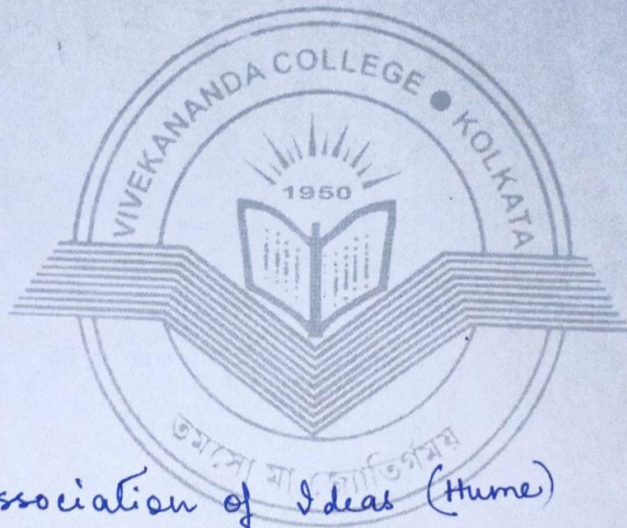


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NAAC ACCREDITED 'A' GRADE



Topic: Association of Ideas (Hume)

Course Title: History of Western Philosophy - II

Paper: CC4 - PHIA

Unit:

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The material is taken from the book.

A History of Western Philosophy.

— F. Copleston

It is original text book. But it is not available
to market. So, I am giving the material.

✓ my
27/04/2020.

4. When the mind has received impressions, they can reappear, as Hume puts it, in two ways. First, they can reappear with a degree of vividness which is intermediate between the vividness of an impression and the faintness of an idea. And the faculty by which we repeat our impressions in this way is the memory. Secondly, they can reappear as mere ideas, as faint copies or images of impressions. And the faculty by which we repeat our impressions in this second way is the imagination.

Thus, just as Hume described the difference between impressions and ideas in terms of degrees of vividness, so now he describes the difference between ideas of the memory and ideas of the imagination in a similar manner. But he goes on to give another account of this difference, which is rather more satisfactory. Memory, he says, preserves not only simple ideas but also their order and position. In other words, when we say, for example, that a person has a good memory of a cricket-match, we mean that he recalls not only the various events taken singly but also the order in which they occurred. The imagination, however, is not tied down in this way. It can, for instance, combine simple ideas arbitrarily or break down complex ideas into simple ideas and then rearrange them. This is frequently done in poems and romances. 'Nature there is totally confounded, and nothing mentioned but winged horses, fiery dragons, and monstrous giants.'¹

But though the imagination can freely combine ideas, it generally works according to some general principles of association. In memory there is an inseparable connection between ideas. In the case of the imagination this inseparable connection is wanting; but there is nevertheless a 'uniting principle' among ideas, 'some associating quality by which one idea naturally introduces another'.² Hume describes it as 'a gentle force, which commonly prevails'. Its causes are 'mostly unknown and must be resolved into original qualities of human nature, which I pretend not to explain'.³ In other words, there is in man an innate force or impulse which moves him, though without necessity, to combine together certain types of ideas. What this 'gentle force' is in itself, Hume does not undertake to explain: he takes it as something given. At the same time we can ascertain the qualities which bring this gentle force into play. 'The qualities from which this association arises, and by which the mind is, after this manner, conveyed from one idea to another, are three, viz. resemblance, contiguity in

¹ *T.*, I, I, 3, p. 10.² *T.*, I, I, 4, p. 10.³ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

time or place, and *cause* and *effect*.¹ The imagination runs easily from one idea to another which resembles it. Similarly, by long custom the mind acquires the habit of associating ideas which are contiguous, immediately or mediately, in space and time. 'As to the connection that is made by the relation of *cause and effect*, we shall have occasion afterwards to examine it to the bottom, and therefore shall not at present insist upon it.'²

5. In the *Treatise* the section on the association of ideas is followed by sections on relations and on modes and substances. These are complex ideas which are asserted to be effects of the association mentioned above. In classifying complex ideas in this way Hume is adopting one of Locke's classifications. We can take the idea of substance first.

✓ Hume asks, as we would expect, from what impression or impressions the idea of substance is derived, supposing that there is such an idea. It cannot be derived from impressions of sensation. If it is perceived by the eyes, it must be a colour; if by the ears, a sound; if by the palate, a taste. But nobody would say that substance is a colour, or a sound or a taste. If, therefore, there is an idea of substance, it must be derived from impressions of reflection. But these can be resolved into our passions and emotions. And those who speak of substances do not mean by the word passions or emotions. The idea of substance is derived, therefore, neither from impressions of sensation nor from impressions of reflection. It follows that there is, properly speaking, no idea of substance at all. The word 'substance' connotes a collection of 'simple ideas'. As Hume puts it, 'the idea of a substance . . . is nothing but a collection of simple ideas that are united by the imagination and have a particular name assigned them, by which we are able to recall, either to ourselves or others, that collection'.³ Sometimes the particular qualities which form a substance are referred to an unknown something in which they are thought to inhere; but even when this 'fiction' is avoided, the qualities are at least supposed to be closely related with one another by 'contiguity and causation'. Thus an association of ideas is set up in the mind, and when we perform the activity which we describe as discovering a new quality of a given substance, the new idea enters into the cluster of associated ideas.

Hume dismisses the subject of substance in a summary manner. It is clear that he accepts the general line of Berkeley's criticism

¹ *T.*, I, I, 4, p. 11.

² *Ibid.*

³ *T.*, I, I, 6, p. 16.

of Locke's notion of material substance, and that he does not consider that the theory of an unknown substratum needs further refutation. What is peculiar to him is that he also rejects Berkeley's theory of spiritual substance. That is to say, he extends the phenomenalist interpretation of things from bodies to souls or minds. True, he evidently does not feel very happy about the resolution of minds into psychic events, united with the aid of the principle of association. But his general empiricist position obviously points to a consistent phenomenism, to an analysis of all complex ideas into impressions, and he is involved in the attempt to treat spiritual substance in the same way as material substance. If he feels that his analysis leaves something out and suspects that his explanation of minds is an instance of explaining by explaining away, his doubts indicate either the insufficiency of phenomenism in general or, at least, the inadequacy of his statement of phenomenism. However, it is only in a later section of the *Treatise* that he deals with the mind or soul, under the heading of 'personal identity', and we may leave aside this problem for the moment, though it is useful to note at once that he does not confine himself, as Berkeley did, to a phenomenalist analysis of the idea of material substance. ✓

When discussing relations in the *Treatise* Hume distinguishes two senses of the word 'relation'. First, the word may be used to signify the quality or qualities 'by which two ideas are connected together in the imagination, and the one naturally introduces the other, after the manner above explained'.¹ These 'qualities' are resemblance, contiguity and the causal relation, and Hume calls them natural relations. In the case of natural relations, therefore, ideas are connected with one another by the natural force of association, so that the one tends naturally or by custom to recall the other. Secondly, there are what Hume calls philosophical relations. We can compare at will any objects, provided that there is at least some similarity of quality between them. In such comparison the mind is not impelled by a natural force of association to pass from one idea to another: it does so simply because it has chosen to institute a certain comparison.

Hume enumerates seven types of philosophical relation: resemblance, identity, relations of time and place, proportion in quantity or number, degrees in any quality, contrariety and causation.² It will be noted at once that there is a certain

¹ *T.*, I, I, 5, p. 13.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15; cf. *T.*, I, 3, 1, p. 69.

over-lapping between natural and philosophical relations. In fact, all three natural relations occur in the list of philosophical relations, though not, of course, as natural relations. But this over-lapping is not due to any oversight on Hume's part. He explains, for example, that no objects can be compared unless there is some resemblance between them. Resemblance is, therefore, a relation without which no philosophical relation can exist. But it does not follow that every resemblance produces an association of ideas. If a quality is very general and is found in a very great number of objects or in all objects, it does not lead the mind from one particular member of the class to any other particular member. For instance, all material things resemble one another in being material, and we can compare any material thing with any other material thing. But the idea of a material thing *as such* does not lead the mind by the force of association to any other particular material thing. Again, greenness is common to a great many things. And we can freely compare or group together two or more green things. But the imagination is not impelled, as it were, by natural force of association to move from the idea of green thing X to the idea of green thing Y. Again, we can compare any two things according to spatio-temporal relations, but it does not necessarily follow that the mind is impelled to do this by the force of association. In some cases it is (for example, when we have always experienced two things as spatially and immediately contiguous or as always succeeding one another immediately); but in very many cases there is no force of association at work. It may be that I am naturally, if not inevitably, impelled to think of St. Peter's when I think of the Vatican palace; but the idea of New York does not naturally recall the idea of Canton, though I can, of course, compare these two cities from a spatial point of view, asserting, for instance, that the one is so far distant from the other.

As for causation, Hume again postpones discussion of it. But it may be as well to remark here that in his view causation, considered as a philosophical relation, is reducible to such relations of space and time as contiguity, temporal succession and constant conjunction or togetherness. There is here no necessary connection between ideas; there are only factual spatio-temporal relations. Hence causation as a philosophical relation affords no ground for proceeding beyond experience by inferring transcendent causes from observed effects. In causation considered as a natural

relation there is, indeed, an inseparable connection between ideas; but this element must be explained subjectively, with the aid of the principles of association.

6. Hume treats of general abstract ideas in the first part of the