

# Hume's 'Manifest Contradictions'

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## Abstract

This paper examines Hume's 'Title Principle' (TP) and its role in a response to one of the 'manifest contradictions' he identifies in the conclusion to Book I of *A Treatise on Human Nature*. This 'contradiction' is a tension between two 'equally natural and necessary' principles of the imagination, our causal inferences and our propensity to believe in the continued and distinct existence of objects. The problem is that the consistent application of causal reason undercuts any grounds with have for the belief in continued and distinct existence, and yet that belief is as 'natural and necessary' as our propensity to infer effects from causes. The TP appears to offer a way to resolve this 'contradiction'. It states

Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate upon us.' (T 1.4.7.11; SBN 270)

In brief, if it can be shown that the causal inferences that undermine the belief in external world are not 'lively' nor mixed with some propensity' then we have grounds for think that they have no normative authority (they have no 'title to operate on us). This is in part a response to another 'manifest contradiction', namely the apparently self-undermining nature of reason. In this paper I examine the nature and grounds of the TP and its relation to these 'manifest contradictions'.

## 1.

In the complex and dramatic dialectic of *A Treatise of Human Nature* T 1.4.7 'Conclusion of this book' Hume asks how we could possibly retain the 'glorious title' of 'philosophers' when 'we ... knowingly embrace a manifest contradiction' (T 1.4.7.4; SBN 266).<sup>1</sup> The contradiction to which he refers is not a formal one, but an opposition between two 'equally natural and necessary' principles of the human imagination. The first principle is our propensity to reason from causes to effects, a principle of the imagination in virtue of being grounded in the associative or 'natural relation' of cause and effect. The second principle, which is more difficult to characterize with

<sup>1</sup> Norton and Norton (eds) *A Treatise of Human Nature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), following the convention of book, part, section and paragraph numbers. Page references to *A Treatise of Human Nature* ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, revised by P. H. Nidditch (2<sup>nd</sup> ed., Oxford: Clarendon, 1978) (SBN).

any brevity, is the propensity which ‘convinces us of the continu’d existence of external objects’. The ‘contradiction’ lies in the fact that causal reason – a natural and necessary propensity – apparently dictates the conclusion that there are no external objects, and yet the belief in external objects is equally natural and necessary. It ‘is not possible for us to reason justly and regularly from causes and effects, and at the same time believe the continu’d existence of matter’ (T 1.4.7.4; SBN 266). If we reason properly, the external world must vanish.

This is not the only ‘manifest contradiction’ Hume identifies in his conclusion. Part IV of Book I of the *Treatise* opens with a section entitled ‘Of scepticism with regard to reason’, a scepticism to which he returns in the conclusion. ‘Of scepticism with regard to reason’ presents a seemingly radical argument that the normative demands of reason are such that their consistent application would lead to ‘a total extinction of belief and evidence’ (T 1.4.1.6; SBN 182). When Hume first presents this argument he tells us that that, fortunately, that such arguments have no doxastic effect: it is ‘happy ... that nature breaks the force of all sceptical arguments in time, and keeps them from having any considerable influence on the understanding’ (T 1.2.1.12; SBN 187). However, when he revisits the topic he states that although ‘refin’d reflections have little or no influence upon us ... we do not, and cannot establish it for a rule, that they ought not to have any influence; which implies a manifest contradiction’ (T 1.4.7.7; SBN 268). The contradiction, it seems, is that although reflection has no doxastic effect of belief we cannot say that it should not.

In what follows I shall examine these manifest contradictions and how they might be resolved. But it might seem that Hume’s only answer to these manifest contradictions is, as it were, to go with the natural flow. The Humean predicament is one where reason makes an epistemic mockery of our doxastic life, though fortunately our beliefs are psychological immune to this mockery. ‘Nature is obstinate’, Hume writes, ‘and will not quit the field, however strongly attack’d by reason; and at the same time reason is so clear in the point, that there is no possibility of disguising her’ (T 1.4.2.52; SBN 215). And this might seem precisely what Hume says when the first of the manifest contradictions is alluded to in the first *Enquiry*. The reasoning which leads us to make the distinction between primary and secondary qualities renders it impossible to believe in external objects except in the sense of ‘a certain unknown, inexplicable *something*, as the cause of our perceptions; a notion so imperfect, that no sceptic will think it worth while to

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attend against it.' (EHU 12.16; SBN 115) In a footnote, attributing these arguments to Berkeley, Hume responds by declaring them 'merely sceptical' and that they

admit of no answer and produce no conviction. Their only effect is to cause that momentary amazement and irresolution and confusion, which is the result of scepticism (EHU 12.16; SBN 115n)

Reason dictates a sceptical conclusion, one that admits of no answer, but thankfully belief does not follow, and so no conviction is produced.

On the face of it, this general line of response seems unsatisfactory. We are still left with a negative epistemic evaluation of belief, in external objects in the first case, and belief more generally in the case of scepticism with regard to reason. So although philosophers are carried along with the tide of nature, they must do so with an air of ironic detachment.<sup>2</sup> But although this is the image of the Humean predicament outside of the circle of Hume scholarship, it is not one embraced by everyone within it. Hume's conclusion, and its relation to scepticism, has been the subject of a great deal of discussion in the last 20 years or so. One particular claim Hume makes in 'Conclusion of this book' is relevant to the manifest contradictions and has been dubbed by Don Garrett the 'Title Principle' (TP). It runs as follows:

Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate upon us.' (T 1.4.7.11; SBN 270)

On the face of it, the Title Principle is a normative one, telling us when and when not, reason should command assent and Garrett has deployed it in resolving the manifest contradictions. My interest in it began when I pointed out that Hume's claim that sceptical arguments about the external world are such as to 'admit of no answer but produce no conviction' can be read in the light of the TP. Putting aside the expression 'mixes itself with some propensity' for the time being, the TP connects the normative authority of reason to its 'liveliness' and its lack of normative authority when there is a lack of liveliness. Liveliness is the property that distinguishes the attitude of belief or conviction from mere conception. The fact that the arguments 'produce no conviction' means that such arguments have no 'title to operate on us'. We are permitted to ignore the 'merely sceptical arguments' and not simply because the conclusion is

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Broughton, J. 'Hume's Naturalism and His Skepticism' in Radcliffe (ed.) *A Companion to Hume* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2008).

psychologically impossible for us. We are not *required* to follow the conclusions of such arguments.

In what follows I revisit and develop this earlier claim of mine. I shall begin by discussing the Title Principle and distinguish my reading of its nature and grounds from Garrett's. I shall then apply that reading to the manifest contradictions.

## 2.

The TP runs as follows

Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate upon us. (T 1.4.7.11; SBN 270)

What does Hume mean by 'reason', by 'lively' and by 'mixes itself with some propensity'? We shall begin with reason.

Hume's treatment of reason in the *Treatise* is oriented around a conception of reason as a psychological faculty that operates upon the mind's contents (ideas) and is concerned with the relations in which such contents stand. 'All kinds of reasoning', writes Hume, 'consists in nothing but a comparison, and a discovery of those relations ... which two or more objects bear to each other' (T 1.3.2.2; SBN 73). There are two classes of relation over which reasons ranges, one the object of *demonstrative* reason, the other the object of *probable* reason.<sup>3</sup> The first, constant relations, are relations that supervene on the intrinsic character of the ideas compared – they 'depend entirely on the ideas' (T 1.3.1.1; SBN 69) – and are a distant ancestor of what we would now call analytic relations. Inconstant relations are relations that change without any change in the intrinsic character of the ideas compared, and the most significant relation, and the object of probable reason, is that of *causation*. For the rest of this discussion, I shall be focussing on probable reason alone.

Causation is central because it is the only relation that 'can be trac'd beyond our senses, and informs us of existences which we do not see or feel' (T 1.3.2.3; SBN 74). That is, it is the only relation that can ground any inference from what we presently observe to what we do not. But although I have talked of probable reason as a 'faculty' that discovers this relation, such faculty talk is not left undischarged. For Hume uses the principles of association, and in particular the

<sup>3</sup> Not all relations are discovered by reason. Degree in quality, for example, is discovered by intuition, relations of space by perception.

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associative relation of cause and effect, to explain the *inferences* we draw from cause and effect. Experience of (but not necessarily experiences *that*) objects standing in the relation of cause and effect impact upon the mind and leave the habits of inference which constitute the basic mechanism of probable reason. Probable reason as an inferential faculty is a 'mechanical tendency' (EHU 5.22; SBN 55), and 'nothing but a wonderful and unintelligible instinct in our souls, which carries us along a certain train of ideas, and endows them with particular qualities, according to their particular situations and relations' (T 1.4.16.9; SBN 179).

This 'mechanical tendency' of drawing such inferences is something that Hume terms probable reason and, what's more, a tendency that is tied to epistemic success. The mechanism is geared to causal relations and allows us to 'discover the real existence ... of objects' (T 1.3.2.2; SBN 73). Causation 'informs us of existences and objects' (T 1.3.2.3; SBN 74), and 'brings us acquainted with such existences' (T 1.3.2.13; SBN 108). Inferences in line with causal relations are 'just': causation is the only relation 'on which we can found a just inference from one object to another' (T 1.3.6.7; SBN 89).

Those used to seeing Hume as sceptic about probable reason or 'induction' might be surprised to see both that he discusses reason in terms that are redolent of epistemic success and that he uses terms like 'just' in connection with such inferences. However, the scholarly consensus is that Hume does treat probable reason as having positive epistemic value, though quite how that is to be understood remains a matter of controversy. I align myself to those take a consequentialist approach, namely that the justness of probable reason is connected to its being a faculty productive of true belief. To put it another way, at least part of the positive epistemic status of probable reason must owe itself to its (presumed) *reliability*.<sup>4</sup> Our 'reason must be consider'd a kind of cause, of which truth is the natural effect' (T 1.4.4.1; SBN 180) and his discussion of it is

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, L. Loeb 'Inductive Inference in Hume's Philosophy' in Radcliffe (ed.) *A Companion to Hume* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2008). and H. Beebe *Hume on Causation* (London: Routledge, 2006). The most sophisticated and articulated statement of the view is Schmitt *Hume's Epistemology in the Treatise: A Veritistic Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014). I hereby reject the view I offered in Kail, P. J. E. *Projection and Realism in Hume's Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007).

often accompanied by factives like ‘informs’, ‘discover’ and ‘brings us acquainted with’. Here, he writes, is a

pre-established harmony between the course of nature and the succession of our ideas. ... Had not the presence of an object instantly excited the idea of those objects, commonly conjoined with it, all our knowledge must have been limited to the narrow sphere of memory and senses (EHU 12.2; SBN 54)

Our inferential mechanism is responsive to the course of nature in that our inferential dispositions are acquired through experiences of the manifestations of its regularities. Such a mechanism may be presumed reliable but not infallible. We can check first-order inferences and to that end Hume offers a series of rules ‘by which to judge of causes and effects’ (T 1.3.15). There is obviously much more that could said here,<sup>5</sup> and we shall presently come to another norm of correction, but let us now turn to ‘liveliness’.

I mentioned above that liveliness is the mark of conviction and belief and I shall understand the liveliness of reason to consist its being productive of belief. The liveliness of belief involves the transference of the liveliness possessed by a present impression or memory to the idea constituting the content of belief. Indeed, Hume ties his account of inference to this transference of vivacity. He allows that there are cases of ‘hypothetical’ reasoning (i.e. moving from mere idea to idea) but his discussion of reasoning tends to be tied to the transference of vivacity from an impression or a memory. Although ‘the mind in its reasonings from causes or effects, carries its view beyond those objects, which it sees or remembers, it must never lose sight of them entirely, nor reason merely upon its ideas, without some mixture of impressions, or at least ideas of the memory, which are equivalent to impressions’ (T 1.3.4.1; SBN 82). If I merely conceive an idea of cause C I may, by association, come to have the idea of its effect E but that idea won’t constitute belief since there is no source of vivacity. If, however, I experience C – in impression or memory – the liveliness of the impression is transferred up the associational track to the idea.

At first blush, reason would not be lively just in cases when there is no transference of vivacity, cases where the mind does ‘lose sight of its objects’. To explore this, let us return to T 1.4.1, ‘Of scepticism with regard to reason’. The discussion of ‘Of scepticism with regard to

<sup>5</sup> For a very extensive discussion, see Schmitt *Hume’s Epistemology in the Treatise: A Veritistic Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

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reason' begins with a statement of the presumptive reliability of reason on the one hand, and its fallibility on the other. Our 'reason must be consider'd a kind of cause, of which truth is the natural effect; but such-a-one as by the irruption of other causes, and by the inconstancy of our mental powers, may frequently prevented' (T 1.4.1.1; SBN 180). Our first-order inferences are 'sometimes just and sometimes erroneous' (T 1.4.1.9; SBN 184), the former being the result of appropriate causes, the latter determined by other 'contrary' causes, either from interference or by some psychological slackness on our part. Our memory of such errors issues in a demand that we arrive at a new judgment that is the combination of the first-order judgment and the memory of the erroneous judgment, one that has a lower degree of probability than the original judgment. 'We must...in every reasoning form a new judgment, as a check or controul on our first judgment or belief'. (T 1.4.1.1; SBN 180) This demand, however, iterates: the second judgment is liable to the same 'check or controul', and each new judgment has a lesser degree of probability than its predecessor. The first casualty of the demand is knowledge in that it degenerates into probability' (T 1.4.1.1; SBN 180). From a state of being certain, both doxastically and epistemically, that  $p$ , reflection on fallibility introduces grounds to be less certain that  $p$ . But that is not the end of the matter, given the iterative character of the demand. Eventually, we arrive at a judgment that gives no credence to the truth of  $p$  that was the content of the original judgment.

When I reflect on the natural fallibility of my judgement, I have less confidence in my opinions ... and when I proceed still farther, to turn the scrutiny against every successive estimation I make of my faculties, all the rules of logic require a continual diminution, and at last a total extinction of belief and evidence. (T 1.4.1.6; SBN 182)

We shall return to the epistemic implications of this argument presently, but right now let us concentrate on the 'total extinction of belief', since we are considering non-lively reason. A key point Hume makes in this section is that we are not doxastically responsive to such iterative exercises. They are too remote from the original impression- and memory-based sources of vivacity (which he calls 'original evidence' (T 1.4.1.9; SBN 184)). The 'conviction, which arises from a subtle reasoning, diminishes in proportion to the efforts, which the imagination makes to enter into the reasoning', (T 1.4.1.11; SBN 186) and when 'the mind reaches not its objects with easiness and facility, the same principles have not the same effect as in a more natural conception of ideas' (T 1.4.1.10; SBN 185).

This gives us a working conception of non-lively reason: inferences are that comply with ‘all the rules of logic’ but which do not have any doxastic effect. Hume reiterates the upshot of this argument in ‘Conclusion to this Book’, stating that ‘the understanding, when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either in philosophy or common life’ (T 1.4.7.1; SBN 267). Here, however, Hume is not as sanguine as he was earlier about the implications of this observation. One could choose to reject ‘refin’d or elaborate reasoning’ but to do so would ‘cut off entirely all science and philosophy’ (T 1.4.7.7; SBN 268). However, such reasoning leads to a total destruction of evidence, and although ‘refin’d reflections have little or no influence upon us...we do not, and cannot establish it for a rule, that they ought not to have any influence’ (*op. cit.*). Now, to be somewhat brief and dogmatic, I shall take the term ‘evidence’ to be some positive epistemic property (rather a merely doxastic one<sup>6</sup>) and so refined reasoning destroys the positive epistemic standing of any belief. Furthermore, we cannot simply ignore the demand to proportion our belief to considered evidence: ‘we do not, and cannot establish it for a rule, that they ought not to have any influence’.

At this point of ‘Conclusion to this book’ crisis looms: even the consolation that sceptical arguments have few or no doxastic consequences seems to disappear. He writes that although he stated that ‘reflections very refin’d and metaphysical have little or no influence upon us’ (T 1.4.7.8: SBN 266), from his ‘present feeling and experience’ the ‘*intense* view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning’. Noting that this ‘deplorable condition’ is dispelled by leaving the study and returning to company and relaxation, his reflections prompt a question: Why should he engage in subtle and refined reasoning at all? Why ought he ‘torture [his] brain with subtilities [sic.] and sophistries’ and why he must make ‘so painful an application’ when he has ‘no tolerable prospect of arriving by its means at truth and certainty’ (T 1.4.7.10; SBN 270)? ‘Under what obligation do I lie of making such an abuse of time? And what end can it serve either for the service of mankind, or for my own private interest?’ (T 1.4.7.10;

<sup>6</sup> For this kind of reading see D. Owen *Hume’s Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999) and what I take to be well-placed criticism see K. Meeker *Hume’s Radical Scepticism and the Fate of Naturalized Epistemology* (London: Palgrave, 2013).



SBN 270) He resolves never to be 'led a wandering into search dreary solitudes, and rough passages' through which he hitherto been and will only strive against his natural propensities when he has a 'good reason'.

This sentiment – which expresses what Hume calls his 'spleen and indolence' – leads to his statement of the TP. At this juncture we should consider the last aspect of the TP, that of 'mixes with some propensity'. One question Hume in the vicinity is what constitutes a good reason to strive against inclination, and it seems that propensity here is some independent motivation to pursue refined reasoning and Hume mentions 'curiosity' and 'ambition' (T 1.4.7.1.13; SBN 271), when he is 'naturally *inclin'd*' (T 1.4.7.12; SBN 270) and that in not pursuing philosophy he would be 'the loser in the point of pleasure' (T 1.4.7.12; SBN 271). This might seem to us either rather odd or trivial. Surely the exercise of reason is *always* in the service of some motivational propensity, be it the importance attached to determining whether *p*, our curiosity in determining whether *p* or the pleasure of knowledge. However, if we think about the intellectual context in which Hume was working we can see this as a response to those who hold that the exercise of reason is of non-natural value, a value that is independent of humdrum practical concern. Perhaps the most explicit articulation of this is to be found in the philosophy of Nicolas Malebranche, a thinker with whom Hume was particularly exercised. Like many philosophers of the time, Malebranche held that the traditional doctrine that man is made in the image of God is best captured in the terms that we resemble Him with respect to our reason. Our *virtue* consists in the extent to which we resemble God and the properly virtuous person will exercise reason even against his natural inclinations. In the unconditional pursuit of truth and reason the devout, secluded from ordinary commerce can 'sacrifice his peace of mind for the sake of Truth, and his pleasures for the sake of Order ... He can, in a word, earn merit or demerit'.<sup>7</sup> Both here and in the conclusion to Book II of the *Treatise* 'Of curiosity and the love of truth' Hume is bring the pursuit of truth through reason down to earth. For Malebranche there is an independent demand to be 'led a wandering into search dreary solitudes, and rough passages', and is this, as I have argued at length elsewhere, one of Hume's targets in 'Conclusion to this book'.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Nicolas Malebranche, *Treatise on Ethics*, trans. C Walton (Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1993), 48.

<sup>8</sup> See my 'Hume's Ethical Conclusion' in Frasca-Spada & Kail (eds) *Impressions of Hume* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005).

As I read it, ‘mixes with some propensity’ provides only a motivation to pursue reasoning. However that aspect of the TP has no *epistemic* bearing: it is not the case that what motivates one to reason determines the standing of reason’s products. It cannot determine the conditions under which reason does or does not have a title to operate upon us. So we are left with the question of just why non-lively reason has no title to operate upon us.

It seems to me that the best way to understand this idea is as follows, though I cannot claim any direct textual smoking guns. The sceptical argument, recall, began with the presumption of the reliability of the faculty. Our first-order judgments are the product of reason, which we must think of as a kind of cause, of which truth is the natural effect in virtue of its being a mechanism that is responsive to causal relations. It is (presumptively) reliable, though not infallible, and it is presumptive responsiveness that allows for its normativity, relative to an interest in truth (one form of ‘propensity’ with which reason is mixed). But iterated use of the faculty appears to undermine the presumptive epistemic standing of its deliverances by delivering a conclusion that no belief so produced has any positive epistemic standing. If it is the case that reflection provides a reason that undermines the presumption of reliability it also at the same time undercuts the normative authority, relative to an interest in truth, of reflection. For it undermines the idea that its deployment in cases of reflections leads to the truth, and so undercuts the grounds for the demand it should be followed. So there is no reason to pursue reason to its self-undermining conclusion. The absence of such a reason means that we are permitted to ignore the conclusions of higher-order reasoning, i.e. those instances that are non-lively. This reading also explains why Hume tells us why a ‘true sceptic is diffident of his philosophical doubts’ (T 1.4.7.14; SBN 273) and why he suggests that one ‘can find no error in the foregoing arguments’. (T 1.4.1.8; SBN 184) With respect to the first, Hume is sceptical about the compellingness of the sceptical argument given that it seems self-undermining but at the same time, and with respect to the second point, the norms governing reflection do seem to require iteration. The sceptic’s response is the same inasmuch as the argument appears to leave us with no reason to pursue reason in that direction. This is not equivalent to rejecting all reflective reasoning. To do so, recall, would ‘cut off entirely all science and philosophy’ (T 1.4.7.7; SBN 268). For it remains true that reflective reasoning itself can be lively in the relevant sense. It is rather that very refined reason that is disconnected from liveliness has no title to operate on us.

3.

With this understanding of the TP, let us consider the second of Hume's 'manifest contradictions'. Hume describes how causal reasoning threatens our belief in the external world in T 1.4.4, 'Of the modern philosophy'. By 'modern philosophy' Hume means the distinction between primary and secondary qualities. Whereas primary qualities are supposed qualities of matter, modern philosophy maintains that 'colours, sounds, tastes, smells, head and cold...[are] nothing but impressions in the mind, deriv'd from the operations of external objects, and without any resemblance to the qualities of the objects' (T 1.4.4.3; SBN 226).<sup>9</sup> Hume finds only one argument in favour of the distinction 'satisfactory', one that is a variant on the Argument from Conflicting Appearances. X appears F under circumstance C, but appears F\* under circumstances C\*. It is assumed that there is no change in X. The fact of conflicting appearances, however, is insufficient to draw the distinction. It allows to infer that not all appearances F (F-impressions) are caused by resembling quality F. But with presumption that like causes have like effects, we conclude that none is caused by F, and that all instances of F are properties of impressions. However, Hume thinks that this line of reasoning 'rather than explaining the operations of external objects by its means, we utterly annihilate all these objects, and reduce ourselves to the opinions of most extravagant scepticism, concerning them' (T1.4.4.6; SBN 227–8). For once these qualities are excluded from body no content can be given to an external object. The upshot of this is that

... there is a direct and total opposition betwixt our reason and our senses; or more properly speaking, betwixt those conclusions we form from cause and effect, and those that persuade us of the continu'd and independent existence of body. When we reason from cause and effect, we conclude that neither colour, sound, taste, nor smell have a continu'd and independent existence. When we exclude these sensible qualities there remains nothing in the universe, which has such an existence. (T 1.4.4.15; SBN 231)

Hume presents a variant of this argument in the first *Enquiry*, which he claims comes from the 'most profound philosophy' of

<sup>9</sup> Hume is often mistakenly accused of misunderstanding Locke on this issue. This, however, is itself a mistake. See my *Projection and Realism in Hume's Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), chapter 7, section 2.1.

Berkeley.<sup>10</sup> Hume's presentation here does indeed have a more Irish flavour inasmuch as explicit reference is made of the impossibility of abstracting secondary qualities from primary qualities. In this case Hume doesn't explicitly discuss considerations of causation that drive the distinction in the first place, but takes the distinction as given and derives from it the mind-dependency of objects. His conclusion is that this objection represents our usual assumption of the continued existence of external objects as

... contrary to reason; at least, if it be a principle of reason, that all sensible qualities are in the mind, not in the object. Bereave matter of all its intelligible qualities, both primary and secondary, you in a manner annihilate it, and leave only a certain unknown, inexplicable *something*, as the cause of our perceptions; a notion so imperfect, that no sceptic will think it worth while to attend against it. (EHU 12.16; SBN 115, emphasis original)

Now, I have omitted the detail from both versions of the argument and I shall make no comment on their soundness. The main point is the causal reasoning leads to distinction, and the distinction to annihilation and this is what generates the 'manifest contradiction'. I shall call this combination of concerns the 'Annihilation Argument'.

Before we discuss the Annihilation Argument directly, it should be first noted that Hume is at best equivocal over whether the primary/secondary quality distinction is a sound one. This is significant inasmuch as the manifest contradiction is adduced from the distinction, and yet Hume seems at the very least ambivalent about that distinction. He says in the *Treatise* that the annihilation consequence is a 'very decisive' objection to the system of modern philosophy. That system that 'pretends to be free' from the 'defect' of stemming from principles of nature that are 'neither universal nor unavoidable in human nature', and in this section Hume claims to be examining 'this pretension' (T 1.4.4.2; SBN 226). We shall return to this point presently. Note too in the *Enquiry* presentation there is some initial distancing from the argument when he says 'if it be a principle of reason' that we should conclude that the distinction is sound. In 'Of the Standard of Taste', Hume says of the 'famous doctrine' that it is

<sup>10</sup> J. Hakkarainen misleads somewhat when he labels this *argument* 'profound' (in 'Hume's Scepticism and Realism', *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 20(2): 286. Hume doesn't call the argument profound, he instead calls Berkeley's philosophy profound.

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'supposed to be fully proved in modern times' (EMPL p.166n) and in a letter he refers to the distinction as a 'paradox'.<sup>11</sup>

Still, such Hume's apparent distancing himself from the distinction does not itself get us very far in avoiding the 'manifest contradiction'. For, recall, Hume tells us of a conflict between two 'equally natural and necessary' principles of the human imagination. For Janet Broughton the choice here is a stark one. She writes that 'to avoid "contradiction" we would have to give up drawing causal inferences, or we would have to give up our commonsense belief in the existence of external world'.<sup>12</sup> But this is a false dilemma: the TP allows us to distinguish between instances of causal inferences to which we ought to assent and instances that have no title to operate upon us, i.e. those non-lively instances. So we need to see whether such inferences are of the non-lively variety.

Alas, however, it cannot be said that the evidence points one way or the other. The best piece of evidence that such reasoning violates the TP is the remark from the *Enquiry* about the arguments being such to 'admit of no answer and produce no conviction' (EHU 12.16; SBN 115n), but this obviously has to be treated with caution since the *Enquiry* and the *Treatise* are rather different texts. So let us take a closer look at Hume's language in 'Of the modern philosophy'. Hume tells us there the conflicting appearance argument is 'satisfactory' (T 1.4.4.3; SBN 226) and, what's more, a further conclusion can be drawn from it that 'is likewise as satisfactory as can be possibly be imagined' (T 1.4.4.3; SBN 226) That conclusion is that impressions have non-resembling causes. The expression 'likewise as satisfactory as can be possibly imagined' seems difficult to read as anything other than a lively instance of reason.

As things progress the argument is couched in terms that are a little more equivocal. He says that the distinction 'seem[s] to follow by an easy consequence' (T 1.4.4.5; SBN 227, my emphasis). The next stage of the argument in 'Of modern philosophy' concerns the impossibility of conceiving extension without either colour or sensations of touch, both of which are secondary qualities. Hume certainly writes that 'will appear entirely conclusive to everyone that comprehends it', but, on the other hand, 'it may seem abstruse and intricate to the

<sup>11</sup> Letter to Hugh Blair, July 1762, reprinted in P.B. Wood 'David Hume on Thomas Reid's An Inquiry into the Human Mind, on the Principles of Common Sense: A New Letter to Hugh Blair from July 1762', *Mind* 95 (1986) 411–16.

<sup>12</sup> J. Broughton 'Hume's Naturalism and His Skepticism' in Radcliffe (ed.) *A Companion to Hume* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2008): 431.

generality of readers' (T 1.4.4.10; SBN 229). But this is hardly decisive in favour of the relevant instances of reasoning being the non-lively sort. There are, it seems to me, only two other considerations that could be said to lend support to such reasoning violating the TP, though neither is particularly strong. The first is that the distinction between primary and secondary qualities itself difficult to believe. Thus so 'strong is the prejudice for the distinct continu'd existence of [secondary qualities], that when the contrary opinion is advanc'd by modern philosophers, people imagine that they can almost refute it from their feeling and experience, and that their very senses contradict this philosophy' (T 1.4.2.13; SBN 192). However, this does not directly tell against the arguments for the distinction being themselves instances of lively reasoning. The second would be to point out that Hume seems to be implying that the doctrine of modern philosophy is a principle is not amongst those which are 'neither universal nor unavoidable in human nature'. Recall we noted above that Hume is examining the 'pretension' that the doctrine is such a principle and argues that it is a decisive objection to the system that it 'annihilates' the external world. So then the doctrine is not an instance of a principle that is 'neither universal nor unavoidable in human nature'. But there are a number of problems with this move. First, if that is the implicit conclusion of 'Of the modern philosophy', why then does Hume talk about a conflict between two 'equally natural and necessary' principles of the human imagination in 'Conclusion of this book'? For it seems the doctrine of modern philosophy implicated is implicated in the 'manifest contradiction' and so is 'natural and necessary'. One might try to avoid this in the following way. Hume is implicitly distinguishing between instances of reasoning that are natural and necessary and those that are not in 'Of the modern philosophy' and it is only when we get to the TP that that distinction is properly drawn. There may be some mileage in this suggestion, but it doesn't itself show that the reasoning in the Annihilation Argument is non-lively and so we are still at a loss.

For the moment, it seems to me, that an appeal to the TP to solve the first of Hume's manifest contradictions remains an open option but the textual support is not very strong.

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