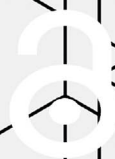


The background of the cover is a complex, black-and-white line drawing. It consists of numerous overlapping lines that create a sense of three-dimensional space and perspective. The lines form various geometric shapes, including rectangles, triangles, and polygons, some of which are nested or intersected by others. The overall effect is that of a technical or architectural drawing, possibly representing a complex structure or a series of interconnected planes. The lines are of varying thickness and orientation, creating a dynamic and somewhat chaotic yet structured visual field.

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Lorne Falkenstein



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Consciousness, Time, and Scepticism in Hume's Thought

David Hume's philosophical work presents the reader with a perplexing mix of constructive accounts of empirically guided belief and destructive sceptical arguments against all belief. This book reconciles this conflict by showing that Hume intended his scepticism to be remedial. It immunizes us against the influence of "unphilosophical" causes of belief, determining us to proportion our beliefs to the evidence.

In making this case, this book develops Humean positions on topics Hume did not discuss in detail but that are of interest to contemporary philosophers: consciousness and the unity of consciousness, temporal experience, visual spatial perception, the experience of colour and other qualia, objective experience, and spatially extended minds. It also challenges currently accepted interpretations of Hume's views on the finite divisibility of space and time, vacuum, the duration of unchanging objects, and identity over time. It deals with criticisms of Hume that were raised by his contemporaries, notably by Thomas Reid, draws attention to earlier seventeenth- and eighteenth-century work that has bearing on the interpretation of Hume's thought, and compares Hume's achievements with those of later nineteenth-century psychologists and philosophers.

Consciousness, Time, and Scepticism in Hume's Thought will appeal to scholars and advanced students interested in Hume, history of philosophy, and early modern theories of perception, time, and consciousness.

Lorne Falkenstein is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at Western University, Canada. He is a co-author of *Logic Works: A Rigorous Introduction to Formal Logic* (Routledge: 2022), co-editor of the Broadview editions of Hume's *Enquires*, *Dissertation*, and *Natural History* (2011–13), and has written many articles on early modern philosophy.

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Abbreviations and short titles for primary sources

Works by Hume

References to Hume's work by commentators who use other editions have been converted to references to the following editions. Where commentators make dual references, only those to the following editions are retained.

Ab	Abstract	<i>An abstract of a book lately published; entitled, A Treatise of Human Nature, &c.</i> Cited by paragraph number in <i>Treatise</i> , 403–17.
Ad	“Advertisement”	Advertisement to the 1777 and remaindered earlier editions of the second volume of ETSS. Cited from <i>Enquiry</i> , 1.
Ax	Appendix	Appendix to <i>Treatise</i> . Cited by paragraph number in <i>Treatise</i> , 396–401.
D	Dialogues	<i>Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion</i> , edited by Dorothy Coleman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Cited by part and paragraph numbers.
DP	Passions	“A Dissertation on the Passions” in <i>A Dissertation on the Passions; The Natural History of Religion: A Critical Edition</i> , edited by Tom L. Beauchamp. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007. Cited by section and paragraph numbers. Editorial material is cited by page number following a comma.

xii *Abbreviations and short titles for primary sources*

E	<i>Essays</i>	<i>Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary: A Critical Edition</i> , edited by Tom L. Beauchamp and Mark A. Box. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2021. Work by Hume is cited by this edition's specified short title for the individual essay and by paragraph number. Editorial material is cited by page number. (Page numbers are continuous across the two volumes.)
EHU	<i>Enquiry</i>	<i>An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding: A Critical Edition</i> , edited by Tom L. Beauchamp. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000. Cited by section and paragraph number. Editorial material is cited by page number following a comma.
EPM	<i>Morals</i>	<i>An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals: A Critical Edition</i> , edited by Tom L. Beauchamp. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998. Cited by section or appendix (EPMAx) and paragraph number.
ETSS		<i>Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects</i> . A collection comprised of E, EHU, DP, EPM, and NHR issued in multiple editions with varying contents between 1756 and 1777. For full publication details, see E1, xxiv–xxvii, 404–36, and 446–95.
HE 1754	<i>History</i>	<i>The History of England</i> , edited by William B. Todd. 6 vols. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1983. Cited by chapter number and, after a comma, page number of the volume containing that chapter. Where the occasion warrants, references are to the first (1754) edition of the first volume to be published (Edinburgh: Hamilton, Balfour, and Neill).
	“Immortality”	“Of the Immortality of the Soul.” Cited by page number in Miller.
	Introduction	Introduction to the <i>Treatise</i> . Cited by paragraph number in <i>Treatise</i> , 3–6.
L	<i>Letters</i>	<i>Letters of David Hume</i> , edited by J. Y. T. Grieg. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932. Cited

- by volume and letter number with page number following a comma from the compilation by Mark C. Rooks for InteLex Corporation's *Past Masters* Database, <https://www.nlx.com>.
- LG A Letter from a Gentleman to His Friend in Edinburgh. Cited by paragraph number in *Treatise*, 419–31.
- NL *New Letters* *New Letters of David Hume*, edited by Raymond Klibansky and Ernest C. Mossner. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954. Cited by volume and letter number with page number following a comma from the compilation by Mark C. Rooks for InteLex Corporation's *Past Masters* Database, <https://www.nlx.com>.
- Miller *Essays Moral, Political, and Literary*, edited by Eugene F. Miller. Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1987.
- MOL *My Own Life* *My Own Life*. Cited by page number in Miller, xxxi–xli.
- NHR *Natural History* *The Natural History of Religion*, in *A Dissertation on the Passions; The Natural History of Religion: A Critical Edition*, edited by Tom L. Beauchamp. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007. Cited by section and paragraph numbers. Editorial material is cited by page number following a comma.
- “Suicide” “Of Suicide” cited by page number in Miller.
- T *Treatise*
T2
1739
1740 *A Treatise of Human Nature: A Critical Edition*, edited by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton. 2 vols. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007. Volume 1, containing Hume's text, is cited as T or *Treatise*, followed by book, part, section, and paragraph numbers, or just a page number when editorial content is being cited. Volume 2 is cited as T2 with page numbers following a comma. Where the occasion warrants, citations are from the original editions of 1739 and 1740 (London: John Noon and London: Thomas Longman) using the imprints appearing in *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*.

Works by other authors

- | | | |
|-----|---------------------|---|
| | Port Royal | Arnauld, Antoine and Nicole, Pierre. 1996. <i>Logic or the Art of Thinking</i> , translated by Jill Vance Buroker. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. |
| | <i>Metaphysics</i> | Aristotle. 1995. <i>Metaphysics</i> . In <i>Aristotle Selections</i> , translated by Terence Irwin and Gail Fine. Indianapolis: Hackett. |
| | <i>Confessions</i> | Augustine of Hippo. 1997. <i>Confessions</i> . In <i>Basic Issues in Medieval Philosophy</i> , edited by Richard N. Bosley and Martin Tweedale. Peterborough: Broadview, 147–55. |
| | Barrow 1685 | Barrow, Isaac. 1685. <i>Lectiones Mathematicae</i> XIII. London: George Wells. |
| | Barrow 1734 | Barrow, Isaac. 1734. <i>The Usefulness of Mathematical Learning Explained and Demonstrated</i> , translated by John Kirkby. London: Stephen Austen. |
| | <i>Dictionnaire</i> | Bayle, Pierre. 1991. <i>Historical and Critical Dictionary: Selections</i> , edited and translated by Richard H. Popkin. Indianapolis: Hackett. |
| NIT | <i>Essay</i> | Beattie, James. 1770. <i>An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth</i> . Edinburgh: A. Kincaid and J. Bell. Citations note any discrepancies between this 1st edition and the 5th edition of 1774 (Edinburgh: William Creech), the last to have appeared in Hume's lifetime. |
| NTV | | Berkeley, George. 1710. <i>An Essay Towards a New Theory of Vision</i> . 2nd ed. Cited from Ayers by paragraph number. |
| | <i>Principles</i> | Berkeley, George. 1734. <i>A Treatise Concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge</i> . 2nd ed. Cited from Ayers by paragraph number. |

- Ayers Berkeley, George. 1995. *Philosophical Works Including the Works on Vision*, edited by Michael R. Ayers. Everyman Library London: J M Dent.
- Cyclopedia* Chambers, Ephraim. 1728. *Cyclopedia*. London: James and John Knapton and others. Cited by article.
- Clarke-Collins Clarke, Samuel. 2011. *The Correspondence of Samuel Clarke and Anthony Collins, 1707–08*, edited by William L. Uzgalis. Peterborough: Broadview.
- Demonstration* Clarke, Samuel. 1998. *A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God*, edited by Ezio Vailati. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Traité* Condillac, Étienne Bonnot, Abbé de. 1947. *Traité des sensations*. In *Oeuvres Philosophiques de Condillac*, edited by Georges Le Roy. Vol. 1. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- AT VII *Meditations* Descartes, René. 1984. *Meditations on First Philosophy*. In *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, edited by John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch, Vol. 2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Cited by the pagination of volume 7 of the Adam and Tannery revised edition of *Oeuvres de Descartes*. Paris: Vrin / C.N.R.S., 1964–76.
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- AT VI *Dioptrique* Descartes, René. 2000. *Discourse on Method, Optics, Geometry, and Meteorology*, translated by Paul J. Olscamp. Rev. ed. Indianapolis: Hackett. Cited by the pagination of volume 6 of the Adam and Tannery revised edition of *Oeuvres de Descartes*. Paris: Vrin / C.N.R.S., 1964–76.
- Euclid 1703 Euclid. 1703. *Quæ supersunt omnia*, translated by David Gregory. Oxford. Commonly catalogued as *Euclidis Elementorum libri XV. Accessit XVI. de solidorum regularium comparatione*.
- Euclid 1705 Euclid. 1705. *The English Euclid*, translated by Edmund Scarburgh. Oxford.
- Euclid 1714 Euclid. 1714. *The Elements of Euclid*, translated by Andrew Tacquet. 3rd ed. London: J. Roberts.
- Euclid 1726c Euclid. 1726. *The Elements of Euclid Explain'd*, English translation of the French translation of F. Claud. Francis Milliet de Chales (Claude-François Milliet Dechales). 7th ed. London: James and John Knapton and others.
- Euclid 1726h Euclid. 1726. *The Six First, Together with the Eleventh and Twelfth Books of Euclid's Elements*, translated by Henry Hill London: William Pearson.
- URC Feder 1787 Feder, Johann Georg Heinrich. 1787. *Ueber Raum und Caussalität: zur Prüfung der Kantischen Philosophie*. Göttingen: Dietrich.
- PO *Physiological Optics* Helmholtz, Hermann von. 1962. *Helmholtz's Treatise on Physiological Optics*, translated by James P. C. Southall. 3 vols. New York: Dover. Cited by volume, section, and page number.

- Elements* Hobbes, Thomas. 1992. *Elements of Philosophy*. In *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes*, edited by Mark C. Rooks. Charlottesville: InteLex Corporation, 1992. <https://www.nlx.com>. Cited by part, chapter, and paragraph number.
- Human Nature* Hobbes, Thomas. 1994. *Human Nature and De Corpore Politico*, edited by J. C. A. Gaskin. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Principles* James, William. 1981. *Principles of Psychology*. 2 vols. Cambridge: Harvard University Press. Cited by volume and chapter number, in the pagination of the Harvard edition from the electronic edition Charlottesville: InteLex Corporation, 2008. <https://www.nlx.com>.
- A / B *Kritik* Kant, Immanuel. 1781 and 1787. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*. Riga: Johann Friedrich Hartknoch. My own translations cited by the pagination of the 1781 (A) and 1787 (B) editions.
- Keill 1720 Keill, John. 1720. *An Introduction to Natural Philosophy*. London: William and John Innys.
- Leibniz-Clarke Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. 1717. *A Collection of Papers, Which Passed Between the Late Learned Mr. Leibnitz, and Dr. Clarke, in the Years 1715 and 1716*, translated by Samuel Clarke. London: James Knapton. Cited by letter and paragraph number.
- Essay* Locke, John. 1975. *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, edited by Peter H. Niddich. Oxford: Oxford University Press. Cited by book, chapter, and section number.
- Search* Malebranche, Nicolas. 1997. *The Search after Truth*, translated by Thomas M. Lennon and Paul J. Olscamp. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Referenced by book, part, chapter, and section number with page number following a colon.

	<i>Dioptrica Nova</i>	Molyneux, William. 1709. <i>Dioptrica Nova</i> . 2nd ed. London: Benjamin Tooke.
	<i>Principia</i>	Newton, Isaac. 1729. <i>The Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy</i> , translated by Andrew Motte. 2 vols. London: Benjamin Motte. Cited by volume and page number.
	<i>Opticks</i>	Newton, Isaac. 1730. <i>Opticks</i> . 4th ed. London: William Innys.
	Pardies 1734	Pardies, Ignace Gaston. 1734. <i>Short, But Yet Plain Elements of Geometry</i> , translated by John Harris. 7th ed. London: D. Midwinter.
	<i>Review</i>	Price, Richard. 1758. <i>A Review of the Principal Questions and Difficulties in Morals</i> . London: A. Millar.
	“Abstract”	Reid, Thomas “[Abstract of the <i>Inquiry</i>].” In <i>Inquiry</i> , 257–62.
	<i>Inquiry</i>	Reid, Thomas. 1997. <i>An Inquiry into the Human Mind</i> , edited by Derek R. Brookes. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Cited by chapter and section number with page number following a comma.
EIP	<i>Intellectual Powers</i>	Reid, Thomas. 2002. <i>Essays on the Intellectual Powers of Man</i> , edited by Derek R. Brookes. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press. Cited by essay and chapter number with page number following a comma.
M		Sextus Empiricus. 1997. <i>Adversus Mathematicos</i> . In <i>Hellenistic Philosophy</i> , 2nd edition, translated by Brad Inwood and L. P. Gerson, 302–97. Indianapolis: Hackett.

PH

Sextus Empiricus. 1997. *Outlines of Pyrrhonism*. In *Hellenistic Philosophy*, 2nd edition, translated by Brad Inwood and L. P. Gerson, 302–97. Indianapolis: Hackett.

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Smith, Robert. 1738. *A Compleat System of Opticks*. 2 vols. Cambridge: Cornelius Crownfield. Cited by book, chapter, and section number.



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Introduction

Hume's remedy for unphilosophical belief

Reacting to David Hume's first, anonymously published book, Thomas Reid wrote,

if [the mind] is indeed what the *Treatise of human nature* makes it, I find I have been only in an enchanted castle, imposed upon by spectres and apparitions.

(*Inquiry* 1.6, 22)¹

Hume would have approved of this assessment. Here is why.

I.1 Epistemic determinism

The themes taken up in *Consciousness, Time, and Scepticism in Hume's Thought* are unified by their contribution to a remedy Hume proposed for a problem with belief. The problem is a practical problem. The remedy is likewise a practical remedy. Hume wrote that belief is

the necessary result of placing the mind in such circumstances. It is an operation of the soul, when we are so situated, as unavoidable as to feel the passion of love, when we receive benefits; or hatred, when we meet with injuries.

(EHU 5.8)

Chief among these circumstances is what he called "custom." For Hume, "custom" often refers to what is commonly experienced to be the case. But he also recognized a second kind of custom: what is commonly opined to be the case.² Only the first kind of custom is "recogniz'd by philosophers" (T 1.3.9.19). Hume also identified other circumstances that can influence or necessitate belief (EHU 10.16–19; T 1.3.9–10; T 1.3.13). Many of these circumstances "have not had the good fortune" to be recognized by philosophers. Some are "disclaimed" by them (T 1.3.13.1; T 1.3.13.2).

2 Introduction

The distanced tone of these pronouncements is striking. “This is what philosophers have declared,” he said. He held back from endorsing their verdicts.³

Hume famously argued that there is no justification for believing that what has customarily happened up to now will continue to happen that way (EHU 4; T 1.3.6.4–11). This poses a problem. What entitles philosophers to approve of beliefs that are proportioned to common experience and disclaim those based on other factors? This is a problem that concerned Hume (EHU 1.11–12; T 1.4.7); it is at the root of the dispute between commentators who take Hume’s primary message to be destructive and sceptical and those who take it to be constructive and naturalistic; and it has inspired as many critical observations, and as many interpretations as there are critics and defenders of his epistemology.⁴

As a determinist about belief, Hume approached this problem from a different angle than those who accept what he at one place called a “fantastical system of liberty” (T 2.3.1.15). Even were there a justification for basing belief on common experience, there would be no practical point to appealing to it unless our awareness of that justification were a circumstance that could determine us to behave accordingly.⁵ On Hume’s account, philosophers have not in fact been determined to proportion belief to the evidence by reason or justifications. They have been placed in circumstances that have determined them to discover and accept a general rule to that effect.⁶ There is nothing they can say to those who have not been similarly placed that will convince them to follow their example or endorse their beliefs. They can only be apprehensive that those others will gain some measure of social control. Worse, when philosophers come to apply their own rule to particular cases, they often find that they are themselves unable to resist the force of the special circumstances of those cases. Those special circumstances necessitate them to form beliefs that are disproportioned or even contrary to the evidence. Considering this discovery, philosophers find themselves naturally determined to look for and place themselves and others in some further circumstance that might more effectively determine them to abide by the general rule.

There is some indication that Hume thought that being impressed with the force of sceptical arguments is such a determinant. The indication is strongest in the *Enquiry* (12.24) and the *Dialogues* (1.8), but it is not absent from the *Treatise* (1.4.7.11), which puts on more of a show of dismay over sceptical results, even while it is more desperate to establish them.

Hume was fond of observing that no sceptical argument is strong enough to overcome the natural circumstances inducing us to form beliefs (EHU 12.23; T 1.4.7.9–10; and elsewhere). But he also maintained that some sceptical arguments naturally induce an enduring distrust (*Morals* 8.8 calls it “diffidence”) of our cognitive powers, a consequent degree of hesitation over our beliefs, and a greater readiness to abandon them as new

circumstances arise. For someone impressed by the force of sceptical arguments, only those beliefs repeatedly inculcated by prevailing circumstances may be able to overcome this diffidence. Those are the beliefs produced by repeated experience.⁷ Beliefs determined by circumstances that are more varied, temporary, and conflicting have less of an influence and that influence does not last as long. As it turns out, the beliefs determined by the circumstances recognized by philosophers are the ones those impressed by the force of sceptical arguments are compelled to accept, whereas the beliefs disclaimed by philosophers are the ones those impressed by the force of sceptical arguments hesitate over accepting. In Hume's hands, scepticism is not destructive or problematic. It offers a remedy for "unphilosophical" belief.

This answer to the question of how to reconcile the naturalist and sceptical tendencies in Hume's thought has its roots in the work of commentators who have recognized the role of "unphilosophical" factors in Hume's psychology of belief,⁸ and of commentators who have underscored the Pyrrhonian elements in Hume's thought.⁹ Rather than recognize opposed naturalistic and sceptical trends in Hume's thought, it takes a practical problem to be exposed by Hume's account of the causes of belief. It takes sceptical arguments to offer a practical remedy to this problem. It thereby weaves Hume's naturalism and his scepticism into a consistent whole under the auspices of his determinism.¹⁰

Philosophers are professionally disposed to value considerations of warrant over those of motivation. Philosophers disposed to defend Hume can be further disposed to look to his writings for a justification for proportioning belief to the evidence. This is a legitimate project. Hume did express concern over the proper guide for belief (EHU 1.10–11; T 1.4.7).¹¹ But his struggles with this topic are compatible with recommending scepticism as an effective antidote to precipitate, obstinate, and intolerant belief (EHU 5.1 and 12.24), particularly for those not determined to respect reasoning. *Treatise* 1.4.7.11 suggests that sceptical arguments might serve as an antidote to beliefs that are not well supported by the evidence, there offering Hume hope that he might be able to pursue the research of the following two books of the *Treatise* in a way that is both scientific and sceptical, and the one because it is the other.¹²

Hume had many goals. One of them was "to fix some general rules, by which we may know when [objects] really are [causes or effects to each other]" (T 1.3.15.2). More generally, he was concerned to determine what we should endorse as a proper guide to belief. But it does no good to discover the "rules by which to judge of causes and effects" (T 1.3.15) if we prove to be incapable of following them, even though we know and accept them. In addition to being a philosopher, determined to identify which beliefs are optimal, Hume was a historian, who was under no illusions

4 Introduction

about the popular efficacy of any “logic” he or other philosophers might recommend.

To oppose the torrent of scholastic religion by such feeble maxims as these, that *it is impossible for the same thing to be and not to be*, that *the whole is greater than a part*, that *two and three make five*; is pretending to stop the ocean with a bull-rush. Will you set up profane reason against sacred mystery? No punishment is great enough for your impiety. And the same fires, which were kindled for heretics, will serve also for the destruction of philosophers.

(NHR 11.5)

Hume offered the outstanding early modern account of the motives for belief, surpassing even that offered by his fellow British determinist, Hobbes.¹³ That achievement merits scrutiny.

This book examines the features of Hume’s thought that give rise to his remedial proposal, assesses what his sceptical arguments do to realize it, and considers whether he overplayed those arguments to achieve his goal.¹⁴ It takes for granted that Hume was a determinist about belief. Granting that much, it studies the principles on which Hume’s sceptical arguments are founded (Chapters 1–5), his account of the causes of belief and how they give rise to the situation that calls for remedy (Chapter 6), and whether his sceptical arguments can perform the remedial task he assigned to them (Chapters 7 and 8).

I.2 Approach, method, and objectives

In pursuing these topics, *Consciousness, Time and Scepticism in Hume’s Thought* (hereafter short-titled *Hume’s Remedy*) draws on things Hume said to develop positions on topics he did not discuss: consciousness, experience of the very recent past, and objectivity. It also criticizes him for saying what he did about the finite divisibility of space and time, the endurance of unchanging objects, the conceivability of a vacuum, identity, and the causes of the belief in body. Section I.3 discusses how these topics are connected.

Hume’s Remedy gives pride of place to what Hume wrote in his authorized publications, generally giving them priority in discussion, and identifying divergences between them and the anonymous works.¹⁵ This having been said, *Hume’s Remedy* lets the chips fall where they may on the contentious issue of the relation between the authorized works and the *Treatise*.

As a work in the history of philosophy, *Hume’s Remedy* aims to get the historical facts right. That means being open to the likelihood that the

historical subject, being a human being, will have made mistakes, taken wrong turns, and overlooked opportunities, including opportunities to further develop ideas first floated in earlier work and then abandoned. The last of these possibilities is not to be discounted. In Hume's case, there are reasons for considering how his thought failed to evolve.

Hume was not much given to changing his mind about things. He made it a principle never to reply to critics (MOL, xxxvi) and seems to have taken this so far as not to revise his works in any way that might be construed as making a reply to an increasingly large body of them.¹⁶ But this is just part of the story. Hume seems to have been constitutionally ill-disposed to revising his earlier work. His response to difficulties was not to make changes but to make cuts, narrowing down on what he was most confident he had gotten right and excising the rest. While he frequently re-edited, significant revisions or insertions tend to appear only within the first two subsequent editions. After that, his alterations are almost exclusively stylistic, with one exception. He could be persuaded to shut up about things. There continue to be deletions and extractions to appendices or footnotes. He may never have given up on much of the deleted material. He may simply have decided that his work would make more of an impact if it were omitted or downplayed. Because he was largely disinclined to rethink his original views, there are inconsistencies that were never eliminated, mistakes that went uncorrected, and missed opportunities: ways in which he might have further developed his ideas that he did not pursue. Part of the job of the historian, having recognized shortcomings in the work and serious objections raised by the more astute contemporary critics, is to assess the magnitude of those shortcomings. That can only be done by considering what the historical figure would have been able to do to repair the work, given the resources available at the time. This means drawing only on examples, information, and ways of thinking that would have been current at the time. Even then, any repair that is proposed must be proposed as such, not attributed to the historical figure as if it were their own idea. Getting the history right means recognizing failures of clarity, cogency, and development, as well as mistakes, and not presenting improvements made on the figure's behalf as if they were that figure's own thoughts.

Proposing ways in which the philosophy might have been better developed at the time amounts to treating the philosophy, as well as the philosopher, as a historical subject, and considering how it might have developed had surrounding events taken a different course. The question is what Hume would have been able to say in reply to Reid or Kant, or what use he might have been able to make of theses put forward by Condillac, not what we would now be able to say on his behalf.

The question is also what Hume did in fact think, for better or worse, on the topics that come up for examination. This second question continues

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to preoccupy the main part of *Hume's Remedy*. On some topics (the conception of a vacuum and the endurance of unchanging objects) *Hume's Remedy* reaches verdicts opposed to the current scholarly consensus.

1.3 Overview

Hume offered many sceptical arguments. Some contribute to the problem that his remedial proposal addresses; others figure in the remedy. The foundational arguments concern causal inference and necessary connections. They establish that empirically guided inference cannot be rationally justified. The remedial arguments are offered over the course of *Enquiry* 12 (correspondingly, at *Treatise* 1.4.2.44–9 and 1.4.4.6–14).¹⁷ Scepticism about causal inference reappears at this second stage (at EHU 12.22, though not in T 1.4), but the remedial sceptical arguments Hume had principally in mind are those that establish doubt about our knowledge of an external world.¹⁸

Whereas scepticism about causal inference applies to all experience of regularities, whether in the motion of billiard balls or in the sequence of pain, passion, and volition, external world scepticism rests on a veil of perception argument, premised on a distinction between “bodies” (T 1.4.2.1) and “images presented by the senses” (EHU 12.8) or perceptions (T 1.2.6.7–9 and 1.4.2.2 at the end).

The most serious challenge to Hume's case for external world scepticism arises from his cavalier attitude to the nature of the “objects” as he was disposed to ambiguously call them, of our experience.¹⁹

Enquiry 2.1–2 opens by talking about impressions as exemplified by the pain of heat, the pleasure of moderate warmth, and a fit of anger. These are private sensory states. Publicly observable objects, instanced by monsters, golden mountains, and virtuous horses make a brief appearance in connection with ideas formed in imagination (EHU 2.4). Otherwise, *Enquiry* 2 and 3 only consider ideas as derived from impressions, and discuss their association. But in *Enquiry* 4 reference to impressions and ideas is abruptly abandoned, not to reappear except briefly, in *Enquiry* 5.2 when accounting for belief, and in *Enquiry* 7 when accounting for the idea of necessary connection. The bulk of Hume's famous account of causal inference appeals to regularity in the succession of species of external objects, like billiard balls, bread, wine, fire logs, and swords. It seems as if these objects are as directly perceived as impressions of pain or anger. But then, when Hume turned to talk about external world scepticism in *Enquiry* 12, “images presented by the senses” make a sudden appearance, posing a challenge to our acquaintance with external objects.

Like the *Enquiry*, the *Treatise* fumbles with objectivity. Unlike the *Enquiry*, it draws a distinction between simple and complex perceptions (T 1.1.1.2). But then it proceeds to ignore the question of what limits the

complexity of perceptions. According to the *Treatise*, an apple is a complex impression, as if it were obvious why we parse the sensible points constitutive of a visual or tactile field as outlining that “image” rather than some other. And, like the *Enquiry*, for all its opening talk of impressions, ideas, and perceptions, whenever the *Treatise* turns to talk about relations (causal relations in particular) the language of impressions, ideas, and perceptions is abruptly abandoned in favour of a preponderant use of the term “object” exemplified by publicly observable external objects.

Like a complex perception of an apple, an image captures how something appears when displayed against a contrasting background. It is something that has been cut out, presenting a unity of form within a larger context. A visual perception, consisting just of coloured points disposed in space out to the edges of the visual field (like a piece of abstract art), is not an image. It is something more primitive. It is like a page of dots in a child’s game book, which reveals one figure when the dots are connected according to the instructions, but something else should they be connected in a different way. The dots are given where they are in space. But the child decides to connect them one way rather than another. Connecting the dots brings a figure/background distinction out of the whole field of spatially disposed points.

It takes some work to account for how a visual experience, consisting of various spatially and temporally disposed coloured points, takes on the character of an image of a table or an apple. It then takes more work to identify images, which are temporary and perspective-dependent, with multi-faceted, mobile objects that change in regular ways over time. Kant referred to these operations as unifying a sensory “manifold” in the conception of an object. In speaking of images as being presented by the senses, the *Enquiry* takes the first of these operations, and so the second, for granted. Even on the supposition that images just are objects, Hume is exposed to the classic Kantian objection that he was only able to offer an empirical account of causal inference (as based on observed regularities in the succession of species of object) by taking the achievement of recognizing objects for granted, neglecting the essential role of a priori concepts, such as those of substance and cause, in this operation.²⁰

Hume’s Remedy argues that Hume had the resources to avoid the Kantian objection. His views on association by contiguity in space and on identity over time are key to that resolution. However the resolution calls for a reassessment of his sceptical arguments.

Foundational work on how we recognize objects among the “blooming buzzing confusion” of sensory experiences had already begun in the period before Hume. It was partly inspired by geometrical optics, which suggests that the information transmitted by the eye underdetermines what we see. More radically, it was inspired by Cartesian dualism, extended to idealism by Berkeley. The doctrine that minds are unextended scuttles

the view that we perceive the spatial properties and relations of things by experiencing extended, mental images, leaving Cartesians and Berkeleians attempting to account for how the mind gathers information about spatial properties and relations from a succession of purely qualitative sensations. Descartes assumed the mind must somehow be able to contemplate images imprinted in the brain or “corporeal imagination,” and Berkeley only got as far as accounting for visual depth perception, visual perception of objective magnitude, single vision, and erect vision, without managing to reduce localization on the two-dimensional field of view (let alone tactile experience) to something more primitive. The goal of completing the project was bequeathed to their disciples. Berkeley’s claim that an “intelligence” capable of seeing but not feeling would not be able to understand the first principles of geometry (NTV 153–9) was a further step in that direction, as well as an early instance of a turn to consider the limits of what each sense tells us on its own, and how one might inform the others. Reid wrote his *Inquiry* as a series of investigations into what we are able to learn from each of our senses, asking what a being capable only of having tactile sensations could know about space (*Inquiry* 5.6) and what beings confined to a two-dimensional world would think about the objects around them (*Inquiry* 6.9). Condillac argued that even though colours are disposed in space, touch needs to educate vision to see them that way (*Traité* 1.11.8, 3.3.1–13), and is the only sense that can acquaint us with an external world (*Traité* 2.4–5).

In doing his own work on the elements of the science of human nature, Hume had a resource to draw on that these other authors did not. He had no commitment to dualism (“Immortality”; T 1.4.5), and so felt no pressure to recognize a problem of how the mind localizes pains or colour sensations in space. He could take it to be a fact, revealed by experience, that visual and tactile sensations are originally given as spatially disposed. If that means that mental states are spatially disposed, so much the worse for the dualists.

The thesis that sensory experience exhibits spatial and temporal structure antecedent to any operations of the imagination or understanding is one that Hume shared with Kant. Kant ruminated that it reflects subjectively necessary conditions under which it is possible for us to have sensations; Hume just took it to be a further feature of our experience. Those early modern philosophers who were convinced that minds are not in space were forced to either maintain that the spatial structure of experience is constructed rather than intuited or invoke innate ideas. Kant had the opposite problem. He needed to look for special reasons to deny the “transcendental reality” of space and time.²¹ Hume’s approach makes it possible to offer a strictly empirical account of objectivity (Sections 6.10–12).

Taking the spatial and temporal arrangement of coloured and tangible points to be intuited (or “perceived”) is a crucial first step to avoiding Kantian synthesis under a priori concepts.

Hume devoted parts of *Treatise* 1.2 to discussing our experience of space and time. It was there that he introduced the notion that space and time are experienced as “manners of disposition” of unextended impressions and ideas. He did not return to that topic in his authorized publications. Recognition of the spatial complexity of our most primitive experiences is nonetheless as much a feature of the *Enquiry* as the *Treatise*. While there is no dedicated discussion of spatial “manners of disposition” in the *Enquiry*, they are still there, from the shades of blue of *Enquiry* 2.8, which are said to be experienced as descending along a line in space in order of their phenomenally experienced intensity, to the assertion that we associate ideas depending on how those ideas are spatially and temporally disposed (EHU 3.3 and 5.17), to the talk of “images” that are “presented by the senses.”

Recognizing space and time as manners in which impressions are disposed means recognizing that what the author of the *Treatise* called “complex impressions” are not the product of any cognitive operation performed on simple impressions.²² Section 1.6 shows that Hume thought that complex sense impressions are “original,” that is, “such as without any antecedent perception arise in the soul” (T 2.1.1.1). The simple parts into which they might be divided are only rarely given in isolation, as simple impressions. In the case of visual or tactile points, they never are. A point is only experienced as such insofar as it is hemmed in on all sides by surrounding points.

Taking complex impressions to be originally given as extended over space implies that minds are spatially extended. Hume embraced this consequence. His most astute contemporary critic, Thomas Reid, was deeply troubled by it. Encountering it in the *Treatise* led Reid to reject his early acceptance of Berkeley’s immaterialism. As Reid understood it, Hume had shown that Berkeley’s principles lead to a consequence far more troubling than the rejection of an external world: that “the mind either is no substance, or that it is an extended and divisible substance, because the ideas of extension cannot be in a subject which is indivisible and unextended.”²³ In the early 1760s, some 14 years after publishing the first edition of the *Enquiry*, Hume corresponded with Reid about this topic (*Inquiry*, 255–65). He did not take the occasion to object that Reid had misinterpreted him.

Section 1.2 argues that Reid understood Hume correctly. Sections 1.3–5 defend Reid’s interpretation of Hume against objections raised by Reid himself and by James Beattie. In doing this work, Sections 1.2–5 present Hume and Reid as champions of two starkly opposed views of the

representation of the spatial properties and relations of sensations and the objects of experience. On the Humean account, to have an idea of extension is to have an extended idea (T 1.4.5.15). On Reid's account, to perceive an extended object is to perform an act of conception that acquaints us with that object, even though the act itself is not extended and does not otherwise resemble that object (*Inquiry* 6.20, 168). According to Sections 1.3 and 1.4, the dispute between the two comes down to rival intuitions about the nature of our experience of colour.²⁴

In light of this dispute, it is noteworthy that, in an attempt to argue that we have no conception of a vacuum, Hume conceded to Reid that it is possible to have sensations of colour that are nowhere in space (T 1.2.5.11–12).²⁵

This turn of events requires anyone wishing to defend Hume's position on representation to engage what he said about vacuum. Section 2.6 and Chapter 5 show that Hume had only one argument for denying the conceivability of a vacuum, an argument from the non-entity of unqualified points (T 1.2.3.12–17). Section 2.6 shows that this argument is flawed. Hume also sought to provide an alternative explanation of what we experience when we "falsely imagine" we are perceiving a vacuum. Chapter 5 argues that this explanation tacitly invokes the very conception it seeks to replace. Fortunately for those wishing to defend Hume's position on representation, he was unable to escape the intuition that we can only experience two lone coloured points as spatially contiguous or separated by a space where there is nothing visible or tangible.

Section 1.9 initiates a parallel discussion of Hume's views on time. Those views entail that, just as the idea of extension is an extended idea, so the idea of time is an idea that takes time to occur. But, like everyone else before Einstein, Hume was a "presentist." He thought that what is past no longer exists, that the future does not yet exist, and that what does exist is confined to a simple and indivisible moment (T 2.3.7.5, 1.2.2.4, 1.2.3.8).²⁶ This moment is perpetually perishing and perpetually renewed. Such an account would appear to confine all knowledge of the past to the experience of presently occurring traces or images. But, barring innate ideas, no collection of presently existing images can give us the idea of succession. Hume accepted that we do have that idea, but he did not consider how that could be possible (Costa 1990, n9). Section 1.9 addresses this difficulty with work that is critically constructive. It presents Hume as someone who was capable of missing opportunities and making mistakes, but it also looks for a way he could have done better, by appealing to other things he had to say.

The thesis that impressions and ideas are extended and take time to occur does not just have implications for theories of mind and accounts of temporal experience. It creates problems for accounts of consciousness.

If impressions and ideas are spatially distributed and take time to occur, and impressions and ideas are conscious states, consciousness is likewise distributed over space and composed of distinguishable temporal parts. William James famously charged that this is impossible, observing that “A succession of feelings, in and of itself, is not a feeling of succession” (*Principles* 1.15, 591) and that when twelve people standing in a row each think one word of a twelve-word sentence “nowhere will there be a consciousness of the whole sentence” (*Principles* 1.8, 162). Section 1.6 refers to this as the “comprehension problem.” Versions of this problem were raised in Hume’s time by Bayle (*Dictionnaire*, 130) and Clarke (*Clarke-Collins*, 47), and were taken to prove that consciousness, and so the mind must be indivisible and so unextended.

There is a further problem, referred to in Section 1.7 as the “limitation problem.” Supposing that impressions and ideas extend over space and time, what fixes their bounds? Hume naïvely thought that the bounds of complex impressions and ideas are fixed by the surfaces of objects like apples and tables. But this opens him to the Kantian objection. What determines us to draw the bounds as we do rather than in some other way?

Section 1.8 argues that Hume had the resources to address these problems. One implication of that work is that Hume could have modified his account of complex impressions to provide an account of consciousness. Another is that, though he seems not to have fully realized it, he cannot have been a psychological atomist.²⁷ The thesis that space and time are originally perceived (not subsequently constructed) entails that complex impressions are not just aggregates of parts but wholes that display parts as spatially and temporally related, where the relations are not determined by anything in the parts considered individually. The parts need not be qualitatively different. They can be differentiated just by how they are disposed within the whole. Their manner of disposition is additional information, not to be found in the parts considered individually or in their bare collectivity (T 1.3.1.1). It is instead given in what Hume called the “perception” (immediate experience) of a whole (T 1.3.2.2; Section 2.4.1).

Kant thought that a determination of the conditions of the possibility of experience of sensory images and external objects could do something to answer sceptical arguments. If Hume could have offered an account of objectivity, would it have undermined his sceptical arguments and the success of his remedial proposal?

In the *Enquiry*, Hume appealed to a veil of perception argument underwritten by a Berkeleyan argument from the phenomenal status of sensible qualities. He opposed these arguments to a blind and powerful, natural instinct or prepossession to suppose that there is an external world. The author of the *Treatise* appealed to the same arguments but also sought to

establish that the belief in an external world is based on trivial qualities of the fancy conducted by false suppositions. Chief among the false suppositions is the supposition that interrupted but resembling objects can be identical.

Chapter 7 argues that the considerations that would have enabled Hume to explain how we come to recognize objects undermine his claim that the belief in body rests on trivial qualities of the fancy conducted by false suppositions.²⁸ Chapters 6 and 7 also argue that the spatiality of visual and tactile experience makes it possible to justify identity attributions to interrupted objects. Hume was led to think otherwise by a flawed identity theory, hobbled by the supposition that unchanging objects do not endure. Chapter 4 presents an alternative “free Humean identity theory” (one free of the supposition that there are no monotonous successions). Chapter 3 shows that Hume had no good reason for rejecting the endurance of unchanging objects.²⁹ Section 3.4 argues that the rejection is inconsistent with his presentism.³⁰

However, Chapter 8 also argues that the sceptical arguments of the *Enquiry*, along with their prototypes in *Treatise* 1.4.2.45 and 1.4.4.6–14, retain their power.³¹ “Images presented by the senses” may lead us to recognize objects, but these objects are not external objects. They are naturally taken for external objects, but they are demonstrably distinct from them. As Reid complained, if Hume is right, we find ourselves in an enchanted castle, imposed upon by spectres and apparitions.

These remedial sceptical arguments stand as “proof against proof.” They do not disprove a belief based only on disreputable foundations. They oppose a belief that is as well warranted as any can be. They leave us readier to question and abandon our beliefs, but cannot overcome our disposition to be guided by the evidence.

Notes

- 1 See “Abbreviations and Short Titles for Primary Sources” (pp. xi–xviii above) for a key to references to works first published prior to the twentieth century.
- 2 DP 2.33; T 1.3.9.16–19. *Treatise* 1.3.9.16 speaks of “other kinds of custom” and remarks that “custom ... may operate upon the mind ... after two several ways.” The second of these ways, there labelled “education” is said to give rise to opinions that “take such deep root, that ’tis impossible for us, by all the powers of reason and experience, to eradicate them; and this habit not only approaches in its influence, but even on many occasions prevails over that which arises from the constant and inseparable union of causes and effects” (T 1.3.9.17).
- 3 He did not always do so (Qu 2016, 59). This is only to be expected. He will himself have been determined by circumstances to believe certain things to be improbable, to view those who accept them as ridiculous and contemptible, and to express those sentiments (Falkenstein 1997; Garrett 1997, 157–9). See

- the *Natural History* from start to finish. This did not preclude him from recognizing that those sentiments were “extorted” from him (T 1.4.7.15) or from recognizing the force of sceptical arguments against his own practices (EHU 12.22) and of common opinions contrary to his own (T 1.3.14.24, especially at the end).
- 4 Qu (2019) provides a useful survey of interpretations in the more recent literature. The suggestion made in this book, that Hume’s scepticism was remedial, is not mentioned. The opposed sceptical and naturalistic interpretations of Hume were forged by Reid, *Inquiry* and *Intellectual Powers*, and Kemp Smith (1905, 1941).
 - 5 This is not to be discounted. As Hume noted (DP 2.33), our opinions of ourselves are determined by the opinions that others have of us, making the desire to earn their admiration and approval one of the driving forces of all our behaviour. This can extend to doing what earns us a reputation for wisdom and good judgment. It just depends on whether we find ourselves in the company of those who admire others naturally endowed with an ability to proportion belief to the evidence, or of people who place a premium on some other quality, such as perseverance in original opinions, loyalty to a party line, or implicit faith in the words of demagogues or priests.
 - 6 EHU 8.13 quoting T 1.3.12.5, EHU 9.5n, “Rise and Progress” (E1, 102). The circumstances enumerated in these passages include character traits, cognitive abilities, and environmental factors: curiosity and the opportunity and resources to pursue it, along with experience and the abilities involved in gathering and codifying information from what it offers and drawing logical inferences from it. The role of general rules and of curiosity in Hume’s thought has been exhaustively studied by Wilson (2008).
 - 7 Tenets promulgated by education and popular opinion can also be repeatedly encountered, but wherever opinion bears on divergent interests it can be counted upon to be factious (interest being a determinant of belief by way of arousing passions [T 1.3.10.4]). Opinion is also frequently contrary to experience, and in these cases is often refuted by subsequent events. Seeing is believing, and can produce a disposition to distrust the words of others when they lead to disappointment.
 - 8 They include MacNabb (1951, 95–100), Norton (1994), Falkenstein (1997), Loeb (2002, 101–38), and Fogelin, (2009, 29–38).
 - 9 Notably Popkin (1980, esp. 127–32), and Baxter (2008, 9–14).
 - 10 The most complete earlier expression of this approach is Falkenstein (1997). Fogelin (2009) intimates a similar position. Williams (2004, 290–2) comes close but is voluntarist (273, 274). Loeb emphasizes the importance of Hume’s recognition of a distinction between philosophical and unphilosophical beliefs (2013 and the other work referenced there) but seeks to draw epistemological conclusions rather than recognize the remedial role of sceptical arguments in a context where belief is determined by circumstances. Ainslie (2015, 8) considers our ability to overcome sceptical arguments to be a crucial challenge for an adequate theory of mind to address.
 - 11 *Enquiry* 1.12 declares that “Accurate and just reasoning,” rather than scepticism, “is the only catholic remedy [to abstruse philosophy and metaphysical jargon mixed up with popular superstition], fitted for all persons and all dispositions[.]” This is the only case where “remedy” is used as a noun in the *Enquiry*. In contrast, sceptical arguments are only recommended as something that “may be ... useful” (EHU 12.24). However, the preponderance of the