Husserl and Kant, the two German philosophers most vividly influenced by David Hume, both pay great attention to his doctrine of "fictions" constituted by reason and imagination. Husserl berates this fictionalism. Hume transforms the entire lived world, substances, the self, and all scientific constructions into unreal artifices, says Husserl, because he is blind to the objectivating, intentional, function of consciousness. "For this Positivism, things are reduced to empirically regulated complexes of psychic data... and their identity, as well as their entire real sense, is turned into a pure fiction. This is not only a false doctrine, totally blind to essential phenomenological factors, but it is also contradictory since it does not see that even fictions have their own mode of being, their mode of evidence..." The results are disastrous in Husserl's opinion: a catastrophic skepticism and an unreal, "as if" philosophy. Husserl's response is to take Hume's fictions as the starting point of his own philosophy. The meanings, objects, and ego that Hume discards as philosophical illusions are accepted by phenomenology as authentically constituted by consciousness, and the entire program of phenomenology becomes the analysis of their constitution.

Kant's reaction is quite different. Instead of rehabilitating what Hume discards, Kant justifies the rejection. Causal necessity and substantial identity are said to be the result of categories imposed on experiential data and to this extent constructed by consciousness; the ideas of God, soul, and world are purely regulative, and when applied constitutively to experience, become transcendental illusions. The formal components of experience are "artifices" of consciousness.

The Modern Schoolman, xiv, March 1968
Only the critical philosophy makes us aware of their unreality and saves us from the contradictions that arise when we naively confuse nomena and phenomena. Critical philosophy is the rigorous science of the artifices and fictions of consciousness. In it, Kant establishes the absolute necessity of Hume’s fictions.

What is the philosophy of artifice and fiction that influenced Kant and Husserl in such different ways? It is found chiefly in Hume’s Treatise. In his later writings the concept of illusion almost disappears, so our study will concentrate on his first major work.


2 Kant explicitly mentions only Hume’s critique of causality, but then goes on to deny the intuitive givens of other things that Hume rejects. Cf. the Introduction to the Prolegomena; also Critique of Pure Reason, A 790-61. Kant seems to think that Hume only criticized the principle of necessary causality; cf Critique of Pure Reason, A 760.

3 In his later writings both on understanding and on social philosophy Hume eschews such terms as “fiction,” “illusion,” “artifice,” etc. Perhaps he felt they were too offensive to the public. In his Essay Concerning Human Understanding even the concept of fiction and artifice vanishes, except in reference to the illusions of metaphysics or superstition. The reason for this may be found in what N. K. Smith has shown about Hume’s later philosophy; Hume gradually abandoned his doctrine of the “propensities” in human nature which are the causes of fictions. Smith says Hume became less Newtonian in his analysis of human nature. In his later works he gives fewer explanations and is content simply to describe. For instance, not only imaginative propensities, but even the dynamic force of “sympathy” no longer appear in the Inquiries. Cf. N. K. Smith, The Philosophy of David Hume (New York, 1960), pp. 59 note 1, 116, 125, 151, 226. The absence of these “explanations” in the later works certainly makes them less powerful philosophically. The Treatise is a better work philosophically not merely because it uses mechanical propensities as causes, but because these mechanical concepts are transformed by philosophical metaphor into philosophical explanations. In his later social writings, Hume drops the terminology of “Illusions” but retains the concept of social artifices; for instance, the Essay Concerning the Principles of Morals, p. 199, compares rules of justice with superstitious practices and admits that both are artificial and arbitrary. Also Appendix III contrasts justice with virtues of instinct. In his essay, “Of the Original Contract,” Essays, Moral, Political and Literary (Oxford, 1963), pp. 466-88, the concept is again present though the terminology of fiction is absent. In this essay we will use the Selby-Bigge edition of both the Treatise and the Enquiries. References to the Treatise will be abbreviated.

4 Treatise, pp. xx.

5 Ibid., p. xxii

6 Ibid., p. xxii

1. The Science of Man and the Methodology for Discovering Illusions

In the Introduction to his Treatise Hume outlines a twofold aim for his philosophy. First he intends to provide a unified explanation for all sciences by showing their origins in a science of human nature. “In pretending therefore to explain the principles of human nature, we in effect propose a complete system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost entirely new, and the only one upon which they can stand with any security.” This science, by directly attacking human nature as the “capital or center of these sciences,” will dissipate the scandalous doubts, errors, and fruitless controversies that continue to mar human understanding of the foundations of science. It will bring peace and agreement to fundamental scientific speculation. In this expectation Hume resembles both Husserl and Kant who felt that their own “sciences of man” would be rigorous and scientific enough to bring an end to philosophical disagreement.

The second aim deals with another sort of peace and contentment. Hume will show the limits of human inquiry and thus allow us to rest satisfied with what we can attain instead of trying to satisfy vain hopes. “When we see, that we have arrived at the utmost extent of human reason, we sit down contented; and though we be perfectly satisfied in the main of our ignorance, and perceive that we cannot give no reason for our most general and most refined principles, beside our experience of their reality; which is the reason of the mere vulgur . . .” Whereas the first aim is theoretically constructive, the second is cathartical. The first goal is to achieve scientific satisfaction and completion where that is possible, the second is to show that it is impossible in certain respects. Philosophy will put us at rest by showing that there is nothing to be looked for, where previously reason or imagination anticipated finding something. “When this mutual contentment and satisfaction can be obtained between the master and scholar, I know not what more we can require of our philosophy.” His philosophy must unmask illusions and artifices and thus bring the mind to rest.

The contrast between Hume and Aristotle on this point is striking. For Aristotle the mind also rests when it reaches the limits of scientific explanation. It cannot “march to infinity” in its explanations, but reaches certain principles where it must stop. These principles are unquestionable because they are so lucid; they are

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self-evident propositions, needing no fuller explanation because they carry their explanation within themselves.7 The mind does not ask for more because it is completely satisfied. In Hume, the mind rests in a very different type of unquestionability. There are certain principles simply experienced as facts. They cannot be explained, nor are they self-explanatory. The mind can and does fabricate questions about them, but this only leads to contradiction and error. Peace of mind comes only when we stop asking questions about basic principles and mortify our desire to know. We are content and satisfied when “we perceive that we can give no reason for our most general and most refined principles, besides our experience of their reality.” Not eminent intelligibility but unintelligible facticity is all we can reach.

The methodology that will enable us both to erect a science of human nature and put an end to vain desires is also explained in the Introduction. Abstruse metaphysical argument is to be avoided and experience alone is accepted as a guide and criterion of truth: “The only solid foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observation.”8 Whatever is rejected by this criterion is illusory and artificial. In practice the application of this principle involves the distinction between impressions and ideas, which are the only two forms of “perceptions” Hume admits in the mind. Since every idea is by definition a faint copy of an impression, it must be possible to refer each idea to the impression it is derived from.9 In this way we can validate ideas by showing the basis they have in “experience and observation.”

Sometimes the application of this principle invalidates certain purported “ideas.” For instance in attacking the notion of abstract ideas, like that of a triangle which is neither isosceles nor scalene, Hume rest his argument on the derivation of ideas from impressions: “But to destroy this artifice, we need but reflect on that principle so oft insisted on, that all our ideas are copied from our impressions.”10 Since we find there is no corresponding impression, we must discard the pretended idea.

It is important to see what is being discarded here. It is not the case that we have certain ideas that pretend to be copies of impressions but really are not. According to Hume, if we cannot find an impression, then the idea itself does not exist. If we cannot find an impression, we were simply mistaken in believing we had an idea at all. “But if you cannot point out any such impression, you may be certain you are mistaken, when you imagine you have any such idea.”11 It is not the case that such ideas really exist but are false. How do mistakes arise then? We may rashly suppose that we do have a certain idea, or our language may mislead us into thinking we have one: “...in all of these expressions, so applied, we have really no distinct meaning, and make use only of common words, without any clear and determinate ideas.” Usually, Hume adds, the trouble is not that we have no ideas whatsoever behind our words, but that we misapply legitimate words: “But as 'tis more probable, that these expressions do here lose their true meaning by being wrongly applied, than that they never have any meaning...”12 A word belonging to one idea is applied to another, and the supposed combination cannot exist as an idea.

That Hume's criticism is directed against the very existence of certain ideas is confirmed by the second methodological principle he uses to discriminate between reality and illusion. Besides the technique of tracing ideas to their impressions, Hume uses another criterion of truth which is not mentioned in the Introduction to the Treatise but occurs frequently in that work. This second criterion could be called a priori, since it can establish the validity of an idea without actually tracing it to its proper impression. The

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7 Vg. Posterior Analytics, I, #3.  
8 Treatise, p xx.  
9 The derivation of ideas from impressions is faced with difficulties of which are particularly vexing: (a) The problem of Hume's atomism. Is consciousness presented with discrete bits of experience, but are combined to form complex objects, or are the atoms of consciousness the result of analysis? The latter position is defended, and a survey of recent literature on this subject is given in C. Hendel, Studies in the Philosophy of David Hume (Indianapolis, 1963), pp. 379-480. A text which seems important for Hume's atomism, but which is not mentioned in discussions about it, is found on p. 366 of the Treatise: "Ideas never admit of a total union, but are endowed with a kind of impenetrability, by which they exclude each other, and are capable of forming a compound by their conjunction, not by their mixture. On the other hand, impressions and passions are susceptible of an entire union; and like colors, may be blended so perfectly together, that each of them may lose itself, and contribute only to that uniform impression, which arises from the whole." It seems to say that impressions are not atomic while ideas are; but if this is the case, how can discrete ideas ever be copies of blended impressions? (b) What is the exact relationship between ideas and impressions? How do ideas "signify" impressions, and how do impressions "cause" ideas? It has been forcibly argued that the relation between impressions and ideas is an instance of the very causality that Hume criticizes: M. O'Donnell, "Hume's Approach to Causation," Philosophical Studies, Vol. 10 (1960), 80-84, 91.  
10 Treatise, p 72.  
11 Ibid., p 65.  
12 Ibid., p 162; cf. p. 262: "The problems of personal identity are to be regarded rather as grammatical than as philosophical difficulties." And pp. 61-62: "...Tis usual for men to use words for ideas, and to talk instead of thinking in their reasonings."
validity of an idea is determined simply by inspecting the idea itself. If the idea is not in contradiction with itself, and if it can be clearly conceived, then it is a valid and real idea. Hume says: "Whatever is clearly conceived, after any manner, may exist after the same manner. This is a principle, which has been already acknowledged." 13 Earlier, in talking about space and time, Hume says, "'Tis an established maxim in metaphysics, That whatever the mind clearly conceives includes the idea of possible existence, or in other words, that nothing we imagine is absolutely impossible." 14 If we can bring any idea to a clear conception, then we can infer that what the idea expresses must be capable of existing. To use Hume's own example, we can clearly conceive of a golden mountain, and such a mountain must be capable of existing. It would be possible for us to have an impression of it. However, we cannot form a clear conception of a mountain without a valley, because such a complex idea would be contradictory. Hence this complex being could not exist; we could never have an impression of a mountain without a valley. Here we have a criterion for judging the reality or artificiality of our ideas without actually relating them to an impression. The idea itself can tell us whether it can be the true image of an impression or not. The criterion is intrinsic to the ideas themselves.

How can Hume justify this criterion? It is based on the mind's passivity. If we really have an idea, it must have come from a corresponding impression. "For suppose I form at present an idea, of which I have forgot the corresponding impression, I am able to conclude from this idea, that such an impression did once exist ..." 15 In speaking of causal necessity Hume says: "Upon this head I repeat what I have often had occasion to observe, that as we have no idea, that is not derived from an impression, we must find some impression, that gives rise to this idea of necessity, if we assert we have really such an idea." 16 No clear and distinct idea can exist in our minds unless it has been derived from some impression, whether of sensation or reflection. Therefore when we find it is possible to bring a given idea to a clear and distinct existence in the mind, we have a sure sign that the idea has come from an impression. What the idea expresses must be capable of real existence. "To form a clear idea of anything, is an undeniable argument for its possibility, and is alone a refutation of any pretended demonstration against it." 17

The criterion works in a negative way also. We can disqualify certain things that pretend to be ideas but really are not by showing that they are contradictory. We may think we have a certain idea as long as we leave it vague or merely talk about it uncritically, but when we try to clarify it we find it is self-contradictory. Thus we never had an idea after all, and we know apriori the impossibility of ever bringing this supposed idea to its original impression. Contradiction "destroys the idea" before we find its proper impression.

Thus Hume has two criteria for distinguishing reality from illusion: tracing a supposed idea to its impression, or inspecting the idea itself to see whether it can be clearly conceived. Now that we have distinguished these two criteria, we must show that in practice they are very much dependent upon one another. Hume says that in fact it is almost impossible for us to make our ideas clear (and hence to test for contradiction) without finding their impressions: "... 'Tis impossible perfectly to understand any idea, without tracing it up to its origin, and examining that primary impression, from which it arises. The examination of the impression bestows a clearness on the idea ..." 18 In using both criteria in the Treatise Hume slips from one to the other, now saying that something is contradictory, now denying that it has an impression. The two procedures reinforce one another. But we cannot equate them; clarifying idea is not the same thing as finding their impressions.

13 Ibid., p. 233
14 Ibid., p. 32.
15 Ibid., pp 105-06.
16 Ibid., p. 155; cf. p 67.
17 Treatise, p. 89.
18 Other passages where this principle is stated: pp. 19-20, 29, 43, 95, 11, 236, 250. On p. 67 it is tied in with the "idea" of existence: "Whatever we conceive, we conceive to be existent." Cf. M. O'Donnell, Hume's Approach to Causation, pp. 77-80, and R. F. Anderson, Hume's First Principles (Lincoln, 1966), pp. 36 ("Whatever is conceivable is possible"). In this discussion Hume faces the same problem Plato examines in asking how we can talk and think about what is not (Sophist 23B-237; Cratylus 429). Hume has transformed Plato's problem into a question about human nature and the ideas existing in our minds, but the essentials of the difficulty remain; if we have no ideas, how can we ever talk about them even in a mistaken way? Hume's reply is that our speech is unclear and obscure; we cannot talk about nonexistent ideas if we speak clearly.
19 Ibid., pp 74-75.
10 Ibid., p. 83

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2. SPECULATIVE ILLUSIONS IN BOOK I OF THE “TREATISE”

Book I of the Treatise is Hume’s analysis of cognition. In describing the nature and limits of human knowledge, he is forced to discuss various illusions produced by the imagination and reason. He does this to show the points at which man goes beyond the proper bounds of knowledge. Although he considers both reason and imagination capable of producing artifices, he nowhere speaks of any illusions in sensibility, the third cognitive faculty. Why is this so? It would be tautologous to explain this by saying that Hume is an empiricist. Is there any reason why sensibility is the locus for unquestionable veracity in Hume’s thought?

Hume’s reasons for accepting sensibility as the final standard for what is real are rather negative. It is not because our impressions are so lucid that they cannot be questioned. Impressions do not take the place of Aristotle’s self-evident propositions, whose evidence is obvious to all who understand them. For Hume, the reason we cannot correct sensibility is merely that we cannot do any better than our sense impressions. They are the beginning of our knowledge: “Tis impossible for us to carry on our inferences in infinitum; and the only thing, that can stop them, is an impression of the memory or senses, beyond which there is no room for doubt or enquiry.”

20 We cannot test whether or not our impressions are illusory simply because we cannot go any farther than these impressions. There is nothing self-justifying about impressions; in fact their causes are totally unknown to us. “As to those impressions, which arise from the senses, their ultimate cause is, in my opinion, perfectly inexplicable by human reason…” 21 The impossibility of an infinite regress makes us accept impressions as infallible, not any particular evidence in sensibility itself. “Tis certain, that the mind, in its perceptions, must begin somewhere.” 22 Aristotle also infers the need for underviable propositions through the impossibility of an infinite regress, but he adds to this the positive characteristic of self-evidence to explain how such propositions can be primary. For Hume, we stop with impressions because we must stop somewhere and these are the first items we can discover. There is nothing intrinsic to impressions that justifies them as unquestionably true.

Thus Hume can talk about illusions and fictions in the imagination and reason because he can test both of these faculties against the criterion of impressions to discover whether what they assert is true. But sensibility itself cannot be tested because we have no criterion more basic than impressions. Therefore we cannot speak of any illusions or fictions in sensibility; everything it presents must be accepted as true.

We will classify the various types of speculative illusions discussed by Hume in Book I into three groups: (1) “objective” illusions, such as permanent physical substances, necessary causal relations, powers and qualities attributed to things, and certain other fictional relationships the mind constructs for objects; (2) the “subjective” illusions of the self as a permanent substance; (3) the fictions produced by the ancient philosophy, superstition, education, and poetry. Hume considers the first two groups of fictions natural and necessary for human existence and action, but except for poetry the fictions in the third group are unnatural and often malevolent.

20 Ibid., p 84. Cf. Enquiry concerning Human Understanding: “It is a question of fact, whether the perceptions of the senses be produced by external objects, resembling them: how shall this question be determined? By experience surely; as all other questions of a like nature. But here experience is, and must be entirely silent. The mind has never anything present to it but the perceptions, and cannot possibly reach any experience of their connexion with objects,” p. 153.

21 Treatise p 175.
out the time our attention is turned elsewhere. If we follow the path of a bird in flight, then turn aside from it, and then later turn back and see the bird at a more distant point, our imagination simplifies the interrupted sequence of impressions by asserting the continued existence of the bird during the interruption. This fictional continued existence is then the basis upon which we assert the existence of the object as distinct from us.

Something similar happens when we claim to experience causal necessity between two objects. All we have given in impressions are the two objects and the relationship of continuity, succession, and constant conjunction. The concurrence is repeated many times, gradually making us expect the “cause” to be invariably followed by the “effect.” But we never have an impression of the causal nexus as such. We never perceive the causal relation directly, and thus never directly experience the absolute necessity that this effect should follow that cause. The imagination brings about this illusion of a necessary bond when it attributes its own expectancy to the things themselves, and in addition bestows “powers” in things which are supposed to be able to bring about the expected cause. But in all this the imagination merely objectivizes its own expectations and inclinations.

The idea of necessity arises from some impression. There is no impression conveyed by our senses, which can give rise to that idea. It must, therefore, be derived from some internal impression, or impression of reflection. There is no internal impression, which has any relation to the present business, but that propensity, which custom produces, to pass from an object to the idea of its usual attendant. This therefore is the essence of necessity.

The idea of necessity does exist as an idea, but it is not derived from the external world; it is an idea coming from reflection on our own propensity. Thus the fiction involved here is the misplacement of a subjective tendency into objective reality.

In a more general way, the imagination is prone to add many extra relationships to what is actually given in experience. For example, we realize that taste is not something spatial, and yet attribute a spatial presence to it by saying, for example, that it is “in this fruit.” The only relationships between taste and fruit that are actually given are those of cause (for we customarily find a certain taste in a given piece of fruit) and contiguity in time. But to these we add the spatial relationship in order to unify the two impressions more closely:

For ‘tis a quality, which I shall often have occasion to remark in human nature, and shall explain more fully in its proper place, that when objects are united by any relation, we have a strong propensity to add some new relation to them, in order to complete their union. But we shall not find a more evident effect of it, than in the present instance, where from the relations of causation and contiguity in time betwixt two objects, we feign likewise that of a conjunction in place, in order to strengthen the connection.

The imagination tends to round out and simplify sense experience by postulating a relationship or endurance which is not really given in the impressions we experience. Also, because of this propensity of the imagination, we tend to attribute to objects all sorts of powers and qualities which we consider the sources of other impressions which we customarily find associated with the objects. We do this despite the fact that we never have any impressions of such powers or qualities.

Why does the imagination constitute such fictions? In the beginning of the Treatise, Hume speaks about the attraction that exists among our simple ideas when they bear a resemblance to one another. This attraction is compared to gravitational force in nature, but Hume renounces any attempt to explain why or how it occurs: “...But as to its causes, they are mostly unknown, and must be resolved into original qualities of human nature, which I pretend not to explain.” Thus the tendency of similar ideas to come together, “like to like,” is simply an obvious fact of experience whose causes remain beyond our grasp. However the work of the imagine-

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tion is something more than the mere association of ideas. It is the constitution of a new relationship or endurance upon the associated ideas, and by implication at least Hume does try to explain this action. He says that the imagination creates its fictions in order to keep us in a state of ease and tranquillity.

The mind's experience of impressions that are distinct from one another and yet similar sets up a conflict in our consciousness. The similarities incline us to group the impressions and ideas together, while the fact that they are distinct from one another compels us to keep them apart. In the case of our perception of an external, physical thing, for example, when we perceive it for a while, then turn away, and finally turn back to it, we have the following situation: "Now there being here an opposition between the notion of the identity of resembling perceptions, and the interruption of their appearance, the mind must be uneasy in that situation, and will naturally seek relief from the uneasiness." 27

Hume has just observed that whenever we experience a contradiction

either to sentiments or passions, we feel a "sensible uneasiness," 28 while things that agree with our natural inclinations give us pleasure. Thrust into this contradictory and uneasy state the mind tries to find reconciliation and repose by asserting the continuity of its impressions during the time it turns away from the object it had been contemplating. Then it can say that the object "exists continuously" even when it is not seen, despite the fact that the mind has no warrant to say this. "The relation facilitates the transition of the mind from one object to another, and renders its passage as smooth as if it contemplated one continued object." 29

The purpose of this duplicity is to bring rest to the mind by removing the contradiction it experiences and bringing about a maximum of unity, continuity, and simplicity. It is as though the mind wanted to recover the changeless simplicity of the present instant in all its observations and experiences. The entire explanation is based on the principle of the least expenditure of energy: "The faculties of the mind repose themselves in a manner, and take no more exercise, than what is necessary to continue that idea, of which they were formerly possest, and which subsists without variation or interruption." 30

Despite the mind's need to assert these relations or endurance, Hume strongly insists that they are unreal. He calls them fictions, fallacies, illusions, falsities, absurdities, artifices, fancies, errors, and obseurdities; we feign and contrive them, and the mind is seduced by them. Hume uses both criteria in deciding that they are illusory; he often observes that we have no impressions of permanent substances, objective causal necessities, or hidden powers and qualities. In addition, he also uses the argument that what the imagination produces in these cases would be contradictory if taken as something derived from the objective world. For example, when we assert the continued existence of objects, we are really saying that our impressions continue to exist even when we are not aware of them. But it is a contradiction to "suppose a perception to exist without being present to the mind." 31 In the case where the imagination produces new relationships, such as the spatial relationship of tastes, a contradiction also results since a nonspatial idea, taste, is asserted to be in a certain place "All this absurdity proceeds from our endeavouring to bestow a place on what is utterly incapable of it; and that endeavour again arises from our inclination to complete a union..." 32

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In attacking the notion of necessary causality, Hume's primary weapon is the claim that we have no impression of any such relation; because we have none, it is not possible “for us ever to form the most distant idea of it, considered as a quality in bodies.” 33

The argument that such an idea is self-contradicting when applied to external bodies is only slightly mentioned, 34 but is present by implication, since the contrivance of necessary causes involves attributing to external bodies something that belongs exclusively to the mind: the determination or inclination to go from one object to another. Hume goes on to say that all necessities, such as those in arithmetic and geometry, are likewise necessities of the mind and are not found in the things they are usually attributed to. 35

Hüngewald says Hume never doubts the reality of objects, only our ability to prove they exist; cf. Über die Lehre Hume's von der Realität der Aussen- dinge, p. 57. Such interpretations miss the point of Hume's skepticism. As long as he speaks in the natural, vul- gar attitude, Hume does admit objects and causes; but when he turns to the philosophical stance, he cannot admit them. The attitudes or points of view of the speaker partially determine what the speaker can say. Certainly, nature rescues the philosopher from his solipsistic dilemma, but the fact that he must be rescued shows that as a philo-osopher he simply cannot say so or do certain things that are possible in the natural attitude. J. O. Nelson, "The Conclusion of Book One, Part Four, of Hume's Treatise," Philosophy and Phenomenological Research, Vol. 24 (1964), 512-21. is correct in taking Hume's dilemma at the end of Book I seriously; but he explains it as an "oscillation" between the certitude of perception and the uncertainty of general explanation. I think the oscillation is between a natural and a philo-osophical viewpoint. 36

(2) The fiction of the self is constructed by the imagination in much the same way that objective illusions are fabricated. 37 We have no continuing impression of the self as distinct from individual perceptions; all we have given is a series of perceptions following one another in causal sequence. Then just as the imagina-tion feigns a continuous existence for what we intermittently experience in the world, so it posits the existence of a permanent personal identity sustaining the varied perceptions that occur in the mind. 38 ...Identity is nothing really belonging to these different perceptions, and uniting them together; but is merely a quality, which we attribute to them, because of the union of their ideas in the imagination, when we reflect upon them.” 39 This illusion of identity is based on the relations of resemblance and causation that we experience among our perceptions, the relation of contiguity playing little or no role here. As in the case of external objects, the purpose of this artifice is to bring about “an easy transition of ideas” when it operates upon internal experience 40

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But there is one interesting difference between our experience of the mind and our perception of external reality. "The intellectual world, though involved in infinite obscurities, is not perplexed with any such contradictions, as those we have discovered in the natural What is known concerning it, agrees with itself; and what is unknown, we must be contented to leave so." Our awareness of our own consciousness is free of the "contradictions" that beset our knowledge of the world. Contradictions arise in experience only when philosophers attempt to explain how we know ourselves. Their attempt to explain what is inexplicable in the mind is done "at the hazard of running us into contradictions, from which the subject is of itself exempted." 43

What does Hume mean by this? Why does self-knowledge avoid contradictions that arise in knowledge of the world? The contradictions that arise in our knowledge of nature come about because we naturally combine ideas that belong to the mind with ideas that come from objects. Causal necessity is a reflexive impression, and yet we impose it on things; perceptions are possible only in the mind, and yet we feign their continued existence in external objects even when we are not perceiving them; even the arbitrariness of added relations, such as adding spatial relations to tastes in things, occurs when the mind tries to interpret its own reactions as properties of things: "'Tis a common observation, that the mind has a great propensity to spread itself on external objects, and to conjoin with them any internal impressions, which they occasion, and which always make their appearance at the same time that these objects discover themselves to the senses." 44 In general, the contradictions that arise in our experience of nature are the result of the mind's

perceptions allows the dimension of temporality to be present in consciousness. On p. 261 Hume observes that causal connections give us a "present concern for our past or future pains of pleasures." In this respect external objects are different from the ego; the successive impressions constituting an object do not exercise causality on one another. Resemblance is the basic relation among them. The temporal dimensions of past, present, and future are applicable to the ego in a way they cannot be applied to objects. On this subject see the good remarks by R. W. Church, Hume's Theory of the Understanding (Ithaca 1935), pp 15-16, 160-61.

42 Treatise, p. 232.
43 Ibid. An apparent exception to this is stated on p. 251 where Hume says that the attempt to provide an impression for the permanent self will yield a "manifest contradiction and absurdity." But this is not a natural contradiction in the subject itself; it arises when we try to philosophize.
44 Ibid., p. 167; cf. p. 169.
45 Ibid., p. 251. This is probably why Hume felt a science of human nature can be the only foundation for all other sciences. As he says on p. 273, it is the only area of inquiry where "assurance and conviction" can be reached.
46 Ibid., p. 166.

propensity to impose its own qualities on things. When the mind knows itself, however, this type-crossing is no longer a danger because it is not dealing with two regions. No contradiction need be feared in a homogeneous domain. When Hume rejects the idea of the self as an illusion, therefore, his entire attack is based on the fact that we have no distinct impression for a continuous, invariable self; the theme of contradiction is not used. 42

The two types of illusions we have discussed, that of the self and those feigned for the objective world, arise spontaneously with no artful contrivance or duplicity on our part. They occur before we deliberate. They arise from the unknown springs of human nature and are illusions that human nature needs. Man is an artificer by nature, asserting the reality of what is not: the continued existence of object, the identity of the self, and causal necessities. These natural illusions make life easier and more pleasant for the vulgar. Because of them, the mind needs to expend less energy in acting and orientating itself in the world. Illusions bring a pleasant repose to the conscious life, even though they do so by maintaining sheer contradictions. The vulgar overlook these contradictions, however, for the sake of rest and ease.

The true philosopher is the only one who unmask these illusions and points out these contradictions. He alone keeps his mind only to what is authentically given and asserts only what is strictly warranted. The result of this intellectual scrupulousness is that the philosopher, who alone avoids the natural contradictions, appears to be paradoxical and contradictory himself: "I am sensible, that of all the paradoxes, which I have had or shall hereafter have occasion to advance in the course of this treatise, the present one is the most violent..." 46 In the face of "the inveterate prejudice of mankind" the true philosopher appears to be the dispenser of contradictions and illusions, and it is only "by dint of solid proof and reasoning" that he can ever hope to sustain his position.

The philosopher suffers a fearful punishment for frustrating and unmasking the natural illusions of humanity. He faces social exile and internal anxiety. The careful use of reason has led him to a state of immobility, both in thought and action. Having suspended the contrivances of nature, he loses the ease and facility that they bring about and separates himself from the common illusions that sustain social and political company. He has become "some strange uncouth monster, who not being able to mingle

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and unite in society, has been expelled all human commerce, and left utterly abandoned and disconsolate." 47 There is no exit from this dilemma except to slip back into those same illusions of nature it is his vocation to condemn. "Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, nature herself suffices to that purpose, and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras." 48 The same nature whose contrivances the philosopher unmasks saves him from the shock and despair that his audacious honesty leads him to. Even in the person of the philosopher, man seems unable to bear much reality and must return to the comforting illusions without which he cannot act or think. 49

Why should any man undertake philosophy if it leads to such a disastrous and fruitless end? Hume mentions two reasons. First, nature itself seems to incline him to this endeavor. There are times of silence and recollection when he is "naturally inclined" to raise such questions, to inquire into the nature of knowledge, morals, esthetics, and politics, to try to remedy ignorance and instruct mankind. "These sentiments spring up naturally in my present disposition; and should I endeavor to banish them, by attaching myself to any other business or diversion, I feel I should be a loser in point of pleasure; and this is the origin of my philosophy." 50 The nature that makes men live by illusion and artifice seems to call some men to uncover these illusions; and

since the philosophical vocation then leads to an anxious, immobile, and solitary perplexity, this same nature almost mockingly rescues the philosopher from his melancholy and delirium. Not all men are called to this; most live in the current of normal affairs and should "keep themselves in their present situation." 51 But Hume does seem to anticipate a sort of community of philosophers who may share his hope of building up a science of man "which if not true (for that, perhaps, is too much to be hoped for) might at least be satisfactory to the human mind...." 52 He invites the readers who should experience in themselves the same inclination of nature, the "same easy disposition" to philosophy, to follow him in his further thinking. Some men turn to philosophy because of a natural vocation.

But after being saved from philosophical melancholy and delirium by nature, is the philosopher who returns to natural existence any better off than he was before? Does it help him to know that what supports his life and action is only illusion perpetrated by the imagination? He must still submit to illusion and artifice; is he in any way happier than the vulgar who also submit but do not realize it? In his Dialogue Hume does say that the philosopher who sinks back into the plebeian life is changed because of his experience: "...If a man has accustomed himself to sceptical considerations on the uncertainty and narrow limits of reason, he will not entirely forget them when he turns this reflection on other subjects; but in all his philosophical principles and reasoning, I dare not say, in his common conduct, he will be found different from those, who either never formed any opinions in the case, or have entertained sentiments more favorable to human reason." 53 But in what way is he different from the nonphilosophical man?

If any value is to be reached in the skeptical philosophy, it must be the "peace and contentment" that Hume promises in the Introduction to the Treatise. This is the peace that comes from knowing the limits of explanation; we are not disquieted because we know that there are no further explanations to be sought. As justice brings peace to society when it limits our greed by laying down boundaries to what we can acquire, so the skeptical philosophy brings peace of mind by discovering the limits of human knowing. That this Epicurean ease and contentment is what Hume promises the philosopher is implied in what he says during his critique of the ancient philosophy; he condemns the constructs of ancient phil-

47 Ibid., p. 264
48 Ibid., p. 269
49 The immobility and inaction to which sceptical philosophy leads are described in the Enquiry concerning Human Understanding: "All discourse, all action would immediately cease; and men remain in a total lethargy, till the necessities of nature, unsatisfied, put an end to their miserable existence. It is true; so fatal an event is very little to be dreaded. Nature is always too strong for principle," p 160. See also his essay, "The Sceptic," Essays, Moral, Political and Literary, pp. 175-79. Hume believes that rigorous philosophy leads to this impasse; cf. R. H. Popkin, "David Hume: His Pyrrhonism and his Critique of Pyrrhonism," Philosophical Quarterly, Vol. 1 (1950-51) 385-407 But this self-destruction of reason occurs not because of any contradiction in reason itself. Reason is destroyed not by inconsistency with itself but by the impossibility of being lived. It is in contradiction with the necessities of life. Hume says that other philosophies, such as the ancient, are in contradiction with themselves, but his own is not. The ordinary, nonphilosophical attitude is contradictory and therefore speculatively untenable, though practically inevitable. Cf. Treatise, p. 231; the contradiction is between reason and senses, or natural propensities, and not within philosophical reason itself.
50 Treatise, p. 271.
51 Ibid., p. 272.

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osaphy as illusions, but adds that these fictions do bring a certain satisfaction and rest to the mind: "By this means these philosophers set themselves at ease, and arrive at last, by an illusion, at the same indifferency, which the people attain by their stupidity, and true philosophers by their moderate scepticism." 84 Viewing the limits of human understanding brings a fearful anguish to the philosopher, but when he is rescued from this by the inclination of nature he returns to the vulgar with a satisfaction and ease that can be possessed only by someone who has undergone the same trial. As Hume says in the first Inquiry, "We must submit to this fatigue, in order to live at ease ever after." 86

This is the positive value Hume sees in skeptical philosophy. In addition there is a second reason, a negative, critical one, why some men should undertake philosophy. It serves as a corrective for other more dangerous illusions, such as those of superstition and prejudice, or for the useless fictions of the ancient philosophy. The skeptical philosophy controls and restrains aberrations of the mind.

(3) The fictions and illusions Hume finds in the ancient philosophy are similar to those fabricated by the imagination in ordinary life except that they are more extravagant. The vulgar imagination merely adds relations and endurances to impressions we actually receive, and does so by taking authentic ideas and misplacing them. But the philosophical imagination goes farther and feigns entirely new causes and principles, things "unknown and invisible" such as substances, first matter, substantial forms, accidents, faculties, and occult qualities. It fabricates these things, claims Hume, to avoid the contradictions that seem to arise in our minds; for instance if we experience a given object at intervals, we are impressed by both considerable differences and similarities. To reconcile this contradiction between sameness and diversity, "the imagination is apt to feign something unknown and invisible, which it supposes to continue the same under these variations; and this unintelligible something it calls substance, or original and first matter." 86 Whereas the vulgar imagination merely confuses legitimate ideas, the ancient philosophy contrives illusions that are entirely absurd. Moreover, the natural fictions are necessary to human existence and are based on irresistible and universal principles of the mind. Without them human action is impossible. But philosophical fictions are trivial, coming from changeable, weak, irregular, and useless principles, with no real effect on human actions. 87

Despite his low estimate of the ancient philosophy Hume thinks it is worth examining as a clue to human nature: "I am persuaded, there might be several useful discoveries made from a criticism of the fictions of the ancient philosophy, concerning substances, and substantial forms, and accidents, and occult qualities; which, however unreasonable and capricious, have a very intimate connexion with the principles of human nature." 88 In a Freudian turn of thought he says these arts can serve like dreams which often reveal our character better than waking actions do. The aberrations of ancient philosophy can serve as hermeneutic clues in deciphering human nature.

Moreover there is a certain benevolence in the ancient philosophy, since it does bring repose to the minds of those who engage in it. They think that they have answered problems when they say certain actions or events are due to "occult qualities" or "faculties" in things. This is no more than a verbal reply but it satisfies them and leads them to the same rest that the vulgar attain because they never question anything and the true philosophers reach because they know the limits of knowledge. 89 The illusions of ancient philosophy are harmless, though useless, and affect a very few persons.

This is not the case for the arts of superstition, with which Hume closely associates popular religion. Superstition is a very powerful aberration of the imagination. It is more extravagant than philosophy since it creates new beings and events that are supposed to be added to the things we experience. Further, it is a pragmatic error; superstition makes us act, whereas philosophy merely satisfies our minds. Superstition arises "naturally and easily from the popular opinions of mankind, it seizes more strongly on the mind, and is often able to disturb us in the conduct of our lives and actions." 90

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The fictions of superstition arise because the mind has an inexorable tendency to go beyond what it is warranted to assert. Since it seems impossible for man to remain with the things he actually experiences, the best practice is to let the mind expend its energies in ways that are “safest and most agreeable.” 63 This is best done in philosophy, whose errors, says Hume, are at worst only ridiculous, while those of religion are dangerous 64. When left to itself religion leads to many abuses and is often a cloak for other ambitions; the only way to avoid this is to practice the philosophical and rational religion. 65

The illusions of education are similar to those of superstition. They are ideas that we entertain not because of any experience or impression, but because we have accepted them from others. They are illusions of prejudice. These are also powerful fictions, affect our actions and life, and differ from both superstitions and philosophical illusions in being accepted by very many people. “I am persuaded, that upon examination we shall find more than one half of those opinions, that prevail among mankind, to be owing to education, and that the principles, which are thus implicitly embraced, over-balance those, which are owing either to abstract reasoning or experience.” 66 The illusions of education are similar to opinions we have from experience in that repetition and custom operate in both; even in education, it is constant repetition that gradually instills an opinion in us and makes us think that we have experienced it as true. Hume compares this process to the self-deception of liars, who repeat their fictions so many times that they end by believing them themselves. In both education and constant lying ideas acquire the vivacity and force that belong to ideas of the memory and thus develop into powerful fictions. A special instance of educational fictions might be found in the illusions communicated by orators through rhetoric, which Hume briefly mentions 67.

Finally, Hume says a few words about the fictions made by poets, who are “liars by profession.” 68 These are entirely harmless illusions and can be detected even by the vulgar with the least reflection. Of all the artifices we have examined, these alone are consciously recognized as such from the beginning to end by everybody. No philosophical criticism is needed to unmask them. Yet even these fictions, if they are to be “entertaining to the imagination” must bear the appearance of truth. Therefore poets use certain standard names and events, they build up a traditional system of things, and they interweave truth with their contrivances. Both the poet and the listener must feign a belief if we are to have true poetry. But since we are consciously feigning the belief (and not feigning something we believe in), we remain always capable of freeing ourselves from this counterfeit belief.

But in all fictions besides poetical ones, philosophy must exercise a critical role and make us assent only to what deserves our assent. Thus the philosophical vocation can be justified, according to Hume, by the corrective function it exercises over the aberrations of human nature: those of the ancient philosophy, superstition, and education.

3. The Place of Book II

This concludes our study of speculative fictions as described by Hume in Book I of the Treatise. The concept of fiction is abundantly discussed in Book I and again in Book III. It is almost entirely absent in Book II, so we need not discuss that book at length. We may however point out a curious problem about the position of Book II in the Treatise. Its subject is the passions: pride and humility, love and hatred, and the will, which for Hume is a simple inclination to action and not a source of freedom. In Book I Hume has concluded that the self is a fiction of the imagination; Book II seems to reinstate the self as an agent so that Book III will be able to discuss the subject of morals. Book II constitutes the self as agent by beginning with the passions of pride and humility, passions which Hume sometimes says are able to bring about the idea of the self. About pride he says: “To this emotion she [nature] has assigned a certain idea, viz. that of self, which it never fails to produce.” 69 Hume’s terminology is loose on this point; sometimes he says the idea of the self is the object of pride, thus implying that the idea is there before the passion. 70 At any rate, this passion at least constitutes the self as public agent with status, and so Book III depends on Book II for the idea of an agent with natural inclinations to action.

However, in one important respect Book II depends on what Hume does in Book III. Pride is an emotion of pleasure coming

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from a good quality in something that belongs to me; humility is an unpleasant emotion coming from a bad quality in something that is mine. Both these passions, which establish the self as agent, depend on the concept of “belonging” or property. But this is only described in Book III, when Hume discusses the artificial virtue of justice. Thus we have something of a vicious circle; the self is constituted as agent by the passion of pride and thus can enter into public action. But it is this very public action (in the form of justice and property rights, as we shall see) that is the basis for the passion of pride. Moreover, this vicious circle is not merely a question of which book should come first. It has implications in determining the self as a public agent: public fictions of property and justice become fundamental for man’s ability to act in a human way.

4. BOOK III: MORALS. THE FORMAL STRUCTURE OF ALL VIRTUES, BOTH NATURAL AND ARTIFICIAL

The theme of fiction returns in Book III of the Treatise, where Hume attempts to describe the nature of justice. Justice, he claims, is an artificial virtue, founded on the convention of men. The problem of justice dominates the entire Book, so the theme of artifice and fiction is as central to this part of the Treatise as it was to Book I, where Hume discusses human understanding.

Before distinguishing between natural and artificial virtues, we must discuss the formal structure that Hume attributes to all virtues. In all virtuous action, we must distinguish between the action as good and the action as a duty or moral obligation. Hume insists that the motive of duty itself never grounds the goodness of an action. The fact that we do an action because it is our duty does not make it a good action; it must have been good prior to our recognition of it as our duty or moral obligation. Actions must have a principle of goodness distinct from their morality. Paternal care of children is good because it stems from paternal affection; this is what makes it good. The fact that it is a duty or moral obligation only follows upon the goodness of such an action; it is not the ground of goodness. We have the obligation to care for children because this action is antecedently recognized as good and virtuous.

Thus Hume has introduced the concept of a “natural” goodness or badness to actions. But his analysis does not stop here. First of all, our moral evaluation is not directed towards the acts that a person performs, but towards the motive that prompts his actions. The motive in turn is considered good or bad only as it signifies a permanent personal quality. Individual acts are not important morally for Hume; it is a person’s permanent disposition that is applauded as good or condemned as evil. This permanent disposition is the ultimate principle of the goodness or badness of actions, and it serves as the motive for actions. For instance, the action of parental care is good only because it expresses the permanent quality of paternal affection; almsgiving is good because it expresses the permanent disposition of humanity.

Thus Hume’s analysis of virtue has led to a double reduction: the morality of actions is reduced to that of motives, and motives are good or bad only when considered as signs of permanent qualities. The final basis of morality is found in permanent dispositions. Now the problem becomes epistemological: how are these dispositions found to be good or bad? Hume replies with the moral sense. Nature has instilled in man a sensibility that approves certain personal qualities and condemns others: “To have the sense of virtue, is nothing but to feel a satisfaction of a particular kind from the contemplation of a character. The very feeling constitutes our praise or admiration.”

When we analyze virtues philosophically, therefore, we cannot appeal to duty as the ground of their goodness. We must find what permanent disposition makes the action good in itself. This must be done for both the natural and artificial virtues.

The natural virtues present no problem; the stable qualities we applaud in them are attributes that we simply recognize as good: parental affection, humanity, generosity, gratitude, courage, and mildness are all things that we spontaneously feel to be good. We esteem any actions motivated by these qualities. These qualities moreover are attributes of human nature that arise without any contrivance or intervention of man; they are as natural as man’s physical or cognitive powers. Any obligation we ascribe to men to foster such qualities and to act in accordance with them stems from the prior admission that these qualities are naturally good.

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70 Cf. ibid., p. 471.
71 Cf. ibid., p. 579. Hume observes that rhetoricians would try in vain to arouse such virtues unless they were already instilled in man by nature.

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5. MORAL ARTIFICES: JUSTICE, GOVERNMENT, AND PROMISES

But what occurs in the case of justice? When we pay taxes or obey laws, what motive do we have for these actions? Is there some natural, permanent quality of persons which serves as the motive for just actions? Hume replies in the negative; he goes through several possibilities of a natural basis for justice, such as concern for the public interest, love of humanity, and benevolence towards private individuals, and shows that none of these can be the ground of justice. His conclusion is: "... That the sense of justice and injustice is not derived from nature, but arises artificially, though necessarily from education, and human conventions." 73

How does justice arise artificially?

Hume observes that man is not sufficient as an individual; he has great needs coupled with great weaknesses. Other animals all have the strength and resources to satisfy whatever needs nature has given them, but man, when left to his own individual forces, is utterly unable to sustain himself. He can remedy this situation only in society, where corporate effort makes up for the weakness of individuals.

But once men are thrown together in society, the danger of the selfishness of individual members arises. This natural greed is directed towards external material goods, whose possession is very precarious. In society there is no problem, Hume says, with internal goods of the mind because no one can take these away; nor is there any problem with external goods of one’s body, like beauty or physical strength, because even though others can take these away it does them no good to do so; but there is great difficulty with the goods we have acquired as our property, since these things are always capable of being coveted and taken for the use of others. 74 Once society is constituted, therefore, the problem of property becomes a constant threat to its existence; society is always in danger of being destroyed because of it, leaving man once again in the state of individual weakness and incapacity.

To avoid this calamity, which would be in the interests of no one, men contrive to draw up rules for the possession and transfer of property. Through this artifice the norms of justice are established. "The remedy, then, is not derived from nature, but from artifice; or more properly speaking, nature provides a remedy in the judgment and understanding, for what is irregular and incoherent in the affections." 75 Thus the artifice of justice arises because of man’s need to use and possess external, material objects for his subsistence and well being, together with the inevitable precariousness these possessions are exposed to when man enters society—which he is also forced to do by his natural weakness as an individual. Two natural tendencies, the inclination to use material goods and the inclination to society, thus collide, and their mutual annihilation can be avoided only by artifice. Judgment and reason must intervene because nature has not given man any natural quality that could resolve the conflict. 76

The fundamental artifices man devises in justice are the rules governing how possession of property will be decided, how more can be acquired, and how its transfer can be carried out. All these rules are contrivances; there is nothing "natural" for instance, in laws determining inheritance. And yet, in his analysis of the modes of acquiring and transferring property, Hume shows that the laws men devise usually do follow the inclinations of thought. For example the rights of inheritance (which he calls succession) are formulated in order to make men more industrious and frugal, and also because the mind tends to associate members of a family as the proprietors of given goods. 77 Nevertheless, such laws are the fabrication of reason and do not arise from any natural propensity in men.

Hume’s explanation of how justice becomes institutionalized in government develops further the theme of artifice and fiction. Once certain rules have been agreed upon for property, all problems have not been solved. It still remains very difficult for individual persons to apply the rules objectively because personal, immediate interests always entice our passions. We are poor judges in cases in which we ourselves take part. The only way we can hope to obtain objectivity is to leave the immediate, proximate view of things and look at them from a distance: "When we consider any objects at a distance, all their minute distinctions vanish, and we always give the preference to whatever is in itself preferable, without considering its situation and circumstances." 78 As individuals, however, we find it impossible to take a distant and objective view of things when they affect us; it becomes necessary to commission certain people

73 Ibid., p. 483
74 Ibid., p. 487
75 Ibid., p. 489.
76 On p. 577 Hume observes that as justice keeps cupidty in check, so the contrivances of manners keep natural human abrasiveness under control and facilitate social contact.
77 Cf. ibid., pp. 510-12
78 Ibid., p. 536
to do this for us, whom we call judges and magistrates. We make it the personal interest of these people to take a distant view of things. "They cannot change their natures. All they can do is change their situation...." 79 Thus the execution of justice according to objective laws becomes the personal interest of these men, and in this way objectivity is assured.

Hume does not talk about illusion in this context, but his explanation of the office of judges and magistrates implies that these men are commissioned to be official artificers for the body politic. The viewpoint they take is by profession an illusory one; they do not experience objects in their concrete, full immediacy. They look at them only from a distance, where the details of concrete reality are blurred, where reality becomes illusory. Since they are paid to do this, it is in their personal interest to maintain this artificial viewpoint, but it is also in the interest of society. For it is only by having such professional artificers serving society that the original artifice of justice can be maintained. Thus quite consistently, Hume says that the fiction of justice engenders a class of official artificers whose vocation it is to preserve this fiction; and in order to do so, they look at things from a viewpoint which makes reality illusory. And looking at things in this unreal way, they make decisions and impose their judgments on the men who live in their society.

The theme of fictions is developed in still another direction when Hume examines the nature of promises. We all admit that we have an obligation to honor our promises; Hume asks if there is any natural inclination or feeling in us that serves as the base of this obligation. Is keeping promises a natural virtue? Is the action of promising an expression of some natural, permanent personal quality? Hume's answer again is negative. Like the rules of justice promises are artifices and contrivances of men. A promise is simply a public act whereby I will an obligation for myself. The obligation does not stem from any natural inclination; it arises only from my contrivance, from my artifice of binding myself publicly to do something. 80

The artificiality of promises is stressed in an acute remark Hume makes about people who fail to keep promises. When a man commits himself publicly to do something, failure to carry out his promise does not cause the man to be considered deficient in any natural virtue; rather his punishment is never to be trusted to keep his word in the future. "When a man says he promises anything, he... subjects himself to the penalty of never being trusted again in case of failure..." 81 The man's punishment is not moral condemnation, but political exclusion. He will no longer be admitted to that society of men who, by the fidelity of their words, allow the peaceful possession and transfer of property to take place and thus make possible the living together of men.

But why are promises necessary at all? Their need comes from the way property must be exchanged. Once justice has been established and the stability of property has been assured, it becomes possible for men to live together in peace. Then rules for the transfer of property must be devised, so that men can become mutually advantageous. But there is a curious temporal condition attached to this transfer of property. Because we can attend to only one thing at a time, it often becomes necessary to put off till the future some reciprocations: "Now as it frequently happens, that these mutual performances cannot be finished at the same instant, 'tis necessary, that one party be contended to remain in uncertainty, and depend upon the gratitude of the other for a return of kindness." 82 Given the considerable selfishness of men, a person could not count on another's fulfilling his part of some labor or exchange unless this could be certified publicly, and promises are the device and artifice that accomplish this. Though artificial, they are necessary for the continuance of society because of the temporal dispersion of human existence. Only one thing can be done at a time, so the present must make some claims upon the future.

Thus once the need for disposition of external goods has introduced justice as the first artifice in social existence, the other two contrivances of magistrates and promises arise as necessary complements. Magistrates and judges, with their illusory viewpoint of reality, operate in the domain where the individual citizen is incapable of judging objectively and must submit his own judgment to that of other men; promises operate in the domain where the individual citizen is capable of his own public judgment and decision, and indeed where he must make up his own mind and follow it through at the risk of being expelled from the confidence of men. A promise is a law an individual makes for himself. Magis-

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79 Ibid., p. 537.
80 Ibid., p. 517.
81 Ibid., p. 522.
82 Ibid., p. 521.
trates and judges help the individual because he is unable to maintain objectivity in the present instant, when faced with the overwhelming allurements of immediate goods; promises help the individual because of his fallibility towards the future, his tendency to forget a present obligation when it becomes distant through the flow of time. Citizens who disobey the magistrates and judges are considered criminal and dangerous to the social order because they allow their natural propensity to self-interest to override the artificial conventions of justice, which are the foundations of society; citizens who break promises are not considered dangerous but merely irresponsible and unworthy of confidence in public exchange, so no one takes them seriously any longer.

Finally, promises and public offices have undergone a curious reversal of dependencies. In the present state of things we do not choose all our magistrates and judges. They are determined by the laws and customs of the institutionalized government and the individual citizen must submit himself to them. However, at the very beginning of government, institutions had not yet been constituted and the entire social order was on the level of promises. At that time the members of society chose their magistrates themselves, whose office then would be subject to the strength of the citizens' promises. Thus at the present time promises are a private matter and bind only the man who makes them, and our private affairs are dependent upon and subordinated to public affairs: "This separates the boundaries of our public and private duties, and shows that the latter are more dependent on the former, than the former on the latter." But at the beginning of human society promises were the very basis for all public authority. The public domain was completely sustained by private promises.

6. NATURAL APPROBATION OF MORAL ARTIFICES

Justice, institutional government, and promises arise through the artifice of men and not through any direct inclination of nature. However, once they have been constituted nature sets its seal of approval on them. Man has a tendency whereby he naturally ap-

proves justice, government, and promises as morally good; therefore the moral esteem we hold for these artifices is a natural thing. "After that interest is once established and acknowledged, the sense of morality in the observance of these rules follows naturally and of itself...." The respect and allegiance we show to rulers in government also receives a natural approbation, not merely an artificial approval: "...I maintain, that though the duty of allegiance be at first grafted on the obligation of promises, and be for some time supported by that obligation, yet it quickly takes root of itself, and has an original obligation and authority, independent of all contracts." It is true that our allegiance and obedience to the artifice of government is often encouraged by education and by the artificial craft of politicians, both of which are fictional and contrived procedures. In these cases we have one artifice being supported and encouraged by two further artifices. However, unless nature had instilled in us a moral inclination to respect government, the artifices of politicians and educators would not move us at all. They carry out their wiles only upon the basis of a natural inclination.

Finally, fidelity to our promises is also approved as a morally good quality, and in this way nature instills in us a sentiment and inclination to support the artifices we must fabricate to maintain social existence.

Hume explains this natural moral approval of artificial virtues by basing it on sympathy. In speaking of justice he says, "After it is once established by these conventions, it is naturally attended with a strong sentiment of morals; which can proceed from nothing but our sympathy with the interests of society." Sympathy is that quality of human nature whereby men tend to respond affirmatively to other men, the degree of response being greater the more similar the persons are. We have more sympathy with relatives than with strangers, more with countrymen than with foreigners, more with men than with animals. This sympathetic response extends not only to other persons themselves, but also to whatever promotes their well being. Since the public virtues and institutions not only promote human well being but are even necessary for its possibility, our sympathy with the good of humanity is the source of our moral approbation of justice, allegiance, and fidelity. Through sympathy nature sets its approval on man's artificial contrivances.

83 A fine summary of the three social artifices of justice, government, promises is given in Hume's essay, "Of the Original Contract," Essays, Moral, Political and Literary, pp. 466-68.
84 Treatise, p 546.
85 Cf. ibid., p 535
86 Ibid., p 531.
87 Ibid., p 542.
88 Cf. ibid., pp 546, 578-79.
89 Cf. ibid., pp. 545-46
90 Ibid., pp. 579-80
7. COMPARISON OF CONTEMPLATIVE AND MORAL FICTIONS

In both the contemplative and active domain nature forces man to make fictions and artifices. In thinking the mind constructs the fictions of permanent objects, the self, necessary causal relations, and other unperceived relationships; in action man must fabricate the artifices of justice, government, and promises. These two types of fiction are interrelated. Through the rules of justice, the fictions of external objects are distributed and controlled as the properties of individual citizens who are themselves, philosophically speaking, only illusions of the imagination. These same citizens are the makers of promises who must be presumed to be the same individuals at a later time, when the performance of what was promised is demanded; and yet speaking philosophically the permanent identity of the self is not given. The promise enjoys an official, public permanence in time, since it is related to a future performance, but the agent who makes the promise is not admitted philosophically as something enduring in time. But all these difficulties and paradoxes arise only in philosophical speculation. To the natural man, or to the philosopher when he returns to the natural attitude, the fictions of nature appear real and no problem is seen in asserting someone to be the same person he was years ago when he acquired property, was appointed a magistrate or judge, or made a promise.

Both groups of fictions, the speculative and the social, receive an approbation from nature. Nature approves political fictions by appending a moral sentiment to them. After they have been constructed we consider the man who respects them as good because of our sympathy to what benefits humanity. Nature approves speculative fictions by attaching an ease and effectiveness in action to the man who believes in them. Only the man who believes in the permanence of objects and his own self, as well as the reliability of causes, can be a man of successful action. The philosopher who is not duped by these fictions is reduced to immobility. Thus nature rewards those who follow her social fictions by the well being of moral uprightness, and she rewards those who are deluded by her speculative fictions by ease and success in life.

In both cases the reason why nature provokes and approves fictions is to preserve man from self-destruction. If he did not arrange the contrivance of justice his conflicting passions of self-interest and the need for society would set him into perpetual and final warfare with others. If he did not submit to the illusions of the imagination he would be reduced to a solipsism of the present instant, lost in the myriad changes of impressions, incapable of planning, acting, choosing, or using things. Rather than the self-annihilation of warfare, this would lead to the self-destruction of an absurd, motionless peace. The social fictions save man from excessive aggression, the contemplative fictions save him from inaction.

In the speculative fictions men's natural instinct has to save him from the immobility of reason, but in the social sphere the roles are reversed: reason rescues man from the blind forces of instinct, which would destroy him by their greed.

However as long as man remains in the natural attitude he does not recognize these artifices as fictions. For the vulgar the identity of the ego and the permanence of things are just as real, objective, and natural as human nature itself. Even kings, for instance, have thought that they were "divinely appointed" and thus constituted as objectively in their office as creation is objectively established by the divine will. The vulgar consider both the speculative and the social artifices to be real, natural entities. "Obedience or subjection becomes so familiar that most men never make any inquiry about its origin or cause, more than about the principle of gravity, resistance, or most universal laws of nature." Only the philosopher is raised to that viewpoint from which these things appear as the fictions that they are. He alone is the critic of illusions, the one who can distinguish between what is natural and what artificial in human existence. Only the philosopher discerns that the substantiality of objects and of the self is the result of an art hidden in the depths of human nature, and that the objectivity of laws and governments is the result of a fabrication established in the hidden, forgotten beginnings of society.

Human nature needs artifice to prevent its self-destruction. Why does it need philosophy? Why should it call certain persons to discover the artificiality of its fictions? As regards the speculative fictions, philosophers are needed to prevent the natural fictions from

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91 Some alleviation of this paradox is found in Hume's doctrine that subsequent states of consciousness are related by causality; see above, note 41. The maker of promises causally influences a later action in his own consciousness. But he is still not identically the "same" person, so it is paradoxical philosophically that society can hold him to his word.


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running wild. Nature does not stop with the fabrication of fictions necessary for action and ease; it has a propensity to continue in the fabrication of superstitious fictions, prejudices, and the unwarranted fictions of ancient philosophy. All these abuses disrupt the ease and propriety that the natural fictions allow. The vulgar, because they do not have the gift of discerning fictions from reality, do not know that natural propensity has driven beyond its proper limits when it fabricates these things, so they are at the mercy of superstition and prejudice. Only the philosopher can protect them with his moderate skepticism, since he alone knows the limits of human nature.

As regards the social fictions philosophers are also able to prevent abuses. The vulgar are unaware of the artificiality of government. They do not know that laws and magistrates are established only to preserve the self-interest of men in social community. When tyrants abuse the laws and use them to destroy the interests of citizens, the vulgar have no theoretical recourse. They have no protection against the whimsical tyranny of governments because they do not know the origin of government. The tyrant may claim to be divinely appointed or to rule by natural right, and his subjects will be morally prevented from revolting lest they break the divine or natural laws. But the philosopher, who knows the artificiality of government and who sees its subordination as a means to the self-interest of citizens, can provide a theoretical justification for revolutions when governments become intolerable. Thus as regards both the intellectual and the social fictions, philosophers can serve as the guardians of natural rights. They can protect human nature against abuses because they can discriminate between what is real and what is artificial.

But is this negative, critical, custodial function the only value of philosophy? Does the philosophical vocation afford anything to the philosopher himself, not considered as a citizen but as philosopher? Certainly his vocation leads him to great anxiety and solitude; since the fictions are needed for action and for human community, the discovery that they are fictions suddenly renders the philosopher unfit for both these dimensions. In his moments of philosophical reflection he cannot do anything with objects because they have become unreal, and he cannot deal with other men because their substantiability has become illusory, and the basis of his interaction with them has become an artifact. Thus in the moments of philosophizing his vocation leads him to immobility and solipsism. But after he has returned to natural existence the memory of what transpired in philosophy is rewarding and provides him with something no one else can have. The philosopher has come to see the limits of human nature and this vision leaves him with a sort of peace and satisfaction since he can now renounce the unsettling propensity of human nature to go beyond its own limits. He is not subject to the restlessness of common men who are looking for information and explanations where none can be found. “When this mutual contentment and satisfaction can be obtained betwixt the master and scholar, I know not what more we can require of our philosophy.”

8. Hume's fictions and classical thought

There are interesting similarities and differences in the concept of the vocation to philosophy as understood by Hume and Plato. If we take Plato's allegory of the cave as a central text we find the following likenesses: for both Hume and Plato, the philosopher must go apart from the crowd to exercise his activity. In Plato the philosopher leaves the cave and stumbles towards the light, in Hume the vocation comes in solitude: “At the time, therefore, that I am tired with amusement and company, and have indulged a revery in my chamber, or in a solitary walk by a river-side, I feel my mind all collected within itself....” For both philosophers this contemplative activity results in an alienation from common men; Hume feels himself “some strange uncouth monster, not being able to mingle and unite in society,” and Plato's returning prisoner is set upon and perhaps killed by his fellows. Both are exposed to the ridicule of men, and both find it impossible to state their defense in words that the crowd understands. For

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Hume the intricate reasonings of philosophy can be taken seriously only by one who spends the great effort needed to follow them, which the crowd will never do; for Plato the philosopher is awkward and ineffective in the law courts, incapable of using the arguments of the masses in his defense. 97 Both Hume and Plato agree that the ordinary life is beset with illusion and unfounded opinion, and that the true philosopher is the only discriminator of appearances. He is the only one in the cave who knows that the echoes and shadows are not real things but only phantoms, and he alone is aware of the artifices and fictions with which nature deludes man. These are similarities. The differences are all the more striking in contrast: for Plato the moments of philosophical reflection are the moments of triumph, happiness, and protection for the philosopher. It is in the rarified speech of philosophy that he overcomes the mundane lawyer. 98 But for Hume the moments of absorption into philosophy are the time of anxiety, exile, and helplessness. Plato considers the return to the cave as a sort of downfall, an Untergang that can go as far as death; Hume thinks that the return to the crowd is a time of relief, ease, and rest. Only as a memory can philosophy be comforting. For Plato the return to the city is made out of loyalty and a sense of duty to fellow men; for Hume the return is the only salvation possible for the philosopher. Only by returning can he be freed from the anxiety of his thinking. The philosopher returns to be saved by common men, and together with them must submit knowingly to the illusions of ordinary life. This would be the supreme degradation of the philosopher in Plato's eyes.99

Hume's differences with Plato, and his general doctrine of fictions, illustrate many of the characteristics of modern thinking, of which Hume is certainly one of the representative figures. His concept of artifice in both contemplation and social action is in keeping with the present emphasis on man as fabricator. Hume considers man as an artificer not only in technological and political matters but even in contemplation, since the objects that are known by man turn out to be fictions contrived by his imagination. Thus contemplation, which in the classical view was contrasted to acting and making, becomes a species of production. Philosophy, instead of revealing the fundamental truth of being, is the narration of what man makes. In this Hume anticipates the constructivist epistemology of Kant and the "constitutive" phenomenology of Husserl. 100

Hume's doctrine of fiction and illusion also foreshadows the alienation between man and his world so heavily stressed by modern thinking. Descartes had already separated man as a thinking substance from matter as pure extension, but still used the concept of God as a bridge between the two. Hume omits God from any positive role in his philosophy and leaves man entirely alone. The world that man thinks he inhabits is a fiction of his own making, and the only knowledge which philosophy can ever hope to acquire is a science of human nature in which man simply knows himself. Facing him is a world of which philosophy can say nothing, a world whose only meaning lies in what man can do with it.