

Hume's 'Compleat Answer to Dr Reid'

Peter Millican, University of Leeds

Third International Reid Symposium, July 2004

1. *The Puzzle of Hume's 'Advertisement'*

I believe the philosophical Essays contain every thing of consequence relating to the Understanding, which you would meet with in the Treatise; & I give you my Advice against reading the latter. By shortening & simplifying the Questions, I really render them much more complete. *Addo dum minuo*. ['I add by subtracting.'] The Philosophical Principles are the same in both: But I was carry'd away by the Heat of Youth & Invention to publish too precipitately. So vast an Undertaking, plan'd before I was one and twenty, & compos'd before twenty five, must necessarily be very defective. I have repented my Haste a hundred, & a hundred times. (to Gilbert Elliot of Minto, March/April 1751, *HL* i. 158)

2. *'Philosophical Principles'*

- (a) Where the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* cover the same topics, they start from the same premises and draw the same conclusions.
- (b) The *fundamental* philosophical principles of the *Treatise* and *Enquiry* are the same.

3. *An Enlightenment Tract?*

Stephen Buckle, *Hume's Enlightenment Tract* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001)

4. *Abstruse Metaphysics, Science, and Critical Thinking*

It [is] no inconsiderable part of science barely to know the different operations of the mind, to separate them from each other, to class them under their proper heads ... This task of ordering and distinguishing ... And if we can go no farther than this mental geography, or delineation of the distinct parts and powers of the mind, it is at least a satisfaction to go so far; (*E* 13, 1.14)

May we not hope, that philosophy, if cultivated with care ... may carry its researches still farther, and discover, at least in some degree, the secret springs and principles, by which the human mind is actuated in its operations? (*E* 14, 1.15)

5. *A Manifesto for Inductive Science*

6. *Reid's Criticisms of 'the Author of the Treatise of Human Nature'*

7. *Conclusion*

For more on this interpretation of the Enquiry, and also some background on Hume's religious views, his changing attitude to scepticism and the decline of his confidence in 'associationism' (interpreted as a theory of secret springs and principles), see Peter Millican, 'The Context, Aims, and Structure of Hume's First Enquiry', Chapter 1 in Reading Hume on Human Understanding: Essays on the First Enquiry (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002). For a detailed analysis of Hume's argument concerning induction, and how it provides a basis for his conception of science, see Chapter 4 in the same volume.

Peter Millican
p.j.r.millican@leeds.ac.uk

An Outline of the Enquiry's Main Themes and 'Principles'

Section I	General aims are to advocate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undermining of spurious metaphysics that sustains superstition • 'Mental geography' – delineation of mind's powers and operations • Aspiration to discover 'secret springs and principles' of the mind 	E 11-13; 1.11-12 E 13-14; 1.13-14 E 14; 1.15
Section II	Copy Principle can be used to clarify or reject dubious ideas	E 19-22; 2.5-9
Section III	Connexion of ideas in the imagination appears to occur only through the relations of resemblance, contiguity in time or place, and cause or effect.	E 24; 3.2-3
Section IV, <i>Part i</i>	'Hume's Fork' – relations of ideas and matters of fact <i>All factual inferences are founded on causation, and causes are discoverable by experience alone. Hence the only appropriate scientific ambition is to resolve phenomena into simple, quantifiable laws that describe phenomena</i>	E 25-6; 4.1-2 E 26-7; 4.4-5 E 27-30; 4.6-11 E 31-2; 4.12-13
<i>Part ii</i>	Factual inference is founded on experience, hence on principle of uniformity Uniformity, and hence factual inferences, cannot be founded on reason	E 32-3; 4.14-16 E 33-9; 4.16-23
Section V, <i>Part i</i>	Factual inference is based on <i>custom</i> or <i>habit</i> rather than reasoning Belief arises irresistibly by custom, starting from the memory or senses	E 43; 5.5 E 45-7; 5.7-8
<i>Part ii</i>	Belief is characterised by an indefinable but familiar sentiment Associative relations increase vivacity when based on the memory or senses Operation of custom in causing belief is analogous to associative relations	E 47-50; 5.10-13 E 50-3; 5.14-19 E 54; 5.20
Section VI	Custom generates degrees of probability where connexion is not constant	E 56-9; 6.1-4
Section VII, <i>Part i</i>	Complex ideas can be definable; simplest ideas require Copy Principle We do not understand natural powers, even of our bodies and minds Occasionalism is an unfounded extension of vulgar animistic superstition	E 62; 7.5 E 63-9; 7.6-20 E 69-73; 7.21-5
<i>Part ii</i>	Idea of necessity or power comes from the customary transition of the mind Cause may be defined in two ways, by constant conjunction or inference	E 74-6; 7.27-8 E 76; 7.29
Section VIII, <i>Part i</i>	There are uniform patterns in human behaviour, as in the natural world <i>When uniformity fails, we should look for hidden causes (in either sphere)</i> We naturally draw inferences based on these observed uniform patterns Common reluctance to accept necessity is based on illusion of insight into matter, but definitions of cause show that this reluctance is misplaced Liberty means a power of acting or not acting according to the will	E 83-6; 8.7-11 E 86-8; 8.12-15 E 88-91; 8.16-20 E 92-3; 8.21-2 E 95-7; 8.25, 27 E 95; 8.23-4
<i>Part ii</i>	Moral responsibility presupposes the doctrine of necessity Necessity doesn't undermine moral sentiments, but raises the problem of evil	E 97-9; 8.28-31 E 100-3, 8.32-6
Section IX	<i>Analogical inference is legitimate, though weaker than perfect custom</i> Animals reason by custom, so analogy supports the theory of human custom	E 104, 9.1 E 105-8, 9.2-6
Section X, <i>Part i</i>	<i>A wise man proportions his belief to the evidence</i> Testimony can establish a miracle only if its falsehood would be miraculous	E 110-12, 10.3-6 E 112-16, 10.7-13
<i>Part ii</i>	Testimony for miracles has always fallen well short of such reliability	E 116-31, 10.14-41
Section XI	<i>When we infer a cause, we must proportion it to the observed effects</i> Hence the Design Argument is impotent as a proof of providence etc. The analogy from human works to the universe is very distant <i>Where a cause is unique, no law can be established and so no inference</i>	E 136-7, 11.11-13 E 137-42, 11.14-23 E 143-4, 11.25 E 148, 11.30
Section XII, <i>Part i</i>	Scepticism can be 'antecedent' or 'consequent', extreme or moderate We naturally believe in the external world, though it cannot be proved <i>Our concept of matter is very imperfect, so cannot be a basis for science</i>	E 149-51, 12.2-5 E 151-4, 12.6-14 E 154-5, 12.15-16
<i>Part ii</i>	Philosophical scepticism about our reasoning faculty is irrefutable, but excessive scepticism is not sustainable and would anyway be futile	E 156-60, 12.17-23
<i>Part iii</i>	Mitigated scepticism advocates modesty, limiting enquiries to subjects for which our faculties are adapted, and 'methodizing and correcting' <i>The proper subjects of enquiry are mathematics and empirical science</i>	E 161-2, 12.24-5 E 163-5, 12.26-34

Reid's Criticisms of 'the Author of the Treatise of Human Nature'

Position of 'the author of the Treatise' to which Reid objects, and in what way

*Reid's Inquiry
(page numbers bracketed)*

*Hume's
Treatise*

*Hume's
Enquiry*

Unwarranted Doctrine of Ideas

The doctrine of ideas (incorporating the Copy Principle) is taken for granted rather than founded on any good argument	Ch. 2 Sect. 6 (33) Ch. 5 Sect. 7 (69, 71)	I i 1	Sect. II
--	--	-------	----------

Implausible Oversimplification

The ideal system is simplistic in attempting to build on only one fundamental principle (i.e. the doctrine of ideas)	Ch. 7 (210)	I i 1 and <i>passim</i>	<i>(Copy Principle used only once, in Sect. VII)</i>
The three laws of association are far too crude to provide a plausible basis for a complete science of the human mind	Ch. 1 Sect. 6 (22)	I i 4 and <i>passim</i>	<i>(Sects III & V ii make no such ambitious claim)</i>

Incorrect Taxonomy of Mental Operations

The differences between various propositional attitudes cannot properly be captured in terms of force and vivacity	Ch. 2 Sect. 5 (30) Ch. 6 Sect. 24 (197-8)	I i 3 I iii 5, 7	<i>(Sect. V ii makes no attempt to define belief)</i>
The classification of all ideas into those of sensation and those of reflection is inaccurate and incomplete	Ch. 7 (213-4)	I ii 2	-
The inductive principle cannot be resolved into the association of ideas, because ideas and beliefs are not one and the same	Ch. 6 Sect. 24 (199)	I iii 7-8	<i>(Sect. V ii claims only an analogy)</i>

Excessive Scepticism

The Humean theories of personal identity and the ontological independence of perceptions are ridiculous	Ch. 1 Sect. 5 (20) Ch. 2 Sect. 6 (32, 35)	I iv 5-6	-
Scepticism about both the material and the mental worlds is latent in the doctrine of ideas (incorporating the Copy Principle), leaving perceptions as the only existents	Ch. 1 Sects 7-8 (23) Ch. 2 Sect. 6 (33-4) Ch. 6 Sect. 6 (94) Ch. 7 (213-5)	I iv 2, 4, 6	<i>(Sect. XII i does not imply the non-existence of mind or body)</i>

Unsound Argument against Immateriality

It is unsound to argue that the mind is not an immaterial substance based on its having extended ideas	Ch. 7 (217)	I iv 5	-
--	-------------	--------	---