

WHY HUME CANNOT BE A REALIST

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, I argue that there is a sceptical argument against the senses advanced by Hume that forms a decisive objection to the Metaphysically Realist interpretations of his philosophy – such as the different naturalist and New Humean readings. Hume presents this argument, apparently starting with the primary/secondary qualities distinction, both in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book 1, Part 4, Section 4 (Of the modern philosophy) (1739) and *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Section 12 (Of the Academical or Sceptical Philosophy), paragraphs 15 to 16 (1748). The argument concludes with the contradiction between consistent reasoning (causal, in particular) and believing in the existence of Real (distinct and continued) entities. The problem with the Realist readings of Hume is that they attribute both to Hume. So their Hume is a self-reflectively inconsistent philosopher. I show that the various ways to avoid this problem do not work. Accordingly, this paper suggests a non-Realist interpretation of Hume's philosophy: Hume the philosopher suspends his judgment on Metaphysical Realism. As such, his philosophical attitude is neutral on the divide between materialism and idealism.

Key Terms: Hume, David, scepticism, realism

INTRODUCTION

Hume concluded Part 1, Section 12 in the *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748)ⁱ before the posthumous 1777 edition as follows:

The second objection goes farther, and represents this opinion 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. (EHU 12.16; SBN 155)

It is a restatement of his conclusion of *Of the modern philosophy* (1.4.4) in *A Treatise of Human Nature* (1739-40)ⁱⁱ:

Thus 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. (THN 1.4.4.15; SBN 231)

Hume refers back to this in the conclusion to *Treatise 1*:

'Tis this principle, which makes us reason from causes and effects; and 'tis the same principle, which convinces us of the continu'd existence of external objects, when absent from the senses. But tho' these two operations be equally natural and necessary in the human mind, yet in some circumstances they are directly contrary, nor is it possible for us to reason justly and regularly from causes and effects, and at the same time believe the continu'd existence of matter. How then shall we adjust those principles together? Which of them shall we prefer? Or in case we prefer neither of them, but successively assent to

both, as is usual among philosophers, with what confidence can we afterwards usurp that glorious title, when we thus knowingly embrace a manifest contradiction? (THN 1.4.7.4; SBN 265-6)

Following Hume in the Enquiry, I will call the argument that concludes with this contradiction 'the second profound argument'. It is the other modern Pyrrhonian argument 'against the senses' in Section 12. In this paper, my intention is to show that it is one of Hume's own arguments and therefore he cannot be a Realist, which clears ground for the true sceptical account of his metaphysics that is neutral on the divide between materialism and idealism. In order not to make the paper unnecessarily long, I will take the Enquiry and the Treatise as advancing the same argument although there are differences in details between them. As they are the only works where Hume presents this argument, I will limit my discussion to them and the Abstract of Treatise 1 and 2 (An Abstract of a Book lately Published: Entitled A Treatise of Human Nature etc. 1740).ⁱⁱⁱ

Hume's view on realism has been an ongoing controversy since his own time. In recent decades, its main manifestation has been the New Hume debate. As usual in philosophical controversies, there has not been a general agreement even on the subject of the debate, i.e. how 'realism' should be understood. So Peter Kail, who defends a New Humean interpretation, has stressed the need to chart the different possible forms of the distinction between realism and anti-realism and to compare Hume with them (2007a: xxvii). One of the forms of realism is conceptual in nature. According to this type of realism, there can be thinkable content for external objects and causation beyond mere regularity. In Hume's framework, this has a semantic consequence: talk about them is not totally meaningless because thinkable content provide meanings for words. This is a form of semantic realism. By contrast, one type of the conceptual

and semantic anti-realism is the position that does deny the thinkability and meaningfulness of external objects and causation as more than mere regularity (Kail 2007b: 253-5; 2008: 442-3).

Below, I will argue that Kail's characterisation of the conceptual realism/anti-realism divide catches a core issue in the problem of Hume's view on realism: the thinkability of external objects. Nevertheless, I think that Hume scholars should start with Hume's own definition of 'real' and realism. Besides, Hume's definition is intended to be exact. So it may provide a precise starting point for the discussion even if not exhausting the discussion. In this respect, it seems to me that it serves the literature better than Kail's different possible types of realism and anti-realism (Kail (2007a: 57) acknowledges this realism, though). I will also talk about one current use of the term 'metaphysical realism' which corresponds rather well to Hume's definition (Lowe 2006: 177). For the sake of brevity, I will drop the attribute 'Metaphysical' and talk about 'Realism' with a capital 'r' in order to distinguish it from Kail's realisms in particular, and the uses of 'realism' in contemporary philosophy in general. When I am speaking of 'Realism', it should be understood in the following sense. Realism is the position according to which there are existentially and causally perception-independent entities that exist continuously (no gaps) and externally to the perceiver in perception-independent space. 'Real' entities are beings that satisfy these criteria and 'Body' is a corporeal thing that is Real. The second profound argument concerns the existence of Bodies, i.e. perception-independent matter and bodies in various early modern materialist or substance-dualist ontologies. Since Hume thinks that those ontologies are the best accounts of Bodies (THN 1.4.4.2; 1.4.5.1; SBN 226; 232), the second profound argument is decisive regarding his attitude to the existence of material substance and Bodies, i.e. corporeal Real things. It is also so with regard to any Real entity because Real entities must be Bodies; they are, by definition, concrete (spatio-temporal) things.

That this is the true Humean definition of Realism needs to be defended briefly. Hume begins his discussion of the existence of body or external objects by defining the subject of the

discussion in both the Treatise and the Enquiry (THN 1.4.2.2; SBN 187-8 and EHU 12.7-8; SBN 151-2). When these definitions are coupled with the passages where Hume explicitly links his definitions to 'real' (THN 1.4.2.9-10; 20; 24; 1.4.4.5; SBN 190-1; 195-7; 199; 227 and EHU 12.9; SBN 152), it is clear that this is the Humean definition of Realism and Real. One of the definiens of Real entities, continuous existence, is explicit in Hume's definition in THN 1.4.2.2 (SBN 187-8; see also EHU 12.8; SBN 152). In this definition of the Treatise, under 'existence distinct from the mind and perception', Hume comprehends both 'external position' and 'independence of existence and operation'. This shows two things. (1) External position is in perception-independent space rather than perception-dependent space because Hume subsumes it under the existence distinct from the mind and perception. This is confirmed by the Enquiry: 'an external universe, which depends not on our perception' (EHU 12.7; SBN 151). (2) The perception-independence of Bodies is both existential and causal, which is a point that is too seldom noticed; Hume speaks about 'existence and operation'. Existential independence is rigid and it is put in terms of Hume's absolute or metaphysical modality (THN 1.3.14.35; SBN 172): it is metaphysically possible (does not entail a contradiction) that a Body exists and there is no perception (impression or idea) of it, or, indeed, any perception in the world. Causal independence is obviously stated in terms of Hume's causal modality. It means that perceiving a Body does not affect its properties and existence (perceiving does not create or destroy it). Hume must make this distinction between existential and causal independence, since he holds two views which are inconsistent without a distinction: a (simple) perception is both independent from and dependent on the mind, or to be more precise, other (simple) perceptions.^{iv} On the one hand, a (simple) perception is independent from the mind in Hume's bundle theory of the mind because it is metaphysically possible that it exist without any mind, i.e. bundle of perceptions (THN 1.4.2.39; SBN 207). On the other hand, Hume argues that a perception is dependent on the mind, or to be more precise, other (simple) perceptions (THN 1.4.2.44-5; SBN 210-11). In fact, it is the

difference between a perception and a Real entity that the former, while existentially independent as well as the latter, may be causally dependent on other perceptions while the latter does not depend causally on any perception (Ibid.). In order to make these statements consistent, the independence of a (simple) perception must be existential and its dependence has to be causal, which are two different forms of dependence/independence. The text, indeed, supports this. In THN 1.4.2.39 (SBN 207), Hume speaks about the existential independence. In THN 1.4.2.44-5 (SBN 210-1), he argues that the causal circumstances of perception affect the content of sense-impressions (and their ideas, in turn). These passages also put it beyond reasonable doubt that the existential independence is in terms of metaphysical modality.

This paper has four sections. After the introduction, I will summarise my account of the second profound argument. At the same time, I will show why it forms a decisive argument against the Realist Hume interpretations. The last main section consists of my replies to the objections to the second profound argument being decisive. In the conclusion, I shall propose that the second profound argument, or rather, Hume's subscription to it, suggests a no-single-Hume interpretation of his attitude to Realism, which I have defended elsewhere (Hakkarainen 2012: 301-6).^v It also clears ground for the sceptical interpretation that Hume overcomes the putative dichotomy between materialism and idealism by his neutral view on it.

1. THE OBJECTION: THE SECOND PROFOUND ARGUMENT

The second profound argument begins with a principle that I think should be called 'the Proper Sensible Qualities Principle' (PSP) rather than the primary/secondary qualities distinction. Hume's statements of this principle vary slightly (EHU 12.15-6; SBN 154-5; THN 1.4.4.3-6; 15; SBN 226-8; 231). But there is a proposition that connects them: no proper sensible quality is Real.^{vi} So this is the correct formulation of the PSP and Hume's denial of resemblance between the perceptions of proper sensibles and Bodies should be taken as a corollary of it. For the PSP

entails with suitable extra premises (about resemblance) that if there are Bodies, none of the perceptions of proper sensibles resembles anything in them.

Talking about proper sensible qualities instead of secondary qualities calls for an argument as it is a common supposition that the second profound argument is premised on the primary/secondary qualities distinction. Elsewhere, I have made a full case for this, but it is possible to summarise the main reason here (Hakkarainen 2011: 237-40). This avoids saddling Hume with Locke's gross misunderstanding in this respect. In his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Locke repeatedly says that secondary qualities are powers in bodies (Locke [1689] 1975: 135). If Hume said that secondary qualities are nothing in Bodies, he would explicitly contradict Locke's words, which is implausible in this case. Fortunately, this misunderstanding may be avoided by realising that Hume's point is that none of the qualities that are perceived directly by one sense only, i.e. proper sensibles are Real. This is supported by the point that Hume calls these properties 'sensible qualities' and his list of them includes only what he takes as proper sensibles: colours, tactile qualities (hardness, temperature), sounds, smells and tastes (EHU 12.15-6; SBN 154-5; THN 1.4.4.3-14; SBN 226-31). It is also a fairly correct description of what 'new' materialist or substance dualist philosophers thought: none of them believed that there are proper sensible qualities in Bodies (Hakkarainen 2011: 239-40).

In the *Treatise*, Hume advances a causal argument for the PSP: 'The conclusion drawn from them, is likewise as satisfactory as can possibly be imagin'd' (THN 1.4.4.4; SBN 227). It is also premised on Hume's fourth rule of causal reasoning (THN 1.3.15.6; SBN 173-4): 'from like effects we presume like causes' (THN 1.4.4.4; SBN 227).^{vii} In the *Treatise*, Hume thus presents the PSP as a tenet that he endorses. It is also important to point out that holding the PSP does not mean commitment to the existence of Bodies and its corollary can be held hypothetically: if there are Bodies, then the perceptions of proper sensibles do not resemble anything in Bodies. I think

Hume must hold the corollary hypothetically because he endorses the PSP and as I will show, he cannot be a Realist.

For the sake of argument, Hume distinguishes the PSP from what I call the Primary Qualities Principle (PMQ):

For upon the removal of sounds, colours, heat, cold, and other sensible qualities, from the rank of continu'd independent existences, we are reduc'd merely to what are called primary qualities, as the only real ones, of which we have any adequate notion. These primary qualities are extension and solidity, with their different mixtures and modifications; figure, motion, gravity, and cohesion. (THN 1.4.4.5; SBN 227)

Before proceeding to the next stage of the second profound argument, I have to make an important observation concerning Hume's view of the logical structure of what he calls the modern 'system' (THN 1.4.4.6; SBN 227). The relation between the PSP and PMQ is especially significant, for Kail, Don Garrett and Peter Millican have proposed that the second profound argument is a reductio ad absurdum of the entire system including the PSP (Kail 2007a: 70; Garrett 1997: 218; Millican 2002: 465). This is not correct, since Hume thinks that the PSP is logically independent from the PMQ. For the PSP is his main premise in the argument against the PMQ – as I will show just below. The independence of the PSP from the PMQ is also suggested by Hume's words just before stating the PMQ: 'This principle [PSP] being once admitted, all the other doctrines [e.g. PMQ] of that philosophy seem to follow by an easy consequence' (THN 1.4.4.5; SBN 227; my emphasis). Thus, the second profound argument cannot be a reductio of the conjunction of the PMQ and the PSP.

With these considerations in place, the next stage of the second profound argument can be put in relatively easy terms although Hume takes pains to argue for it in THN 1.4.4. For it

follows almost directly from his view on space in THN 1.2 – consequently, in the Enquiry, he is much briefer. According to Hume's view on space, extension or space is inconceivable without colours or tactile qualities such as temperature and hardness (THN 1.2.3.5 and 15; SBN 34 and 38-9). From this, it directly follows that any perception of extension is a perception of colours or tactile qualities – or, more, a perception that is ultimately composed of the simple perceptions of coloured or tactile mathematical points (THN 1.4.4.8; SBN 228). Extension is the mere 'order' of these coloured or tactile mathematical points (THN 1.2.4.2; SBN 39-40). Colours and tactile qualities are proper sensibles. Thus, any perception of extension is fundamentally a perception of proper sensible qualities (THN 1.4.4.8; SBN 228). As such, by the corollary of the PSP and certain other premises of resemblance that I do not have to make explicit here, it cannot be a perception of Bodies.

How about other primary qualities? Hume's (and Berkeley's) point is that as they presuppose extension (THN 1.4.4.7-11; SBN 228-30)^{viii}, all of their perceptions are also perceptions of extension, which is ultimately an ordered collection of the simple perceptions of proper sensibles. Hence, by the corollary of the PSP, none of the perceptions of primary qualities can be the perception of a Body. The second stage of the second profound argument thus concludes that there cannot be any perception of Bodies: Bodies are imperceptible. This is not limited to the clear and distinct perceptions of Bodies; it concerns any perception of them. (THN 1.4.4.9, 10; SBN 228-9; EHU 12.15; SBN 154-5) So the second profound argument involves conceptual anti-realism, in Kail's terms, regarding Bodies.

Hume is clear that the conclusion of the second profound argument is the contradiction between consistent reasoning, causal reasoning, in particular, and believing in the existence of Bodies. But it is not obvious at all what the rational stance is with which Realism is contradictory and how this contradiction is supposed to follow from the imperceptibility of Bodies. There is

also the problem that Hume says so little about these issues. Let me first shoot down a tempting misunderstanding.

In EHU 12.15.n.32 (SBN 155), Hume claims that he took the second profound argument from Berkeley. When we look at the candidate arguments in Berkeley (1998a: §10; 1998b: 1D, 193-4), we see that Berkeley's argument concludes that the modern notion of Body involves a contradiction. Thus, Body according to this notion cannot exist. This might give us some ground to assume that the contradiction Hume is talking about is also involved in the notion of Body. Realism would contradict reason because the law of contradiction is a rational principle. This assumption suffers from the problem, however, that the text just does not support it. Neither in the Enquiry nor in the Treatise version of the second profound argument does Hume say that the notion of Body involves a contradiction (cf. THN 1.4.5.1; SBN 232; THN Appendix App. 10; SBN 633). Besides, it is hard to see how the law of contradiction could be a causally or inductively rational principle for Hume; it seems to be an intuitive or demonstrative principle.

Fortunately, there is an important clue in both EHU and T: Hume says that the second profound argument annihilates Body (EHU 12.16; SBN 155 and THN 1.4.4.6; SBN 228). Furthermore, in THN 1.4.4.10 and 15 (SBN 229; 231), he speaks about exclusion. I take this to mean that on Hume's view, the argument destroys all the perceivable properties of Body. This fits well with what I have concluded so far: the second profound argument, by the corollary of the PSP, strips Body off Real properties. Since Hume thinks that there cannot any perception of objects without properties, 'bare particulars' in contemporary parlance (THN Appendix App. 19; SBN 635), the second profound argument annihilates Body as a thing of which there can be any perception. This is an important clue for the very reason that according to Hume believing presupposes thinkable content: no belief without some perception (e.g. THN Abstract Abs. 21; SBN 653-4; EHU 5.13; SBN 50). So when we add this Humean premise, it follows that rational persons ought not to believe in Realism. It is a rational norm that one should not believe in the

existence of Bodies of which one cannot have any perception. Hence, if rational persons are capable of following this rational norm, they do not, in fact, believe in the existence of Bodies: they refrain from this belief, suspend it. As it is contradictory to believe and not to believe in the same thing at the same time, the second profound argument concludes that it is contradictory to be rational and a Realist at the same time. So the contradiction lies between the rational suspension of believing in Realism and believing in it (at the same time).

Yet I have not made it clear why Hume speaks about causal reasoning in the Treatise, that is, why it is precisely causal rationality that is inconsistent with believing in Realism. The answer is easy regarding the PSP, which Hume clearly takes as a causal tenet (or ‘inductively causal’, in modern parlance). He also apparently thinks that his view on space rests at least partially on empirical grounds because he supports it by empirical evidence (e.g. the ink spot experiment, THN 1.2.1.4; SBN 27-8). As direct sense-perception hardly supports a theory of perceiving space, this theory of Hume rests at least partially on a causally rational, that is, inferential, foundation. The same is true about his theory of belief (EHU 4, Part 2), which provides the premise that a belief presupposes a perception. It is thus understandable that Hume takes the suspension of belief in Realism following from the consistent and correct use of causal reasoning.

The decisive objection to the Realist Hume interpretations lies exactly here. The problem with them is that they want to attribute both to Hume: consistent causal reasoning and the belief in the existence of Bodies. But then they attribute a contradiction to him of which he is very well aware. Their Hume is therefore a self-reflectively inconsistent philosopher.

In the next section, I will argue that the Realist interpretations cannot escape this problem. The second profound argument, or Hume advancing it, thus forms a compelling argument against them.

2. REPLIES TO THE OBJECTIONS

Let me first consider the textual evidence. First of all, Hume does not present any specific, explicit answer to the second profound argument after evincing it in the Enquiry or the Treatise. There may be speculation about a possible solution occurring before it in either work, but as far as I can see, there is not any solution explicitly in the text. I think this is a fact that should be taken seriously. For it suggests that Hume does not have any answer to the argument: he really does think that it is irrefutable and that consistent (causal) reasoning and being a Realist are inconsistent.

Of course, lack of evidence is not evidence of absence. It may also be objected that Hume explicitly refutes Pyrrhonism in EHU 12.23 (SBN 159-60; see also THN 1.4.7.9ff.; SBN 269ff.). Does not this show that he eventually rejects the Pyrrhonian arguments, including the second profound argument, as well (even if the refutation is in practical terms: wide-spread Pyrrhonism would be lethal to society)? I do not think so. My reason for thinking so is that Hume sharply distinguishes Pyrrhonism from the Pyrrhonian arguments, including the second profound argument. For him, Pyrrhonism is universal suspension of belief (whether this understanding of Pyrrhonism is historically correct or not): 'they ["the profounder and more philosophical sceptics", i.e. Pyrrhonists] endeavour to introduce an universal doubt into all subjects of human knowledge and enquiry' (EHU 12.14; SBN 153; see also EHU 12.18; 22; SBN 156; 158). The Pyrrhonian arguments have their own conclusions, but the point is that their relation to Pyrrhonism is causal rather than logical or argumentative: they may or may not cause the universal suspension of belief (momentarily). This is shown by the following passages in which Hume uses causal terminology in describing this relation:

Their [merely sceptical arguments] only effect is to cause that momentary amazement and irresolution and confusion, which is the result of scepticism (EHU 12.15.n.32; SBN 155;

emphasis added).

Reason here seems to be thrown into a kind of amazement and suspence (EHU 12.18; SBN 156; emphasis added).

a Pyrrhonian may throw himself or others into a momentary amazement and confusion by his profound reasonings (EHU 12.23; SBN 160; emphasis added).

Finally, even if Hume does not use the term 'Pyrrhonism' in the Treatise (its first occurrence in his published works is in THN Abstract Abs. 27; SBN 657), in light of the Enquiry the following passage in the conclusion of Treatise 1 must be speaking about it and its relation to the Pyrrhonian arguments:

But what have I here said, that reflections very refin'd and metaphysical have little or no influence upon us? This opinion I can scarce forbear retracting, and condemning from my 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, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another. (THN 1.4.7.8; SBN 268-9; the first and last emphases added)

From the causal nature of the relation between the Pyrrhonian arguments and Pyrrhonism, it follows that Hume may consistently take these arguments as irrefutable, even subscribe to them, and reject Pyrrhonism. It does not involve any logical contradiction. This is, indeed, his view. Part of Hume's view on Pyrrhonism is that although Pyrrhonism itself, as suspending every belief, is untenable, the modern Pyrrhonian arguments are unanswerable:

all his [the Pyrrhonist's] objections [...] can have no other tendency than to show the whimsical condition of mankind, who must act and reason and believe; though they are not able, by their most diligent enquiry, to satisfy themselves concerning the foundation of these operations, or to remove the objections, which may be raised against them. (EHU 12.23; SBN 160; emphasis added)

Hume also says that the Pyrrhonist's scruples may be overcome only by instinct, which means that they are irrefutable as arguments:

To bring us to so salutary a determination, nothing can be more serviceable, than to be once thoroughly convinced of the force of the Pyrrhonian doubt, and of the impossibility, that any thing, but the strong power of natural instinct, could free us from it. (EHU 12.25; SBN 162)

Moreover, in the note discussing Berkeley that Hume inserted into the second profound argument in EHU, he maintains that it, as a Berkeleyan argument, 'admit[s] of no answer' (12.15.n.32; SBN 155; see also 12.14; 21; SBN 153-4; 158-9). All in all, Hume must take the second profound argument as irrefutable: consistent (causal) reasoning and being a Realist are, indeed, inconsistent.

Yet Hume scholars holding a Realist interpretation have proposed various ways to avoid attributing the conclusion of the second profound argument. Next I will take the most serious challenges, seven altogether, one by one and show that they are ineffective.

(1) Garrett has challenged Hume's endorsement of the PSP and thus Hume's subscription to the entire argument. According to Garrett, Hume 'pointedly refrains from endorsing' the PSP (1997: 220). I have shown elsewhere, by a meticulous analysis of the relevant texts, that even if it

is true that Hume never asserts it in the first person, there is sufficient textual evidence for his endorsement of this principle (Hakkarainen 2011, 240-7). As I pointed out before, the clearest evidence may be found in the Treatise where Hume maintains that the PSP, as the conclusion of a causal argument, is 'as satisfactory as can possibly be imagin'd' (THN 1.4.4.4; SBN 227).

(2) Kail (2007a: 70) suggests that the conclusion of the second profound argument does not satisfy Hume's criterion of justification or warrant, what Garrett calls Hume's 'Title Principle': 'Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to.' (THN 1.4.7.11; SBN 270) Kail is not very clear about this possibility, but the idea is something like the following. Hume takes the premises of the second profound argument as justified or warranted. He also thinks that the conclusion of the argument does follow from the premises. The argument is valid (in some logic). But Hume does not take the conclusion as justified or warranted, since it is not warranted by the Title Principle: it does not mix 'itself with some propensity'.

It is not easy to reply to this objection as it should be spelled out in detail: for instance, what mixing 'itself with some propensity' exactly means. Still it suffers from a serious textual problem. The Title Principle is missing from the Enquiry, Section 12. It occurs only in the Treatise. The passages speaking about the involuntariness of the Realist belief, which I will discuss below, make a different point. So if Hume answered to THN 1.4.4 by this principle – and even this is dubious as the immediate context of the principle is a different sceptical argument –, he does not do so on the second thought. Hence, the Title Principle cannot be Hume's considered answer to the second profound argument.

(3) However, Kail would protest to this that Hume not only says that Berkeley's arguments 'admit of no answer', he also writes that they 'produce no conviction'. According to Kail (2007a: 70), this phrase shows that Hume eventually thinks that the second profound argument, or rather its conclusion, does not compel assent because it does not satisfy the Title Principle. I am afraid this is a misunderstanding of the phrase. It does not criticise the second

profound argument. Why would Hume first praise the argument and then immediately criticise it in the same sentence? The reading that renders the sentence coherent is that 'produce no conviction' refers to the rational attitude of suspending the Realist belief as the conclusion of the irrefutable second profound argument.

(4) John P. Wright's Realist solution is to distinguish proper believing and conceiving from believing as supposing in Hume's theory (1995: 226 and 2007: 89-90). He does this in terms of the distinction between ideas that are clear and distinct and those that are not, such as obscure and confused ideas. Clear and distinct ideas that satisfy the conjunction of Hume's Copy Principle (THN 1.1.1.7; SBN 4) and the simple/complex ideas distinction (THN 1.1.1.2; SBN 2) provide the content for proper beliefs conceptions, whereas the content of beliefs as mere suppositions are non-clear and non-distinct ideas. In the case of the second profound argument, this is supposed to answer it in the following manner (1995: 231-4). Wright admits that the existence of Bodies cannot be held as a proper belief because Bodies cannot be conceived by clear and distinct ideas. In terms of the proper beliefs and clear and distinct ideas, the second profound argument works. Still, the existence of Bodies may be believed as an assumption in virtue of an 'inconceivable supposition' of things having only primary qualities, which is Kail's conceptual realism. In the domain of beliefs as mere suppositions, the rational norm of refraining does not hold and believing the existence of Bodies as a supposition does not contradict it. In addition, on Wright's view, Hume's subscription to the PSP gives a reason to hold a Realist interpretation, since the PSP presupposes the existence of Bodies, and since Hume thinks that it has a firm inductive-causal basis (1995: 231-2).

My reply to Wright is both textual and philosophical. Although Hume might make a distinction between believing as supposing and proper believing, he does not explicitly employ any inconceivable supposition to avoid the conclusion of the second profound argument. The possible commitments to inconceivable suppositions occur in different contexts (THN 1.2.6.8-9;

1.4.5.19-20; SBN 67-8; 241), and even this commitment is dubious because of THN 1.4.2.2 (SBN 188) where Hume says that 'we have already shown its absurdity'. So there is not any specific textual evidence for Wright's interpretation here. My main reason for not holding Wright's interpretation is philosophical though: Wright's inconceivable supposition, i.e. obscure and confused ideas, cannot answer the second profound argument. One of the points of the second profound argument is conceptual anti-realism: there cannot be any perception of Bodies – whether clear and distinct or obscure and confused. This follows (mainly) from the PSP and Hume's view on space. As according to Hume, 'nothing is ever present to the mind but perceptions', there cannot be any thinkable content present to the mind of Bodies. Bodies without primary qualities just are patently unthinkable: they are completely out of the reach of human understanding. So there cannot be any thinkable content even for taking their existence for granted, believing in them in that manner. Thus, not even the obscure and confused idea of the existence of Bodies is able to provide the means to avoid the contradiction between Humean reason and Realism. Furthermore, Wright's contention that the PSP presupposes the existence of Bodies just is not true. It merely states negatively that proper sensibles are not Real; it does not involve any positive assumption of existence. From this, with suitable extra premises, it follows that if there are Bodies, the perceptions of proper sensibles do not resemble anything in them. This does not involve commitment to the existence of Bodies.

(5) In addition to Wright, Galen Strawson defends a conceptually realist answer to the second profound argument. He claims that 'relative ideas' offer an escape route for a Realist interpretation (2002: 239-40). Garrett has sometimes proposed the same conceptually realist solution (2007). The idea is that even if there cannot be a 'positive', i.e. descriptive, contentful idea (or impression) of Bodies, it is possible to single them out as the causes of some sense-impressions. This happens by means of the relative ideas of Bodies that consist of three elements: a positive idea of a sense-impression, a causal relation and the imperceptible Bodily cause of the

impression, an incomprehensible 'x'. An example of the relative idea would be the thought that there is an unperceived Body that causes a particular impression of red. In virtue of these relative ideas, it is possible to suppose the existence of Bodies and the conclusion of the second profound argument is avoided.

There are both textual and philosophical problems in this solution. Textually, its ground is thin. The only place where Hume might explicitly employ something like a relative idea to answer to the second profound argument is the last sentence of EHU 12.16 (SBN 155), which was inserted into it in the posthumous 1777 edition (the possible uses of relative ideas in THN 1.2.6.9 (SBN 68) and 1.4.5.19-20 (SBN 241) are not employed as a solution to THN 1.4.4). Let me discuss the philosophical problem first and then come back to this passage.

I think there is a decisive philosophical argument against Strawson: Hume cannot commit himself to the relative idea of Body if he is consistent with his nominalism and view on relations. There is a passage in the Treatise that strongly suggests that the ideas of relations are complex – whether 'natural' or 'philosophical relations': 'These complex ideas may be divided into Relations, Modes, and Substances' (THN 1.1.4.7; SBN 13; cf. 1.1.5.1; SBN 13-4). It seems to me that this is also how it must be in Hume's theory of ideas. According to him, simple ideas are mereological atoms: they do not divide into proper parts (THN 1.1.1.2; SBN 2; EHU 7.4; SBN 62). How then could the ideas of relations be simple? For relational facts themselves [$R(a, b)$ holds] are always composite, consisting of the relation and one term at least (if there are reflexive relations) – no relation without relata. The relevant point implied here for present purposes is that the putative relative idea of a Body collapses into its positive idea component. To Hume, the necessary condition for thinking about a relation is that there must be a perception of both its terms; no relation is present to the mind without both of its terms being present – indeed, no complex perception is present to the mind without its proper parts being present. However, in the case of the putative relative idea of Bodies, there cannot be any perception of the other term in the

supposed causal relation (as Strawson himself acknowledges); the Body itself is, in principle, an imperceptible *x*. Hence there cannot be any idea – or indeed, thought – of the relation. Therefore it is not possible to distinguish this alleged relative idea from one of its three components, the positive idea of the sense-impression; for there cannot be any positive idea of the third component, i.e. the Body. Thus, the putative relative idea collapses into its positive idea component, which, given the second profound argument, is not an idea of a Body. The conceptual anti-realism of the second profound argument regarding Bodies still stands.

Even if it were admitted that the idea of this type of supposed causation is provided by the abstract idea of causation, this would not help.^{ix} The abstract idea of causation cannot be of this specific type of (possible) causation as the above argument shows. It must be of some other specific type because in Hume's nominalism (THN 1.1.7) every idea of causation is the idea of some particular determinate causal relation, i.e. token of causation. It is, for example, the idea of some observed causal relation where both the cause and the effect were perceived. So if this 'substitute' causal relation is used in order to single out the Bodily cause of some sense-impression, it may single out something that is not actually the cause – we cannot know. It may, so to speak, point to the wrong object or even type of entity. This follows from the fact that the substitute causal relation is indeterminate in this case. The point can be illustrated by an everyday example. Let us suppose that I know that smoking causes cancer. It is pretty obvious that knowing this particular causal relation does not help me in singling out the cause of Alzheimer's. Regarding the relative idea, it follows that the resulting relative idea of Body must be indeterminate as well: it cannot single out any particular entity or even a type of entities – it may pick out, say, an impression instead of Body as the cause of some sense-impression.^x At best, the putative relative idea of Body is not therefore the idea of Body, which is a conceptually anti-realist result. It does not provide a means to think about Body specifically.

Hume's last-minute insertion into EHU 12.16 (SBN 155) should be read from this perspective:

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 contend against it.

On pain of making Hume inconsistent with his nominalism and view on relations, this passage ought to be read as Hume foreseeing Strawson's conceptually realist reply to the second profound argument and pointing out that it does not work: 'a notion so imperfect, that no sceptic will think it worth while to contend against it.' The passage should not be read, then, as signalling a commitment to the relative idea of Body. As this is the only place where Hume might solve the second profound argument by the relative idea, Strawson's view is not finally supported by any specific textual evidence.

(6) The basic naturalist point is that human beings, even sceptics, are incapable of following the rational norm that Realism ought not to be believed; we just cannot help but believe in the existence of Bodies. It is not psychologically possible to refrain from this belief. As such, the second profound argument is impotent against it. This kind of interpretation may be supported by what I call 'the involuntariness passages' where Hume seems to claim the involuntariness of the belief in the existence of Bodies.

In EHU 12.23 (SBN 160), Hume states that the only tendency that the Pyrrhonian arguments can have is to show 'the whimsical condition of mankind'. We must act, reason, and believe although we cannot found these operations on any certain basis (or refute the arguments against them). The natural reading of this passage is that it also alludes to the belief in the

existence of Bodies. This is therefore an involuntary belief against which there are irrefutable arguments.

In a familiar passage in the Abstract, Hume concludes that nature always overcomes Pyrrhonism and compels us to assent to external existence (THN Abstract Abs. 27; SBN 657). Equally famously, he begins his explanation of the belief in Direct Realism in the Treatise by asserting that "tis in vain to ask, Whether there be body or not? That is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasonings.' (THN 1.4.2.1; SBN 187). The sceptic

must assent to the principle concerning the existence of body, tho' he cannot pretend by any arguments of philosophy to maintain its veracity. Nature has not left this to his choice, and has doubtless, esteem'd it an affair of too great importance to be trusted to our uncertain reasonings and speculations (Ibid.).

Despite the fact that Hume expresses doubts about this statement in the penultimate paragraph of the section, he finishes it with the following affirmation:

For this reason I rely entirely upon them [the senses]; and take it for granted, whatever may be the reader's opinion at this present moment, that an hour hence he will be perswaded there is both an external and internal world. (THN 1.4.2.57; SBN 218)

Between these, Hume also writes that even philosophers have 'so great a propensity to believe' in Realism that faced with the non-Reality of perceptions, they invent Representative Realism (THN 1.4.2.56; SBN 218; see also 50; SBN 213-4).

Finally, just before proclaiming the whimsical condition of mankind, Hume writes that '[n]ature is always too strong for principle' (EHU 12.23; SBN 160). This formulation is

reminiscent of the well-known passage in the Abstract. The same point is also made when Hume discusses the second 'species' of Academical philosophy in EHU 12.25 (SBN 162), which I already quoted:

To bring us to so salutary a determination [Academical philosophy], nothing can be more serviceable, than to be once thoroughly convinced of ... the impossibility, that any thing, but the strong power of natural instinct, could free us from it [Pyrrhonism].

It seems to me that in the light of all these passages it is not reasonable to deny that the natural causes of the belief in Body are psychologically so strong that the belief cannot be permanently suspended or rejected.^{xi}

My reply to this basic naturalist point is very simple. Hume is explicit that it is, indeed, psychologically possible to refrain from believing in the existence of Bodies. The only thing is that this refraining must be merely momentary. Hence, he must allow the psychological possibility for human beings to follow, even if not permanently, the rational norm that Realism should not be believed. The clearest textual evidence for this is formed by the following passages, which I quote above:

Their [Berkeleyan sceptical arguments including the second profound argument] only effect is to cause that momentary amazement and irresolution and confusion, which is the result of scepticism (EHU 12.15.n.32; SBN 155).

a Pyrrhonian may throw himself or others into a momentary amazement and confusion by his profound reasonings (EHU 12.23; SBN 160).

(7) Finally, an objection that is close to the naturalist reply and need to be addressed would be that in the conclusion of the second profound argument, the contradiction is inevitable or not a problem in philosophy in the end. The section of the Treatise advancing the argument, 1.4.4, is part of Hume's 'natural history of philosophy' and its purpose is merely to show that even the best account of Body so far leads to a contradiction. Contradictions and conflicts are inherent in philosophy and the metaphysics of Body.

However, there are two fundamental problems with this suggestion. First, recall that Hume endorses the PSP, which is a component of the modern system. So it is simply not so that the modern account of Body, which is the best theory, is totally untenable; Hume thinks that there is something correct in the modern system. Secondly, Hume is clear in his recapitulation of the conclusion of THN 1.4.4 in THN 1.4.7 that this particular contradiction ought not to be accepted in philosophy. Let me remind you of the recap:

Or in case we prefer neither of them, but successively assent to both, as is usual among philosophers, with what confidence can we afterwards usurp that glorious title, when we thus knowingly embrace a manifest contradiction? (THN 1.4.7.4; SBN 266)

So even if Hume thought that this contradiction is inevitable on certain assumptions, it would still be a deep problem with which philosophers should come to terms. In general, Hume is very reluctant to accept contradictions in philosophy. Take, for instance, his criticism of his account of personal identity involving a contradiction in the Appendix – although we do not know what that contradiction precisely is (THN Appendix App. 21; SBN 636).^{xii}

I have gone through every serious objection to Hume's endorsement of the second profound argument. I have shown that they do not work. It seems to me that this gives a sufficient

reason to conclude that Hume commits himself to the second profound argument and its conclusion. Hence, he cannot be a Realist.

3. CONCLUSION

I would like to conclude the paper by pointing out what my argument suggests. First, that we should endorse what I have called a 'no-single-Hume interpretation' (Hakkarainen 2012: 297ff.). On the one hand, the second profound argument establishes that Hume cannot be a Realist. On the other hand, the involuntariness passages show it is not psychologically possible for him, by his own lights, perpetually to refrain from believing in the existence of Bodies. In order to avoid the contradiction between these, we have to make a distinction. Richard Popkin's solution is to draw a temporal distinction between Hume's moods or moments as a sceptic and a Realist (Popkin 1980: 112; 114-6; 119-20; 123-6; 130-2). Robert Fogelin would say that the difference is in perspectives: in one perspective, Hume is not a Realist, in another, he is (1998: 164-8). Donald L.M. Baxter makes a distinction between different types of assent (2006: 114-7). Hume withdraws the active rational assent to the existence of Bodies, but eagerly assents to them naturally. My interpretation, which I have defended elsewhere (Hakkarainen 2012: 301-6), is that Hume suspends his judgement on Realism in the domain of philosophy, whereas, when the philosophical analysis of his belief in the domain of everyday life is given (as Hume does in THN 1.4.2), he can be said to be a firm Realist. Philosophy and everyday life are two domains of doxastic assent that differ in degree. They are distinct because epistemic standards in them are different: in philosophy, they are theoretical virtues such as consistency and coherence rather than the more practical values of everyday life.

Furthermore, it seems to me that accepting the second profound argument as Hume's argument clears ground for the true sceptical interpretation of Hume's metaphysics that is neutral on the divide between materialism and idealism. On this reading, there are perceptions and entities composed of them such as minds and bodies, but whether there are other things in the

world, e.g. Bodies, Hume suspends his judgement in the domain of metaphysics and philosophy.^{xiii}

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NOTES

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- i. Henceforth 'Enquiry' or 'EHU'.
- ii. Henceforth 'Treatise' or 'T'.
- iii. Henceforth 'Abstract' or 'Abs.'
- iv. Speaking about perception-independence rather than mind-independence is more precise for the simple reason that according to Hume's bundle theory, a mind depends on the perceptions composing it.
- v. all the sensible qualities of objects, such as hard, soft, hot, cold, white, black, &c. are merely secondary, and exist not in the objects themselves, but are perceptions of the mind, without any external archetype or model, which they represent. (EHU 12.15; SBN 154).

all the qualities, perceived by the senses, be in the mind, not in the object (Ibid.).

all sensible qualities are in the mind, not in the object. (EHU 12.16; SBN 155)

colours, sounds, tastes, smells, heat and cold [...] be nothing but impressions in the mind, deriv'd from the operation of external objects, and without any resemblance to the qualities of the objects. (THN 1.4.4.3; SBN 226)

the impressions of colour, sound, &c. are confest to be nothing but internal existences, and to arise from causes, which no ways resemble them. (Ibid.4; SBN 227)

the removal of sounds, colours, heat, cold, and other sensible qualities, from the rank of continu'd independent existences (Ibid.5; SBN 227)

colours, sounds, tastes, and smells be merely perceptions (Ibid.6; SBN 228).

Colour is excluded from any real existence. (Ibid.8; SBN 228)

the exclusion of colours, sounds, heat and cold from the rank of external existences (Ibid.10; SBN 229).

neither colour, sound, taste, nor smell have a continu'd and independent existence. (Ibid.15; SBN 231)

vi. This is also true about the other statements of the principle in Hume's works (Hakkarainen 2011: 240-6)

vii. I agree with Louis Loeb, however, that there is a gap in the argument that Hume did not spot (Hakkarainen 2011, 253).

viii. Hume argues that this is also true of solidity as it is impenetrability, which presupposes at least two points or bodies, i.e. extension (THN 1.4.4.9, 10 and 14; SBN 228-9; 231).

ix. Garrett made me this comment in conversation.

x. These points elaborate on (Flage 2007: 146-53) and (Winkler 2007: 59-64).

xi. The psychological character of this conclusion should be stressed, though: it is not an epistemic conclusion of justification or warrant. Hence, Hume is not bringing forward the Title Principle in them.

xii. See also EHU 2.4; 4.21; 5.10; 8.8; 8.36; 12.20; 12.20.n.34; THN 1.1.5.8; 1.4.4.1; 1.4.5.1-2; 14; 1.4.6.2; 1.4.7.4-8, and Appendix App.10; SBN 18; 37; 47-8; 84; 103; 156.7; 156; 15; 225; 232; 239; 251-2; 265-8, and 633.

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