

David Hume

REASON IN HISTORY

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THE PENNSYLVANIA STATE UNIVERSITY PRESS  
UNIVERSITY PARK, PENNSYLVANIA

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# *Introduction*

David Hume has long been recognized as one of the most profound, creative, and widely influential thinkers in the history of modern philosophy. His writings range from epistemology and metaphysics, through discussions of the principles of explanation in the human sciences, to moral theory, political theory, economics, aesthetics, and history. Indeed, during his life and for much of the following century, Hume was more widely known for his writings in economics and history than as a philosopher. However, beginning with his contemporaries such as Reid and Kant, philosophers throughout Europe gradually came to regard Hume's philosophical system as a compelling challenge to the preceding tradition. Over the next two centuries, his works would become a point of reference and a resource for such diverse developments as the idealist tradition in nineteenth-century Germany, the empiricist tradition in nineteenth-century Britain, and both the phenomenological and analytic movements in twentieth-century philosophy. Indeed, Hume has been perpetually rediscovered, either as a source of unappreciated insights or as a target of criticism, by almost every subsequent movement in the Western philosophical tradition.

In light of Hume's influence and importance, it is surprising to find that there have been very few attempts to develop a systematic examination and interpretation of his thought as a whole, including his contributions to the various humanistic

and social scientific disciplines, as well as to philosophy. The only direct examples are two studies by Laing and Laird, both from the 1930s, and an introductory study by J. V. Price, originally published in 1968 and updated in 1991.<sup>1</sup> Several more recent works, such as those by Livingston, Baier, Danford, and Herdt, have sought to present a unified account of a number of themes in his thought, although without the explicit order of a systematic survey. On the other hand, the *Cambridge Companion to Hume* provides an overview of his contributions to different fields of inquiry, in essays by different authors which reflect recent developments in the study of Hume, but without attempting to provide a unified interpretation of his thought.<sup>2</sup>

This study is intended to address this lacuna in the literature. It is intended for several types of readers. First, it is offered to beginning students of Hume, as an introduction to the depth and range of his thought, and to the main debates over his thought in the secondary literature. Next, it is directed to those scholars in various disciplines outside philosophy who are interested in Hume's influence in the history and methodology of their own fields. Third, it is offered to specialists in other areas of philosophy, as an overview and synthesis of recent developments in Hume scholarship. Finally, I hope that this study will also be of interest to specialists in the study of Hume, as an attempt to combine a systematic survey of his thought with a distinctive interpretation of his project.

In contrast to many approaches to the interpretation of his philosophy, I argue that Hume presents a constructive account of human reason or, in other words, an account of the elements and principles of human cognition, by which he intends not only to explain but also to justify and improve our reasonings in both the natural and human sciences. At the same time, he also seeks to establish the limits of human reason and the principles governing its subordination to the passions in the activities of human life. Finally, I also argue that he seeks to trace what we today call the social and historical dimensions of human consciousness. This appears in his consideration of how our concepts, beliefs, emotions, and even standards of judgment in different areas of inquiry are shaped by our experience, both in our individual histories and through our participation in the life of a community. In undertaking this project I am accepting the challenge proposed in 1941 by Norman Kemp Smith in his *Philosophy of David Hume*, and reaffirmed by Mossner in the final edition of his biography of Hume and Baier in her study of Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*. This is Kemp Smith's call for a study of Hume "in all his manifold activities: as philosopher, as political theorist, as economist, as historian, and as man of letters," with the hope that "Hume's philosophy, as the attitude of mind which found for itself

1. Laing, *David Hume*; Laird, *Hume's Philosophy of Human Nature*; and Price, *David Hume*.

2. Norton, *Cambridge Companion to Hume*.

these various forms of expression, will then have been presented, adequately and in due perspective, for the first time.”<sup>3</sup>

The history of the interpretation of Hume is an important part of the history of modern philosophy, since many subsequent philosophers have used his writings, often rather loosely, as a point of reference for their own creative inquiries and achievements.<sup>4</sup> Alongside this reception, which would merit a study in its own right, the scholarly interpretation of Hume has developed in a series of overlapping stages, through which he has been regarded variously as a skeptic, as a positivist or a narrow empiricist, and as a more broadly constructive philosopher.

The skeptical interpretation of Hume first appeared in several of the earliest reviews of his philosophical writings and has persisted from the eighteenth century to the present.<sup>5</sup> The earliest of his major critics, Thomas Reid, the leading figure among the Scottish Common Sense philosophers, charged Hume with presenting “a system of scepticism, which leaves no ground to believe any one thing rather than its contrary.”<sup>6</sup> Kant rejected the supposed refutation of Hume by his Scottish contemporaries, but also regarded Hume’s thought as skeptical and destructive in its tendency, since Hume overlooked the “positive harm” that would arise from depriving human reason of its “most important vistas.”<sup>7</sup> In his 1874 edition of Hume’s writings, Thomas Green argued that Hume, by pursuing the Lockean theory of ideas to its ultimate conclusion, ended by declaring knowledge to be impossible.<sup>8</sup> This skeptical interpretation was reaffirmed through much of the twentieth century, for example by Bertrand Russell, Karl Popper, and D. C. Stove.

During the first part of the twentieth century, Hume was also regarded as a forerunner of the version of empiricism known as logical positivism. Indeed, the leading figures among the logical positivists, both on the Continent and in England, identified Hume as one of the main predecessors of their movement.<sup>9</sup> Other commentators on Hume, such as G. E. Moore and John Laird in

3. Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, vii–viii; Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, vii; Baier, *Progress of Sentiments*, viii–ix.

4. James Fieser has assembled a valuable collection of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century reactions to Hume in his multivolume *Early Responses to Hume*. On the reception of Hume’s work by his British contemporaries, and on Hume’s response to their criticisms, see Somerville’s *Enigmatic Parting Shot*. On Hume’s influence in German philosophy, see especially Kuehn, *Scottish Common Sense Philosophy in Germany*; Gawlick and Kreimendahl, *Hume in der Deutschen Aufklärung*; Waszek, *Scottish Enlightenment*; and Murphy, *Hume and Husserl*.

5. Mossner, *Life of David Hume*, 117–33 and 286–300.

6. Reid, *Works*, 1: 95.

7. Kant, *Prolegomena*, 8n, in *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, 4:258n.

8. Green, *Hume and Locke*, 2.

9. See especially Hahn, Neurath, and Carnap, “The Scientific Conception of the World,” 304; and Ayer, *Language, Truth and Logic*, 31 and 54–55.

the early twentieth century, along with more recent figures such as Farhang Zabeeh, Antony Flew, Robert Anderson, David Pears, and Georges Dickers, have regarded Hume as a leading representative of a more general empiricism in philosophy.

A third approach to the interpretation of Hume is the allegation that he does not present any consistent philosophical position. This view again appears among his earliest critics, such as James Beattie, another Scottish Common Sense philosopher, who denounced the “paradoxes” in Hume’s philosophy.<sup>10</sup> This view is also echoed by Selby-Bigge in his 1894 introduction to the *Enquiries*: “Hume’s philosophic writings are to be read with great caution. His pages, especially those of the Treatise, are so full of matter, he says so many different things in so many different ways and different connexions, and with so much indifference to what he has said before, that it is very hard to say positively that he taught, or did not teach, this or that particular doctrine. . . . This makes it easy to find all philosophies in Hume, or, by setting up one statement against another, none at all.”<sup>11</sup> This criticism has also been directed against Hume by John Laird, Jonathan Bennett, and Antony Flew. The most elaborate version of this approach is presented by John Passmore, who rejects the wholesale application of the prevailing traditional labels to Hume’s thought, but then applies them to its allegedly conflicting aspects. Hume thus becomes in different respects a positivist, a phenomenalist, a skeptic, and so on.<sup>12</sup> This approach to Hume, or indeed to any author, is, however, open to the objection that the critic is simply giving up any sustained effort to trace the underlying unity in the thought of his author, or to view his entire body of writings as a coherent project.

The single most influential challenge to these interpretations of Hume as a skeptic, as a positivist, or as fundamentally incoherent, was developed by Norman Kemp Smith, especially in his *Philosophy of David Hume*. According to Kemp Smith, Hume criticized the prevailing conceptions of reason in order to emphasize the role of feeling and “natural belief” in both cognition and morality. On this view, Hume sought to establish “the thorough subordination—*by right*, if not always in actual fact, of reason to the feelings and instincts,” by showing that we must rely on feeling and belief, rather than reason, in “all the really ultimate issues” of life. Kemp Smith also interprets Hume’s account of our ideas of causality, the existence of external objects, and personal identity as a doctrine of “natural beliefs,” or beliefs that arise from “the ultimate instincts or propensities which constitute our human nature.” Indeed, he identifies this

10. Beattie, *Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth*, 18.

11. Selby-Bigge, “Editor’s Introduction,” vii.

12. Passmore, *Hume’s Intentions*. For a postmodern defense of this approach, see Parusnikova, “Against the Spirit of Foundations,” 1–17.

as “the most essential, and perhaps the most characteristic doctrine in Hume’s philosophy.”<sup>13</sup> Kemp Smith’s “naturalistic” interpretation of Hume has been further developed by Hendel, Stroud, Wright, and Mounce, while others such as MacNabb, Penelhum, Fogelin, Pears, and Waxman have sought to distinguish the elements of skepticism and naturalism in Hume’s thought.

The continuing value of Kemp Smith’s approach lies in his attempt to develop a broadly constructive interpretation of Hume’s philosophy, and his emphasis on the continuity between Hume’s epistemology and his moral philosophy. However, there are several difficulties in Kemp Smith’s approach and in his “naturalistic” interpretation of Hume’s philosophy. The first of these is his emphasis upon the words “nature,” “natural,” and “natural belief.” Hume himself does not use the phrase “natural belief,” and while he often uses the word “nature” in contexts that might seem to support Kemp Smith’s interpretation (cf. T I.4.I.7, I.4.I.12, I.4.7.9 [SBN 183, 187, 269]), he gives the term “nature” no emphasis comparable to his typographical emphasis on such words as “CUSTOM” and “HABIT” (T I.3.8.10 [SBN 102]; cf. EHU 5.5 [SBN 43]). Indeed, Hume frequently calls attention to the ambiguity of the word “natural,” in order to indicate that it has little or no explanatory value without further specification or qualification (T 3.I.2.7–10 [SBN 473–75]; EPM App.3.9 [SBN 307]).<sup>14</sup> Kemp Smith also overlooks Hume’s account of the principles of probable or scientific reasoning, as we will see in Chapter 3, and therefore gives an inadequate view of the role of critical reflection in Hume’s account of human cognition. His “subordination thesis” has also been challenged as a misrepresentation of the relation between “reason” and “feeling” in Hume’s thought.<sup>15</sup> Finally, although he explores the relation between Hume’s epistemology and his moral theory, Kemp Smith does not extend the scope of his discussion to Hume’s writings in other areas of philosophy and intellectual inquiry.

Since the early twentieth century, a number of studies have challenged these prevailing approaches to the interpretation of Hume, and have indicated some of the directions in which an alternative approach to the constructive interpretation of his philosophy might be developed.<sup>16</sup> These challenges have become increasingly prominent in the last forty years, especially since the middle of

13. Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, 84–86 and 545.

14. For these and other criticisms of Kemp Smith, see Lenz, “Hume’s Defense of Causal Inference,” 169–70; Hearn, “Norman Kemp Smith,” 3–7; Beauchamp and Rosenberg, *Hume and the Problem of Causation*, 57–67; Norton, *David Hume*, 3–20; Agassi, “Smith’s Term ‘Naturalism,’” 92–96; and Gaskin, *Hume’s Philosophy of Religion*, 108–19. Mounce provides a discussion of several different uses of the term “naturalism” in *Hume’s Naturalism*, 1–14, though I am not convinced that either Mounce’s “Scottish naturalism” or his “scientific naturalism” correspond to Kemp Smith’s conception of Hume’s naturalism.

15. See especially Norton, *David Hume*, 17–20 and 208–38.

16. Some of these valuable earlier studies of Hume include those by Mary Shaw Kuypers, Ralph Church, Constance Maund, William Gordon Ross, and Rachael M. Kydd.

the 1970s. The contributors to this trend, such as John Stewart, Páll Árdal, Nicholas Capaldi, Duncan Forbes, Annette Baier, Fred Wilson, David Fate Norton, Peter Jones, Donald Livingston, John Danford, Jennifer Herdt, Don Garrett, David Owen, and Dale Jacquette, have pursued new investigations into almost every aspect of Hume's philosophy, and also into the relation between his philosophy and the other areas of his thought.<sup>17</sup> I will refer frequently to these and other studies throughout this book. Finally, several recent studies have even regarded Hume's philosophy and his larger intellectual project as anticipations of the so-called postmodern movement in contemporary thought. Hume's affinity to postmodernism has been traced especially in his account of the tension between skepticism and naturalism; in his move from philosophy to the study of history, literature, and politics; in his criticism of earlier approaches to establishing normative principles for cognition and action; and in his use of irony, multiple perspectives, and other playful devices in his writings.<sup>18</sup>

In this book I argue, drawing upon many of these recent studies, that Hume's philosophy can be understood more accurately and completely as an examination of "reason in history," or as an account of the historical dimension of rationality. This unifying theme will become apparent through a systematic study of his account of the elements of human cognition and the standards of justification in the different areas of human life and thought. In the first five chapters I examine Hume's account of cognition, with particular attention to the formation of abstract ideas and their relation to language; the principles of philosophical probable reasoning; the role of imagination in our ideas of space, time, causation, external existence, and personal identity; and his defense of "moderate," "mitigated," or "academic" skepticism. In the remaining eight chapters I consider his application of these principles to the study of human nature, and to our reasonings in what we now call the various humanistic and social-scientific disciplines. Throughout this study I call attention to Hume's consideration of the influence of social context and historical tradition on the various aspects of human thought and consciousness, such as the formation of abstract ideas, the use of language, the acquisition of beliefs, the formulation

17. Waxman criticizes the naturalizing tendency in recent Hume scholarship and seeks to reaffirm the skeptical implications of Hume's philosophy; see *Hume's Theory of Consciousness*, 1–23 and 266–79. However, he then calls attention to Hume's constructive view of the contribution of the human mind to the constitution of its objects and also acknowledges Hume's transition from an examination of the individual mind in Book 1 of the *Treatise* to the social context of the passions and morality in Books 2 and 3.

18. See Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, and Parusnikova, "Against the Spirit of Foundations," 1–17. For an interpretation of Hume's literary career in a postmodern style, see Christensen, *Practicing Enlightenment*. Hume's philosophy has also been regarded as an alternative to both modernism and postmodernism; see Livingston, *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium*, 383–407; Danford, *Problem of Reason*, 14–25; and Williams, *Cultivated Reason*.

of the standards of scientific judgment, the directing of the passions toward various objects, and the development of moral, political, aesthetic, and religious traditions. I also consider his account of the principles by which various aspects of human life are to be explained as products of human nature in general, of a particular cultural and historical tradition, or of critical reflection.

Hume frequently affirms his intention to establish the principles of the “sciences,” or the various intellectual disciplines. In the introduction to the *Treatise* he expresses dismay over the “present imperfect condition of the sciences,” where “there is nothing which is not the subject of debate.” He then proposes to reassess all of the other areas of human inquiry by beginning with the “science of MAN,” since by explaining the principles of human nature “we in effect propose a compleat system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost entirely new, and the only one upon which they can stand with any security.” He even suggests that “Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Natural Religion” must ultimately be established on the foundations provided by the “science of man,” although the *Treatise* is more particularly directed toward the subjects belonging to “moral philosophy,” including “Logic, Morals, Criticism, and Politics” (T Int.2–6 [SBN xiii–xvi]; cf. A P.3 [SBN 643–44]).<sup>19</sup> In the first “Advertisement,” which was published with the first two volumes of the *Treatise*, he describes the general plan of this work: beginning with a study of the understanding and the passions, and then proceeding to morals, politics, and criticism (T Adv.1 [SBN xii]). He echoes this plan in the concluding sections of both Books 1 and 2 of the *Treatise*, in which he considers our motives for intellectual inquiry as a transition to his topics in the rest of the *Treatise* (T 1.4.7.12–15, 2.3.10.1–12 [SBN 270–74, 448–54]). Similarly, he concludes the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* with a summary of the principles of reasoning that belong to the different natural and human sciences (EHU 12.26–34; cf. 8.18 [SBN 163–65; cf. 90]). He further examines the principles of explanation in the human sciences in his essays, in his writings on religion, and in the *History of England*. Hume’s contributions to what we would now identify as the various academic disciplines are important, not only for the development of these disciplines, but also as a sustained effort to explore the implications of philosophical inquiry for understanding the methodological foundations of the sciences. In this respect, he calls attention to the significance and value of philosophy for understanding the methodological principles of the individual academic disciplines.

19. In eighteenth-century English usage, “natural philosophy” refers to what we now call the natural sciences, while “moral philosophy” refers to the “human sciences,” or what we now call the humanities and social sciences. Indeed, the subsequent German distinction between the *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften* is itself derived from Mill’s related distinction between the “natural” and “moral” sciences. See Dilthey, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*, 57.

The arrangement of this study will reflect the general order in which Hume's philosophical arguments are developed, and in which his major works were written and published.<sup>20</sup> At least in Hume's case, the sequence of his writings also provides a convenient structure for the systematic organization of his thought.<sup>21</sup> I will accordingly advance from his initial analysis of ideas at the beginning of the *Treatise* (Chapter 1) to his works in religion and history (Chapters 12 and 13).

In Chapters 1 through 5, I consider Hume's epistemology and metaphysics, as these include in his account of ideas, demonstrative reasoning, causal reasoning, the traditional topics of metaphysics, and the various types of skepticism. These topics are addressed in Book 1 of the *Treatise of Human Nature*, in his anonymously published *Abstract* to the *Treatise of Human Nature*, and in the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. In Chapters 6 and 7, I examine his account of the passions in Book 2 of the *Treatise* and the dissertation "Of the Passions," and his analysis of human action in Book 2 of the *Treatise* and in the first *Enquiry*. In Chapters 8 and 9, I turn to his moral and political theories, as these are developed in Book 3 of the *Treatise*, in the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, and in his essays.<sup>22</sup> In Chapters 10 through 12, I consider Hume's economic theory, as presented in the *Political Discourses* and other essays; his aesthetic theory, especially in the essays "Of Tragedy" and "Of the Standard of Taste"; and his various discussions of religion in the first *Enquiry*, the *Natural History of Religion*, the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, and in his political and historical writings. Finally, in Chapter 13, I examine his various discussions of historical method, and his approach to the writing of history, especially in his six-volume *History of England*. In the conclusion I provide a summary of the relation between history and reason in Hume's thought by considering his view of the historical dimension of human consciousness. I then

20. For a bibliography of Hume's works and their publication history from the original editions through 1937, and of translations and responses, see Jessop, *Bibliography*, 5–43. A more recent and complete catalog of Hume's works, mainly of the editions which appeared during his own lifetime, is included in Ikeda, *David Hume*, 1–181. On the chronology of Hume's manuscripts, see Stewart, "Hume's Manuscripts," 267–314.

21. For valuable biographies of Hume, see Greig, *David Hume*; Mossner, *Life of David Hume*; and Streminger, *David Hume: Sein Leben und sein Werk*.

22. Hume published a collection (his first) of fifteen essays, *Essays, Moral and Political*, in 1741; a second collection of twelve essays in 1742; and a collection of three essays in 1748. Additional essays were published in the *Political Discourses* in 1752 and the *Four Dissertations* of 1757. Most of these essays were included, with the two *Enquiries*, in his collected *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*. This collection, in one, two, or four volumes, was first published starting in 1753, and then reissued in a series of revised editions until the posthumous edition of 1777. The essay section in this collection was given the subtitle "Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary" after 1758. Hume retitled several of his essays, withdrew some from publication, and added others over the course of these editions. He also wrote two essays, "Of Suicide" and "Of the Immortality of the Soul," which were circulated but not published under his name during his lifetime because of their controversial treatment of religious topics. See Jessop, *Bibliography*, 5–42; Eugene Miller, "Foreword," xi–xviii; and Ikeda, *David Hume*, xvi–xvii.

consider some of the implications of my interpretation of Hume for understanding his relation to a variety of later discussions, including subsequent developments in German philosophy, recent discussions within analytic philosophy concerning the social and historical dimensions of human cognition, and current discussions of the Enlightenment and modernity across the academic disciplines.

Readers of Hume are often bewitched, or bedeviled, by a variety of interpretive problems arising from the literary artistry and subtlety of his writings, including not only the complexity of his prose but also his frequent uses of irony and the dialogue form.<sup>23</sup> Indeed, several recent studies have called attention to the dialectical character of many passages in his writings. These include not only the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, the coda entitled “A Dialogue” at the end of the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, and the Epicurean dialogue in Section 11 of the first *Enquiry*, but also his juxtaposition of voices and opinions in many of his political and philosophical essays, and even his dramatic progression in the *Treatise of Human Nature* from an examination of the principles of the human mind, through the darkness of total skepticism, to a renewed enthusiasm for his further inquiries into the passions, morals, and political theory.<sup>24</sup> I address many of the resulting issues of interpretation as they arise. Most notably, I argue in Chapters 3 and 12 that Philo should be regarded as the main spokesman in the *Dialogues* for Hume’s general philosophical view; and, in Chapter 5, that Hume intends to provide a constructive account of human cognition in the concluding section of Book 1 of the *Treatise*. I also emphasize the consistency of his thought over the course of his literary career, although I consider some of the changes in presentation between his writings, especially from the *Treatise* to the two *Enquiries*.

Since Hume’s intellectual interests are reflected in his correspondence with his friends and fellow *litterati*, I also occasionally cite his letters. However, it is important to note that Hume tended to adjust the tone and content of each letter according to its intended reader, and that he generally valued goodwill and courtesy over argument and persuasion in written exchanges with his friends, and even with his critics.<sup>25</sup> I will accordingly indicate if he seems to be treating a given topic either more circumspectly or more candidly in a letter than in his published writings, by considering the style of the letter, and the nature of his relationship with the recipient.

23. On Hume’s literary style and its relation to his philosophical concerns, see Price, *The Ironic Hume*; Christensen, *Practicing Enlightenment*; and Box, *Suasive Art of David Hume*.

24. Livingston, *Hume’s Philosophy of Common Life*, 34–59, and *Philosophical Melancholy and Delirium*, 97–100, 137–40, and 168–71; Baier, *Progress of Sentiments*; Rorty, “From Passions to Sentiments,” 165–79; Immerwahr, “Hume’s Essays on Happiness,” 307–24; Malherbe, “Hume and the Art of Dialogue,” 201–23.

25. For examples, see his letters to his friend Hugh Blair in 1761 (L 1.348–51), and also to his critic George Campbell in 1762 (L 1.360–61).

This study is intended to provide a unified and constructive interpretation of Hume's thought in his various writings. Since this is in itself a demanding project, I have not attempted to criticize or evaluate Hume's arguments, at least to the extent that is usual among contemporary philosophers in studies of their predecessors. On the other hand, I would argue that attempts to understand historical texts in philosophy can and should be directed, not only toward evaluating arguments and tracing the history of issues which are currently popular in philosophy, but also toward discovering new perspectives and new problems that might have been overlooked by previous commentators. Accordingly, in the present study I show that many misleading interpretations of Hume's project, both in its details and in its overall character, have become entrenched in the subsequent philosophical tradition. I hope that a renewed consideration of the unity and constructive character of Hume's thought, and of the history of its interpretation, will in itself be a useful and valuable contribution to discussions in contemporary philosophy.

I have not attempted to provide a systematic account of the background and sources of Hume's thought in the works of his predecessors, or a systematic overview of Hume's influence in the history of philosophy.<sup>26</sup> I also have not discussed extensively his own social, intellectual, and cultural context, beyond what is required for considering the theoretical significance of his remarks concerning contemporary life and various current events in Europe, Great Britain, and Scotland.<sup>27</sup> In other words, although I explore Hume's approach to history, including the study of human cognition, emotion, and volition within their historical context, I am approaching these topics by examining the principles formulated by Hume for pursuing these inquiries. While these principles were indeed developed in the context of his own time, place, and intellectual tradition, Hume intended them to be applicable to the study of human nature in any culture, by anyone who is willing to share the intellectual commitments he defends. I will approach the explanation and interpretation of his philosophy in this spirit.

I have been perpetually encouraged, delighted, and challenged in preparing this book by the flourishing community of Hume scholars. It is regrettably no longer possible, if indeed it ever was, to consult every publication that would be relevant to a general study of this nature. I have therefore referred mainly to

26. The editors of the Clarendon and Oxford Philosophical Text editions of Hume's writings have provided valuable references to many of Hume's sources and predecessors. See the notes and editorial apparatus by David Fate Norton and Mary Norton in the OPT edition of the *Treatise*, and by Tom Beauchamp in the Clarendon and OPT editions of the two *Enquiries*.

27. For recent studies of Hume's immediate intellectual context in eighteenth-century Scotland, see Sher, *Church and University*; Allan, *Virtue, Learning, and the Scottish Enlightenment*; and Wood, *Scottish Enlightenment*. For an eminently readable history of Scotland during this period, including economic, political, cultural, and intellectual developments, see Herman, *How the Scots Invented the Modern World*.

those works (and they are many) that I have found to be especially important in the development of my own thinking about Hume, without attempting to provide a comprehensive survey of the secondary literature on every topic included here. I hope that these references will provide a valuable point of departure for readers who wish to pursue any of the topics in my study, or to contest some aspect of my interpretation of Hume.

Finally, a word on the title of this study. The phrase “reason in history” was introduced by Hegel in the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, and was adopted either by Hegel or by his editor, Johannes Hoffmeister, as the subtitle for Hegel’s introduction to his lectures on the philosophy of history, apparently to summarize their underlying theme.<sup>28</sup> Hume and Hegel are often regarded as representing the extreme poles of empiricism and idealism, although Hegel was actually influenced by Hume’s historical writings in at least one important respect, as we will see in Chapter 13. However, many recent studies have observed that Hume and Hegel are among the relatively few philosophers who were deeply interested in the study of history, and in pursuing the connections between history and philosophy.<sup>29</sup> In this study I hope to show that Hume, like Hegel, seeks to develop a constructive account of human reason, and that Hume, like Hegel, also locates the activity of human reason in history, although his style in approaching these topics is clearly different from that of his successor. I have, therefore, freely borrowed my subtitle from the realm of Hegelian discourse, since the phrase “reason in history” also expresses what I regard as the unifying theme in Hume’s thought.

28. See the selection from Hegel’s *Encyclopedia* in Hegel, *Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind*, 277 (§549), and Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, 1.

29. See Livingston, *Hume’s Philosophy of Common Life*, 2 and 36; Rorty, “From Passions to Sentiments,” 169; and Williams, *Cultivated Reason*, 26.

## 4

# Metaphysics

In the initial presentation of his theory of ideas, Hume identifies perceptions, including impressions of sensation, impressions of reflection, and ideas, as the contents of all our conscious states. In the course of the *Treatise* Hume argues that the principles of traditional metaphysics, or the ideas which serve to structure our ordinary experience, including our ideas of space, time, causation, external existence, and personal identity, are constructed by the mind through various types of imaginative extrapolation from our impressions of sensation and reflection. In the *Abstract* and the first *Enquiry* Hume focuses his attention upon the idea of causation, and sharply curtails or even dispenses with his analysis of our ideas of space, time, external existence, and personal identity.

In this chapter I will consider Hume's analysis of our ideas of space and time in Book 1, Part 2 of the *Treatise*, and our ideas of external existence and personal identity in Book 1, Part 4. This order of presentation, and indeed Hume's own organization of Book 1, might seem to be problematic, since not only space and time, but also external existence and even personal identity are presuppositions of his analysis of causation. More specifically, Hume argues that the idea of causation is superimposed upon sets of external objects by the mind as a result of its memory of a series of conjunctions in space and time between similar objects.<sup>1</sup>

1. For a further discussion of Hume's order of presentation, see Price, *Hume's Theory of the External World*, 6–8, 17–18, and 116–17.

I have already provided a preliminary consideration of Hume's account of our idea of space in Chapter 2, in relation to his discussion of geometry. However, I have postponed his treatment of space and time to the present chapter in order to trace the continuity between this theory and his analysis of our ideas of external objects and the self. I will consider his examination of the preceding systems of metaphysics and the various forms of skepticism in Chapter 5.

#### SPACE AND TIME

In Book 1, Part 1 of the *Treatise* Hume initially presents spatial and temporal contiguity as natural relations, and relative locations in space and time as philosophical relations that are given directly through observation (T 1.1.4.1, 1.1.5.5, 1.3.2.1–2 [SBN 11, 14, 73–74]). He examines our “abstract ideas” of space and time in Part 2 (T 1.2.3.5–6 [SBN 34–35]). Many of Hume's critics have regarded his analysis of space and time as obviously unsatisfactory, or indeed even as incoherent.<sup>2</sup> I contend, however, that Hume provides a thoughtful and intriguing account of the origin of our ideas of time and space, as arising from the mind's recognition of the arrangement of its perceptions in inner and outer experience.

As we have already seen in Chapter 2, Hume argues that our ideas of space and time, and therefore also space and time themselves, are composed of indivisible parts he calls “points” and “moments.” However, he also argues that these indivisible parts of space and time must be filled with something perceptible in order to be either perceived or imagined. First, the “atoms” occupying the minimal points of space must be colored or solid, and hence visible or tangible. For their part, the indivisible moments of time must be filled with “some real object or existence” drawn from “our perceptions of every kind,” including not only our inner and outer impressions, but also our ideas (T 1.2.3.5–7, 1.2.3.17 [SBN 34–35, 39]).

In applying his first principle to our abstract ideas of space and time, Hume finds that these ideas do not arise from any “primary distinct impression” that is either “mix'd up” with other impressions or can appear to the mind apart from any other impression (T 1.2.3.10; cf. 1.2.3.1, 1.2.5.28 [SBN 36–37; cf. 33, 64–65]). Instead, he argues that our ideas of space and time arise from the ideas of extension and duration, which we in turn derive, as distinctions of reason, by comparing the arrangements, or what he calls the “manner of appearance,” which we discover among our perceptions (T 1.2.3.4–5, 1.2.3.10 [SBN 34, 37]).

2. For surveys of recent assessments of Hume on space and time, see Johnson, *Mind of David Hume*, 81–107, and Frasca-Spada, *Space and the Self*, 57–58. See also Jacquette, *David Hume's Critique of Infinity*, 11–13.

Through the propensity of the imagination to continue its operation, we then project our ideas of extension and duration beyond any immediate series of perceptions, in order to formulate our abstract ideas of space and time.<sup>3</sup>

First, in considering the origin of our idea of space, Hume argues that our impressions of sensation, for example in the visual appearance of a table, do not provide a separate impression of extension, but present themselves merely as “impressions of colour’d points, dispos’d in a certain manner.” However, when we compare this collection of colored points to various other collections of colored points in our visual field, we are able to overlook their differences in color and formulate an abstract idea of extension founded “merely on that disposition of points, or manner of appearance, in which they agree.” In addition, we discover a resemblance between the arrangement of these colored points and our impressions of touch, since the latter are “found to be similar to those of sight in the disposition of their parts” (T 1.2.3.4–5 [SBN 34]). The concept of extension is thus formulated through a distinction of reason, in which we attend to a specific type of resemblance: a resemblance in the configuration or “manner of appearance,” first among, and then also between, our visual and tactile sensations (cf. T 1.4.2.11–12, 1.4.5.9 [SBN 191–92, 235]).

Next Hume turns to the idea of time, which is derived from the concept of duration.<sup>4</sup> Here he argues that time never appears to the mind as an impression, either alone or in the perception of any unchanging object. Instead, the idea of time is conveyed to the mind “by some *perceivable* succession of changeable objects,” and “arises altogether from the manner, in which impressions appear to the mind.” For example, “five notes play’d on a flute give us the impression and idea of time,” not indeed as a separate perception, but when the mind, through a distinction of reason, “takes notice of the *manner*, in which the different sounds make their appearance.” The abstract idea of this arrangement, or this succession of different perceptions, is the concept of duration (T 1.2.3.7–10; cf. 1.2.5.28, 1.4.2.29 [SBN 35–37; cf. 64–65, 200]).

While the idea of spatial extension arises from the arrangement of only our visual and tactile sensations, our idea of temporal duration arises from “the succession of our perceptions of every kind,” including “ideas as well as impressions, and impressions of reflection as well as of sensation.” Accordingly, the idea of time “comprehends a still greater variety than that of space,” and is “for ever present with us” in the continuous series of perceptions in our minds.

3. For studies of Hume’s account of our idea of space and time in the context of his general theory of ideas and cognition, see Church, *Hume’s Theory of the Understanding*, 57–64; Maund, *Hume’s Theory of Knowledge*, 210–26; Waxman, *Hume’s Theory of Consciousness*, 116–17; Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment*, 52–57 and 168–69; Frasca-Spada, *Space and the Self*; Falkenstein, “Space and Time,” 179–201; and Jacquette, *David Hume’s Critique of Infinity*, 43–128.

4. On Hume’s examination of time, see Johnson, “Time and the Idea of Time,” 205–19, and Costa, “Hume, Strict Identity, and Time’s Vacuum,” 1–16.

In other words, the idea of time is more encompassing than the idea of space, and is also more immediately and continually present to the mind (T 1.2.3.6, 1.2.5.29 [SBN 34–35, 65]).

Hume thus presents our ideas of extension and duration as abstract ideas, or concepts, in which we associate a general term with many particular images of extended or changing objects, according to the resemblances that we discover in the “manner of their appearance.” However, these abstract ideas of extension and duration are always represented in the mind by some particular image which has “a determinate quantity and quality” (T 1.2.3.4–6 [SBN 34–35]).

Since our ideas of space and time do not arise directly from distinct impressions, but are merely ideas “of the manner or order, in which objects exist,” Hume argues that we cannot form any image of space apart from material objects, or any image of time apart from a succession of changing objects. In other words, we cannot formulate a positive idea of either empty space or empty time. However, the claim that “we can form no idea of a vacuum, or space, where there is nothing visible or tangible” seems to be contradicted, not only by our apparent experiences of both observing and imagining spaces between bodies, but also by the arguments of many natural scientists, who claim that we must presuppose the idea of empty space in order to account for the motion of bodies (T 1.2.4.2, 1.2.5.1–4, 1.2.5.24 [SBN 39–40, 53–55, 63]).

Hume responds to the apparent arguments for the possibility, and the existence, of a vacuum by arguing that our idea of empty space is derived from our idea of extension. According to his analysis, I develop the idea of empty space only by seeing or touching separated bodies, and finding that I can place other bodies between them, or move my hand from one to the other. Since the supposed empty distance between bodies can be converted into a composition of extended points by receiving another body, and since this distance affects the senses in ways that are similar to the distance of an extended body, Hume concludes that the idea of empty space is derived from the idea of extension by an association of ideas, according to the natural relations of causation and resemblance. Accordingly, our idea of empty space, such as the space in an empty room, is a “fictitious distance,” or the merely derivative idea of an invisible and intangible gap in an arrangement of visible and tangible objects, which we regard as capable of receiving other objects (T 1.2.5.21–23 [SBN 61–62]).<sup>5</sup>

Hume initially concludes this argument in the *Treatise* by disavowing any intention to explain how material objects can be separated by invisible and intangible distances that have the capacity to receive other bodies. Indeed, he describes this as a question that lies outside his own investigation, and even

5. See also Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment*, 49 and 54–57; Frasca-Spada, *Space and the Self*, 157–93; and Jacqueline, *David Hume's Critique of Infinity*, 57–99.

beyond the range of our experience and understanding, since we can never know any of the properties of bodies “otherwise than by those external properties, which discover themselves to the senses” (T 1.2.5.26; cf. 1.2.5.3, 1.2.5.23–26 [SBN 64; cf. 54–55, 62–64]). He expands upon this in a footnote added in the Appendix, where he notes that if we seek to move beyond the “*appearances* of objects to our senses,” and to discover the “real nature and operations” of these objects, our efforts are likely to end in “scepticism and uncertainty.” He applies this argument in particular to the question of whether the apparent space between bodies must be filled with some type of body in order to account for separation and motion. In response, he states that “the *Newtonian* philosophy” asserts the existence of a vacuum only by affirming that bodies may be so distributed as to receive other bodies between them. However, at least in his view, Newtonian physics does not attempt to determine whether the intervening distance is filled with “something or nothing,” or to describe “the real nature of this position of bodies,” apart from their effects on our senses (T 1.2.5.26n12 [SBN 638–39]).<sup>6</sup>

Similarly, Hume argues that we cannot derive an idea of empty time, or of “time without a changeable existence,” either from a distinct impression of time, or by observing an unchanging object. Instead, we apply the concept of duration to a static object only through a “fiction,” by regarding this object as coexisting with a changing object, or in other words, a changing series of perceptions, such as the moving hands of a clock. We also regard an unchanging object as capable of changing in a given period of time, and we recognize that the qualities of a static object vary in our memory in the same degrees as those of a changing object. Our idea of time thus arises from a succession of changing perceptions and can be applied to an unchanging object only “by a fiction of the imagination, by which the unchangeable object is suppos’d to participate of the changes of the co-existent objects” (T 1.4.2.29; cf. 1.2.5.29 [SBN 200–201; cf. 65]).

Although he maintains that we cannot formulate a positive idea of empty space or empty time, Hume concedes that we may apply our concepts of extension and duration to the apparent spaces between bodies and to unchanging objects. He describes these extrapolated ideas of extension and duration in both cases as a “fiction,” or an idea produced by the inertial propensity of the imagination when it projects the ideas derived from our impressions, including the abstract idea of the manner of their distribution, beyond the arrangement of a given set of sensible points or a given succession of perceptions (T 1.2.3.11, 1.2.5.23, 1.4.2.29 [SBN 37, 62, 200–201]).

6. On the relation of Hume’s argument to various discussions among his predecessors and contemporaries, see Frasca-Spada, *Space and the Self*, 157–93, and Jacquette, *David Hume’s Critique of Infinity*.

Finally, Hume also considers our systematic extrapolation and application of these “fictitious” ideas of extension and duration through various types of reasoning. For example, he finds that we project our ideas of space and time beyond the range of our perceptions through causal reasoning, which gives us information concerning “such existences, as by their removal in time and place, lie beyond the reach of the senses and memory” (T 1.3.9.4 [SBN 108]). He also identifies location in space and time as philosophical relations, or relations in which we judge the relative situations of objects by “an infinite number of comparisons, such as *distant*, *contiguous*, *above*, *below*, *before*, *after*, &c.” We may even divide extension and duration into units and use these to measure and to calculate extensions in space and time according to the philosophical relation of “proportions in quantity or number,” although Hume maintains that “we ought not to look for the utmost *precision* and exactness” in these applications of mathematical reasoning to extended objects (T 1.1.5.6, 1.3.1.2, 1.2.4.17 [SBN 14–15, 70, 45]). Hume accordingly indicates that, by engaging in causal reasoning and using various systems of measurement, we can extend our ideas of extension and duration beyond our direct field of perception in order to situate other inferred objects within a continuous spatial and temporal framework (cf. T 1.2.1.5 [SBN 28]). He thus interprets the Newtonian conceptions of absolute time and space, not as positive ideas of empty time and space, but rather as imaginative extrapolations of our concepts of extension and duration into unfolding fields of possible perception, which we project in order to accommodate any objects whose existence we may infer beyond the immediate range of our senses (cf. T 1.2.5.23–29, 1.2.5.26n12 [SBN 62–65, 638–39]).<sup>7</sup>

After his analysis of our ideas of space and time in Book 1, Hume also considers the influence of space and time on the human passions in Book 2 of the *Treatise*. In this context he examines various characteristics of space and time from the standpoint of human existence, such as the division of time into past, present, and future (T 2.3.7.1–2.3.8.13 [SBN 427–38]). We will return to this discussion in Chapter 6, in which we will consider the human passions and the human attitude of concern within a physical and social environment.

#### EXTERNAL EXISTENCE

The longest section in Book 1 of the *Treatise* is devoted to our idea of the existence of external objects. In this chapter I consider Hume’s analysis of our ordinary idea of external existence in Part 4, Section 2, and its relation to his

7. See Price, *Hume’s Theory of the External World*, 174–77; Kuhns, “Hume’s Republic,” 73–95; and Wright, *Sceptical Realism*, 100–105.

earlier account of our ideas of existence and substance. In the next chapter I will turn to his critical assessment of the ordinary idea of external existence and his discussion of the alternative proposals offered by the “antient” and “modern” systems of philosophy, as presented in Sections 2–4.

As we have seen, Hume maintains that “nothing is ever really present with the mind but its perceptions or impressions and ideas,” and that “the only existences, of which we are certain, are perceptions,” since only these are “immediately present to us by consciousness” (T 1.2.6.7, 1.4.2.47 [SBN 67, 212]).<sup>8</sup> He even indicates that perceptions may be identified as substances, according to the definition of a substance as whatever may be “consider’d as separately existent, and may exist separately” and has “no need of any thing else” to support its existence (T 1.4.5.5; cf. 1.4.5.24, 1.4.6.3 [SBN 233; cf. 244, 252]).<sup>9</sup>

In Part 2 Hume further characterizes a perception as an “object of thought,” or simply as an “object,” and distinguishes an object in this sense from “external objects,” which are known to us “only by those perceptions they occasion” (T 1.2.6.2–7 [SBN 66–67]). However, in the course of Book 1 he also uses the word “object” noncommittally, or even with a deliberate equivocation, for both perceptions and external objects (cf. T 1.1.5.1–10, 1.2.3.1–17 [SBN 13–15, 33–39]). He finally explains this apparent ambiguity in Part 4. Here he notes that the “vulgar,” among whom he includes “almost all mankind, and even philosophers themselves, for the greatest part of their lives,” identify their perceptions with external objects and suppose “that the very being, which is intimately present to the mind, is the real body or material existence” (T 1.4.2.38 [SBN 206]; cf. EHU 12.6–8 [SBN 151–52]).<sup>10</sup> He then stipulates that he will distinguish in his philosophical analysis between an “object,” or an external object, and a “perception.” However, he warns us that when he is considering our ordinary idea of external existence, he will revert to the undifferentiated usage of the vulgar by supposing that there is “a single existence, which I shall call indifferently *object* or *perception*” (T 1.4.2.31; cf. 1.4.2.46 [SBN 202; cf. 211]).<sup>11</sup>

8. For two valuable discussions of Hume’s account of perceptions, see Bricke, *Hume’s Philosophy of Mind*, especially 150–53, and Waxman, *Hume’s Theory of Consciousness*, 210–22.

9. For different assessments of this assertion, see Bricke, *Hume’s Philosophy of Mind*, 67–71, and Johnson, *Mind of David Hume*, 280–81 and 307–8. Since Hume repeatedly asserts the autonomy of perceptions in similar terms (cf. T 1.4.2.39, 1.4.6.16 [SBN 207, 259–60]), I would regard this characterization of perceptions as a serious proposal. I indeed agree with Bricke that Hume is distinguishing between two uses of the word of “substance”: the traditional use of this term for a substratum, and his use of this term for a perception. See Bricke, *Hume’s Philosophy of Mind*, 59–62.

10. In Part 3 Hume distinguishes the “wise,” or those who rely on philosophical probable reasoning, from the “vulgar,” who often do not (T 1.3.13.12 [SBN 150]). However, in Part 4 he uses the term “vulgar” interchangeably with “common” and “popular” for the opinions of the “generality of mankind,” including “all of us, at one time or other,” in contrast to the opinions we reach through philosophical reflection (T 1.4.2.31, 1.4.2.36, 1.4.2.56–57 [SBN 202, 205, 217–18]).

11. For a further discussion of Hume’s usage, see McRae, “Nature of Mind,” 150–67.

Indeed, he maintains that it is impossible for us to conceive of any external objects as “any thing but exactly the same with perceptions” (T 1.4.2.56; cf. 1.2.6.6–9 [SBN 218; cf. 67–68]).

Hume presents a separate discussion of the idea of existence in Book 1, Part 2. Here he notes that we might expect to derive the concept of existence directly from our impressions and ideas, since all of these are “conceiv’d as existent.” However, he argues that we encounter several problems in attempting to explain our idea of existence. First, the idea of existence is not derived from any distinct impression that attends every perception. Next, we cannot derive the idea of existence by comparing a perception that exists to a perception that does not exist, since every perception, as such, necessarily exists. Instead, Hume argues that the idea of existence is already itself the same as “the idea of what we conceive to be existent” (T 1.2.6.2–4; cf. App.2 [SBN 66–67; cf. 623]).<sup>12</sup>

However, at the end of this discussion Hume distinguishes between the idea of existence that applies to our perceptions, which I will call “absolute existence,” and the idea of “external existence,” or the existence which we attribute to external objects. Here he argues that although we cannot formulate a positive idea of anything which would be “specifically different from ideas and impressions,” we can form a “relative idea” of the existence of external objects, by which we do not suppose these objects to be “specifically different” from our perceptions, “but only attribute to them different relations, connexions and durations” (T 1.2.6.1–9 [SBN 66–68]). That is, we regard external objects as continuing to exist apart from our perceptions, or as composed, in effect, of unobserved and connected perceptions. Hume considers this “relative idea” of external existence in Part 4 and elsewhere in his writings in terms that reinforce the contrast between external existence and his account of absolute existence in Part 2. In the first *Enquiry* he argues that “whatever *is* may *not be*,” and “the non-existence of any being, without exception, is as clear and distinct an idea as its existence.” As a result, two propositions affirming its existence or non-existence are equally intelligible, even though only one can be true; and the existence of any being “can only be proved by arguments from its cause or its effect,” which are “founded entirely on experience” (EHU 12.28–29 [SBN 164]). Similarly, the relative idea of external existence seems to be reflected in Cleanthes’ claim that “whatever we conceive as existent, we can also conceive as

12. Wilson argues that, in Hume’s view, the idea of existence is not a distinction of reason but a species-concept, which applies to all of our perceptions but is not derived either from a separate impression or from a quality in which they resemble one another. See Wilson, “Hume on the Abstract Idea of Existence,” 167–201. For other attempts to explain Hume’s arguments on the concept of existence, see Cummins, “Hume on the Idea of Existence,” 61–82; Tweyman, “Some Reflections,” 137–49; and Johnson, *Mind of David Hume*, 108–16.

non-existent,” and that there is no being “whose non-existence implies a contradiction” (DNR 11.189). We will return to Hume’s account of the concept of existence and of external existence in the course of the present section.

In Part 4 Hume examines the causes of our ordinary belief in the existence of “body,” or external objects.<sup>13</sup> He begins by dividing our idea of external existence into two constituent ideas: the idea of a “CONTINU’D existence” of objects, when they are not immediately present to the senses, and of an “existence DISTINCT from the mind and perception.” He then divides the idea of distinct existence into two further ideas: those of their “situation” and “relations,” or “their *external* position as well as the *independence* of their existence and operation” (T 1.4.2.2; cf. 1.4.2.23, 1.4.2.44 [SBN 188; cf. 199, 210]).

Next, Hume examines the three possible sources for the ideas of continued and distinct existence: the senses, reason, and imagination. First, the senses cannot provide the idea of the continued existence of an object, since it is precisely the interrupted character of our sensations that initiates the problem of continued existence, and since the continued existence of objects could only be given through the senses if we suppose that the senses continue to operate “even after they have ceas’d all manner of operation,” which is a “contradiction in terms.” Nor can the senses give us any idea of the distinct existence of objects, since sensations do not indicate in their immediate appearance whether they are the representations of external objects or merely subjective states of consciousness (T 1.4.2.3–4 [SBN 188–89]).

Second, Hume argues that our ideas of continued and distinct existence cannot arise from reason. Here he appeals to the evidence provided by children, common people, and even animals, who all believe in the continuing and distinct existence of body, but do not have a sophisticated ability to reason. On the contrary, reason shows us, through “a very little reflection and philosophy,” that “every thing, which appears to the mind, is nothing but a perception, and is interrupted, and dependent on the mind” (T 1.4.2.44, 1.4.2.14 [SBN 210, 193]; cf. EHU 12.8–16 [SBN 151–55]). Here Hume is referring to the evidence put forward by many ancient and modern philosophers, and also by contemporary natural scientists, to show that our impressions of sensation appear to be relative to the condition of our sense organs, nerves, and “animal spirits.” Hume refers to several of these observations, including the discovery that we can induce double vision by pressing our eyeballs, or recognizing the effects of distance or illness on our sensations (T 1.4.2.45; cf. 1.4.4.3–4 [SBN 210–11; cf. 226–27]). Several critics have objected that Hume is begging the question here, since his argument allegedly requires us to presuppose the continued

13. The most thorough discussion of this analysis is Price’s study, *Hume’s Theory of the External World*. Several valuable recent studies include Pears, *Hume’s System*, 152–97; Waxman, *Hume’s Theory of Consciousness*, 238–65; Wilson, *Hume’s Defence of Causal Inference*, 84–98; and Collier, “Filling the Gaps,” 155–70.

existence and distinct operation of our sense organs and nervous system when we are not perceiving them.<sup>14</sup> However, Hume's larger argument does not rest upon the supposition of the distinct and continued existence of our sensory apparatus, since his main concern is to argue that perceptions are dependent on the mind or consciousness, prior to any determination regarding the existence of body, including my own body. On Hume's view, our scientific belief in the continued and distinct existence of our sensory apparatus arises from the same principles as our vulgar and philosophical beliefs in the existence of external objects, since I regard even my own body as an object that is exterior to my mind, and since I learn about the interior of my own body through the study of other human bodies. In this passage Hume is merely noting that once we have accepted the existence of an external and internal sensory apparatus, scientific reasoning shows us that our sensations are correlated to the observed states of this apparatus.

Hume further argues that we cannot derive our belief in external objects from causal reasoning, since causal reasoning only arises from the conjunction of two observed objects and leads us to expect the conjunction of similar observable objects. This type of inference can never lead us beyond the field of observation to infer the existence of an unobserved object from the appearance of a perception, since we cannot observe a conjunction between an unobserved object and a perception (T 1.4.2.14, 1.4.2.47 [SBN 193, 212]).

Having eliminated the senses and reason as candidates, Hume provisionally concludes that our idea of the distinct and continued existence of sensible objects must be "entirely owing to the IMAGINATION" (T 1.4.2.14 [SBN 193]).

To trace the role of the imagination in producing our idea of external existence, Hume suggests that we should begin by reconsidering the apparent division of our impressions into two types. The first includes "our pains and pleasures, our passions and affections," while the second contains those other impressions, including "colours, tastes, smells, sounds, heat and cold," along with "figure, bulk, motion and solidity." Of these two types of impressions, we regard the former as "internal and perishing" and the latter as qualities of external objects. Next, in a more differentiated account of the second set of impressions, Hume notes that the "vulgar" believe that the secondary qualities of color, taste, and sound, as well as the primary qualities of shape, solidity, and motion, have a "distinct continu'd existence," while philosophers ascribe a distinct and continued existence only to primary qualities (T 1.4.2.12, 1.4.2.15–16; cf. 1.4.4.3–4 [SBN 192, 194; cf. 226–27]; EHU 12.15 [SBN 154–55]). However, he notes that sounds, tastes, and smells, while "commonly regarded by the mind

14. For discussions of this passage, see Price, *Hume's Theory of the External World*, 7–9 and 115–20; Waxman, *Hume's Theory of Consciousness*, 220–21 and 254–62; and Johnson, *Mind of David Hume*, 264–65.

as continu'd independent qualities," appear, in contrast to color and shape, "not to have any existence in extension, and consequently cannot appear to the senses as situated externally to the body" (T 1.4.2.9; cf. 1.4.6.13 [SBN 191; cf. 258]). Finally, neither the vulgar nor philosophers attribute a continued distinct existence either to pains and pleasures, or to the passions (T 1.4.2.12 [SBN 192]).

In a later discussion of nonspatial objects Hume argues, against the view he attributes to many other metaphysicians, "that an object may exist, and yet be no where," and even that "the greatest part of beings do and must exist after this manner." Among these nonspatial objects or perceptions he includes tastes, smells, and sounds; desires, passions, and moral reflections; and indeed "all our perceptions and objects, except those of the sight and feeling." He then argues that the impressions of taste and smell cannot exist in a "local conjunction" with extended objects, and that our idea of this conjunction arises indirectly from other relations. That is, we attribute taste or smell to an object when we discover that a conjunction between an extended object and certain organs of our body regularly produces a specific impression of taste or smell in that organ. The imagination is led by these relations of contiguity and causation to suppose a "conjunction in place" between the smell or the flavor and the extended object. We therefore suppose that the taste of an olive exists in the object; and even that this flavor exists "in such a manner, that it fills the whole without extension," yet also subsists "entire in every part without separation" (T 1.4.5.10–13; cf. 1.4.2.10, 2.1.5.6 [SBN 235–38; cf. 191, 287]).

In response to Hume's assertion that neither the vulgar nor philosophers attribute a continued distinct existence to the passions (T 1.4.2.12; cf. 1.4.2.20 [SBN 192; cf. 195]), Price has argued that we often regard our passions as continuing to exist even after an interruption. This view is also affirmed by Hume in his own discussion of the passions, where he attributes to human beings "certain calm desires and tendencies," which produce "little emotion in the mind, and are more known by their effects than by the immediate feeling or sensation." Indeed, he argues that such a disposition tends to operate as a "settled principle of action" or a "predominant inclination of the soul," although its influence can be interrupted by a momentary passion (T 2.3.3.8–2.3.4.1 [SBN 417–19]). Hume also describes the "characters and disposition" of a person as a set of tendencies in that person "that is durable or constant," since it is made up of "durable principles of the mind, which extend over the whole conduct" (T 2.3.2.6, 3.3.1.4 [SBN 411, 575]). Price describes this theory of affective dispositions, which Hume appears to presuppose in his later discussion, as an "introspective naive realism," corresponding to the perceptual naive realism of the vulgar, and suggests that Hume can also account for our belief in latent affective traits on the basis of his analysis of our idea of continued

existence.<sup>15</sup> However, Price's suggestion that this application of Hume's theory must also entail the distinct existence of the passions seems less plausible, since an affective disposition would presumably have a continued existence within the mind, and not apart from it.<sup>16</sup>

Indeed, Hume's analysis of the passions calls attention to an interesting problem in his account of external existence, which is his failure to explain the concept of "distinct existence." As we have seen, Hume argues that our idea of the "existence of body" consists in the ideas of continued, external, and independent existence, with the second and third together comprising the idea of distinct existence. That is, we regard something with an independent external existence as distinct "from the mind and perception" (T 1.4.2.2 [SBN 188]). However, Hume also recognizes that we often attribute a continued and independent, although not an external, existence to many of our sensations (such as tastes, smells, and sounds), and a continued, but not an independent or external, existence to some of our impressions of reflection (for example, to our calm passions or dispositions).<sup>17</sup> In other words, although we attribute a *continued* existence to many impressions apart from those which we regard as distributed in space, we attribute *external* existence only to impressions of color and touch, through a process which Hume has indeed already considered in his account of our idea of extension. Accordingly, it would seem that in Part 4, Hume is actually presenting an account of our idea of the continued existence, and perhaps also the independent existence, of any entity, which might be either mental or corporeal; while his account of our idea of external or corporeal existence is instead presented in Part 2. Hume appears to recognize this later in Part 4, in noting that the imagination cannot attribute spatiality to any perceptions "except those of the sight and feeling" (T 1.4.5.10 [SBN 235–36]; cf. EHU 12.15 [SBN 154]). Indeed, Hume surreptitiously replaces his analysis of externality in Part 4 with an account of the independence of body, thereby abandoning any more specific discussion of spatiality, at least in this context (T 1.4.2.4–5, 1.4.2.9–10 [SBN 189, 191]). Finally, as Hume himself indicates, any account of our belief in external existence, even in the external existence of the objects of sight and touch, must include an account of the self to which these objects

15. Hume's account of the enduring existence of affective mental dispositions might also be applied to our cognitive abilities, such as reason and the imagination, when we regard these as faculties that have a continued existence even when we are not using them (cf. T 1.4.2.2, 1.4.2.32–35 [SBN 188, 202–4]).

16. See Price, *Hume's Theory of the External World*, 27–29 and 69–70; cf. 19–20. For further views of the status of mental dispositions in Hume's philosophy, see Bricke, *Hume's Philosophy of Mind*, 46–58; Johnson, *Mind of David Hume*, 296–300; Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment*, 170–71; Wilson, *Hume's Defence of Causal Inference*, 36; and Frasca-Spada, *Space and the Self*, 157–93.

17. We can apparently imagine that a passion could have an independent as well as a continued existence, if a passion can be imagined as intruding itself from outside into the conscious life of an individual, for example in certain types of alleged psychic abilities. However, we need not require Hume to consider this possibility, since it does not belong to our everyday understanding of the passions.

are exterior. This requires either an account of the mind, which Hume has not yet provided, or an account of the idea of our own body, which must apparently be explained in the same terms as our idea of any other corporeal object (T 1.4.2.4–10 [SBN 189–91]).<sup>18</sup>

With this consideration of the problem of independence and externality we may now turn to the central concern of Hume's discussion: his account of our idea of the continued existence of objects.

First, Hume argues that in many of our attributions of continued existence to objects we are guided by a "peculiar *constancy*" among our impressions, whenever these present themselves "in the same uniform manner, and change not upon account of any interruptions in my seeing or perceiving them." As examples of constancy, or of exact resemblance among the perceptions in an interrupted series, we may consider "these mountains, and houses, and trees, which lie at present under my eye," along with "my bed and table, my books and papers," which "when I lose sight of them by shutting my eyes or turning my head, I soon after find them return upon me without the least alteration" (T 1.4.2.18 [SBN 195–96]). As we will see, this exact resemblance between our interrupted perceptions leads us to regard these perceptions as "individually the same," even though they are different from each other, and to further suppose the continued existence of these perceptions even when we do not perceive them (T 1.4.2.24 [SBN 199]).

Second, we often attribute a continued existence to objects on the basis of a series of perceptions that do not exactly resemble each other. In these cases Hume finds that the changes in the series of perceptions "preserve a *coherence*, and have a regular dependence on each other," providing the foundation for "a kind of reasoning from causation" which also produces the idea of continued existence. In his example, my visual impressions of the merry blaze in my fireplace might be very different after I have been away from the room for an hour. However, I attribute a continued existence to the fire because I remember a certain sequence of changing perceptions during an interval of time similar to the one that elapsed while I was away (T 1.4.2.19 [SBN 195]). This recognition

18. Pears also objects to Hume's account of distinct existence, though for different reasons. According to Pears, Hume mistakenly attributes to the vulgar the view that "the object of his perception" has a continued and independent existence, but not an existence in physical space. This interpretation can be criticized on several grounds. First, Hume includes externality in our idea of distinct existence, and also argues that the vulgar believe that their perceptions exist as objects in space: or externally, as well as independently from the mind. Next, while Pear asserts that the vulgar, according to Hume, do not ask themselves whether their "objects" are physical or mental, Hume evidently maintains that the vulgar do indeed identify a subset of their perceptions with physical objects, and do not regard these perceptions as mind-dependent entities (T 1.4.2.12–13, 1.4.2.31, 1.4.2.36, 1.4.2.40–41 [SBN 192–93, 202, 205, 207–9]). Hume thus is not committed to the view that the idea of external existence entails belief in the double existence of perceptions and objects. Instead, on his view, the vulgar believe in the external existence of certain perceptions as external objects, but not in the double existence of perceptions and objects. See Pears, *Hume's System*, 155–67.

of a coherence among our perceptions, arising from our projection of a remembered causal sequence onto an interrupted series of perceptions, enables us to form an idea of, and belief in, a changing world as the cause of our individual impressions. This allows me to account for the movement of a messenger through the door and into the room behind me, and for the arrival of a letter written to me by a friend in a foreign country and delivered by means of “posts and ferries.” We are thus led to suppose “the effects and continu’d existence” of objects according to our “memory and observation,” and to “connect their past and present appearances” according to the changes we have found by experience “to be suitable to their particular natures and circumstances.” As a result, we regard the world “as something real and durable,” which continues to exist even when not present to our senses (T 1.4.2.20 [SBN 195–97]; cf. EHU 12.7–8 [SBN 151–52]).

Hume argues that the imagination produces our idea of the continued existence of external objects by generating a “supposition” or “fiction,” which extends our idea of an object beyond our immediate perceptions (T 1.4.2.29, 1.4.2.36, 1.4.2.43 [SBN 200–201, 205, 209]). He presents this supposition as another product of the inertial propensity of the imagination, whose activity he has traced in our idea of an exact standard of equality in geometry (T 1.4.2.22; cf. 1.2.4.23–26 [SBN 198; cf. 47–49]). In attributing external existence to a constant series of interrupted perceptions, the mind is attempting to resolve a conflict between their exact resemblance, which gives us an idea of their perfect identity, and the real difference between them that arises from their interruption. To overcome this conflict, the imagination disguises the interruption by supposing its perceptions to be connected by “a real existence, of which we are insensible.” Similarly, in observing a coherent series of changes in an interrupted series of perceptions, we discover that this coherence is “much greater and more uniform, if we suppose the objects to have a continu’d existence” (T 1.4.2.22–24 [SBN 198–99]). This supposition of a continued existence acquires the character of a “belief” through the combined forcefulness of the individual impressions of sensation, enhanced by the lively satisfaction we receive from uniting our “broken impressions.” Finally, once we have developed the propensity to attribute a continuing existence to a series of impressions, we tend to ascribe persistence to similar sequences of perceptions, even before we have had a comparable experience of their constancy or coherence. In these cases the resemblance we discover between various constant and coherent sequences among our perceptions become “a source of reasoning and analogy,” which enables us to attribute “the same qualities to the similar objects” (T 1.4.2.24, 1.4.2.42 [SBN 199, 208–9]).

In sum, the constancy or coherence we discover among our successive impressions arouses the inertial “propension” of the imagination and leads it to

generate a “fiction” by which we regard these sequences of impressions as objects that continue to exist even when the series is interrupted (T 1.4.2.36 [SBN 205]).<sup>19</sup>

Finally, Hume adds that our belief in the “*distinct or independent* existence” of objects apart from the mind is a “necessary consequence” of our belief in their continued existence. In his own words, this belief appears “wherever the mind follows its first and most natural tendency,” even though “the doctrine of the independent existence of our sensible perceptions is contrary to the plainest experience” (T 1.4.2.44 [SBN 210]). Here he is echoing his initial assertion that the continued and the distinct existence of objects will mutually entail each other. However, he now apparently reduces “distinct” to “independent” existence, thereby implicitly conceding, as I have suggested, that he has not specifically explained our idea of external or spatial existence in Part 4 (T 1.4.2.2; cf. 1.4.5.10 [SBN 188; cf. 235–36]).

We may now return to Hume’s general account of our idea of existence. As we have seen, Hume suggests that the idea of existence in the strict sense, or what I have called the absolute idea of existence, is derived from the existence of our perceptions, which, however, cannot be compared to any nonexistent perceptions. He then argues that we can only form a “relative idea” of the existence of external objects, or of objects “suppos’d *specifically* different from our perceptions,” when we “attribute to them different relations, connexions and durations” than we attribute to perceptions themselves (T 1.2.6.9 [SBN 68]). In Part 4 he shows that this “relative idea” of external existence arises from the imagination, which attributes durations and connections to our perceptions by supposing that they continue to exist when they are not perceived, or by supposing that they are connected to unperceived impressions. Through these propensities, the imagination produces our idea of an external object and our belief in its existence.

Once we have formulated the relative idea of an external object, Hume indicates that we may also develop the idea of a nonexistent external object, or an object that does not have the appropriate set of connections to the objects we believe to exist, as well as the idea of an unobserved object. We may formulate the idea of a nonexistent object in two ways. First, the idea of a nonexistent object may be a deliberate product of the creative fancy, in which case it is not an object of belief. Second, the idea of a nonexistent object may be an extrapolation from a series of impressions that, upon a more careful or a complete survey, does not display a very compelling constancy or coherence, in which case we regard our initial belief in the object as mistaken. In cases of the latter type,

19. Price has proposed a more streamlined version of Hume’s argument by suggesting that constancy and coherence are both types of “gap-indifference,” with constancy as the limiting case of coherence; see *Hume’s Theory of the External World*, 37–38 and 59–71.

in which we mistakenly believe in the existence of some particular external object, we have allowed our imagination to be guided by our hasty judgments of the causal relations between our perceptions: judgments which we may correct by appealing to the philosophical principles of causal reasoning. In other words, Hume argues that we may draw inferences from “the coherence of our perceptions,” to distinguish, for example, between those impressions conjured by poetry or madness, and those which we should regard as real objects, by relying upon “reflection and *general rules*” (T 1.3.5.2, 1.3.10.11 [SBN 84, 631]).

According to Hume’s analysis, we thus rely on causal reasoning, not only to attribute external existence to a changing series of impressions, but also to distinguish those sequences of perceptions we identify as external objects from those sequences we regard as fictions or illusions (cf. T 1.2.6.9, 1.4.2.45, 1.3.10.11–12 [SBN 68, 210–11, 632]). Similarly, we can account for our idea of and our belief in an unobserved object, such as an object distant in space or remote in time, as a further supposition produced by the imagination, under the guidance of analogy and causal reasoning, to explain a set of present perceptions (T 1.3.9.4 [SBN 108]).<sup>20</sup> Hume argues that causal reasoning cannot be the source of our idea of external existence, since we cannot perceive any cause of our perceptions that is separate from our perceptions (T 1.4.2.21 [SBN 197–98]). However, we rely upon the habit of causal reasoning in order to form the idea of any particular changing object, to distinguish a real object from an illusion, and to posit the existence of unobserved objects. Hume is accordingly referring to external existence, or the relative idea of existence, when he claims that “whatever is may not be,” and when he asserts that the existence of a being “can only be proved by arguments from its cause or its effect” which are “founded entirely on experience” (EHU 12.29 [SBN 164]; cf. DNR 11.189).

Hume concludes that this activity of the imagination in producing a “supposition” or a fiction is the source of our common or vulgar idea of separate and enduring objects, which “are seen, and felt, and become present to the mind,” and are considered to be “sometimes present to the mind, and sometimes absent from it, without any real or essential change” (T 1.4.2.40 [SBN 207–8]; cf. EHU 12.8 [SBN 151–52]). However, he argues that this opinion of the continued and distinct existence of our perceptions as external objects is shown by “a very little reflection and philosophy” to be false (T 1.4.2.44 [SBN 210]). These arguments have led philosophers develop a distinction between perceptions and objects: a distinction which Hume examines at the end of his discussion, and which I will consider in Chapter 5.

20. See Price, *Hume’s Theory of the External World*, 164–75 and 216, and Wilson, *Hume’s Defence of Causal Inference*, 41–70.

In concluding this section I would like to examine two key principles in Hume's account of our idea of external existence: the concept of identity, and the concept of a fiction.

Hume introduces the concept of identity in Part 2 as a philosophical relation that we first ascribe, "in its strictest sense," to "constant and unchangeable objects," and then also, in a derivative sense, "to every being, whose existence has any duration" (T 1.1.5.4 [SBN 14]). He further includes identity among those relations of fact immediately given to the senses (T 1.3.2.1–2 [SBN 73–74]). In Part 4 he offers a more detailed analysis of the concept of identity, as a relation that we attribute to external objects and our own mind. He initially argues that a single object or perception can give rise only to an idea of "unity," and rejects the use of the word "identity" for the supposed relation of an object to itself, since the alleged proposition that "an object is the same with itself" does not include a distinct subject and predicate, and would accordingly "mean nothing." On the other hand, we cannot derive the concept of identity from a "multiplicity" of objects, since the mind regards each object as a separate individual. The concept of identity therefore cannot be derived either from one perception or object, or from a collection of these (T 1.4.2.26–27; cf. 1.4.6.6 [SBN 200; cf. 253–54]).

In order to account for our idea of identity, and its relation to both unity and number, Hume returns to his account of time. As we have seen, in Part 2 Hume argues that the concept of duration is derived from a changing succession of perceptions, and then attributed to unchanging objects by a "fiction of the imagination." He now suggests that this fiction, when applied to an uninterrupted sequence of unchanging objects, produces the concept of identity, in which we regard a number of distinct momentary perceptions as a single object enduring through time. In our attributions of identity we accordingly judge, in effect, that "the object existent at one time is the same with itself existent in another." In other words, identity is "a medium betwixt unity and number," or more properly "either of them, according to the view, in which we take it," since in our attributions of identity we regard a multiplicity of perceptions as forming a unity through a "suppos'd variation of time" (T 1.4.2.29–30 [SBN 200–201]).

Hume argues that we may attribute identity "in its strictest sense," or "perfect identity," only to "constant and unchangeable objects," or in other words, to a perception enduring through time without an interruption or a change. This would presumably be an uninterrupted view of an unchanging object (T 1.1.5.4, 1.4.2.33; cf. 1.4.6.6 [SBN 14, 203; cf. 254]). However, we also have the propensity to ascribe identity to an interrupted succession of exactly resembling perceptions, and even to successive perceptions that do not resemble each other very closely but are regularly conjoined in certain ways. In other words,

the imagination continues the same “smooth and uninterrupted progress” when it recognizes “a succession of related objects” as in considering “the same invariable object,” and tends to confuse “the succession with the identity” (T 1.4.2.34 [SBN 203–4]). He accordingly states that all the objects “to which we ascribe identity, without observing their invariableness and uninterruptedness” consist in a succession of perceptions that are related to each other by “resemblance, contiguity, or causation” (T 1.4.6.7 [SBN 255]).<sup>21</sup> This type of identity, which we attribute to objects from an interrupted series of resembling perceptions, or a coherent series of changing perceptions, may be called “imperfect” identity (T 1.4.6.9 [SBN 256]).

Finally, Hume considers the principles by which we attribute this “imperfect” identity to changing objects. First, we generally attribute a continued identity to any “mass of matter” after a very small part has been added or removed, usually distinguishing a small change from a change in the identity of an object “by its *proportion* to the whole.” Thus, in his examples, “the addition or diminution of a mountain wou’d not be sufficient to produce a diversity in a planet,” although a change in “a very few inches wou’d be able to destroy the identity of some bodies.” Next, we regard a “mutual dependence,” or a “reciprocal relation of cause and effect,” within a series of perceptions, even in their “actions and operations,” as grounds for attributing identity. This is especially apparent in the case of organic bodies, which we regard as maintaining their identity through a series of changes even while “their form, size, and substance” are “entirely alter’d,” and even when the body does not preserve “one particle of matter, or figure of its parts the same.” Finally, we may also regard the human ability to direct each in a series of changing objects toward a “*common end* or purpose” as a basis for attributing identity to a sequence of perceptions as a single object. This is evident, for example, in the case of “a ship, of which a considerable part has been chang’d by frequent reparations.” Indeed, Hume finds that many attributions of identity are determined by human artifices or conventions as these apply to a causal sequence. This appears, for example, when we say, after an old brick church has fallen into ruin, that “the parish rebuilt the same church of free-stone, and according to modern architecture,” even though “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.” We may even consider a “republic or commonwealth” to maintain its identity through all of the “incessant change of its parts,” including not only

21. Price has argued that, on Hume’s account, even the identity of a supposedly unchanging and uninterrupted object arises from our attribution of duration to a series of spatial minima and/or temporal minima: see his *Hume’s Theory of the External World*, 46–50, and also Waxman, *Hume’s Theory of Consciousness*, 203–7.

new generations of inhabitants, but also changes in its “laws and constitutions” (T 1.4.6.9–13, 1.4.6.19 [SBN 255–58, 261]).<sup>22</sup>

In cases of very close resemblance and very familiar causal relations in a sequence of perceptions, Hume argues that the constitutive of the imagination “almost universally takes place,” producing a spontaneous agreement among human observers in our judgments of identity (T 1.4.2.29 [SBN 201]). In other cases our attributions of identity require a more specialized experience with similar objects, and judgments drawn through philosophical probable reasoning concerning the regular sequence of changes in this type of object under various conditions. In other words, an Indian prince would not judge a pool of ice to be identical to a pool of water without experience of the tendency of water to freeze in cold temperatures (cf. EHU 10.10 [SBN 113–14]). Finally, in attributing identity to objects on the basis of human purposes, or human conventions, we must apply the standards of identity that are implicitly recognized for that type of object within the life of a community, or even explicitly prescribed by an institution, as in the case of a ship or a parish church. However, Hume observes that we do not always have a precise standard in every case for determining the identity of the object through every possible change; and for this reason he concludes that many of our disputes over the identity of an object might seem to be “merely verbal,” although the parties in these disputes appeal to the philosophical concept of identity insofar as “the relation of parts gives rise to some fiction or imaginary principle of union” (T 1.4.6.21; cf. 1.4.6.7 [SBN 262; cf. 255]).<sup>23</sup>

Hume thus indicates that we may develop standards for attributing identity to certain types of objects according to our philosophical or scientific principles of probable reasoning, and in some cases according to the social conventions that govern the attribution of identity to certain types of objects (cf. 1.3.10.11–12 [SBN 631]). That is, we appeal to the philosophical principles of probable reasoning to distinguish those products of the imagination which are “permanent, irresistible, and universal” from those which are “changeable, weak, and irregular,” or the “trivial suggestions of the fancy” from the “general and more establish’d properties of the imagination” that we call the “understanding” (T 1.4.4.1, 1.4.7.7 [SBN 225, 267]). Our concept of identity is, therefore, a construction of the imagination, which we may judge to be applicable to an object in any given case according to the standards of critical reflection provided by Hume in his account of probable reasoning and his later discussion

22. See Noxon, “Senses of Identity,” 367–84, and Ashley and Stack, “Hume’s Theory of the Self and its Identity,” 239–54.

23. On the linguistic and philosophical aspects of Hume’s account of identity, see Penelhum, “Hume on Personal Identity,” 213–39; Robison, “In Defense of Hume’s *Appendix*,” 89–99; and Waxman, *Hume’s Theory of Consciousness*, 324n22. See also Henze, “Linguistic Aspect of Hume’s Method,” 121.

of the conventional standards for various types of judgment in social and political life.<sup>24</sup>

Hume introduces the concept of a fiction in Book 1, Part 2, where he observes that our 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.” His example in this context is the idea of duration, which arises from a series of changing perceptions but is also applied to unchanging objects (T 1.2.3.11; cf. 1.2.5.29 [SBN 37; cf. 65]). We also apply a fictitious extension to distances between objects, even though this distance is not filled with visible or tangible objects (T 1.2.5.23 [SBN 62]). Our supposed idea of a standard of equality in geometry is also “a mere fiction of the mind,” along with our supposed ideas of precise colors or musical notes, by which we suppose that we can judge “an exact comparison and equality beyond the judgments of the senses” (T 1.2.4.24 [SBN 48–49]).

In Part 4 Hume again argues that we can apply the idea of time to an unchanging object “only by a fiction of the imagination” (T 1.4.2.29 [SBN 200–201]). He also describes our idea of an object when it does not appear to the senses as the “fiction of a continu’d existence” (T 1.4.2.36; cf. 1.4.2.42, 1.4.6.6–7 [SBN 205; cf. 209, 254–55]). In other words, the idea of continued existence is a fiction produced by the imagination in order to unite a series of related but interrupted perceptions. As we will see, the identity of the mind is also a “fictitious” identity, which is produced by the imagination in order to unite our remembered perceptions as a subjective succession (T 1.4.6.15; cf. 1.4.6.21 [SBN 259; cf. 262]).

Many commentators have regarded Hume’s account of fictions as a skeptical, dismissive, or despairing conclusion to his analyses of space, time, external existence, and personal identity. This is reflected, for example, in Bennett’s statement that, according to Hume, the vulgar belief in external objects is merely “another worthless fiction.”<sup>25</sup> Other studies have suggested that Hume intends to present a more positive view of fictions, as the principles by which the imagination constructs both the physical and the mental world, and even the social world with its “fictional” artifices and conventions, which we will consider in later chapters.<sup>26</sup>

Hume himself presents a multileveled approach to the question of whether and in what sense the fiction of external existence is justified as a principle of

24. For further discussions of Hume’s view of the relative justification of our judgments of identity, see Price, *Hume’s Theory of the External World*, 139–40, 144, 160–64, and 215–17; Baier, *Progress of Sentiments*, 119–21; and Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment*, 214–15.

25. Bennett, *Locke, Berkeley, Hume*, 349.

26. See Wilson, *Hume’s Defence of Causal Inference*, 90–98; Sokolowski, “Fiction and Illusion,” 189–225; Traiger, “Impressions, Ideas, and Fictions,” 381–99; and Baier, “Hume’s Account of Social Artifice,” 757–78. See also Whelan, *Order and Artifice*, 17, 58, 98–101, 131–34, and 308–9, and Strawson, *Secret Connexion*, 49–67.

cognition. First, he repeatedly states that this fiction is “really false,” and that we can only extend an idea beyond our immediate perceptions by an “error” or “mistake” of the imagination (T 1.4.2.43–44, 1.4.6.6–7 [SBN 209–10, 254–55]). He reaffirms this assessment in considering the skeptical implications of his analysis, which we will consider in Chapter 5. However, Hume also maintains that these fictions are “very natural” and “almost universally take place,” leading Kemp Smith and others to describe them as spontaneous, unreflective, and unavoidable “natural beliefs” (T 1.2.4.24, 1.4.2.29 [SBN 48, 201]).<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, although any attribution of external existence involves a fiction of the imagination, Hume argues that we may distinguish dreams, hallucinations, and poetic images from the objects of sensation and memory. In other words, we may apply the standards of causal reasoning in order to judge which of these apparent external objects possess “truth and reality” (T 1.3.10.6 [SBN 121–22]; cf. 1.3.5.4, 1.3.10.10–12 [SBN 85, 630–32]; EHU 5.10–13 [SBN 47–50]). Accordingly, when we judge the spatial and temporal location of objects, their identity through time, and even the identity of a human person, we are guided not merely by the promptings of the imagination, but also by the philosophical or scientific principles of causal reasoning. In this respect Hume regards the fictions of space and time, external existence, and personal identity not merely as unavoidable and nonrational beliefs arising from the imagination, but also as principles of judgment whose application in every individual case is subject to critical evaluation and correction.

Finally, several critics have objected to Hume’s account of fictions by arguing that Hume cannot account for the idea of a fiction within his “copy theory” of ideas. For example, Williams has criticized Hume’s account of fictions as a departure from the copy theory, while Traiger has instead suggested that “what is commonly called Hume’s theory of impressions and ideas ought to be called the theory of impressions, ideas, *and fictions*.”<sup>28</sup> However, I would argue that, on Hume’s view, the idea of a fiction is the idea of that propensity of the imagination by which we attribute extension to an empty distance, duration to unchanging objects, continued existence to an interrupted series of perceptions, and the unity of belonging to a single mind to a series of perceptions. On this view, the derivation of the idea of a fiction is parallel to the derivation of the idea of a necessary connection between a cause and its effect. According to Hume, the idea of a necessary connection is derived from an impression of necessity, which is itself a disposition of the mind, arising in this case from a custom or habit produced by repeated observations. We then project our idea of this necessity onto sets of objects or sequences of events, which we regard as

27. Kemp Smith, *Philosophy of David Hume*, 124–27, 454–58, and 485–87.

28. Williams, “Hume’s Criterion of Significance,” 290–91; Traiger, “Impressions, Ideas, and Fictions,” 381. See also Johnson, *Mind of David Hume*, 261.

necessarily connected to one another (T 1.3.14.22 [SBN 165–66]). Similarly, our idea of a fiction, such as the fiction of external existence, is an idea of the felt propensity of the mind to posit a series of unperceived perceptions, or an unperceived object, to connect our perceptions. Here again, the idea arises from the disposition of the mind to project the products of the imagination outward, and to suppose, in this case, the independent existence of a series of perceptions which we then call the object.<sup>29</sup> This view is reflected in Hume's assertions that we have "no idea" of space, time, external objects, or the self, if these are supposed to arise from any positive image derived from any particular impression (cf. T 1.2.3.16, 1.2.5.28, 1.4.5.6, 1.4.6.1–2 [SBN 39, 64, 234, 251–52]). However, we may form relative ideas of various arrangements of our perceptions, as these arrangements are projected beyond our perceptions by the imagination.<sup>30</sup>

#### PERSONAL IDENTITY

In Book 1, Part 4 of the *Treatise* Hume also presents an account of our idea of the mind or self. He returns to the topic of personal identity in the Appendix, where he appears to direct a searching criticism against his earlier analysis, although the precise nature and extent of his later reservations are matters of considerable controversy.

In the course of his discussion, Hume distinguishes between the analysis of personal identity "as it regards our thought or imagination," and personal identity as it pertains to "our passions or the concern we take in ourselves." He addresses the first question in Book 1, while apparently deferring his discussion of "our identity with regard to the passions" to Book 2 (T 1.4.6.5, cf. 1.4.6.19 [SBN 253; cf. 261]). I will consider Hume's account of the self as an object of our thought and imagination in the remainder of this chapter, and his account of the self as the subject of passion and volition in Chapters 6 and 7.<sup>31</sup>

Hume introduces his analysis by rejecting the view that we can receive any impression of the self through our senses, or indeed that the senses "can ever distinguish betwixt ourselves and external objects." On the contrary, the question of personal identity is among the most abstruse in philosophy, and can only be addressed through "the most profound metaphysics" (T 1.4.2.6 [SBN 189–90]). He then anticipates his later argument that "what we call a *mind*, is

29. See Wilbanks, *Hume's Theory of Imagination*, 80–84, and Wright, *Sceptical Realism*, 106–7.

30. See Flage, "Hume's Relative Ideas," 65.

31. For additional discussions, see Penelhum, "Hume on Personal Identity," 571–89; Noxon, "Senses of Identity," 367–84; Ashley and Stack, "Hume's Theory of the Self and Identity," 239–54; Vesey, *Personal Identity*; Bricke, *Hume's Philosophy of Mind*; Pears, *Hume's System*, 120–51; Baier, *Progress of Sentiments*, 122–28; Biro, "Hume's New Science of the Mind," 47–58; Waxman, *Hume's Theory of Consciousness*, 203–37; Johnson, *Mind of David Hume*, 285–310; and Stevenson, "Humean Self-Consciousness Explained," 95–129.

nothing but a heap or collection of different perceptions” which are “united together by certain relations, and suppos’d, tho’ falsely, to be endow’d with a perfect simplicity and identity.” Finally, external objects are said to become “present to the mind” when they attain “such a relation to a connected heap of perceptions,” as to influence these perceptions “very considerably in augmenting their number by present reflections and passions, and in storing the memory with ideas” (T I.4.2.39–40 [SBN 207]).<sup>32</sup>

Next, Hume responds to those philosophers who “pretend that we have an idea of the substance of our minds,” and that we cannot account for our perceptions without some “material or immaterial substances, in which they suppose our perceptions to inhere.”<sup>33</sup> Here he reaffirms his earlier argument that we have no impression or idea of a substance apart from our perceptions nor of either a material or an immaterial substance in which these perceptions are supposed to inhere. However, he also adds that we may describe perceptions themselves as substances, according to the definition of a substance as “something which may exist by itself,” since perceptions are “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” (T I.4.5.2–5 [SBN 232–34]; cf. I.1.6.1–2 [SBN 15–16]; E IS.591–92).

In presenting his constructive account of our idea of personal identity in Section 6, Hume begins by rejecting the popular belief among philosophers that “we are every moment intimately conscious of what we call our SELF; that we feel its existence and its continuance in existence; and are certain, beyond the evidence of a demonstration, both of its perfect identity and simplicity.” On the contrary, he claims on the basis of introspection that we cannot find any single, constant, and invariable impression of a self among our perceptions; and thus do not have “any idea of *self*, after the manner it is here explain’d.” Instead, he reports that “when I enter most intimately into what I call *myself*, I always stumble on some particular perception or other,” such as “heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure,” and can never catch “*myself* at any time without a perception, and can never observe any thing but the perception.” Accordingly, while a few metaphysicians might claim to discover a separate impression of themselves, he ventures to affirm for himself and the rest of the human species that we are each of us “nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity,

32. Waxman has indeed argued that Hume’s account of personal identity is a necessary presupposition for his complete account of external existence, although this is obscured by his order of presentation in the *Treatise*; see *Hume’s Theory of Consciousness*, 238–44.

33. McIntyre and Russell both argue that the most immediate target of Hume’s criticism of the view of the soul as an immaterial substance is Samuel Clarke. See McIntyre, “Hume: Second Newton of the Moral Sciences,” 3–18, and Russell, “Hume’s *Treatise* and the Clarke-Collins Controversy,” 95–115.

and are in a perpetual flux and movement.” In order to account for the idea of the self, we must therefore explain our propensity “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 1.4.6.1–5 [SBN 251–53]).

Hume’s main focus in his discussion of personal identity, both in the original text and in the Appendix, is upon the idea of the mind. As indicated above, he argues that the mind consists entirely in a sequence of perceptions that are distinguishable and separable from each other. Since we cannot discover any “real bond” or “real connexion” between our perceptions, he argues that it is the imagination which attributes identity to the mind, based on the relations of resemblance and causation that we discover within this sequence of perceptions (T 1.4.6.16 [SBN 259–60]).<sup>34</sup> However, Hume’s account of the influence of these relations on this activity of the imagination is rather obscure, and indeed he himself appears to have become dissatisfied with his own analysis, judging by his reconsiderations in the Appendix.

In the original text of Section 6 Hume first argues that our memory-images resemble our past perceptions, and that “the frequent placing of these resembling perceptions” in our train of thought conveys the imagination from one to the other, giving the entire sequence the appearance of identity. While we are only able to discover these resemblances among our own perceptions, he argues that we would also recognize these resemblances if we could “see clearly into the breast of another, and observe that succession of perceptions, which constitutes his mind or thinking principle.”<sup>35</sup> Next, he reminds us of his earlier argument that “impressions give rise to their correspondent ideas, and these ideas in their turn produce other impressions,” in what we regard as a series of causal relations. Accordingly, “the true idea of the human mind, is to consider it as a system of different perceptions” which are “link’d together by the relation of cause and effect.” Finally, memory is the faculty that discloses both the succession of our perceptions and the relations of resemblance and causation between them. Hume therefore maintains that memory “not only discovers the identity, but also contributes to its production,” and should thus be regarded as the “source of personal identity” (T 1.4.6.18–20 [SBN 260–62]).

34. Hume excludes contiguity from his account of mental identity as having “little or no influence in the present case” (T 1.4.6.17 [SBN 260]). Waxman has accordingly noted that the spatial contiguity of perceptions seems irrelevant to Hume’s account of the identity of the mind: see *Hume’s Theory of Consciousness*, 228. However, since the natural relation of contiguity includes both spatial and temporal contiguity (T 1.1.4.1 [SBN 11]), we may still ask why Hume does not consider the possible influence of the temporal contiguity of perceptions in contributing to the identity of the mind, especially given the importance of memory in his theory. This application of the principle of temporal association might indeed have anticipated Kant’s account of time as the form of inner sense, including empirical self-consciousness.

35. See Brice, *Hume’s Philosophy of Mind*, 85–91, and Waxman, *Hume’s Theory of Consciousness*, 326n29.

Hume accordingly maintains that the identity we ascribe to the mind is “only a fictitious one.” The imagination initially applies this identity to a given series of changing perceptions (T 1.4.6.15 [SBN 259]). However, to disguise any interruptions in this series of perceptions, we then extend this fiction by supposing the existence “of a *soul*, and *self*, and *substance*,” which is supposed to be endowed with a “perfect identity and simplicity” (T 1.4.6.6, 1.4.6.1; cf. 1.4.6.22 [SBN 254, 251; cf. 263]). This supposition is reflected especially in the doctrine of the soul as an immaterial substance, which Hume has already criticized in Section 5. By contrast, he maintains that our successive perceptions alone “compose” or “constitute the mind,” and that apart from these perceptions we have no idea “of the place, where these scenes are represented, or of the materials, of which it is compos’d” (T App.20, 1.4.6.4 [SBN 635, 253]; cf. A 28 [SBN 657–58]; DNR 2.146, 4.158–59).

However, this concept of the mind, as a system of perceptions disclosed by memory, does not yet give us our complete idea of personal identity. Although we derive the idea of our identity from our remembered perceptions, we also extend this idea to include “the identity of our persons beyond our memory.” Indeed, we regard this extension as including the greater part of our lives. In order to account for this extended concept of personal identity, Hume argues that once we have developed an idea of our mind from the memory of our successive perceptions, we continue to trace “the same chain of causes” beyond the direct reach of our memory. This allows us to project the “identity of our persons” through many other “times, and circumstances, and actions, which we have entirely forgot, but suppose in general to have existed.” In other words, we suppose our continuing identity, during those intervals of time which we do not remember, through causal reasoning, by which we judge that we were probably present during various past events which we judge to have occurred from the evidence now available to us. In this extension of our idea of personal identity, Hume concludes that memory accompanied by causal reasoning “does not so much *produce* as *discover* personal identity” (T 1.4.6.20 [SBN 261–62]).

We may also ask whether Hume includes the idea that we each have of our own bodies in his account of personal identity. One response to this question is suggested by Ayer’s statement that Hume “equates personal identity with the identity of the mind, and defines this without any reference to the body.”<sup>36</sup> In Book 2 of the *Treatise*, Hume alludes to the discussion among his predecessors over whether the body should be regarded “as a part of ourselves” or “as something external” (T 2.1.8.1 [SBN 298]). He presents his own view earlier in Book 1, Part 4, by arguing that although we might expect to discover through the

36. Ayer, *Hume*, 51. See also Bricke, *Hume’s Philosophy of Mind*, 92–94; Flew, *David Hume*, 3–5 and 90–108; and Pears, *Hume’s System*, 121, 129–34, and 145–49.

senses that “our own body evidently belongs to us,” and that many other objects are “exterior to the body,” we discover upon a more careful consideration that “properly speaking, ’tis not our body we perceive, when we regard our limbs and members, but certain impressions, which enter by the senses.” Our idea of our own body is an idea of an object which we perceive through our senses, and must be explained in the same way as our idea of any other external object (T 1.4.2.9 [SBN 190–91]). This body, which we regard as a corporeal object through sensation, causal reasoning, and imaginative supposition, presumably provides a further ground for the attribution of personal identity. This is because we suppose that the body continues to exist during an interval of publicly measured time, through the interruptions of our perception and memory, as in sleep or other periods of unconsciousness. We are also led by causal reasoning to attribute a series of changes to this body, such as its development from infancy to maturity (T 1.4.6.20, 1.4.6.3, 1.4.6.12 [SBN 261–62, 252, 257]).

Hume also considers the problem of the apparent interaction between the mind and body. In Section 5 he endorses the view that thought and extension are “wholly incompatible, and never can incorporate together into one subject.” More specifically, thought can never exist in a “local conjunction” with extension, since thought is not given to us as distributed in space. Accordingly, he rejects the view of “materialists, who conjoin all thought with extension” (T 1.4.5.7, 1.4.5.11–15 [SBN 234–35, 236–39]). On the other hand, we also discover, through observation and causal inference, that various types of impressions are conveyed to the mind by the organs of our body, that our capacity to receive impressions is influenced by the condition of the body, and that it is interrupted by sleep and terminated by death (T 1.4.2.12, 1.4.2.45, 1.4.5.12, 1.4.6.3 [SBN 192, 210–11, 237, 252]; E 1S.596–98). In addition, we discover constant conjunctions between our perceptions and the movements of objects, and also between our thoughts and the movement of our own bodies. Hume argues that these constant conjunctions are the necessary and sufficient conditions for affirming both the possibility and the actuality of a causal interaction between thought and matter, as in the case of any other causal connection, even if we cannot explain this conjunction at any deeper level. In other words, although “thought and motion are different from each other,” we also find that they are “constantly united,” and may conclude “that motion may be, and actually is, the cause of thought and perception,” (T 1.4.5.30 [SBN 248]). Through our experience of their constant conjunction, we also find that thought and volition may be the causes of physical action, as we will see at greater length in Chapter 7 (T 1.4.5.30, 2.3.1.1–4 [SBN 248, 399–401]; EHU 8.1–36, 12.29n35 [SBN 80–103, 164n1]; DNR 4.160).<sup>37</sup>

37. For a further discussion of this argument, see Bricke, *Hume's Philosophy of Mind*, 25–45, and Cummins, “Hume as Dualist and Anti-Dualist,” 47–55.

Hume therefore provides us with the materials for regarding our idea of our own bodies as a product of the imagination, which is produced in the same way as our idea of any other external object. However, he also indicates that we discover, through causal reasoning, that this body has a distinctive relation to the remembered succession of perceptions which constitutes our mind. In particular, we find that our sensations arise from the organs of the body, and that our volitions can cause various actions of the body.<sup>38</sup> Hume returns to this discussion in Book 2, in which he considers our ideas of the various qualities of our minds and bodies, along with our experience and our conception of voluntary action.

Hume's reflections concerning personal identity in the Appendix have been regarded by many commentators as a retraction of his analysis of personal identity in the original text of the *Treatise*.<sup>39</sup> However, while his later reflections are perhaps even more obscure than his original account of the relations between our perceptions, Hume's departure in the Appendix from his earlier discussion may be less extreme than suggested by many of his critics.

In the original text Hume assures his readers that "the intellectual world," or the mind, "tho' involv'd in infinite obscurities, is not perplex'd with any such contradictions, as those we have discover'd in the natural," in considering our idea of external existence (T 1.4.5.1 [SBN 232]). However, in the Appendix he admits that "upon a more strict review of the section concerning *personal identity*," he finds himself "involv'd in such a labyrinth" that he doubts his ability to defend a consistent position. While he reaffirms his argument against "the strict and proper identity and simplicity of a self or thinking being," he now questions his earlier account of the "principle of connexion" that is supposed to bind our perceptions and give us an idea of their "real simplicity and identity." He still maintains that "no connexions among distinct existences are ever discoverable by human understanding," and instead that "we only *feel* a connexion or a determination of the thought, to pass from one object to another." However, he is apparently dissatisfied with his failure to provide a more specific account of "the principles, that unite our successive perceptions in our thought or consciousness," and is unable to offer any satisfactory theory of these principles. He is thus left with two allegedly inconsistent propositions, "that all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences, and that the mind never perceives

38. For more on the role of the body in Hume's account of personal identity, see Baier, *Progress of Sentiments*, 130–42; Frasca-Spada, *Space and the Self*, 194–98; Williams, *Cultivated Reason*, 129–66; and Stevenson, "Humean Self-Consciousness Explained," 120–22.

39. See Pears, "Hume on Personal Identity," 289–98, and *Hume's System*, 135 and 145–47; along with Dicker, *Hume's Epistemology and Metaphysics*, 31–32. For other assessments, see McIntyre, "Is Hume's Self Consistent?" 79–88; Robison, "In Defense of Hume's Appendix," 89–100; Bricke, *Hume's Philosophy of Mind*, 95–98; Swain, "Being Sure of One's Self," 107–19; Loeb, "Causation," 219–31; Waxman, "Hume's Quandary Concerning Personal Identity," 233–53; and Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment*, 163–86. Garrett also includes an excellent survey of various recent approaches to the interpretation of the Appendix.

any real connexion among distinct existences” (T App.10, App.20–21 [SBN 633, 635–36]). The problem for his readers is to find what he means here by a “real connexion,” and why he now regards his initial failure to give an account of this connection as a difficulty for his analysis. In his original discussion, Hume did not appeal to a strict connection between our perceptions to account for personal identity, instead presenting the relations of resemblance and causation as the “uniting principles” which lead the imagination to formulate the idea of personal identity. He even reminds us that all our judgments of causation, even those that contribute to our idea of personal identity, rest on a “customary association of ideas” rather than any “real connexion” (T 1.4.6.16 [SBN 259–60]).

Hume never explains why he has come to regard the absence of any explanation of the “real connexion” between our perceptions as a difficulty for his earlier theory of mental identity. However, it seems evident that in the Appendix he is acknowledging the inadequacy of some aspect of his general theory of perceptions, including their relations according to the natural principles of association, for supporting a satisfactory theory of the mind.

Several commentators have suggested that in recognizing a problem in his analysis Hume is anticipating Kant’s theory of the transcendental unity of apperception, in which we find the unity of the mind to be presupposed by any activity of combining perceptions according to any principles of relation. This comparison is perhaps supported by Hume’s own indication that the “self or person” may be characterized as “that to which our several impressions and ideas are supposed to have a reference” (T 1.4.6.2 [SBN 251]).<sup>40</sup>

Whatever might be the precise character of the difficulty that he is attempting to address in the Appendix, it seems clear that Hume does not regard this difficulty as a threat to his larger philosophical argument in the *Treatise*. As we have seen, he initially hopes that his account of the mind will not be “perplex’d” with such contradictions as those in his discussion of external existence (T 1.4.5.1 [SBN 232]). While he abandons this hope in the Appendix, he also reminds his readers that this new difficulty is only another of the many “contradictions, and absurdities” which have already been “abundantly supplied” in the *Treatise* (T App.10 [SBN 633]). Hume is therefore cheerfully prepared to accommodate the difficulty he has discovered in his analysis of personal identity, whatever this problem might be, within his larger philosophical project. We will consider his further account of the implications of these contradictions for his philosophical project in the following chapter, where we will turn to his discussion of skepticism.

40. See Robison, “Hume on Personal Identity,” 181–93; Waxman, “Hume’s Quandary Concerning Personal Identity,” 244–45, and *Hume’s Theory of Consciousness*, 326–27n32; and Brook, *Kant and the Mind*, 192–94. See also Garrett, *Cognition and Commitment*, 169–71.

We have thus seen that in Book 1, Part 4 Hume extends his account of the philosophical principles of probable reasoning in order to account for the standards by which we determine the distinct and continued existence of external objects, the identity of the mind, and the relation of the mind to a particular body. These judgments of identity involve an imaginative extrapolation beyond our perceptions and are therefore “false” in the strict sense, but they may also be more or less justified individually, according to the relations of resemblance and causation we discover between our perceptions, as directed by the rules for judging causes and effects, and in some cases by the standards of identity established in the culture and institutions of a community. In other words, Hume defends the relative legitimacy and value of our standards of identity for persons and objects, both in ordinary life and in the natural and human sciences.<sup>41</sup>

However, Hume’s analysis of external existence and personal identity, along with his further reflections concerning causal reasoning, are all presented within the larger context of his discussion of skepticism in Part 4. In order to defend the present interpretation of his analysis as a constructive account of human cognition, we must therefore turn to his discussion of the various forms of skepticism, and their relation to our everyday opinions and to various systems of philosophy.

41. Several commentators have indeed described Hume’s account of the identity and nature of physical objects as a version of critical realism that is intended to provide a justification for the modern natural sciences. See especially Wright, *Sceptical Realism*; along with Wilson, “Was Hume a Subjectivist?” 247–82; “Is Hume a Sceptic with Regard to the Senses?” 49–73; and *Hume’s Defence of Causal Inference*, 90–98. For a discussion of this view, see Livingston, “A Sellarsian Hume?” 281–90; Wilson, “Hume’s Critical Realism,” 291–96; and Winkler, “The New Hume,” 52–87.