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Recitation 2

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## Idea Copy Machine

According to Hume, all of our perceptions are either impressions or ideas. An impression is a lively perception and comes from the use of our senses, including for instance, touch, hearing, and sight. An example is looking at your grandmother standing in front of you at the moment. An idea is also a perception, but has less vivacity than impressions. An idea, for instance, can be the visualization of how your grandmother looks like in your mind. While in person, you have an exact image of how your grandmother looks like, it is impossible to include all of the smaller details, like the exact shape of certain wrinkles and the location of spots on her face, in the visualization in your mind. Hume's Copy Principle states that "all our ideas or more feeble perceptions are copies of our impressions or more lively ones" (Hume 11). Essentially, ideas are derived from impressions. You gain ideas from your impressions, which you obtain as you use your senses. According to this principle, bringing back the previous examples, the more feeble visualization in the mind of your grandmother, an idea, was a copy of the more lively perception of your grandmother in person, which is the impression.

Hume provides two arguments to support the Copy Principle. His first argument is that "when we analyse our thoughts or ideas, however compounded or sublime, we always find, that they resolve themselves into such simple ideas as were copied from a precedent feeling or sentiment" (Hume 11). In other words, our complex ideas consist of simple ideas, and simple ideas are copies of impressions. An example is the idea of a rainbow-colored frog with a star pattern on its skin. The idea of this frog with its features can be considered the complex idea, and the idea of the color of rainbow, the idea of a star pattern, and the idea of a frog can be considered the simple ideas, gained from impressions. I believe Hume's first argument is strong and does not carry any false premises. It seems reasonable as we all think of more complex ideas

through the combining of simpler ideas, and we don't seem to have needed an impression to gain the complex idea as long as we had obtained the simpler ideas through impressions.

One may object to Hume's first argument because it may seem to contradict the Copy Principle. The Copy Principle states that "all our ideas" are copies of impressions (Hume 11). However according to the first argument, we can have complex ideas which come from simpler ideas and not directly from impressions. If you look at the issue with a larger perspective, though, you can see that complex ideas come from the combination of simple ideas, which are copies of impressions. Therefore, complex ideas indirectly derive from impressions; their components are copies of impressions. For instance, the idea of the rainbow star frog did not come from an impression, as there aren't any of these frogs on the planet. However, the idea of this frog can be gained from the simple ideas that make up the complex idea of a rainbow star frog, and these individual simple ideas could be gained through impressions. Thus, Hume's first argument does not contradict the Copy Principle, reinforcing it instead by accounting for the case of complex ideas that aren't direct copies of impressions.

Hume's second argument for the Copy Principle is as stated: "If it happen, from a defect of the organ, that a man is not susceptible of any species of sensation, we always find, that he is as little susceptible of the correspondent ideas" (Hume 12). In other words, those who lack the ability to have a type of sensation also lack the ideas that correspond to this sensation. According to Hume, this is evidence for the Copy Principle because it helps demonstrate that ideas are copies of impressions with a different angle. Hume believes, for instance, that blind people cannot form visual ideas, like the idea of what an elephant looks like. And the reason why blind people cannot know what an elephant looks like is because they lack the ability of sight and therefore cannot have an impression of seeing an elephant. So, since blind people can't have the

impression of seeing an elephant, they cannot have an idea of what an elephant looks like, because ideas are copies of impressions.

Initially, it seems as though Hume's second argument makes sense. How could a man who lacks the sense of touch have any ideas of what something hot or cold feels like? However, Hume's second argument is weaker compared to his first argument in that he doesn't specify whether the ideas must be correct. Just because a person lacks the ability to feel sensations a certain way does not mean that that person won't be able to form ideas relating to that sensation. Hume believes that blind people cannot have an idea about what seeing an object like a tree would be like. However, there is nothing stopping a blind man from using the ideas that he already has to come up with an idea of what he believes seeing a tree may be like. Blind people can form ideas of what visualizing a tree would be like, even if they aren't the same idea that a person with vision has. Although the ideas of the visualization of a tree could be different for a blind person and for a person with vision, they are still both ideas regarding the visualization of a tree, just obtained in different manners. A person with eyesight could gain the idea of what a tree looks like through seeing a tree in person, or having an impression of seeing a tree firsthand. A blind person could obtain the idea of what a tree looks like through impressions using his other senses. For instance, he can use his hands to touch the rough bark of the tree, the thin branches of the tree, and the smoothness of the tree's leaves, and piece these impressions to form an idea of what seeing the tree visually would be like.

Although Hume is incorrect in believing that blind people cannot have ideas regarding vision, the Copy Principle isn't proven to be false; the example of the blind person doesn't show that someone who lacks an impression of something cannot have an idea of that thing. Recalling Hume's first argument, complex ideas consist of simpler ideas, which can be formed from

impressions. The first argument allows for the formation of complex ideas, not directly from impressions but from simpler ideas gained from impressions. Summing up, complex ideas indirectly derive from impressions. In the case regarding blindness, the person was able to form ideas from non-visual impressions and combine them to create complex ideas that relate to visualizing things. Therefore, the Copy Principle still holds.

Direct objections against the Copy Principle can be made through counterexamples, but such counterexamples are not successful in demonstrating that the principle is false. Let's take a look at an example regarding mathematics. Imagine that you know about numbers and the rules of addition. Imagine that you encounter a math problem you have never seen before. According to the Copy Principle, since you have never had an impression of this math problem or of solving the problem, you cannot have an idea on how to solve this problem. However, we know that if we know the rules of addition, we don't need to have seen a specific addition problem before in order to know how to solve it. If we needed to have an impression of a math problem before in order to solve it, we would all fail our mathematics exams, which likely have problems we have never seen before. However, this does not mean the Copy Principle does not work. We don't fail our math exams not because the Copy Principle is false but because we are able to form complex ideas from simpler ideas from impressions, which is Hume's first argument. We didn't need to have impressions of math problems on our exams because we combine the ideas of math rules gained from past impressions, which in this case comes in the form of learning from instructors, books, and practice problems, to form the idea of how to solve a new math problem we encounter. We've learned math rules, so we use these ideas and combine them to solve new problems. Thus, this counterexample doesn't work to prove the Copy Principle doesn't work.

Hume addresses a counterexample of his own to the Copy Principle. He supposes that there is a man who has directly seen all shades of blue except for one. Hume believes that the man could indeed have an idea of this missing shade. According to the Copy Principle, the man shouldn't be able to have an idea of the missing shade because he has never seen it with his own eyes, or had an impression of it. However from examining Hume's first argument to support the Copy Principle, we can see that this counterexample does not pose a serious problem for his theory. Recalling this argument, we know that complex ideas compose of more simple ideas. Having an idea of this missing shade can be considered a compounded idea, consisting of simpler ideas. The simple ideas would include the idea of a shade darker than the missing shade and the idea of a shade lighter than the missing shade. The remaining simple idea could be the idea that mixing a lighter shade of color with a much darker shade will result in a shade somewhere between these two shades. If these simpler ideas are combined, the man can have the idea of mixing the lighter shade of blue with the darker shade of blue to obtain the missing shade. Therefore, it is possible for the man to form an idea of this missing shade of blue without having seen it in person.

With the strong support of Hume's first argument, the Copy Principle stands strong. It is correct to believe that ideas are copies of impressions and that complex ideas can be formed from simpler ideas.

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