

Hume's *Treatise*, 2: Theory of Relations

Hume's *Treatise*, Book 1



2. *Hume's Theory of Relations*

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Locke on the Types of Relation (1)

- Locke (II xxv-xxviii) emphasises:
 - 'Cause and Effect' (II xxvi 1-2)
 - 'Relations of Time' (II xxvi 3-4)
 - 'Relations of Place and Extension' (II xxvi 5)
 - 'Identity and Diversity' (II xxvii)
 - 'Proportional Relations' (II xxviii 1)
- The last of these categories includes both what Hume calls 'degrees in quality' and 'proportions in quantity or number'.

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Hume's *Treatise*, 2: Theory of Relations

Hume's Dichotomy

- Hume divides his seven types of relation into two groups (T 1.3.1.1):
 - The Four "Constant" Relations
Those relations that 'depend entirely on the ideas, which we compare together' (i.e. resemblance, contrariety, degrees in quality, proportions in quantity or number);
 - The Three "Inconstant" Relations
Those relations that 'may be chang'd without any change in the ideas' (i.e. identity, relations of time and place, cause and effect).

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Hume's Dichotomy – the motive

- Hume gives his taxonomy of relations in order to facilitate his arguments:
 - That the Causal Maxim cannot be intuitively certain (T 1.3.3.2);
 - That relations of virtue and vice are not demonstrable (T 3.1.1.19).
- He seems to argue from the principle:
 - Any proposition that is intuitively or demonstratively certain can contain only constant relations.

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Locke on the Types of Relation (2)

- Locke then says there are 'infinite others' of relations (II xxviii 1), notably:
 - 'Natural Relations' such as 'Father and Son, Brothers ... Country-men' (II xxviii 2)
 - 'Instituted, or Voluntary' relations such as 'General ..., Citizen, ... Patron and Client, ... Constable, or Dictator' (II xxviii 3)
 - Various moral relations (II xxviii 4-16)
- Note that Locke does not mean the same by 'natural relation' as Hume.

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Locke to Hume on Relations (1)

- Locke's 'diversity' apparently becomes Hume's 'contrariety'.
- Hume's 'resemblance' – which he says enters into all relations – fulfils a similar role to Locke's 'agreement' (II xxviii 19).
- Locke doesn't treat 'resemblance' as a single type, but recognises myriad forms of resemblance (e.g. 'Country-men, i.e. those who were born in the same Country').

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The Failure of the Dichotomy

- Sadly, this is nonsense. There are lots of 'analytic' propositions involving identity, relations of time and place, or causation:
 - If A=B and B=C, then A=C.
 - Anything that lies inside a small building lies inside a building.
 - Every mother is a parent.
 - Anyone whose paternal grandparents have two sons, has an uncle.

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The Source of Hume's Mistake?

- I suggest that Hume confused, when considering propositions about objects:
 - Supervenience: *what is implied by the properties of the objects themselves* (independently of their relative situation etc.)
 - Analyticity: *what is implied by our ideas of the objects themselves* (independently of ideas about their situation etc.)

(See Bennett 1971: 250-6 and 2001: 242-4 for the best published discussions of the issue)

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Locke to Hume on Relations (2)

- Hume seems deliberately to subsume Locke's 'natural', 'instituted' and moral relations under cause and effect:
 - ... all the relations of blood depend upon cause and effect ... (T 1.1.4.3)
 - ... the relation of cause and effect ... we may observe to be the source of all the relations of interest and duty, by which men influence each other in society, and are plac'd in the ties of government and subordination. (T 1.1.4.5)

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Locke and Hume on Relations

[Locke doesn't speak of 'agreement' as a relation]	Resemblance [a relation, but also involved in all relations]
Cause and effect Natural, Instituted, Moral	Cause and effect
Relations of time	Space and time
Relations of place	
Identity	Identity
Diversity	Contrariety
Proportional relations	Proportions in quantity Degrees in quality

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Hume's Conceivability Principle

- Hume mostly relies not so much on his Dichotomy as on the *Conceivability Principle*:
 - 'Tis an establish'd 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. (T 1.2.2.8)
 - To form a clear idea of any thing, is an undeniable argument for its possibility, and is alone a refutation of any pretended demonstration against it. (T 1.3.6.5)
 - whatever we conceive is possible, at least in a metaphysical sense: but wherever a demonstration takes place, the contrary is impossible, and implies a contradiction. (A 11, cf. E 12.28)

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Hume's Fork

- In the *Enquiry* (4.1-2), Hume replaces his Dichotomy with the distinction between 'relations of ideas' and 'matters of fact'.
 - Relations of ideas can be known *a priori* by inspecting ideas; hence their falsehood is inconceivable and they are necessarily true.
 - Hume's 'reasoning concerning matter of fact' (factual inference for short) is *ampliative* reasoning, that draws conclusions beyond what can be inferred by relations of ideas.

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