

# Hume's *Treatise*, Book 1

## *5. Of the Sceptical and Other Systems of Philosophy*



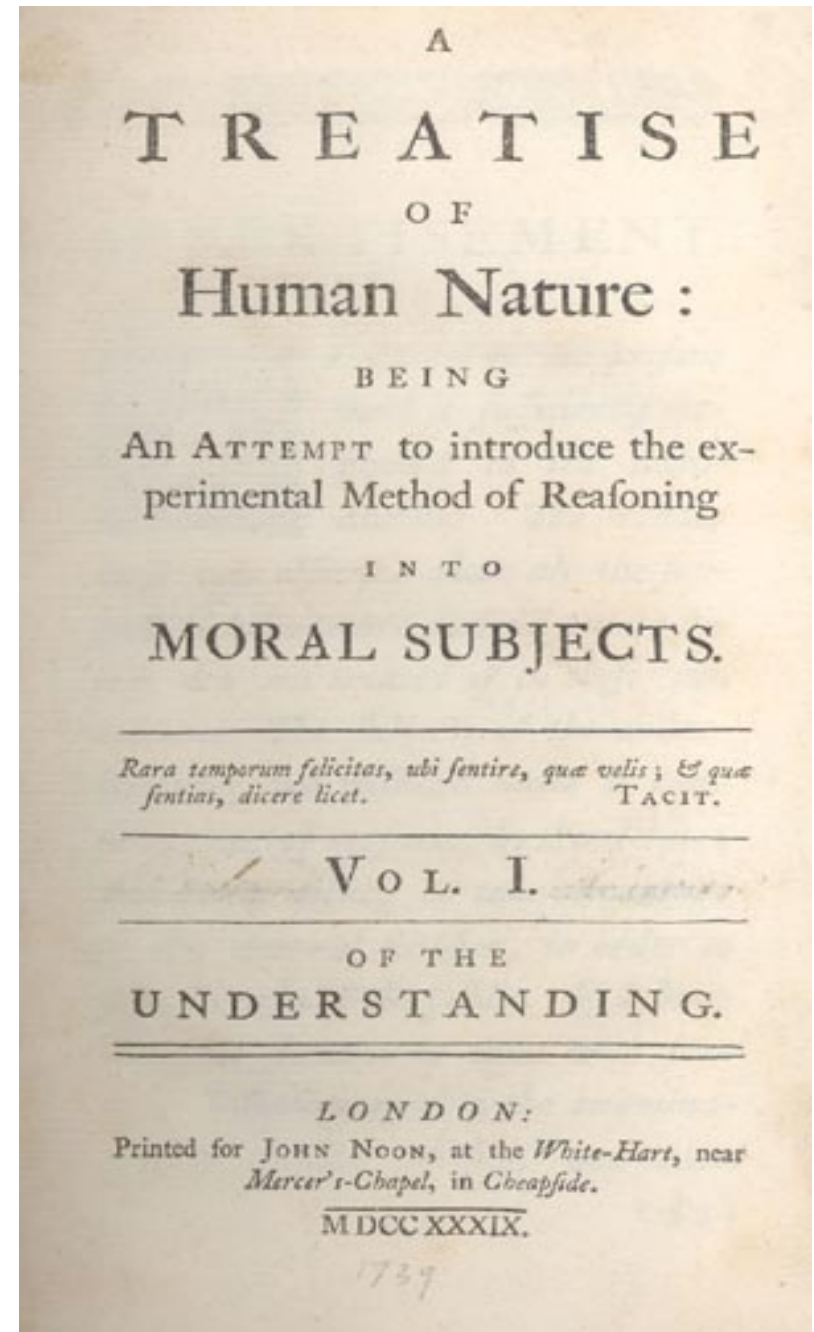
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# The Structure of Book 1 Part 4

- Section 1: “Of scepticism with regard to reason”
- Section 2: “Of scepticism with regard to the senses” (i.e. the nature of our ideas and beliefs about the external world)
- Section 3: “Of the antient philosophy”
- Section 4: “Of the modern philosophy” (i.e. primary and secondary qualities etc.)
- Section 5: “Of the immateriality of the soul” (argues that matter could cause thought)
- Section 6: “Of personal identity”
- Section 7: “Conclusion of this book”

5(a)

Of Scepticism  
with Regard to  
Reason



# From Knowledge to Probability

- *Treatise* 1.4.1 contains a famous – and very radical – sceptical argument which, however, seems problematic.
- Its first stage argues that, even if we assume that in “demonstrative sciences the rules are certain and infallible” (*T* 1.4.1.1), an element of doubt is still appropriate because our faculties sometimes make mistakes.
- Thus “knowledge [i.e. in the strict sense] degenerates into probability” (*T* 1.4.1.3).

# The First Reflex Judgement

- Hence when we consider what confidence to place in a mathematical argument, we need to make a judgement about the reliability of our reason or understanding:  
“we ought always to correct the first judgment, derived from the nature of the object [i.e. the mathematical judgement], by another judgment, deriv’ d from the nature of the understanding.” (*T* 1.4.1.5)

# The Second Reflex Judgement

- The same sort of correction is appropriate for probable judgements (*T* 1.4.1.5)
- So how good are we in judging the reliability of our own faculties? That first [probable] reflex judgement is itself subject to error, so we need to make a second correction:  
“we are oblig’ d by our reason to add a new doubt deriv’ d from the possibility of error in the estimation we make of the truth and fideity of our faculties.” (*T* 1.4.1.6)

# Iterative Weakening

- The second reflex judgement can only weaken the evidence left by the first:

“this decision, tho’ it should be favourable to our preceding judgment, being founded only on probability, must weaken still farther our first evidence, and must itself be weaken’ d by a fourth doubt of the same kind, and so on *in infinitum*; and even the vastest quantity ... must in this manner be reduc’ d to nothing. ... all the rules of logic require a continual diminution, and at last a total extinction of belief and evidence.” (T 1.4.1.6)

# Does Hume Accept the Argument?

“Shou’ d it be ask’ d me, whether I sincerely assent to this argument ... and whether I be really one of those sceptics, who hold that all is uncertain, and that our judgment is not in *any* thing possest of *any* measures of truth and falshood; I shou’ d reply, that this question is entirely superfluous, and that neither I, nor any other person was ever sincerely and constantly of that opinion. Nature, by an absolute and uncontroulable necessity has determin’ d us to judge as well as to breathe and feel; ...” (T 1.4.1.7)



# The Irresistibility of Belief

“... nor can we any more forbear viewing certain objects in a stronger and fuller light, upon account of their customary connexion with a present impression, than we can hinder ourselves from thinking as long as we are awake, or seeing the surrounding bodies when we turn our eyes towards them in broad sunshine. Whoever has taken the pains to refute the cavils of this *total* scepticism, has really disputed without an antagonist ...” (*T* 1.4.1.7)

# Hume's Intention Here

“My intention then in displaying so carefully the arguments of that fantastic sect, is only to make the reader sensible of the truth of my hypothesis, *that all our reasonings concerning causes and effects are deriv'd from nothing but custom; and that belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures. ... I have prov'd, that ... If belief ... were a simple act of the thought, without any peculiar manner of conception, or the addition of a force and vivacity, it must infallibly destroy itself, and in every case terminate in a total suspence of judgment.*” (T 1.4.1.8)

# How Does Hume Escape?

- So how does Hume's own account of belief escape this iterative weakening and eventual reduction to complete suspension?

“I answer, that after the first and second decision; as the action of the mind becomes forc'd and unnatural, and the ideas faint and obscure; tho' the principles ... be the same ...; yet their influence on the imagination [weakens] ...” (*T* 1.4.1.10)
- Hume goes on to remark that we are familiar with the difficulty of following and being moved by abstruse arguments. (*T* 1.4.1.11)

# A Trivial Property of the Fancy

- Later, at *T* 1.4.7.7, Hume will note the significance of our being saved “from ... total scepticism only by means of that singular and seemingly trivial property of the fancy [i.e. the imagination], by which we enter with difficulty into remote views of things”.
- This raises serious doubts about the adequacy of his response to scepticism in the *Treatise*.

# Is Hume's Argument Strong?

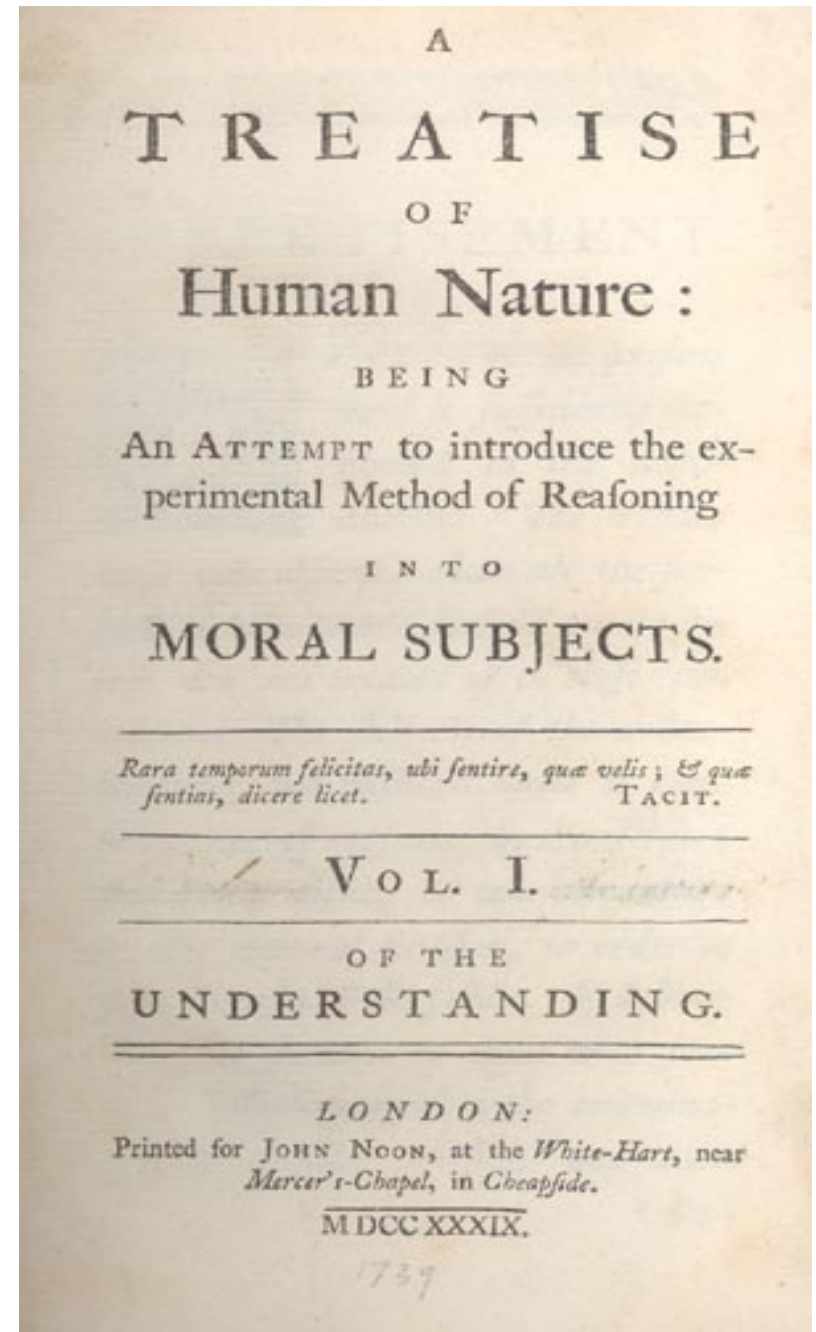
- The *T* 1.4.1 argument seems dubious:
  - Suppose I make a mathematical judgement.
  - Experience suggests to me that I go wrong about 1% of the time in such judgements, so I adjust my credence to 99%.
  - Then it occurs to me that my estimate of 1% might be wrong ... but why should this make me assume that my estimate is likely to be too *optimistic* rather than *pessimistic*? Maybe my credence should be *greater than 99%*?

# Why Iterate?

- Some defenders of Hume admit that reduction is not forced, but suggest the iteration implies a “spreading” of the probability estimate, so it becomes completely non-specific.
- But the case for iteration also seems weak. My appropriate credence in a mathematical judgement should depend on my reliability [and hence remembered track record] in judging *mathematics*, not on my reliability in judging my reliability in judging ... (etc.).

5(b)

Of Scepticism  
with Regard to  
the Senses



# Presupposing the Existence of Body

- *Treatise* 1.4.2 is complex, difficult, and confusing, but nevertheless rewarding.
- Hume starts out by repeating the message of *T* 1.4.1, that the sceptic continues to believe even when his beliefs cannot be defended:  
“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* 1.4.2.1).



# Doubts About the Existence of Body

- Hume accordingly announces that his agenda is to explain “the causes which induce us to believe in the existence of body” (*T* 1.4.2.2)
- But by the end of the section, his explanation of these causes is generating sceptical doubts:  
“I begun ... with premising, that we ought to have an implicit faith in our senses ... But ... I feel myself *at present* of a quite contrary sentiment, and am more inclin’ d to repose no faith at all in my senses, or rather imagination, than to place in it such an implicit confidence.” (*T* 1.4.2.56).

# Analysing the Belief

- Hume analyses the belief in body into two aspects, each of which is to be explained:
  - “why we attribute a CONTINUED existence to objects, even when they are not present to the senses”
  - “why we suppose them to have an existence DISTINCT from the mind and perception”
  - He goes on to explain that the *distinctness* of bodies involves both their *external* position and also their *independence*. (T 1.4.2.2)

# Which Faculty?

- Having distinguished *continuity* from *distinctness*, Hume remarks that each implies the other. He then declares his aim, to:

“consider, whether it be the *senses*, *reason*, or the *imagination*, that produces the opinion of a *continu’d* or of a *distinct* existence. These are the only questions, that are intelligible on the present subject. For as to the notion of external existence, when taken for something specifically different from perceptions, we have already shown its absurdity [in *T* 1.2.6]”

# Eliminating the Senses

- In discussing the *senses* as a potential source of the belief in body, Hume seems to treat them as bare sources of impressions. As such,
  - They obviously cannot “give rise to the notion of the *continu’d* existence of their objects, after they no longer appear to the senses”. (*T* 1.4.2.3)
  - Nor can they “offer ... their impressions as the images of something *distinct*, or *independent*, and *external* ... because they convey to us nothing but a single perception, and never give us the least intimation of any thing beyond.” (*T* 1.4.2.4)

# Fallacy, Illusion, and Transparency

- “If our senses, therefore, suggest any idea of distinct existences, they must convey the impressions as those very existences, by a kind of fallacy and illusion.” (*T* 1.4.2.5)
- This is an illusion because the perceptions of the senses are, so to speak, *transparent*:
  - “all sensations are felt by the mind, such as they really are” (*T* 1.4.2.5)
  - “since all actions and sensations of the mind are known to us by consciousness, they must ... appear in every particular what they are ...” (*T* 1.4.2.7)

# Externality to the Body

- It might seem relatively unproblematic for our senses to present things as external to our body, but this presupposes that we have identified our body to start with:
  - “ascribing a real and corporeal existence to [our limbs etc.] is an act of the mind as difficult to explain, as that which we examine at present.” (*T* 1.4.2.9)
- Hume adds considerations from the nature of our various senses, and the primary/secondary quality distinction (*T* 1.4.2.12-13).

# Reason and the Vulgar View

- Children, peasants, and the “vulgar” in general clearly believe in the external world without consulting philosophical reason (*T* 1.4.2.14):

“For philosophy informs us, that every thing, which appears to the mind, is nothing but a perception, and is interrupted, and dependent on the mind; whereas the vulgar confound perceptions and objects, and attribute a distinct continu’d existence to the very things they feel or see. This sentiment, then, as it is entirely unreasonable, must proceed from some other faculty than the understanding.”

# Eliminating Reason

- Even if we adopt the philosophers' view, and “distinguish our perceptions from our objects”, we still can't reason from one to the other.
- Hume spells this out at *T* 1.4.2.47 (cf. *E* 12.12), arguing that since we are directly acquainted only with the perceptions, we are unable to establish any causal correlation with objects, and so cannot infer the latter by causal reasoning, the only kind of “argument ... that can assure us of matter of fact” (*T* 1.4.2.14).



# Turning to the Imagination

- With the senses and reason eliminated, our belief in “the continu’ d and distinct existence of body ... must be entirely owing to the IMAGINATION” (*T* 1.4.2.14).
- Most of the rest of the section is devoted to an explanation of how the imagination generates the belief.
- At *T* 1.4.2.18-19, Hume identifies *constancy* and *coherence* as the key factors that induce us to judge perceptions as external to us.

# Constancy and Coherence

- *Constancy* of perceptions involves their similarity, when they “return upon me” (e.g. after closing then opening my eyes) “without the least alteration” (*T* 1.4.2.18).
- *Coherent* perceptions change, but in regular (and hence expected) or explicable patterns – at *T* 1.4.2.19, Hume seems to gesture towards what is now known as Inference to the Best Explanation (IBE), whereby we infer the existence of unperceived objects to give a coherent explanation of our observations.

# Explaining the Vulgar View

- Hume summarises the account he is about to give at *T* 1.4.2.24:

“When we have been accustom’ d to observe a constancy in certain impressions, and have found, that the perception of the sun or ocean, for instance, returns upon us after an absence or annihilation with like parts and in a like order, as at its first appearance, we are not apt to regard these interrupted perceptions as different, (which they really are) but on the contrary consider them individually the same, upon account of their resemblance. ...”

“But as this interruption of their existence is contrary to their perfect identity, and makes us regard the first impression as annihilated, and the second as newly created, we find ourselves somewhat at a loss, and are involv’ d in a kind of contradiction. In order to free ourselves from this difficulty, we disguise, as much as possible, the interruption, or rather remove it entirely, by supposing that these interrupted perceptions are connected by a real existence, of which we are insensible. This supposition, or idea of continu’ d existence, acquires a force and vivacity from the memory of these broken impressions, and from that propensity, which they give us, to suppose them the same; and ... the very essence of belief consists in the force and vivacity of the conception.”

# The Four-Part Account

- At *T* 1.4.2.25 (cf. *T* 1.4.2.43), Hume summarises the four parts of this account, which he then discusses in depth:
  - The principle of individuation, *T* 1.4.2.26-30
  - How resemblance leads us to attribute identity to interrupted perceptions, *T* 1.4.2.31-36
  - Why we unite interrupted perceptions by supposing a continu'd existence, *T* 1.4.2.37-40
  - Explaining the force and vivacity of conception, which constitutes belief, *T* 1.4.2.41-42

# A Problematic Assumption?

- In Hume's complex discussion of parts two to four of his "system" – from paragraphs 31 to 46 – he speaks with the vulgar by supposing "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".
- But one might expect the scientific explanation of the vulgar belief – given that it is not a *rational* explanation – to be *subcognitive*, and hence not expressible in vulgar terms.

# Fallacy and Fiction

- Having explained how the vulgar view arises, Hume emphasises (*T* 1.4.2.43) how much falsehood and error it involves:
  - False attribution of identity, into which we are “seduced” by the resemblance of perceptions.
  - The fiction of a continued existence, which “is really false” but serves “to remedy the interruption of our perceptions”.
  - “experiments [reveal that] ... the doctrine of the independent existence of our sensible perceptions is contrary to the plainest experience” (*T* 1.4.2.44).

# The Key Experiment

- “When we press one eye with a finger, we immediately perceive all the objects to become double” (*T* 1.4.2.45)
  - “But as we do not attribute a continued existence to both these perceptions”
  - “and as they are both of the same nature”
  - “we clearly perceive that all our perceptions are dependent on our organs, and the disposition of our nerves and animal spirits.”
- A similar argument will come at *T* 1.4.4.4.



# The Philosophical System

- Philosophers realise that perceptions are not independent, but they are very reluctant (or unable) to give up belief in the continued and distinct existence of body.
- Hence they invent a new theory “of the double existence of perceptions and objects” as a “palliative remedy” (*T* 1.4.2.46).
- This “*has no primary recommendation either to reason or the imagination*”, and acquires all its imaginative appeal from the vulgar view.

# Recapitulation and Overview

- In spelling out these points, Hume repeats or expands some of his earlier arguments:
  - Reason cannot establish continuing objects causing our perceptions (*T* 1.4.2.47).
  - The imagination leads naturally to the vulgar, rather than philosophical, view (*T* 1.4.2.48).
  - Hence the philosophical view must acquire its force from the vulgar view (*T* 1.4.2.49-52).
  - This explains various aspects of the philosophical view (*T* 1.4.2.53-55).

# The Despairing Conclusion

“I cannot conceive how such trivial qualities of the fancy, conducted by such false suppositions, can ever lead to any solid and rational system. ... Philosophers deny our resembling perceptions to be identically the same, and uninterrupted; and yet have so great a propensity to believe them such, that they arbitrarily invent a new set of perceptions, to which they attribute these qualities. I say, a new set of perceptions [because] ... ’tis impossible for us distinctly to conceive, objects to be in their nature any thing but exactly the same with perceptions. What then can we look for from this confusion of groundless and extraordinary opinions but error and falshood? And how can we justify to ourselves any belief we repose in them?” (*T* 1.4.2.56)

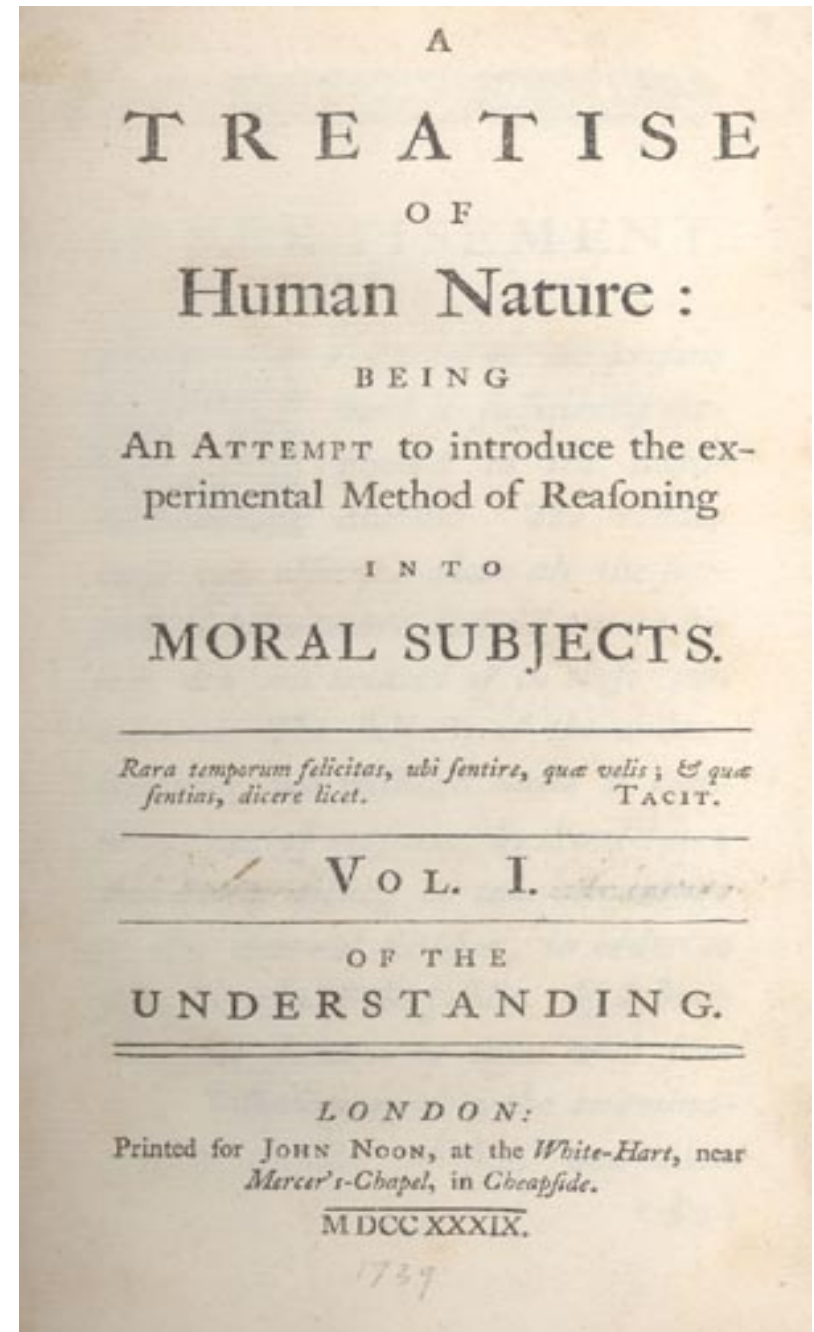
# Carelessness and Inattention

“As long as our attention is bent upon the subject, the philosophical and study’ d principle may prevail; but the moment we relax our thoughts, nature will display herself, and draw us back to our former opinion.” (*T* 1.4.2.51 cf. 53)

“’ Tis impossible upon any system to defend either our understanding [cf. *T* 1.4.1] or senses; and we but expose them farther when we endeavour to justify them in that manner. As the sceptical doubt arises naturally from a profound and intense reflection on those subjects, it always encreases, the farther we carry our reflections, whether in opposition or conformity to it. Carelessness and in-attention alone can afford us any remedy.” (*T* 1.4.2.57)

5(c)

# Of the Antient and Modern Philosophies



# Of the Antient Philosophy

- Section 1.4.3 of the *Treatise* is largely devoted to debunking Aristotelianism:
  - “the fictions of the antient philosophy, concerning *substances*, and *substantial forms*, and *accidents*, and *occult qualities*; which, however unreasonable and capricious, have a very intimate connexion with the principles of human nature.” (*T* 1.4.3.1)
- Hume explains these “fictions” as naturally arising from the imagination, by which the “Peripatetics” allowed themselves – far too easily and naively – to be seduced.

# False Simplicity and Identity

- “The most judicious philosophers” (cf. Locke, *Essay* II xxiii) consider “that our ideas of bodies are nothing but collections form’ d by the mind of the ideas of the several distinct sensible qualities, of which objects are compos’ d”.
- But the sorts of confusions outlined in *T* 1.4.2 lead us naturally to think of objects as *simple* things that retain their *identity* through time:
  - “The smooth and uninterrupted progress of the thought ... readily deceives the mind, and makes us ascribe an identity to the changeable succession ...” (*T* 1.4.3.3)

# Inventing Substance

- When we realise these supposedly identical things have actually changed over time,  
“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 1.4.3.4)
- We likewise imagine this *original substance* to be simple and uncompounded:  
“a principle of union or cohesion among [the object’ s] qualities” (T 1.4.3.5)



# Substantial Forms and Accidents

- The Peripatetics [i.e. Aristotelians] then ascribe the differences between substances to their different *substantial forms* (T 1.4.3.6).
- Qualities of objects such as colour and figure are then considered as *accidents* [accidental as opposed to essential qualities] “inhering in” the substance, so these philosophers:
  - “suppose a substance supporting, which they do not understand, and an accident supported, of which they have as imperfect an idea. The whole system, therefore, is entirely incomprehensible.” (T 1.4.3.8)<sub>41</sub>

# Faculties and Occult Qualities

- Men naturally “imagine they perceive a connexion” between constantly conjoined objects. Philosophers who investigate further cannot find any such connexion,  
“But ... instead of drawing a just inference from this observation, and concluding, that we have no idea of power or agency, separate from the mind, and belonging to causes ..., they ... [invent] the words *faculty* and *occult quality*. ... They need only say, that any phaenomenon, which puzzles them, arises from a faculty or an occult quality ...” (*T* 1.4.3.10)

# Sympathies, Antipathies etc.

“But among all the instances, wherein the Peripatetics have shown they were guided by every trivial propensity of the imagination, no one is more remarkable that their *sympathies, antipathies, and horrors of a vacuum*. There is a very remarkable inclination in human nature, to bestow on external objects the same emotions, which it observes in itself ... This inclination, ’tis true, is suppress’d by a little reflection, and only takes place in children, poets, and the antient philosophers. ... what excuse shall we find to justify our philosophers in so signal a weakness?” (T 1.4.3.11)

# Imaginative Principles, Good and Bad

- Hume has criticised the Aristotelians for founding their philosophy on the imagination. But this might seem very unfair, when he has earlier (in *T* 1.3.6) argued that all inductive “experimental reasoning” – which he advocates as the only legitimate basis of science (e.g. the *Treatise* subtitle) – is itself founded on custom, a principle of the imagination.
- He addresses this objection in a famous passage right at the start of *T* 1.4.4, distinguishing between two sorts of imaginative principles, one sort philosophically respectable and the others disreputable:

“In order to justify myself, I must distinguish in the imagination betwixt the principles which are permanent, irresistible, and universal; such as the customary transition from causes to effects, and from effects to causes: And the principles, which are changeable, weak, and irregular; such as those I have just now taken notice of. The former are the foundation of all our thoughts and actions, so that upon their removal human nature must immediately perish and go to ruin. The latter are neither unavoidable to mankind, nor necessary, or so much as useful in the conduct of life; but on the contrary are observ’ d only to take place in weak minds, and being opposite to the other principles of conduct and reasoning, may easily be subverted by a due contrast and opposition. For this reason the former are receiv’ d by philosophy, and the latter rejected.” (*T* 1.4.4.1)

# Two Senses of “Imagination”

- This same distinction informs a footnote inserted while the *Treatise* was in press:  
“as our assent to all probable reasonings is founded on the vivacity of ideas, it resembles many of those whimsies and prejudices, which are rejected under the opprobrious character of being the offspring of the imagination. By this expression it appears that the word, *imagination*, is commonly us’ d in two different senses; and ... in the following reasonings I have often [fallen] into [this ambiguity].” (*T* 1.3.9.19 n. 22)

# Of the Modern Philosophy

- Modern (Lockean) philosophy claims to be based on the “solid, permanent, and consistent principles of the imagination” (*T* 1.4.4.2).
- But now Hume will argue – through an attack on the primary/secondary quality distinction – that it has no such secure foundation.
- He suggests that the only “satisfactory” argument for the distinction “is deriv’ d from the variations of [sensory] impressions”, depending upon such things as our health, constitution, and external situation (*T* 1.4.4.2).

# A Causal Argument

“’Tis certain, that when different impressions of the same sense arise from any object, every one of these impressions has not a resembling quality existent in the object. ... Now from like effects we presume like causes. Many of the impressions of colour, sound, &c. are confest to be nothing but internal existences, and to arise from causes, which in no way resemble them. These impressions are in appearance nothing different from the other impressions of colour, sound, &c. We conclude, therefore, that they are, all of them, deriv’ d from a like origin.” (*T* 1.4.4.4)



# A Berkeleian Objection

- Hume focuses on one objection, which takes inspiration from George Berkeley:
  - “If colours, sounds, tastes, and smells be merely perceptions, nothing we can conceive is possest of a real, continu’ d, and independent existence; not even motion, extension and solidity, which are the primary qualities chiefly insisted on [by Lockeans].” (*T* 1.4.4.6)
- To form an idea of a moving extended body, my idea of extension must have some content, which can only come from sight or touch, ultimately from coloured or solid simples.

# Annihilating Matter

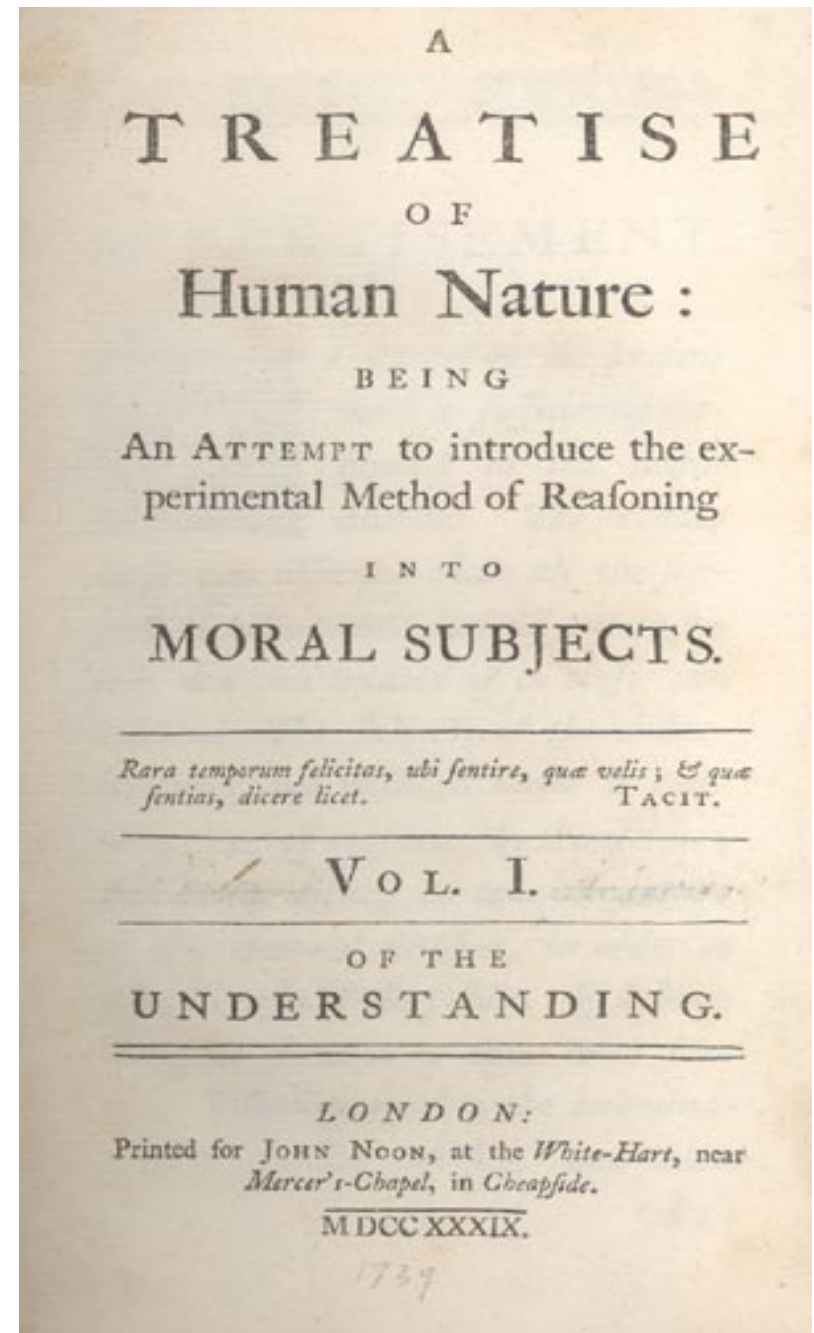
- Colour “is excluded from any real existence” (as a subjective secondary quality).
- “The idea of solidity is that of two objects, which ... cannot penetrate each other” (*T* 1.4.4.9). So understanding solidity requires some *antecedent* grasp of what an object is, and with colour and solidity itself excluded, there’s nothing left which can give this.
- “Our modern philosophy, therefore leaves us no just nor satisfactory idea ... of matter.”

# Reason Against the Senses

- Hume elaborates this argument further from *T* 1.4.4.10-14, and then concludes:  
“Thus there is a direct and total opposition betwixt our reason and our senses; or more properly speaking, betwixt those conclusions we form from cause and effect, and those that persuade us of the continu’ d and independent existence of body.”
- Causal reasoning concludes that secondary qualities aren’ t objective; but without appeal to impressions of colour, we cannot form any coherent notion of an extended body.

5(d)

# The Soul and the Self



# Turning to the Internal World

- “Of the Immateriality of the Soul” marks a turn to “the intellectual world”. This, “tho’ involv’ d in infinite obscurities”, is not perplex’ d with any such contradictions, as those we have discovered in the natural” (*T* 1.4.5.1).
- From *T* 1.4.5.2-6, Hume attacks the notion of mental *substance* (and the related notion of *inhesion*) in various ways, including an appeal to the Copy Principle (at *T* 1.4.5.4). The notion is condemned as meaningless.

# The Location of Perceptions

- From *T* 1.4.5.7-16, Hume discusses the issue of the location and extension of perceptions:
  - Note in particular his insistence that only perceptions of sight and feeling have spatial location (*T* 1.4.5.10). Other, non-spatial, perceptions prove that “*an object may exist, and yet be no where*”. And causation cannot require spatial contiguity (cf. *T* 1.3.2.6 n. 16).
  - Note also the illusion whereby we are seduced by the imagination into ascribing sensations of taste (which have no physical location) to the object – e.g. a fig – that produces them (*T* 1.4.5.13-14); this discussion is referenced by the footnote at 1.3.14.25 n. 32.

# A Spinozistic Parody

- From *T* 1.4.5.17-28, Hume parodies the standard arguments against the “hideous hypothesis” (*T* 1.4.5.19) of Spinoza, deploying them against the orthodox theological idea of a simple soul.
- Spinoza sees “the universe of objects” as being modifications of a “simple, uncompounded, and indivisible” substance (*T* 1.4.5.21). This is supposed to be outrageous. And yet theologians see “the universe of thought” – my impressions and ideas – as being all modifications of a simple, uncompounded and indivisible soul.

# Defending Materialism

- The standard anti-materialist argument insists that material changes cannot cause thought, because the two are so different.  
“... and yet nothing in the world is more easy than to refute it. We need only to reflect on what has been prov'd at large ... that to consider the matter *a priori*, any thing may produce any thing, and that we shall never discover a reason, why any object may or may not be the cause of any other, however great, or however little the resemblance may be between them ” (T 1.4.5.30)



- Hume then goes further to insist that material motion *is indeed* found to be the cause of thought:
  - “we find ... by experience, that they are constantly united; which being *all the circumstances, that enter into the idea of cause and effect* ... we may *certainly* conclude, that motion may be, and *actually is*, the cause of thought and perception.” (*T* 1.4.5.30, my emphasis)
  - “as *the constant conjunction of objects constitutes the very essence of cause and effect*, matter and motion may often be regarded as the causes of thought, as far as we have any notion of that relation.” (*T* 1.4.5.33, my emphasis)

# The 1.4.5 Dilemma

- Hume starts paragraph 1.4.5.31 with a dilemma, before arguing for its second horn in the remainder of the paragraph:

“There seems only this dilemma left us ... either to assert, that nothing can be the cause of another, but where the mind can perceive the connexion in its idea of the objects: Or to maintain, that all objects, which we find constantly conjoin’d, are upon that account to be regarded as causes or effects.” (*T* 1.4.5.31)

# Applying the Definition of Cause

- Thus at the end of *Treatise* 1.4.5 – just as in the discussion of “Liberty and Necessity” which is to come in 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 – Hume is applying his (first) definition of cause in terms of constant conjunction.
- These are *positive* (rather than sceptical) implications of his definition: they *vindicate* the application of causation to mental phenomena.
- *Treatise* 1.3.14 has thus served the purpose of supporting materialism and determinism.

# A Puzzling Conclusion

- The final paragraph of *Treatise* 1.4.5 starts by emphasising Hume's key lesson (cf. *T* 1.3.15.1) that causes and effects can be known only by experience, since *whatever we can imagine, is possible* from an a priori point of view.
- However the last two sentences refer to “the immortality of the soul”, which hasn't so far been mentioned! This seems to be a trace of one of the “noble parts” on religion which Hume excised from the *Treatise* manuscript when he “castrated” it in 1737 (cf. letter to Henry Home, *NHL* 2)

# Of Personal Identity

- *Treatise* 1.4.6 addresses the topic of personal identity, wielding the Copy Principle (*T* 1.4.6.2) to deny that we have any idea of the self which is anything like the conventionally presumed notion with its “perfect identity and simplicity” (*T* 1.4.6.1).
- When I look inside 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.” (*T* 1.4.6.3)

# The Bundle Theory

- Hence the only genuine idea of self is that of:  
“nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions [impressions and ideas], which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement. ... The mind is a kind of theatre, where several perceptions successively make their appearance ... There is properly no *simplicity* in it at one time, nor *identity* in different. ... The comparison of the theatre must not mislead us. They are the successive perceptions only, that constitute the mind; nor have we the most distant notion of the place, where these scenes are represented ...” (*T* 1.4.6.4)

# Explaining the Attribution of Identity

- Hume now goes on to explain our “propension to ascribe an identity to these successive perceptions, and to suppose ourselves possess of an invariable and uninterrupted existence” (*T* 1.4.6.5).
- He takes this to involve the same sort of imaginative principles that are at play when we attribute identity “to plants and animals”, based on our tendency to be seduced by an easy associative transition of ideas.

# Confusion and Absurdity

- Just as with external objects (cf. *T* 1.4.2 and 1.4.3), when we consider a gradually changing sequence of perceptions, we are apt to confuse this with an ongoing identity (*T* 1.4.6.6).
- Reflection on the changing sequence shows this to be absurd, so to resolve “this absurdity, we ... feign some new and unintelligible principle, that connects the objects together ... Thus we ... run into the notion of a *soul*, and *self*, and *substance*, to disguise the variation.”



# Association and Identity

- “To prove this hypothesis”, Hume aims “to show ... that the objects, which are variable or interrupted, and yet are suppos’ d to continue the same, are such only as consist of a succession of parts, connected together by resemblance, contiguity, or causation”, that is, by the association of ideas (*T* 1.4.6.7).
- We tend to attribute identity when changes are *proportionately* small and *gradual* (*T* 1.4.6.9-10), or when the changing parts are relevant to “some *common end* or purpose”, and all the more so when they bear “the reciprocal relation of cause and effect” to each other (*T* 1.4.6.11-12).

# Explaining Personal Identity

- The attribution of personal identity is just another instance of this phenomenon: “The identity, which we ascribe to the mind of man, is only a fictitious one, and of a like kind with that which we ascribe to vegetables and animal bodies.” (*T* 1.4.6.15)
- Hume backs this up by appeal to his Separability Principle and his theory of causation, which tells us “that the understanding never observes any real connexion among objects, and that even the union of cause and effect ... resolves itself into a customary association of ideas”. So identity cannot *really* apply between our perceptions (*T* 1.4.6.16).

# Resemblance, Causation, Memory

- So “our notions of personal identity, proceed entirely from the smooth and uninterrupted progress of the thought along a train of connected ideas” (*T* 1.4.6.16).
- Contiguity plays little role here, so it is the mutual *resemblance* and *causation* between our perceptions that are crucial (*T* 1.4.6.17-19).
- Memory produces resemblance between our perceptions, and our concern about our future adds to their causal linkages. Memory also reveals the sequence of linked perceptions to us, and so is the chief “source of personal identity” (*T* 1.4.6.18-20).

# Notorious Second Thoughts

- In the *Appendix* to the *Treatise*, published with Book 3 in late 1740 (just 21 months after Books 1 and 2), Hume famously expressed despair about his account:
  - “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 App* 10).
- Unfortunately, Hume leaves it very obscure what exactly he takes the problem to be:

# Two Inconsistent Principles?

“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 would be no difficulty in the case.” (*T App 21*)

- But the two cited principles aren't apparently inconsistent! So this has left an intriguing puzzle for Hume's interpreters.

# “Conclusion of This Book”

- *Treatise* 1.4.7 is another major puzzle for Hume interpreters, presented as a dynamic sequence of thoughts on the position in which he has been left by the sceptical results from earlier sections.
- Most of our mental processes have been revealed as dependent on the imagination and its mechanisms, which generate “the vivacity of ideas” (*T* 1.4.7.3).
- Worse, *T* 1.4.4 has found a “manifest contradiction” between our causal reasoning and the continued existence of matter (*T* 1.4.7.4).
- The analysis of causation in *T* 1.3.14 also shows our thoughts about it to be deeply confused (*T* 1.4.7.5).

# A “Dangerous Dilemma”

- So how far should we allow ourselves to be seduced by the imagination?

“For if we assent to every trivial suggestion of the fancy; beside that these suggestions are often contrary to each other; they lead us into such errors, absurdities, and obscurities, that we must at last become ashamed of our credulity.” (*T* 1.4.7.6)
- But if we resolve to reject all “trivial suggestions of the fancy”, we will have no answer to the radical scepticism of *T* 1.4.1. So it seems that we have “no choice left but betwixt a false reason and none at all” (*T* 1.4.7.7)

# Dealing with Scepticism

- In *Treatise* 1.4.7, it seems that Hume's only answer is something like the "carelessness and in-attention" to which he appealed at the end of *T* 1.4.2:

“I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and [afterwards] these speculations ... appear so cold, and strain'd, and ridiculous, that I cannot find it in my heart to enter into them any farther.” (*T* 1.4.7.9)
- For Hume's mature and settled answer to scepticism, we must look to his *Enquiry* ...