the imagination to trans-

pose and change its ideas". (T.10) We are able to do this because the imagination has the ability to detect that impressions are not inseparable. If impressions are not inseparable, then it follows from the first principle that ideas are likewise not inseparable:

Nor will this liberty of the fancy appear strange, when we consider, that all our ideas are copy'd from our impressions, and that there are not any two impressions which are perfectly inseparable. Not to mention, that this is an evident consequence of the division of ideas into simple and complex. Wherever the imagination perceives a difference among ideas, it can easily produce a separation. (T.10)

Hume, as we have seen, gives a rather confused account of simple ideas. He does not make it clear whether complex perceptions can be analysed logically or psychologically, and whether the results of any analysis of the complex is a logical entity or a perceptually discrete image. However, with regard to Hume's claim for the imagination, we can say in his defence that we can reconstruct ideas in the way he describes. Goats can be given lion heads, and Medusas can be crowned with vipers.

The difficulties which arise from the simple-complex division of ideas is avoided by the comment he makes on the separability of impressions. He could say that chimaera can be constructed only if their elements have been given as simple impressions. This would mean that complex ideas would not have to be analysed into simple images which can exist separately. That is, the imagination would have the liberty

to separate and transpose only those ideas which are copies of impressions which were given separately.

The conclusion which Hume draws from the conjunction of his two premises, that perceptions are distinguishable from one another, and that anything may exist in the manner in which we conceive it, is as follows:

Since all our perceptions are different from each other, and from every thing else in the universe, they are also distinct and separable, and may be consider'd as separately existent, and may exist separately, and have no need of any thing else to support their existence. They are, therefore, substances, as far as this definition explains a substance. (T.233)

By this Hume is not to be understood as advocating a doctrine of substance. His argument is designed to show that the concept of substance as something which exists separately and has no need of anything else to support its existence is otiose because perceptions themselves can fill this particular bill.

In the same way he can show that substance as the support of qualities is also unnecessary: "Every quality being a distinct thing from another, may be conceiv'd to exist apart, and may exist apart, not only from every other quality, but from that unintelligible chimaera of a substance." (T.222)

So far Hume has shown that, within the limits of his own philosophy, substance is both unintelligible and unnecessary. However, he also produces arguments to show that the

concept, even if adopted, can give rise to more problems than it solves. To this end he cites the arguments of the immaterialists against those who claim that mind is composed of material substance. Then he promptly turns the tables on the immaterialists and uses their own arguments against them.

Those who claim that mind is immaterial substance argue against the materialists that if thoughts existed in material substance, they would have to exist in some part of it, and be of specific dimensions. But no-one would hold that thoughts exist to the right or to the left of one another, or that feelings could be "a yard in length, a foot in breadth, and an inch in thickness". (T.234) Therefore, or so the immaterialists argue, mind is immaterial, non-extended substance.

Hume agrees with the immaterialist attack on material substance, but disagrees with the conclusion which they draw from it: "This argument [of the immaterialists] affects not the question concerning the substance of the soul, but only that concerning its local conjunction with matter." (T.235) Hume believes that the immaterialists have made an important observation with regard to the nature of thought and its conjunction with matter. Some thoughts are unextended, and it would be patently absurd to attempt to locate them in an extended material substance. But, Hume points out, one cannot conclude anything concerning the nature of substance from this argument, for there are both extended and non-extended

perceptions.

There must be extended perceptions because: "The first notion of space and extension is deriv'd solely from the senses of sight and feeling; nor is there any thing but what is colour'd or tangible, that has parts dispos'd after such a manner, as to convey that idea." (T.235)

Hume argues that the impressions of sight and touch must be extended, because it is from these alone that the idea of extension can be derived: "To cut short all disputes, the very idea of extension is copy'd 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 it is extended." (T.239-40)

Hume then proceeds to hoist the immaterialists by their own petard. They have shown that non-extended qualities cannot inhere in extended substance. But, as Hume points out, there must be extended perceptions. It follows that extended thoughts must be incompatible with a simple, non-extended immaterial substance:

The free-thinker may now triumph in his turn; and having found there are impressions and ideas really extended, may ask his antagonists, how they can incorporate a simple and indivisible subject with an extended perception? . . . Is the indivisible subject, or immaterial substance, if you will, on the left or on the right hand of the perception? Is it in this particular part; or in that other? Is it in every part without being extended? Or is it entire in any one part without deserting the rest? 'Tis impossible to give any answer to these questions, but what will both be absurd in itself, and will account for the union of our indivisible perceptions with an extended substance. (T.240)

In the same way Hume reveals the superfluity of the debate between the upholders of Spinoza's simple, universal substance, and the advocates of the doctrine of a simple soul. Extended perceptions, argues Hume, must be capable of division. It follows that divisible perceptions can inhere neither in an indivisible universal substance, nor in an indivisible soul.

So far in this Chapter we have examined only Hume's application of his first principle to the doctrine of substance, together with other secondary attacks on that doctrine. Hume's attacks are not limited to metaphysical doctrines alone, however. The first principle, coupled with Hume's underlying dogma concerning the nature of experience, is capable of as forceful an indictment of common-sense belief.

The best expression of Hume's dogma occurs in Book I, Part 11, Section 6. There he makes it quite clear that he is not prepared to admit that there can be experience of anything but perceptions:

Now since nothing is ever present to the mind but perceptions, and since all ideas are deriv'd from something antecedently present to the mind; it follows, that 'tis impossible for us so much as to conceive or form an idea of any thing specifically different from ideas and impressions. Let us fix our attention out of ourselves as much as possible: Let us chace our imagination to the heavens, or to the utmost limits of the universe; we can never really advance a step beyond ourselves, nor can conceive any kind of existence, but those perceptions, which have appear'd in that narrow compass. This is

the universe of the imagination, nor have we any idea but what is there produc'd. (T.68)

We have seen how this dogma, in effect, defines substance out of the realm of intelligible concepts. Substance is not numbered amongst the universe of perceptions, therefore it is not a meaningful concept. However, as Hume is not loth to point out, anything which does not answer to a perception is to be excluded from meaningful discourse. Since the external world cannot possibly present itself as a perception, it, too, must suffer the same fate as the concept of substance: "That our senses offer not their impressions as images of something distinct, or independent, and external is evident; because they convey to us nothing but a single perception, and never give us the least intimation of any thing beyond." (T.189)

We all of us, whether of a metaphysical bent or not, believe in the existence of an external world which is peopled with material objects. Hume, by limiting our experience to perceptions, dispels any empirical basis we might have had for believing in such a world. We never experience both a perception and the external object which it supposed to represent. We only ever experience the former, and, consequently, must cease to claim acquaintance with the latter.

Hume's iconoclasm, when it is extended to cherished beliefs of common-sense, has profound epistemological and ontological consequences. What he has done, in fact, is to remove the grounds we have hitherto had for distinguishing

between objects which exist, and the apparitions which are the results of illusions, dreams and hallucinations. Normally we would test the veracity of our perceptions by appealing to the things of which they are perceptions. For example, we may be deceived into thinking that there is a black cat upon the carpet. On closer inspection this turns out to be a bowler hat. Upon discovering that what we had thought was a black cat is, in fact, a bowler hat, we conclude that we have suffered a delusion. We have submitted our judgement to empirical verification - that is, we have investigated the material world more closely to ascertain if our former opinion as to what was on the mat was correct.

Now Hume, of course, cannot verify his experience in this way, for he denies that any appeal can be made to the external world. It follows that his perceptions must be incorrigible, for since there is nothing present to his experience but perceptions, he can never be mistaken in what he perceives:

Every impression, external and internal, passions, affections, sensations, pains and pleasures, are originally on the same footing; and . . . whatever other differences we may observe among them, they appear, all of them, in their true colours, as impressions or perceptions. And indeed, if we consider the matter aright, 'tis scarce possible it shou'd be otherwise, nor is it conceivable that our senses shou'd be more capable of deceiving us in the situation and relations, than in the nature of our impressions. For since all actions and sensations of the mind are known to us by consciousness, they must necessarily appear in every particular what they are, and be what they appear. Every thing that enters the mind, being in reality as the perception, 'tis impossible that any thing shou'd to feeling appear

different. This were to suppose, that even where we are most intimately conscious, we might be mistaken.
(T.190)

It follows from this and from what he has said concerning the unknowability of the external world that perceptions are the only things of which we can be certain that they exist. Indeed, the very concept of existence is derived from perceptions themselves: "There is no impression nor idea of any kind, of which we have any consciousness or memory; that is not conceiv'd as existent; and 'tis evident, that from this consciousness the most perfect idea and assurance of being is deriv'd." (T.66)

It is inconceivable, as far as Hume is concerned, that the concept of existence should be applied to an external world, for existence is inseparable from perceptions. His reasoning here is that, since existence is not derived from any perception in particular, it must derive from all of them equally. But: "So far from there being any distinct impression, attending every impression and every idea, that I do not think that there are any two distinct impressions which are inseparably conjoin'd." (T.66) That is, no impression is ever found to accompany another invariably, therefore existence is not a separate impression. Neither can it be distinguished by a distinction of reason, for: "That kind of distinction is founded on the different resemblances, which the same simple idea may have to several different ideas. But no object can be presented resembling some object with respect to its exist-

ence, and different from others in the same particular; since every object, that is presented, must necessarily be existent." (T.67)

If it is the case that the only existents of which we have any knowledge are perceptions, why do we so persistently adhere to beliefs in the external/^{world} and to beliefs in entities such as substance? It is clear to Hume that there is some process at work which extrapolates beyond empirical experience:

A single perception can never produce the idea of a double existence, but by some inference either of the reason or imagination. When the mind looks farther than what immediately appears to it, its conclusions can never be put to the account of the senses; and it certainly looks farther, when from a single perception it infers a double existence, and supposes the relations of resemblance and causation betwixt them. (T.189)

Hume's answer to the above question introduces us to the explanatory phase of Book I. The inference to the external world, and, for that matter, to substance, the self and personal identity, is the result of a certain propensity manifested by the imagination. According to Hume the imagination possesses the ability to unite perceptions in respect of certain characteristics. When a strong enough bond has been established, a belief in something quite other than perceptions themselves, such as external bodies, or even substances, is produced.

The explanation Hume offers for our beliefs in the existence of things which are different from the perceptions

themselves is profoundly psychological in character. It is of paramount importance to the present paper for it is by means of it that Hume demonstrates how it is that we come to have a belief in our own personal identity. The part played by the imagination in the production of our sense of personal identity will receive a close examination in the following Chapter. Here we will merely introduce Hume's new doctrine, at the same time examining the part it plays in the production of our beliefs in the external world and in substance.

Hume contends that what distinguishes 'illusory' experiences from what we regard as manifestations of a stable, external world are the coherence and constancy of the latter. (T.195-6) Wyverns rarely appear, if at all, while horses make fairly regular appearances. When horses appear they are all remarkably alike, preserving constant configuration and differing but little from perception to perception. When a series of impressions of a particular object is observed to be constant, that is, changing but little from moment to moment, and coherent, that is, exhibiting only those changes which would normally be associated with that object, then the mind seizes on the uniformity which the series displays, unites all the perceptions in one body, and accords it an existence external to the mind. (T.194-8)

Hume reasons that this process cannot be in the least sophisticated because "children, peasants, and the greatest

part of mankind are induc'd to attribute objects to some impressions, and deny them to others". (T.193) The process, therefore, cannot be a matter of conscious reasoning, but it must be due, instead, to some universal tendency or instinct of the human mind. The faculty which Hume believes is responsible is, as we have seen, the imagination: "Our reason neither does, nor is it possible it ever shou'd, upon any supposition, give us an assurance of the continu'd and distinct existence of body. That opinion must be entirely owing to the IMAGINATION." (T.193)

The imagination unites certain perceptions in respect of their coherence and constancy and thus produces a belief in an external object which those perceptions are supposed to resemble. This belief is characterised by the vivacity of the perceptions so united, and it is this vivacity which provides the criterion by which we distinguish 'real' objects from the things encountered in dreams, states of delirium, illusions and novels.

Strictly speaking Hume's doctrine of natural belief is not intended to explain the origin of the concept of substance. Substance is a sophisticated invention and is not common to the majority of mankind. However it will be seen later that the belief in substance stems from the activity of the imagination in the same way as does the belief in the external world.

Vivacity adds nothing to an impression or to an idea,

just as brightening the colours does not otherwise alter a painting:

A particular shade of any colour may acquire a new degree of liveliness or brightness without any other variation. But when you produce any other variation, 'tis no longer the same shade or colour. So that as belief does nothing but vary the manner, in which we conceive an object, it can only bestow on our ideas an additional force and vivacity. (T.96)

'Force' or 'vivacity' causes us to assent to the existence of an object: "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." (T.629)

That Hume uses so many terms here in an attempt to describe adequately what he means by belief is an eloquent testimonial to the shortcomings of the psychological aspects of his work. His present account lacks the crispness and deftness of his excision of substance by means of the first principle. Mental phenomena, unlike clear-cut logical definitions, are notoriously difficult to pin down, as Hume himself admits in the following passage:

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. And in philosophy we can go no farther, than assert, that it is something felt by the mind, which distinguishes the ideas of the judgement from the fictions of the imagination. It gives them more force and influence; makes them appear of greater importance; infixes them in the mind; and renders them the governing principles of all our actions. (T.629)

In spite of his difficulties, Hume is convinced that he is on the right track, and that everyone is aware of what it is he is trying to say. He himself feels that the difficulty lies with the subject matter and not with his own theory, and he throws down the gauntlet to other philosophers challenging them to give a more satisfactory account of the situation than he has done:

Thus upon a more general view of the subject, there appear to be two questions of importance, which we may venture to recommend to the consideration of philosophers, Whether there be any thing to distinguish belief from the simple conception beside the feeling or sentiment? And, Whether this feeling be any thing but a firmer conception, or a faster hold, that we take of the object? (T.627)

Belief in an external world arises from the unity supplied by the imagination in respect of the coherence and constancy manifested by perceptions. Hume contends that the concept of substance is invented when discerning philosophers detect that the unity supplied by the imagination is really a diversity of perceptions:

By this means there arises a kind of contrariety in our method of thinking, from the different points of view, in which we survey the object, and from the nearness or remoteness of those instants of time, which we compare together. When we gradually follow an object in its successive changes, the smooth progress of the thought makes us ascribe an identity to the succession; because 'tis by a similar act of the mind we consider an unchangeable object. When we compare its situation after a considerable change the progress of the thought is broke; and consequently we are presented with the idea of diversity. (T.220)

The philosopher is confronted with a paradox: the object to which he attributes a unity, is also a plurality. To resolve this paradox he fabricates an unknown something which underlies all change and preserves the unity of objects through change: "In order to reconcile which contradictions the imagination is apt to feign something unknown and invisible, which it supposes to continue the same under all these variations; and this unintelligible something it calls a substance, or original and first matter." (T.220)

The concept of the simplicity of substance arises in the same way. The tendency to regard an object as a collection of qualities, such as colour, taste and texture, runs counter to the primary urge to call it one object. This "obliges the imagination to feign an unknown something, or original substance and matter, as a principle of union or cohesion among these qualities, and as what may give the compound object a title to be called one thing, notwithstanding its diversity and composition". (T.221)

This completes the programme of the present Chapter. Here we have discussed the way in which Hume undermines metaphysical, and even common-sense beliefs, by a vigorous application of the first principle. Whatever status Hume accorded this principle it certainly seems as though he believes that it is more universal than he would be prepared to admit. Reid heralded it as a 'principle of Inquisition', but he neglected to add that the prisoner is always found

guilty before he reaches the dock. If, as Hume says, his first principle is empirical in origin, one would expect him to utilise it with more care. However, this is really no fair criticism of Hume or even a worthwhile criticism. At worst he could be guilty only of dissimulation. More to the point, as was suggested in the previous Chapter, is the utility of his theory. In this paper we shall examine the utility of his theories only within the context of his philosophical works. This is a limited aim but it will serve as a useful assessment of the internal consistency of Hume's system, if such it can be called.

Hume's mode of explanation of the origin of certain common-sense beliefs and metaphysical doctrines have been introduced in this Chapter. In what follows we shall examine the way in which Hume utilises this mode of explanation to evolve his theory of personal identity. It is hoped that the debt this theory owes to the first principle and Hume's psychological bias will become clear in the following Chapter.

CHAPTER. III

HUME'S THEORY OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

Hume's analysis of identity is intricate, but it can be conveniently divided into three broad areas of enquiry. In the first place he seeks to show that we have no idea of identity in the strict sense of the term. Secondly, by analysing the circumstances in which we apply the term, he shows that we need not look for an underlying unity or identity in change. Finally, he describes the principles whereby the imagination is enabled to bind our successive perceptions to produce our belief in identity, and consequently our belief in personal identity.

We have already seen that Hume attacks the concept of a simple, identical self by means of the first principle and by demonstrating that the concept breeds more difficulties than it was designed to solve. The first principle states that all simple ideas are the copies of simple impressions which have preceded them. There is no impression of a simple, identical self, therefore there is no idea of such a self. All our experience, however, is of perceptions alone, and this means that the idea of self is derived solely from perceptions in some way. Hume decides that the whole fund of perceptions collectively constitute the self, and emphasises

that such a collection can never manifest simplicity or identity:

But setting aside metaphysicians of this kind, I may venture to affirm of the rest 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. (T.252)

Since the 'bundle' is ever changing, it fails to present us with an identity: "There is properly no simplicity in it at one time, nor identity in different." (T.253)

As for the usefulness of such a concept as that of a simple, identical self, Hume has already pointed out (T.234-240) that some perceptions are extended, such as those of sight and touch. It is therefore inconceivable to him that such perceptions can exist in a simple, indivisible self.

Identity, in the opening pages of Book I, is deemed to be a relation. Hume attaches two senses to the term 'relation':

Either for that quality, by which two ideas are connected together in the imagination, and the one naturally introduces the other, after the manner above-explained; or for that particular circumstance, in which, even upon the arbitrary union of two ideas in the fancy, we may think proper to compare them. (T.13)

The first of these two sorts of relation Hume calls 'natural relations'. These are the "principles of union or cohesion among our simple ideas" (T.12), "and we may establish [it] for a general rule, that whenever the mind constantly and uniformly makes a transition without any reason, it is influenc'd by these relations". (T.92) No conscious determination

is made of the corresponding qualities of the perceptions to be united:

We are to regard [the uniting principles among ideas] as a gentle force, which commonly prevails, and is the cause why, among other things, languages so nearly correspond to each other; nature in a manner pointing out to every one those simple ideas which are most proper to be united into a complex one.

(T.10-11)

A connexion or association ~~or association~~ can be made between certain simple ideas, and this connexion is the result of the imagination passing smoothly from one simple idea to another with no conscious prompting.

There are three relations only whereby ideas can be united by the imagination: "The qualities, from which this association arises, and by which the mind is after this manner convey'd from one idea to another, are three, viz. RESEMBLANCE, CONTIGUITY in time or place, and CAUSE and EFFECT." (T.11)

The second species of relation Hume calls 'philosophical relations': "'Tis only in philosophy, that we extend [the meaning of the term 'relation'] to mean any particular subject of comparison, without a connecting principle." (T.13-14) Simple ideas are united in respect of the three natural relations, The philosophical relations, of which there are seven, afford only standards of comparison betwixt ideas, and in no way unite them.

In the early sections of Book I identity is referred to as a philosophical relation, and is defined in the foll-

owing terms:

This relation I here consider as apply'd in its strictest sense to constant and unchangeable objects; without examining the nature and foundation of personal identity, which shall find its place afterwards. Of all relations the most universal is that of identity, being common to every being, whose existence has any duration. (T.14)

Even before examining personal identity, Hume decides that there really is no such relation as identity as he has defined it. From what, he asks, could the idea of identity arise? The contemplation of one object¹ gives rise only to the idea of unity:

We may observe that the view of any one object is not sufficient to convey the idea of identity. For in that proposition, an object is the same with itself,

¹Throughout Book I Hume frequently refers to 'objects' in spite of his denial that we can speak meaningfully of the external world. However, he often equates 'object' with 'perception', albeit tacitly. Later in this present section he acknowledges the interchangeability of the terms for the use of this section; he is not always so careful: "In order, therefore, to accommodate myself to their [i.e. ordinary people's] notions, I shall at first suppose; that there is only a single existence, which I shall call indifferently object or perception, according as it shall seem best to suit my purpose, understanding by both of them what any common man means by a hat, or shoe, or stone, or any other impression convey'd to him by his senses." (T.202)

if the idea expressed by the word, object, were no ways distinguish'd from that meant by itself; we really shou'd mean nothing, nor wou'd the proposition contain a predicate and a subject, which however are imply'd in this affirmation. One single object conveys the idea of unity, and not that of identity. (T.200)

Alternatively, if we choose to regard an object throughout its successive states of change, we are presented with the idea of diversity, or of number:

A multiplicity of objects can never convey this idea, however resembling they may be suppos'd. The mind always pronounces the one not to be the other, and considers them as forming two, three, or any determinate number of objects, whose existences are entirely distinct and independent. (T.200)

In short the relation of identity as first defined, on page 14 of the Treatise, is not applicable to objects of our experience. It is, in Humean terminology, a 'fictitious' idea which has arisen as a result of the operations of the imagination.

The 'fiction' of identity arises in the following way. When we consider an object at two different points in time, we can do so in either of two ways. We can consider both states of the object as co-existing at the same time. This gives rise to the idea of number, for the object "must be multiply'd, in order to be conceiv'd at once, as existent in two different points of time". (T.201)

Alternatively we can consider the object as conceived at the first moment as existing in the second moment "without any variation or interruption in the object". (T.201) This

gives rise to the idea of unity.

By both of these means we can arrive at an idea which is something between number and unity, and this Hume calls 'identity':

Here then is an idea, which is a medium betwixt unity and number; or more properly speaking, is either of them, according to the view, in which we take it: And this idea we call that of identity. We cannot, in any propriety of speech, say, that an object is the same with itself, unless we mean, that the object existent at one time is the same with itself existent at another. (T.201)

There is, then, in a manner of speaking, an idea of identity which answers to the definition on page 14, but it is merely a product of the imagination and is not an actual relation which holds between objects:

Thus the principle of individuation is nothing but the invariableness and uninterruptedness of any object, thro' a suppos'd variation of time, by which the mind can trace it in the different periods of its existence, without any break of the view, and without being oblig'd to form the idea of multiplicity or number. (T.201)

This account depends to some extent on Hume's radically empiricist treatment of time. Our idea of time is derived from a succession of objects, and cannot, strictly speaking, be applied to a single, unchanging object. It can only be so applied if, as we have seen, the imagination fabricates a fictitious situation whereby an object can be conceived in multiples at one instant, or as a unity which has duration: "Ideas always represent the objects or impressions from which they are deriv'd, and can never without a fiction represent or be apply'd to any other." (T.37)

Unfortunately, Hume's treatment of time, because of its radically empiricist nature, is controversial, and may not even be adequate within the context of the Treatise.

Kemp-Smith, for example, believes that: "Hume's positive teaching, that space and time consist of physical points is, I think we must agree, one of the least satisfactory parts of his philosophy, as he himself later seems to have recognised."¹

However, his treatment of time plays little part in Hume's treatment of personal identity. So, too, does his theory of relations, which itself gives rise to monumental difficulties. For example, the subject of Section 2 of Part III is an attempt to divine the mode of apprehension of instances of the relation of identity. In that section Hume holds that it an object of perception, as opposed to intuition (T.70), demonstration (T.70), and reason (T.73):

When both the objects are present to the senses along with the relation, we call this perception rather than reasoning; nor is there in this case any exercise of the thought, or any action, properly speaking, but a mere passive admission of the impressions thro' the organs of sensation. (T.73)

Later, In Part IV, Section 2 of Book I, Hume is at great pains to show that identity is not a relation which actually holds between objects. It is a construction of the imagination, and as such cannot be said to be admitted "thro'

¹Kemp-Smith, op. cit., p. 287.

the organs of sensation". Kemp-Smith is surely right when he says that Hume, in Part IV, retracts his previous assertions on identity: "This is Hume's virtual recantation of his first, casual treatment of identity in 1,i,5 and 1,iii,1, where it is regarded as a genuine, non-fictitious special type of relation."¹

Whatever construction is put upon Hume's treatment of identity, it will, perhaps, be seen that it does not affect his treatment of personal identity in Book I, Part IV, Section 6. There his main concern is to show that judgements of personal identity are judgements of specific identity, and not judgements of numerical identity. It is numerical identity which is defined in Part I, Section 5, where it is stated that identity applies to unchanging objects. To fulfil the conditions for numerical identity an object which is perceived at different points of time, or in successive states of change, must be perceived to be one and the same object. Specific identity is merely resemblance - that relation which holds between objects in respect of certain similarities which they bear to one another. This latter type of identity, unlike numerical identity, does not require the existence of a single, uninterrupted object which persists through, or underlies, change. Whatever place identity has

¹Ibid., p. 45, note 1.

in the Treatise, whether it depends on an inadequate analysis of time, or on an inconsistent theory of relations, Hume is still free to analyse the conditions of specific identity to show that there is no need to postulate an enduring 'something' which connects all our perceptions.

The fictional status of the idea of identity is stressed in the crucial Section 6 of Part IV, which is devoted to the treatment of personal identity. Hume's central thesis is that we are mistaken when we attribute identity to a succession of different objects, and that such a mistake arises from our confounding of specific with numerical identity. As the following passage shows, Hume allows that we have an idea of numerical identity, which he has defined as: "The invariableness and uninterruptedness of any object thro' a suppos'd variation of time." (T.201)(61) But he insists that this idea cannot properly be applied to a succession of different objects, however closely related those objects may be:

We have a distinct idea of an object, that remains invariable and uninterrupted thro' a suppos'd variation of time; and this idea we call that of identity or sameness. We have also a distinct idea of several different objects existing in succession, and connected together by a close relation; and this to an accurate view affords as perfect a notion of diversity, as if there was no manner of relation among the objects. But tho' these two ideas of identity, and a succession of related objects be in themselves perfectly distinct, and even contrary, yet 'tis certain, that in our common way of thinking they are generally confounded with each other. (T.253)

Of course, if Hume's assertion, that there is, in reality, no numerical identity, rests neither on his theory of time nor on his theory of relations, then it must be assumed that his grounds for this assertion are yet another example of the dogmatism of which Basson accuses him.¹ Once again it does appear that Hume has so ordered his conception of reality that there is no place in it for the relation of numerical identity. In Chapter II above we saw that Hume's attack on substance by means of the first principle was like this. Substance cannot be found amongst our perceptions because it is not the sort of thing which could be found there. Likewise he appears to be saying here that perceptions cannot represent unchanging objects for they are themselves perpetually changing. In short, we can never experience numerical identity because Hume describes perceptions in such a way that they can never be numerically identical.

A close examination of the Section on personal identity, however, will show that this interpretation is not wholly fair to Hume. In that Section he demonstrates how, on his theory of the association of ideas, it is possible to confuse the relations of specific and numerical identity; and he then proceeds to offer a further analysis of instances in which we attribute numerical identity to objects in order to

¹Vide supra p. 22 and p. 30.

show that we do commonly confuse these relations, and that we are not in the least justified in ever attributing numerical identity in any situation.

Hume maintains that the faculty which is responsible for the confusion between these two ideas of identity is the imagination. The 'smooth passage' of the mind between closely related, but different, objects is closely akin to the contemplation of an uninterrupted object:

That action of the imagination, by which we consider the uninterrupted and invariable object, and that by which we reflect on the succession of related objects, are almost the same to the feeling, nor is there much more effort of thought requir'd in the latter case than in the former. The relation facilitates the transition of the mind from one object to another, and renders its passage as smooth as if it contemplated one continu'd object. This resemblance is the cause of the confusion and mistake, and makes us substitute the notion of identity, instead of that of related objects. (T.254-5)

This transition of the mind, as we have already noted above, is a natural propensity, and occasionally we are aware of the mistake to which it gives rise. So strong, however, is the tendency to regard the related objects as one, that: "We cannot long sustain our philosophy, or take off this bias from the imagination." (T.254) In the end we yield to our 'bias' and pronounce the objects identical. Nevertheless, we are often aware, at the same time, that our acquiescence to our imagination gives rise to a paradox, for the many cannot be a unity. To solve the paradox, we invent various devices to preserve the unity in the face of diversity:

In order to justify to ourselves this absurdity, we often feign some new and unintelligible principle, that connects the objects together, and prevents their interruption or variation. Thus we feign the continu'd existence of the perceptions of our senses, to remove the interruption; and run into the notion of a soul, and self, and substance, to disguise the variation. (T.254)

Still others are "apt to imagine something unknown and mysterious, connecting the parts, beside their relation;" (T.254) Those who are not of such an inventive turn of mind also confuse specific and numerical identity, even though they cannot find "any thing invariable and uninterrupted to justify our notion of identity;" (T.255)

"Thus", says Hume, "the controversy concerning identity is not merely a dispute of words." (T.255) The concept of personal identity is not simply another invention like 'substance' which was designed to account for the apparent unchangeableness of objects. Personal identity is a widespread affliction suffered by the whole of mankind, and is felt even by those who lack the intellectual power to understand philosophical doctrines. In short, although instances of numerical identity simply cannot occur, we experience something very like it.

A very serious objection to Hume raises its head on this score. He himself has claimed that experience is infallible. Now, if this is the case, then we cannot have made a mistake when we believe that we have experienced the relation of numerical identity:

Every impression, external and internal, passions, affections, sensations, pains and pleasures, are originally on the same footing; and that whatever other differences we may observe among them, they appear, all of them, in their true colours, as impressions or perceptions. And indeed, if we consider the matter aright, 'tis scarce possible it shou'd be otherwise, nor is it conceivable that our senses shou'd be more capable of deceiving us in the situation and relations, than in the nature of our impressions. For since all actions of the mind are known to us by consciousness, they must necessarily appear in every particular what they are, and be what they appear. Every thing that enters the mind, being in reality as the perception, 'tis impossible any thing shou'd to feeling appear different. This were to suppose, that even where we are most intimately conscious, we might be mistaken. (T.190)

As Kemp-Smith has said in ~~another~~ context¹, is not Hume "running counter to his avowed position, that immediate awareness is infallible, and that perceptions are in all respects precisely what they are experienced as being"? Laird's comment is that: "A consistent phenomenalist, one would suppose, should have said that if the heap [of perceptions] looked connected it was connected."²

In answer to these objections it must be said that Hume is not just a phenomenalist: he is a dogmatic phenomenalist, as Kemp-Smith himself is not slow to point out.³ He

¹Op. cit., p. 279, where he discusses Hume's doctrine of simples.

²J. Laird, *Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature*, (London: Methuen, 1932), p. 173.

³Op. cit., p. 279.

has carefully defined experience in such a way that it is impossible that we should really experience the relation of numerical identity. Consequently he is enabled to go beyond straightforward belief that something is the case, and can legislate whether it is the case or not. Hume can therefore escape Laird's and Kemp-Smith's criticisms if he admits that numerical identity has already been judged and condemned.

In all fairness to Hume, another aspect of the case must be pointed out. His constant cry is that in asserting numerical identity we are not only making a mistake, but we are aware that we are in error: "We incessantly correct ourselves by reflexion, and return to a more accurate method of thinking, yet we cannot long sustain our philosophy, or take off this bias from the imagination." (T.254) If this is true, Hume can claim empirical verification of his theory. However, Penelhum contends¹ that there is no mistake to be made, and that only amateur philosophers ever detect a 'mistake'. If he is correct, then it must be concluded that Hume has neither analysed human experience adequately, nor has he furnished a dogma which represents a valid logical appraisal of the situation.

Before considering Penelhum's objection we must consider Hume's analysis of those situations in which we attrib-

¹T. Penelhum, "Hume on Personal Identity", Hume, ed. V.C. Chappell, (New York: Anchor, 1966).

ute numerical identity to objects, for it is with this analysis that Penelhum takes issue.

Hume sets out in Section 6 to show, by reference to examples which occur in everyday experience, that we apply the idea of numerical identity to those cases which do not merit it:

What will suffice to prove this hypothesis to the satisfaction of every fair enquirer, is to show from daily experience and observation, that the objects, which are variable or interrupted, and yet are supposed to continue the same, are such only as consist of a succession of parts, connected together by resemblance, contiguity or causation. (T.255)

His catalogue of such instances is comprehensive, ranging over plants, animals and inanimate objects. His central thesis is that change destroys identity in so far as it interrupts the object under scrutiny. Change means diversity, and however much the mutations resemble the original model, they are not identical with it. This thesis rests on the distinction between numerical and specific identity. Objects which are related by specific identity are yet different in number: they are a multiplicity and not a unity. Hume believes that all the examples he gives are cases of specific identity. The application to them of numerical identity is the result of a confusion, for each 'object' he analyses is, in reality, a multiplicity.

A mass of matter must be pronounced numerically identical if all its parts remain the same for any length of time. The slightest change in its parts, however, destroys the

numerical identity, for we are then presented with a multiplicity of objects. But in those instances in which the change is inconsiderable, we are still inclined to regard the object as being perfectly, or numerically identical: "We scruple not to pronounce a mass of matter the same, where we find so trivial an alteration." (T.256)

This is because we experience that 'gentle force' of the imagination which leads the attention from one object to another to which it is closely related: "The passage of the thought from the object before the change to the object after it, is so smooth and easy, that we scarce perceive the transition, and are apt to imagine, that 'tis nothing but a continu'd survey of the same object." (T.256)

Similarly, when the change is continuous but gradual an object is generally thought to preserve its identity: "The mind, in following the successive changes of the body, feels an easy passage from the surveying its condition in one moment to the viewing of it another." (T.256)

Considerable or violent change in a body normally breaks the link provided by the imagination; but there are occasions upon which the imagination can overcome these. For example, the magnitude of the change is less important than its proportion to the whole: "The addition or diminition of a mountain wou'd not be sufficient to produce a diversity in a planet; tho' the change of a very few inches wou'd be able to destroy the identity of some bodies." (T.256)

Again, we are inclined to overlook considerable, and even violent change, when these are regarded as being normal features of an object. A river is just such an object as this:

The nature of a river consists in the motion and change of parts; tho' in less than four and twenty hours these be totally alter'd; this hinders not the river from continuing the same during several ages. What is natural and essential to any thing is, in a manner, expected; and what is expected makes less impression, and appears of less moment, than what is unusual and extraordinary. (T.258)

Considerable change is also overlooked when it is observed that all the parts, both old and new, contribute to some "common end or purpose". (T.257) A ship which has undergone extensive repairs is still considered to be the same ship for: "The common end in which the parts conspire, is the same under all their variations, and affords an easy transition of the imagination from one situation of the body to another." (T.257)

When a sympathy of parts is added to their common end, we are able to account for the identity which we attribute to plants and animals. Over a period of time these change their parts entirely, but not only do the individual parts "have a reference to some general purpose, but also a mutual dependence on, and connexion with each other." (T.257)

Numerical identity and specific identity are confused when we hear a noise which is interrupted and renewed. In spite of the fact that we are aware that we are hearing a

succession of noises we are inclined to call it the same noise, even though "there is nothing numerically the same, but the cause, which produc'd them." (T.258)

The confusion arises when we speak of a church before and after its renovation. If it has fallen into ruin and has been rebuilt we tend to speak of it as the same church, although all its components have been renewed:

Here neither the form nor materials are the same, nor is there any thing common to the two objects, but their relation to the inhabitants of the parish; and yet this alone is sufficient to make us denominate them the same. But we must observe, that in these cases the first object is in a manner annihilated before the second comes into existence; by which means, we are never presented in any one point of time with the idea of difference and multiplicity; and for that reason are less scrupulous in calling them the same.
(T.258)

Penelhum disagrees with the conclusions that Hume draws from his examples. Hume has attempted to show that we frequently mistake specific for numerical identity in the most commonplace circumstances. Penelhum shows that in at least two of his examples Hume has misjudged the situation. He criticises the example of the series of noises on the grounds that no-one would believe that he was hearing a numerically identical noise, in spite of the fact that most people would say that each noise in the series is the same noise. A man who calls the noises 'the same noise' at each occurrence would have done one of two things: either he has attributed a specific identity to them in the awareness that they are exactly similar but numerically different; or he has regarded

the word 'noise' "as roughly equivalent to 'an intermittent series of exactly similar sounds,' in which case the constituent sounds of the noise, in this sense of 'noise', can certainly come and go."¹ In other words, the use of the term 'same' does not commit the hearer to a belief in the numerical identity of the sounds.

Penelhum makes a like criticism of the renovated church. He denies that two piles of stone would ever be confused by anyone, at least in the normal course of events. Hume has accused mankind of confusing the identity of the two piles of stone with the relationship which each bears to the parish. But, says Penelhum, mankind does not do this, for the two piles of stone are patently not the same. Any building which served the needs of a particular parish would be called the church of that parish, but no-one would call two different buildings the same building: "The village church of Muddlehampton can be pulled down and rebuilt again many times with perfect logical propriety."²

Leroy makes the same point against this example. He holds that the identity of the church lies in the relationship between the name saint of the parish, the priest and the congregation - it has nothing whatsoever to do with the building which is used to fulfil the needs of this group:

¹Penelhum, op. cit., p. 230.

²Ibid., p. 231.

L'analyse est incomplète; le vocable de l'église, l'assemblée des fidèles, et la présence des mêmes officiants apportent assez de constance pour justifier une quasi-identification. Le même vocable, la même assemblée, les mêmes officiants, c'est toujours en définitive une même attitude d'esprit à peine troublée par le changement du bâtiment. L'identité d'une église serait alors semblable à celle d'un corps vivant.¹

Leroy also points out that we do not confuse the two church buildings. Even though they do not exist together, and even though both have been accorded the title 'the parish church of such-and-such a place', no-one would call the two buildings the same: "Certes, ce dernier exemple de Hume est moins persuasif; car la comparaison intervient, même si les deux églises n'ont jamais co-existé."²

Can we ever be said to confuse numerical and specific identity as Hume says we can? Penelhum's answer is in the negative. In the first place, Penelhum argues, Hume's paradox never arises. Hume's central point is that we give rise to a paradox when we call a multiplicity a unity. Penelhum, in answer to this, shows that there can, in a sense, be a unity with perfect logical propriety:

Let us call the unchanging single object X. X, we would say, is the same throughout. Let us call our succession of distinct but related objects A, B, C, D, E, F, etc. Here, if we count, we obviously have several, not one. But we can quite easily produce a class-name for the series of them, say ϕ , such that a ϕ is, by definition, any group of things like A, B, C, D, E, F, etc. So there would be no contradiction

¹Andre-Louis Leroy, David Hume, (Paris, 1953), p. 165

²Ibid.

in saying there are six objects and one ϕ ; this is what a ϕ is. Quite obviously our ordinary language works in this way.¹

It follows that there is no absurdity to justify, as Hume claims there is (T.254), for any succession of objects can be subsumed under a class-name:

There is no contradiction in saying "There are six notes in this theme," or "There are six words in this sentence," though there would be in saying "There are six notes but only one," or "There are six words but only one." Naturally this would be absurd, but no one ever says it (for that reason).²

In the second place, Penelhum denies that numerical identity is incompatible with either change or diversity. To say that a thing has changed does not destroy its numerical identity, for it, itself, could not have changed without somehow enduring through change: "I cannot be said to have changed unless I am the same in the numerical sense."³

It is all, Penelhum maintains, a question of definition. Numerical identity is destroyed by change only if the object is, by definition, an unchanging thing.⁴ The concept 'house', for example, contains, among other things, the expectation of change. The destruction and subsequent renewal of the roof does not prompt us to assert the existence of another house, for we expect a house to undergo this sort of change:

¹Penelhum, op. cit., pp. 225-6.

²Ibid., p. 226.

³Ibid., p. 227.

⁴Ibid.

What kinds of changes occur without our having to say that the thing has ceased to exist and given place to something else depends on what kind of thing we are talking about. To know what such changes are is part of what it is to know the meaning of the class-term for that sort of object. A house, or a person, is something which admits of many changes before we would say it had ceased to exist. To know what these changes are is to know, in part at least, what the words "house" and "person" mean.¹

Whether we regard two objects as one or not depends upon the way in which we wish to talk about them. A pile of stones can be considered as a multiplicity of stones or as a house. We could talk of several stones or of one house without breaking any logical laws. However, one house cannot be two houses, and several stones could not be one stone at one and the same time. Only if we were to talk of a house as being at one and the same time two houses would we be perpetrating a logical absurdity, or, as Hume says, creating a paradox. It is Penelhum's claim that any such absurdity would spring from the misuse of a noun and not from the confusion of numerical and specific identity:

Whether we get one or not depends entirely on what nouns we choose to work with, and not on the concepts of identity and diversity. Put generally, whether the result is logically absurd, or logically possible, or logically necessary, if the two phrases "the same continuing x" and "several different y's" are used of the same thing, depends entirely on what nouns we use to replace x and y. It does not depend on the words "same" and "different" in themselves.²

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., pp. 229-30.

Any uneasiness we might feel when ascribing identity to two objects would arise only in the assessment of borderline cases:

In deciding whether the roofless structure in front of us is a house or a heap of stones, we may have reached a point where the conventions governing neither expression are sufficient to tell us, and we just have to decide for ourselves and, in so doing, make these conventions more precise.¹

Our uneasiness would be due not, as Hume says, to a conscious struggle between numerical and specific identity, but to the lack of a precise definition which would be applicable in this particular circumstance. Our criteria for deciding between houses and piles of stones would have let us down because "our words are not geared to meet every eventuality."²

What does Penelhum's attack mean for Hume's treatment of identity? The former has shown that there is no paradox in calling a multiplicity a unity, or in calling an object which manifests various states of change one object. Consequently there is no 'mistake' to be made, and Hume is incorrect when he says that we all of us all the time make the mistake of attributing numerical identity when there is none.

However, Penelhum admits that Hume may well be correct in his diagnosis of the rationalist claim that there is

¹Ibid., p. 232.

²Ibid., p. 233

some unifying entity which underlies change or a multiplicity of parts:

The philosophers in question may have found a contradiction between saying that a thing has changed and saying that it is still the same thing; and they may have tried to overcome this by saying that there is in fact some crucial aspect in which the thing will not have changed, and inventing the self to fill the bill.¹

As far as Penelhum is concerned, these particular philosophers "need not have bothered; since there is no contradiction there to be avoided, the fiction is unnecessary."² And he further points out that, while Hume may be correct in his denunciation of the fiction³ of an underlying self, he is at fault in conceding the main premise of the philosophers he attacks, that there is a contradiction here.⁴

Therefore Hume and Penelhum can at least make common cause over the issues of 'substance' and 'self', for both are agreed that they are fictional entities. However, Penelhum denies that numerical identity is fictitious. He argues that whatever are the merits of Kemp-Smith's suggestion of 'Pickwickian' as meaning something less censorious than 'fictitious' ^{ious}⁵, there is nothing in the least wrong with calling

¹ Ibid., p. 234.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid., pp. 233-4: "I agree that the self is a fiction."

⁴ Ibid., p. 234.

⁵ Ibid., p. 235: q.v. Kemp-Smith, op. cit., p. 501.

people or things 'the same':

Whether [Hume's] account of what makes us talk of identity in this mistaken or Pickwickian way is intended as a description of how we hide the paradox from ourselves, or merely of what enables us to talk with a perfectly proper lack of concern for it, it is in either case misdirected, since our apparent unconcern for the paradox is due to its nonexistence, and what he in fact describes are the factors governing the use of substantives, and not the misuse of the adjective "same".¹

Hume's contention in his theory of personal identity is that there is no real identity, that is, numerical identity, obtaining between our successive mental states. The identity we feel to be there is the result of the binding forces provided by the imagination. Had he agreed with Penelhum, as it seems he must do, his theory might not have developed this psychological twist. If Penelhum is correct, and it is the case that the meanings of nouns override considerations of identity and diversity, then Hume should, perhaps, have forsaken his psychology, and have embarked instead on a programme of linguistic analysis.

However, it must be said that even though Hume were to agree with Penelhum, he would still be free to offer a psychological explanation for our ability to construct concepts which embody the expectation of change and multiplicity. Penelhum has only said that it can be done: Hume tries to show how it is done. That is, Penelhum gives his logical

¹Ibid., p. 236.

approval and Hume reveals the psychological mechanism responsible for the feat. Looked at in this light, it really makes very little difference to Hume's account of personal identity whether we are involved in a paradox or not.

This interpretation encounters difficulties in Hume's language. In the following passage he insists that there can be no 'perfect', or numerical, identity in the face of a multiplicity of perceptions:

'Tis evident, that the identity, which we attribute to the human mind, however perfect we may imagine it to be, is not able to run the several perceptions into one, and make them lose their characters of distinction and difference, which are essential to them. (T.259)

However, it is clear from Penelhum's account that he, too, would say that several perceptions could not actually be one, although they could form a single series. Now a few lines after this passage Hume allows for the possibility that these perceptions can be regarded as one, but, as he rightly points out, this 'oneness' needs clarification: "But, as, notwithstanding this distinction and separability, we suppose the whole train to be united by identity, a question naturally arises concerning this relation of identity." (T.259)

The question which arises is crucial for Hume:

Whether [the relation of identity] be something that really binds our several perceptions together, or only associates their ideas in the imagination. That is, in other words, whether in pronouncing concerning the identity of a person, we observe some real bond among his perceptions, or only feel one among the ideas we form of them. (T.259)

This question would not necessarily conflict with Penelhum's views. All Hume has to do is admit that perceptions can, without logical impropriety, be considered to be elements in a single series. He can still ask whether the unity is perceived, or whether it is imposed upon perceptions by the mind. Hume does, in fact, answer this question, and he also elaborates upon the way in which we do construct a unity from a diversity.

The question whether the unity is experienced in perception or is merely felt is, for Hume, a rhetorical one. He has already decided to his own satisfaction that there is no perceivable connexion between perceptions, and that any connexion is provided only by the imagination. This assumption underpins his whole theory of the association of ideas:

This question we might easily decide, if we wou'd recollect what has already been prov'd at large, that the understanding never observes any real connexion among objects, and that even the union of cause and effect, when strictly examin'd, resolves itself into a customary association of ideas. For from thence it evidently follows, that identity is nothing really belonging to these different perceptions, and uniting them together; but is merely a quality, which we attribute to them, because of the union of their ideas in the imagination, when we reflect upon them. (T.259-60)

Hume wants to say that the association of ideas unites perceptions only in respect of the qualities of resemblance, contiguity and causation which they actually possess. No perceptions possess the quality of numerical identity. Therefore, no perceptions are ever united in respect of such

a relation.

Because the relation of numerical identity cannot exist among perceptions themselves, it follows for Hume that it is merely a fabrication of the imagination, or, in other words, a 'fiction'. By his own first principle, if an idea is not derived from an impression it cannot be applied to perceptions. Consequently, the concept of numerical identity is incorrectly applied to the world of reality. If his account is to agree with Penelhum's, it must therefore be amended, and the province which will suffer most severely will be that of the association of ideas. Hume's answer would, in fact, have to be a Kantian one. He must say that, while the relation of identity is not itself a perception, it is an a priori condition of our perceiving. Its reality would not derive from perceptions themselves, but from the fact that it is a real category which can be applied to experience. In short, Hume appears to have asked the correct question about the relation of identity, but his theory of association and his notion of reality provide him with quite the wrong answer.

It is interesting to speculate on Hume's motives for rejecting his original claim that the relation of identity is the most universal of all the relations. At the outset of the Treatise he has no misgivings as to the non-fictional status of the relation, and he still accords it this status in Sections 1 and 2 of Part III of Book I. He does not

recant his original view until Section 2 of Part IV when he accuses the principle of individuation of giving rise to a mistaken belief in the external world. Without examining whether or not this accusation is justified, it can, perhaps, be said that Hume's quarrel with identity stems from his fear that it gives rise to other 'fictions', such as external bodies, substances and selves. In some way he seems to feel that the relation of identity will somehow undermine the autonomy of discrete perceptions, and will pave the way for those unknown principles of unity which he holds in such abhorrence. Penelhum, however, shows that the acceptance of a doctrine of numerical identity does not commit him to a doctrine of substance, or to any other rationalist doctrine. It seems, therefore, that Hume's attack on rationalism has gone too far, and has carried him beyond the point to which Kant returned, with more evidence of success, some forty years later.

Hume, then, for his own motives, and for what are probably not good philosophical reasons, chooses to deny the reality of the relation of identity in his search for a satisfactory account of the origin of our awareness of personal identity. It is to this account that we must now turn our attention.

We already know that the idea of personal identity is produced by the activity of the imagination. "The only question, therefore, which remains, is, by what relations

this uninterrupted progress of our thought is produc'd, when we consider the successive existence of a mind or thinking person." (T.260)

Contiguity is dismissed at once as having no bearing on the case. He rests the burden of producing the idea of personal identity on resemblance and causation, but gives no reason for his rejection of contiguity. This is strange, for the relation of contiguity is so intimately bound up with that of causation: "We may therefore consider the relation of CONTIGUITY as essential to that of causation." (T.75) He points out in this passage that there are some objects which are "not susceptible of juxtaposition and conjunction", and refers the reader to Part IV, Section 5 of Book I. It turns out that these objects are simple, unextended substance and extended perceptions, or, alternatively, extended substance and unextended perceptions.

If contiguity is so closely linked to causation, why does Hume say it has no bearing on the production of personal identity? Kemp-Smith asks an even more fundamental question, namely that if causation is dependent upon contiguity, why does Hume not reduce the former to the latter and have only two natural relations, namely those of resemblance and contiguity?¹ Kemp-Smith's answer is that contiguity alone is

¹Op. cit., pp. 242-50.

insufficient to establish a causal nexus, for it conveys the idea only of a relation in space. Causation, however, is the result of constant contiguity of perceptions over a period of time. Therefore, besides contiguity, the idea of temporal priority is necessary for the production of the idea of causality. This answer may suffice to satisfy our own enquiry. Contiguity, being only a spatial relation, is insufficient to establish the connectivity which an individual feels he perceives when he investigates his own past. Causality, which contains the concept of temporal priority and succession, enables the individual to connect all his past experiences. We will treat of causation in more detail after an examination of resemblance.

Resemblance plays its part via the medium of memory:

For what is the memory but a faculty by which we raise up the image 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 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 not only discovers the identity, but also contributes to its production, by producing the relation of resemblance among the perceptions. (T.260-1)

Causation plays a rather more subtle role, but by far the more important one, in the production of personal identity. The relation of cause and effect is established by the constant conjunction of objects, the cause always being prior to the effect (T.173). Numerous instances of observed conjunctions give rise to a habitual association of the two ideas in

the mind. That is, when only one of the ideas is present, the other is recalled. Causation is the only relation which can be "trac'd beyond our senses, and informs us of existences and objects, which we do not see or feel." (T.74) Because of this attribute causation enables us to bridge the gaps in our memories. Memory is, in large measure, responsible for causation because it is the means whereby like conjunctions of ideas may be recalled. Once the relation is established, however, it can go beyond memory, or what is remembered:

We can extend the same chain of causes, and consequently the identity of our persons beyond our memory, and can comprehend times, and circumstances, and actions, which we have entirely forgot, but suppose in general to have existed. For how few of our past actions are there, of which we have any memory? Who can tell me, for instance, what were his thoughts and actions on the first of January 1715, the 11th of March 1719, and the 3d of August 1733? Or will he affirm, because he has entirely forgot the incidents of these days, that the present self is not the same person with the self of that time; and by that means overturn all the most establish'd notions of personal identity? In this view, therefore, memory does not so much produce as discover personal identity, by showing us the relation of cause and effect among our different perceptions. 'Twill be incumbent on those, who affirm that memory produces entirely our personal identity, to give a reason why we can thus extend our identity beyond our memory. (T.262)

The way in which causation actually accomplishes this feat is revealed in the following passage:

The true idea of the human mind, is to consider it as a system of different perceptions or different existences, which are link'd together by the relation of cause and effect, and mutually produce, destroy, influence, and modify each other. Our impressions give rise to their correspondent ideas; and these ideas in their turn produce other impressions. One thought chaces another, and draws after it a third,

by which it is expell'd in its turn. In this respect, I cannot compare the soul more properly to any thing than to a republic or commonwealth, in which the several members are united by the reciprocal ties of government and subordination, and give rise to other persons, who propagate the same republic in the incessant changes of its parts. And as the same individual republic may not only change its members, but also its laws and constitutions; in like manner the same person may vary his character and disposition, as well as his impressions and ideas, without losing his identity. Whatever changes he endures, his several parts are still connected by the relation of causation. And in this view our identity with regard to the passions serves to corroborate that with regard to the imagination, by the making our distant perceptions influence each other, and by giving us a present concern for our past or future pains or pleasures. (T.261)

This passage demands some clarification, because, as Laird points out, it leads to difficulties in interpretation of Hume's theory of causation:

Regarding [the role causation plays in the production of personal identity] Hume's description was still more obscure. For him 'causes' were only associative expectations. Therefore the mental 'heap' could not really be connected by causation in the same objective sense as the constituents of the heap might resemble one another. Yet what other intelligible meaning could be read into Hume's statement ([T]261) that our "different perceptions are link'd together by the relation of cause and effect, and mutually produce, destroy, influence and modify each other"?¹

By the 'objective sense' in which objects resemble one another, Laird probably refers to the fact that ideas resemble one another in respect of a common quality such as 'greenness'. Causation, of course, is not like this. It is the result of

¹J. Laird, Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature, p. 174.

a constant association of ideas in the mind: a sufficient number of like conjunctions of ideas, the one idea always preceding the other, builds up an expectation that such a conjunction will always occur. This is what Laird means by 'associative expectations'.

Laird's point appears to be that since perceptions are not connected by causation in respect of some common quality, the heap cannot be united in the way that Hume says it is by the relation of causation. He seems to imply that Hume is thinking of a stronger connexion than that of a mere 'associative expectation', namely some sort of causal efficacy that holds between perceptions. If this is what Hume means, then he is contradicting his own theory of causation, for earlier he has said that we do not have "any impression, that contains any power or efficacy." (T.161) And yet, as Laird asks, what else can Hume mean when he speaks of the mutual modification and destruction of ideas? The following interpretation is offered here in an attempt to exonerate Hume of the charge of inconsistency, and also to clarify the meaning of the 'republic' passage.

Hume uses causation to explain why it is that we feel justified in asserting that our selves have preserved their identities even throughout those periods of time of which we have no recollection. As an illustration of how effective is the bond of causation between our successive ideas he draws a parallel between the mind and a republic. The parallel has

its dangers, because republics are things of the external world, of which he says we can know nothing. Further, it is generally assumed that events in the material world are connected by some sort of causal efficacy; that a war, for example, is the outcome of material forces which are brought to bear on a certain situation, and is not merely a conjunction of some events with others. However, Hume must say that the relation of causation between events is only a product of the mind - it does not exist between the events themselves, but is imposed on them by the imagination. If we look closely at our republic we see that it is made up of a succession of events which have no connexion other than that provided by the imagination. Causal relationships are the result of long experience of observing like successions of events, and a constant conjunction between certain sorts of events, one sort always being temporally prior to another sort.

Hume's republic would seem to be connected by the causal relation in the following way. In spite of the fact that a republic is in a constant state of flux from the date of its inception, it is clear to all observers that each change is related to the prior state of affairs. This feeling that there is a relationship between successive states of affairs is the result of much experience of similar changes in this and in other republics. By this means the feeling arises that the republic has maintained its identity through change, even though, strictly speaking, the change has dest-

royed its numerical identity.

In carrying over the parallel to the mental world, Hume now appears to say that one state of mind can be said to have caused another state of mind only because we are accustomed to the one constantly following the other. By manifesting successive changes of states of mind an individual can be said to change through the years, and his identity, like that of the republic, is really destroyed. But the establishment of the causal relation by means of the associative expectation between his different states of mind leads him to believe in his own identity. If this interpretation is correct there is no need to attribute to Hume any doctrine of dynamism or causal efficacy between perceptions, other than the dynamics of the association of ideas by the imagination.

As we have seen, Hume also relies on causation to establish the belief that we have existed during those periods of which we have no recollection. Hume's point seems to be that an individual, having created a causal nexus between his remembered perceptions, is led to assert that such a nexus exists throughout the whole succession of perceptions, remembered and forgotten. Causation does not bring forgotten perceptions back to the light of remembrance, but it does impress upon us that what happened during our unreclected periods was responsible for what we are now. Consequently we regard them as being a part of our own history, and not a part of someone else's. Hume has forgotten what he thought on

the first of January, 1715, but he would remember the events of a period prior to that. He would also know from past experience that each day in his life is connected, albeit associatively, with the next. This leads him to assume that his identity has been preserved intact even during those periods which he has forgotten.

It must be remembered that Hume is not offering a proof of our continued existence through unrecollected periods of our lives. His aim is to show how it is that we are convinced of our numerical identity, and, as we have seen, his explanation is a psychological one, resting as it does on the association of ideas produced by the imagination.

As a postscript to the section on personal identity, Hume shows that the very same mechanism which is responsible for the production of the sense of personal identity can produce the concept of the simplicity of the self:

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

(T.263)

In this Chapter we have examined Hume's analysis of identity, his proofs that there is not necessarily an underlying unity which persists through change, and, finally, his psychological explanation for our belief in personal identity. With regard to Hume's treatment of identity, it was seen that his radically empiricist account of time weakens it a great deal. This weakness is, to some extent, compensated by his further treatment of identity in Section 6 of Part IV. However, with regard to his later treatment, it was seen that there is no paradox in asserting numerical identity of perceptions and that, consequently, Hume has made a serious error in saying that the relation of identity is a fiction. It was noted that he can still maintain that there is no underlying entity which preserves the identity of an individual through change, but the fact that the relation of identity is not a fiction renders his psychological explanation of the mechanism which constructs this fiction otiose. He would, perhaps, have been better advised to show how it is that the relation of identity is objective, even though it is not a characteristic of the perceptions themselves.

However, we ought to follow Basson's advice and accept Hume's account of the universe until we have assessed its utility. Little can be done in this respect within the terms of the present paper, and we shall confine ourselves in the following Chapter to an examination of the utility of Hume's principle for his own theories.

CHAPTER IV

PERSONAL IDENTITY IN BOOK II OF THE "TREATISE"

Many of Hume's commentators believe that the theory of the self which Hume propounds in Book I is inadequate to the tasks which Hume sets it in Book II of the Treatise. Generally it is felt that Hume needs a self which is different from the 'bundle of perceptions' which are connected by the imagination in respect of the two natural relations resemblance and causation. It will be the purpose of this Chapter to allay suspicions that the self of Book I is inadequate when applied to Book II.

This attempt, to reveal the adequacy of Book I for the purposes of Book II, at least, in respect of the theory of personal identity, could play a part in the general justification of Hume's theories on the grounds of their utility. It will be remembered that Basson suggests just such a justification. As we have already indicated, the scope of this paper is too narrow to admit of a general justification here, but the proof of the utility of the self within Hume's framework may go some little way in this direction.

Of course, if Penelhum is correct in saying, as he appears to do, that the relation of numerical identity is

non-fictitious, then it is difficult to see how Hume's theory can be applied to the real world, for it is his aim to deny that there is any experience whatever of numerical identity, except in the fictitious sense. However, if Hume's 'system' of impressions and ideas is at all useful in framing theories about such things as meaning, and the foundations of human knowledge, then this in itself may be sufficient justification to ignore what Penelhum has said, and it may, as Butchvarov has suggested¹, render Kant's theory of relations not false but superfluous. But these are issues far too wide for this paper, and we have to confine ourselves to an assessment of the internal adequacy of Hume's theory of personal identity.

Book II of the Treatise is a survey of human emotions, and of the mechanisms by which they operate. Two categories of emotion are especially controversial as far as personal identity is concerned. These are the passions, and man's capacity for sympathising with his fellows.

The passions evoke an immediate interest in the present context, for Hume has already referred to them in the Section on personal identity. (T.261) There he seems to suggest that the passions play a part in the production of personal identity. It will be remembered that in that Section he sets himself the task of explaining why it is

¹Panayot Butchvarov, "The Self and Perceptions: A Study in Humean Philosophy", Philosophical Quarterly, (April, 1959), p. 109.

that we believe in our own self identity when none of the elements in our experience is permanent: "What then gives us so great a propension to ascribe an identity to these successive perceptions, and to suppose ourselves possess of an invariable and uninterrupted existence thro' the whole course of our lives?" (T.253)

In answer to this question Hume says that we must differentiate between personal identity "as it regards our thought or imagination and as it regards the passions or the concern we take in ourselves." (T.253) Personal identity "as it regards our thought or imagination" is the subject of the last ten pages of Section 6. As was seen in the previous Chapter of this paper, the imagination unites successive perceptions in respect of the natural relations resemblance and causation, thus giving rise to the idea of the identity of the self. This idea is not derived from an impression, but is a fabrication of the imagination: it is, therefore, a fictitious idea.

Personal identity "as it regards the passions or the concern we take in ourselves" is not dealt with in Section 6, and is presumably left until the discussion of the passions in Book II. At the end of the 'republic' passage, however, in Section 6, Hume does mention the subject of the passions again. That particular passage, it will be remembered, emphasises the causal relationship which obtains between past and present states of mind. Hume terminates his observations

with:

And in this view our identity with regard to the passions serves to corroborate that with regard to the imagination, by the making our distant perceptions influence each other, and by giving us a present concern for our past or future pains or pleasures. (T.261)

If it is true that the passions operate in this way, that is, by giving us a concern in ourselves, and if the self with which it makes us concerned should be the same with the bundle of connected perceptions, then at least one commentator's suspicions will have been allayed.

Hendel is convinced that the weakness of his theory of the self became apparent to Hume in the course of writing Book II of the Treatise. The demands made by the doctrine of the passions are cited as the causes of Hume's change of heart.¹ Hendel claims that both doctrines would seem to require that we be conscious of ourselves. Further he states that the self of which we are conscious should be "more real than anything that enters our ken, despite our inability to seize upon any distinct perception of it."

It will be argued here that Hume's self is real enough for the purposes of Book II, and that the 'identity' of which he is conscious sufficiently explains the phenomena of sympathy and the passions. The question as to what Hume himself thought of his own theory will be dealt with

¹Hendel, op. cit., p. 229. The relevant passage is quoted in full in Chapter V below.

in Chapter V below.

In order to assess the adequacy of Hume's theory of the self for the doctrines of Book II we must examine the relevant doctrines of the latter Book carefully. First of all we shall deal with the passions.

The passions are simple¹ impressions of reflexion, and arise only upon the prior appearance in the mind of an impression or an idea (T.275). For the purposes of this Chapter an examination of the account Hume gives of the passions of pride and humility will suffice: "The passions of PRIDE and HUMILITY being simple and uniform impressions, 'tis impossible we can ever, by a multitude of words, give a just definition of them, or indeed of any of any of the passions. The utmost we can pretend to is a description of them, by an enumeration of such circumstances as attend them." (T.277)

Foremost among these circumstances is the intimate relationship between pride and humility and the self. Whatever the state of affairs we may be contemplating, if it is not related to the self in some way, then neither pride nor humility is generated:

¹By 'simple', as the following quotation makes clear, Hume means 'unanalysable'. However, there are manifold difficulties with Hume's doctrine of simples, especially with regard to the question of the analysis of perceptions. For a discussion of these difficulties, see Chapter I above, especially pp. 5-9.

'Tis evident , that pride and humility, tho' directly contrary, have yet the same OBJECT. This object is self, or that succession of related ideas and impressions, of which we have an intimate memory and consciousness. Here the view always fixes when we are actuated by either of these passions. According as our idea of ourself is more or less advantageous, we feel either of those opposite affections, and are elated by pride, or dejected with humility. Whatever other objects may be comprehended by the mind, they are always consider'd with a view to ourselves; otherwise they wou'd never be able either to excite these passions, or produce the smallest encrease or diminition of them. When self enters not into the consideration, ther is no room either for pride or humility. (T.277)

Thus far all is well. The self to which Hume refers is the orthodox self of Book I, namely "That succession of related ideas and impressions." However, he may only be paying lip service to a now defunct doctrine. Only a detailed examination of the doctrine of the passions will reveal whether or not Hume is justified in retaining the self of Book I.

The self is the object only, and not the cause of the passions, for these two passions, of pride and humility, are contrary and can never make an appearance together: "'Tis impossible a man can at the same time be both proud and humble." (T.278) The causes of these passions must be something other than the self, and Hume sees them as being variously qualities of the mind and body, and also more remote objects, such as family, possessions and nationality:

Every valuable quality of the mind, whether of the imagination, judgement, memory or disposition; wit, good-sense, learning, courage, justice, integrity;

all these are the causes of pride; and their opposites of humility. Nor are these passions confin'd to the mind, but extend their view to the body likewise. A man may be proud of his beauty, strength, good mein, address in dancing, riding, fencing, and of his dexterity in any manual business or manufacture. But this is not all. The passion looking farther, comprehend[s] whatever objects are in the least ally'd or related to us. Our country, family, children, relations, riches, houses, gardens, horses, dogs, cloaths; any of these may become a cause either of pride or humility. (T.279)

This passage contains an explicit recognition that the mental world is in some way different from the physical world. On the face of it this would not seem to accord at all with the doctrine of Book I which reduces all knowledge to knowledge of mental events. There Hume has assumed that all experience is of perceptions only, and that consequently meaningful statements about any world not composed of perceptions cannot be made. Therefore it would seem that Hume is not entitled to talk about physical objects.

To this charge Hume would answer that it is simply the case that we do differentiate between our perceptions in this way. We believe that some perceptions represent a world which is external to our world of perceptions, and we believe that other perceptions represent nothing external to our world of perceptions. These latter we describe as internal. Thus, although the question may be raised as to how we come to make this distinction between internal and external worlds, there can be no question that we actually do make the distinction:

Thus the sceptic still continues to reason and believe, even tho' 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. We may well ask, What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body? but 'tis in vain to ask, Whether there be body or not? That is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasonings. (T.187)

The causes which induce us to believe in the existence of bodies external to ourselves have been examined in Chapter II above. There it was seen that the constancy and coherence of certain perceptions induce the imagination to attribute to them the properties of distinct and continued existence. It follows that Hume can speak of an external world only if he is prepared to admit that he is adopting the concepts of the vulgar (T.202), and is not asserting the existence of such a world.¹

However, another more serious charge can be laid against Hume on the basis of the passage from his discussion of the passions quoted above. According to his theory of the self as outlined in Book I, the mind is composed of all our perceptions. How then can he regard perceptions of "gardens,

¹Hume, in I, iv, 2, acknowledges an instance in which he speaks as though there were immediate acquaintance with the external world. The full relevant quotation is given in Chapter III above, p. 51, note 1.

horses, dogs, cloaths", and even the impressions of pride and humility themselves, as being related to the mind when they are, on his own account, actually a part of the mind? Hume's answer is that since there is no observable connexion between perceptions, they can be considered as existing separately from one another, and as existing separately from the mind itself:

Now as every perception is distinguishable from another, and may be consider'd as separately existent; it evidently follows, that there is no absurdity in separating any particular perception from the mind; that is, in breaking off all its relations, with that connected mass of perceptions, which constitute a thinking being. (T.207)

When the passion of pride, for example, is brought into play, we must therefore differentiate carefully between the impression of pride itself, the perception which occasioned it and the bundle of perceptions which is the self to which attention is drawn by the passion. In order to justify such a differentiation Hume need only say that it can be done: his task is merely to reveal the mechanism responsible for the process.

It is clear that on the basis of Book I perceptions can be separated off from the mind. Of course, any perception which is present to the awareness must be in reality a part of the bundle of perceptions which make up the self. What Hume probably means is that the passion and the object which excites it are both considered to be separate from the mind, and

and can be so considered without apparent contradiction. Hume must say that, as a matter of fact, the passions and the exciting objects of the passions are not separate from the mind; but he can also say that, because there is no necessary connexion between perceptions other than of forming part of the bundle which is present to awareness, it is possible to consider perceptions as existing in other relationships to one another. In other words, a particular part of the bundle can be considered to be the self, and other parts of the bundle can be seen as external objects which stand in a certain relationship to the part of the bundle which is called the self. That this is done is no justification for the practice, but it is an explanation of the sort of thing which goes on when people's passions are aroused.

Hume says that we must be concerned with objects in some way if they are to produce any passion at all in us: "Beauty, consider'd as such, unless plac'd upon something related to us, never produces any pride or vanity." (T.279) On the other hand, however, that we are concerned with the object in question is not enough. The object itself must be possessed of some quality which is capable of affecting us in some way: "The strongest relation alone, without beauty, or something else in its place, has as little influence on that passion." (T.279)

Briefly, the passion of pride, for example, is produced in the following way. We perceive an object which belongs to us, and we further perceive that it is beautiful; its beauty causes a sensation of pleasure within us; this feeling of pleasure, because it is caused by a quality in an object which belongs to us, gives rise to the sensation of pride. (II, i, 5)

This mechanism operates only because pride has, as its special object, the self, and because the self has the capacity for experiencing that passion: "We must suppose that nature has given to the organs of the human mind, a certain disposition fitted to produce a peculiar impression or emotion, which we call pride: To this emotion she has assign'd a certain idea, viz. that of self, which it never fails to produce." (T.287)

This last quotation seems to imply that pride does not merely recall to the attention the idea of self, but rather creates the idea of the self. This interpretation is borne out by an earlier statement in the same account: "[A] passion, when excited, turns our view to another idea, which is that of self. Here then is a passion plac'd betwixt two ideas, of the one [e.g. an external object] produces it, and the other the self is produc'd by it. The first idea,

therefore, represents the cause, the second the object of the passion." (T.278)

The general impression gained from his account of the passions, however, is that pride and humility merely fix the attention on an idea of the self which is constructed by the imagination: in other words, the self to which the passions direct us is the same with the self of Book I. The description of the self of Book I is given in two consecutive paragraphs in the opening of the discussion of pride and humility: "This object is the self, or that succession of related ideas and impressions, of which we have an intimate memory and consciousness", and "That connected succession of perceptions, which we call self." (T. 277)

The principle whereby the passions associate themselves with the self is a fresh one. Because it is different from the natural and philosophical relations already encountered, the appellation 'anomolous' lends itself as an apt label:

I find, that the peculiar object of pride and humility is determin'd by an original and natural instinct, and that 'tis absolutely impossible, from the primary constitution of the mind, that these passions shou'd ever look beyond self, or that individual person, of whose actions and sentiments each of us is intimately conscious. Here at last the view always rests, when we are actuated by either of these passions; nor can we, in that situation of mind, ever

lose sight of this object. For this I pretend not to give any reason; but consider such a peculiar direction of the thought as an original quality. (T.286)

The new principle of association is "original and natural" and therefore cannot be reduced to either of the two species of relation to which we were introduced in Book I. Apart from this novel feature, however, all appears to be as it was before. "That individual person" of whom we are "intimately conscious" seems to be the self of Book I. Unfortunately, Hume's language here has caused Hendel and Kemp-Smith to believe that Hume is no longer content with the self of Book I. Since our task here is to show that the self of Book I is adequate for the purposes of Book II, we will defer discussion of this point until our next Chapter.

We are now in a position to clarify Hume's assertion that "our identity with regard to the passions serves to corroborate that with regard to the imagination." Since the passions of pride and humility operate with respect to all our perceptions, they are able to link our present selves with our past achievements and accomplishments. Moreover, they are able to link the self with the future, in so far as they inspire the self with hope for, or fear of, what is going to take place. Whether the causes of pride or humility are remembered perceptions, present impressions, or imaginative constructions of the future, in every case they direct the attention to the self, and link the self, as a bundle of perceptions, to these other perceptions. It is our contention here that Hume can

assert this doctrine without loss of consistency. If we are correct, then it must follow that the self of Book I is adequate for Hume's doctrine of the passions.

We must now examine the allegation that the self of Book I is inadequate for Hume's doctrine of sympathy. As in the case of the passions, this examination should include an outline of Hume's doctrine.

Hume's teaching on sympathy is an attempt to explain why it is that we share so intimately the experiences of others: "No quality of human nature is more remarkable, both in itself and in its consequences, than that propensity we have to sympathize with others, and to receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own." (T.316)

This propensity Hume believes is due to the fact that the relations of resemblance, contiguity and causation obtain between people:

Now 'tis obvious that nature has preserv'd a great resemblance among all human creatures, and that we never remark any passion or principle in others, of which, in some degree or other, we may not find a parallel in ourselves. The case is the same with the fabric of the mind, as with that of the body. However the parts may differ in shape or size, their structure and composition are in general the same. There is a very remarkable resemblance, which preserves itself amidst all their variety; and this resemblance must very much contribute to make us enter into the sentiments of others, and embrace them with facility and pleasure. Accordingly we find, that where, beside the general resemblance of our natures, there is any peculiar similarity in our manners, or character, or country, or language, it facilitates the sympathy. . . . Nor is resemblance the only rela-

tion , which has this effect, but receives new force from other relations, that may accompany it. The sentiments of others have little influence, when far remov'd from us, and require the relation of contiguity, to make them communicate themselves entirely. The relations of blood, being a species of causation, may sometimes contribute to the same effect. (T.318)

The mechanics of sympathy consist in an 'enlivening' of the idea we have of another person. The degree to which that idea is enlivened depends on the strength of the relation between which obtains/ourselves and the other person: "The stronger the relation is betwixt ourselves and any object, the more easily does the imagination make the transition, and convey to the related idea the vivacity of conception, with which we always form the idea of our own person." (T.318) The idea of the other person becomes enlivened to such a degree that we have the same concern for it that we would have for ourselves. By the same token, the mood of the other person as manifested by his overt behaviour becomes enlivened to such a degree that it is converted into an impression of reflexion - it becomes, in effect, our mood: "When any affection is infus'd by sympathy, it is at first known only by its effects, and by those external signs in the countenance and conversation, which convey an idea of it. The idea is presently converted into an impression, and acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself , and produce an equal emotion, as any original affection." (T.317)

The theory of the self as applied to the doctrine of sympathy can now be examined. In two passages from the acc-

ount of that doctrine Hume talks of the self in the following terms: "'Tis evident, that the idea, or rather impression of ourselves is always intimately present with us, and that our consciousness gives us so lively a conception of our own person, that 'tis not possible to imagine, that any thing can in this particular go beyond it" (T.317), and "All these relations, of contiguity, resemblance, and causation which obtain between ourselves and others when united together, convey the impression or consciousness of our own person to the idea of the sentiments or passions of others, and make us conceive them in the strongest and most lively manner." (T.318) It cannot be denied that Hume is speaking here as though there were, in fact, an impression of the self. However, in Book I of the Treatise he expressly denies that there is such an impression:

It must be some one impression, that gives rise to every real idea. But self or person is not any one impression, but that to which our several impressions and ideas are suppos'd to have a reference. If any impression gives rise to the idea of self, that impression must continue invariably the same, thro' the whole course of our lives; since self is suppos'd to exist after that manner. But there is no impression constant and invariable. (T. 251)

The self of Book I is a complex idea whose constituent parts are the whole fund of impressions and ideas which present themselves to human experience. The complex is bound together by the relations of resemblance and causation which give rise to the fictitious idea of personal identity. This is the self of reality: the self of fiction is a permanent, identical entity which endures even through the flux of perc-

options. Is Hume, in his doctrine of sympathy, seriously asserting that it is the latter which is the real self, and thereby denying the utility of the theory of Book I?

Kemp-Smith believes that Hume is in the throes of rejecting the self of Book I. His point is that Hume must reject this self, for it is patently inadequate for the doctrine of sympathy. The latter doctrine rests on the fact that our idea of the other person is enlivened to a very great degree. It is this liveliness which causes us to concern ourselves so much with it. But such liveliness is the mark of an impression¹, or would seem to be. It follows that if our idea of the other person is enlivened to such a degree as to become an impression, then we must be to ourselves an impression:

Hume, in his references to the ever present concept of the self, alternates between the terms 'concept', 'idea', 'impression', and 'consciousness'. But perforce the 'concept' of the self has to be an impression; otherwise it would not, on his teaching, have discharged the functions required - the transfer of a native liveliness, a liveliness which Hume insists is to be found in actual impressions alone.²

In Hume's defence it could be argued that there is no definite boundary between impressions and ideas. He points

¹"Those perceptions, which enter with most force and violence, we may name impressions. . . . By ideas I mean the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning." (T.1)

²Kemp-Smith, op. cit., p. 173.

out in the opening paragraphs of Book I that: "In sleep, in a fever, in madness, or in any very violent emotions of soul, our ideas may approach to our impressions: As on the other hand it sometimes happens, that our impressions are so faint and low, that we cannot distinguish them from our ideas." (T.2) It is possible, therefore, that what Hume really means when he speaks of an impression of the self in Book II is that the idea of the self is so lively that it is mistaken for an impression. If this is the case, then such a lively idea could surely fulfil the function of an impression, namely that of imparting a native liveliness to the idea of another person.

Against this suggestion could be raised the thorny issue of the incorrigibility of perceptions.¹ Hume, in the very heart of Book I, asserts that perceptions cannot be anything other than they appear to be: "Every thing that enters the mind, being in reality as the perception, 'tis impossible any thing shou'd to feeling appear different. This were to suppose, that even where we are most intimately conscious, we might be mistaken." (T.190) From this it follows that if the 'idea' we have of the self appears to be an impression, then it must be an impression.

Of course, this conclusion undermines the whole of Hume's analysis of personal identity in Section 6. His whole thesis rests on the fact that what passes for an idea of a

¹This issue has already been discussed above, Chapter III, p. 60.

simple, identical self is analysable into component perceptions united by the imagination. We have seen that he denies ever having experienced an impression of himself, and that this denial leads to the analysis of the idea of the self. Now we find that the doctrine of sympathy has forced him to accord such a great deal of vivacity to the idea of the self that it must be taken at its face value as an impression. It seems that Hume must either give up his attempt to analyse the self, or forsake his doctrine of sympathy.

The only course left open to Hume is first of all to reassert that the succession of perceptions can at one time be observed as a unity, and at other times as a plurality: "However at one instant we may consider the related succession as variable or interrupted, we are sure the next to ascribe to it a perfect identity, and regard it as invariable and uninterrupted." (T.254) This ensures that the idea of the self is analysable.

Secondly, he can then point out that the unifying activity of the imagination, whereby perceptions are connected in respect of the natural relations, is manifested as a 'gentle force' (T.10). This gentle force Hume would call an impression. It would not be idea, for, by the first principle, all ideas are copies of impressions, and the gentle force does not copy anything. But what sort of impression could it be? It could not be called an impression of sensation, for those arise "without any antecedent perception"

(T.275), and the force arises only when there are other perceptions to be connected. Its most likely label, therefore, is that of an impression of reflexion. These arise only on the prior appearance of an impression of sensation or of an idea, or even on the prior appearance of another impression of reflexion. Unfortunately, Hume has defined impressions of reflexion as being "passions, and other emotions resembling them." (T.275) However, there is no reason why he could not add the gentle force to his list of impressions of reflexion..

If Hume does number the gentle force among his impressions of reflexion, then he could assert that it is its vivacity which imparts a liveliness to the idea of another person. At times this liveliness would quite obscure the fact that our ideas of our own selves, and of those others with whom we are concerned, are actually ideas and not impressions. But this would not prevent us, on occasions, from perceiving the true state of affairs, namely that ideas of ourselves and those of other selves are analysable in the way in which Hume describes in Section 6. If this interpretation is allowed, then there need be no clash between the doctrine of personal identity as given in Book I, and the doctrine of sympathy as given in Book II of the Treatise.

Further evidence against the view that there is a clash between the self of Book I and the self of Book II

appears in the course of Hume's development of his doctrine of sympathy. At one point, Hume finds that his whole theory of sympathy will collapse unless he invokes the aid of the self of Book I. The situation arises in the following way. In Part 11 of Book II Hume observes: "'Tis evident, that as we are at all times intimately conscious of ourselves, our sentiments and passions, their ideas must strike upon us with greater vivacity than the ideas of the sentiments and passions of any other person." (T.339) Later in the same paragraph he formulates a new law: "The imagination passes easily from obscure to lively ideas, but with difficulty from lively to obscure."

The conjunction of these two statements undermines the doctrine of sympathy. That doctrine requires that the attention be directed from the contemplation of our own feelings to those of others. However, Hume now asserts that our own feelings are more lively than those of other people, and that the imagination does not pass easily from more to less lively perceptions. Consequently it is impossible that we should ever come to regard the feelings of others as our own, as the doctrine of sympathy requires.

To resolve this inconsistency, Hume first of all asserts that the attention is not always directed upon the self. The attention is directed to the self when the self is the object of a passion, but "in sympathy our own person is not the object of any passion, nor is there any thing, that

fixes our attention on ourselves." (T.340)

This alone does not save the doctrine of sympathy. In sympathy the object of our compassion must be related to the self, but if the self is not seen as part of the relationship, then the mechanism of sympathy is again paralysed. It is at this point that Hume utilises the concept of the self which was produced in Book I. He argues that, since the self is the sum total of all our perceptions, it is perceived as long as there are perceptions. Further, he implies that there is a distinction between 'internal' perceptions, such as the passions, and 'external' perceptions, such as the overt behaviour of another person.¹ It follows, from these premises, that when the attention is directed to 'external' perceptions, such as the overt behaviour of another person, the self is still in view. According to the doctrine of the separability of perceptions², the overt behaviour of another person is easily distinguished from the rest of our perceptions, so that other people can enter into a relationship with the self which is one of blood, nationality, or close proximity, without being considered a part of the self. This, at least, is the construction we place upon the following passage:

¹Vide supra, pp. 92-3 for Hume's grounds for making this distinction.

²Vide supra, p. 94.

Ourselves, independent of the perception of every other object, is in reality nothing: For which reason we must turn our view to external objects; and 'tis natural for us to consider with most attention such as lie contiguous to us, or resemble us. But when the self is the object of a passion, 'tis not natural to quit the consideration of it, till the passion be exhausted. (T.340-1)

In other words, the presence of a passion inhibits the separating off from the bundle of perceptions of the perception of another person; but when the passions have ceased to operate, then such a distinction among perceptions can be made. Further, when we make the distinction, we can still be said to be "intimately conscious of ourselves", for the external perceptions are as much constituents of the self as the internal ones.

The only difficulty with this interpretation is that it fails to explain how it is that the related external person can be related to the self in terms of blood, nationality, or in terms of anything at all, since the part of the bundle which is normally believed to characterise the self is not present to the attention. The only solution we can offer here is that the appearance of a collection of attributes, labelled 'external person', can possibly strike a chord in one's memory, reminding one that here is a person who resembles, or is somehow related to, that bundle normally characterised as the self.

If our interpretation is correct Hume has successfully salvaged his doctrine of sympathy only by invoking the self

of Book I. By utilising this self he has rendered consistent two otherwise conflicting doctrines, namely that the attention can be directed from the self to another person and can infuse the perception of the other person with the native liveliness of the self, and that the attention moves with difficulty from lively to more obscure perceptions.

The success of Hume's salvage operation would endorse what has been argued at large in this Chapter, namely that the doctrine of the self of Book I is adequate for the purposes of Book II. The part played by the self in the doctrine of the passions and in the doctrine of sympathy has received a full examination, and in each case it has been seen that it is possible to argue that the self of Book I is both consistent with, and adequate for those doctrines.

The results of this argument will play a role in the next Chapter. There an examination will be made of the claim that Hume himself later rejects his theory of the self as expressed in Book I. In concluding this present Chapter, however, it is interesting to note the effect which its findings may have on a theory held by Kemp-Smith.

In the Preface to his work "The Philosophy of David Hume" Kemp-Smith asks:

Why is it that in Book I of the Treatise the existence of an impression of the self is explicitly denied, while yet his theory of the 'indirect' passions [i.e. pride and humility], propounded at length in Book II, is made to rest on the assumption that we do in fact

experience an impression of the self, and that this impression is ever-present to us?¹

His answer is that Books II and III of the Treatise are prior in order of composition to Book I.² He further points out that Hume, when referring to the self, alternates between the terms 'concept', 'idea', 'impression' and 'consciousness' in Book II.³ This vacillation, he says, is symptomatic of Hume's realisation that Books I and II contradict one another. Kemp-Smith is led to believe, partly on the basis of this evidence, that the doctrines of sympathy and of the passions were formulated first, that the concept of the self Hume then used was the self qua an impression, and that Hume later had difficulty in reconciling these doctrines with the self as it made its appearance in the posterior Book I:

If I am correct in assuming that he formulated his doctrine of sympathy prior to the development of the doctrines proper to Book I, it is natural to suppose that his later uneasy awareness of the contradiction between the two Books has necessitated these alternative wordings; as when he uses the cumbersome non-committal phrase "the impression or consciousness of our own person", as well as the more definite phrase "the idea, or rather impression of ourselves".⁴

¹Op. cit., p. v.

²Ibid., p. vi.

³Ibid., p. 173. (Vide supra p. 102)

⁴Ibid.

If, as we have tried to prove in this Chapter, there is no contradiction between the self of Book I and the self of Book II, some of the grounds at least for Kemp-Smith's theory will have been removed. His theory will not have been invalidated because he has other grounds on which to base it,¹ but it can gain no strength from Hume's treatment of the self.

In the way of a Parthian shot it is worth noting that even at the beginning of Book III of the Treatise Hume still sees fit to utilise the self of Book I:

It has been observ'd, that nothing is ever present to the mind but its perceptions; and that all the actions of seeing, hearing, judging, loving, hating, and thinking, fall under this denomination. The mind can never exert itself in any action, which we may not comprehend under the term of perception. (T.456)

At least, the language used here suggests that Hume still believes in the self of Book I. However, it may be that he has now come to believe that the self which loves, hates and thinks is manifested as an impression. His attitude becomes excessively enigmatic - just how much so will be seen in the following Chapter.

¹Ibid., p. vi.

CHAPTER V

HUME'S LATER ATTITUDE TO HIS THEORY OF PERSONAL IDENTITY

The attention which Hume devotes to his theory of personal identity in Book I of the Treatise marks it out as a major thesis of that work. It is, therefore, surprising that his later works contain no reference to this theory. Hume, however, nowhere gives a clear statement of his motives for this omission, and consequently has left posterity with an enigma: why did Hume abandon a theory on which he had expended so much effort?

The Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding parallels the first Book of the Treatise. For example, at the outset Hume restates the first principle which he has formulated in Book I of the Treatise: all ideas are copies of impressions which precede them and which they resemble in every respect but their vivacity. Missing from the Enquiry, however, are the discussions on the immateriality of the soul and on personal identity which occupied so much of his attention in the earlier work. In the Treatise the concept of a simple, identical self is analysed by means of the first principle, and it is found to be reducible to a succession of perceptions which are united by the imagination in respect of the natural relations. Since the first principle makes its app-

pearance in the first Enquiry, it is difficult to see why the analysis of personal identity does not.

An examination of the external evidence reveals only that Hume later rejected the Treatise. Some eleven years after completing the Treatise he makes the following comment in one of his letters: "So vast an Undertaking, plan'd before I was one and twenty, and compos'd before twenty five, must necessarily be very defective. I have repented my Haste a hundred, and a hundred times."¹ The "vast Undertaking" is none other than the Treatise of Human Nature! In 1754, three years after penning this comment, he expresses himself even more strongly to one whom Kemp-Smith identifies as an unfriendly critic:²

That you may see I wou'd no way scruple of owning my Mistakes in Argument, I shall acknowledge (what is infinitely more material) a very great Mistake in Conduct, viz my publishing at all the Treatise of human Nature, a Book, which pretended to innovate in all the sublimest Parts of Philosophy, and which I compos'd before I was five and twenty. Above all, the positive Air, which prevails in that Book, and which may be imputed to the Ardour of Youth, so much displeases me, that I have not the Patience to review it.³

Hume was obviously disenchanted with the Treatise, but he does not tell us just what is the cause of his displeasure.

¹"Letters of David Hume", ed. Greig, i, p. 158, quoted from Kemp-Smith, op. cit., p. 532.

²Kemp-Smith, op. cit., p. 532.

³"Letters", ed. Greig, i, p. 187, ibid.

In any event, he does not impute it to his theory of personal identity.

It has been suggested that Hume was in search not of philosophical but of literary acclaim. That he received neither on the appearance of his Treatise is now a part of the folklore of Philosophy: "Never literary attempt was more unfortunate than my Treatise of Human Nature. It fell dead-born from the press."¹

Standing between Hume and the accolades of the literary world were the radical theories of Book I of the Treatise. One of these theories, of course, is his theory of personal identity, which overturns all established concepts of the reality of the underlying unity of the self. It is, therefore, possible that Hume rejected the more radical theories of the Treatise in order that his later works should receive the serious attention he so ardently desired. Kruse is a supporter of this theory:

It is well known that in his later life Hume time after time suppressed his most radical ideas in order to be better appreciated by the public, and it is characteristic that in his autobiography he describes the "ruling passion" of his life not as a Spinoza would have done, as the urge of philosophical cognition, but love of literary fame. And this literary ambition was not of the nature which was content with the immortality usually accorded to great thinkers by a late posterity; but, practical and concrete as he was, he craved first and foremost the admiration of his contemporaries. . . . And therefore he

¹David Hume, My Own Life, Chap. 1.

was consistently led to regard the judgement of the public as his supreme court, his only guide in his literary work.¹

Kemp-Smith argues against this view at great length.² He claims that Hume rejected his theory on philosophical grounds, and that the first Enquiry represents a more mature appraisal of the contents of the Treatise. In order to understand Kemp-Smith's claim fully, we must first of all briefly recapitulate Hume's explanation of the origin of the awareness of personal identity.

Hume's theory of personal identity is a product of two major principles of the Treatise. The first of these is that all ideas are derived from precedent impressions, and the second is that the only connexion which obtains between perceptions is the 'gentle force' supplied by the imagination in respect of the natural relations. The first principle leads to the denial that there is a simple, identical self which underlies the flux of experience. Instead, using the principle of the association of ideas, we can assert only that the idea we have of personal identity is a fictitious one, which is to say that it is a fabrication of the imagination and has no application to the elements of experience.

Kemp-Smith believes that Hume became more aware, as

¹Vinding Kruse, "Hume's Philosophy in his Principal Work", (Oxford University Press), Eng. trans., p. 8, quoted from Kemp-Smith, op. cit., p. 520.

²Op. cit., Chapter XXIV.

his philosophical acumen developed, that the idea of the identity of the self is not reducible to a complex of perceptions united by the imagination, but that it is as real as anything that enters our experience. As evidence that the doctrine of association of ideas was later felt by Hume to be unsatisfactory as a mode of explanation of everyday beliefs, he points to the fact that it is not so widely used in the first Enquiry. Heralded as a "major discovery" in Book I,¹ and as "the cement of the universe" in the Abstract,² it is omitted in the first Enquiry as an explanation for belief in an independently existing world. That belief is there treated as an ultimate - it is unavoidable and, at the same time, irreducible in the way Hume claimed in Book I of the Treatise. Beset as he was by the realisation that his own identity was non-fictitious, and troubled by the inadequacy of the associative mechanism as an account of it, it is, says Kemp-Smith, scarcely to be wondered at that Hume omits all mention of his theory of identity in his later works. Nor is it to be wondered at that Hume cannot think of anything better to put in its place, for Hume's whole fund of experience is composed of discrete perceptions which do not manifest numerical identity nor any underlying unity.³

¹Treatise, p. 33.

²D. Hume, "An Abstract of a Treatise of Human Nature", ed. J.M. Keynes and P. Sraffa, (Cambridge University Press, 1938), pp. 31-2, quoted from Kemp-Smith, op. cit., p. 533.

³Kemp-Smith, op. cit., p. 534.

Kemp-Smith gains support for his theory from Hume's comments on personal identity in the Appendix to Book III of the Treatise. There Hume confesses that: "Upon a more strict review of the section concerning personal identity, I find myself involv'd in such a labyrinth, that, I must confess, I neither know how to correct my former opinions, nor how to render them consistent." (T.633) The source of his dissatisfaction appears to be the associative mechanism which unites perceptions: "All my hopes vanish, when I come to explain the principles, that unite our successive perceptions in our thought or consciousness. I cannot discover any theory, which gives me satisfaction on this head." (T.635-6)

The doctrine of the association of ideas plays a role of paramount importance in the production of the idea of personal identity. According to the most hallowed principles of Book I, perceptions, which are the sole constituents of human experience, are distinct and separable from one another:

Whatever is distinct, is distinguishable; and whatever is distinguishable, is separable by the thought or imagination. All perceptions are distinct. They are, therefore, distinguishable, and separable, and may be conceiv'd as separately existent, and may exist separately, without any contradiction or absurdity. (T.634)

Not only are perceptions distinct, but there is no perceivable connexion which binds them together: "No connexions among distinct existences are ever discoverable by human understanding." (T.635) In the face of such a disconnected plurality of existences, how is it that the concept of

a simple, identical self arises at all? The answer Hume has given in Book I is that the imagination unites, or associates, ideas in respect of the relations of resemblance and causation to produce the idea of personal identity. This idea is fictitious because there is nothing in the world of experience to which it applies - it is merely a construction of the imagination. In the Appendix it appears that Hume is no longer happy with this explanation: "I am sensible, that my account is very defective, and that nothing but the seeming evidence of the precedent reasonings cou'd have induc'd me to receive it." (T.635)

Hume's diagnosis of the root cause of his dissatisfaction is puzzling:

In short there are two principles, which I cannot render consistent; nor is it in my power to renounce either of them, viz. that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and that the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences. Did our perceptions either inhere in something simple and individual, or did the mind perceive some real connexion among them, there wou'd be no difficulty in the case. For my part, I must plead the privilege of a sceptic, and confess, that this difficulty is too hard for my understanding. I pretend not, however, to pronounce it absolutely insuperable. Others, perhaps, or myself, upon more mature reflexions, may discover some hypothesis, that will reconcile those contradictions. (T.636)

It is simply not the case that the two principles, that distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and that the mind never perceives any real connexion between distinct existences, are inconsistent. Kemp-Smith endorses this statement, and goes so far as to say that, within the context

of the Treatise, the second principle follows from the first:

When Hume says that he cannot render the two principles consistent, he cannot mean what he certainly appears to be saying, viz. that the two principles are inconsistent with one another. So far from the two being inconsistent, the second is a corollary to the first: it states no more than what at once follows from the very special sense in which Hume uses the term 'distinct', i.e. as what is not only distinct in thought but also is never perceived to be in any way dependent upon that from which it is so distinguished.¹

To compound this puzzle, Hume's remarks give rise to a second. He states quite clearly that his problem would be solved if perceptions inhered in a substance, or if a real connexion could be perceived between perceptions. Is Hume on the verge of accepting either of these alternatives, or is he rejecting both?

If he accepts either alternative, the main body of doctrine of Book I must inevitably collapse. Both alternatives have been rejected by a vigorous application of the first principle: there is no impression of a substance, nor is there an impression of a real connexion between perceptions; consequently there can be no idea of either. The acceptance of either must result in the rejection of the first principle, and the flood gates would be opened to a host of a priori concepts which Hume has gone to such great lengths to deny, for the basic premise of the Treatise states that all the

¹Ibid., p. 558.

elements which make up concepts are derived from bare experience of impressions. It is unlikely that Hume would undertake demolition on such a scale without careful prior consideration.

Kemp-Smith agrees with this view, though not wholly, perhaps, for the right reasons:

Hume is not suggesting, as may on first reading appear, that either of these alternatives is really possible. On the contrary, he is rejecting both without qualification. They clash with the principles, neither of which, as he has declared in the opening sentence of the paragraph, is he prepared to renounce. The former suggestion is inconsistent with the first of his principles, and the latter suggestion is a direct denial of the other principle.¹

We must agree with Kemp-Smith that the principle that no real connexion is discovered among perceptions is a direct denial of the second suggestion, namely that a real connexion is in fact perceived. However, it is not so evident that the first principle, that all our perceptions are distinct existences, is inconsistent with the dictum that all our perceptions inhere in something simple and individual.

Hume nowhere says that the two latter doctrines are inconsistent. Instead he argues that perceptions cannot exist in a homogeneous substance, be it extended or non-extended, for some perceptions are themselves extended, and others are non-extended. Since non-extension is incompatible with exten-

¹Ibid. Kemp-Smith's own footnote refers the reader to T.634 and T.233.

sion, it is absurd to locate perceptions solely in either sort of substance. (T.234 ff.) Nevertheless, this argument, together with the application of the principle that ideas resemble impressions which precede them, is sufficient in Hume's eyes to dispose of the concept of a simple, identical substance which underlies perceptions, or in which perceptions inhere.

It is, then, most likely that Hume was rejecting the two alternatives, and was not thinking of them as useful additions to his own philosophy. However, the very fact that Hume has mentioned them sheds light on what is, perhaps, the real source of his dissatisfaction. He seems to be saying that the association of ideas cannot provide a strong enough link between discrete perceptions to account for the intense conviction of the identity of the self, but that something like the two alternatives mentioned could provide a sufficiently strong connexion. If this interpretation is correct, Hume is not stating that his two principles are inconsistent with one another, but that they are incompatible with the immanent reality of the identity of the self. This is Kemp-Smith's appraisal of the situation: "Hume must have meant that the two principles cannot be rendered consistent with what has yet to be allowed as actually occurring, namely, the awareness of personal identity."¹

¹Ibid.

If it is the case that Hume is now convinced beyond all shadow of doubt of his own identity, the situation is truly disastrous. He cannot reconcile his principles of the discreteness and disconnectedness of perceptions with the sense of his own identity, and yet he cannot give up those principles: "In the very act of confessing to failure Hume reaffirms the principles which have been responsible for it."¹

This interpretation gains strength from an item of external evidence. In a letter which he wrote to his cousin Henry Home, Lord Kames, some six years after completing the Treatise, Hume expresses admiration for the latter's theory of personal identity, but laments that he cannot accept it:

I like exceedingly your Method of explaining personal Identity as more satisfactory than any thing that had ever occur'd to me, As to the Idea of Substance, I must own, that as it has no Access to the Mind by any of our Sense or Feelings, it has always appeared to me to be nothing but an imaginary Center of Union amongst the different & variable Qualitys that are to be found in every Piece of Matter. But I shall keep myself in Suspence till I hear your Opinion.²

The central claim of Kames' account³ is that personal identity rests on a lively sense of identity. This is an

¹Kemp-Smith, op. cit., p. 559.

²"New Letters of David Hume", ed. R. Klibansky and E. Mossner (Oxford, 1954), pp. 20-21, quoted from Albert Tsugawa, "David Hume and Lord Kames on Personal Identity", Journal of the History of Ideas, 1961, p. 398.

³This exposition is synthesised from Tsugawa's article. He quotes as its source: Kames, Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion, 1751 and 1759.

impression and is to be found among our impressions of reflexion. It is, in short, an irreducible consciousness of the unity of the self.¹

As Tsugawa points out,² Hume could only know the identity of his self if it were intuitively known or if it were deductively proven. By intuition Hume appears to mean direct acquaintance with a set of impressions having a certain set of characteristics: "When any objects resemble each other, the resemblance will at first strike the eye, or rather the mind." (T.70) By deduction he means the revealing of relationships which may not be immediately apparent to the mind: "When two numbers are so combin'd, as that the one always has an unite answering to every unite of the other, we pronounce them equal." (T.71) Personal identity is something of which everyone is aware without the aid of deduction. It follows that Hume must intuit an identity between his perceptions if he is to know his own identity. It is Tsugawa's belief that Hume was undecided as to whether he can intuit his own identity or not: "[Hume] was, as we saw, of two minds as to whether we can intuit our own self identity. This is the most interesting feature brought out by the letter to Lord Kames."³

¹Tsugawa, op. cit., pp. 398-9.

²Ibid., p. 403.

³Ibid.

Of course, Hume's problem is precisely this, that he cannot experience the relation of identity between objects which are not numerically identical. Perceptions can be the same in the sense that they resemble one another, but they cannot be said to remain unchanged between successive appearances.

Hendel concurs with the interpretation that Hume became convinced of the reality of his self identity, but could not reconcile it with the premises of Book I of the Treatise. He believes that the moment of truth arrived at some point during the composition of the last two Books since there Hume needed a theory of the personality which was stronger than that of Book I, and that this new revelation forced him even more deeply into his scepticism:

At some time during the writing of the last Book of the Treatise Hume began to suspect his original account of the idea of "personal identity". He felt it necessary to tell us so, in the Appendix to that book. Just what aroused in him this suspicion of failure to explain "mind" itself, we can only surmise. He was much occupied, in both the later books, with the subject of personality. The dominating passions centred about persons. Morality and society were meaningless apart from persons. And not only that, but the all pervasive factor of sympathy was unintelligible without self-consciousness. Thus he had been lured into some bold speculations about the ultimate source of sympathy, deriving it from a native concern for the self which is always operative in mankind. This may have induc'd him to reflect upon his earlier treatment of the self, and thus to discover some new reasons for a skepticism in philosophy.¹

¹Op. cit., p. 229.

There are three possible objections to the interpretation that Hume rejected his theory of personal identity on philosophical grounds. In the first place the traditional assumption that Hume was confessing to failure in the Appendix may be incorrect. It may be the case that Hume was asserting that, uncomfortable as his theory is, the facts themselves defy the application of any other. After all, it is not Hume's fault if a careful analysis of experience should fail to substantiate the most cherished convictions of mankind. His 'confession', therefore, may be a general one for all philosophers to recite, namely that no theory can really hope to explain the phenomenon of the belief in personal identity. In other words, he may, as Hendel suggests, have discovered "some new reasons for a skepticism in philosophy". But this does not mean that he has anything to be humble about. It may, when all is said and done, rank as a major philosophical discovery. If Hume himself believed this, then the 'confession' passage can be read not as an admission of failure, but as a piece of typical Humean irony whose real import is that, as usual, Hume has had the last word on the subject: "For my part, I must plead the privilege of a sceptic, and confess, that this difficulty is too hard for my understanding. I pretend not, however, to pronounce it absolutely insuperable. Others, perhaps, or myself, upon more mature reflexions, may discover some hypothesis, that will reconcile those contradictions." (T.636)

In the second place we must take into consideration the conclusion reached in Chapter IV of this paper. There it was argued that Hume's theory of personal identity as expressed in Book I of the Treatise was quite adequate for the purposes of Book II. It is not inconsistent with the theory of the passions, and the phenomenon of sympathy can be explained satisfactorily in terms of a self which is only a lively idea, and of which only one element, namely the gentle force, is really capable of infusing the idea of the self and of the other person with the requisite vivacity. If this interpretation is correct, then at least some of the grounds we have for believing that Hume was dismayed by his theory will have been removed. It also diminishes the number of possible philosophical reasons Hume may have had for rejecting his theory.

Lastly it may be relevant to re-examine a comment made earlier in this Chapter¹ upon the relationship between the Treatise and the first Enquiry. It was observed that Hume omits the association of ideas in his later work as an explanation for the belief in an independently existing world. Instead he treats it as an ultimate which is not reducible to a complex of perceptions united by the imagination. This inevitably leads to the question of why it is that Hume did

¹p. 116.

not treat of personal identity in the same way. Had he treated personal identity as an irreducible belief, he could have avoided the thorny pathways into which his associationist doctrine led him, and he could, at the same time, have possessed himself of an irreducible awareness of identity which is so beloved of traditional doctrines.

The answer to this question could cast an unfavourable light on Hume's personality. It is possible, as Kruse suggests, that Hume played down his more radical doctrines in order to impress his public. If this is true, then it is also possible that he declined to treat personal identity as an irreducible awareness for the same reason, namely that even in that form the concept was too radical for his public. Unable to assert, and perhaps even convinced of the impossibility of ever asserting the reality of the self, he omitted all mention of it in order to avoid alienating his readers.

Of course, Hume may have had some other motive in mind than a rather naive ambition to be lionised by his contemporaries. Kemp-Smith provides what is perhaps the happiest suggestion of all when he says that Hume tired of philosophical debate and devoted his later years to his first love — the field of belles-lettres.¹

¹Op.cit., pp. 537 ff.

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