

HUME'S ETHICS OF BELIEF

by

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Abstract

Hume's theory of belief and his normative standard or ethics of belief are founded on empirically observable, natural principles, principles which have been misunderstood by those who view Hume's belief theory as one based on the forcefulness and liveliness of our ideas.

In this dissertation, I argue that, according to Hume, both factual and value judgments are arrived at via the same basic, natural processes of the mind. All human judgments are ultimately derived from *feeling* or affect, that is, from internal impressions which arise within the human mind in tandem with, or in reaction to, its experience of ideational content, that is, the "parts or composition of the idea, which we conceive." According to Hume, then, our feelings, operating in concert with the sensory and cognitive functions of the mind, provide us with our final standards of judgment, whether factual or evaluative. Our ethics of belief—our normative standards of belief—are therefore, like belief itself, more properly ascribable to the "sensitive" or feeling part of our nature, than to the non-affective, rational, or cogitative aspects of cognition.

In sum, for Hume, belief is a complex but wholly natural cognitive phenomenon, consisting of, firstly, our experience of ideational content, and secondly, our feeling of cognitive commitment—the feeling of believing in the ideational content experienced. All judgments, factual and evaluative, are composed in this way.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A perennial worry about Hume's philosophy is that it seems "broken-backed"; that is, there is a worry that the naturalistic and sceptical dimensions of Hume's philosophy are mutually contradictory (or at least inconsistent) and hence destructive to his positive projects (Russell 2008, 3). In other words, Hume is often portrayed as more of a provider of puzzles than as a systematic philosopher (see, for example, Passmore 1952).

In this dissertation, I will be examining Hume's theory of belief as a way to resolve this apparent conflict between his naturalism and his scepticism. I will be arguing that, for Hume, belief is an experienced activity of the mind, explicable at least in principle on naturalistic grounds (or perhaps, more properly speaking, on natural—as opposed to supernatural or rationalistic—grounds). Further, once belief is properly understood as a *natural* phenomenon, the fundamental unity and coherence of Hume's system emerges, with certain sceptical puzzles within the *Treatise* perhaps more readily resolvable, or at least less problematic to Hume's systemic philosophical purposes, than heretofore thought.

Additionally, I will argue that according to Hume's fundamental view of human cognition, both factual and value judgments are arrived at via the same basic, natural processes of the mind. In Hume's system, all human judgments are ultimately derived from feeling, that is, from internal impressions which arise within the human mind in tandem with, or in reaction to, the ideational content of the mind's perceptions. (In using the term "ideational content", I mean what Hume refers to as the "parts or composition of the idea, which we conceive" (T, 1.3.7.2/95/N66), that is, the subject matter of

conceiving and perceiving, as opposed to the activity of the mind in experiencing that subject matter.) According to Hume, then, our feelings, operating in concert with the sensory and cognitive functions of the mind, provide us with our final standards of judgment, whether factual or evaluative. Our ethics of belief—our normative standards of belief—are therefore, like belief itself, more properly ascribable to “the sensitive, rather than . . . the cogitative part of our natures” (T, 1.4.1.8/183/N123). In brief, instead of providing us with three disjointed theories of judgment in the factual, evaluative, and aesthetic realms, Hume in fact presents, albeit in a somewhat fragmented and even inchoate manner, a unified theory of judgment or belief. Instead of an FLV (“force,” “liveliness,” “vivacity”) theory of factual belief based on causal inference, a disparate theory of (aesthetic) taste, and a mixed moral sense/cognitive theory of moral judgment, Hume in fact lays the groundwork for a *unified* theory of judgment—a theory or family of theories whereby ideational content and affect or feeling combine to provide the human mind with a judgmental (normative) view of that content. In sum, beliefs or judgments are arrived at via the same basic, natural principles and mechanisms in all realms of experience, that is, in all realms of content assessment. As far as I can tell from a review of the literature, no one has ever made this interpretative claim, which is based primarily on a careful reading of Hume’s *Treatise* and his first *Enquiry*, but which fits well with the most recent “history of ideas” analyses of his overall thought.

While my focus will be on Hume’s theory of belief and his ethics or standards of belief in matters of fact, I also briefly argue that the same mechanisms operate in value judgments, and I use judgments of evaluative comparison as an example.

In Chapter 2, I briefly review some of the relevant literature, that is, what I consider to be the “standard view” of Hume’s theory of belief, namely a view that gives pride of place to such terms as “force”, “liveliness”, “vivacity”—the “FLV theory” (an acronym coined by Allison 2008; see, e.g., Flew 1961; Garrett 1997; Allison 2008). I make some preliminary remarks indicative of the inadequacy of viewing Hume’s theory through FLV spectacles, and outline my own interpretation of that theory—a “feeling” theory of belief.

In Chapter 3, I show that Hume retreats from the FLV view, first in his Appendix revisions to the *Treatise*, and then in the first *Enquiry*. I also provide a more complete interpretation of Hume’s actual theory of belief. In brief, for Hume, belief is a complex cognitive phenomenon, consisting of, firstly, ideational content and secondly, a feeling, a *felt* awareness-of-content experienced either in reaction to, or co-occurrent with, that content. In the case of belief as to matter of fact, or for that matter in the case of any judgment, that felt awareness-of-content is experienced as a feeling or affect of cognitive commitment—the feeling of *believing* in the ideational content. As support for this interpretation, I show that certain evaluative judgments are also a matter of ideational content accompanied by an impression of reflection (a feeling of cognitive commitment or approval). I also suggest that further research will, in all likelihood, show us that both moral and aesthetic evaluations operate in the same manner, that is, via ideational content and reflective, reactive impressions or feelings arising from the mind’s assessment of that content. In sum, the processes by which we arrive at our normative or evaluative judgments are the very same type of cognitive-affective processes by which we arrive at beliefs.

Finally, and perhaps most controversially, I argue that *all* perceptions—including sense impressions—consist of two inextricable aspects or elements, aspects that can no more be contemplated abstracted from each other than can the colour of a shape be separated and distinguished from the form by which it is experienced. These two aspects, which can only be *rationally* or notionally distinguished by means of what Hume calls a “distinction of reason” (T, 1.1.7.17-18/24-25/N21-22), are what I refer to, firstly, as *ideational content*—the objects or attended-to subject matter of experience, that which Hume calls the “parts or composition of the idea, which we conceive” (T, 1.3.7.2/95/N66)—and, secondly, as the *felt experience* of that content—the feeling or experiential awareness of that content which is the felt manifestation of the mental activity of experiencing ideational content of any kind. At *Treatise*, 1.3.8.16/106/N74, Hume refers to this mental activity as “the action of the mind in the meditation” of that content, which I interpret as the felt experience/awareness-of-content, and he clearly indicates that we can in some way differentiate or “delineate” the ideational content and the felt experience of that content. At other times he speaks of ideational content’s “feeling to the mind” or of “something felt by the mind” (T, 1.3.7.7/App 628-9/N68); similar expressions appear throughout the *Treatise*. I will argue that this delineation or differentiation may, in some circumstances, occur experientially; in other circumstances, the differentiation of content from the felt experience/awareness-of-content may require what Hume refers to as a “distinction of reason.”

In Chapter 4, I deal with certain critical evaluations of and objections to my interpretation, including statements made by Hume himself in the Appendix (paragraph 4/625-6/N397-8), statements which seem to contradict my interpretation of his theory of

belief. I show that Hume's supposed objections, if properly understood, pose no threat to my interpretation of his belief theory. In fact, these Appendix comments indicate that Hume had, by the time of the Appendix, undergone significant second thoughts about the FLV aspects of his theory of belief; these comments represent the first signs of a "retreat" from FLV, a retreat that continued in the first *Enquiry*.

Finally, in Chapter 5, I discuss some limited aspects of certain of Hume's famous puzzles concerning belief in the self and in the external world, and argue that the challenges posed by these puzzles can be clarified, at least to some extent, once Hume's actual theory of belief is correctly interpreted. I also briefly discuss why Hume may have chosen a "sensationalistic", or feeling, theory of belief, and the implications this presents for a proper interpretation of Hume's philosophy.

References to Hume's Writings

A note on citation of Hume's work: In this dissertation, I cite *A Treatise of Human Nature* (referred to throughout as "the *Treatise*"; citation abbreviation "T"), *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* ("the first *Enquiry*"; citation abbreviation "E"), and *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* ("the second *Enquiry*"; citation abbreviation "EM"), by following the conventions adopted in the Nortons' *Treatise* and in Beauchamp's first and second *Enquiries*. Therefore, references to the *Treatise* cite book, part, section, and paragraph number, while references to the *Enquiries* refer to section and paragraph number. I also provide page references to the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch editions of the *Treatise* and of both *Enquiries*, followed by page references to the Norton or Beauchamp editions.

Thus, for example, “T, 1.3.7.8/97/N68” indicates a reference to the *Treatise*, book 1, part 2, section 3, paragraph 4; Selby-Bigge/Nidditch edition p. 34; Norton edition, p. 68. Similarly, “E, 5.12/49/B41” refers to the first *Enquiry*, section 5, paragraph 12; Selby-Bigge/Nidditch edition, p. 49; Beauchamp edition p. 41, while “EM, 1.9/172-3/B5-6” gives us a reference to the second *Enquiry*, section 1, paragraph 9; Selby-Bigge/Nidditch edition, pp. 172-3; Beauchamp edition, pp. 5-6.

One further complication needs to be mentioned. Late in 1740, when the final part of the *Treatise* was in the process of being published, Hume added an Appendix to the *Treatise*, and many of my citations—especially those dealing with “feeling”—refer to these last-minute Appendix additions.

Where the Norton edition has incorporated those Appendix additions into the main body of the text of the *Treatise*, I have indicated this along the following lines. “T, 1.3.7.7/App 629/N68”, for example, indicates that the Norton edition has inserted a portion of the Appendix into the main body of the *Treatise* text, in accordance with Hume’s instructions, while also indicating that in the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch edition the relevant paragraph has *remained* in the Appendix. Thus, the citation “T, 1.3.7.7/App 629/N68” tells us that the Appendix addition has been inserted into book 1, part 3, section 7, paragraph 7, p. 68, of the Norton edition of the *Treatise*, but remains in the Appendix of the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch edition, at p. 629.

Those portions of the Appendix which neither of the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch or Norton editions incorporate into the main body of the *Treatise* are referred to in the following format: “T, Appendix 2/623-4/N396”, which indicates paragraph 2 of the

Appendix as enumerated in the Norton edition; pp. 623-4 of the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch edition; p. 396 of the Norton edition.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Standard View

Hume's theory of belief, insofar as it concerns the nature of belief, as opposed to the various features of his system that feature or refer to belief (most notably, causal inference), has been given relatively short shrift in the secondary literature. A recent, very prominent commentator, Henry Allison (2008), goes so far as to claim that Hume fails to provide us with a fully realized "general" theory of belief at all (Allison 2008, 369). I argue that this is unfair to Hume, and that a deeper reading of his philosophic system provides us with a profound and (to some) deeply unsettling view of belief formation as it actually occurs in human cognition. I further argue that Hume's theory of belief formation is an essential part of his equally profound, unsettling vision of normativity, in belief, in action and evaluation of action, and in aesthetics.

Most of all, a little exegetical humility is called for. As one prominent analyst of Hume, H. H. Price, might have said, we need to be careful that we do not oversimplify Hume's belief theory in our search for analytic clarity:

We shall be unfair to him [Hume] (and fail to learn what he is trying to teach us) if we take *one* of his formulations by itself, for example the definition of belief in terms of liveliness, and neglect the other expressions he uses, which are intended to amplify this one and correct any misleading implications it may have (Price 1969, 159).

Yet, Price himself, like many others writing in the latter half of the twentieth century, finds himself drawn to Hume's repeated use of words such as "force", "liveliness", and "vivacity" (there are many other terms, some closely related, others less obviously so,

which will be discussed shortly), and thereby falls into an interpretation of Hume's belief theory that Henry Allison (2008) has dubbed the "FLV theory" of belief. Indeed, it is tantamount to an orthodoxy amongst Hume scholars that Hume's theory of belief is essentially founded on terms such as "force", "liveliness", "vivacity" and related terms (hereafter, "FLV" will be used as a convenient acronym), with little, if any useful connection to his analyses of morality or aesthetics.

Price provides us with a fairly representative schema regarding Hume's theory of belief, representative, that is, in its reliance on FLV terminology. According to Price:

Hume's theory of belief may be summed up as follows:

1. The difference between believing and not believing is a difference in the manner of conceiving an idea, and not in the content of the idea conceived.
2. We can roughly indicate what this manner of conceiving is, by saying that a believed idea is one which feels *strong* and *forceful* or *lively* or *solid*.
3. Except in the special case of madness, the *forcefulness* or *liveliness* of the idea arises from its relation to (its associative linkage with) a present impression; the idea gets its *liveliness* from its relation to something actually perceived (or introspected) at the moment (Price 1969, 175; emphasis added).

Here we have the usual elements focussed on by the commentators: belief is a "lively" manner of conception, "liveliness" or FLV is somehow transmitted or transferred from the experience of an immediate impression of sensation (or a memory thereof) to a resultant belief, as in causal inference. Not surprisingly, most commentators find the theory incomplete or unsatisfactory or both. Many simply avert their eyes, after a brief

explication of the theory as one based on FLV, and move on to more philosophically interesting and fruitful aspects of the Hume corpus.

Garrett: Belief as “Vivacity of the Idea”

Consider, for example, Don Garrett’s treatment of Hume’s belief theory, in his highly influential monograph, *Cognition and Commitment in Hume’s Philosophy* (1997). Garrett whole-heartedly accepts, with little discussion, the FLV view of belief as representative of Hume’s theory, and characterizes FLV as playing an important, even “central”, role in Hume’s system. Yet, paradoxically, Garrett never specifically *shows* the FLV theory to be foundational regarding anything of significance in Hume’s philosophical projects within Book 1 of the *Treatise*.

Hume, he tells us, “holds that the conviction or belief typically produced by reason, i.e., both demonstrative and causal or probable reasoning, is nothing but the *vivacity* of the idea that constitutes the conclusion, and so is itself a particular *manner* of having ideas of the imagination” (Garrett 1997, 27). This is as succinct a statement of the standard view of Hume’s belief theory as one is likely to find in the literature.

Furthermore, Garrett sees FLV as a “central unifying explanatory property” for Hume’s theory:

This vivacity, or force or liveliness, is in turn the central unifying explanatory property to which Hume’s cognitive science appeals, a property parallel in some ways (as the choice of terms suggests) to “force” in physics or mechanics. He argues . . . that the presence of greater vivacity—though presumably still in an amount less than that provided by memory—constitutes the difference between beliefs, on the one hand, and ideas merely entertained, on the other. . . . The even greater force and vivacity of impressions and memories also serves to explain

why we are generally so certain of the truth of what they represent, just as the (more limited) force and vivacity of certain ideas in the imagination explains why we confidently accept *them* as true representations (Garrett 1997, 26).

Here we have the classic, hierarchical picture of FLV as the determinant of belief, with immediate impressions of sensation or internal impressions of feeling having the highest intensity of FLV. Memories of such “immediate” impressions possess an intensity level of FLV approaching the intensity associated with those impressions. Causal inference, which leads to the belief in the reality of those objects that the mind feels determined to believe in, as a result of immediate impressions or memories thereof, has an FLV intensity level lower than, but approaching that of, memories and immediate impressions. Mere fictions or suppositions, that is sets of ideational content conceived of but not believed in, possess by far the lowest levels of FLV. An elegant, simple picture of belief is presented: the higher the FLV level of intensity, the more likely it is that ideational content is believed.

Allison: Hume Lacks a Developed Theory

While Henry Allison (2008, 167) labels Hume’s theory of belief “sentimentalist”, thereby implicitly acknowledging a role for feeling in belief, he goes on to characterize Hume’s theory almost exclusively in terms of force, liveliness, vivacity, and related terms, so that we are presented with an FLV (Allison’s acronym) theory of belief, with the role of feeling essentially ignored.

Strictly speaking, Allison does not think Hume really has a fully developed theory of belief at all. In an endnote, he states: “Hume does not attempt to provide a general

theory of belief, but merely (at least primarily) an account of inferential, existential belief, that is, belief in matters of fact resulting from causal inference. Examples of non-inferential, existential belief would be those based on perception or memory” (Allison 2008, 369 n1). Allison goes on to characterize object belief, whether via perception or memory, as *wholly* determined by FLV. He thus epitomizes the usual take on Hume’s theory of belief: namely, that it is an overly simplistic theory, based entirely on FLV, and that as a result of this less than credible reliance on FLV, the theory is of little, if any, philosophic interest. “[T]he most familiar and least plausible feature of Hume’s theory of inferential belief is that he construes it in sentimentalist terms as a function of the intensity of the effect that an idea has upon the imagination” (Allison 2008, 167).

Allison also claims that Hume viewed his thesis that belief consists in a certain “manner of conception”, or way of conceiving, rather than in the modification of ideational content, as entailing or requiring a sentimentalist view of belief. But Allison is in error in interpreting Hume in this way; that is, entailment is a misleading way to characterize the derivation of Hume’s position. Hume is not making a logical or deductive argument in his analysis of belief; to the contrary, he purports to be following the experimental method here. In other words, Hume sees himself as engaged in an *empirical* review of the mind’s operations (i.e., taking “a review of this act of the mind”; see: T, 1.3.13.12/150/N101), and this introspective review is what provides us with our information about the nature of belief. Thus, Hume’s reliance on FLV terminology is not, strictly speaking, a theoretical position, but rather an empirical one, subject to empirically determined revision—precisely the kind of revision made at the end of the *Treatise* Appendix and confirmed in the first *Enquiry*. While Hume acknowledges the difficulties

inherent in such an internal investigation, he nevertheless evinces great confidence in the fruitfulness and accuracy of introspective investigation of the mind's operations, stating that "since all actions and sensations of the mind are known to us by consciousness, they must necessarily appear in every particular what they are, and be what they appear" (T, 1.4.2.7/190/N127).

Reid's Analysis of Hume

Allison's interpretation of Hume on belief follows in the tradition of Thomas Reid, Hume's most prominent and most influential eighteenth-century philosophical critic. Allison explicitly relies on Reid's analysis of Hume's theory, and provides the following lengthy quote from Reid, to illustrate what he sees as the basic weakness (and counter-intuitiveness) of basing belief on the level of intensity of FLV. Reid, after all, famously mocked Hume (if not by name, then by clear implication) and Hume's putative FLV theory, derisively labelling it as "that modern discovery of the ideal philosophy . . . that sensation, memory, belief, and imagination, when they have the same object, are only different degrees of strength and vivacity in the idea" (Reid [1764] 1967, 107a; quoted in Allison 2008, 169). Allison is quoting Reid approvingly: Hume's theory as portrayed by Allison and Reid, to the extent that it even deserves the appellation of "theory", reduces to a crude and laughable correlation between the intensity of FLV and the degree of belief in a given set of ideational content. Such a caricature of Hume's theory is easy to mock, and Reid was all too happy to do so:

But what is this belief . . . which accompanies sensation and memory? Every man knows what it is, but no man can define it. . . . Suppose the idea be that of a future state after death; one man believes it firmly—this means no more than that he

hath a strong and lively idea of it; another neither believes nor disbelieves—that is, he has a weak and faint idea. Suppose, now, a third person believes firmly that there is no such thing, I am at a loss to know whether this idea be faint or lively; if it is faint, then there may be a firm belief where the idea is faint; if the idea is lively, then the belief of a future state and the belief of no future state must be one and the same. The same arguments that are used to prove that belief implies only a stronger idea of the object than simple apprehension, might as well be used to prove that love implies only a stronger idea of the object than indifference. And then what shall we say of hatred, which must upon this hypothesis be a degree of love, or a degree of indifference? If it should be said, that in love there is something more than an idea—to wit, an affection of the mind—may it not be said with equal reason, that in belief there is something more than an idea—to wit, an assent or persuasion of the mind? (Reid [1764] 1967, 107a).

Allison characterizes this as “a powerful *reductio* against Hume’s sentimentalist conception of belief” (Allison 2008, 169). What it actually amounts to is this: it is a “straw man” analysis/argument, a mischaracterization of Hume’s theory set up as such in order to be easily defeated. When Reid challenges Hume by rhetorically asking, “may it not be said with equal reason, that in belief there is something more than an idea—to wit, an assent or persuasion of the mind”, we have a rough approximation of what Hume’s own position *actually amounts to* (or so I will argue): namely, that belief consists in ideational content *plus* the feeling of cognitive commitment (i.e., a feeling of assent or belief), which feeling is the felt manifestation of the operations of the mind involved in *believing* that ideational content. I have italicized the word “believing” because belief is not, strictly speaking, a thing or even a static state of affairs, but rather an ongoing *process* of mental activity, though Hume’s continued use of FLV terminology encourages reification. (To reiterate, belief is an activity of the mind, a mental process or activity

occurring as and when the mind experiences ideational content in a “believing” manner or fashion. As such, belief is merely one of a myriad of mental processes of experiencing ideational content, all of which share belief’s two-part structure of affect and content.) Reid took a highly uncharitable reading of Hume’s belief theory, and Allison, along with many contemporary commentators, has followed Reid’s lead. In so doing, contemporary Hume scholarship has failed to recognize the subtlety and fecundity of Hume’s belief theory.

Flew on Hume’s Theory of Belief

Now, to be fair, we should acknowledge that neither Garrett (1997) nor Allison (2008), in either of their studies of Hume’s *Treatise*, Book 1, is particularly focused on Hume’s belief theory. Accordingly, each can be excused for what I would characterize an over-reliance on FLV terminology in their respective exegeses. Yet an earlier philosopher, Anthony Flew, wrote a monograph whose main topic is putatively Hume’s belief theory (entitled, not surprisingly, *Hume’s Philosophy of Belief* (1961)), but which, contrary to its title, actually deals mostly with other issues—e.g., impressions and ideas, causation, free will, and religion—perennially popular in the corpus of Humean secondary literature. Flew, like Reid and Allison, is also dismissive of Hume’s ‘theory’, such as it is: “It is not only inadequacies in the accepted account of thinking which vitiate Hume’s analysis of belief. It is also . . . the unsoundness of his assumptions about language” (Flew 1961, 103). As much of what Flew says about Hume is said from an “ordinary language” analytic stance, I will forego any detailed analysis of his criticisms of Hume, and will say only that his basic portrayal of Hume’s belief theory follows the

outlines of the Reid/Garrett/Allison view, which I call the “standard view”. That is to say, any cognitive change from a state of non-belief to belief involves a change in “the *manner* of our conceiving them”; this change then simply reduces to an increase in the intensity of “force and vivacity” (Flew 1961, 100; quoting the *Treatise*, without specific attribution, most probably from T, 1.3.7.4-5/96/N67; see also T, 2.3.7.3/428/N274, which contains the exact same quoted phrases).

Doubts Regarding FLV

Of course, not every writer has characterized Hume’s theory of belief as simply an FLV theory. Both Michael Gorman (1993), in providing us with a useful schema of the different ways in which Hume’s theory can be characterized, and Stacy Hansen (1988) give us early versions of what I will call a “feeling” theory of belief.

Gorman outlines four basic ways in which Hume characterizes the nature of belief:

Hume says that a belief is:

1. an idea conceived in a certain manner (e.g., E 49, T 96) [E, 5.12/49/B41; T, 1.3.7.4-5/96/N66-7];
2. that certain manner of conception itself (e.g., E 49, T 97) [E, 5.12/49/B41; T, 1.3.7.6/97/N67-8];
3. an idea that feels a certain way (e.g., E 48, T 97) [E, 5.11/48/B40; T, 1.3.7.8/97/N68; see also T, 1.3.7.7/App 629/N68];

4. that certain feeling itself (e.g., E 49, T 624, 629) [E, 5.12/48-9/B40-1; T, App 2-3/624/N396-7; T, 1.3.7.7/App 629/N68] (Gorman 1993: 89).

Gorman groups (1) and (2) under a “manner of conception” theory and (3) and (4) under a “feeling” theory of belief.

Yet, having opened a door to the possibility of seeing Hume’s theory in terms other than FLV, Gorman proceeds to slam that door shut: “[W]e can simply revise our interpretation [of Hume’s belief theory] to include impressions: a belief is any perception of the mind conceived with a sufficiently high degree of liveliness, which is to say any perception that has a sufficiently lively feeling to the mind” (Gorman 1993, 95). So, the FLV theory survives, with the amendment that whenever Hume refers to “feeling” this is to be subsumed under FLV as a “lively” feeling.

It remains for Hansen (along with other writers, such as Daniel Flage (1990)) to put forward a feeling theory of belief. On the Hansen-Flage reading (Gorman’s term; Gorman 1993, 93), “to say that a belief is an idea that is conceived in a certain manner or to say that a belief is an idea that feels a certain way is to say that it is an idea that is related to a certain kind of impression of reflection” (Gorman 1993, 93).

This is a precursor to the view that I am putting forth, namely that belief is a complex cognitive phenomenon, consisting of, firstly, ideational content, and secondly, the felt awareness/experience-of-content (either a coincident internal impression or an impression of reflection in reaction to that content), namely a feeling of cognitive commitment (the feeling of believing the ideational content). As support for this interpretation, I show that at least one type of normative judgment is also a matter of ideational content accompanied by an impression of reflection, that is, a feeling of

cognitive commitment or approval. Thus, my view resolves certain problems inherent in an FLV theory, problems which commentators have long portrayed as bedeviling Hume's system, particularly Hume's treatment of normative or evaluative judgment.

No Coherent Justification for Normative Judgments

The basic worry arising from the standard view of Hume's belief theory is this: Hume fails (or so it is claimed) to provide us with any convincing justification for normative judgments, whether in aesthetics, morals, or epistemology. Further, there is no coherent or consistent philosophic vision underlying his theory of normative judgment; rather, we get a number of ad hoc stipulations or suggestions, and an array of interesting, but ultimately inconsequential, philosophic puzzles (see Passmore 1952). We get naturalistic explanations—such as the common point of view, which has to be taken in order to communicate so-called objective statements about individuals (“Fred is a good person” as opposed to “I like Fred”)—but the worry is that these are merely explanations or, worse, psychological descriptions; as such, they fail to *justify* our practice of forming normative judgments. Instead, we get sceptical set pieces, which cause some of us to wonder whether any *normative* standard of belief is possible from a Humean perspective.

Another way to express this worry is to see Hume as lacking a consistent theoretical framework capable of dealing with the various types of normative judgments made by humans in all aspects of life. To cite just one example of this expression of worry, consider Jonathan Friday's comments in connection with Hume's “Standard of Taste”, that is, in connection with Hume's take on aesthetic normativity:

Hume's text encourages differing interpretations by appearing to identify a number of different standards of taste while continually suggesting there is

only one. At the very least, one can find Hume hinting at a rule standard, a decision standard, an ideal spectator standard, a test of time standard as well as the position that there is no standard of taste at all (Friday 1998, 545).

In what follows, I show that Hume does in fact have a coherent and consistent theory of belief and that this theory can be utilized to underpin an equally consistent theory of normativity, that is, of an ethics of belief.

Chapter 3: The Feeling Theory of Belief

As we saw in Chapter 2, what can be seen as “the standard view” of Hume’s theory of belief holds that belief is a vivid or lively or forceful idea, conceived in a manner different from an idea merely imagined or posited. But the notions of liveliness, vivacity, and related terms, if characterized as essential features of belief, are deeply flawed and lead to serious misunderstandings of important aspects of Hume’s theory of judgment.

Hume’s theory of belief/judgment is best understood in terms of affect or feeling, rather than in terms of “force”, “liveliness”, or “vivacity”—the FLV theory of belief. (In fact, my interpretation of Hume has a more wide-ranging consequence, namely that *all* perceptions, including impressions of sensation as well as thoughts, are best understood in terms of affect or feeling, since the experiencing of an impression or conceiving of an idea invariably involves a feeling or affect which is an inextricable, integral component of that “mental event”—the event or mental activity of being-aware-of-ideational-content). I will argue that, for Hume, a believed-in idea reduces to experiencing, first, what I call ideational content, and secondly, a feeling of cognitive commitment (possibly but not necessarily an impression of reflection) accompanying that content, which, in effect, indicates or manifests whether, and to what extent, the mind actually *believes* the content which is being experienced or conceived of. This indication or manifestation of believing can, I argue, either occur (i) at the same time as the mind experiences that content (as is the case with sensory impressions that are accepted as such by the mind), in which case the ideational content and the feeling of awareness of that content are only

rationaly distinct (along lines reminiscent of Hume’s “distinction of reason”) (T, 1.1.7.17-18/24-35/21-22; Ainslie, personal communication, 2010); or (ii) in a temporal sequence, as occurs upon reflection on a prior experience of content (for example, when previously conceived thoughts or experienced impressions are now believed, having previously been disbelieved or doubted).

I further argue that Hume's theory of belief may well apply to other types of judgment, namely *evaluative* judgements such as those made in the practical, moral, and aesthetics areas of human life. In sum, belief or judgment, whether factual or evaluative, involves a complex interaction of ideational content and reflective impressions (feelings of commitment or approval).

The “Retreat” From FLV

While Hume often seems to equate different degrees of “force and vivacity”, “liveliness”, “strength”, and other similar terms with this different feeling (see, for example, T, 1.3.7.7/629/N68; E, 5.12/49-50/B40-41), it is clear that, at least by the end of the *Treatise*, he realizes that the feeling of belief cannot, strictly speaking, be reducible to such terms. In the last comment in his Appendix, Hume admits as much:

The second error may be found in Book 1, page 67 [that is, at T, 1.3.7.5/96/N67], where I say, that two ideas of the same object can only be different by their different degrees of force and vivacity, I believe there are other differences among ideas, which cannot properly be comprehended under these terms. Had I said, that two ideas of the same object can only be different by their different feeling, I should have been nearer the truth (T, Appendix 22/636/N400-1).

Notice that Hume is here expressly claiming (albeit by way of a last minute admission) that the crucial, essential difference between a believed-in idea and one merely supposed, imagined, doubted, or disbelieved lies in a differentiation of feeling, a difference in the *felt experience* of the idea, rather than in any variance in the force or vivacity of that idea. Clearly, Hume is now claiming that each and every idea has a distinctive feeling, which feeling (itself a *felt impression* rather than a mere thought or idea or recollection of a feeling) is experienced as an inextricable component of the idea-as-experienced: “two ideas of the same object can only be different by their different feeling.”

Now, it is important to realize that when Hume refers to “two ideas of the same object”, he is referring to two distinct experiences, two distinct ideas-as-experienced—two different mental *events* of being-aware-of-content-in-a-particular-manner, each with the same ideational content, that is, the same “parts or composition of the idea, which we conceive” (T, 1.3.7.2/95/N66). The “object” of these different ideas-as-experienced—that is, their “parts or composition”—is what I refer to as ideational content, the object or subject matter of the mental event that is an idea-as-experienced. This ideational content is, on reflection, rationally distinguishable or notionally separable from the felt awareness-of-content which constitutes any idea as it is experienced by the mind, in much the same way that the colour of an object is distinguishable from the object itself, that is, by means of a “distinction of reason” (see T, 1.1.7.17-18/24-24/N21-22).

Of course, the experiencing of or felt awareness of that ideational content (that which is the subject matter of conceiving or experiencing) is not itself part of the ideational content *qua content*—it is not the phenomenally experienced intentional *object* or subject matter of the experienced idea. Rather, the *experiencing* of that content, which

is to say our *awareness* of the ideational content (which is a necessary condition of experiencing or “having” an idea), manifests or expresses itself as a *feeling*, a felt impression. Hume is implicitly saying that each of us knows *what-it-is-like* to experience ideational content, and that this what-it-is-like is a *feeling*, which occurs as an inextricable and inevitable component of the mental activity/event constituting an experience of ideational content.

(For a useful discussion of two different but complementary ways of understanding Hume’s use of the term “idea”, namely as either: (a) the activity of conceiving, or (b) the content of that activity, see Kemp 2000.)

The implications of this admission are far-reaching, even if Hume himself never fully acknowledges this to be the case. Hume, it must be admitted, refers to the error as one of “less importance” and continues, throughout the *Treatise*, and to a lesser degree, in the second *Enquiry*, to rely heavily on terms such as force and vivacity in his discussions of belief, as well as in his discussions of the difference between impressions and ideas. However, the admission is, notwithstanding Hume’s rather insouciant treatment of it, absolutely critical to a proper reading of Hume on belief. The correction is critical because whenever the text of the *Treatise* seems to indicate the centrality of “force” or “liveliness” or similar terms to a correct understanding of belief, we need to remember that such apparent centrality is an error and an illusion, and admitted as such in the Appendix.

Furthermore, in drafting the Appendix, Hume implicitly acknowledges the severe limitations of FLV language. In particular, consider the passage which, according to Hume’s instructions, was to be inserted into 1.3.7 of the *Treatise* (“Of the nature of the

idea or belief”), and which was repeated almost verbatim in the first *Enquiry* (see E, 5.12/49/B41), wherein Hume implicitly admits that FLV terminology is inadequate when used to describe the belief feeling:

An idea assented to *feels* different from a fictitious idea, that the fancy alone presents to us: And this different feeling I endeavour to explain by calling it a superior *force*, or *vivacity*, or *solidity*, or *firmness*, or *steadiness*. This variety of terms, which may seem so unphilosophical, is intended only to express that act of the mind, which renders realities more present to us than fictions, causes them to weigh more in the thought, and gives them a superior influence on the passions and imagination. Provided we agree about the thing, ’tis needless to dispute about the terms. . . . And in philosophy we can go no farther, than to assert, that it [i.e., belief] is something *felt* by the mind, which distinguishes the ideas of the judgment from the fictions of the imagination (T, 1.3.7.7/App 628-9/N68).

Among other things, Hume is here alluding to the difficulties inherent in describing mental phenomena, which are experienced at the same time as both complex—at least *rationally* differentiable into ideational content and attendant feeling of being aware of that content—and yet as also holistically simple, that is, experienced as a holistic mental event, and therefore experienced as “of-a-piece”, as not experientially differentiable, as experiences which cannot be reducible to other experiences.

When, for example, Hume refers to his intention “to express that act of the mind, which renders realities more present to us than fictions”, the “act of the mind” is a reference to the mental activity of experiencing content—ideational content that can either be of a “reality” such a sensory impression or a recollection thereof or of a “fiction”, some idea or thought that is imagined or considered, but not regarded as a memory or thought of something that actually obtains. But when Hume tells us that an

“idea assented to *feels* different from a fictitious idea” he can also be understood to be considering the entire mental activity or event of experiencing a believed-in idea as compared to experiencing a fictional idea. These are two experiences, two distinct awarenessess-of-content, experienced as wholes. An experience-of-content cannot, as it is in the process of being experienced, be separated into component experiences; it is experientially irreducible. You cannot conceive ideational content without having an experience-or-awareness-of-that-content. Further, you cannot recall the feeling of awareness-of-content, whether it is a feeling of cognitive commitment (belief) or of some other cognitive/affective relation to that content, without some notion of the content that was experienced. Any notional differentiation or rational distinction between the two ‘components’ of experience can only be made in a way that is identical to, or at least closely analogous to, the differentiation made between the colour of a perceived shape and the shape itself. No colour, no perceived shape. No felt awareness-of-content, no content experienced. (For Hume’s discussion of the “distinction of reason” that allows us, in a limited way on reflection, to differentiate the colour of an object from the object itself, see T, 1.1.7.17-18/24-25/N21-22. This will also be discussed in more detail later in the dissertation.)

Hume is also more obviously referring to difficulties inherent in the use of FLV terminology, and was well aware of this problem well before his suggested insertion of *Treatise* paragraph 1.3.7.7, to be inserted into his discussion regarding the nature of belief. For example, a few pages after T, 1.3.7.7, at T, 1.3.8.15, he states:

that ’tis very difficult to talk of the operations of the mind with perfect propriety and exactness; because common language has seldom made any very nice distinctions among them, but has generally call’d by the same term all such as

nearly resemble each other. And as this is a source almost inevitable of obscurity and confusion in the author; so it may frequently give rise to doubts and objections in the reader, which otherwise he wou'd never have dream'd of (T, 1.3.8.15/105/N73).

Here Hume is acknowledging the difficulty inherent in using terms such as “force”, “liveliness”, and “vivacity” (a bit later in paragraph 1.3.8.15, he refers to “a little ambiguity in those words *strong* and *lively*”), terms that in their ordinary usage have to do with physical interactions (in the case of force) and visual perception. Using such terms in an “unphilosophical” manner, that is, using them *analogically* or metaphorically to describe internal mental processes will, as Hume implicitly acknowledges, tend to mislead the unwary. In other words, FLV terminology can itself become “a source almost inevitable of obscurity and confusion” giving rise “to doubts and objections” (T, 1.3.8.15/105/N73).

It is therefore all the more important that we, as readers of Hume, constantly keep in mind, when we encounter FLV terminology, that, according to Hume’s own final, revised opinion, as delivered in his very last remarks in the *Treatise* Appendix, and as later confirmed in the first *Enquiry*, the essential feature of belief—the feature that differentiates a believed-in idea from an idea with the same content that is *not* believed—is, put simply, the *feeling* that accompanies the content of an idea. (More properly, it is the feeling component of the felt experience/awareness-of-ideational content, a component that is only notionally or rationally distinct from the entire, phenomenally holistic experience-of-content.) Further, as Hume reminds us in his Appendix insertion (T, 1.3.7.7/App 628-9/N68), he is merely using FLV terminology to

“explain” that “an idea assented to *feels* different from a fictitious idea”; FLV language “is intended only to express that act of the mind, which renders realities more present to us than fictions.” It is this belief feeling—the feeling that is the *subjectively experienced manifestation* of the “operation of the mind, which forms the belief of any matter of fact”—and *not* FLV per se, “which distinguishes the ideas of the judgment from the fictions of the imagination.” This is what the correction in Appendix 22 confirms, and this is why the correction is so vital to a proper understanding of Hume.

In other words, the correction amounts to an acknowledgement by Hume that the experiencing of content in a believing manner is a particular type of mental activity or cognitive and affective process—an “act of the mind”—the *activity* of believing, which *manifests* itself to the mind, and which is *expressed* by the mind, by means of the feeling of belief or cognitive commitment. This is the feeling, irreducible to any other felt experience and immediately recognized for what it is, that one *believes* that the content of the idea perceived is real or true. As Paul Wolff puts it, “Hume began the *Treatise* with the assumption that empirical knowledge [i.e., belief] could be explained by reference to the contents of the mind alone, and then made the profound discovery that it was the activity of the mind, rather than the nature of its contents, which accounted for all the puzzling features of empirical knowledge” (Wolff 1960, 289). What follows represents my justification for, and explication of, claims along these lines.

Hume’s Theory of Belief Formation

Hume is clear about one matter: the difference between a mere fiction (an idea that is merely understood or conceived without any belief or commitment) and a belief

(an idea actually believed) need not reside in any difference in ideational content. Ideational content, merely as content, is not the key to belief. As previously stated, the term “ideational content” is used in this dissertation to indicate that which Hume refers to as the “parts or composition of the idea, which we conceive” (T, 1.3.7.3/95/N66), “the objects, of which we were thinking” (T, 1.3.8.16/106/N74). In other words, “ideational content” refers to the object or *subject matter* of conceiving or perceiving, as opposed to the *activity* of the mind in experiencing that subject matter (in Hume’s own words, “the action of the mind in the meditation” (T, 1.3.8.16/106/N74); that which is “something felt by the mind, which distinguishes the ideas of the judgment from the fictions of the imagination” (T, 1.3.7.7/App 628-9/N68)). The contrast is between that-which-is-conceived/perceived/experienced-as-object-of-experience-during-the-activity-of-experiencing (ideational content), on the one hand, and the-felt-activity-or-process-of-experiencing-that-which-is-experienced, the felt awareness-of-content (manifested, experienced, and expressed by the mind as affect or feeling), on the other. Hume makes a distinction precisely along these lines, that is, between the “object” of thought and the activity of the mind in “the meditation” of that object, when he tells us that:

In thinking of our past thought we not only delineate out the objects, of which we were thinking, but also conceive the action of the mind in the meditation, that certain *je-ne-sçais-quoi*, of which 'tis impossible to give any definition or description, but which every one sufficiently understands (T, 1.3.8.16/106/N74).

Notice that this is an *empirical*, rather than theoretical, claim. Hume is asserting a phenomenal *fact* about thinking (and also a fact about any instance of experiencing

content), which we his readers, by introspective examination, by a “review of this act of the mind” (to take T, 1.3.13.12/150/N101 out of context), can recognize as a fitting description of *what it is like to think or to experience ideational content*. Thinking, as experienced and as reflected upon, has two components—ideational content and the activity of the mind in the “meditation” of that content (the felt-awareness-of-content)—components that, while experientially inextricable, are nonetheless rationally distinct. The two-fold nature of thinking is fully consonant with Hume’s feeling belief theory—the theory that belief is composed of ideational content and the belief feeling, the manifestation/expression of the mental activity involved in conceiving of ideational content in a believing manner.

Hume assures us that a change in the state of one’s belief (from belief to non-belief, or vice-versa, or even a change in the degree of belief) vis-à-vis a particular set of ideational content does not necessarily require any change in the “parts” or “composition” of that content. Ideational content can remain completely unchanged, yet the mind is nevertheless capable, at any given moment, of conceiving of that content as either believed-in-content or as content that is *not* believed. In other words, the mind is capable of *changing* its manner or mode of conceiving—a belief can *change* into a non-belief, a non-belief can evolve into a belief—even in cases wherein the ideational content has remained completely unchanged. Something in this “manner” of conception differentiates beliefs from non-believed-in ideas—a belief is *conceived in a different manner* from a mere fiction of the imagination. No addition to, or variation of, ideational content is required.

[T]he belief of the existence [of an object] joins no new ideas to those, which compose the idea of the object [i.e., ideational content]. But as ’tis certain there is

a great difference betwixt the simple conception of the existence of an object, and the belief of it, and as this difference lies not in the parts or composition of the idea, which we conceive; it follows that it must lie in the *manner*, in which we conceive it (T, 1.3.7.2/94-5/N66).

Just as the *essential* basis for any differentiation of beliefs from non-beliefs does not reside in some metric of FLV intensity, neither does it reside in ideational content qua content—the “parts or composition of the idea, which we conceive.” That is, we do not differentiate a believed-in idea, on the one hand, from a “mere fiction of the imagination,” on the other, simply by noticing some crucial difference in their respective ideational content. For if that were a prerequisite of a change in our state of belief, we could never change our belief state *regarding the same idea*—a change in the level of cognitive commitment would always require a change in ideational content. But that is precisely what Hume tells us is *not* essential to such a change in one’s belief state. Something else besides a mere alteration of ideational content is needed in order to change the extent of our cognitive commitments. What does Hume mean when he tells us that the key lies in the “manner” of conceiving of, or experiencing, ideational content?

Manner of Conceiving as an Essential Feature of Believing

When I disagree with another person, we may both be experiencing ideas with the same ideational content in all salient respects. (Recall Hume’s example, at T, 1.3.5.4/App 628/N60, of the two men, one of whom remembers and one of whom does *not* remember ideational content that can be schematically represented as “being-at-event-*x*-at-time-*y*”). Suppose we do in fact experience the same relevant ideational content, how then can one of us believe the content to be true, while the other is doubtful or actively disbelieves?

Hume's answer varies in terminology: sometimes FLV language is used (as in T, 1.3.5.3/85/N60), sometimes he refers to "the very same ideas" having a "different feeling from what they had before." (Significantly, this is in an Appendix insertion: T, 1.3.5.4/App 628/N60. As far as I can tell, all references to "feeling" in connection with belief are Appendix addenda and insertions, rather than original text. This is significant because it bolsters my contention that Hume "retreated" from an FLV theory of belief by the time he had drafted the Appendix.)

But whatever the terminology, the difference in our respective states of belief ultimately derives from the different manners or ways in which each of us conceives of and experiences that ideational content. States of belief or lack thereof are not tied to ideational content in and of itself.

Now, the term "manner" in phrases such as "manner of forming an idea" (T, 1.3.7.6/97/N67-8) and "in the manner, in which we conceive" (T, 1.3.7.3/94-5/N66), can apply to either or both the phenomenal *experience* of the idea, that is, the manner or way in which ideational content is experienced, and/or to its causal history, the manner or way in which the ideational content has *come to be* experienced.

This ambiguity in the meaning can be seen from the two formulations of "manner" which Hume uses: sometimes he refers to belief as an idea conceived in a certain manner, which fits the causal interpretation; on other occasions, he refers to belief as the very manner of conception of an idea, which lends itself more easily to the phenomenal experience interpretation. Consider the following: "belief is somewhat more than a simple idea. 'Tis a particular manner of forming an idea" (T, 1.3.7.6/97/N67-8). Here, a causal interpretation fits well. A belief is an idea formed in a certain way; that is, belief

is “produc’d by” (i.e., caused by) a certain “relation to a present impression” (T, 1.3.7.6/97/N68). In other words, a belief is formed according to a certain causal chain or causal history. This causal definition fits with, and is said by Hume to follow from, the definition of belief most often cited by those who maintain the “standard” view: “belief does nothing but vary the manner, in which we conceive any object . . . An opinion, therefore, or belief may be most accurately defin’d, A LIVELY IDEA RELATED TO OR ASSOCIATED WITH A PRESENT IMPRESSION” (T, 1.3.7.5/96/N67). In fact, this definition of belief, while fitting well with the causal interpretation, in its reliance on the believed-in idea being “associated” with an occurrent impression, also fits with the phenomenal experience aspect of belief in its use of FLV terminology—belief as a “lively idea.”

Problems with the Term “Lively” in the 1.3.7.5 Definition

Reference to this, the “classic” definition of belief, at least within the canon of what I have called the “standard” view, requires a further seemingly parenthetical but in fact quite crucial comment, having to do with the nature of the “manner” of conceiving, as set forth in the afore-mentioned definition. After all, this particular definition is perhaps the most often cited and influential Humean definition of belief in the secondary literature, as well as being a formulation repeated by Hume in a number of passages in the *Treatise*. Furthermore, it *prima facie* lends itself to an FLV explication of Hume’s belief theory, in that the notion of “a lively idea” plays such a central role. But it is seldom, if ever, noted that the definition is derived from the following premises, all from *Treatise* paragraph 1.3.7.5/96/N67:

Premise (i): “When you would any way vary the idea of a particular object, you can only increase or diminish its force and vivacity. If you make any other change on it, it represents a different object or impression”;

Premise (ii): “belief does nothing but vary the manner, in which we conceive any object”; therefore (from (i) and (ii)):

Conclusion (iii): “[belief] can only bestow on our ideas an additional force and vivacity.”

Now, the above argument is *fundamental* to the “standard” FLV take on Hume’s belief theory, in that it is the main argument provided by Hume for an FLV interpretation of belief as a mental phenomenon. Therefore, it is of crucial importance that we pay attention to the implications of Hume’s express repudiation of premise (i) in his Appendix correction: “I believe there are other differences among ideas, which cannot properly be comprehended under these terms [i.e., under FLV terminology of “different degrees of force and vivacity’].” Instead of relying on FLV as the essential mode of belief differentiation amongst ideational content, as his initial draft of Book 1 of the *Treatise* would imply, Hume tells us that, “two ideas of the same object can only be different by their different *feeling*” (T, App 22/636/N401; emphasis in the original). Now, it is vitally important to recall that, under my interpretation, when Hume refers to “two ideas of the same object”, he is referring to two distinct cognitive *experiences*, two distinct ideas-as-experienced—that is to say, two different mental *events* of being-aware-of-content-in-a-particular-manner, each with the same (i.e., indistinguishable) ideational content. Variation in one’s belief state or felt-awareness-of-ideational-content is now acknowledged to be essentially tied to a variation in feeling, which is the manifestation of

a change in the mind's activity in experiencing content, a change in the manner or way in which that content is experienced. As a consequence, premise (i), which is of fundamental importance to the FLV version of Hume's theory, no longer obtains; that is, Hume has, by his remarks at Appendix 22, disavowed its accuracy.

In light of Hume's last-minute Appendix 22 amendment, premise (i) should now be amended to read along the following lines, with the proposed revisions italicized:

Premise (i) [amended]: When you would any way vary the idea [i.e., the felt awareness-of-content] of a particular object [i.e., ideational content], you can only [*change the feeling that attends upon the awareness-of-content, that is, change the felt-awareness-of-content*]. If you make any other change on it, it represents a different object or impression. [That is, any other change will involve a change in ideational content. As Hume says, in his Appendix 22 correction: "two ideas of the same object can only be different by their different *feeling*."]

Of course, this amendment to premise (i), if accepted as a consequence of Hume's Appendix correction, vitiates FLV as a useful way to characterize the phenomenal experience of believing in ideational content. The only way to avoid this consequence is to characterize the belief feeling itself as intrinsically a matter of FLV, something more than one commentator has done. But to claim that the belief feeling reduces to FLV is to ignore, by means of an ad hoc stipulation, the clear import of Hume's Appendix correction; in fact, such an interpretation renders Hume's correction otiose and meaningless. Recall that Hume expressly admits that FLV cannot account for all differences in the way the same ideational content is conceived of:

there are other differences among ideas, which cannot properly be comprehended under [FLV] terms. Had I said, that two ideas of the same object can only be different by their different feeling, I should have been nearer the truth” (T, Appendix 22/636/N400-1).

Clearly, we cannot simply subsume FLV terminology under the notion of a “believing feeling”, and still remain true to the intent of Hume’s Appendix correction. Therefore, if we are to take Hume at his word—in his *final* correction to, and hence his final word on, the *Treatise*—we must accept that belief is *not* a matter of FLV intensity, notwithstanding Hume’s repeated references to it along those lines. The Appendix correction thus has a wide-ranging effect on the *Treatise* and on a proper interpretative reading of it.

To discuss an obvious instance wherein reinterpretation is called for, consider the example Hume uses, immediately after premise (i), namely his use of a colour analogy, made in support of FLV:

If you make any other change on it [i.e., on or to ideational content], it represents a different object or impression. The same is the case as in colours. A particular shade of any colour may acquire a new degree of liveliness or brightness without any other variation. But when you produce any other variation, ’tis no longer the same shade or colour (T, 1.3.7.5/96/N67).

Consider how this analogy to colour can be seen to be true to how we experience colours. To say that a specific “shade of any colour” becomes brighter or livelier is to posit an external physical world of colours, or at least an external world of coloured objects, in which the specific shade of that colour is independent of my internal perception or experience of the colour. For example, consider a wall, which in normal light is a greyish shade of white, or “off-white.” In extremely bright sunlight, or under bright klieg lights,

the wall appears to be bright white—same wall, same hue of coloration (of coloured physical or, perhaps better, perceptual atoms) on the wall. The addition of brightness is not thought, under our common sense view of the world, to have changed the actual physical colour of the wall. Hence, Hume’s claim that we are dealing with the “same shade or colour” appeals to our everyday, common sense intuitions.

But, clearly, the actual *experience* of the wall has changed, in that the ideational content itself has changed, which would perforce result in a change in the felt awareness-of-that-(now *altered*)-content. The observer of the wall in ordinary light sees a greyish hue; under brighter light, the observer now sees a swath of bright white. And here is where the colour analogy breaks down. These are experiences with *very different* ideational content.

Therefore, from the vantage point of ideational content, that is, from the vantage point of the ideational content which is the subject matter of the (new) felt awareness-of-content, a change in liveliness or brightness in the realm of colour (*experiential content*) is precisely the kind of change that results in a *change* in that content. Hume’s colour example, far from supporting an FLV version of belief theory, subverts it. If FLV is central to the belief-feeling, then the *only* way one can change one’s belief state is *by a change in ideational content*, as in the difference between “brighter” content—the bright white appearance of the well-lit wall—and “duller” content—the greyish hue of the normally lit wall. Hume’s final Appendix correction recognizes this deep problem, a problem which confronts any version of an FLV theory of belief.

(If we wonder why this is a “deep” problem, we need only remember that, according to Hume, ideational content is not supposed to be the key to variations in one’s

belief-state. That is, a change in content is *not* the essential pre-condition to a change in judgment or state of belief; the same exact content is, according to Hume, capable of forming part of a felt experience-of-content that constitutes believing in the content, even when one has previously not believed in the exact same content. Any FLV theory of belief, on the other hand, requires that, at least on some occasions, a change in content *would* be requisite, since there are instances where FLV forms part of the content of an experience, as opposed to forming part of the felt awareness-of-content.)

Even if I am not correct—that is, even if a commentator can show that Hume’s colour example, if accurate, would support premise (i) as originally formulated—we need to realize that premise (i) is, by implication of Hume’s own admission in the Appendix, *false*. Therefore, by a *reductio*, Hume’s colour example is also false, or at least subject to serious doubt, since it presents itself as an (albeit analogous) example of the now discredited premise.

If, on the other hand, and contrary to what I have argued, a persuasive case can be made that the ideational content of brighter colours is *not* different from the content of the “same” colours experienced under dimmer lighting conditions, the fact remains that the example is no longer supportive of (indeed, it is not relevant to) Hume’s actual, fully considered position, that is, his position as amended by the Appendix paragraph 22 correction. It is therefore doubtful, at least insofar as it purports to represent Hume’s actual position on colour experience. It is doubly doubtful, in that it seems to go against Hume’s final, well considered views on how the same ideational content can be viewed in varying ways.

In any event, if premise (i) should be amended as I have suggested, the entire argument can now be amended as follows, all from *Treatise* paragraph 1.3.7.5/96/N67:

Premise (i): When you wou'd any way vary the [felt awareness-of-content] of a particular object [i.e., ideational content], you can only [*change the feeling component of the awareness-of-content, that is, change the felt-awareness-of-content*]. If you make any other change on it, it represents a different object or impression. [That is, any other change will involve a change in ideational content.]

Premise (ii): belief does nothing but vary the manner, in which we conceive [that is, *the manner or way in which we experience/are-aware-of-content*] any object [i.e., ideational content]; therefore (from (i) and (ii)):

Conclusion (iii): [belief] can only bestow on our ideas [i.e. on ideational content as experienced as the attended-to *subject matter* of a felt awareness-of-content] *an attendant feeling different from the feeling that attends upon the same ideational content, conceived of, but not believed in* [that is, the felt awareness-of-content must now be different from the original felt awareness of the same content].

The result of this is: Hume's "classic" definition of belief, in the last sentence of *Treatise* paragraph 1.3.7.5, must also be amended so that the definition's reference to belief as a "lively idea" now reflects Hume's considered opinion that believed-in ideational content has a different *feeling* from content that is merely conceived, but not believed. The significance of this cannot be overemphasized. The FLV notion of a "lively" idea *no longer has any function within the definition of belief*. Hume's final correction in the

Appendix entails that his belief theory is a feeling theory, not an FLV theory. Therefore, any requirement that a believed-in idea must be “lively” should now be read (throughout the *Treatise*) as follows: a believed-in idea is a *felt experience-of-content* whereby the feeling is one of cognitive commitment to (that is, a belief feeling in) the truth or reality of the ideational content which is the subject matter of the (believing) experience. The notion of “liveliness”, like all usages of FLV terminology is merely a metaphor or “unphilosophical” term for this affective component or aspect of the believing-experience-of-content.

Manner of Conceiving as Feeling

The aforementioned revision, replacing the FLV term “lively” with affect or feeling as determinative of belief, fits well with another formulation of belief, which Hume, inserts only a few lines later, significantly by means of an Appendix addition: “’tis evident that belief consists not in the nature and order of our ideas, but in the manner of their conception, and *in their feeling to the mind*” (T, 1.3.7.7/App 629/N68; emphasis added.) See also the first *Enquiry*, where Hume makes this same statement in almost identical language: “it is evident that belief consists not in the peculiar nature or order of ideas, but in the *manner* of their conception, and in their *feeling* to the mind” (E, 5.12/49/B41). Here, as elsewhere, the use of the term “manner” can refer to either or both of:

- (i) the *causal history* of believing or otherwise cognizing ideational content—the way in which the felt awareness-of-content has come about; and/or

- (ii) the *phenomenal feel* of believing or otherwise cognizing ideational content—the *felt* experience or awareness of that content.

If my interpretation is correct, then the phrase “feeling to the mind” should be read to refer to the felt experience/awareness-of-content. In this latter formulation of belief as a “feeling to the mind”, a “phenomenal experience” interpretation fits more easily, and when it does, we see Hume clearly relying on “feeling” terminology, rather than on the language of FLV. Belief is both a way of *processing* (that is, a manner or way or process of conceiving) ideational content and a way of *experiencing* that content (the felt experience/awareness-of-content). Specifically, I am positing that belief-feelings are *manifestations* of the mind’s activity while it undergoes the *process* of experiencing content, which experience can (in situations of cognitive commitment) be felt as a “believing” type of conceiving. Consider, once again, what Hume is stating: “belief [consists] in their [i.e. in the ideas’] feeling to the mind.” In other words, belief is a *different felt experience*—a different “feeling to the mind”—of what is taken to be the *same ideational content*.

Same content, different experience—how can that be? What can a “different manner of conception” mean? How can the same perceived content be experienced in a different way without a corresponding change in content? Here we have the elements of a dilemma. On the one hand, if we posit that a change from a belief-state to a state of non-belief (and vice versa) requires some sort of change in ideational content, we would find that, contrary to our phenomenal experience, we would, strictly speaking, be unable to change our mind about a particular, specific idea or proposition. Here, the analogy

between beliefs as being instances of “having conceiv’d the object . . . in a different manner” (T, 1.3.7.4/95/N66) and experiencing colours in a “different manner”, as when I see the greyish wall in normal light and then under brighter light—first as grey or off-white and then as bright white—actually works as an analogy supportive of a theory of belief *contrary* to Hume’s actual theoretical position. That is, the colour analogy supports a theory positing some short of *change* in ideational content (i.e., a change in the FLV intensity level of the content). If believed-in content is somehow “brighter”—possessing a higher intensity of FLV—than “duller”, merely-conceived-of, ideational content, then believed-in ideas *do, of necessity*, have content differences from their non-believed-in counterparts. And if that is the case, believed-in content would have at least some affinity with Descartes’ notion that “clear and distinct” ideational content is to be believed, while “duller”, less clearly distinct content should not result in cognitive commitment. But, again, such a picture of belief goes completely against Hume’s *fundamental* position that absolutely no change in ideational content is requisite for a change in one’s belief-state. (See, for example, T, 1.3.7.2/94-5/N66, written *before* Hume’s Appendix 22 correction to his FLV theory of belief: “But as ’tis certain there is a great difference betwixt the simple conception of the existence of an object, and the belief of it, and as this difference lies not in the parts or composition of the idea, which we conceive; it follows, that it must lie in the manner, in which we conceive it.” The “parts or composition” refers to ideational content; a change in the brightness of a coloured experience would constitute a change in the “composition” of ideational content. The “manner, in which we conceive it” refers to the felt experiencing/awareness-of-that-content.)

And conscious experience tells us that, far from being unable to change our minds about most, if not all, ideational content, such changes in our belief states occur on a regular, almost continual basis, often without any discernible change in any FLV metric. For example, one moment I think “I don’t believe the keys are on the coffee table”; the very next moment, I recall putting them there. One moment, the ideational content of an object at a particular location is not believed; then next moment, it *is* believed, without any perceivable or significant change in ideational content or FLV. There is no discernible difference in the *vivacity* or *liveliness* of either case (not believing “x” one moment, believing “x” to in fact be the case in the next moment)—our belief state is “not to be measur’d by the apparent agitation of the mind” (T, 1.3.10.10/App 631/N85), but rather by the *different feeling* in the experience/awareness-of-content from one moment (not believing that “x” is the case) to the next (suddenly realizing that “x” is indeed the case).

Recall also Hume’s Appendix example of the two men discussing an event that one of them does not, at first, recall. Hume tells us that, upon remembering the event, the heretofore forgetful one experiences a change in *feeling*:

Here the person that forgets receives at first all the ideas from the discourse of the other, with the same circumstances of time and place; tho’ he considers them as mere fictions of the imagination. But as soon as the circumstance is mention’d, that touches the memory, the very same ideas [i.e., the same ideational content] now appear in a new light, and have, in a manner, a different feeling from what they had before. *Without any alteration, beside that of the feeling*, they become

immediately ideas of the memory, and are assented to (T, 1.3.5.4/App 628/N60; emphasis added).

While there might in fact be a greater “apparent agitation of the mind” when one suddenly remembers an event, this need not be the case; feeling, not FLV, is determinative.

Now, if we claim that no change in ideational content is required, we are confronted with the same perceived content engendering different belief states. The question is how, within Hume's system, this can be the case. Relying on FLV terminology does not solve the problem; it merely provides a *metaphor* or analogy for the phenomenally experienced fact that “something” is different in a mind that now believes certain ideational content—content which, a moment ago, was subject to doubt or even disbelief.

Hume’s solution, to express this difference as a difference in the *manner* of conceiving of the ideational content in question, indicates (when understood causally) that some activity of the mind has changed—the way (or the manner) in which the mind conceives of the ideational content has changed in some way. But “manner”, as I have already noted, besides alluding to the *causal* way or manner in which a belief has been conceived or arrived at, can also refer to the mode of presentation, that is, the way in which the content is *experienced or felt*. Hence, Hume reformulates his “manner of conception theory” of belief (MCT, following Gorman 1993) in terms of feeling, implicitly as manifestation of that change in mental activity:

- the very same ideas now appear in a new light, and *have*, in a manner, a *different feeling* from what they had before (T, 1.3.5.4/App 628/N60; emphasis added);

- the difference between *fiction* and *belief* lies in some sentiment or *feeling*, which is *annexed to* the latter, not to the former (E, 5.11/48/B40; emphasis added to the word “feeling”);
- belief consists not in the nature and order of our ideas, but. . . in their *feeling to* the mind . . . it is something *felt* by the mind, which distinguishes the ideas of the judgment from the fictions of the imagination (T, 1.3.7.7/App 629/N68; emphasis added to “feeling”; emphasis on “felt” in the original);
- the ideas it [i.e., a fictional, poetical description] presents are different to the *feeling* from those, which arise from the memory and the judgment (T, 1.3.10.10/App 631/N85; emphasis in original);
- Whenever any object is presented to the memory or senses, it immediately, by the force of custom, carries the imagination to conceive the object, which is usually conjoined with it, and this conception is *attended with a feeling* or sentiment, different from the loose reveries of the fancy. In this consist the whole nature of belief This conception [i.e., content that is believed] . . . *feels very differently* from that conception [i.e., content which is not believed] (E, 5.11/48/B40; emphasis added).

Firstly, I want to emphasize again that none of these references to feeling as determinative of belief come from the *Treatise* as *originally* drafted (that is, at the time books 1 and 2 were originally published). All of these passages are from the Appendix or the first *Enquiry*. They show us that the FLV theory has taken a back seat to the feeling theory of belief. Further, they demonstrate a significant shift from Hume's apparent FLV theory in the original draft of the *Treatise* to his final considered feeling theory, in the Appendix and first *Enquiry* (see, e.g., Millican 2002).

Secondly, I have added emphasis to certain phrases about feeling in the above quotations in order to highlight the only way Hume can coherently claim that a belief can have exactly the same ideational content as a non-belief, while at the same time claiming that there is a difference between believing and not believing. The phrases "have a different feeling", "feeling annexed to", "feeling to the mind", "attended with a feeling", and the like all indicate that, besides the subject matter of the idea itself (that is, the ideational content which is the object of experience) the mind also experiences a feeling, which varies as the "manner" of conceiving that content varies. To be clear: the term "manner" is used in connection with both the causal factors leading to the belief state and to the feeling or affective state which is an essential component of the belief state and which acts as a manifestation of the mental activity resulting from those causal factors.

This follows from Hume's interchangeable treatment of manner. That is, in referring to our "manner" of conceiving, he means both the *means* by which we arrive at belief and what it *feels* like to believe. A change in the manner of conceiving means a change in the activity of the mind as it conceives of the content in question. The change in feeling is thus a *manifestation* of that change in activity. In fact, as far as the mind's

phenomenal experiencing is concerned, the feeling *just is* the activity of the mind, given that the feeling is the only empirical evidence available to the conscious mind that such activity is occurring. (We need to keep in mind that, for Hume, our notions of “action” and “activity” are theoretical constructs, arising out the mind’s elision from one atomic experience at one atomic instant to another such experience, and so one, with the set of experiences constructed by the mind into an action.

In other words, the best way to understand “manner of conception” and its relation to “feeling to the mind” (as, for example, in the *Treatise*, 1.3.7.7/App 629/N68 when the two phrases are treated as either equivalent in meaning or co-incident in occurrence) is to see that the manner of conceiving, in its *causal* sense—that is, as referring to the activity of the mind in experiencing believed-in content—is made *manifest* to the mind by feeling, both by the feelings engendered by the activity itself (i.e., awareness that one is experiencing ideational content), and in the belief-feelings that evidence to the mind that the content is *assented to* (as well as the extent to which it is assented to). This belief feeling is an impression; it is a *sensation* of the mind, *felt* (not merely thought) as and when the mind experiences content which is believed. “Every one of himself will readily perceive the difference betwixt feeling and thinking” (T, 1.1.1.1/2/N7). Belief is *not* the result of a “purely rational” (that is, non-affective) aggregation of ideas superadded onto pre-existing bits of ideational content by means of a purely rational, non-affective, cogitative process—a process that supposedly continues until belief emerges. This is decidedly *not* Hume’s picture of how cognitive commitment emerges within the human mind. (Again, recall paragraph 1.3.7.2/94-5/N66: “But as ’tis certain there is a great difference betwixt the simple conception of the existence of an

object, and the belief of it, and as this difference lies not in the parts or composition of the idea, which we conceive; it follows, that it must lie in the manner, in which we conceive it.” Once again, on my interpretation of Hume, the “parts or composition” refers to ideational content; the “manner, in which we conceive it” refers to the felt experiencing/awareness-of-that-content.)

Hence Hume’s famous (to some, notorious) claim: “belief is more properly an act of the *sensitive*, than of the *cogitative* part of our natures” (T, 1.4.1.8/183/N123; emphasis removed from all words, except “sensitive” and “cogitative”). Hume’s *experimental* or introspective examination of human cognition (as per the *Treatise*’s subtitle, this is part of Hume’s “attempt to introduce the experimental method of reasoning into moral subjects”) has revealed that discursive, cogitative, content-focussed, purely rationalistic processes of the mind will not, by themselves *absent feeling or affect*, result in *any* cognitive commitment whatsoever.

Ideational content is, after all, not a *thing*, but rather part of an *experience*—part of a *process* of perceiving or conceiving. More accurately perhaps, in this context we should characterize an idea, in the sense of ideational content, as the “object” or subject matter of perception: “that which is perceived.” During the moments when the belief-state of the mind changes, the mind is actively experiencing, among a myriad of other related and unrelated sets of ideational content, the exact same, or apparently identical, attended-to ideational content, content which continues, throughout the mind’s activity, to be the “object”, the subject matter of belief (or non-belief). Something must be different within the mind, since we experience a belief-state in a different manner or way from a non-belief state (that is, the felt awareness/experience-of-content now has a

different *phenomenal feel*). The difference, insofar as that difference is experienced, is *caused* by the operations or activity of the mind in perceiving the (same, unchanged, or apparently identical) ideational content; these operations form part of the causal story, if you will, of how this particular ideational content, experienced at this particular time, came to be so experienced (the “causal” meaning of “manner of conception”).

But there is, as we have seen, another aspect to the notion of the “manner of conception”, namely the phenomenal experience or the feeling experienced when content is conceived. In other words, the activity of the mind in conceiving of ideational content, which is itself different in the case of belief, *manifests* itself by a different feeling experienced by the mind, as it (actively) conceives, via the operations of the mind, the ideational content that is the “object” of the change in belief-state. Put in yet another way, this different feeling is the *phenomenally experienced manifestation* of whatever differences (i.e., changes or activities) are occurring in the operation of the mind. The different feeling is a reflection of a different manner of conceiving the same ideational content.

Belief as Content and Affect

Belief, then, is an operation or activity of the mind (T, 1.3.7.7/App 628-9/N68); in Hume's words, belief is a particular “manner of conception” or way of conceiving ideational content. Now, we should recall that Hume is a phenomenal atomist: each perceptual experience is composed of an extremely large, but theoretically determinate, set of minima, and each perception is perceived for a determinate duration of time (time being made up of distinct, atomically minimal instants): “our ideas of [time and space]

are compounded of parts, that are indivisible”; “extension, consists of several lesser impressions, that are indivisible to the eye. . . and may be called impressions of atoms or corpuscles endow’d with colour and solidity” (T, 1.2.3.12, 1.2.3.15/38/N30).

Any action or operation or activity, therefore, can only be experienced as a complex impression, consisting of a multiple (usually quite large) number of individual perceptions, occurring in an inconceivably rapid sequence over a determinate duration of time (each separate perception of that action occurring during an minimal instant of time). Strictly speaking, we do not experience any “action” or activity or process or event at all. We only experience a perception at the exact (atomically minimal) instant the object of perceiving (the ideational content of the experience) comes into our perceptual field; the next instant, and all instants following, we *remember* that content or some portion of it, even as other (often perceptually or apparently identical) instantiations of content are being experienced, in the constantly changing flow of experience. Given that an action is a sequence of instances, experienced over a period of time, we therefore have a series of (atomic) experiences over time, and as we so perceive, we also remember perceptions that preceded that which we are currently experiencing, so we have a flow of experiences and overlapping memories: “a bundle of particular perceptions which succeed one another with an inconceivable rapidity and are in a perpetual flux and movement”, with thoughts and memories even more variable than impressions of sensation (T, 1.4.6.4/252/N165). As Hume says about time itself, action or activity is posited by the mind “altogether from the manner, in which impressions appear to the mind” (T, 1.2.3.10/36/N29). Thoughts must be even more variable than immediate impressions of sensation and of feeling, since our mind also anticipates upcoming

perceptions via causal inference, and is therefore continually constructing a system of “realities” (T, 1.3.9.3-4/108/N75).

It is important to realize that, according to Hume’s own empirical strictures, the activity of the mind alluded to in various passages, is never *directly* experienced—all that can be directly experienced are the ever-changing (atomistic) perceptions of the mind, in the form of either ideational content or feelings reflective of, or co-occurring with, that content itself or with the mind’s (posited) activity in experiencing that content. Of course, the mind’s activity—its manner of conception—does *seem* to manifest itself directly to us. Consider, for example, Donald Ainslie’s comments, in a personal communication: “A mental object and the mental act by which we are aware of it are only rationally distinct. I take the act ... to *be* the feeling of the perception” (Ainslie, personal communication, 2010; emphasis in the original). Ainslie, as I understand him, takes the feeling just to be the activity of the mind, whereas I contend that Hume can only claim that the feeling is the experiential *evidence* by which we *theorize* that some mental activity is occurring. That is, mental activity certainly manifests or “shows” itself to the mind as a *feeling*—if I believe a certain idea, this means that I experience the ideational content of the idea, and also that I experience a certain set of feelings, feelings that may, but need not, involve a degree of cognitive commitment to (or belief in) the content of the idea. But we should remember that, strictly speaking, *activity* (as opposed to individual perceptions, experienced in a minimal duration of time) is *posited* by the mind as a relative idea, as that which causes certain feelings or affects or which is manifest to the mind as feeling. Our feelings are our *best evidence* of mental activity but they are not mental activity *per se*; the actual activity of the mind is never directly experienced.

Nevertheless, the notion of feeling as equivalent to, as opposed to merely indicative of, mental activity is intuitively attractive. Ainslie's equation of feeling and activity is a natural leap, if you will. After all, as Hume tells us in Book 2 of the *Treatise*, each item of ideational content has at least one attendant feeling which constitutes an affective reaction to the felt awareness-of-content, as evidenced by a certain "movement of spirits" (T, 2.2.8.4/373/N240)—that is, as evidenced by *mental activity*. This "movement" of the mind's "spirits", an affect or emotion, is my next topic of discussion.

"Emotion" Attends Ideational Content

It is always important to recognize just how intricate and complex is Hume's picture of cognition during the mind's experience of its perceptions. In addition to his belief theory, focussing as it does on the feelings of cognitive commitment which are reflective of, or at least co-occurrent with, the mind's activity in conceiving and experiencing ideational content in a believing fashion, notice Hume further claims that the mind also experiences feelings attendant upon, and in reaction to, the content itself, simply as content, feelings which are experientially different from, and hence separable from, belief-feelings. Hume does not mention this remarkable empirical claim in Book 1, but does label it "this new discovery of an impression, that secretly attends every idea [i.e., ideational content]" in Book 2 (T, 2.2.8.7/375/N241). Ideational content, whether in the form of "an object presented to the senses" or a mere thought (an "image form'd in the fancy") is, Hume tells us,

accompany'd with some emotion or movement of spirits, proportion'd to it; and however custom may make us insensible of this sensation, and cause us to

confound it with the object or idea [i.e., with ideational content as content or object of experience], 'twill be easy, by careful and exact experiments, to separate and distinguish them (T, 2.2.8.4/373/N240).

The implications of this “new discovery”, realized by “careful and exact experiments” of an introspective and reflective nature, are profound. In brief, the experience of ideational content is *always* accompanied by a complex weaving of different types of feeling—the feelings which manifest the mind’s activity in conceiving of that content, but also the feelings engendered by the content itself, the mind’s affective response to content. Habituation and inattention may make us “insensible” of these attendant feelings, but they are present nonetheless, and can, “by careful and exact experiments” be recognized. Any form of reasoning, whether demonstrative or causal, will therefore have attendant feelings, since each of the “objects” of reasoning will be accompanied by some “emotion or movement of spirits, proportion’d to it”. Not only belief, which is often the result of reasoning processes, but reasoning itself, has an ineliminable affective aspect.

Now, reasoning, being a discursive process occurring over time, involves the *activity* of the mind, in much the same way that our experience of anything over time requires mental activity. But we need to again remind ourselves that, within the strictures of Hume’s system, his notion of the “activity” of the mind is a *theoretical* construct, in that the “farthest we can go towards a conception [of mental activity] when supposed specifically different from our perceptions, is to form a relative idea” of such activity (T, 1.2.6.9/68/N49). As Hume states, “the word, action . . . can never be justly be apply’d to any perception [that is, to any single perceptual instance], as deriv’d from a mind or

thinking substance. Our perceptions are all really different, and separable, and distinguishable from one another” (T, 1.4.5.27/245/N160).)

This points to a further layer of complexity, already alluded to, in Hume’s basic theory of impressions and ideas. Hume’s theory of belief, properly understood, portrays the mind, when it actively conceives of *any* ideational content (including the ideational content of impressions of sensation), as experiencing at least two different components of perception (components that while notionally or theoretically separable—that is, “separable” but only by a distinction of reason—are yet, as a *contingent fact* of human cognition, always co-occurring, and experienced as inseparable while perceived). These components are:

- (i) ideational content, or the object or subject matter of the perception; and
- (ii) the mind's manner or way of *experiencing* that content, which can manifest itself as, or give rise to, a feeling of belief (or of non-belief).

On my interpretation, Hume’s theory is unclear as to whether the experiencing of content in a believing manner (such that there is a believing affective aspect to the felt experience/awareness-of-content) will invariably give rise to a subsequent, new impression, i.e., an impression of reflection, or whether the feeling of assent, at least in the case of impressions of sensation, could more properly be thought of as temporally co-occurrent with the mind’s experiencing (felt awareness) of ideational content. In the latter case, the mind’s activity in experiencing the content of an impression of sensation would result in two simultaneous components of experience: the ideational content of that which is experienced (say, an external object such as an apple) along with the various feelings

experienced as one's mind *processes* that content, processes or activities of the mind which will manifest as, *inter alia*, the feeling of assent or belief in the reality of that which is the object of experience (say, the apple). Under this scenario, whatever is causing the ideational content is, at the same time, also causing the mental activity involved in the experience of that content *and* the feeling manifested by that activity.

In sum, I am claiming that the belief feeling, at least insofar as it involves ideas rather than immediate impressions of sensation (ideas, that is, such as memories or causal inferences) operates as the manifestation of, and reaction to, the manner of conceiving (i.e., the activity of the mind in experiencing content). In other words, the feeling of belief (or of any lesser degree of cognitive commitment) *could be*, in such cases, an impression of reflection, and hence could occur *after* the initial experience of ideational content. (As I argue later in this dissertation, nothing much turns on this; in any event, introspection of the mind's mental activity and experiences will not provide us with a definite answer to this question.) Recall that impressions of reflection are "deriv'd from" (which is usually thought to entail that they occur *after*) impressions of sensation, and include all affects or feelings, such as "passions, desires, and emotions" (T, 1.1.2.1/8/N11). Whether the belief feeling involved in our experience of sense impressions is an impression of reflection is also an open question.

The Dual Aspect of Perception

We should note that the implications of this claim are quite radical and controversial. For example, if I am correct, then a proper reading of Hume entails that even though perceptions (including of course all impressions of sensation) are, as it were,

experienced as of-a-piece, as one experience, they are nevertheless at least *rationally* or notionally complex. Recall that, according to Hume, any thought (and by my argued-for extension, any experience of ideational content) has two aspects or components, the ideational content, and the activity of the mind in the meditation on that content:

In thinking of our past thought we not only delineate out the objects, of which we were thinking, but also conceive the action of the mind in the meditation, that certain *je-ne-sçais-quoi*, of which 'tis impossible to give any definition or description, but which every one sufficiently understands (T, 1.3.8.16/106/N74).

But if thoughts (ideas) have this dual aspect of ideational content and mental activity in contemplating (conceiving) that content, then so too must impressions of sensation. In being experienced by the mind, as all impressions of sensation must be, such ideational content engenders or co-occurs with an “action of the mind in the meditation”, which manifests itself as a feeling, the feeling of reality or assent or belief: “To believe is . . . to *feel* an immediate impression of the senses, or a repetition of that impression in the memory” (T, 1.3.5.7/86/N61; emphasis added). This is because awareness of ideational content requires that the mind be active, and such activity—the action of the mind in meditation of ideational content—will manifest itself, at least potentially, any time we are aware of ideational content. Hume implicitly acknowledges this when he refers to “the *belief* or *assent*, which *always attends* the memory and senses. . . this alone distinguishes them from the imagination” (T, 1.3.6.7/86/N61; emphasis added to the phrase, “always attends”). We should note the significance and importance of the phrase “this alone” in the afore-mentioned passage. Belief *alone*, that is, the belief-feeling (which is part of the felt awareness/experience-of-content) and *not* FLV, distinguishes even the most vivid

imagining or re-imagining—even if it is vivid to the point of perfect duplication of the ideational content of an original sense impression, as is the case in hallucinatory experiences—from an actual memory or sense impression. After all, as Hume states in another context (in an Appendix addition, inserted into the body of the *Treatise* text), “there is always something more forcible and real” in the mind’s activity when it believes “than in the fervours of poetry and eloquence.” A fiction or fantasy “may seem to set the object before us in more lively colours. But still the ideas it presents are different to the *feeling* from those, which arise from memory and the judgment. There is something weak and imperfect amidst all that seeming vehemence of thought and sentiment, which attends the fictions of poetry” (T, 1.3.10.10/App 631/N85; emphasis in the original).

Now, an adherent of an FLV theory of belief will likely point out that Hume goes on to use FLV language in dealing with the belief aspect of sensory impressions; to wit: “the belief or assent, which always attends the memory or the senses, is nothing but the *vivacity* of those perceptions . . . this alone distinguishes them from the imagination” (1.3.5.7/86/N61; emphasis added). But this comment is *pre-Appendix*; further, in the same paragraph Hume goes on to equate FLV with mental activity (“the force and liveliness of the perception . . . constitutes the first act of the judgment”) and, later, via an Appendix insertion, with the belief feeling itself, as a manifestation of mental activity. In the Appendix addition, inserted two sections later at 1.3.7.7 (“Of the nature of the idea or belief”), Hume expressly advises us that he is attempting to “explain” the belief feeling by describing it in FLV terms: “An idea assented to *feels* different from a fictitious idea, that the fancy alone presents to us: And this different feeling I endeavour to explain by calling it a superior *force*, or *vivacity*, or *solidity*, or *firmness*, or *steadiness*” (T,

1.3.7.7/App 629/N68; emphasis in the original). Notice the extremely significant import of this Appendix addendum: FLV is no longer—if indeed it ever was—the lynchpin of Hume’s belief theory. Rather, Hume has clearly relegated FLV terminology to an explanatory or illustrative purpose, namely to “explain” or describe by analogy “this different feeling”, the distinctive feeling which is the feeling of belief or cognitive commitment. FLV does no important work within Hume’s belief theory, other than to serve as a metaphor or intuition pump for the belief feeling and the mental activity which it manifests. As Hume states in this Appendix addendum, such “unphilosophical” [i.e., metaphorical or analogical] FLV terminology “is *intended only to express that act of the mind*, which renders realities more present to us than fictions, causes them to weigh more in the thought, and gives them a superior influence on the passions and imagination” (T, 1.3.7.7/App 629/N68; emphasis added; see also E, 5.12/48-50/B41). Belief, he goes on to tell us, “consists . . . in their [ideas’ or ideational content’s] feeling to the mind”, a position he repeats, almost verbatim, at 5.12 of the second *Enquiry* (E, 5.12/49/B41).

But FLV terminology is not, strictly speaking *explanatory* at all; it merely serves as a stand-in or placeholder for the belief feeling itself, “this feeling or manner of conception” which is “impossible perfectly to explain” (E, 5.12/49/B41; see also T, 1.3.7.7/App 629/N68). Strictly speaking, “explaining” the belief feeling to someone who has never actually experienced it would be impossible, in much the same way that it would be “impossible” to explain or “define the feeling of cold or passion of anger, to a creature who never had any experience of these sentiments” (E, 5.12/48/B40). Feelings, whether of cold or anger or belief, are *irreducibles* or, perhaps better, *incommensurables*—not, strictly speaking, susceptible to explanation or even description

in terms of other irreducible, incommensurable experiences. Rather, feelings are “defined” or “described” via ostension, that is, by asking the reader to introspectively experience or recall the feeling in question. “*That is what I am referring to,*” Hume is in effect telling us, and he anticipates that we will recollect and recognize *that feeling*, even if our descriptive powers fail us. Thus, while Hume does refer to ideas of memory as, for example, “more lively and strong than those of imagination” (T, 1.1.3.1/9/N11; see also T, 1.3.5.3/85/N60: “the difference between it [i.e., memory] and the imagination lies in its superior force and vivacity”), such FLV terminology needs to be read and interpreted in light of his Appendix addenda.

In the final analysis Hume is asking us to introspectively recall or pay careful attention to the *actual phenomenal experience*—the feeling—that differentiates believed in memories from mere imaginings. These belief feelings both manifest our belief-state and express that belief—that is, “tell” us that we do believe the ideational content which is the subject matter of the felt awareness-of-content. Introspective experimentation will tell us that memory is *not* differentiated by the intensity of FLV, except insofar as FLV terminology is properly understood to be merely “unphilosophical” or metaphorical language for what *actually* differentiates memories from mere fictions, namely feeling, or felt awareness-of-content: “those faculties [i.e., the faculties of the imagination and memory] are only distinguish’d by the different *feeling* of the ideas they present” (T, 1.3.5.4/App 628/N60; emphasis in the original). And feeling, as the manifestation of “that act of the mind, which renders realities more present”, is a phenomenal experience of which we are all aware, if we attend to it at the time of perceiving, or if we reflect on it after perceiving.

Finally, we should recall that habituation will cause us to grow accustomed to the feelings which accompany ideational content—to the *felt* awareness-of-content—and that we may no longer be conscious or aware of those feelings, at least not on a regular, habitual basis: “when a passion has once become a settled principle of action, and is the predominant inclination of the soul, it commonly produces no longer any sensible agitation. As repeated custom and its own force have made every thing yield to it, it directs the actions and conduct without opposition and emotion” (T, 2.3.4.1/418-19/N268-9; see also 1.3.10.12/App632/N85; 2.3.8.13/437-8/N280). All affect is subject to this “dulling” effect (to use an FLV metaphor) of custom and habituation.

If the thoughts of the imagination include awareness not only of the object of thought (ideational content) but also of the mind’s activity “in the meditation” of that content, and if the only way to distinguish impressions and memories from mere thoughts is by the felt awareness-of-content that manifests itself (or just *is*) the feeling of belief or assent (that is, by the different feeling to the mind), then it follows that awareness of impressions and memories as such (that is, as differentiated from mere thoughts) also entails an awareness however inchoate or even unattended-to, via feeling, of the mind’s action in conceiving, and assenting to, that content. In manifesting itself to the mind as a feeling (more properly, a complex set of feelings, including those “emotions or movements of spirit” which accompany one’s experience of ideational content), this awareness is not an idea, that is, not a superaddition to or change of ideational content, but is rather an impression at the very least *rationaly* distinct from, if experientially fused with, the ideational content which is the subject matter of cognitive commitment, and can be recognized by the mind as such.

Hume's Distinction of Reason and Ideational Content

In order to fully understand this notion of the impression of feeling (the felt awareness-of-content) as rationally distinguishable from the ideational content of a given perception, even though content and the felt awareness/experience-of-content are experienced in a seamless way during the mental activity of perceiving content, we need to recall Hume's discussion of the "distinction of reason" in section 1.1.7 ("Of abstract ideas"). We cannot, strictly speaking, think of the felt awareness-of-content, on the one hand, and the ideational content which is its subject matter, on the other, as properly distinguishable "objects" (of perception, after all) which are distinguishable in the sense meant by Hume in his famous dictum (the "Separability Principle," as per Garrett 1997, 23-24): "We have observ'd, that whatever *objects* are different are distinguishable, and that whatever objects are distinguishable are separable by the thought and imagination" (T, 1.1.7.3/18/N17; emphasis added to the word "objects"—i.e., sets of ideational content). Instead, the felt awareness, which is *about* a specific set of ideational content, but which is not itself experienced *as ideational content* within the overall experience, is no more *experientially* distinguishable from that content, than is a length of line distinguishable from the line itself. In short, the felt awareness/experience-of-content is not an "object" in the sense meant by Hume in his Separability Principle.

Recall Hume's statement at *Treatise*, 1.1.7.3/18-19/N17-18: "But 'tis evident at first sight, that the precise length of a line is not different nor distinguishable from the line itself; nor the precise degree of any quality from the quality." In a sense, any instance of perceiving or conceiving is experienced qualitatively (as a "quality") and the felt

awareness-of-content is an aspect of that experienced “quality”, namely, the *degree* of *feel* of that quality (so long as “degree” is understood metaphorically, as should be all FLV terminology). In much the same way that a shape or form cannot be imagined without *some* imagined visual experience of colour (i.e., as a set of coloured visible points), so too any *experience* of ideational content, as considered by the mind, is unimaginable (inconceivable) without some attendant felt awareness-of-that-content. No felt experience/awareness, no ideational content (the *subject matter* of the felt awareness); no content, no felt experience/awareness-*of-content*.

Nevertheless, experience—not to mention our ability to think counterfactually-- has taught us that a given set of ideational content could have been experienced in a different way. We could have (indeed, we often have) experienced what *seems* to have been the very same ideational content (subject matter of conceiving or perceiving) in a very different way. For example, recall Hume’s example of the two men discussing an event both had been involved in, wherein the second person suddenly remembers ideational content that had heretofore only been understood—understood, but not accepted or believed as a true recounting of events (T, 1.3.5.4/App 627-8/N60).

(Strictly speaking, within Hume’s system, no two sets of ideational content, experienced as they are at different times, are ever identical. Ideational content “x” occurs at time “t₁”; ideational content “x^o” occurs at time “t₂”. They are not the same, since they are the content of two different experiences at two different times. Nor can we ever know they are the same, given that we cannot directly compare them (because we can only experience one at a time, and can only compare them via the operations of memory. (Recall 1.3.5.3/85/N59-60 of the Treatise: “it being impossible to recal the past

impressions, in order to compare them with our present ideas.”) Further, we should be aware that we have a tendency to conflate similar—but non-identical—ideational content, especially when the activity of the mind—the felt awareness-of-content—is similar, as Hume points out at *Treatise*, 1.4.2.32/203/N135: “we may establish it for a general rule, that whatever ideas place the mind in the same disposition or in similar ones, are very apt to be confounded.”)

Now recall Hume’s discussion of “that *distinction of reason*, which is so much talk’d of, and is so little understood, in the schools” (T, 1.1.7.17/24/N21). Hume goes on to explain how we can, in a manner of speaking, “separate” that which is, within his system, truly experientially *inseparable*, by means of counterfactual reasoning:

’Tis certain that the mind wou’d never have dream’d of distinguishing a figure from the body figur’d, as being in reality neither distinguishable, nor different, nor separable; did it not observe, the even in this simplicity there might be contain’d many different resemblances and relations. Thus when a globe of white marble is presented, we receive only the impression of a white colour dispos’d in a certain form, nor are we able to separate and distinguish the colour from the form. But observing afterwards a globe of black marble and a cube of white, and comparing them with our former object, we find two separate resemblances, in what formerly seem’d, and really is, perfectly inseparable. After a little more practice of this kind, we begin to distinguish the figure from the colour by a *distinction of reason*; that is, we consider the figure and colour together, since they are in effect the same and undistinguishable; but still view them in different aspects, according to the resemblances, of which they are susceptible. When we wou’d consider only the figure of the globe of white marble, we form in reality an idea both of the figure and colour, but tacitly carry our eye to its resemblance with the globe of black marble: And in the same manner, when we wou’d consider its colour only, we turn our view to its resemblance with the cube of white marble. By this means

we accompany our ideas with a kind of reflection, of which custom renders us, in a great measure, insensible (T, 1.1.7.18/25/N21-22).

In other words, while we must perforce, within Hume's system, view the white sphere as a seamless experience of ideational content (white visual minima spatially arrayed in a particular configuration), we can counterfactually imagine the form as having a *different* colour, or imagine an array of similarly coloured points as having a different shape. By that means we can focus our mind's attention on one aspect or component of an irreducible (that is, experientially inseparable) experience. We can focus our attention on the white colour; similarly, we can focus on the shape of an object, without attending to the actual colour it exhibits (since it *could have* had a different colour).

In a similar fashion, when we attempt to separately *experience* the feeling aspect or component of an experience—the felt awareness-of-content—by itself, completely abstracted from all content, we fail. Instead, what we *can* do is *focus our attention* on that feeling component of an experience by means of counterfactual thinking, by imagining the same feeling (the same felt awareness-of-content) directed towards some other content. Suppose I deny this, and imagine to myself that I can recall/imagine a feeling or felt awareness-of-content without also recalling/imagining the content which was the subject matter of the experience as a whole. That is, I purport to be able to imagine myself having the exact same feeling (say, of strong belief) but not about any ideational content whatsoever. What exactly am I imagining myself to believe? Or better yet, what exactly is the ideational content of my so-called imagined experience? If I claim that no ideational-content-as-subject-matter-of-experiencing is putatively imagined,

then I am claiming to be imagining a situation wherein I believe “x” (an unknown) and at the same time imagining that, in the very activity of *experiencing* “x” in a believing manner, I am *not* experiencing it.

But this is as absurd, in Humean terms, as imagining that I can *visually perceive* an object without perceiving any colour, that is, visually perceive it as an object made up of *invisible visual* minima. After all, to Hume an object, as perceived, *just is* a spatial arrangement of perceived *visible* (and therefore, *coloured*) points. And ideational content, *as experienced* by the human mind, *just is* a “felt experience/awareness-of-that-ideational-content.” In other words, ideational content, however much we may purport to “abstract” or “separate” it from human experience, is nevertheless ineliminably experiential—a felt awareness of some content “x” as *experienced* by the mind. So, Hume’s comment regarding visible objects—that “we form in reality an idea both of the figure and colour”—applies equally to our felt awareness-of-content: whatever we say to ourselves, *in reality* we experience *both* the felt awareness and the content (subject matter) of which it is awareness of. But because we are able to think counterfactually—because, that is, we can imagine, or at least talk about, having the same felt awareness-of-content, but in relation to some *differently constituted* ideational content—we “accompany our ideas with a kind of reflection, of which custom renders us, in a great measure, insensible” and trick ourselves into thinking (or rather, saying to ourselves) that we recall or imagine the felt experience *without any content whatsoever*.

But some attended-to ideational content, as the subject matter of a felt awareness/experience, is inextricably bound, by the way in which our minds work, to all felt experiences-of-content, however much we might “distinguish” the felt experience

from that which is the subject matter of the experience. Any distinction between the two is, in Hume's terms, a *rational* distinction.

So, experiencing ideational content as the type of content it is, whether as a mere idea or sense impression, can be thought of as a “rationally distinct” aspect of the experience which must be experienced if the mind is to accept the reality of that content. Yet we also need to recognize that this impression or awareness or feeling also has some form of ideational content, however difficult or even impossible it may be to properly describe or articulate that content; otherwise, how could it be remembered when one recollects the experience? Recall the recollection of a thought (T, 1.3.8.16/106/N74): the “action of the mind in the meditation, that certain *je-ne-sçai-quoi*, of which 'tis impossible to give any definition or description”; even though a description of this mental activity is “impossible”. the felt experience of that activity nevertheless has content, since it is the object of thought or remembrance. The same applies to any felt manifestation of mental activity.

Note that memories are thoughts or ideas about other thoughts, ideas, or experiences, and therefore involve exactly that “action of the mind in the meditation” mentioned by Hume (at T, 1.3.8.16/106/N74), which action or activity of the mind evidences itself as an amalgam of feelings, one of which may (or may not) be a feeling of belief. Memory is distinguishable from mere imagination by “the different *feeling* of the ideas” presented (T, 1.3.5.5/App 628/N60; emphasis added). Similarly, and perhaps surprisingly, impressions of sensation are also, in part, ideas (that is, composed of ideational content, at least as rationally distinct from the felt experience/awareness-of-content). That is to say, impressions of sensation possess ideational content (the object or

subject matter of perceiving), but are not *solely* composed of ideational content; such impressions, like all perceptions, are experienced in a certain manner or way. That manner of experiencing content manifests itself, that is, is itself experienced, at least in part, as “belief or assent” (T, 1.3.5.7/86/N61). Part of this belief is belief in the fact that ideational content is being experienced—the awareness of content as content. But, in the case of sense impressions and memories at least, this is also belief in the *reality* of the ideational content of the impression, which belief, at least in the case of memory (but also, I would argue, in the case of sense impressions) manifests itself as “a different feeling from” the feeling attendant upon mere ideas (i.e., ideational content conceived or thought of, but not believed to have actually occurred or to be occurring independently of the mind; see, e.g., T, 1.3.5.4/App 628/N60).

Hume’s initial remarks on the perceptions of the mind, in the very first section of the *Treatise*, should now be considered in light of this *dual aspect* to all perception (i.e., to all instances of the mind’s activity as it perceives or conceives ideational content).

All the perceptions of the mind resolve themselves into two distinct kinds, which I shall call IMPRESSIONS and IDEAS. . . . I believe it will not be very necessary to employ many words in explaining this distinction. Every one himself will readily perceive the difference betwixt feeling and thinking (T, 1.1.1.1/1/N7).

The first circumstance, that strikes my eye, is the great resemblance betwixt our impressions and ideas . . . The one seem to be in a manner the reflection of the other; so that *all the perceptions of the mind are double, and appear both as impressions and ideas* (T, 1.1.1.3/2-3/N8; emphasis added).

Consider the above statements in the context of *Treatise* paragraph 1.3.8.16 (86/N74), Hume's express recognition of two separable and distinguishable aspects of

human cognition (“In thinking ... we not only delineate out the objects, of which we were thinking, but also conceive the action of the mind in the meditation”): firstly, ideational *content* (“the objects” of our remembrance) and, secondly, the *activity* of the mind in perceiving/conceiving that content (“the action of the mind in the meditation [of the objects of remembrance]”). Note also that while these two aspects of cognition are conceptually or notionally or—to use Hume’s term—*rationally* distinguishable and separable, in our actual phenomenal experience, they are factually, if contingently, *inseparable*—neither occurs without the other: no content without awareness of that content; no awareness without content to be aware of. Hume has acknowledged this at paragraph 1.1.1.3: “*All* perceptions of the mind are *double*” (emphasis added). That is, all perceptions present themselves to us as “ideas” (i.e., as ideational content) and as “real perceptions” (i.e., as the “action of the mind in the meditation” or the *experiencing* of that ideational content which manifests as feeling—a *felt* awareness-of-content).

Finally, it is important to note that, within Hume's presentation of cognition, in thinking of a past thought (or impression), one is *remembering* that thought (or impression), not theorizing about its nature or composition. In so remembering, one also remembers “the action of the mind in the meditation.” This is a memory of an *impression*—the feeling of *what it was like* to be conceiving a particular set of ideational content—and, as a memory, it tells us that, at the time of thinking, we were aware, not only of ideational content (the object of the thinking process), but also of the mind's activity in conceiving of that ideational content. This is not presented to us as mere theory; Hume is purporting to be reporting on a phenomenally experienced fact of cognition, and expects that his readers can, via careful review of their own mental

activity, see that his description is accurate. “[C]ustom may make us insensible” of this phenomenon, and may even “cause us to confound” ideational content with the feelings that accompany that content; nevertheless, “by careful and exact experiments” we are able to “distinguish” ideational content from the feelings which accompany that content and the activity of the mind in experiencing that content (T, 2.2.8.4/373/N240).

This two-fold awareness is an instantiation of the “double” aspect of *all* perception. Keeping this in mind will also remind us that, for Hume, each and every perception, from the most complex, vivid sense impression to the most fleeting, basic idea, consists of more than just ideational content—perceptions are not merely free floating “mental objects.” I should emphasize that this is a *contingent* fact of human cognition. Of course, it is conceivable that ideational content could be “free floating”: “all our particular perceptions . . . may exist separately, and have no need of any thing to support their existence” (T, 1.4.6.3/252/N164); and “every distinct object is separable by the mind, and may be separately consider’d” (T, 1.4.6.16/260/N169). But rather than existing “separately” as free floating “objects”, ideas *as actually experienced*, are complex experiences of the mind, which are yet experienced as irreducibles: “a real perception in the mind, of which we are intimately conscious” (T, 1.3.9.15/106/N74). Thus, we *can* be aware (though because of inattention or habituation we may “confound” this awareness with its ideational object and thus may not actually be aware or remember that we *were* aware) of what it feels like to be mentally active and aware, even while we think, given that we are “intimately conscious” of that thinking process, or at least of the feeling that such a process engenders. By parity of reasoning, the same analysis applies to our experience of sense impressions.

Evaluative Comparison and Causal Inference

It might be objected that I have made Hume's belief theory overly complicated, in a way fundamentally foreign to his basic approach, so that, instead of the elegant simplicity of FLV, I have read into Hume's theory a cumbersome aggregation of feeling grafted onto experienced ideational content, with that attendant feeling itself composed of ideational content and feelings manifesting the mental activity involved in being aware of that content, and so on ad infinitum. The complexity is staggering, and the looming problematic of an infinite cascade of ideational content and attendant feeling needs to be dealt with. But notwithstanding such intuitive concerns, anyone who thinks that an intricate and complex aggregation of feeling attendant upon ideational content is foreign to Hume's system needs to reconsider his treatment of two important elements within that system, one generally regarded as central to belief, namely causal inference (see, esp. T, 1.3.14, "Of the idea of necessary connexion"), the other usually dealt with as somewhat peripheral: that is, evaluative comparison (see esp. T, 2.2.8, "Of malice and envy", to which I have already alluded in my discussion of the feelings which accompany our experience of ideational content).

Both of these aspects of Hume's system involve ideational content inextricably enmeshed in a relationship with mental activity manifest as affective response. In other words, within Hume's system it is a contingent fact of human cognition that causal inference and comparative evaluation both give rise to a complex aggregation of content and affect. This "dual aspect" of causal inference and of evaluation points to the deep and

essential role of affect (feeling) underlying Hume's views of perception in general, and belief and judgment in particular.

Let us deal with evaluative comparison first. Our evaluative judgments, Hume tells us, are all too seldom based on the "intrinsic worth" of that which is assessed:

[M]en ... always judge more of objects by comparison than from their intrinsic worth and value. [The word "always" is a bit over-stated; strength of mind can, on occasion, overcome this tendency. See, for example, 3.1.2.4/472/N304.] When the mind considers, or is accustom'd to, any degree of perfection, whatever falls short of it, tho' really esteemable, has notwithstanding the same effect upon the passions, as what is defective and ill. This is an *original* quality of the soul, and similar to what we have every day experience of in our bodies. . . . A small degree of any quality, succeeding a greater, produces the same sensation, as if less than it really is, and even sometimes as the opposite quality. Any gentle pain, that follows a violent one, seems as nothing, or rather becomes a pleasure; as on the other hand a violent pain, succeeding a gently one, is doubly grievous and uneasy (T, 2.2.8.2/372/N240).

Now, none of this is surprising with regard to our passions and feelings. A comparison of various feelings and sensations may well change the way one feels: "Let a man heat one hand and cool the other; the same water will, at the same time, seem both hot and cold, according to the disposition of the different organs" (T, 2.2.8.2/372/N240). But this "original quality of the soul", this tendency to value the same thing differently as a result of varying comparisons, becomes problematic when one considers ideational content, abstracted from feeling:

there may arise some difficulty with regard to our ideas and objects [i.e., ideational content]. When an object augments or diminishes to the eye or imagination from a comparison with others, the image and idea of the object are

still the same . . . nor does even the imagination alter the dimensions of its object on account of a comparison with others. The question then is, how from the same impression and the same idea we can form such different judgments concerning the same object [i.e., the same ideational content] (T, 2.2.8.3/372-3/N240).

In sum, the puzzle is: how can our evaluation or assessment of ideational content change when the content itself stays the same? This parallels the puzzle of belief as a cognitive phenomenon. Same content, yet different belief state (or, in this case, different evaluative state)—how does this happen? Hume’s answer regarding evaluative comparison mirrors his answer regarding belief: if ideational content need not change, then the feeling attendant upon that content *must* change. Here is how he expresses this fundamental fact of human cognition, in connection with evaluative comparison:

This variation in our judgments must certainly proceed from a variation in some perception; but as the variation lies not in the immediate impression or idea of the object, *it must lie in some other impression, that accompanies it.* [Emphasis added. Hume now proceeds to make an empirically based claim about human cognition, one that is directly relevant to his belief theory:] . . . I believe it may safely be establish’d for a general maxim, that no object is presented to the senses, nor image form’d in the fancy, but what is accompany’d with some emotion or movement of spirits proportion’d to it; and however custom may make us insensible of this sensation, and cause us to confound it with the object or idea [i.e., with ideational content], ’twill be easy, by careful and exact experiments, to separate and distinguish them (T, 2.2.8.3-4/373/N240).

A number of comments need to be made. First, at the very end of the quoted passage, Hume reiterates the “dual aspect” of perception: ideational content can, “by careful and exact experiments” be notionally separated and distinguished from the feelings that

attend upon it. This is the case even though ideational content and affect (or feeling) are, as a contingent fact of human cognition, *inseparable* in actual perceptual experience. Here, those feelings are said to be “emotions” which are really manifestations of “some . . . *movement* of spirits” (emphasis added), that is, some activity of the mind which manifests itself as affect. It is important to recognize that, even as Hume portrays this as his “new discovery of an impression [i.e., a feeling], that secretly attends every idea [i.e., ideational content]” (T, 2.2.8.7/375/N241), he is implicitly claiming that the same basic mechanics of ideational content accompanied by affect (“some emotion or movement of spirits proportion’d to [ideational content]”) are at work, whether that ideational content refers to our experiences of impressions of sensation, to our experiences of mere thoughts, or to our experiences of beliefs (T, 2.2.8.4/373/N240).

Second, this phenomenon of ideational content accompanied by a feeling as manifestation of mental activity (“some emotion or *movement* of spirits”) is characterized, for all intents and purposes, as universal and invariable. *All* instances of ideational content, at least insofar as they are consciously experienced, will be accompanied by mental activity, and that mental activity will manifest itself as feeling or “emotion”, which in this context simply means the felt manifestation of the “motion” or activity of the mind, the feeling engendered by the mind undergoing different experiential states at successive instances of time. “Every part, then, of extension, and every unite of number has a separate emotion attending it, when conceiv’d by the mind” (T, 2.2.8.4/373/N241). In other words, every component “part” of ideational content has a separate feeling—that is, a manifestation of the activity of the mind in experiencing that content—which accompanies that component of ideational content. And this is the case,

whether the ideational content in question is a mere thought (a fiction or supposition or even a proposition that is actively disbelieved), a belief, or an immediate impression of the senses.

The consequence of this invariability of affect accompanying ideational content is this: belief if properly understood in accordance with the feeling theory of belief (wherein belief is ‘composed’ of ideational content and the belief feeling aspect of the felt awareness-of-content) is but one instance of a regular pattern of the phenomenal experience that permeates human perception and cognition. While here, in Book 2 of the *Treatise*, Hume calls his empirical claim, “this *new* discovery of an impression, that secretly attends every idea” (2.2.8.7/375/N241; emphasis added), in fact we have already seen that feeling had already been “discovered”, in Book 1, to invariably “accompany” ideational content, whether that content is merely conceived or actually believed, and that feeling also attends on the mental process which produces most of our beliefs, namely causal inference. Hence, a brief discussion of causal belief is called for.

For our purposes, the important affective aspect of causal inference is Hume’s empirical claim that the “observation” of a repetition of resembling conjunctions of resembling events or objects (repeated observations of say, billiard balls colliding, as in *Treatise* paragraph 1.3.14.18/164/N111) gives rise

to a new impression *in the mind* . . . For after we have observ’d the resemblance in a sufficient number of instances, we immediately *feel* a determination of the mind to pass from one object to its usual attendant, and to conceive it in a stronger light upon account of this relation. This determination is the only effect of the resemblance; and therefore must be the same with power or efficacy, whose idea is deriv’d from the resemblance. . . . Necessity, then, is the effect of this observation, and is nothing but an internal impression of the mind, or a

determination to carry our thoughts from one object to another (T, 1.3.14.20/165/N111; emphasis added to the word, “feel”).

Hume’s treatment of “an internal impression of the mind” as equivalent to another locution, “a determination to carry our thoughts from one object to another” is, I claim, yet further recognition by Hume the empirically observable fact that we experience feelings, internal impressions of the mind, as *manifestations* of our mental activity. Here the mental activity is described, theoretically, as a “determination” of our thoughts, and it is important to remember that for Hume, the *experienced* phenomenon of a feeling associated with causal inference is an observed *fact*, not a theoretical construct.

Labelling that feeling a feeling of inevitability or a “determination” of thought may be theoretical, and therefore subject to dispute, but the actual feeling is held to be indisputable, because shared by all. As Hume cautions us in another context, “we must distinguish exactly betwtixt the phænomenon itself, and the causes, which I shall assign for it; and must not imagine from any uncertainty in the latter, that the former is also uncertain. The phænomenon may be real, tho’ my explication be chimerical” (T, 1.2.5.19/60/N44).

To return to Hume’s “explication” then: after repeated experiences of the “constant conjunction” of resembling events or objects, the mind *feels* itself determined to believe that the “usual attendant” will, in reality, obtain. For example, from my experience of billiard balls, the acceleration of one in the direction of my head results in my mind *feeling* a certain internal determination, the determination to believe that a collision is about to occur—that my head is about to be hit and possibly injured. My take on causal inference is, by now, obvious to the reader: the feeling of being determined to

make the causal inference—a feeling of inferential inevitability, of having no other option but to believe—is a feeling which is a manifestation of the mind’s activity in making that inference.

Again, the underlying mechanics of causal inference parallel the operations of belief. The mind, after experiencing relevantly similar conjunctions of events, operates in a certain way when one element of such a conjunction is experienced. This operation or activity of the mind is felt, partly as an experience, in a sense, of *inevitability* or of having *no option* but to believe that the attendant effect (following my example of the projectile billiard ball) is about to occur, or (in different circumstances) that the attendant cause has already obtained. Now, under my interpretation, this “being determined or having-no-option-but-to-make-the-inference” feeling—this feeling that one has no option other than to think of, and believe in the reality of, the attendant object—is a *different* feeling from the resultant belief feeling. But that complexity poses no more problem than did the complications arising from the “new discovery” of section 2.2.8. The operations of the mind proceed with “an inconceivable rapidity” (T, 1.4.6.4/252/N165); therefore, there is no theoretical bar, within Hume’s system, to a cascade of various feelings, all occurring within a very short duration of time, and all attendant in their various guises upon essentially the same (or very similar) ideational content. And, of course, since ideational content is subject to near constant variability, the cascade of feeling is even more complex—more complex, indeed, than memory or occurrent conscious awareness could ever fully reconstruct or apprehend.

In sum, I am arguing that feeling or affect operates as an invariable attendant on ideational content, invariable in part because mental activity *must* occur in order that

ideational content be experienced, and because feeling is the invariable manifestation of that activity. But we must keep in mind that while some feeling is invariably part of the experience of any ideational content, there are a myriad of potential feeling-states that are reflective of, or reactive to, the initial felt experience/awareness-of-content. Thus feeling or affect permeates Hume's entire discussion of perception and belief, especially after the Appendix additions are inserted into the body of Book 1 of the *Treatise*. My interpretation of his belief theory reflects that discussion.

Summary of My Interpretation

Thus far, I have claimed that believing is, for Hume, best understood in two parts. That is, believing is an activity of the mind whereby ideational content is experienced, and the mind also experiences a certain indefinable feeling—"tis impossible to explain perfectly this feeling" (T, 1.3.7.7/App 629/N68)—the feeling of belief in, or cognitive commitment to, the truth or reality of that content. Put simply, belief is ideational content experienced in a certain way, that is, accompanied by the *feeling* that the content is believed: "something felt by mind, which distinguishes the ideas of the judgment from the fictions of the imagination" (T, 1.3.7.7/App 629/N68). The belief feeling can form part of the initial experience of content—that is, the belief feeling can be an integral aspect of the felt experience/awareness-of-content that is itself an inextricable, integral component of the experience of ideational content, "separable", if at all, only by means of a distinction of reason—as is the case when we experience impressions of sensation. But the belief feeling can also be an impression of reflection, a feeling of cognitive commitment arising when we think, and as such, can either be co-occurrent with the

contemplation of that content or can occur after that content has been experienced by the mind.

(Suddenly remembering ideational content that I have been contemplating, as in Hume's example of the two men discussing an event that one remembers while the other, for the moment, fails to recall (T, 1.3.5.4/App 627-8/N60) could be an example of the belief feeling as an impression of reflection, occurring *after*, and in reaction to, the experience of content. However, there is a complication. Content is experienced over time, albeit often very rapidly, so it may well be that the feeling of belief is always co-occurrent with the experience of the particular set of ideational content which is the subject matter of belief. When my mental state shifts from lack of belief regarding the "same" ideational content, in fact, I am conceiving of that content at a *different point in time* and it may be that the belief feeling is simply an integral part of the felt experience/awareness-of-content as experienced at that exact instant in time (the exact time when the belief feeling obtains). Introspective analysis will not tell us, at least not definitively, whether this is the case or not, since any introspection is via memory. We are not able to actually separate and analyse the "parts" of any particular experience of content quite so finely as that experience unfolds; by the time such analysis is attempted, that experience is already "gone" so to speak, lodged, if at all, within memory, and we are only able to *remember* it and analyse how it *seems* to have presented itself to the mind. Since all of this has occurred in the briefest of time spans, a definitive answer as to whether the belief feeling is contemporaneous with the ideational content it attends or whether such a feeling occurs an instant or two *after* the experience of content is, I would argue, simply beyond the mind's capacity.)

To return to the main thread of my argument, I would point out an important (and controversial) implication of this interpretation: *all* perceptions have a dual, albeit co-occurrent *experiential* aspect (T, 1.1.1.3/3/N8: “all perceptions of the mind are double”) in that we experience ideational content (the object of the idea or impression) and, in so experiencing that content, we *feel* the mental activity involved in that experience of content. I contend that it is this feeling, not FLV, which allows us to differentiate impressions from ideas, as well as allowing us to differentiate believed-in ideas from mere fictions or suppositions.

In the next chapter, I will consider and answer some possible objections to my interpretation. I will also demonstrate that my interpretation of belief is deeply consistent with Hume’s overall approach to our experience of ideational content and to our evaluative judgments.

Chapter 4: Critical Review of My Interpretation

The Regress Problem

Perhaps the most serious objection to the feeling theory of belief is the worry that it posits an unrealizable complexity in all impressions and ideas. In other words, it could be objected that my picture of how we experience both impressions and ideas leads to or implies an infinite regress; that is, an infinite series or cascade of levels of awareness (impressions of what it is like to be experiencing a given set of ideational content). If the mind is aware of the ideational content of, for example, an impression of sensation (seeing an apple as the object or ideational content of my impression), and if the mind is also aware of its own activity in perceiving that ideational content, then according to this line of objection, my interpretation of Hume posits the following. In experiencing an impression of sensation, the mind is, firstly, aware of ideational content (say, for example, the various colours, textures, smells of the apple, and any other sensory information received via the senses), and secondly (and sequentially), the mind is also aware of its own activity in experiencing that content. This awareness of mental activity manifests itself as a feeling of *what it is like* to be experiencing this content—“the action of the mind in the meditation, that certain *je-ne-sçais-quois*, of which ’tis impossible to give any definition” (T, 1.3.9.16/106?N74). This feeling will “tell” my mind that I am experiencing an impression of sensation, as opposed to a mere memory of the apple or the imagining of an apple.

This line of objection will also remind us that, within Hume’s system, a feeling must be an impression. And if I experience an impression, then that impression is

experientially separable from the ideational content which it accompanies, and therefore should also, according to this line of objection, by necessary implication of my interpretation, be susceptible (at least in principle) to yet a *further* separation into, on the one hand, ideational content, and, on the other, the feeling engendered by the mind's activity in experiencing that content. After all, so the objection might go, the feeling which is alleged to accompany the mind's experiential activity also contains ideational content, which is itself experienced and which is also *experientially separable*. And if that is the case, then this further reflective feeling should itself *also* be separable into ideational content and feeling; and *that* further feeling should *also* be so separable, and so on, into an infinite regress of matching content and affect. But such an infinite cascade of ideational content and resultant affective awareness cannot go on indefinitely, given the mind's obvious limitations; therefore (according to this line of reasoning), my interpretation of Hume's theory of belief must be incorrect.

So, the problem is: where do we draw the line on affective awareness in reaction to ideational content, without an ad hoc stipulation? My interpretation of Hume's belief theory seems to require an unlimited mental capacity for awareness of ideational content and of its own awareness of that content, with awareness of awareness also constituting ideational content which is subject to the same bifurcated awareness, and so on without any articulable principle limiting the regress.

I have two replies. The first is that the above line of analysis relies on a key misinterpretation of my position. I am *not* alleging that every experience of ideational content is experientially separable; it may well be that most perceptions are not experientially separable and that ideational content can only be "distinguished" or

“separated” from the felt awareness-of-content by a distinction or reason, along the lines heretofore explained. (In brief, we can imagine the same or nearly identical ideational content having a different felt awareness, just as we can imagine the same or very nearly identical feeling or felt awareness in connection with different content, along the lines that we can imagine—or at least tell ourselves that we so imagine—that a white sphere might have been black, and so rationally differentiate the colour of the shape from the shape itself, even though neither can, within Hume’s system, truly be experienced separately from the other. No colour, no experiential shape; no shape, no experience of colour. Similarly, no felt awareness/experience of ideational content, no content; no content, no felt awareness-of-that-content.) It may well be that all impressions of sensation and many, if not all, of our thoughts involve the inextricable seamless of experience of content and felt awareness to such an extent that even differentiation via a distinction of reason (which must perforce be via memory) is beyond our capabilities. Since such experiences are experienced seamlessly and as irreducibles, no infinite regress threatens.

But what of the emotion that attends every experience of ideational content (T, 2.2.8.4/373-4/N240-1), and what of the potential cascade of feelings that can attend any set of ideational content? A clearly Humean answer can be derived from Hume’s own discussion at section 1.4.1 of the *Treatise* (“Of scepticism with regard to reason”), wherein Hume confronts a remarkably similar problem, and deals with it by relying on the *central role of affect itself* within human cognition. Furthermore, the fact that I am able to rely on a similar line of reasoning shows how deeply consonant my interpretation

is with Hume's overall system. In that section, Hume considers the effect of reflection on beliefs formed after considering "some question propos'd to me" (T, 1.4.1.9/184/N123):

[A]fter revolving over the impressions of my memory and senses, and carrying my thoughts from them to such objects, as are commonly conjoin'd with them, I feel a stronger and more forcible conception on the one side, than the other. This strong conception forms my first decision. I suppose, that afterwards I examine my judgment itself, and observing from experience, that 'tis sometimes just and sometimes erroneous, I consider it as regulated by contrary principles or causes, of which some lead to truth, and some to error; and in ballancing these contrary causes, I diminish by a new probability the assurance of my first decision. This new probability is liable to the same diminution as the foregoing, and so on, *in infinitum* (T, 1.4.1.9/184-5/N123-4).

So how does this infinite regress come to a halt? Hume tells us that, after the first and second reviews of one's judgment (after a fairly extensive reflection on one's initially formed judgment), a certain change in *feeling* occurs, "as the action of the mind becomes forc'd and unnatural, and the ideas faint and obscure"; the mind becomes "uneasy" and the "spirits being diverted from their natural course, are not govern'd in their movements by the same laws, at least not to the same degree, as when they flow in their usual channel" (T, 1.4.1.10/185/N124). The mind is no longer able to focus on, *or even experience*, the objects of thought as easily as on earlier reflections: "The attention is on the stretch" (T, 1.4.1.10/185/N124).

In other words, as the iterations of ideational content multiply, awareness of, and ability to focus on and utilize, a particular subset of that content becomes increasingly difficult for the mind to either achieve or to maintain, and is eventually beyond the mind's (admittedly finite) capacities. Similarly, when the iterations of *feelings* in reaction

to content multiply, the mind becomes unable to focus on—to actually *feel*—such impressions of reflection. Of course, when Hume refers to the “spirits being diverted from their natural course” he is not offering an endorsement of any particular physiological theory of mental activity; rather he is using the theoretical terminology of the day in relation to an observable phenomena, namely the limitations inherent in the human mind and in its operative capacities. “The phaenomenon may be real, tho’ my explication be chimerical. The falshood of the one is no consequence of that of the other” (T, 1.2.5.19/60/N44).

In sum, it is an observable, introspectively experienced phenomenon that the mental activity of reflection simply cannot go on forever, especially within the restricted time frames of immediate experience and our actual reflections upon that experience, because of the inherent limits of the mind, particularly its fairly limited scope of attention and retention. And such limitations apply both to our experience of ideational content and to our experience of the feelings which are manifestations of the mind’s experiencing of that content. So, the same limitations which preclude an infinite amount of reflection on content should apply to reflective *feeling*, even if such feeling can possess, as it does (at least in connection with thoughts and reflections on thoughts) according to my interpretation, ideational content of its own. The mind, if and when it experiences a cascade of feeling, will very soon find its ability to attend upon any particular subset of that content to be “on the stretch.” Furthermore, the mind is, in normal conscious circumstances, continually bombarded by new impressions and ideas (newly experienced ideational content), further “stretching” its already limited attentive/retentive capacities. Thus, the mind’s finite capacity, rather than showing my interpretation to be incorrect,

shows instead that awareness of content is *not* a given, and that no infinite regress threatens—at some point, perhaps at *every* instant of experience, the mind simply cannot take in all of the information made available to it.

The same limits apply to our experience of ideas and of impressions. Consider a particularly vivid and emotionally upsetting impression of sensation, such as witnessing a violent accident. The ideational content will surely tend to be quite clear, and the mind will be fully attentive. One might also have reflective thoughts and sensations arising out of one's initial shock at the experience. In other words, a particularly violent impression of sensation could well give rise to a series of cascading sets of ideational content and attendant feelings.

But the cascade will cease, simply because of the mind's limitations. The mind will be diverted by some other ideational content, the memory of the violent impression will fade, and the mind (which never rests for very long on any one set of content) will soon find itself conceiving of other ideational content.

Let us analyze a possible series of (matching pairs of) ideational content and feeling. I see a horrific accident in great detail. I am aware of the experience, and I also experience a cascade of emotions in response to the ideational content. Now, it may well be the case that the emotions felt overwhelm any feeling I might have of the mind's initial activity in perceiving the content. In other words, I might not be aware of the initial feeling of my awareness or mental activity for any time longer than a minimal instant or two. (Hume acknowledges this in his discussions of the interplay of the passions: “passions, however independent, are naturally transfused into each other” (T, 2.3.4.4/421/N270; see also T, 2.2.6.1/366/N236: “impressions and passions are

susceptible of an entire union; and like colours, may be blended so perfectly together, that each of them may lose itself.”) The memory of that awareness could simply disappear, in the face of an ongoing series of strongly felt emotions such as shock, fear, revulsion, pity, excitement, and so on, which continue to be experienced, even as the memory of one’s preceding mental activity fades. Further, the very vividness of such impressions may well overwhelm at least some of the attendant feelings. I may, for example, be aware only of the terrible visual panorama of the accident, along with my feelings of fear and revulsion. All other feelings may be lost or “blended so perfectly together, that each of them may lose itself.”

This fits well with Hume’s picture of the human mind. The mind never rests on any static set of ideational content (T, 2.1.4.2/283/N186). And the mind is not capable of infinite examination or recollection of any given set of ideational content. Thus, it may well be that many of our impressions and thoughts are experienced for such a short time that they are immediately forgotten, without the mind registering any awareness of the ideational content or of the mental activity involved in experiencing that content. Introspective empirical investigation, at least as contemplated by Hume, will not tell us whether this is (or is not) the case. If an impression is immediately forgotten, and if no awareness of the mind’s initial activity registers, then, for all intents and purposes, it will be as if the impression never occurred. Conversely, feelings which are reflective of ideational content may remain, even if recollection of the content is fleeting. Conviction or belief can remain constant even as the mind loses its recollection of the content which gave rise to that conviction: “For even supposing these impressions shou’d be entirely effac’d from the memory, the conviction they produc’d may still remain” (T,

1.3.5.3/84/N59). And if a feeling of conviction remains without the mind being able to reflect on the ideational content that was the source of that conviction, given that the mind no longer has any remembrance of experiencing that content, further examination of ideational content has been terminated, not by ad hoc stipulation, but by the contingent limitations of the mind itself.

Therefore, the threat of an infinite regress can be seen to be illusory, since it is well beyond the mind's capabilities, and given that Hume's theory of belief and of sensation can accommodate the role of feeling as well as the role of content as co-occurrent (as part of a 'seamless' experience of ideational content). If ideational content changes too rapidly, the mind will simply not be able to process or absorb all of that content. Content may not be properly absorbed or experienced to begin with, or, having been experienced for an instant or so, may be immediately forgotten. Any feared regress will stop when the mind reaches its limits of comprehension. Recall that Hume expressly tells us that the input of immediate impressions, and thence the ideational content derived from those sensations, can occur too quickly for the mind to absorb: "If you wheel about a burning coal with rapidity, it will present to the senses an image of a circle of fire; nor will there seem to be any interval of time betwixt its revolution; merely because 'tis *impossible for our perceptions to succeed each other with the same rapidity*" (T, 1.2.3.7/35/N28; emphasis added). Since the inner perceptions of the mind "succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity" (T, 1.4.6.4/252/N165), that is, a rapidity of an even greater magnitude than that of the flux of perception, even more stringent limits of comprehension and memory should obtain.

Another line of analysis might go as follows. Suppose I have seriously misread the implications of belief on Hume's theory of perceptions in general. According to this line of thought, the awareness of "the action of the mind in the meditation" does *not* occur while the mind meditates on the object of thought (ideational content). This awareness is dispositional only, and can occur only on reflection (Owen 1996; Owen, personal communication; see also Ainslie 2001, especially his discussion of "secondary ideas", and p. 560, where Ainslie claims that "For Hume, when we look at a tree, we are aware only of the tree"—an interpretation in some ways antithetical to my own.) In other words, suppose that, while I am conceiving of ideational content, whether perceiving impressions of the senses or conceiving thoughts derived from such impressions, I am only aware of content, as Ainslie and Owen would have it. Suppose I am not aware of the mind's activity. After all, so the objection goes, Hume never expressly states that the mind is explicitly aware of its own activity at the time of experiencing ideational content; he only states that, *in recollection and reflection*, we can "delineate out the objects, of which we were thinking [ideational content], but also conceive the action of the mind in the meditation" (T, 1.3.8.16/106/N74); he does not explicitly claim that we are aware of the mind's "action" *at the time of experiencing* the content of thought. And if we cannot be aware of the felt awareness/experience-of-content during the experience of content, then my "feeling" interpretation of perceiving and conceiving falls apart.

However, the implication of this line of reasoning is: if I can only be aware of the mind's activity in experiencing ideational content *after the fact* via reflection (the memory of the thought or of the impression), then *all* belief becomes reflective; that is, belief can only occur when I think about the impression of sensation or the thought, that

is, when I think about, or reflect upon, ideational content. Further, all feeling becomes reflective, and the problem of the regress re-emerges. But that is not consistent with Hume's picture. In all instances of belief, the mind conceives of the ideational content in a particular way—that is, with a particular *feeling* of belief, which is an integral part of experiencing content in a believing manner. Any reflection on that belief is a reflection, not only on ideational content, but *also on the original feeling of belief itself*. Reflection thus requires that some feeling obtained at the moment of conceiving of ideational content. After all, one cannot actually recall “the action of the mind in the meditation” (T, 1.3.9.16/106/N74), as opposed to merely imagining one has recalled such mental activity, unless there was in fact an occurrent experience to recall. In other words, at the time of that meditation on ideational content, the mind must have been *aware* (either actually or dispositionally) of that meditation in order to later recall it. Otherwise, the putative recollection is a fiction, not a legitimate memory. And the awareness that is in fact recollected is an awareness that manifests as *feeling*. (Of course, this is not to say that a higher order of awareness is always present—that is, sometimes I will not be aware that I am aware of the tree (the ideational content, or subject matter of my felt awareness-of-content); but on other occasions I may well be aware that I am aware. The mind’s capacity for a cascade of felt awareness, though limited, is not as severely restricted as it would be on Ainslie’s interpretation.)

Furthermore, in addition to positing an awareness via feeling of the mental activity involved in conceiving ideational content, Hume tells us that all such content is also accompanied by “some emotion or movement of the spirits, proportion’d to [that content]” (2.2.8.4/373/N240); that is, the mind has an affective response to ideational

content, over and above any feelings of cognitive commitment or of mere imagining or felt experiencing-of-content.

Thus, a complex picture of feeling immediately attending upon ideational content emerges from a careful reading of Hume, with some feeling constituting an integral component of a given experience such that the felt awareness-of-content and the content itself as subject matter of the experience can only be differentiated via a distinction of reason, while other feelings are experienced as fully reflective of content (i.e., as impressions of reflection, possibly occurring *after* the initial experience of ideational content). And we need to keep in mind that one cannot have a feeling unless one is (immediately and through a duration of time) *aware* of that feeling, even if only for a minimal instant such that one fails to retain any memory of it. After all, a feeling is an impression, a mental experience impressed upon the mind and *felt*, not merely thought of (except, of course, in memory, in which case the remembered feeling is remembered as content attended by yet another feeling—the feeling of belief that such a feeling was mine). You cannot have an impression unless you are aware of experiencing that impression. You don't experience an *impression* qua impression through memory; memories are *ideas*. You experience an impression *now* (although the “now” will usually have duration, with memories of the impression experienced at the same time as the—continuing—impression is being experienced). No reflection is required.

Of course, one *can* reflect, as when one (re)considers one's initially held belief (T, 1.4.1.9/184-5/N123-4). Further, as Hume tells us, such reflection may well bring in new information in the form of newly recollected ideational content, and the feelings engendered from that content, as one reviews the original ideational content and the

processes which resulted in the original belief. Given that the mind is by nature extremely changeable (“’Tis impossible for the mind to fix itself steadily upon one idea for any considerable time” (T, 2.1.4.2/283/N186)), reflection and the introduction of further ideational content into the mix are almost inevitable.

But the important point to note is that no reflection is *required* in order to have an *initial* belief. Impressions of sensation and memories may well be assented to or believed without any need of reflection. (Recall that Hume speaks of “the belief or assent, which always attends the memory and senses (T, 1.3.5.7/86/N61; emphasis added to word “always”).) Causal inferences, for example, especially those borne of long habituation, will often obtain without any lengthy course of reflective reasoning. Thus, when a person stops by a river, she need not enter into any conscious reflection whatsoever in order to believe a whole set of ideas about her situation. Custom and habituation often supersede any need for reflection or examination of one’s beliefs, or even any need for conscious thinking of any sort.

A person, who stops short in his journey upon meeting a river in his way, foresees the consequences of his proceeding forward; and his knowledge of these consequences is convey’d to him by past experience, which informs him of such certain conjunctions of causes and effects. But can we think, that on this occasion he reflects on any past experience, and calls to remembrance instances that he has seen or heard of, in order to discover the effects of water on animal bodies? No surely; this is not the method, in which he proceeds in his reasoning. The idea of sinking is so closely connected with that of water, and the idea of suffocating with that of sinking, that the mind makes the transition without the assistance of the memory. *The custom operates before we have time for reflection.* The objects seem so inseparable, that we interpose not a moment’s delay in passing from the one to the other (T, 1.3.8.13/103-4/N72; emphasis added).

Owen, quite appropriately, uses this very passage as an example of what he calls “unreflective causal reasoning”, and tells us that it “seems to be the standard, simple case” (Owen 1996, 489-90). But, of course, the apparent *simplicity* of such an example of mental activity is more a product of the speed of such causal inferences and of our being accustomed to the mind’s operations in such instances, than it is evidence that those operations are in any real sense less complicated, more “simple” than other belief-forming processes. (To be fair to Owen, he is by no means arguing that non-reflective cogitative processes are physiologically simple.) Rapid, non-reflective, cogitation does not entail *operational* simplicity; rather, our own awareness of such cogitation will, like our perceptual experience of the “burning coal” being wheeled about “with rapidity” (T, 1.2.3.7/35/28), be *felt* or experienced as simple and undifferentiated, simply because the mind’s inherent limitations prevent us from recalling all of the experiences constitutive of such cogitation. (In addition, of course, the felt experience might well be muted or “dulled” by habituation.) Such inferences, arrived at, because of habituation and custom, in accordance with the “predominant inclination” of the mind, and made with “inconceivable” speed, will be felt and experienced as simple, even obvious, and will as a result cause little, if any, “sensible agitation” in the mind (see, by way of analogy, T, 2.3.4.1/419/N268). But just as the intensity of agitation, or for that matter the intensity of any phenomenal aspect of an experience expressible in FLV terminology, is not determinative of belief, neither is it an invariant indicator of the underlying mental complexity or lack thereof. As Hume reminds us, in a passage where the agitation of the mind is clearly linked to FLV: “The force of our mental actions in this case, no more than

in any other, is not to be measur'd by the apparent agitation of the mind" (T, 1.3.10.10/App 631/N85).

FLV Objection

The aforementioned example may serve to highlight another objection to my interpretation, namely Hume's continual usage of FLV terminology in describing those qualities of our impressions of sensation that enable us to differentiate sense impressions from other perceptions (such as memory or fictions of the mind).

The difference betwixt these [i.e., between impressions and ideas] consists in the degrees of force and liveliness, with which they strike upon the mind, and make their way into our thought or consciousness. Those perceptions, which enter with most force and violence, we may name *impressions*; and under this name I comprehend all our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul. By *ideas* I meant the faint images of these in thinking and reasoning (T, 1.1.1.1/1/N7).

My basic response is as follows: FLV language, while highly evocative and intuitive (it is quite intuitively attractive to describe the colours of a real apple in view as more "vivid" or "forceful" than the "colours" of memory), is also, when used to describe impressions, in reality merely metaphorical, in much the same way that FLV terminology is described as "unphilosophical" when used in connection with the felt experience of believing ideas: "This variety of terms [i.e., FLV terminology used to describe the feeling of belief], which may seem so unphilosophical, is intended only to express that act of the mind, which renders realities more present to us than fictions" (T, 1.3.7.7/App 629/N68). Further, as Hume admits, at the very outset of the *Treatise*, immediately after ostensibly

making FLV the criterion of differentiation, when we examine our actual phenomenal experience, FLV does *not* always help us determine whether ideational content experienced is an impression of sensation or merely an idea. After all, imagined thoughts can approach the intensity of the FLV of impressions, and the FLV of certain impressions can be as faint and weak as that of our ideas:

[I]n particular instances they [i.e., the impressions and ideas] may very nearly approach to each other. Thus in sleep, in a fever, in madness, or in any very violent emotions of soul, our ideas may approach to our impressions: As on the other hand it sometimes happens, that our impressions are so faint and low, that we cannot distinguish them from our ideas (T, 1.1.1.1/2/7).

Yet most of us, most of the time, have no problem recognizing a less than vivid impression for what it is (i.e., an impression of sensation: ideational content that has come to us via our sensory organs). Similarly, we have no problem realizing that even the most vivid and lively thought is merely an idea. Hume gives us the example of “almost” believing a recently departed loved one still abides amongst us:

After the death of any one, 'tis a common remark of the whole family, but especially of the servants, that they can scarcely believe him to be dead, but still imagine him to be in his chamber or in any other place, where they were accustom'd to find him (T, 1.3.9.18/117/N80).

Even though such an idea may be quite vivid, may indeed be accompanied by an uncanny feeling akin to belief, it is still experienced as merely an idea (ideational content arrived at via the memory and/or the imagination). So, even by Hume's own use of FLV terminology—even if we accept that impressions can generally (that is, for the most part) be characterized as having a higher level of FLV intensity than their corresponding

ideas—FLV in and of itself is neither invariable nor determinative, either in differentiating impressions from thoughts, or beliefs from mere fictions. In normal circumstances we are quite readily able to differentiate an impression of sensation from a mere idea, and to distinguish ideas presented as truths from mere poetical fictions, without regard to, and on occasion without being influenced by, the intensity level of FLV.

Referring to “poetry”, that is, to the “poetical system of things, which . . . is commonly esteem’d a sufficient foundation for any fiction” (T, 1.3.10.6/121/N83), Hume tells us, in an Appendix addition, that, by way of contrast with causal inference (i.e., “reasonings from causation” received by the mind as “truth” as per T, 1.3.10.6/121/N83),

the vivacity they [i.e., poetical fictions] bestow on the ideas is not deriv’d from the particular situations or connexions of the objects of these ideas, but from the present temper and disposition of the person. But how great soever the pitch may be, to which the vivacity rises, ’tis evident, that in poetry it never has the same *feeling* with that which rises in the mind, when we reason, tho’ even upon the lowest species of probability. The mind can easily distinguish betwixt the one and the other; and whatever emotion the poetical enthusiasm may give to the spirits, ’tis still the mere phantom of belief or perswasion (T, 1.3.10.10/App 630/N84-5; the emphasis on “feeling” is Hume’s)

Note that Hume expressly acknowledges that even a maximal level of FLV will not, by itself, create a state of belief in a normal human mind which is confronted by that which is recognized as fictional or imaginary. Interestingly, this passage is rarely if ever cited by those who adhere to an FLV interpretation of Hume’s belief theory; rather, there exists a tendency to portray Hume as holding that the intensity level of FLV is completely determinative of belief. See, for example, Stroud 1977, 70-71. See also Allison 2008,

172, citing an earlier (i.e., pre-Appendix) passage from Hume:

If one person sits down to read a book as a romance, and another as a true history, they plainly receive the same ideas, and in the same order; nor does the incredulity of the one, and the belief of the other hinder them from putting the very same sense upon their author . . . The latter has a more lively conception of all the incidents . . . While the former, who gives no credit to the testimony of the author, has a more faint and languid conception of all these particulars (T, 1.3.7.8/97-8/N68-9).

Allison portrays Hume as wedded to an FLV theory of belief that “as a bit of phenomenology, is highly dubious. In fact”—and here Allison turns the knife—“it seems to be an egregious example of facts being twisted in order to conform to the requirements of a theory” (Allison 2008, 172).

But Hume is clearly *not* wedded to FLV, as his Appendix revision on poetical fiction shows. The FLV involved in such “poetical” experiences, much like the FLV involved in madness, is derived “from the present temper and disposition of the person” and is not therefore, at least not in normal minds in ordinary circumstances, a source of belief: “But how great soever the pitch may be, to which this vivacity rises, ’tis evident, that in poetry it never has the same *feeling* with that which arises in the mind, when we reason, tho’ even upon the lowest species of probability” (T, 1.3.10.10/App 630/N84-5; again, emphasis in the original; we should note that both the “highest” and the “lowest” level of perceived probability will generally have a *low* intensity level of FLV, whereas the FLV intensity of fictions is often quite high, without thereby engendering any degree of belief). Whatever it is that is ultimately indicative of “some difference between believing what you read and taking it as a fiction” (Stroud 1977, 71; quoted by Allison

2008, 172), Hume certainly *agrees* with Stroud and Allison (and Reid) that an FLV analysis does not capture it: “whatever emotion the poetical enthusiasm may give to the spirits, ’tis still the mere phantom of belief or perswasion” (T, 1.3.10.10/App 630/N84-5).

Perhaps part of the interpretative problem is that the Selby-Bigge/Nidditch version of the *Treatise*—the version cited and relied upon by all but the most recent generation of Hume scholars—does not incorporate any Appendix additions into the body of the text. Book 1, as presented by Selby-Bigge, is virtually bereft of the “feeling” aspect of belief. This mode of presentation of Hume’s theory of belief may well have encouraged the tendency in the secondary literature to characterize it as an FLV theory.

Yet we can clearly see from Hume’s Appendix insertions, incorporated into the body of the text in the Norton edition of the *Treatise*, that something other than the intensity of FLV is at work as the mind parses reality—some other factor that enables the mind to recognize impressions and causal inferences as part of our “system” of “reality”, some phenomenal experience of the mind that enables us to assent to, commit to, and believe in our present impressions and ideas of that reality (T, 1.3.9.3/108/N75; see also T, 1.3.6.7/86/N61). I have argued that this “something else” is, simply put, the *belief feeling* that accompanies the ideational content of sensation and thought. This shows us the true significance of Hume’s final comment in the Appendix. When Hume states, “I believe there are other differences among ideas [i.e., differences other than FLV intensity], which cannot be comprehended under these terms. Had I said, that two ideas of the same object can only be different by their different feeling, I shou’d have been nearer the truth” (T, Appendix 22/636/N401), he could equally be commenting on the actual, essential difference between impressions and ideas—namely, that the ideational

content of each is differentiated by the different manner of experiencing that content, and that this different manner is manifested to the mind by a feeling.

In what follows, I argue that one implication of a “feeling” theory of belief—an implication that admittedly is not explicitly articulated by Hume—is that the belief feeling contains certain foundational, instinctual “information” (i.e., the belief feeling, when reflected upon, provides the basis of propositional/ideational content) which “tells” the mind whether to consider a perception to be externally or internally generated. If this is correct, affect (feeling) plays or could have played an even more significant role in Hume’s philosophy than heretofore imagined, and many of Hume’s own puzzles concerning our belief in the self and the external world become less problematic, at least insofar as non-reflective belief is concerned.

The FLV View of Impressions Does Not Affect My Interpretation

Further, even if FLV does, to some degree, function as a means by which the mind differentiates impressions of sensation from ideas, my interpretation of Hume can still survive. That is, the implications of Hume’s theory as a *feeling* theory of belief still hold, namely that all perceptions (including impressions of sensation) have a dual aspect (“all perceptions of the mind are double” as per T, 1.1.1.3/3/8) in the sense that we experience *both* ideational content (the object, subject matter, or content of the idea or impression) *and* the attendant feelings (the felt awareness/experience-of-content) which are manifestations of the mental activity involved in that experience of content. I have argued that it is these feelings, rather than a change in the intensity level of FLV, that are essential if we are to differentiate impressions from ideas. Of course, a change in the

intensity level of FLV quite often accompanies these feelings, but it is the feelings, as manifestations of mental activity, which are determinative, not FLV. Moreover, a “feeling” theory of belief opens the way for positing that these feeling afford the mind the means to assess and differentiate its various types of perception, that is, to recognize impressions of sensation as such and to recognize thoughts (perceptions which *seem* to the mind to be internally rather than externally generated) as such. (Of course, this is but a *possible* implication of the feeling theory of belief that Hume himself did not explore; my comments in this regard are therefore speculative and call for further research and investigation, well beyond the scope of this dissertation.) In short, the feelings that attend upon our experience of ideational content allow and enable our minds to recognize which impressions are *felt* to originate within the mind—that is, the ideational content of such impressions is felt to originate within the mind—and which are *felt* to originate elsewhere.

Here, in brief, is my justification for these claims—claims that I acknowledge were never explicitly endorsed by Hume himself. Ideas or thoughts of the imagination include awareness not only of the object of thought (ideational content) but also of the mind’s activity in meditation (T, 1.3.9.16/106/N74). Further, ideational content, simply as content, is accompanied by feeling (T, 2.2.8.4-7/373-5/N240-1). We distinguish impressions and memories from mere thoughts, not by means of FLV, but rather by our awareness of belief or assent (T, 1.3.6.7/86/N61). This belief or assent cannot be reduced to FLV, despite comments by Hume which do tend to appear reduce it to FLV, for reasons previously given. Rather, this belief or assent must be understood in terms of feeling—of the felt awareness/experience of ideational content. And if feeling is the

mode by which we differentiate impressions of sensation from mere thoughts, then there may well be an aspect of that set of feelings which indicates to the mind whether experienced ideational content is generated within the mind (as it is in the case of mere thoughts and impressions of reflection) or elsewhere (as it appears to be the case with many impressions of sensation, especially those involving vision, sound, and touch).

Admittedly, at paragraph 1.3.5.7/86/N61, Hume does say: “’Tis merely the force and liveliness of the perception, which constitutes the first act of the judgment,” but this use of FLV language needs to be interpreted in light of his Appendix insertions into the text. In brief, FLV language is “unphilosophical”, that is, it is a mere “placeholder” for the belief feeling, which is an irreducible, incommensurable experience, not susceptible to anything other than metaphorical or analogical description in terms of other experiences. So, awareness of the mind’s activity is experienced as a feeling, which is experienced coincident with awareness of ideational content. This feeling is not an idea, but rather an immediately felt awareness/experience-of-content, which obtains as a contingent but invariable *fact* of human cognition—a fact about us which conceivably could have been different, but which, as far as we can tell from experiential data, operates as it does with a feeling of inevitability. This felt experience is a fact about us, a fact which *must* obtain if the mind is to be aware of any content whatsoever.

If this is the case, there is no requirement that the feeling attendant upon awareness of ideational content be a *simple* phenomenon, even it is irreducible in the sense that it cannot be fully described in terms of other experiences. The feeling is experienced as a manifestation of mental activity, and that mental activity, since it occurs over an extended period of time, involving changing states of affairs, must be complex,

manifesting a change of affect over time. Hence, the feeling attendant upon that activity could well be equally variegated. Introspection, I suggest, tells us that this is indeed the case. The feeling of awareness of mental activity is liable to contain any number of (rationally or experientially distinguishable, as the case may be) elements, including, but by no means limited to the following: feelings that accompany the content simply as content (T, 2.2.8.4-7/373-5/N240-1); the feeling that the ideational content arises from sources other than one's own mind (and hence is an impression of sensation of the body); the feeling that the ideational content is merely derived from the mind (and hence is an idea of the imagination or memory); feelings of desire or aversion; feelings attendant upon any reflections upon feelings; feelings of mental activity itself (the way it feels to experience this particular ideational content); and, of course, feelings of belief or cognitive commitment. (Some, but by no means all of these affects are adverted to in the *Treatise*. Feelings of what I will call "internality" and "externality" are not, so far as I can tell, specifically referred to; hence, my comments are clearly speculative—more in the vein of what I claim Hume *should have* posited than what in fact he *does* present in the *Treatise*.)

Note that the complexity of the attendant feeling allows for the possibility that the belief feeling is part of an *original* impression of sensation. That is, as I have previously argued, it is an open question as to whether the belief feeling need be an impression of reflection. In fact, the best way to interpret most instances of the felt awareness-of-content vis-à-vis ideational content is that the two form a "seamless" experience and are not strictly speaking, distinguishable from one another; they can only be differentiated by a distinction of reason. Introspection of our cognitive processes will

not provide us with any definitive answer to this question of whether a particular belief feeling is in fact experientially separable from the ideational content which is the subject matter of the belief feeling or whether they can only be distinguished via a distinction of reason. This is because of the “inconceivable rapidity” of those processes, and the fact that any attempt to actually “separate” the belief feeling from the subject matter of belief must be done by retrospective introspection—by means of the memory of a series of inconceivably rapid mental processes/experiences.

Note also that the belief feeling (or any other feeling manifested during the felt awareness/experience-of-content) could “contain” elements or have aspects that coincide with FLV terminology. That is, the mind could experience a *feeling* of “forcefulness” or “liveliness” as part of the manifestation of mental activity. Labelling ideational content, rather than the mental activity of conceiving or perceiving that content, as forceful or lively could be a mistake, albeit an easily made error, arising from these same inherent difficulties involved in the introspection and recollection of our mental processes. In general, it is preferable to recognize that what we call “forcefulness” or “liveliness” are qualities or aspects of our *feelings*, rather than of the ideational content itself. Of course, in many instances—visual experiences come to mind—ideational content itself could properly be described in terms of “liveliness” or “brightness” or any number of FLV terms. But since Hume holds that content itself does not mandate belief, FLV *as content* is not essential to believing in the reality of that content, *even if* we were to continue to construe Hume’s belief theory as an FLV theory. Further, if the FLV component of ideational content is not determinative of belief, then the only role that FLV can play under any interpretation of Hume’s belief theory must fall within the affective aspect of

perception. FLV must be subsumed under feeling. In his final Appendix remarks, Hume implicitly recognizes this.

Objection: The Feeling Theory Requires Duration

Another potential objection to my interpretation raises the possibility that my take on Hume requires an impression of sensation to be composed of *both* ideational content and an impression or impressions of reflection, as separate entities (i.e., as attended-to objects of experience). This makes all impressions complex in duration, in a way that is supposedly antithetical to Hume's system. According to such an objection, every perception must occur over a span of at least two minimal instances: in the first such instance or instances, the mind is exposed to ideational content; in the subsequent instance(s), an impression (or series of impressions) of reflection is experienced. This can be seen to be an untenable consequence of my interpretation, in that it introduces an unnecessary complication to Hume's system, and opens the way to an indefinite, potentially infinite, cascade of ideational content and reflective impressions, which can only be terminated by ad hoc stipulation. The FLV theory, so the objection goes, is much more palatable: it reflects what Hume actually states, it is never explicitly repudiated by Hume, either in the Appendix or in the first *Enquiry*, and it operates in an elegant and easily understandable way.

My first response to such a criticism is to point out that my analysis of the experience of ideational content acknowledges that content and the felt awareness/experience-of-content may well be co-occurrent and inextricably linked, to the extent that only by means of a "distinction of reason" can we even notionally

“distinguish” or “separate” the feeling involved in the felt awareness-of-content from the ideational content which is taken by the mind as the subject matter of the experience. Recall the earlier discussion in this dissertation of the applicability of the distinction of reason to the experience of content. As per Hume’s discussion of the “distinction of reason” in section 1.1.7 of the *Treatise* (“Of abstract ideas”), we cannot, strictly speaking, think of the felt awareness-of-content, on the one hand, and the ideational content which is its subject matter, on the other, as properly distinguishable “objects” of perception, distinguishable in the sense meant by Hume’s Separability Principle: “We have observ’d, that whatever objects are different are distinguishable, and that whatever objects are distinguishable are separable by the thought and imagination” (T, 1.1.7.3/18/N17). Ideational content is, after all, the “object” or subject matter of a given experience (a given instance of perceiving) and the felt awareness-of-that-content is *not* the subject matter or “object” of that experience. Instead, the best way to think of the felt awareness-of-content, which is *about* a specific set of ideational content, is to recognize that it is no more truly distinguishable from that content, content which *is* the subject matter of the given experience, than is a length of line distinguishable from the line itself (to recall Hume’s example at T, 1.1.7.3/18-19/N17-18).

My second response: FLV theory does not do *any* real work within Hume’s system; whether or not FLV is phenomenologically true to our experience of believed-in perceptions is ultimately irrelevant to the feeling theory of belief. As I have explained, any comments made by Hume that seem, at first blush, to commit him to an FLV theory of belief need to be read in connection with his Appendix amendments and insertions. It may well be that Hume would have been well advised to rework parts of Book 1 of the

Treatise in light of his Appendix insertions; be that as it may, a charitable reading of Book 1, including the Appendix insertions and the final Appendix remarks, clearly shows that Hume retreats from the significance of, and extensively qualifies, his use of FLV terminology in connection with belief. This “retreat” from FLV continues apace in the second *Enquiry*.

My third response: the “ideational content plus affect” picture of perceptions need not require that perceptions span more than a minimal or near minimal instant of time, even in those cases where some of the feelings attendant on ideational content are in fact truly distinct (i.e., are impressions of reflection or impressions experientially distinguishable from the experience of ideational content). Take the most problematic example: impressions of sensation, which according to Hume are the source of all of our ideational content—that is, all the information which we utilize in thinking and in constructing the system of reality in which we function (see, for example, the discussion at T, 1.3.9.3-4/107-8/N75). According to my interpretation, the awareness of ideational content and the feeling of the mental activity involved can both occur *at the same time*. That is, my interpretation is consistent with the dual aspect of perceptions—experiencing ideational content and experiencing attendant feelings—conceived as being coincident in time, and inseparable in human cognition.

But my interpretation is also consistent with awareness of content and of mental activity occurring *sequentially*. I contend that nothing of significance, and certainly nothing problematic to my interpretation, flows from the possibility of some sequential occurrence of mental activity being involved in the experience of immediate impressions of sensation. The reason is simple: any sequential occurrence would obtain over an

incredibly short period of time, and might well be too fast for the sequence to register *as a sequence* within the mind. After all, Hume is quite willing to accede to external natural phenomena occurring at a faster rate than human perception can register. Recall the earlier cited burning coal example:

If you wheel about a burning coal with rapidity, it will present to the senses an image of a circle of fire; nor will there be any interval of time betwixt its revolutions; merely because 'tis impossible for our perceptions to succeed each other with the same rapidity, that motion may be communicated to external objects (T, 1.2.3.7/35/N28).

By parity of reasoning, there is every reason to suppose that the cascading flux of another natural phenomenon, namely mental activity, might well operate with greater rapidity than the perceptions (i.e., conscious awareness) of that mental activity can manage. Thus, a fundamental fact of the matter concerning human cognition, that is, whether or not awareness of ideational content, on the one hand, and awareness of our feelings manifesting the mental activity involved in such awareness of content, on the other, occur simultaneously or sequentially, may simply be *beyond the capacities of our perceptual awareness*—for all intents and purposes, in our experience content and affect, both may well occur “at the same time”, or near enough, because that is how we experience them (or better yet, that is how we *recall* our experience of them).

Suppose this is not the case. Suppose instead that we can somehow determine that awareness of ideational content occurs at some minimal or near minimal time “*t*”, and that the feeling engendered by the mental activity occurs at some later time “*t* plus *n*”. The “experimental” question becomes: do I, on introspection, observe this sequence to occur, and can I recollect such a sequence? Notice that such recollection must perforce

occur at yet a *later* time, say “*t* plus *x*” (as is the case in Hume’s discussion of the dual aspect of any thought, at T, 1.3.9.15/106/N74); if that is the case, then all we are inspecting is our *memory* of awareness and feeling. But, as Hume points out, “it being impossible to recal the past impressions, in order to compare them with our present ideas, and see whether their arrangement be exactly similar” (T, 1.3.5.3/85/N59-60), this issue is not resolvable by direct or *immediate* (i.e., contemporaneous) introspection or “review” of the mind. Rather, the issue is only resolvable by the indirect, retrospective “review” via memory, and by the feelings attendant upon the ideational content of such memories. Each of us, as armchair, introspective “natural philosophers” must report what we find when we examine (our memory of) our perceptions. My own report: ideational content and affective awareness of the mental activity involved in comprehending that content *appear*, so far as I can recall, to have occurred simultaneously.

Of course, such self-reporting cannot engender absolute certainty, especially given Hume’s underlying sceptical stance; introspective examination and descriptive accuracy of mental activity is extremely difficult: “’tis very difficult to talk of the operations of the mind with perfect propriety and exactness; because common language has seldom made any very nice distinction among them, but has generally call’d by the same term all such as nearly resemble each other. . . . [T]his is a source almost inevitable of obscurity and confusion” (T, 1.3.8.15/105/N73). Or, as Hume states in the first *Enquiry*, “the finer sentiments of the mind, the operations of the understanding, the various agitations of the passions, though really in themselves distinct, easily escape us, *when surveyed by reflection*; nor is it in our power to recal the original object, as often as we have occasion to contemplate it” (E, 7.1/60/B49; emphasis added).

Another point to consider: in claiming that ideational content, on the one hand, and the feeling one has in contemplating that content, on the other, are *notionally* or rationally distinct, I am by no means characterizing them as *factually* (i.e., contingently) separable; they are merely notionally or conceptually separable, *in the imagination*, most likely by means of a distinction of reason. Conceptual or rational distinguishability does not entail that any form of experiential separability ever actually obtains within human cognition, given our current cognitive and sensory apparatus. The fact that we can at least notionally differentiate (i.e., by a distinction of reason) content from affect or feeling, and therefore talk about (if not actually “conceive” in Humean terms) the possibility that ideational content could subsist without any felt experience of it—a possibility that Hume considers in his discussion of personal identity (T, 1.4.6.16/259/N169: “every distinct perception, which enters into the composition of the mind, is a distinct existence, and is different, and distinguishable, and separable from every other perception”)—does not entail that such separation ever *in actual fact* occurs within human cognition, or that we ever *believe* (as opposed to merely imagine or talk as if) it could.

Hume's Supposed Objection to My Interpretation

I will now deal with what is perhaps the foremost objection or obstacle to my interpretation of Hume's theory of belief. This problem for my interpretation of Hume's belief theory occurs at paragraph 4 of the Appendix, and involves certain comments made by Hume himself, as part of his Appendix comments on belief. That such a formidable textual problem should arise is somewhat surprising, in light of the immediately

preceding comment at paragraph 3, which seems to support my interpretation (and which is consistent with what Hume says about belief in the first *Enquiry*):

When we are convinc'd of any matter of fact, we do nothing but conceive it, *along with a certain feeling, different from what attends the mere reveries of the imagination* (T, Appendix 2/624/N396; emphasis added).

Here we have a formulation that fits my picture of belief as ideational content accompanied by the belief feeling—that is, an impression of reflection manifesting the mind's cognitive commitment to the reality or truth of that content.

Yet, perplexingly, in the very next breath, in paragraph 4 of the Appendix, Hume (seemingly) undermines the support given in Appendix paragraph 3. That is, he explicitly *denies* the notion “that belief, beside the simple conception, consists in some impression or *feeling*, distinguishable from the conception” (T, Appendix 4/625/N397). Hume here seems, *prima facie*, to be rejecting the view that belief can be analyzed in terms of ideational content plus the attendant feeling of cognitive commitment. If this is indeed the case, my interpretation of his belief theory may well *seem* to be in serious trouble. (I should point out, however, that the danger is more apparent than real, since my interpretation of Hume's belief theory *does* recognize the possibility that many, perhaps all, beliefs may well consist of a believing felt awareness/experience-of-content *inextricably linked* to the ideational content which is the subject matter of that experience; that is, my interpretation does not require that the belief feeling is invariably an impression of reflection. As I shall argue, near the end of this section, nothing much turns on whether the belief feeling can ever be truly experientially separable from the ideational content which is believed (and therefore constitute a experientially separable

impression of reflection) or whether the belief feeling is only distinguishable on an ‘as-if’ basis by means of a distinction of reason. In either case, Hume’s theory of belief is best understood in terms of feeling and affect as determinative of belief, rather than in terms of FLV.)

We need to consider the context in which this apparent denial of the “feeling” theory of belief occurs, and we need to examine the concerns that motivate Hume to issue this supposed denial. Here is the context, which in turn requires us to focus on Hume’s concerns. In this portion of the Appendix, Hume is worried about “the nature of that belief, which arises from the relation of cause and effect.” In connection with the nature of causal beliefs (beliefs which are the result of causal inference), Hume presents us with an “inevitable” dilemma: “In my opinion, this dilemma is inevitable. Either the belief is some new idea, such as that of *reality* or *existence*, which we join to the simple conception of an object, or it is merely a peculiar feeling or sentiment” (T, Appendix 2/623/N396).

In other words, Hume is claiming that a theory of belief must maintain that a non-belief state regarding ideational content being conceived can be transformed into a state of belief regarding that same content in only one of two ways. One’s belief-state changes either by:

- (i) the superaddition of some new ideational content of a special sort (content that in some unspecified way designates the currently conceived content as “real” or “existent”) to the currently conceived content; or by

- (ii) a change in the operations of one’s mind, that is, a change in the manner in which the mind experiences or conceives of ideational content (which manifests itself as a “peculiar feeling or sentiment”); or, in terms used throughout this dissertation, *a change in the felt awareness/experience-of-content*.

Clearly, the second horn of the dilemma fits well with my interpretation of Hume’s theory. (It is also clear that the second horn is neutral as to whether the belief feeling can be a true impression of reflection—an impression that is experientially separable from, since experienced after, the ideational content which is the subject matter of belief.) Hume *rejects* the first horn of the dilemma in a fairly summary fashion: no such new idea or impression is added on to what has already been conceived. That is, there is no separate notion or ideational content of “existence” capable of being grafted onto a given idea so as to transform it into a belief (T, Appendix 2/623-4/N396, referring to earlier arguments at T, 1.2.6/66-68/N48-9). Further, while we *can* control the appearance and organization of mere ideas (*fictions* or speculations of the imagination), we cannot, so long as our cognition is operating normally, exercise such control over ideas that are actually believed. If belief were, contrary to our actual experience of the belief process, the result of an idea or an impression with new ideational content (i.e., of “existence” or “reality”) accompanying and supplementing previously non-believed ideational content, then we could presumably control the content of our beliefs (i.e., by adding or subtracting such specialized ideational content via the imagination).

Of course, experience has shown us that normally functioning humans *cannot* control their states of belief, at least not by direct volition. Further, we should recall that indoctrination, that is, ideas “inculcated on” the mind, as occurs in education (T, 1.3.9.13-17/114-17/N79-80), by mere repetition of ideas, is capable of *indirectly* causing us to believe. This inculcation, a kind of forced or artificially manufactured belief, can occasionally be self-induced in normal, sane individuals, as “in the case of liars; who by frequent repetition of their lies, come at last to believe and remember them, as realities” (T, 1.3.5.6/86/N60-61). These are examples of the *indirect* control of belief by the mere repetition and aggregation of ideational content, under certain peculiar psychological circumstances.

But such examples pose no threat to my interpretation of Hume’s belief theory as one of feeling, since repetition and inculcation are intricate processes and will presumably have complex effects on the activity of the mind in conceiving ideational content, and therefore on the *feeling* of the mind. In other words, the special circumstances of such artificially induced belief states (which are “artificial” in the Humean sense that they are the result of human artifice) is such that the mind’s felt awareness/experience-of-content changes over time from cognitive disbelief or indifference to cognitive commitment. We can see that this is the case from Hume’s comparison to poetical fiction, which unlike inculcation, does not result in belief, at least not in normal humans under normal conditions: “in the same manner as education infixes any opinion, the constant repetition of these [fictional] ideas makes them enter into the mind with facility, and prevail upon the fancy, without influencing the judgment” (T, 1.3.10.6/121/N83). The feeling engendered by fictional ideas is a different feeling from

that inculcated by educative repetition precisely because it lacks the peculiar circumstances attendant upon a socially embedded, intricate, coordinated effort to inculcate certain *believed* ideas onto the minds of impressionable persons (such as children, who are the usual objects of the kind of education/indoctrination to which Hume refers).

Therefore, in the normal state of cognition (i.e., of a normal human cognizer), our state of belief is *not* changed by the addition of some sort of *specialized*, belief-inducing ideational content, content which somehow, in and of itself and independent from special inculcatory conditions, designates that the ideational content which is the object of our conceiving should be and is to be believed. There is no such belief-inducing idea of “existence” or “reality” that enables us to make ourselves believe merely by the superaddition of that idea onto ideational content that is currently the object of thought. That is, there is no such thing as ideational content which, *as content*, is belief affirming of other content when added onto that content.

In sum, we don’t arrive at belief merely by changing or adding certain “specialized” ideational content, in the very limited sense of merely thinking of such content and superadding it onto other content that is the subject matter of state of (un)belief. This is the case, even though changing our state of belief often involves the consideration and reconsideration of a variety of ideational content in addition to that content which is the object of conception. In fact, the actual set of ideational content contemplated by the mind during any period of time will almost certainly be different from any other comparable time. It is, after all “almost impossible for the mind of man to rest” (T, 1.4.7.13/271/N176)—the occurrent ideational content is always changing and

will seldom, if ever, exactly repeat. (“’Tis impossible for the mind to fix itself steadily upon one idea [i.e. one particular set of ideational content] for any considerable time” (T, 2.1.4.2/283/N186).) Nevertheless, Hume’s core point remains: change of content, *in and of itself*, is neither necessary nor sufficient to bring about a change in one’s belief state. If we could, contrary to our actual experience of belief, change our state of belief by the mere addition or limited (i.e., non-inculcatory) repetition of ideational content, we would have *direct* volitional control over belief. But experience shows us that in fact (when functioning normally) we lack any such control; we cannot exercise our will or our desires to directly control our belief-states.

Hume expresses this argument as follows, with the notion of “existence” as some putative ideational content abstracted from all other content playing a central role:

That it [belief] is not a new idea [such as that of “reality” or “existence”], annex’d to the simple conception, may be evinc’d from these two arguments. *First*, We have no abstract idea of existence, distinguishable and separable from the idea of particular objects. ’Tis impossible, therefore, that this idea of existence can be annex’d to the idea of any object, or form the difference betwixt a simple conception and belief. *Secondly*, The mind has the command over all its ideas, and can separate, unite, mix, and vary them, as it pleases; so that if belief consisted merely in a new idea, annex’d to the conception, it wou’d be in a man’s power to believe what he pleas’d (T, Appendix 2/623-4/N396).

But, as already stated, experience shows us that normal humans *cannot* decide what to believe (i.e., belief is not under our direct volitional control). And this is at least partly because we have no such direct control over the mind’s affects, emotions, and feelings—a list which includes feelings of belief. Thus, if “existence” were, contrary to our actual phenomenal experience, an idea available to the mind, able by its mere presence in the

mind to change non-belief into belief, the imagination would then have the power to superadd this putative idea onto any set of ideational content, and by its own volition create a state of belief in that ideational content. Given the imagination's inability to do so (at least under normal conditions, that is, absent unusual, extraordinary mental disorders), there is no such belief-changing idea of "existence".

Now, the reason we have no "abstract" idea of existence goes back to section 1.2.6 ("Of the idea of existence, and of external existence")—there is no single impression (or, for that matter, family of impressions) possessing the putative ideational content of "existence" and which invariably attaches such (putative) content to our impressions of objects. The mind simply does not, as a matter of *empirical* observation, experience its impressions of the external world in such a way. "So far from there being any distinct impression, attending every impression and idea, that I do not think there are any two distinct impressions, which are inseparably conjoin'd. ... And thus, tho' every impression and idea we remember be consider'd as existent, the idea of existence is not deriv'd from any particular impression" (T, 1.2.6.3/66/N48). That is, there is no particular, separate, "free standing" ideational content representing "existence" or "reality" to the mind such that its presence in the mind is required for belief, much less any such content which could be capable of inducing belief that other ideational content is in fact "real" or "existent".

The implication of this line of reasoning (strictly speaking, it is presented as an analysis of empirical, introspective observations of the mind's operations) about our experience of objects or "existents" is as follows: there is no specialized ideational content, derived from either an impression or an idea, of "existence" or "reality", separate

and apart from a particular set of ideational content which is, at a particular moment, the “object” of thought (in the sense alluded to at, for example, T, 1.3.9.16/106/N74: “the objects, of which we were thinking”). Existence is thus not a separable attribute of an object conceived of; existence plays no role in ideational content *as content*:

The idea of existence, then, is the very same with the idea of what we conceive to be existent. To reflect on any thing simply, and to reflect on it as existent, are nothing different from each other. That idea [i.e. the allegedly “abstract” or separable ideational content of “existence”, falsely supposed to be “distinguishable and separable from the idea of particular objects”], when conjoin’d with the idea of any object, *makes no addition to it* (T, 1.2.6.4/66-7/N48; emphasis added).

This putative (but fictitious and illusory) separate, independent ideational content of existence (as content separated and abstracted from any notion of particular objects) having been eliminated by Hume as a possible source of belief, we now see that belief cannot arise from the operations of the will, “but must arise from certain determinate causes and principles, of which we are not masters” (T, Appendix 2/624/N396), operations or activities of the mind which manifest themselves, not as ideas (i.e. mere thoughts, which we have some control over) but rather as impressions of reflection or as felt awarenesses/experiences-of-content, that is, as *feelings*. And while ideational content qua content *is*, to a large degree, under the control of the imagination, our affective responses to content, as well as the manner in which we experience content (the felt awareness/experience-of-content) *are not* normally under volitional control. Hume is referring to “causes and principles”, in the sense of laws of nature or natural dispositions governing the mind which operate in the mind, but which need not directly affect

ideational content as content, at least not by any addition or subtraction from the set of ideas “contained” within a particular set of that content. Any such addition to, or subtraction from, ideational content would be an operation of the imagination, normally or for the most part subject to direct volitional control. Furthermore, strictly speaking, the “idea” arrived at via subtraction or addition of ideational content is a *different* idea from that which was, prior to that subtraction or addition, the original object of thought. But, according to Hume, ideational content can be believed at one moment and disbelieved at another, *without any difference in content*.

The upshot of all of this discussion of “existence” is that the context of Hume’s discussion clearly shows his main worry to be some form of belief formation theory that posits a definable and experientially distinguishable, or a “clear and determinate”, idea of “existence” or of some functionally equivalent concept (T, 1.3.14.14/162/N110; perhaps echoing the Cartesian “clear and distinct”)—some supposed but again, in Hume’s view, fictitious, concept or set of ideational content that *tells* the mind whether other contemplated ideational content is (or is not) to be believed.

This represents the first horn of Hume’s “inevitable dilemma.” No such “belief-creating” idea or informational input emerging either from the external world or from the mind’s conceptual apparatus is available to us; there is no externally generated impression or internally generated idea providing us with an objective, clear, and determinative criterion of belief.

Instead—and this is the second horn of Hume’s “inevitable dilemma”—all we have, when determining whether or not to believe, is our own affect or feeling, that is, our own *affective response* to the ideational content received and experienced. Mental

activity, not ideational content, “tells” us or manifests to us what it is that we do believe, and the extent to which we are cognitively committed to the ideational content that is the subject matter or “object” of belief. Hume’s comments in paragraphs 2 and 3 of the Appendix support this reading:

Did not the belief consist in a sentiment different from our mere conception, whatever objects were presented by the wildest imagination, would be on an equal footing with the most establish’d truths founded on history and experience. There is nothing but the feeling, or sentiment, to distinguish the one from the other (T, Appendix 2/624/N396).

In short, the mind is left to its own devices—its own mental activity and the feelings arising therefrom—in determining that which is to be believed, and the extent of its cognitive commitment to that belief.

I should here acknowledge that my use of the term “*affective response to ideational content*” in the preceding paragraph is potentially problematic. The term should not be interpreted to mean that *all* feeling, including all belief feeling, must occur *after* ideational content has been experienced, and is therefore experientially separable from the ideational content which is the subject matter of belief. After all, the experience of content at its most basic—without any cognitive commitment, for example, as in the case of a fleeting thought—requires an experientially seamless component of felt awareness/experience-of-content, a feeling which is not experientially separable from content, but which can only be “distinguished” from ideational content as subject matter of the thought by means of a distinction of reason. Similarly, in the case of a sense impression, it is most likely the case that the belief feeling is inextricably embedded in the original felt awareness/experience-of-content, and that the “belief or assent which

always attends the memory and senses” (T, 1.3.5.7/86/N61), that is, the belief feeling that always accompanies the ideational content of a sense impression, in fact occurs *simultaneously* with the sense experience of content. But this is by no means axiomatic; it could also be the case that the belief feeling occurs *after* the original sense impression, as part of the felt awareness/experience-of-content, whereby the ideational content which is actually the subject of belief is the *memory* of the original impression. In such a case, we could say that in one sense this belief feeling *is* an “affective response” to the original sense impression; in another sense, the belief feeling is *not* a response at all, but rather an integral aspect of the felt awareness-of-the-*new*-content (which is a *memory* of the original sensory content and which will often *seem* to the mind to be the same ideational content as that experienced in the original sense impression).

After all, any ongoing sense impression—a perception occurring over a duration of time, and therefore composed of a myriad of individual sets of ideational content—is perforce a complex aggregation of instances of ideational content, most of which are recent memories, and only a few of which are experienced in the present instant. As I have earlier argued, all of this mental activity occurs with such “inconceivable rapidity” that we are simply unable, via our limited capacity for introspective analysis (i.e., retrospective analysis, in that all such mental activity is “surveyed by reflection”), to definitively settle the matter as to whether a given belief feeling is an impression of reflection or an integral aspect of a felt awareness/experience-of-content. As Hume reminds us, “the finer sentiments of the mind, the operations of the understanding, the various agitations of the passions . . . easily escape us, *when surveyed by reflection*; nor is

it in our power to recal the original object, as often as we have occasion to contemplate it” (E, 7.1/60/B49; emphasis added).

Hume’s Support for the Feeling Belief Theory

Let us then review what Hume says in paragraph 2 and 3, the paragraphs immediately preceding the problematic paragraph 4. “We may, therefore, conclude, that belief consists merely in a certain feeling or sentiment; in something that depends not on the will, but must arise from certain determinate causes and principles, of which we are not masters” (T, Appendix 2/624/N396). How are we to interpret this statement? What follows is my attempt, based on my interpretation of Hume’s belief theory.

In the above quoted sentence from paragraph 2 of the Appendix, Hume is commenting on only one aspect of a belief-state, namely the belief feeling; he is making no comment whatsoever about ideational content (the object of the thought, which, if believed, gives rise to, or is accompanied by, the belief feeling of cognitive commitment). We should note that the belief feeling is a manifestation of the mind’s activity in conceiving of the ideational content in a “believing” manner or mode. We should also note that the mind is capable of a complexity of activities, which may occur simultaneously or in sequence. Introspective analysis may not tell us whether these activities are co-occurrent or sequential, mainly because the operations of the mind change with an “inconceivable rapidity” and the mind may not be able to attend to, or even recall, all of its own perceptions. Further, as the mind experiences ideational content, it will be *assessing* that content, at least in part in order to *understand* the ideational content as experienced or as remembered. This comprehension may occur

within an instant of time or over a relatively lengthy duration, a duration of time which may well extend past the time of actual experience of the content, or which may occur as the content changes from its original derivation from impressions of sense to a derivation from the mental operations of memory. The more complex and difficult it is to understand the ideational content, the more likely it is that the mind will require an extended duration of time in order to comprehend, interpret, and assess the meaning of the content.

The mind cannot “decide” (in a loose, non-volitional sense of cognitive commitment) whether to believe in the truth or reality of ideational content unless and until it feels that it comprehends that content, at least to some extent. So, the “believing-activity” of the mind can be expected to occur after the “understanding-activity” in those situations whereby the mind requires more than a minimal instant or two to comprehend the content of what is being experienced. In the aforementioned quote (“We may, therefore, conclude, that belief consists merely in a certain feeling or sentiment; in something that depends not on the will, but must arise from certain determinate causes and principles, of which we are not masters” (T, Appendix 2/624/N396)), Hume is referring to the belief-feeling, which I have argued is a manifestation of the mind’s activity, its “believing-activity.” Let us now examine Hume’s next statement:

When we are convinc’d of any matter of fact, we do nothing but conceive it, *along with* a certain feeling, different from what attends the mere reveries of the imagination. And when we express our incredulity concerning any fact, we mean, that the arguments for the fact produce not that feeling (T, Appendix 2/624/N396; emphasis added).

Here, the terms “matter of fact” and “fact” clearly refer to ideational content—the “object” or subject matter of thinking and conceiving. Believing in the truth of that content involves, Hume tells us, experiencing a “certain feeling”, that is, the feeling of belief. All of this is completely consistent with my interpretation: we have ideational content accompanied by (“along with”) a feeling of cognitive commitment. (Perhaps this could be better expressed as follows: we have a particular phenomenal experience, a particular felt awareness-of-content when we merely conceive of ideational content; when we *believe* in that content, the felt awareness-of-content *changes* so that it is now a felt awareness-*in-a-believing-manner*-of-content. The feeling aspect of the felt awareness-of-content is different when ideational content is believed than when it is merely conceived of without cognitive commitment.) I have argued that this feeling of belief is a manifestation of mental activity, and is experienced as such. I have also argued that, since mental activity is complex, it can manifest a complex of attendant feelings—the belief feeling being one, but not necessarily the only one or even the most powerfully felt, of these sets of feelings.

In the statement, Hume tells us that this belief feeling is “different” from the feeling that attends the “mere reveries” of the imagination. What he means is this: the mental activity involved in contemplating (and understanding) ideational content is different from the activity involved in committing to the truth or reality of that content (i.e., believing the content); therefore the feeling engendered from the mental activity will also be different. Note that on this interpretation, a believed in idea will have a set of feelings manifesting the *comprehending* activities of the mind together with a different set of feelings manifesting the *believing* activities of the mind. The feelings which attend

upon any given set of ideational content are a congeries of affect, with the disparate feelings all too easily conflated and confounded on recollection. As Hume states, in another context: “the finer sentiments of the mind, the operations of the understanding, the various agitations of the passions, though really in themselves distinct, easily escape us, *when surveyed by reflection*; nor is it in our power to recal the original object, as often as we have occasion to contemplate it” (E, 7.1/60/B49; emphasis added).

Now, if I correctly understand Hume’s comments in yet another context, namely in section 2.2.8 of the *Treatise*, in his discussions of comparative evaluation, the mind will *also* have feelings reflective of the content itself, as that content is compared to other ideational content experienced or recollected, and these feelings will operate as discrete “bits” of evaluative affect. For example, the “admiration” that we have for “any very bulky object, such as the ocean . . . or any very numerous collection of objects, such as an army, a fleet, a crowd . . . increases or diminishes by the encrease or diminution of the objects” which demonstrates, Hume tells us,

that ’tis a compound effect, proceeding from the conjunction of the several effects [i.e., “bits” of evaluative feeling], which arise from each part of the cause. Every part, then, of extension, and every unite of number has a separate emotion attending it, when conceiv’d by the mind (T, 2.2.8.4/373/N240-1)

So, the mind not only comprehends, and *feels* that it comprehends, ideational content, it also *judges* (believes or doubts or disbelieves; values or deplores; enjoys or is pained by; and so on) that content. Furthermore, such judgement is an *affective, feeling process*. In other words, as the mind experiences ideational content, the mind perforce also *evaluates* any content that it comprehends; epistemic, evaluative, and aesthetic judgments and

valuations are *inevitable* components of the experience of content. Evaluation is built into the system of perceiving/conceiving/experiencing/feeling ideational content. Hume confirms as much in his very next statement:

If this be allow'd with respect to extension and number [i.e., that evaluative feelings are attributable to "every part of extension, and every unite of number"], we can make no difficulty with respect to virtue and vice, wit and folly, riches and poverty, happiness and misery, and other objects of that kind, which are always attended with an evident emotion (T, 2.2.8.4/374/N241).

So, evaluative feelings run throughout human comprehension and experience of ideational content, as do the feelings which are manifestations of the mind's activity in believing or disbelieving. Just as a belief state *feels* differently from a state of "mere reverie" (a state of merely contemplating ideational content, with the mind experiencing a low level of evaluative affect while yet maintaining awareness), whatever the state of one's belief or non-belief, the mind must also feel at least some attendant *evaluative* "emotions" or feelings regarding the ideational content it comprehends (T, 2.2.8.4-7/373-5/N240-1). All of this supports my interpretation of Hume's belief theory and is consistent with what he says in paragraphs 2 and 3 of the Appendix. As such, it shows us the deep systematic consistency underlying Hume's view of human cognition and phenomenal experience.

But to return to the problematic concerns raised in the Appendix, let us consider the question that Hume then raises, the question which leads to his apparent objection to my "feeling" theory interpretation:

This, therefore, being regarded as an undoubted truth, *that belief is nothing but a peculiar feeling, different from a simple conception*, the next question, that

naturally occurs, is, *What is the nature of this feeling, or sentiment, and whether it be analogous to any other sentiments of the human mind?* (T, Appendix 3/624/N396).

Again, Hume is *not* referring to ideational content; rather, he is focussed on the belief *feeling*, and is asking whether that feeling is “analogous” or related to any other “sentiments” or feelings of the mind. Now, a feeling in this context is a manifestation of mental activity, according to Hume’s theory, and I have just argued that a whole host of different feelings are manifested by the mind’s various activities in conceiving, comprehending, believing (or not), and evaluating ideational content. So when Hume asks the question as to whether there are any other activities of the mind which operate in a saliently similar manner to the operations which manifest as belief (and which cause us to act accordingly), we should expect an affirmative answer, which Hume does in fact provide.

However, Hume’s answer relies on FLV terminology, so we need to recall that FLV refers to the belief feeling, *not* to ideational content as such, and also that such language is “unphilosophical”, that is to say, metaphorical, given the terminological difficulties in describing mental phenomena: “[T]is very difficult to talk of the operations of the mind with perfect propriety and exactness; because common language has seldom made any very nice distinction among them, but has generally call’d by the same term all such as nearly resemble each other. . . . [T]his is a source almost inevitable of obscurity and confusion” (T, 1.3.8.15/105/N73). Notwithstanding these difficulties, Hume is able to tell us that the activities of the mind when experiencing impressions are indeed “analogous” to the activities of the mind involved in believing an idea.

Now . . . there is a greater firmness and solidity in the conceptions, which are the objects of conviction and assurance, than in the loose and indolent reveries of the castle-builder ... In short, they [the conceptions, that is, the *mental activities* of *conceiving* and comprehending ideational content in a believing manner] approach nearer to the impressions, which are immediately present to us; and are therefore analogous to many other operations of the mind (T, Appendix 3/624/N397).

This statement is strongly supportive of my interpretation both of Hume's belief theory and of his treatment of perceptions in general. Recall that not only have I argued that belief is a two-fold mental phenomenon, composed of ideational content and the resultant or concomitant belief-feeling, but I have also claimed that all perceptions have an *analogous* (to borrow Hume's term) or saliently similar dual aspect ("all perceptions of the mind are double") in the sense that we experience *both* ideational content (the object of the idea or impression) and the attendant feeling manifesting the mental activity involved in that experience of content. It is this feeling, this *felt* awareness/experience-of-content, rather than FLV that allows us to recognize our impressions and ideas for what they are, and to differentiate them, one from the other. After all, in saying that believed-in ideas "approach nearer" to immediate sense impressions, Hume is using a spatial metaphor (i.e., the metaphor of "getting closer to") in describing our feelings when experiencing ideational content. And so the question arises: in what sense does the mind recognize remembered ideas or beliefs as being "closer" to immediate sense impressions? The answer: not by *direct* (i.e., contemporaneous) comparison of ideational content, "it being impossible to recal [i.e., experience] the past impressions, in order to compare them with our present ideas," but rather by the "different feeling" which

remembered ideas (beliefs) have, vis-à-vis mere fictions or conjectures (T, 1.3.5.3-4/85, App 627-8/N59-60). The spatial metaphor applies to feelings—the belief feelings attendant upon memories and beliefs are “closer” to the feelings attendant upon immediate impressions of sensation. This closeness supports Hume’s contention that the operations of the mind involved in both are “analogous.”

In confirming that beliefs are indeed “analogous” to the operations of the mind involved in our experience of impressions, Hume is again focussing on our felt awareness of the mental activity involved in experiencing ideational content. He is, in effect, confirming my contention that the feeling which attends the activity of the mind—activity which is required if we are to experience the ideational content of any perception, whether of an idea believed or an impression assented to—is a manifestation of mental activity of a *general type* (i.e., is “analogous” to other such feelings), whether that activity involves believing an idea, or assenting to the reality of an impression, or evaluating the worth or beauty of an object, action, or phenomenon.

This is not the first time that Hume has analogized belief to impressions. He also makes the same comparison in what he considered to be his own highly original framing of a key question (“never yet explain’d”) regarding belief. In a famous footnote to paragraph 1.3.7.5 of the *Treatise*, Hume focuses on the “acts” (activities) of the mind and argues that the various putative divisions of the “acts of the understanding” heretofore posited are in fact reducible to one type of activity—“conception” (i.e., reducible to the *activity of conceiving* and comprehending ideational content). He goes on to state that the activities of the mind in *understanding* ideational content

are nothing but particular ways of conceiving our objects. Whether we consider a single object, or several; whether we dwell on these objects, or run from them to

others; and in whatever form or order we survey them, the act of the mind exceeds not a simple conception; and the only remarkable difference, which occurs on this occasion, is, when we join belief to the conception, and are perswaded of the truth of what we conceive. This act of the mind has never yet been explain'd by any philosopher; and therefore I am at liberty to propose my hypothesis concerning it; which is, that 'tis only a strong and steady conception of any idea, and such as *approaches in some measure to an immediate impression* (T, 1.3.7.5 n20/96-7/N67; emphasis added).

Ignoring, for the moment, the reliance on FLV terminology (Hume repeats the question in his Appendix material, using “feeling” terminology as well as FLV language; see T, 1.3.7.7/App 628-9/N68), the following points are supportive of my interpretation: Hume is focussing on mental *activity* and claiming that the mind’s experience and understanding of ideational content is a particular *type* of activity—a type that includes believing the ideational content of ideas as well as experiencing (and believing) the ideational content of impressions. That is, experiencing ideational content in a believing way—wherein the felt awareness/experience-of-content includes a feeling of belief in that content, a feeling of cognitive commitment to the reality or truth of that content—is a felt awareness/experience-of-content “such as *approaches in some measure to an immediate impression*” (T, 1.3.7.5 n20/96-97/N67; emphasis added). It is of the same type of feeling as that “belief or assent, which always attends the memory and senses” (T, 1.3.5.7/86/N61).

Hume's Apparent Objection (Appendix 4)

So far, so good, at least for my interpretation. But herein lies the rub. Regarding that which Hume has just acceded to (that is, in apparent support for my interpretation) he now proceeds, or so it at first seems, to voice strong disagreement. But this apparent withdrawal of support in Appendix paragraph 4 is, I argue, only illusory, the result perhaps of a too hastily written challenge to certain opponents of his theory of belief. (In a part of the Appendix written immediately after the portion we are considering, Hume admits to the difficulties in dealing with belief, stating somewhat ruefully, “For my part I must own, that I find a considerable difficulty in the case [i.e. in dealing with belief]; and that even when I think I understand the subject perfectly, I am at a loss for terms to express my meaning” (T, 1.3.7.7/App 628/N68).)

Here is what Hume says, a statement which constitutes a seeming obstacle to my interpretation, at least insofar as my interpretation applies to the *Treatise*, a statement made immediately after concluding that the activities of the mind involved in believing ideational content *are* “analogous” to a wide variety of mental activities, including those involved in experiencing (and comprehending) impressions:

There is not . . . any possibility of evading this conclusion, but by asserting, that belief, beside the simple conception, consists of some impression or feeling, distinguishable from the conception. It does not modify the conception, and render it more present and intense: It is only annex'd to it, after the same manner that will and desire are annex'd to particular conceptions of good and pleasure (T, Appendix 4/625/N397).

Let us consider each part of this characterization of a theoretical position regarding the nature of belief, always remembering that, in the above passage, Hume is characterizing the position of someone who *denies* his own theory.

Let us call this theoretical position, which Hume lambastes, the “opposing view”; let us call any one who holds such a view, “the opponent.” Let us further recall which of the two options regarding belief (i.e., which of the two horns of the dilemma) Hume rejected. This is this option (the option *rejected* by Hume) that must be acceded to by the opponent, that is, by whoever adopts the theoretical position outlined in the first two sentences of paragraph 4. Recall the dilemma:

In my opinion, this dilemma is inevitable. Either the belief is some new idea, such as that of *reality* or *existence*, which we join to the simple conception of an object, or it is merely a peculiar feeling or sentiment (T, Appendix 2/623/N396).

Note that Hume *rejects* the first horn of the dilemma. The second horn, which Hume accepts, leads to his claim that belief is analogous to our experience of impressions. That is, accepting that belief (more exactly, that aspect of belief involved in the “conceiving-in-a-believing-way” type of mental activity, which manifests as belief-feeling) is indeed a “feeling or sentiment” rather than a superadded *idea* of “reality” has led Hume to the following conclusion about the relationship between the belief-activities of the mind and the mental activities involved in experiencing immediate impressions: “In short, they approach nearer to the impressions, which are immediately present to us; and are therefore analogous to many other operations of the mind” (T, Appendix 3/624/N397).

The opponent, having rejected this conclusion of Hume’s, must (given that this conclusion is a logical consequence of the second horn) therefore reject that horn; that is,

the opponent rejects Hume's position that belief involves "a peculiar feeling or sentiment" (T, Appendix 2/623/N396). Therefore, the opponent accedes to the *first* horn of the dilemma (the horn rejected by Hume): the opponent holds that belief is a form of ideational content, and that belief is the result of super-adding this "belief/ideational content" (some putative "existence" or "reality" content) onto the ideational content which is the current object of the mind's activity of conceiving.

I now want to deconstruct the "opposing view" of belief, keeping in mind that the "opponent", in supposedly holding this view, also, under Hume's analysis, adheres to the view that "belief is some new idea, such as that of reality or existence, which we join to the simple conception of an object." Let us call this the "superadded reality content" theory of belief, or the "rationalistic" theory, since the superaddition of content can be seen as an exercise of "pure" reasoning, unaffected by feeling or emotion. We can only properly comprehend the opposing view, as Hume understands it, if we keep in mind that the opponent also holds to this "superadded reality content/rationalistic" theory of belief. And, at the risk of belabouring the point, we must always keep in mind that Hume has expressly claimed that "belief ... is merely a peculiar feeling or sentiment"; that is, the mental activity of *believing* ideational content is manifested by a feeling or sentiment of cognitive commitment to the truth or reality of that content.

So, what are the component parts of the opponent's view of belief, and why does Hume think that view is wrongheaded? The opposing view on belief can be divided into three propositions. Let us analyze each in turn.

First, the opposing view holds that: "*belief, beside the simple conception, consists of some impression or feeling, distinguishable from the conception.*" This is the most

puzzling portion of Hume's formulation of the opposing view, since it seems to be an awkward paraphrase of the "feeling" theory, which Hume—rather than the opponent—accepts. Hume must mean something quite different from a recapitulation of the feeling theory of belief.

The term "simple conception" could mean any number of things, among them: (a) ideational content (that which is conceived); or (b) the activity of merely conceiving, without conceiving in a believing manner; or (c) the mental activity of conceiving-in-a-believing way; or (d) the mental activity of conceiving *and* the ideational content itself (the object of conception). Which, if any, of these possible meanings is most likely? Meanings (b), (c), and (d) are highly unlikely, since using any of them to characterize the opposing view is a serious distortion of the opponent's position. Consider, for example, attributing meaning (b) ("simple conception" means "the activity of merely conceiving in a non-believing manner") to Hume's characterization of the opponent's position. This portrays the opponent as maintaining that belief consists of the mental act of conceiving in a non-believing fashion plus experiencing some feeling (the belief-feeling?) that is distinguishable from that mental activity. But this is, if anything, Hume's *very own* belief theory (or a variant of it); it is decidedly *not* the opponent's theory of belief.

For similar reasons, we cannot impute meanings (c) and (d) to the opponent, since they too include mental activity (conceiving), while the opponent's belief theory, according to Hume, is all about the super addition of some ill-defined "reality" ideational content, not about the role of mental activity in belief.

But this leaves us with meaning (a), and surely, Hume *cannot* be using "simple conception" to mean (a), that is, ideational content without reference to mental activity:

such a reading requires that he reject the very view of belief (“merely a peculiar feeling or sentiment”) which he has adopted in the immediately preceding paragraphs. Or so a “common sense” interpretation of the statement would have it. Let us review the statement, with “simple conception” taken to mean “ideational content” (the object or subject matter of thought). The statement becomes “*belief, beside [ideational content], consists of some impression or feeling, distinguishable from the conception.*” In other words, the opponent is characterized as holding that belief consists of ideational content plus some feeling, which is distinguishable from that content. But any feeling, given that all feelings are impressions (not ideas), is in fact readily *distinguishable* from an idea (ideational content, or the subject matter of perception, considered as content), so long as we understand this distinguishability to be achievable via a distinction of reason. So, on the “common sense” reading, if by “simple conception”, Hume means ideational content, then he has told us that the opponent adheres to essentially the same view as does Hume himself.

But of course that cannot be. So Hume must mean something else when he makes the initial statement of the opponent’s position. Here is a suggestion: Hume could mean “ideational content” when he refers to the “simple conception”, but only if the second part of the statement—“*some impression or feeling, distinguishable from the conception*”—also refers to some *experientially separable* (as opposed to distinguishable only by means of a distinction of reason) impressions’ ideational content, content which is the superadded ideational content of “existence” or reality experienced as an impression, rather than to the belief-*feeling*. The key here is that the opponent is claiming that the belief feeling is *always experientially separable* from ideational content qua

content, and that the ideational content of that putative ‘belief-impression’, when added to the ideational content which is the subject matter of conceiving, will result in belief and is required for belief. If that is so, then Hume’s terminology is, to say the least, confusing, given that he has just used the term “feeling” in a completely different sense in his expression of the correct belief theory. That is, Hume has used “feeling” interchangeably with the related term “sentiment”, in paragraphs 2 and 3, and has clearly referred to feeling as the belief feeling, which differentiates non-believed conceiving from conceiving-in-a-believing-manner. Hence, my reluctant charge of too-hasty composition, in that Hume now appears, in paragraph 4, to be using the term “feeling” interchangeably with a (fictional, non-existent) “impression” of “reality” or “existence”.

The most charitable interpretation of this first part of the first sentence in paragraph 4 is that a denial of Hume’s own theory of belief entails that the opponent hold, firstly, that: “belief, beside [ideational content], consists of some superadded ideational content of ‘existence’ or ‘reality’, *experientially* distinguishable from the ideational content which is the subject matter or object of belief.”

The second main component of the opposing view—“*It [i.e., belief] does not modify the conception, and render it more present and intense.*”—can now be understood as follows: “Belief does not affect the *experience* of ideational content”; that is, Hume is characterizing his opponent as viewing belief as a special form of ideational content—some sort of “existence” or “reality” content that *tells* the mind that the ideational content which is the subject matter of thought now has the status of “ideational content that is believed.” The opponent is portrayed as claiming that this happens without any change in mental activity, without the experience of ideational content becoming “more present and

intense.” (I am thus suggesting, in my discussion of Hume’s arguments against the opposing view, that Hume’s targets are the rationalists, those holding to a “superadded reality content/rationalistic” theory of belief.)

The third component of the opposing view: “*It [i.e., belief] is only annex’d to it [i.e., the conception or ideational content simpliciter], after the same manner that will and desire are annex’d to particular conceptions of good and pleasure.*” Here Hume is clearly portraying the opponent as relying on a notion of distinguishability which involves what I have called *experiential separability*: The opposing view sees this specialized (in Hume’s view, fictitious) “reality” ideational content as having been *superadded* or “annex’d” onto the pre-existing ideational content, the content which is the subject matter of thinking (that is, the “object” of conceiving in a believing or non-believing fashion), in much the same way as desire accompanies or is “annex’d” to our notions of what is desirable (“the good”). Just as volition accompanies desire, here content is superadded under direct volitional control of the mind.

That is, Hume could be alluding to his worry that holding what I have called the “superadded reality content/rationalistic” theory of belief allows us to also hold that belief is voluntary, subject to our desires and our will; it is thereby eliminated as a viable possibility via an implied *reductio*. That is, experience clearly tells us that belief is *not*, in normal circumstances, under our volitional control; the “superadded reality content” theory implies that belief *is* voluntary, under the control of the imagination’s desires and the dictates of rationality; therefore the theory is incorrect. Such a reading is reinforced if we consider Hume’s similar comments, concerning volitional control and belief’s lack of relationship to matters which “can be commanded at pleasure” in the first *Enquiry*: “the

difference between fiction and belief lies in some sentiment or feeling, which is annexed to the latter, not to the former, and which depends not on the will, nor can be commanded at pleasure. It must be excited by nature, *like all other sentiments*” (E, 5.11/48/B40; emphasis added). Hume’s theory divorces any supposed connection between the will and desire, on the one hand, and belief on the other. The opponents’ view joins volition (and the desires which give rise to volition) to belief, contrary to all of our experiential evidence, and is therefore mistaken.

So, the third component, again in relation to the opponents’ theory, not Hume’s, can be interpreted as follows: “Belief [i.e., the “superadded reality ideational” content] is attached to the ideational content which is the subject matter of our thinking, and this is done pursuant to our desires and is subject to our volitional control.”

Hume’s Argument Against the Opposing View of Belief

In light of this interpretation, Hume’s arguments against the opponent become less puzzling, and more convincing. That is, it can now be more easily seen as an argument against “rationalistic” opponents, rather than as an objection to my interpretation of Hume’s own belief theory. Hume advances a four-part argument, as follows. I will quote the salient portions of each part of the argument, and then deal with each part separately. The first part of the reply to the opponents:

[The opponents’ “hypothesis”] is directly contrary to experience, and our immediate consciousness. All men have ever allow’d reasoning to be merely an operation of our thoughts or ideas; and however those ideas may be vary’d to the feeling, there is nothing ever enters our conclusions but ideas, or our fainter conceptions . . . this whole operation is perform’d by the thought or imagination alone. The transition is immediate. The ideas presently strike us. Their customary

connexion with present impression, varies them and modifies them in a certain manner, but produces no act of the mind, distinct from this peculiarity of conception (T, Appendix 4/625-6/N397-8).

Let us call this part, the “argument from causal inference” (the third part is a variation of this). The “peculiarity of the conception”, on my interpretation refers to the *felt* determination of the mind, the feeling of inevitability which is the manifestation of the mental activity involved in causal inference. The opponents’ view of belief would require that, in addition to the causal inference, which after all results in a new belief—belief in the existence or reality of the object or event that is the attendant to the experience giving rise to the inference—there be further ideational content, some idea of “reality” or “existence” superadded to the content being experienced. But, as Hume tells us, no such additional content obtains; all we have is the feeling of inevitability, the felt determination of the mind. Further, the belief feeling is an integral part of the felt awareness/experience-of-content; it is not an experientially separable activity of the mind, separable from this felt awareness-of-content.

The second part of the argument:

[I]t must be allow’d, that the mind has a firmer hold, or more steady conception of what it takes to be a matter of fact, than of fictions. Why then look any farther, or multiply suppositions without necessity? (T, Appendix 5/626/N398).

My comments will be brief. While the phrases “firmer hold” and “more steady” do reflect a continuing reliance on FLV terminology, if my interpretation of Hume’s belief theory is correct, he is simply referring to the belief feeling itself—the feelings which manifest the mind’s activity in believing differ from mere feelings of the imagination, or “fictions.”

“Firmness” and “steadiness” are not attributes of content *per se*, but rather of the belief feeling.

The third part of the argument is simply a different way of expressing Hume’s concern that the opponents’ view of belief requires the superaddition of ideational content onto the content which is the subject matter of a causal inference:

We can explain the causes of the firm conception, but not those of any separate impression. And not only so, but the causes of the firm conception exhaust the whole subject, and nothing is left to produce any other effect. An inference concerning a matter of fact is nothing but the idea of the object, that has been frequently conjoin’d, or is associated with a present impression (T, Appendix 6/626/N398).

The “separate impression” referred to in the above passage is superadded ideational content of “existence” or “reality”, the causes of which are, according to Hume, perfectly inexplicable (see T, 1.2.6/66-68/N48-49). The reference to an “inference concerning a matter of fact” refers us back to Hume’s “classic” definition of belief: “An opinion, therefore, or belief may be most accurately defin’d, A LIVELY IDEA RELATED TO OR ASSOCIATED WITH A PRESENT IMPRESSION” (T, 1.3.7.5/96/N67). As we have already seen, this “classic” definition, while it lends itself to an FLV explication of Hume’s belief theory in its use of the term “lively”, is in fact consonant with Hume’s depiction of belief as involving a “peculiar *feeling* or *sentiment*” (the second horn of the Appendix 2 dilemma) in that it rests on the following premises, all from *Treatise* paragraph 1.3.7.5:

Premise (i): “When you wou’d any way vary the idea of a particular object, you can only encrease or diminish its force and vivacity. If you make any other change on it, it represents a different object or impression”;

Premise (ii): “belief does nothing but vary the manner, in which we conceive any object”; therefore (from (i) and (ii)):

Conclusion (iii): “[belief] can only bestow on our ideas an additional force and vivacity.”

We need to recall the implications of Hume’s express repudiation of premise (i) in his final Appendix 22 correction: “I believe there are other differences among ideas, which cannot properly be comprehended under these terms [i.e., under FLV terminology of “different degrees of force and vivacity’].” Instead of relying on FLV as the essential mode of belief differentiation amongst ideational content, as his initial draft of Book 1 would imply, Hume tells us that, “two ideas of the same object can only be different by their different *feeling*” (T, Appendix 22/636/N401; emphasis in the original). Variation in one’s belief state vis-à-vis a particular set of ideational content is now acknowledged to be *dependent on a variation of attendant feeling*, rather than on a variation in the intensity level of FLV. As a consequence, premise (i) no longer obtains; that is, Hume has, by his remarks at Appendix 22, disavowed this premise.

The premise should now be read along the following lines, with the proposed amendment italicized and placed in square brackets:

Premise (i) [amended]: “When you wou’d any way vary the idea of a particular object, you can only [*change the feeling that attends upon the idea*]. If you make any other change on it, it represents a different object or impression.”

Of course, this amendment to premise (i), if accepted as a consequence of Hume's Appendix correction, completely destroys FLV as a useful way to characterize the phenomenal experience of believing in ideational content. Therefore, belief is *not* a matter of FLV intensity, notwithstanding Hume's repeated references to it along those lines. The definition to which Hume hearkens back to should now be read as if it stated: "An opinion, therefore, or belief may be most accurately defin'd, AN IDEA ACCOMPANIED BY THE PECULIAR *FEELING* OR *SENTIMENT* OF BELIEF RELATED TO OR ASSOCIATED WITH A PRESENT IMPRESSION." The definition now accords with the second (correct) horn of Hume's Appendix 2 dilemma.

The final part of Hume's Appendix 4 argument again relies on FLV terminology, but really only amounts to the claim that belief can be adequately explained by the belief feeling, and there is no need to introduce some other operation of the mind:

The *effects* of belief, in influencing the passions and imagination, can all be explain'd from the firm conception; and there is no occasion to have recourse to any other principle (T, Appendix 7/626/N398).

Now, I want to again emphasize that, even after making these points, Hume still holds onto his position that the only essential difference between believing an idea (ideational content or "matter of fact"), on the one hand, and merely contemplating or considering or doubting or disbelieving that same idea, on the other, rests in the *manner of conceiving* of that idea, that is, in the activity of the mind in its experience of ideational content. And I have argued that this manner of *conceiving-in-a-believing-way* is an *activity* of the mind that can only manifest itself to us as a *feeling*, i.e., the belief feeling. This belief feeling is an "original quality" of the mind, "inseparable from the soul" (T, 2.1.3.3/280/N184); that is, the belief-feeling, along with the activities of the mind of

which it is a manifestation, is “an original and natural instinct” of the mind, part of “the primary constitution of the mind” (T, 2.1.5.3/286/N187). And, as we have seen (T, Appendix paragraph 4 and T, 1.3.7.5 n20/96-7/N67), this original quality of the mind is “analogous” to that quality of the mind which operates during the experiencing of “immediate” impressions: “’tis . . . such as approaches in some measure to an immediate impression” (T, 1.3.7.5 n20/97/N187). Hume is presenting belief as part of a systematic, unified picture of human cognition. Belief formation is a natural phenomenon of the mind, a “sensitive” (i.e. affective) phenomenon, analogous to experiencing impressions, rather than a purely rationalistic process (recall T, 1.4.1.8/183/N123: “*belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures*”).

Thus, I argue, in discussing these four argumentative parts, that Hume is simply reiterating his central claim that this *manner* or way of conceiving certain ideational content (when that content is conceived of in a *believing* fashion) does not consist of, nor does it rely on, the annexing of some further ideational content onto either the believing process or onto the ideational content which is the object of that process. Rather, this manner or way of conceiving is Hume’s way of referring to *mental activity* (conceiving of or experiencing ideational content in a believing manner) which manifests itself to us as the belief feeling.

We can see further indications of this in Hume’s “two questions of importance”, as well as from his discussion of the phrase “manner of conceiving” described in terms of FLV (force, liveliness, vivacity, and related terms):

There appear to be two questions of importance . . . *Whether there be any thing to distinguish belief from the simple conception beside the feeling or sentiment?*

And, *Whether this feeling be any thing but a firmer conception, or a faster hold, that we take of the object?* (T, Appendix 8/627/N398).

Again, we should remind ourselves that “belief” is best read as a process noun, as “believing” and that in this context, “simple conception” is best interpreted as “conceiving without actually believing”. Hume is again claiming that the only way to differentiate between the two is the *feeling* manifested to the mind, and he goes on (very partially, very roughly, and very metaphorically) to describe that feeling (of believing) as a “firmer” way of conceiving of ideational content, or as having a “faster” or firmer hold on that content. But this “manner” of conceiving, the “manner” involved in believing, while experienced by us all, is perhaps impossible to fully describe. A lengthy quotation, written a few paragraphs later in the Appendix as originally drafted (meant to be inserted in the body of the *Treatise* as per Hume’s instructions), is needed to give a full sense of Hume’s difficulty in description and his empirical basis for rejecting the rationalist version of belief:

This operation of the mind, which forms the belief of any matter of fact, seems hitherto to have been one of the greatest mysteries of philosophy; tho’ no one has so much as suspected, that there was any difficulty in explaining it. For my part I must own, that I find a considerable difficulty in the case; and that even when I think I understand the subject perfectly, I am at a loss for terms to express my meaning. I conclude ... that an opinion or belief is nothing but an idea, that is different from a fiction, not in the nature, or order of its parts, but in the *manner* of its being conceiv’d. But when I wou’d explain this manner, I scarce find any word that fully answers the case, but am oblig’d to have recourse to every one’s feeling, in order to give him a perfect notion of this operation of the mind. An idea assented to *feels* different from a fictitious idea, that the fancy alone presents to us: And this different feeling I endeavour to explain by calling it a superior

force, or *vivacity*, or *solidity*, or *firmness*, or *steadiness*. This variety of terms, which may seem so unphilosophical, is intended only to express that act of the mind, which renders realities more present to us than fictions, causes them to weigh more in the thought, and gives them a superior influence on the passions and imagination. Provided we agree about the thing, 'tis needless to dispute about the terms (T, 1.3.7.7/Appendix 628-9/N68).

We can contrast this rather tortured commentary with the fairly quick, almost perfunctory treatments of other basic internal impressions, such as the impression of the will (T, 2.3.1.2/399/N257); Hume is clearly aware that he is immersed in conceptual and descriptive difficulty in his treatment of belief.

Of course, I have expended considerable effort attempting to clarify Hume's terminology and highlight the essentials of his actual belief theory. I have also argued that he was, or should have been, well aware of the significance of replacing (in the final three sentences of the *Treatise*, no less) "degrees of force and vivacity"—FLV terminology par excellence—with difference in *feeling* as the essential criterion of belief (T, Appendix 22/636/N400-401). With this belated correction, Hume implicitly concedes that FLV type terminology should be interpreted in terms of feelings of belief, as signifiers of what Hume is really discussing, namely the activity of the mind in believing.

The rationalist theory of belief formation ignores these concerns and fails to address certain empirically observable facts about human cognition, facts which introspection (empirical or, in Hume's terms, "experimental" observation of the mind's perceptions) and reflection make available to those of us willing and able to expend the effort.

Chapter 5: The Puzzle of the External and the Internal

The fundamental problem with Hume's treatment of the "puzzle" of how we come to believe in independent, continuous, external objects (which I will call "object belief"), at least insofar as he deals with this issue in the *Treatise* (the first *Enquiry* avoids the issue), is that he attempts to analyze this basic belief (which Kemp Smith labelled one of Hume's "natural" beliefs) without referring either to the belief feeling itself or to a fundamental aspect of the belief feeling as one of many affects or feelings, each of which "secretly attends" whatever ideational content the mind conceives of or experiences (T, 2.2.8.7/375/N241), an aspect of his belief theory which is implicit, albeit never fully articulated, throughout his system.

Thus, what is implicit in Hume's treatment of the belief feeling as the phenomenally experienced manifestation of the mind's actions, is this: we experience our cognitive commitment to that which is perceived *as an external object* (experienced as "an immediate impression" (e.g., T, 1.3.6.7/86/N61) or "impression of sensation"), not as a theoretical idea that the object has "existence" or "reality" independent of the ideational content of the object's properties (i.e. the propositionally articulable attributes of the object), but rather as a *feeling* that such ideational content, *as experienced* (i.e., experienced in a certain manner or way), is of a certain "family" or grouping of content. That is, certain types of ideational content, such as pains or pleasures or, for that matter, bodily awareness (i.e., proprioception, which is, admittedly, never discussed by Hume), are experienced (felt) as *of a kind*, while other types of ideational content, such as external entities and events, are felt (and therefore grouped by the mind) in a different way and as a different type or kind.

Again, none of this explicit in Hume, but it is the most palatable implication arising from his settled view, in the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*, concerning the nature and causes of belief. Once FLV is rejected as the essential foundation of belief, and replaced with feeling, Hume's theory must (at the very least) recognize the *possibility* of two basic families of feeling, each of which is an original quality or instinct of the mind, each of whose respective propositional ideational content is minimally (and only approximately) as follows: on the one hand, a feeling of internality, i.e., "of this"; on the other its opposing feeling, i.e. "not-of-this" or "of-that." The first feeling ("of this") can be expressed more fully as, "this ideational content is of the mind itself; it is internal, generated from within, not from without", so long as we recognize that the feeling does not contain any propositional reference to a theoretical entity, such as the mind itself, but is inchoate and non-theoretical. Any references to theoretical entities, to "relative" ideas of the internal operations of the mind, or to an unchanging "self", for example, are based on our recollection of the feeling, and on our tendency to provide explanations for our experiences—the feeling of internality itself has no theoretical content. By way of contrast with the feeling of internality, the second, contrasting feeling is that of externality, i.e., "of that" or "of not-this" (or: "this ideational content is *not* of the mind itself; it is *not* internal, not generated from within but rather generated from without").

The objection to this interpretation of Hume is likely to be along lines set out in section 1.2.6 ("Of the idea of existence, and of external existence") and in section 1.4.2 ("Of scepticism with regard to the senses"). Firstly, it might be argued that I am doing precisely what Hume warned against in 1.2.6, namely that I am trying to "sneak in by the back door", so to speak, the highly suspect ideational content of "existence" or "reality"

as an attribute or property that can be conceived in the mind, separate and apart from ideational content which is the “object” of belief (or non-belief, as the case may be), and then grafted or “annex’d” onto that ideational content. And, of course, this is precisely what Hume, in the Appendix, accused those who denied his theory of belief as doing. Hume denies the viability of any such move: “There is no impression nor idea of any kind, of which we have any consciousness or memory, that is not conceived as existent; and ‘tis evident, that from this consciousness the most perfect idea of *being* [i.e., of existence] is deriv’d” (T, 1.2.6.2/66/N48). The ideational content of all immediate impressions (and of all memories derived from those impressions) is always conceived of as “existent”; no “annexing” of some magical, fictitious “reality” ideational content is needed (or possible). This is an empirical, observable fact concerning the human mind, and is partly what Hume means when he later states: “*belief or assent* ... always attends the memory and senses” (T, 1.3.5.6 /86/N61).

But what is actually more salient to my current purposes is the second half of the above-quoted portion of paragraph 1.2.6.2: “*from this consciousness* the most perfect idea of *being* is deriv’d” (emphasis added). “Consciousness” should be understood as the *experience* of the ideational content contained in memory or sense impressions; consciousness is therefore a manifestation of the mental activity involved in such experiencing of content. That is, consciousness *just is* the mental activity involved in being aware of the ideational content; it is “the action of the mind in the meditation, that certain *je-ne-sçais-quoi*, of which ’tis impossible to give any definition or description, but which every one sufficiently understands” (T, 1.3.9.15/106/N74); furthermore, this

experienced awareness is *felt* by the mind—this feeling is the way, indeed the only way, in which can be aware of its own operations.

What we label, after reflecting on this “action of the mind”, as our notion of “existence” or “reality” or “being” is a notion derived from our felt experience of the ideational content of our sense impressions, feelings which I have argued are, as a matter of contingent fact of human cognition, *experientially inseparable* from the experience of any ideational content, but which can be “*as if*” differentiated from content by means of a “*distinction of reason,*” in the same way that Hume rationally separates the “action of the mind in the meditation” from the “objects” of thought in his discussion of our recollection of an idea (T, 1.3.8.16/106/N74). But if such feelings are abstracted (and strictly speaking they cannot be experientially separated) from the ideational content of the actual experience, the notion of “of this” or “not-of-this” lacks content—it is a “relative idea”, an “idea” without any independent ideational content—in Humean terms, a mere “supposition”, the ideational content of which is “unknown and incomprehensible” (T, 1.4.5.23/244/N160)). All that one has, in contemplating such a relative idea, is the memory of the *feeling* that one believed in the ideational content experienced, and that the content felt *as though* it originated from without (“not-of-this”) or from within (“of this”). After all, Hume’s empirical claim that “*belief or assent ... always attends the memory and senses*” has to do with believing in that which is or was experienced as an *external* reality (in the case of, for example, visual sense impressions) or a “system” of “realities” (T, 1.3.5.6-7/86/N61).

That is, accepting or believing the impressions of the senses simply means taking the ideational content of such experiences to be “external objects ... existences, which

remain uniform and independent” (E, 12.8-9/151-52/B113-14) or as “concerning matter of fact; that is, concerning the existence of objects or their qualities” (T, 1.3.7.1/94/N65). It is important to recall that the belief in, or assent to, a sense impression (of say, an object such as an apple) is not simply assenting to the fact that one is experiencing ideational content, although surely that feeling is contained within the belief feeling. Rather, Hume is confirming our phenomenal experience: assenting to the impression means that we believe in the *external* existence or mind-independent “reality” of the object. The object, as experienced and as remembered, is not experienced as “of this”; it is not experienced as generated solely from *within* the mind.

Hume goes on to explain how this comes about, in his discussion of our “system” of “realities” (T, 1.3.9.2-8, esp. 3,4 /107-110/N74-76) and, much more elaborately, in his overall discussion at 1.4.2. But before examining those parts of the Treatise, we need to continue with 1.2.6. Our impressions are experienced as existent:

[W]e may form a dilemma, the most clear and conclusive that can be imagin’d, *viz.* that since we never remember any idea or impression without attributing existence to it, the idea of existence must either be deriv’d from a distinct impression, conjoin’d with every perception or object of our thought, or must be the very same with the idea of the perception or object (T, 1.2.6.2/66/N48).

By “distinct impression”, Hume means distinct ideational content experienced as an impression *different from* the impression to which existence has been attributed; but experience shows us that no such *independently experienced* ideational content obtains. Thus, Hume tells us that the second horn of the dilemma must obtain (that is, that the so-called “idea” of existence just *is* whatever happens to be the ideational content experienced as existent, that is, the ideational content of the impression to which

existence has been attributed). This is because, not only do we never find (in our examination of the mind) any “distinct impression” (in the sense of experientially distinct ideational content) which is always attached to every idea and every impression of that-which-is-believed-to-exist, but we will *never* find “any two distinct impressions, which are inseparably conjoin’d” (T, 1.2.6.3/66/N48).

This position is a direct consequence of Hume’s phenomenal atomism. According to Hume, there are a determinate number of, for example, visual atoms or minima within the field of vision (see, for example, T, 1.3.9.11/112/N77: “the eye at all times sees an equal number of physical points”). By parity of reason, all tactile sensations, sensations of sound, impressions of sense of any kind, and all ideational contents derived therefrom, are also composed of a determinate number of “atoms” of sensation. Those atoms, experienced in the aggregate through the mind’s mental activity, compose the ideational content of each perception, as it occurs, and as it, or any fragmentary portion of it, are remembered. There is no “non-sensational minima” of ideational content (so-called “existence” atoms) that can be grafted onto the atoms of ideational content gleaned by the mind from experienced sensation.

Now, we need to remember that the complete ideational content of an impression is seldom, if ever, fully captured in the remembered ideational content. Recall Hume’s reference to Paris: “many of our complex impressions never are exactly copy’d in ideas. . . . I have seen *Paris*, but shall I affirm I can form an idea of that city, as will perfectly represent all its streets and houses in their real and just proportions” (T, 1.1.1.4/3/N8). If we analyze the fragmentary “bits” of ideational content (“the parts or composition of the idea, which we conceive” (T, 1.3.7.2/95/N66)), we will never find any aggregation of bits

(phenomenal atoms or corpuscles) that are *always* conjoined with other aggregations. Simply put, under Hume's phenomenal atomism, any atomic or fragmentary "bit" of perception (any "part" of ideational content) could be linked to any other bit.

It is important to emphasize that none of this harms my interpretation of Hume's belief-theory as it pertains to object belief. My claim, roughly put, is that the *feeling* of internality or externality regarding ideational content is not "contained" within that content at all. Rather, the feeling of internality/externality arises from (is a manifestation of) or arises simultaneously with the mind's activity in *experiencing* that ideational content. That is to say, the feeling of internality or externality (as the case may be) is an affective, instinctual aspect of the experience of content. Ideational content itself, as content, does not tell the mind whether the content is internal (a thought generated by the mind) or external (a sensation generated by something other than the mind). Rather, "nature", via the mind's affects and feelings, indicates whether an experience is a mere thought or an impression of sensation. Again, this echoes what can be seen as the dual aspect of all experience: the mind is aware of ideational content, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, also aware (albeit often in a dispositional sense only and not in any experientially separable way) of its own mental activity, that is "the action of the mind in the meditation, that certain *je-ne-sçais-quoi*, of which 'tis impossible to give any definition or description, but which every one sufficiently understands" (T, 1.3.9.15/106/N74).

Causal Inference Presupposes Object Belief

Before I move on to section 1.3.9, and Hume's discussion of the "system" of "realities", namely the external world which all of us, pre-theoretically, believe in, I need to emphasize that this belief in an external world, this "object belief", is clearly seen by Hume as obtaining *before*, and as a necessary precondition for, causal inference. That is, causal inference can only obtain once an object is *felt* to be an object external to, and independent of, the mind experiencing it; it is only then that causal inference can even begin to emerge, much less operate. This is the case because causal inference involves object belief, but cannot itself be the source of such belief. Consider the following, representative, statements by Hume. First, causal inference cannot be the ultimate source of object belief:

[T]he relation of cause and effect can never afford us any just conclusion from the existence or qualities of our perceptions to the existence of external continu'd objects (T, 1.4.2.54/216/N143). [This is because] as all reasoning's concerning matters of fact [i.e., concerning the existence of external objects] arises only from custom, and custom can only be the effect of repeated perceptions, the extending of custom and reasoning beyond the perceptions can never be the direct and natural effect of the constant repetition and connexion, but must arise from the co-operation of some other principles (T, 1.4.2.21/198/N132).

Thus, we see that object belief requires some "other principles" in order to obtain; further, these "other principles" precede causal inference, given that object belief is already operating when we reason causally. So we have a second representative position: "All our arguments concerning causes and effects consist both of an impression of the memory or senses, and of the idea of that *existence*, which produces the object of the impression, or is produced by it" (T, 1.3.5.2/84/N59; emphasis added).

I have emphasized the word “existence” in order to indicate that causal inference *presupposes* external existence of the objects, both of the impression and of the ideational content believed in as a result of the causal inference. If anything, Hume articulates this position more clearly in the first *Enquiry*:

We may observe, that, in these phænomena, the belief of the correlative object is always presupposed; without which the relation could have no effect. The influence of the picture [of a person long absent] supposes, that we *believe* our friend to have once existed. Contiguity to home can never excite our ideas of home, unless we *believe* that it really exists (E, 5.20/54/B44).

Indeed, in Hume’s *Enquiry* discussion of probable reasoning (i.e., in sections 4, 5, and 12) he takes it as a given that the conclusions of causal inferences are beliefs in matters of fact or “real existences” (see, for example, E 26, 27, 35, 42, 164). All of this is consistent with what Hume states in 1.2.6 of the *Treatise*, concerning the “idea” or ideational content of “external existence”:

[T]is impossible for us so much as to conceive or form an idea of any thing specifically different from ideas and impressions. . . . The farthest we can go towards a conception of external objects, when suppos’d *specifically* different from our perceptions, is to form a relative idea of them, without pretending to comprehend the related objects (T, 1.2.6.8-9/67-68/N49).

In other words, there simply is no ideational content in our notion of external objects, over and above the content contained in our impressions and memories of them. Our belief in the external existence of such content is not derived from the content itself, but rather from the mental activity of the mind as it experiences that content. And Hume is

adamant that such object belief is *not* derived from causal inference. So, from whence does our belief in external existence come?

Now, I have argued that this belief is part of, or inextricably linked to, the belief feeling experienced as a manifestation of the mind's activity, first in experiencing impressions, and then in experiencing memories of those impression. And nothing said about causal inferences or the lack of "*specifically* different" ideational content (T, 1.2.6.9/68/N49) harms my interpretation, since the belief-feeling does not contribute towards "the parts or composition" (T, 1.3.7.2/95/N66) of ideational content, but rather reflects or manifests the mind's activity in conceiving and experiencing that content. Further, this picture fits well with what Hume has to say concerning our belief in the "system" of "realities" which constitutes our experience of, and belief in, the external world.

Section 1.3.9: Our "System" of "Reality"

Section 1.3.9 ("Of the effects of other relations and other habits") involves an analysis of how it is that only certain types of perceptions—sense-impressions, memories, and causal inferences—are "comprehended" (that is, understood and believed in) as a coherent "system" of "reality" or "realities", while other relations, such as resemblance and contiguity do not (normally) result in object belief. Martin Bell (2002) has suggested that Hume's reliance on FLV terminology in Book 1 of the *Treatise* leads to a difficulty—a potential objection to Hume's belief theory—which Hume attempts to answer at paragraphs 1.3.9.3-4/107-109/N73.

Recall that in the main text of the *Treatise*, Hume has claimed that the difference between ideational content believed in and content merely conceived of does not, in its essence, consist in a difference in the content itself. Since this is the case, it might be thought that the difference between belief and mere supposition can consist only in a difference in FLV (at least that is the original, “official”, or standard version of the Humean position):

When you wou’d any way vary the idea of a particular object [i.e., without changing ideational content], you can only encrease or diminish its force and vivacity. If you make any other change on it, it represents a different object or impression (T, 1.3.7/96/N67).

Now, interestingly, Hume does not repeat this claim in the first *Enquiry*; rather, he characterizes the difference between merely conceiving and actually believing ideational content as a difference in “some sentiment or feeling, which is *annexed* to the latter [i.e., belief] but not to the former [i.e., non-belief]” (E, 5.11/48/B40; emphasis added). This is consistent with the revisions already referred to in the Appendix of the *Treatise*. Recall that in the Appendix Hume adds a correction to his claim that the only possible difference between believing and merely conceiving resides in a difference in FLV. Hume admits to an “error”

. . . where I say, that two ideas of the same object can only be different by their different degrees of force and vivacity. I believe there are other differences among ideas, which cannot be properly comprehended under these terms. Had I said, that two ideas of the same object can only be different by their different *feeling*, I shou’d have been nearer the truth (T, Appendix 22/636/N400-401).

One of the reasons why this characterization of the essential difference between belief and non-belief in terms of FLV is an error becomes apparent in section 1.3.9 of the *Treatise*, where Hume confronts the following problem. The FLV belief theory does not provide Hume with a principled (as opposed to *ad hoc*) way of dealing with the experienced fact that causal inferences create belief, whereas continuity and resemblance, though helpful to belief formation, are not by themselves sufficient, even when there high intensity levels of FLV are present—as when, for example, one is experiencing a vivid piece of fiction. After all, Hume has admitted that fiction, even when experienced vividly, does not normally engender belief.

As Hume formulates the problem, *if* the only difference between belief and non-belief is FLV, and *if* all there is to belief is an “enlivening” of ideational content, then “it shou’d follow, that the action of the mind [i.e., in believing ideational content] may not only be deriv’d from the relation of cause and effect, but also from those of contiguity and resemblance” (T, 1.3.9.2/107/N75). Hume confronts this problem prior to his correction in the Appendix to the *Treatise*, so that at the time he drafts his solution to the problem, he is “officially” still seemingly wedded to the FLV position. Nevertheless, his solution involves an implicit retreat from FLV as an essential ingredient of belief, or at least an acknowledgement that FLV is not fully explanatory of belief as a natural phenomenon.

Certain perceptions (sense impressions, memories, and causal inferences) but not others are, according to Hume “comprehended” (i.e., understood or believed in) together as “systems” of “realities” or independent existences (T, 1.3.9.3-4/107-8/N75). The first such system is formed by the mind *before* causal inference: “Of these impression or ideas

of the memory we form a kind of system, comprehending whatever we remember to have been present, either to our internal perception or senses; and every particular of that system, join'd to the present impressions, we are pleas'd to call a *reality*." As Martin Bell (2002, 182) says, "the impressions of sense and ideas of memory [as portrayed in T, 1.3.9.3] . . . are immediately and non-inferentially regarded as presenting their objects as *real existences*" (emphasis added). It is only after this system of perceptions operates within the mind that conditions are amenable to the operation of causal inference. Having established a system of object belief based on immediate impressions and memory, the mind finds that there is another system, "connected by custom, or if you will, by the relation of cause or effect." Since the mind "feels that 'tis in a manner necessarily determin'd" to view the ideas derived from causal inference as "realities" as well, it proceeds to form "a new system, which it likewise dignifies with the title of *realities*. The first of these systems is the object of the memory and senses; the second of judgment [i.e., of belief]" (T, 1.3.9.3/108/N75).

Thus, object belief is pre-theoretical, operating prior to *any* reasoning (causal or other) whatsoever, while on the other hand causal inference forms a system of realities antecedent to and *dependent upon* the original, immediate, and instinctive system of object belief. Object belief, at its origin, is a natural, immediately occurring, instinct of the mind. Note also that on my interpretation Hume is claiming, without argument (perhaps he is relying on our phenomenal experience of the mind's operations), that the mind has already, *before making* causal inferences, differentiated certain experiences as "internal perceptions" and others as sensory or external. External object belief is not the only immediate instinctive operation of the mind; belief in the internal is also immediate

experienced and believed in *as internal*. Clearly, even though Hume continues to use FLV language (e.g., he refers to memories and immediate impressions “striking upon the mind with a vivacity”), the means by which the mind actually differentiates the internal from the external is explicable neither in terms of FLV nor in terms of causal inference.

What I would suggest is that, as he writes this passage (T, 1.3.9), Hume is already moving away from FLV and towards a “feeling” theory of belief; further, this belief feeling, on my interpretation, includes, at least by implication, pre-theoretical feelings of *internality* and of *externality*, which allow the mind to differentiate (prior to causal inference and therefore pre-theoretically) internal perceptions from those perceptions—the immediate impressions of sensation—which are *experienced as external* or as externally generated. Such a pre-causal, pre-theoretical, immediate, and instinctive system is necessary for the operation of causal inference firstly because causal inference must operate quickly and from an “external realism” stance of experiential intelligibility so that we can immediately and effectively interact with the external objects of the world of experience. Furthermore, in order that it be effective in helping us cope with the world, causal inference requires that the mind recognize salient similarities amongst perceptions that are felt to be in a causal relation; whether or not perceptions are internally generated, as are mere thoughts, or externally generated, as in the case of external objects, would almost certainly be the most salient such similarity.

Further, as Hume tells us, object belief must, in our interactions with the world, operate even more immediately and exigently than does causal inference. Our perceptions of pain and pleasure (our positive and negative feelings) are, says Hume, “the chief spring and moving principle of all [the mind’s] actions” (T, 1.3.10.2/118/N81). But the

immediacy of this motivating principle depends on whether the ideational content is experienced as an impression (i.e., as object belief) or as an idea believed in (as occurs in causal inference). Impressions are more immediate and exigent: “Impressions always actuate the soul, and that in the highest degree, but ‘tis not every idea [i.e., all instances of ideational content] which has the same effect” (T, 1.3.10.2/118/N81). Causal inference is itself immediate and pressing, but it is less immediate, less urgent than are immediate impressions of external objects and events: “the ideas of those objects, which we believe either are or will be existent [i.e., object beliefs derived from causal inference], produce in a lesser degree the same effect with those impressions, which are immediately present to the senses and perception” (T, 1.3.10.2-3/118-19/N81-2). Here is yet a further indication that Hume considers object belief to precede causal inference.

So, here we have Hume presenting a pre-theoretical, instinctual, immediate “external realism” stance, a stance taken by humans from the earliest age; it is also a stance that animals take, so it is clearly more “sensitive” than “cogitative” (see, e.g., E, 4.23/39/B33; see also T, 1.4.1.8/183/N123: “belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures”). The “reality” of our impressions and memories is experienced, not as a theoretical proposition derived from other propositions, that is, not as ideational content derived from elaborate cogitative operations of the mind, dealing with ideational content different from, or abstracted from, the content believed in (which is the way in which Hume deals with the issue at section 1.4.2 (“Of scepticism with regard to the senses”) of the *Treatise*), but rather as an impression—a feeling, a manifestation of activities of the mind that are not cogitative, but which either are, or have a close affinity to, the operations of the mind involved in sensation. This feeling is

more properly a set or aggregation of feelings, each with some sort of “family” resemblance to the other sets of feeling; the mind recognizes each feeling as a particular type of, and level of, cognitive commitment.

The Puzzle of Object Belief in Section 1.4.2

But how can this overall picture, along with my interpretation of Hume’s system, survive certain puzzles contained in section 1.4.2 of the *Treatise* (“Of scepticism with regard to the senses”)? After all, in rejecting sensation (narrowly construed) as the foundation of object belief, and instead relying on quite elaborate processes of the imagination (1.4.2. is the longest and most involved section in the *Treatise*), Hume seems to be going against my interpretation of such belief as immediate and instinctive.

I offer but two relatively brief replies. (Many more responses to 1.4.2 could be offered; the secondary literature on 1.4.2 is formidable and ever expanding.) First, the mind operates with “an inconceivable rapidity” (T, 1.4.6.4/252/N165), so there is no theoretical bar to object belief being perceived as immediate, even if such belief requires the relatively elaborate operations of the imagination contemplated in 1.4.2.

Secondly (and this will constitute my substantive response), in rejecting the senses as a possible source of object belief, Hume too narrowly construes what his theory holds sensation to be, and unnecessarily uses the concept of continuous existence as a required component of object belief. In short, Hume does not give sufficient weight to the observation that “[object] belief is more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures” (T, 1.4.1.8/183/N123). Hume’s own feeling theory of belief has an implication that Hume himself never explored, namely that object belief is

an activity of the mind which occurs within the ambit of the affective aspect of sensory impressions; it is antecedent to processes involving reasoning or the imagination, in the sense that both reasoning and imagination generally involve the aggregation of various distinct sets of ideational content, recognized *as* distinct sets, or “objects” of experiencing. Thus, object belief can occur without the mind necessarily *believing* in, or even conceptualizing, the object’s continued, independent existence. Object belief is, at its essence, a feeling which manifests the mind’s activity in experiencing a given set of ideational content. There is no principled reason, within Hume’s system of belief formation, that it cannot occur immediately (i.e. within an atomic or minimal instant of time).

Consider how Hume begins the section, at paragraph 1.4.2.1, in effect conceding that object belief is pre-theoretical. Object belief, he tells us, is “a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasonings”; that is, nature has not left belief “in the existence of body” to our “choice”; object belief is “an affair of too great importance to be trusted to our uncertain reasoning’s and speculations” (T, 1.4.2.1/187/N125). I read this as an implicit concession that, within the operations of human cognition, object belief is a starting point. In other words, the activities of the mind involved in cognizing a given set of ideational content as “body” (that is, as external) precede, and indeed take precedence over, other activities of the mind, including those operations which Hume describes, as belonging to the imagination rather than to reason, and to which he ascribes our belief in the continued as well as independent (i.e. external) existence of “body.”

If it is objected that a “feeling” of externality cannot have sufficient propositional ideational content to support any so-called “pre-theoretical” object belief, I can only reply

that Hume has already offered an instance of a feeling which is supposed (by Hume) to provide the mind with the impression upon which complex ideational content is derived, namely the impression (the feeling of inevitability) underlying causal inference. Recall that that the “observation” of a repetition of resembling conjunctions of resembling events or objects (repeated observations of say, billiard balls colliding, as in T, 1.3.14.18/164/N111) gives rise

to a new impression *in the mind* . . . For after we have observ’d the resemblance in a sufficient number of instances, we immediately *feel* a determination of the mind to pass from one object to its usual attendant, and to conceive it in a stronger light upon account of this relation. This determination is the only effect of the resemblance; and therefore must be the same with power or efficacy, whose idea is deriv’d from the resemblance. . . . Necessity, then, is the effect of this observation, and is nothing but an internal impression of the mind, or a determination to carry our thoughts from one object to another (T, 1.3.14.20/165/N111; emphasis added to word, “feel”).

Now, this “feeling” of the mind—this feeling of inevitability, of being “forced” or “determined” or (dare we say?) “caused” to think of, and also to believe in, an attendant idea—gives rise to ideational content of quite startling complexity, namely the notion of causal “power, of force, of energy, and of efficacy” (T, 1.3.14.15/162/N110). A feeling of “externality” would carry no greater burden of content.

Concluding Remarks

One question that might come to mind is this: why does Hume rely on such a “sensationalistic” view of human cognition? That is, why does feeling play such a large (if at times less than fully developed) role in his system? Perhaps one indication comes in

Hume's concluding remarks to Book 3:

All lovers of virtue (and such we all are in speculation, however we may degenerate in practice) must certainly be pleas'd to see a moral distinction deriv'd from so noble a source, which gives us a just notion both of the generosity and capacity of our nature. It requires but very little knowledge of human affairs to perceive, that a sense of morals is a principle inherent in the soul, and one of the most powerful that enters into that composition. But this must certainly acquire new force, when reflecting on itself, it approves of those principles, from whence it is deriv'd, and finds nothing but what is great and good in its rise and origin. Those who resolve the sense of morals into original instincts of the human mind, may defend the cause of virtue with sufficient authority; but want the advantage, which those possess, who account for that sense by an extensive sympathy with mankind. According to the latter system, not only virtue must be approv'd of, but also the sense of virtue: And not only that sense, but also the principles, from whence it is deriv'd. So that nothing is presented on any side, but what is laudable and good (T, 3.3.6.3/619/N394).

Here, Hume is implicitly relying on the mind's propensity to experience impressions of reflection, that is, feelings as manifestations of mental activity, in light of and in reaction to any and all ideational content (including the ideational content of the impressions of reflections themselves). It is this propensity, which, as we have seen, evidences itself in causal inference: the felt determination of the mind, a feeling arising in reaction to ideational content, whether of a cause or an effect. It also shows itself in the mind's propensity to an emotion or movement of the spirit regarding any instantiation of ideational content (which forms the basis for explaining evaluative comparison, as per 2.2.8 of the *Treatise*), in belief, and in any normative judgment.

But Hume, in these concluding remarks, goes further. He tells us that reflecting on our moral sense, an impression of reflection which arises within the soul [i.e., mind] as an original quality of the mind or natural instinct, not directly controllable by the will or by desire, will result in yet another reflective feeling—a feeling of approval. We will feel that what *must* be the case (or, better, what feels as if it must be the case) *should* be the case. We will approve of our moral sense. And in so approving, we will also be approving of the principles underlying not only all of our judgments (our beliefs as to matters of fact, our judgements as to practical and aesthetic matters) but also the principles underlying our experience of the world and of ourselves. “Where reason [and, if I am correct, not only reason but all experience] is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity [that is, where it is attended by the appropriate affect], it ought to be assented to” (the “Title Principle”, admittedly modified; see T, 1.4.7.11/270/N176).

Paul Russell (2006) and Páll Árdal (1977) have made similar claims, in dealing with what Russell calls the “master virtue” of morality—a “disposition to moral reflection” which promotes “virtue only through the fusion of reason and sentiment” (Russell 2006, 169), a virtue which Árdal labels as “reasonableness.” The most salient quote from the second *Enquiry*, which shows that Hume considered the relationship between feeling and reasoning (i.e., the combination of ideational content in order to arrive at further inferences) to be fundamental, shows us, as Russell notes (164) “that moral evaluation of conduct and character involves the activity of both reason and sentiment.”

The final sentence, it is probable, which pronounces characters and actions amiable or odious, praiseworthy or blameable; that which stamps on them the mark of honour or infamy, approbation or censure; that which renders morality an

active principle and constitutes virtue our happiness and vice our misery: It is probable, I say, that *this final sentence depends on some internal sense or feeling, which nature has made universal in the whole species*. For what else can have an influence of this nature? But in order to pave the way for such a sentiment, and give a proper discernment of its object, it is often necessary, we find, that much reasoning should precede, that nice distinctions be made, just conclusions drawn, distant comparisons formed, complicated relations examined, and general facts fixed and ascertained (EM, 1.9/172-3/B5; emphasis added).

I have shown, or at least argued, that the same underlying principles, namely the mind's dependence on "some internal sense or feeling" operate in belief formation, in the experiencing of impressions, and in at least one class of normative judgments (e.g., evaluative comparison). Further, in his concluding remarks in the *Treatise*, Hume is reminding us that our reflective feelings will lead us to approve of those principles, a sentiment echoed in the second Enquiry remarks quoted immediately above. This approval will, in turn, lead us to approve of (at least some of) the processes by which we arrive at our beliefs and valuations.

At least part of the motivation behind Hume's 'sensationalistic' turn might be his anti-theistic stance (see Russell 2008). Hume's reliance on human affect fits very well with the "Radical Enlightenment" movement of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (see Israel 2002), and its embrace of anti-theism and atheism. Hume's sensationalistic reliance on affect gives a foundational grounding to normativity, without relying on a rational, over-arching Being who imparts legitimacy to our evaluations. In simple terms, if we reflect on the natural operations of our minds, we will see that we are constituted in certain ways to make judgments and to feel approval or disapproval of those judgements.

We will also find that this (dis)approval is affected by social factors and that we may (dis)approve of these as well (Baier 1991).

We also find that, so long as each of us reflects, regarding those matters which are the proper subjects of reflection (perhaps everything but our most fundamental “natural” beliefs and impressions) that certain issues are never fully resolved, the matter is never closed, everything is up for potential review. The human mind truly never rests (T, 1.4.7.13/271/N176; 2.1.4.2/283/N186). Ideational content is never static, nor are the feelings which attend on that content and which reflect the mind’s ever-changing operations. There is, within the minds of humans, as individuals and as members of social groups, no end point, no final answer regarding whether our beliefs on matters of fact, our valuations, our actions, our commitments are correct, worthy of approbation. All we can ask of ourselves and of each other, at any given point in time, is: do I (do we) approve of this belief, this evaluation, this action, this aspect of human life? Human judgment is an inextricably affective phenomenon, and there is no static end point to feeling, precisely because there is no static end point to mental or social processes. As long as the fundamental constitution of human nature remains essentially as it is today, the succession of our ideas and our beliefs will invariably give rise to a vast array of feelings, including feelings of approval and disapproval regarding what we believe and how we should structure our lives.

So what is the significance in our acceding to the claim that Hume’s belief theory is a feeling theory, and not a theory dependent on FLV terminology? I have suggested that seeing Hume’s belief theory in this way may well help resolve or at least minimize the sting of many of his sceptical conundrums. Pure rationalism, the superaddition of

ideational content without regard to the feelings (of belief or non-belief) which accompany each discrete set of content, will lead us into terrifying puzzles about how we can commit to any belief, since reflection on our own cognitive deficits will diminish our faith in every conclusion within every chain of reasoning. But we do not reason or believe in an affective vacuum. Belief involves feeling, and therefore any process of reasoning which involves believing the ideational content that is the subject matter of the reasoning process will, perforce, also involve feeling.

If we believe in independent external objects (and we do), any explanation of this must take into account our affective, feeling, emotional nature—our *human* nature. I have dealt with a possible solution to at least some of the difficulties Hume discusses in connection with the problem of object belief. In sum, I have argued that Hume’s position that all ideational content is accompanied with feeling (T, 2.2.8.4-7/373-75/N240-1) opens the door to a feeling that certain content emanates from *outside* of the mind, just as some ideational content—the content of mere thoughts—is felt to originate *within* the mind.

If we believe in the self (and we do), any explanation—any solution to Hume’s own “labyrinth” concerning personal identity (T, Appendix 10/633/N398-399) needs to deal with the self as experienced, as an “idea . . . always intimately present to us” (T, 2.2.4.7/354/N229), which entails, if I am correct, dealing with the role of feeling in our concept of self. In short, viewing Hume’s theory of belief as a feeling, rather than FLV, theory may well assist us in understanding Hume’s difficulty in explaining “the principles, that unite our successive perceptions in our thought and consciousness” (T, Appendix 20/635/N400). The two principles which Hume “cannot render consistent”,

namely, firstly that “all our distinct perceptions are distinct existences” and, secondly, that “the mind never perceives any real connexion among distinct existences” and which lead him to “plead the privilege of a sceptic” and leave the puzzle of personal identity for us to solve can, I would suggest, be modified if my tentative arguments about feelings of internality and externality have any merit.

If, for example, all distinct perceptions of a given human mind have an array of attendant feelings, and if, amongst those feelings are feelings along the following lines: “this experience of content is mine”, then the “real connexion” among distinct perceptions of that mind is not a connection among their ideational content, but rather a felt connection among the multitude of experiences—each of which was felt at the time, and is recollected as having been so experienced, as being an experience of “this” (the mind which now recollects that experience). Recall Hume’s Appendix remarks about memory: when recollected, ideational content that, prior to remembrance, had no feeling of being mine, in the sense of being content that I had previously experienced, acquires “a different feeling” from what it had immediately prior to recollection, once it is in fact remembered (T, 1.3.5.4/App628/N60). I am suggesting—and it can, at this point, only be a suggestion for further investigation—that the “real connexion” Hume sought would, under his belief theory, most probably be a connection among a *family* of feelings. This family of feelings would derive their familial resemblance from being manifestations of the mental activities of the *same* mind, and would be experienced (that is, felt) as similar or “connected” as such.

If we make evaluations (and of course we do) in whatever sphere of life (evaluations of prudential action, of morality, of beauty and aesthetic pleasure), we must,

if we are to understand Hume's system, keep in mind his "new discovery" of some internal impression or set of impressions—feelings or emotions or "movement of spirits"—"that secretly attends every idea", that is, every discrete set of ideational content (T, 2.2.8.7/375/N241-2). Our experience of the world is our experience of ideational content, the subject matter or object of our thoughts and experiences, but that experience is comprehended via feeling. Our very awareness of content is accompanied by feeling; our evaluations of content have a feeling component; and our judgments—our beliefs about matters of fact, our moral and prudential judgments, our aesthetic reactions—are felt. Rather than strive for a purely rational, objective, and unassailable realm of "truth" in our judgments, we should, Hume tells us, acknowledge that all judgment is ineliminably affective and that all judgment is potentially subject to further reflection, further scrutiny, and further affective response.

If there is an ethics to Hume's feeling theory of belief, it is this: once we understand the nature of our judgments, how we form them, and how we revise them, we will be in a better position to assess them. Hume does not provide the final word on such assessment, though he does provide much that is useful to aid in the assessment of our theories, actions, and evaluations. Rather, he reminds us that assessment will never end ("tis almost impossible for the mind of man to rest" (T, 1.4.7.13/271/N176) and that, as humans, reflective assessment will always involve our human, affective, *felt* response to the judgments, beliefs, and ideas we hold.

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