HUMEANISM AND THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF TESTIMONY

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Abstract

A contemporary debate concerning the epistemology of testimony is portrayed by its protagonists as having its origins in the eighteenth century and the respective views of David Hume and Thomas Reid. Hume is characterized as a reductionist and Reid as an anti-reductionist. This terminology has been widely adopted and the reductive approach has become synonymous with Hume. In §1 I spell out the reductionist interpretation of Hume in which the justification possessed by testimonially-acquired beliefs is reducible to the epistemic properties of perception, memory and inductive inference. This account of testimony is taken to be found in the section 'On Miracles' of Hume's *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*. In §2 I introduce the distinction between global and local reductionism, and Coady's interpretation of Hume as a global reductionist. He takes Hume's position to be untenable. The rest of the paper explores alternative interpretations of Hume. §3 develops a local reductionist interpretation of Hume on testimony. It is argued, though, that such an approach is unstable and, in response, §4 turns to anti-reductionism in its contemporary forms and in Reid's teleological account. In §5 I argue for an anti-reductionist account of Hume, one drawn from his discussion of the testimony of history in the *Treatise of Human Nature*, thus moving away from the usually exclusive focus upon the discussion of miracles in the first *Enquiry*, upon which the reductionist interpretation is based. Given the standard meaning of 'Humeanism' in the current debate, my interpretation amounts to the claim that Hume is not a Humean with respect to testimony.

Key words

Hume, testimony, reductionism, anti-reductionism, miracles, history.

1. Reductionism in the Epistemology of Testimony

A contemporary debate concerning the epistemology of testimony is portrayed by its protagonists as having its origins in the eighteenth century and the respective views of David Hume and Thomas Reid. Hume is characterized as a reductionist, with the justification possessed by testimonially-acquired beliefs reducible to the epistemic properties of perception, memory and inductive inference. I am justified in believing Martha because I have *perceptual* evidence that she has regularly told the truth before, I *remember* that she has a reliable record, and I am capable of carrying out the *inductive inference* that she is likely to continue to be reliable. This account of testimony is taken to be found in the section 'On Miracles' of Hume's *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*. Hume claims that our 'assurance' that someone speaks the truth 'is derived from no other principle than our observation of the veracity of human testimony, and of the usual conformity of facts to the reports of witnesses' (EHU 10.5).

This account is evidentialist: the testimonial beliefs we acquire are those supported by empirical evidence concerning their likely truth, and Hume is seen as explaining testimony in terms of his account of causal reasoning.

> It being a general maxim, that no objects have any discoverable connection together, and that all the inferences, which we can draw from one to another, are founded merely on our experience of their constant and regular conjunction; it is evident, that we ought not make the exception to this maxim in favour of human testimony, whose connexion with any event seems, in itself, as little necessary as any other. (EHU 10.5)

Thus,

> The reason, why we place any credit in witnesses and historians, is not derived from any *connexion*, which we perceive *a priori*, between testimony and reality, but because we are accustomed to find a conformity between them. (EHU 10.8)

As a consequence of this evidentialist approach, the strength of assurance in particular testimonial reports can vary, dependent on the kind of testimony offered and the reporters in question.

> [A]s the evidence, derived from witnesses and human testimony, is founded on past experience, so it varies with the experience, and is regarded either as a proof or a probability, according as the conjunction between any particular kind of report and any kind of object has been found to be constant or variable. (EHU 10.6)

Consequently, more evidence is required concerning the reliability of a speaker when the events in question are unlikely to have occurred, the prior probability of which we can assess according to laws of nature that are derived from our own experience of the regularities of the world and other people. In the case of miracle-testimony, any assurance we may have in the reporter is outweighed by the unlikeliness of the reported miracle and so trust in miracle-testimony is never warranted. I shall not, though, be concerned with the specific argument against miracles here, but rather with the claim that Hume is a reductionist with respect to testimony.

This interpretation of Hume is standard in the literature. Jennifer Lackey, for example, takes Hume to be 'the most well-known proponent of this view' (2008, 142); Anthony Coady claims '[Hume's] theory constitutes a reduction of testimony as a form of evidence or support to the status of a species…of inductive inference' (1992, 79); Robert Fogelin refers to the 'Humean or inductive approach' (2003, 89) and Mark Webb to 'Humean reductionism' (1993, 263). Fricker (1994, 2002), Schmitt (1987), McMyler (2011, 23–24), Goldman (2002, 173), Bailey and O'Brien (2006, 137–40) and Shieber (1999) also interpret Hume in this way. This terminology has been widely adopted and the reductive approach has become synonymous with Hume.

In §2 I introduce the distinction between global and local reductionism, and Coady's interpretation of Hume as a global reductionist. He takes Hume's position to be untenable. The rest of the paper explores alternative interpretations of Hume on testimony. §3 develops a local reductionist interpretation of Hume. It is argued, though, that such an approach is unstable and, in response, §4 turns to anti-reductionism in its contemporary forms and in Reid's teleological account. In §5 I argue for an anti-reductionist interpretation of Hume, one drawn from Hume's discussion of the testimony of history in the *Treatise of Human Nature*, thus moving away from the usually exclusive focus upon the discussion of miracles in the first *Enquiry*, upon which the reductionist interpretation is based. Given the standard meaning of 'Humeanism' in the

current debate, my interpretation amounts to the claim that Hume is not a Humean with respect to testimony.[1]

2. Global Reduction

Elizabeth Fricker (1994) distinguishes between global and local reductionism.[2] Global reductionists argue there is good reason to trust testimony in general, and trust in specific testifiers and their reports is derived from this global claim. Coady takes Hume to be committed to this kind of reductionism. '[T]he usual conformity of facts to the reports of witnesses' provides evidence that testimony is in general reliable, and this evidence justifies beliefs in what particular speakers say or what is written.

Coady (1992, 79–100) takes this to be Hume's account of testimony, but he argues that it is hopeless. We have too little first-hand evidence of the reliability of speakers, whether this is evidence concerning particular individuals or types of speakers such as teachers or politicians.[3] He also highlights what he sees as a 'fatal ambiguity' in Hume's discussion (1992, 80–5). When Hume says that 'our assurance…is derived from no other principle than our observation of the veracity of human testimony' (EHU 10.5), whose observations and experience is he referring to? He could be using 'our experience' in a rhetorical sense, referring to the experience of individuals: to your experience and how it grounds your assurance, and to my experience and how it grounds my assurance. The particular examples that he uses, though, suggest that this is not what he intends. When speaking of 'a uniform experience' against resurrection he is not merely claiming that he has not witnessed such an event, but that this 'has *never* been observed in any age or country' (EHU 10.12). He is using 'our' experience in a 'collective' sense (Schmitt, 1987, 75n5): *no-one* has witnessed such an event.[4] Similarly, the

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[1] In earlier work I interpreted Hume as a reductionist (Bailey & O'Brien, 2006), but I have now come to reject this interpretation.

[2] See Lackey (2008, 142–9) for discussion of the varieties of reductionism. For criticism of global reductionism, see Stevenson (1993) and Insole (2000), and Weiner (2003) for criticism of local reductionism.

[3] For further discussion of Coady's arguments, see Gelfert (2014, 105–8).

[4] Shieber (2015, 63) talks of the distinction between 'rhetorical' and 'distributed' uses of 'our experience', but for the latter I prefer Schmitt's (1987) term 'collective'.

'firm and unalterable experience' which has established the laws of nature is not the consistent experience of Hume himself, but of people in general.

Such a collective notion of experience is also required to underpin Hume's explanation in the *Treatise* of why we attribute continued existence to aspects of the external world which we are not presently perceiving.[5] Some of his examples can plausibly be seen as involving the consistent experience of an individual. The squeak Hume hears just before the porter appears is taken to be the squeak of a door, since, in the past, doors have made such a sound. Further, Hume takes it that the stairs are still in existence, otherwise the porter would not have been able to arrive at his door (THN 1.4.2.20). In this case, it is plausible that Hume would have enough experience of doors and staircases for him to be able to reason in this way. This may not be so, though, in the following case.

> I receive a letter, which upon opening I perceive by the hand-writing and subscription to have come from a friend, who says he is two hundred leagues distant. 'Tis evident I can never account for this phaenomenon, conformable to my experience in other instances, without spreading out in my mind the whole sea and continent betwixt us, and supposing the effects and continu'd existence of posts and ferries, according to my memory and observation. (THN 1.4.2.20)

Hume was well travelled, but it's not likely that he had first-hand experience of the global postal service. It is not *his own* experience of the postal service that enables Hume to believe in the continued existence of his friend, but collective experience that Hume has acquired by testimony and the details of which might be quite sketchy. Coady claims that this ambiguity between the rhetorical and collective senses of 'our experience' undermines Hume's account. Hume's empiricism demands that his account of testimony relies on the experience of an

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[5] Wilson argues that our knowledge of the principles of causation also depends on such collective experience. We accept the principle that '[t]he same cause always produces the same effect, and the same effect never arises but from the same cause' (THN 1.3.15.6), but '[t]he experience that supports the acceptance of this principle is not simply that of the investigator, the "artisan", say, or the philosopher: it is indeed my experience that is relevant, but my experience is backed up by that of others—what is relevant is *our* experience, the experience of *us* taken collectively' (Wilson, 2010, 67).

individual, but the beliefs Hume takes us to acquire—concerning, for example, resurrection and the postal service—depend on the latter, collective notion. This latter notion, though, cannot be depended on without begging the question. This, Coady notes (1992, 99n10), was a criticism raised to Hume by his contemporary George Campbell. Campbell interrogates Hume's claim that resurrections have not occurred. How can Hume know this?

> [W]hat has been observed, and what has not been observed, in all ages and countries, pray how can you, sir, or I, or any man, come to the knowledge of? Only I suppose by testimony oral or written. (Campbell 1762, 33)[6]

Hume thus assumes the evidential force of testimony. Coady's argument is seen by many as fatal to Hume's reductionist account of testimony; Axel Gelfert thus claiming that 'global reductionism…is regarded as a non-starter by most contributors to the debate' (2014, 107).

I shall explore two distinct responses to this difficulty; my focus being not on whether a particular form of reductionism is defensible, but how Hume should be interpreted. One response, to which I turn in the next section, is to interpret Hume as a local reductionist. The other response is to see him as an anti-reductionist. I devote the rest of the paper to this suggestion.

3. Local Reduction

Fricker draws a distinction between the developmental and mature phases of one's epistemic life. In the developmental phase, as children (and perhaps beyond), we have no choice but to take much of what we believe about the world on trust: 'Simply-trusted testimony plays an inevitable role in the causal process by which we become masters of our commonsense scheme of things' (Fricker, 1995, 403). Consonant with her suggestion, Hume says that children 'implicitly embrace every opinion propos'd to them' (THN 2.1.11.2). It is not required that testimonial beliefs are justified in the reductive way assumed by global reductionism, but once such a background is established—when, that is, we enter the mature phase—then there is an imperative to check the credentials of the testimony we hear or read *for ourselves.* And this we can do, because:

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[6] We return to Campbell's criticism of Hume in §5 below.

> On almost any actual occasion of testimony, a normally knowledgeable adult will be absolutely awash with relevant circumstantial evidence bearing on the question of whether the speaker is to be trusted on her topic. She will have, in the cognitive background in light of which she approaches fresh instances of testimony, a multitude of background beliefs about human and non-human nature which are relevant to whether this fresh instance of testimony, this current invitation to believe on trust in the teller, is indeed to be trusted or not. (Fricker, 2002, 381)

The kind of default trust that is necessary in the developmental period cannot be maintained since '[w]e know too much about human nature to want to trust anyone, let alone everyone, uncritically' (Fricker, 1995, 401). Thus, in order for our testimonial beliefs to be justified.

> [T]he hearer must always be monitoring the speaker critically. This is a matter of the actual engagement of a counterfactual sensitivity: it is true throughout of the hearer that if there were any signs of untrustworthiness, she would pick them up. (Fricker, 1994, 154)[7]

She should be looking for intoxication, nervousness, confusion, lack of eye contact, twitching and suchlike. The justification acquired from such monitoring is local, concerning the particular speaker in question and the circumstances of their utterance; it does not require any commitment to the global claim that we are justified in believing testimony in general.

Hume, then, could be seen as a local reductionist. The ambiguity in his use of 'our experience' would not then be fatal. The references to collective experience reflect beliefs acquired in the developmental phase, beliefs that can then be appealed to in the mature phase in order to validate the credentials of specific cases of testimony: evidence against resurrection, for example, can be taken on trust, whilst monitoring for deceit or error should occur with respect to miracle-reports in responsible, mature believers.

Gelfert (2009), however, argues that local reductionism is unstable and that, in the end, the local reductionist has either to reject reductionism or embrace the sceptical claim that belief

[7] Such monitoring need only be 'registered and processed at an irretrievably sub-personal level' (Fricker, 1994, 150).

in testimony is not justified. I shall first spell out Gelfert's argument, and then consider how this relates to the suggested local reductionist interpretation of Hume. Gelfert argues that:

> 'developmental' phases occur throughout our epistemic lives: consider receiving training in a new academic field, acquiring expertise on a topic, learning a new language or technical vocabulary, or immersing oneself in a new cultural environment. In each of these cases, an agent will have to acquire new epistemic standards and criteria of trustworthiness, and one's grounds for trusting the new testimony cannot be expected to reduce to previously acquired criteria and heuristics. (2009, 185–6)

The sharp line that Fricker attempts to draw between the developmental and mature phases cannot be drawn, but such a line is crucial to the local reductionist since it allows standards of trustworthiness to be taken on trust and insulated, as it were, from the reductive constraints of the mature phase. Such standards need to be established in this way since, as Coady argues, an individual does not have enough experience on their own to justify the range of testimonial beliefs we take to be justified. If, however, such standards are those wholly established in the developmental phase, then this would 'severely impair[] the possibility of rationally adjusting, in the light of warranted criticism and correction by others, one's habitual response to testimony' (Gelfert, 2009, 189). We are able, though, to learn new standards and it's not clear how the reductionist can account for this.

Hume allows for the continual possibility of refining one's epistemic standards concerning who to trust. We sometimes draw rash generalizations and apply misguided general rules. Having never met an Irishman with wit (Hume's example) we may infer that all Irishmen lack intelligence. Such prejudices, however, can be corrected by general rules of an epistemically superior kind (THN 1.3.13.7). These are second-order judgements about the reliability of the various forms of reasoning in which we engage, what Kemp Smith calls 'wider and more reliable forms of custom' (1941, 95). Such a generalization concerning the Irish would lead to conflict when one meets an intelligent Irishman. One thus holds back from this kind of generalization, perhaps demanding more evidence, and thus regulating one's biases. Such 'unphilosophical probability' is therefore seen as standing in need of correction by

'general rules' or more philosophical ways of thinking.[8,9] Deborah Boyle (2012, 170) suggests that trust in testimony could depend on a general rule that testimony is reliable, a rule that can then be tempered by other, more precise general rules when we discover kinds of cases where testimony should not be trusted. We may, for example, come to learn that priests are not to be trusted on moral matters and that certain people should be considered good judges when it comes to matters aesthetic.[10] The latter case is particularly relevant to Gelfert's argument against local reductionism since this would not seem to be the kind of discovery we could make on our own. Initial faith in others is required; initial faith that is not confined to the developmental phase. We need to trust those who testify that Jancis is a good judge of wine and we have, at first, to trust Jancis's statements regarding the quality of a particular vintage and the flavours of which it is comprised. In doing so we come to acquire, through experience, 'delicacy of taste' along with a whole range of further general rules concerning particular kinds of wine-testimony. We can, for example, come to be sceptical of the restaurant's claim that their 1991 claret is outstanding or that this year's Beaujolais nouveau will improve with age. Without the initial trust in Jancis, though, experience could not have equipped us with such refined abilities to assess this kind of testimony. This is precisely the kind of case Gelfert highlights as undermining local reductionism. The claim, then, is that the acquisition of epistemic standards relevant to different kinds of testimony is not restricted to childhood or to a time-limited developmental phase. Throughout our lives we must at times be open to trust (in the absence of reductive evidence) in order to be receptive to testimony concerning new domains. This is at odds with local reductionism where trust is insulated in the developmental phase.

Gelfert concludes that local reductionism is unstable: we are caught between 'blissful gullibility or thoroughgoing scepticism' (2009, 190). Stability can be secured by allowing that the developmental-phase border can be breached and that default trust has a role in one's epistemic maturity. This amounts to an embrace of anti-reductionism to which we turn in the

[8] It is the 'vulgar' and uneducated who 'carry all *national characters* to extremes; and having once established it as a principle, that any people are knavish, or cowardly, or ignorant, they will admit of no exception, but comprehend every individual under the same censure' (Hume, 'Of National Characters', E 197). Hume, however, allows that the vulgar can be educated and that prejudices can be overturned.

[9] I return to unphilosophical probability in §5 below.

[10] On Hume on Christian morality, see Bailey & O'Brien (2013, 185–7), and on aesthetic judgement and testimony, see Hume's essay, 'Of the Standard of Taste' (E 226–52).

next section. Alternatively, the reductionist can resist this embrace but, in so doing, fall prey to Coady's objection that we have not done the requisite groundwork for justifying testimony and so our testimonial beliefs cannot be justified. Such a sceptical interpretation of Hume, though, is implausible given that it is clear that he draws a distinction between testimony that should be trusted and cases where it should not—miracle-testimony, of course, being a case of the latter.

4. Anti-Reductionism

In §5 I shall develop an anti-reductionist interpretation of Hume on testimony. First, though, I shall clarify what is meant by anti-reductionism in the context of the epistemology of testimony. This shall be done by contrasting the kind of anti-reductionism I find in Hume with the a priori accounts of contemporary anti-reductionists and with Thomas Reid's teleological form of anti-reductionism.

Anti-reductionists take testimony to be a fundamental source of knowledge, alongside, and not reducible to, perception, inference and memory. Testimony causally depends on perception and memory since a hearer must hear what the speaker says and remember what her words mean, but justification for belief in testimony is not provided by inductive reasoning concerning the past reliability of speakers. Anti-reductionists are also called 'fundamentalists' (Graham 2006), 'credulists' (Pritchard 2006, 21) and 'presumptive right' theorists (Fricker 1994).[11] Suggestive of anti-reductionism is what Coady calls the 'phenomenology of learning' (1992, 143). There may be times when we seem to weigh up the evidence for and against what someone says in the way the reductionist claims—and miracle-testimony is a good case of this—but this is not usually the case: 'in only the rarest instances do we reason at all before forming a belief based on what someone has told us. In the vast majority of cases we simply believe them, or else not' (Webb 1993, 262).[12] The local reductionist argues that mature-stage

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[11] See Fricker (1994, 125): '*PR* [Presumptive Right] *thesis:* On any occasion of testimony, the hearer has the epistemic right to assume, without evidence, that the speaker is trustworthy, i.e. that what she says will be true, unless there are special circumstances which defeat this presumption. (Thus she has the epistemic right to believe the speaker's assertion, unless such defeating conditions obtain)'.

[12] That this is a feature of the psychology of testimonial trust does not of course entail epistemological anti-reductionism with respect to testimony. We may 'simply believe them', but should we?

beliefs are only justified if the requisite monitoring and assessment of standards occurs, with such scrutiny not required in the developmental phase. The anti-reductionist, however, takes it that we have default justification in all cases of testimony.

There are various proponents of anti-reductionism. Peter Strawson claims that '[i]f we (often) know, directly and immediately, what our eyes tell us, then we (often) know, no less directly and immediately, what other people tell us' (1994, 27), and Michael Dummett, that '[w]e need no particular reason to take things to be as others inform us that they are, save when we have some weaker contrary ground for not so taking them to be as we are told they are' (1994, 265). Some prominent anti-reductionists present transcendental arguments for default trust based on the Davidsonian claim that understanding another demands the assumption of rationality which itself relies on the assumption that the other's beliefs are mostly true and should therefore be trusted.[13] As, however, my primary interest is in interpretations of Hume, I shall say nothing more concerning such approaches, given their profoundly anti-Humean character. Of more relevance is the view of Hume's contemporary, Thomas Reid.

Reid and Hume both place great importance in testimony. Hume claims that 'there is no species of reasoning more common, more useful, and even necessary to human life than that which is derived from the testimony of men, and the reports of eye-witnesses and spectators' (EHU 10.5) and Reid, that 'we…receive the greatest and most important part of our knowledge by the information of others', and that 'she [reason, that is], finds a necessity of borrowing light from testimony, where she has none within herself' (1983, 93, 96). Today's debate concerning reduction in the epistemology of testimony is painted as reflecting and continuing the eighteenth-century debate between Hume and Reid: Hume the reductionist, Reid the anti-reductionist. The Humean account is reductive in that testimonial justification is grounded in the justification provided by perception, memory and inference. Reid, however, has a non-reductive account: testimony is a basic form of knowledge alongside (and not reducible to) that provided by these other sources of justification. He argues that we should always accept

[13] See, for example, Coady's 'Martian argument' (1992, 85–93), Stevenson (1993) and Burge (1993). Burge argues that intelligible propositions display rationality and are therefore prima facie credible: 'A person is apriori entitled to accept a proposition that is presented as true and that is intelligible to him, unless there are stronger reasons not to do so, because it is prima facie preserved (received) from a rational source, or resource for reason; reliance on rational sources—or resources for reason—is, other things equal, necessary to the function of reason' (1993, 467). For the Davidsonian background, see Davidson (1984).

someone's testimony unless we have good reason to suspect that a particular report is false. He supports his claim by giving an account of certain aspects of human nature. First, there is a 'principle of credulity': we have 'a disposition to confide in the veracity of others, and to believe what they tell us' (Reid, 1983, 95) (just as we usually believe our own eyes and our memory). That we possess such an innate disposition is suggested by the fact that trust appears strongest in children: 'the *principle of credulity*…is unlimited in children, until they meet with instances of deceit and falsehood; and it retains a very considerable degree of strength through life' (Reid, 1983, 95).[14] Second, Reid claims that credulity is justified because people are naturally disposed to speak the truth.

> [We have] a propensity to speak truth, and to use the signs of language, so as to convey our real sentiments…. Truth is always uppermost, and is the natural issue of the mind. It requires no art or training, no inducement or temptation, but only that we yield to natural impulse. Lying, on the contrary, is doing violence to our nature. (1983, 94)

For Reid, such a presumptive right to trust is justified by the co-ordination of these principles of human nature. Given that human beings are disposed to tell the truth, it is epistemically justified to have default trust in what they say.

Hume, according to the reductionist interpretation, has no preconceptions about the reliability of testimony; Reid, however, assumes that it is correct. Empirical evidence therefore plays a different role in their respective accounts. For the Humean, empirical evidence of a speaker's reliability provides you with justification for accepting their testimony. For Reid, however, empirical evidence plays only a negative role. If a speaker is found to be unreliable, then your justification—that which all testimony has a priori—is defeated. Reid has a teleological account of the source of our default justification for testimonial trust since the co-ordinated faculties of credulity and veracity are the work of 'The wise and beneficent Author of Nature' (1983, 93). Contemporary anti-reductionists are motivated by transcendental arguments concerning rational constraints on interpretation and the impossibility of global error. Neither of these approaches could inform an anti-reductionist interpretation of Hume

[14] Note that we now use 'credulity' to imply gullibility. This is not Reid's intention. His claim is only that children are trusting and that they are right to be so, until, that is, they meet with deceit and falsehood.

given his hostility towards teleological or a priori considerations.[15] Thus, in the following section I shall suggest a distinct motivation for anti-reductionism, one that is opposed to the reductive view that is labelled 'Humean' in the contemporary debate.

5. Testimony and History

In a letter to Lord Kames concerning the preparation of his *Treatise*, Hume says 'I am at present castrating my work, that is, cutting off its nobler parts; that is, endeavouring it shall give as little offence as possible' (Hume, 1932, 1, 25–6). These nobler parts comprised 'some *Reasoning concerning Miracles*, which I once thought of publishing with the rest, but which I am afraid will give too much offence'. A discussion concerning miracles was thus 'excised' from the *Treatise* and it is presumably this which evolved—to a greater or lesser extent—into the miracles essay that was to first appear in his *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding* in 1748, and then all subsequent editions of the first *Enquiry* from 1758 on. It is very plausible that it was to have been included at *Treatise* 1.3, in the discussion of probability. I argue, though, that its likely role there was not to support a general reductionist account of testimony; rather, miracles would highlight the problem of gullibility, a solution to which can be found within an anti-reductionist account. Let us first, then, consider what remains at *Treatise* 1.3 concerning testimony.

At *Treatise* 1.3.4.1 Hume introduces the belief that Caesar was killed in the Senate House on the Ides of March. This is a testimonial belief, one passed to us down a very long train of transmission. Hume, though, seems to highlight an epistemic problem with such historical belief. To assess the plausibility of such a claim, it could be thought that we need to assess the reliability of each link in the testimonial chain, each assessment providing a probability concerning, for example, 'the fidelity of printers and copyists'. However, '[e]very new probability diminishes the original conviction' (THN 1.3.13.4) and this consideration of the 'millions' of links in the chain would lead to it being the case that:

> the evidence of all antient history must now be lost or at least will be lost in time…. This may be consider'd only in a certain vivacity, convey'd from an original

[15] For Hume's rejection of teleological thinking, see Greco & O'Brien (2019).

> impression, it would decay by the length of the transition, and must at last be extinguished. (THN 1.3.13.4)

There are various interpretations of what Hume intends here. Elizabeth Anscombe (1973) takes Hume to be highlighting sceptical concerns. On a reductive account such a belief concerning Caesar can only be justified if one has knowledge of the historical chain of transmission and if one can assess the reliability of each of its links. It is, however, highly unlikely that we can do this and thus we are led to scepticism concerning history. This, Anscombe argues, undermines Hume's account of historical belief since, first, such scepticism is incredible, and second, Hume would be attempting to answer scepticism about Caesar by appealing to links in a chain of testimony for which we have even less evidence.

Fogelin (2009) also has a sceptical interpretation of this passage. He focuses, though, on Hume's claim that:

> There is no variation in the steps [in the links of the testimonial chain]. After we know one, we know all of them; and after we have made one, we can have no scruple as to the rest. This circumstance alone preserves the evidence of history. (THN 1.4.13.6)

Usually when we read history we do not consider all the links in the relevant testimonial chains, and that is epistemically acceptable, since:

> most of these proofs [of the reliability of the links in the chain] are perfectly resembling, the mind runs easily along them, jumps from one part to another with facility, and forms but a confus'd and general notion of each link. (THN 1.3.13.6)

We conflate links, skip over some, and, if we think of them at all, we think of them in somewhat vague and imprecise terms. According to Fogelin, such casual assessment of the provenance of historical belief protects us from scepticism: 'It seems, then, that beliefs in remote past events are preserved only because we become fuddled when we think of how they have been handed down to us' (2009, 35). This, however, is only a temporary remedy for scepticism (for the philosopher), in light of the sceptical arguments that are about to come down the line in *Treatise* 1.4.

Donald Livingston suggests a third interpretation. As said, when reading history we do not often assess the links in the testimonial chain, at least not in a dedicated and methodical

manner. Rather, Livingston says, 'our belief in the existence of Caesar is grounded in a fundamental belief in the historians who have written the book we are reading and not in a conclusion reached by inference through the links in a chain of record' (1974, 17).

> Belief in recorded history is on the whole a belief *that there has been* a chain of tradition of reports and records going back to contemporary knowledge; it is not a belief in the historical facts by an inference that passes through the links of such a chain. (1974, 14)

Belief in the reliability of testimonial chains is assumed. Fogelin takes Hume's claim concerning how we 'run…easily through links in the chain' to indicate our casual epistemic assessment of the evidence. Livingston, however, claims that '[w]hen Hume speaks of "passing thro' all the intermediate space betwixt ourselves and the object", he does not mean that we must methodically *infer* our way through it as a condition of our knowing the object but, rather, that the idea of the intermediate space is entailed in the idea of the object' (1974, 18). When one reads a text *as* a history book, one takes there to be a testimonial chain of transmission, and our default position—unless something raises our suspicions—is to take this chain to be reliable. Livingston's '*fundamental belief* in the historians who have written the book' (1974, 17; my emphasis) should be read as a default account of testimonial trust, one in which we should trust their testimony unless we have specific reasons not to.

Let us then consider the mechanisms that could ground such trust. For Hume, 'belief may be most accurately defin'd, [as] A LIVELY IDEA RELATED TO OR ASSOCIATED WITH A PRESENT IMPRESSION' (THN 1.3.7.5). What, though, is the source of the vivacity that leads to lively ideas acquired through testimony, and what are the relevant present impressions?

On Anscombe's account, the original vivacity-conferring present impressions would seem to be those of eye-witnesses to the historical event, and there is thus the threat of vivacity diminishing through transmission. This, though, cannot be Hume's account. We are concerned with those who believe the historical texts—us, now—and the source of vivacity that feeds such beliefs. Such vivacity cannot flow between individuals, nor down testimonial chains; its source must be the 'present impressions' of the readers of history.

According to the reductionist account of Humean testimony, we have experience of conjunctions between assertions and states of affairs in the world to which those assertions refer. The sensory impressions of written or spoken testimony can then be seen to contribute vivacity to the ideas we acquire via causal reasoning. There are, though, other accounts—by

Hume's lights—of the sources of vivacity that ground testimonial belief and that could explain our 'fundamental' or default belief in historical testimony. Michael Welbourne (2002, 421–2), for example, highlights the importance of resemblance between the content of testimonial reports and the ideas that they produce in the hearer's mind. This resemblance between the impression of someone's testimony—testimony 'consider'd as an image' (THN 1.3.9.12)—and the idea that is subsequently acquired, enlivens the latter via the principle of association by the relation of resemblance, thus facilitating the acquisition of testimonial belief. The content of your testimony concerning Rome resembles the idea of Rome that I acquire from you, and this idea is then enlivened in virtue of this resemblance and becomes a belief concerning Rome. Contiguity can also play a role: ideas of biblical events enlivened for those 'who have seen MECCA or the HOLY LAND' (THN 1.3.9.9), places contiguous to where the reported events occurred. Another potential source of vivacity lies in sympathetic mechanisms. Hume is explicit that sympathy is involved in the acquisition of beliefs constitutive of national character and religious beliefs, and sympathy can be seen as having a wider influence on belief. Pall Ardal, for example, suggests 'there is no reason to suppose that Hume does not mean his words [concerning sympathy and belief] to be taken to refer to people's opinions as to matters of fact as well as to their moral opinions' (1966, 47). Further, in a recent paper I have suggested a possible sympathetic mechanism underlying testimonial belief acquisition, with ideas acquired from testimony enlivened through vivacity-transfer from the impression of the self (as is the case with Hume's account of emotional contagion) (O'Brien, 2017).

For any such presumptive right thesis or anti-reductionist account of testimony there arises the problem of gullibility. Surely we should not trust everything we hear? There is, however, a distinction between default acceptance of testimony and gullibility. Anti-reductionist accounts need not engender the latter; that is, if there are mechanisms to correct for gullibility. Hume has such resources. First, Saul Traiger notes that 'for impressions of characters and letters to induce belief, one must *take* those characters and letters as reports or beliefs of the testifier, and not as stories, fables, dreams, or mere utterances' (1993, 139).[16]

[16] It could be clearer, though, how Hume accounts for this notion of *taking as.* Jost notes Hume's difficulties with respect to drawing a distinction between belief in history and the vivid ideas associated with reading fiction: 'In his repeated attempts to describe belief in both the *Treatise* and the first *Enquiry* Hume is clearly gesturing toward a sentimental *je ne sais quoi* that is not simply identical to being impressed by a good story, but because he characterizes belief as a feeling, his language fails to draw a firm barrier between rhetorical or narrational suasion and epistemological conviction' (2014, 150).

Second, if one does read a text *as history*, one can discover red flags that prompt us to look more closely at certain links in the testimonial chain.[17] Miracle-testimony, of course, raises such concerns: these are cases where putative historical testimony involves claims that are counter to the laws of nature. According to Hume, then, there has never been reported testimony of such impeccable provenance that could support belief in such unlikely events, regardless of whether there are many links in the chain of testimonial transmission or just one.

My anti-reductionist interpretation of Hume on testimony is taken from the *Treatise*, rather than from the first *Enquiry*, which is usually the sole focus of contemporary 'Humean' interpretations. I suggest, then, that the excision of the discussion of miracles from the *Treatise* and its reinstatement in the first *Enquiry* has distorted interpretations of Hume's account of testimony. In the *Enquiry*, his account of testimony appears in a section dedicated to religion, and thus the need to justify the relevant testimony is highlighted. Miracle-testimony, though, is a special case where, given the nature of religion, we need to be especially vigilant for misleading testimony. The wider everyday acceptance we have of testimony is downplayed and so the anti-reductionist interpretation ignored—although, as I argue, this can be found in the *Treatise.*[18]

To avoid 'fatal ambiguity' in the use of 'our experience' I argue that Hume embraces the collective notion of experience, suggesting that 'books and conversation enlarge …the sphere of one man's experience' (EHU 9.5n20). This claim is developed in his essay 'Of the Study of History' (E 563–68).

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[17] Also see Welbourne (2002, 421): 'If previous experience triggers suspicion about some particular testimony we abandon the default mode of response and in fact begin to behave, as in these circumstances we *should*, more like jurors or historians'.

[18] It is interesting to speculate about why Hume saw fit to bring the discussion of miracles back in the *Enquiry*. Selby-Bigge saw the miracles discussion as an opportunity to 'spice up the work and provoke public notoriety' (Millican, 2011, 155). However plausible one finds this claim, this alone would not explain the reappearance of miracles. It must also be the case that Hume, for some reason, became less concerned about the offence his discussion would cause. One reason for this could be that the political climate may have changed. In a letter to James Oswald, Hume says 'I have some thoughts of taking advantage of this short interval of liberty that is indulged us and of printing the Philosophical Essays I left in your hands. Our friend, Harry [Henry Home], is against this, as indiscreet. But in the first place, I think I am too deep engaged to think of a retreat. In the second place, I see not what bad consequences follow, in the present age, from the character of an infidel; especially if a man's conduct be in other respects irreproachable. What is your opinion?' (Hume, 1932, 1, 106)

> [I]f we consider the shortness of human life, and our limited knowledge, even of what passes in our own time, we must be sensible that we should be for ever children in understanding, were it not for this invention, which extends our experience to all past ages, and to the most distant nations; making them contribute as much to our improvement in wisdom, as if they had actually lain under our observation. A man acquainted with history may, in some respect, be said to have lived from the beginning of the world, and to have been making continual additions to his stock of knowledge in every century. (E 566–7)

Thus, when Hume says that our 'assurance' that someone speaks the truth 'is derived from no other principle than our observation of the veracity of human testimony', we should not take this as entailing a reductive account. First, this statement is made in the context of miracles and thus, as I have argued, this red flag can trigger reductionist considerations in this kind of case, without also demanding commitment to reductionism across the board. Second, the anti-reductionist can take 'our observation' in the collective sense. Trust in history allows us, as it were, to see through other people's eyes and to see the veracity (and mendacity) of our fellows. Such evidence can then be supplemented by our own experience.[19]

There is further textual evidence to consider that may help judge what exactly Hume had in mind by 'our experience', and this is in the form of Hume's own reply to the accusation that his wording is ambiguous and misleading. George Campbell, in his *A Dissertation on Miracles* (1762), argued that testimony could support belief in miracles, and section 2 of this work is entitled 'Mr Hume charged with some fallacies in his way of managing the argument'. He suggests one of these fallacies lies in Hume's phrase 'our experience': Hume 'uses the term *experience* in proposing his argument; in prosecuting it, he, with great dexterity, shifts the sense, and, ere the reader is apprised, insinuates another' (1762, 32–3); 'he all along avails himself of ambiguity in the word *experience*' (1762, 39–40). Campbell distinguishes 'personal' experience and 'derived' experience, that acquired from testimony, and, according to him, the latter should not be discounted, as it is by Hume, when its content is out of line with what are taken to be the laws of nature. Campbell is an anti-reductionist, seeing testimony as one of the

[19] Also see Hume (EHU 8.9): 'Hence likewise the benefit of that experience, acquired by long life and a variety of business and company, in order to instruct us in the principles of human nature…. The general observations, treasured up by a course of experience, give us the clue of human nature'.

'original grounds of belief' (1762, 24), alongside perception. Hugh Blair sent Hume Campbell's manuscript and Hume returned his thoughts concerning it in a letter to Blair. With respect to the accusation of ambiguity, Hume attempts to clarify his position: 'No man can have any other experience than his own. The experience of others becomes his only by the credit of testimony; which proceeds from his own experience of human nature' (1932, 1, 349). The first sentence is clear. I cannot literally have the experiences of others.[20] There is another sense, though, in which we can be said to have the experiences of another and that is when we accept their testimony. The question, then, of whether Hume is a reductionist or an anti-reductionist can be assessed according to how we interpret Hume's claim that the credit given to testimony 'proceeds from his own experience of human nature'.

Since Campbell was an anti-reductionist, Hume's letter, contra my interpretation, could suggest that Hume is here highlighting his reductionist credentials: his 'own experience of human nature' constituted by his *personal* experience of others. This would be to reduce Campbell's 'derived experience' to 'personal experience'. Such a reading, though, is not compulsory. There is also an anti-reductionist reading. My 'own experience' could include things that I have read and learnt from others, as we saw suggested above in Hume's claims concerning how 'books and conversation enlarge…the sphere of one man's experience' and how history 'extends our experience to all past ages'. Read in this way, Hume's reply to Campbell (by way of Blair) is not a reductionist retort to the accusation of ambiguity, but rather, a clarification that makes clear his anti-reductionist credentials. On such an interpretation, the views of Campbell and Hume are closer than they might appear: they both adopt an anti-reductionist approach to testimony, although they differ concerning how anti-reductionism applies to miracle-testimony. Hume is critical of Campbell's openness to miracle-testimony, but, relevant to my interpretation of Hume's reply, he appears to be intrigued by Campbell's theory of testimony, wishing that Campbell 'had endeavoured to establish his principles in

[20] Even when I sympathetically acquire the emotions of another, it's *my* sadness I feel.

general, without any reference to a particular book or person' (1932, I, 349). Hume would perhaps have liked to engage further with Campbell's anti-reductionist account.[21,22]

Paul Faulkner (1998) and Gelfert (2010) stress that reductionists place too much emphasis on the reliability of particular speakers. They, in contrast, focus on the usually two-stage nature of trust. First, we acquire evidence concerning facets of human nature: it is 'our *experience* of the governing principles of human nature, which gives us any assurance of the veracity of men' (THN 1.3.9.12). Second, it is this knowledge that we put to use on particular

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[21] Preferably, though, without focusing on miracle-testimony. There is a weary tone to Hume's letter, and no engagement with Campbell's accusation of ambiguity beyond the two quoted sentences above. This is because Hume finds Campbell 'a little too zealous for a philosopher' and, in contrast to the usual entertaining and instructive conversations between Hume and his clergyman friend, Blair, 'when the conversation was diverted by you [Blair]…towards the subject of your profession; tho I doubt not but your intentions were very friendly towards me, I own I never received the same satisfaction: I was apt to be tired, and you to be angry.' (1932, 1, 351)

[22] I accept that Hume's letter to Blair is somewhat problematic for my anti-realist interpretation. There are other ways to interpret this letter, those that do not take it as an outright expression of Hume's reductionism, but those that also do not take Hume to be an out-and-out anti-reductionist. One could, for example, accept that Hume acknowledges a collective notion of experience, but only if the experiences of others can be deemed trustworthy on the basis of personal experience. This is a natural reading of Hume's claim that '[t]he experience of others becomes his only by the credit which he gives to their testimony; which proceeds from his own experience of human nature'. Further, Hume claims that 'the youthful propensity to believe…is corrected by experience' (1932, I, 349), and there is again a natural reading of such 'correction' that involves one's mature, *personal* experience of human nature. See Millican (2011, 157) for such an interpretation, an interpretation that is itself more nuanced than the received reductionist interpretation; Millican claiming that 'Hume has no need to dispute the claim that we must start by taking testimony for granted to build our knowledge of the world' (2011, 158).

Given such an alternative, and given that Hume does not explicitly offer an anti-reductionist account of testimony, my interpretation should be seen as a 'rational reconstruction' (Millican, 2014, 206) of the various things Hume says about testimony across his works, from his major philosophical works through to his *History of England* and *Essays.* I am committed to at least the following: 'if this theory can make good sense of texts that would otherwise be incoherent, then we should be prepared to consider it as suggestive of genuine tendencies in Hume's own thought' (ibid.). I am also happy to accept Millican's proviso: 'Any such development, however, is bound to be highly controversial, so even in the best case it remains desirable to see clear boundaries drawn between the texts and their speculative interpretation' (ibid.).

occasions, both to explain how testimonial beliefs are acquired and why we are justified in trusting some sources of testimony and not others.

> Were not the memory tenacious to a certain degree; had not men commonly an inclination to truth and a principle of probity; were they not sensible to shame, when detected in a falsehood; Were not these, I say, discovered by *experience* to be qualities, inherent in human nature, we should never repose the least confidence in human testimony. A man delirious, or noted for falsehood and villany, has no manner of authority with us. (EHU 10.5)

Such facets of human nature and the general rules concerning testimonial trust that are derived from them are, I argue, 'discovered by experience' both in the personal sense, by individuals, and in the collective sense, often through history. History provides 'so many collections of *experiments*' by which we can come to account for human nature 'in the same manner as the physician or natural philosopher becomes acquainted with the nature of plants, minerals, and other external objects', 'furnishing us with materials, from which we form our *observations*' (EHU 8.7; my emphasis). Trust in history should not of course be blind, and Hume details defeaters to which we should be sensitive. We should be wary of testimony given by those 'of a doubtful character; when they have an interest in what they affirm; when they deliver their testimony with hesitation, or on the contrary with too violent asseverations. There are many other particulars of the same kind, which may diminish or destroy the force of any argument from human testimony' (EHU 10.7). Note, though, that knowledge of such defeaters is also something that can be acquired through trust in history.

Gelfert's (2010) interpretation of Hume is similar to mine in various ways. He argues that focusing on the *Enquiry* distorts our interpretation of Hume on testimony and he draws more widely on Hume's works to support his interpretation. He also responds to Coady's accusation of ambiguity by taking Hume to see experience in a collective, or what he calls 'pooled', sense (following Pitson, 2006). Such collective experience supports his claim, in a later work, that a 'hearer can draw on his background knowledge of human nature and the social world—much of it itself due to testimony—and in many cases can simply trust his tacit understanding of the various practices of giving and receiving information' (Gelfert, 2014, 122). Collective experience, that which provides us with knowledge of human nature, is acquired 'simply through immersion in the social world' (Gelfert, 2010, 71), and through history's capacity to 'extend[] our experiences to all past ages'. Gelfert thus argues that the

received, reductionist view 'is inaccurate at best, and misleading at worst' (2010, 60). He holds back, though, from an anti-reductionist interpretation and suggests that Hume's view 'may be closest' to local reductionism, a claim that I rejected in §3 above, on the grounds that Hume allows for the continual possibility of refining our epistemic standards and that he does not accept that a sharp line can be drawn between developmental and mature phases of trust in testimony upon which the local reductionist approach depends.[23]

It is important to be clear on the relation between reductionism, anti-reductionism and inductive inference. The reductionist claims that I am justified in accepting someone's testimony if I have empirical evidence that their testimony is likely to be true. This empirical evidence must also be seen as non-testimonial. I have argued that Hume should not be interpreted in this way. Inductive inference, though, can still play an important role in testimonial exchanges. Our background theory of human nature is acquired through inductive inference, although the 'experiences' from which the inferences are drawn should not be limited by an individualistic conception of the experiential evidence. We have personal experience of human nature and we have, via testimony, the experiences of others. Such collective experience of testimonial practice and human nature results in us, via inductive inference, believing what most people say most of the time, but it also enables us to assess particular cases of testimony when the need arises, again, applying probabilistic assessments drawn from inductive inferences.

Others also reject the reductionist interpretation of Hume, and two prominent anti-reductionists are Traiger and Welbourne. Their arguments, though, are distinct in certain ways from mine and from those of each other, although much of our outlook is shared. In the passages from the *Enquiry* that suggest reductionism, Welbourne claims that Hume 'writes carelessly' or 'carelessly assumes' that his inductive account of belief formation concerns *all* factual beliefs (2002, 407). Hume is 'so beguiled' (2002, 413) by his account of inductive inference that he takes it to apply universally, and thus also to testimonial beliefs. We do not, though, have the requisite inductive evidence concerning the likely truth of particular testimonial statements. One kind of case upon which Welbourne focuses is that of testimony concerning things radically unfamiliar, claims for which there is no track record. Thus, argues

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[23] My argument in §3 builds on Gelfert (2009), a paper that argues for the instability of the contemporary local reductionist approach, not one concerned with interpretations of Hume. It should also be noted that Gelfert accepts that there are 'limits to the similarities' (2010, 74) between Hume's approach and local reductionism.

Welbourne, Hume's 'idea must be that we have learnt to associate testimony *as such* with reality' (2002, 413), and this is something an individual can do: 'each of us learns from experience that people have this inclination [to truth and probity]' (2002, 419). This may sound like the claim of a global reductionist, but it is not. When he talks of learning from experience, he is not referring to induction based on a constant conjunction between antecedently understood utterances and our experience that what they refer to is indeed the case. He is referring to our original acquisition of language as children and how we come to learn that some kinds of sounds are testimonial utterances and, at the same time, that such speech acts aim at the truth: 'The central thought is that…I have become accustomed to associate testimony as such with reality as such, and thus, through experience, I have acquired a general propensity to believe what I am told' (2001, 84). Testimony, then, should be seen as *sui generis*, as a kind of evidence that we learn to utilize when we acquire language and, in particular, when we learn to understand the practice of giving testimony.

As we saw in §3, though, local reductionists allow default trust in the developmental phase—which is the crucial phase for Welbourne in establishing the *sui generis* character of testimony—but insist on inductive standards of assessment for testimony in the mature phase. I agree that testimony has to be taken on trust by children, but this can also be the case in the mature phase. My account has the advantage of taking seriously Hume's inductive-sounding claims concerning testimony, and not seeing them, as Welbourne does, as being careless. Induction does play a role in the assessment of testimony and in justifying the acceptance of particular cases of testimony on particular occasions or in undermining the default justification we take other claims to have. Inductive inference is not incompatible with an anti-reductive account, since inductive inferences can be made on the basis of non-individualistically characterized evidence. When Hume refers to '*our*' assurance, observation or experience he refers to experience in the collective, pooled sense, and not the perceptual experience of an individual.

Welbourne further claims that 'Hume has no *theory* of testimony, properly so-called; hence not even a bad theory. Rather he takes the practice of testimony for granted as a highly familiar source of beliefs and does not enquire into its mechanism' (2002, 410). This, however, is not the case. Welbourne suggests that a theory of testimony should provide both an explanation of the mechanism by which testimonial beliefs are transmitted and also an account of how testimonial utterances are distinguished from other speech acts, those which we may not have the propensity to believe, such as surmising or suggesting. Hume, though, does provide at least schematic explanations of both features of testimony. In the Caesar passage

discussed above, the testimonial utterance concerning Caesar's murder is given as an example of a belief grounded in causal inference, one which, as with all causal beliefs, is enlivened through vivacity transfer from a present impression. Second, it is not the case, as Welbourne claims, that 'Hume is entirely silent' on the distinction between testimonial 'tellings' and other speech acts. As we saw above, Hume discusses the difference between taking a text as a history or as fiction, one he grounds in the distinct experiences associated with each, although his account of the phenomenology does not chime with many serious readers of fiction:

> [The reader of history] has a more lively conception of all the incidents. He enters deeper into the concerns of the persons: represents to himself their actions, and characters, and friendships, and enmities: He even goes so far as to form a notion of their features, and air, and person. While the former, who gives no credit to the testimony of the author, has a more faint and languid conception of all these particulars; and except on account of the style and ingenuity of the composition, can receive little entertainment from it' (THN 1.3.7.8).[24]

Traiger also rejects the reductionist interpretation of Hume, although our accounts differ in two ways. First, I do not find his diagnosis of the cause of the reductionist error persuasive. Second, I place greater emphasis on the role that history plays in Hume's account.

Traiger argues that reductionism follows from the assumption that Hume's empiricism is individualistic. One reason for taking Hume to be committed to individualism is his emphasis on the copy principle and the claim that all ideas have their origin in impressions that one has experienced (Traiger 1993, 136–7). However, such individualism (and the reductionism taken to follow from it) is derived from 'a misreading of Hume's texts, specifically a limited and individualistic interpretation of Hume's texts, specifically a limited and individualistic interpretation of Hume's theory of ideas' (Traiger 2010, 44). Traiger's claim is not just that reductionism is compatible with individualism or that it is motived by individualism, but that '[t]he *only* grounds for excluding the non-reductionist position from Hume is that it is incompatible with his theory of ideas and his account of causal inference' (2010, 48; my emphasis). Traiger, therefore, offers a rereading of Hume's theory of ideas, one that is not individualistic and one that is compatible with a non-reductionist reading of Hume on

[24] For further discussion of Hume on the notion of taking texts as particular kinds of speech act, see Traiger (1993, 139–40, 146; 2010, esp. 242, 247–54), and footnote 16 above.

testimony. Abstract ideas are not grounded in impressions of such abstractions, and beliefs in persisting objects and persons are not grounded in impressions of such enduring things. All such ideas are the result of mechanisms of the imagination, and Traiger argues that these processes of the imagination are described by Hume in non-individualistic, social terms. The word 'triangle' is associated, not with an abstract idea, but with a 'revival set' of particular ideas of triangles, each of which has its origin in an impression (or impressions) (Garrett, 1997, 103). Traiger therefore claims that to have an abstract idea is not to have such an idea before the mind, but 'to possess the disposition to apply a socially learned linguistic expression in an appropriate manner' (2010, 50). Social factors are also relevant to our belief in enduring things. The constancy in my impressions of a mountain through the window of a train causes the mind to feign the 'fiction' of its continued existence when I enter a tunnel and the impression of it drops from my mind. Traiger speculates that Hume modelled his account here on the social process of feigning in the context of legal practice, or at least the similarity between the kind of feigning in both cases is 'striking' (2010, 52–3). Thus, Traiger claims, '[i]f my interpretation of the general outlines of Hume's use of abstraction and fictions is correct, then Hume isn't required to treat experience as individual sense-experience purified of reference to other persons' (2010, 54), and so the way is clear for an anti-reductionist interpretation of Hume on testimony.

I shall not discuss here the plausibility of Traiger's social reading of Hume's theory of ideas. I shall, instead, question his claim that an individualistic reading of Hume is the *only* grounds for not adopting an anti-reductionist interpretation.[25] Traiger's social reading provides an account of the meaning or content of abstract ideas and ideas of enduring objects, and his claim is that this account presupposes the existence of other people and the social relations between them. The reductionism/anti-reductionism debate, though, concerns whether and how we are justified in trusting testimony, and a social account of content does not entail a social account of epistemology. It may be the case, as Traiger argues, that ideas of enduring mountains and triangles (in the abstract) depend on social factors, but this does not rule out the possibility that our trust in testimony concerning such things be grounded in evidence wholly accumulated

[25] I think he's right about anti-reductionism, but for the wrong reasons. As Traiger himself notes, there is no direct evidence that Hume had legal fictions in mind in the context of abstract ideas, and, given the influence of Locke on Hume, Traiger needs to do more to show that Hume does not hold a private language conception of the meaning of words and ideas, as Locke does.

by an individual.[26] As said, then, I do not find Traiger's diagnosis of the cause of the reductionist error persuasive.

I also place greater emphasis on the role of history in Hume's account of the social contexts relevant to the epistemology of testimony.[27] First, I do not agree with Traiger's claim that the discussion of Caesar in the *Treatise* is only in the service of a causal explanation of the origin of historical belief: 'his concern is not with justification in these passages' (Traiger, 1993, 141). The belief about Caesar's murder is presented as an example of a historical belief, and this kind of example is chosen because it emphasizes how causal inference takes us 'beyond the senses' (Traiger, 1994; THN 1.3.2.3), as perceptual contact with Caesar is ruled out. It is not the case, though, that Hume is only interested in a description of the causal origin of this belief, as Traiger claims. Some detail is given of its origin, but there is also a normative dimension to the discussion. The section is titled 'Of unphilosophical probability'—probability, that is, that is not a 'reasonable foundation' for belief. Hume distinguishes philosophical probability (THN 1.3.13.12)—that grounded in causal reasoning—from sources of unphilosophical probability, such as beliefs acquired through indoctrination, mere repetition, and where the passions have had an undue effect on what we believe, perhaps through fear (THN 1.3.13.10) or wonder (THN 1.3.10.4). In order to correct for such effects, the wise are able to apply 'general rules' that show, for example, that inductive reasoning is superior to indoctrination (THN 1.3.13.12), and also 'rules by which to judge of causes and effects' (THN 1.3.15.2) that determine how conclusions should be drawn from inductive regularities. The third kind of case of unphilosophical probability discussed by Hume (THN 1.3.13.3) is where our 'assurance' concerning a certain belief is diminished due to its derivation via a long chain of arguments or 'consequences'. In this context the belief about Caesar is presented as a 'curious phenomenon' because our belief in Caesar's murder is not diminished in this way, even though the chain of testimonial links is long. Hume's aim is therefore to explain why this belief is not diminished, and thus, why the belief about Caesar does not amount to a case of

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[26] In terms of contemporary epistemology, my claim is that cognitive externalism does not entail epistemological externalism.

[27] I agree with Traiger, though, that social factors play a much more extensive role in Hume's epistemology of testimony than is supposed, even by anti-reductionists. Testimonial beliefs can also be acquired via sympathy and certain intellectual virtues are relevant to testimonial exchanges, virtues assessed according to social utility. I explore these facets of Hume's social epistemology in O'Brien (2017) and (2018).

unphilosophical probability. The normative dimension is clear if we remember, as was noted above, that Hume's original discussion of miracle-testimony was likely to have also appeared in this section or hereabouts. The contrast would have been sharp between the two testimonial cases: both belief in Caesar's murder and belief in miracles are the result of long chains of testimony, but only the former is well-grounded.

Further, in the *Enquiry*, where Traiger does take Hume to be interested in justification, he agrees that beliefs concerning human nature play an evidentialist role, but this role is only negative. We have default justification for belief in testimony, except where—as I discussed with respect to miracles—there are red flags indicating that particular kinds of testimony or testifiers are unreliable. There is no need, though, to limit the epistemic role of our knowledge of the causal context of testimony in this way. There can be positive epistemic reasons to believe certain cases of testimony or certain kinds of testimony even if one is not a reductionist of either a global or local stripe, and even if, as Traiger says, there is 'no single, over-arching generalization about testimony' (1993, 144) and 'no comprehensive theory of *justified* belief' (1993, 146). The testimony of others is taken as a source of enlarged experience and it seems to be the case that in most circumstances it coheres with our ever-widening experience of the ongoing regularities in the physical world and the behaviour of others. That being said, there are times when red flags are raised, and also times when, for one reason or another, we feel the need to think more carefully about the reliability of testimony and where our investigations find positive inductive evidence that provides further justification for testimonial belief. In contrast to my account, Traiger also underplays the role of historical beliefs in our understanding of the causal contexts relevant to the assessment of testimony. His examples of works that can illuminate human nature are those of psychology texts and novels (1993, 145), whereas I suggest a key role is played by the very kind of beliefs upon which the discussion of Caesar focuses—beliefs about history that reveal facets of our human nature and that can thus play a role is assessing testimony at other times and places.[28]

What we see in Hume's account of testimony is the rejection of a foundationalist picture in which testimonial justification is reducible to an individual's perception of the reliability of others. Hume, I argue, does not accept that testimonial knowledge must have direct perceptual foundations. In order to assess the reliability of others we require a theory of human nature,

[28] Hume later goes on, in his *History of England*, to supplement his *Treatise* of human nature with an account of how our nature is revealed by social and political turmoil—*A History of Human Nature*, if you will.

one derived from our observations of 'men's behaviour in company, in affairs, and in their pleasures' (THN Intro 10), but also one that requires us to take historical testimony on trust and thus to greatly expand the scope of empirical evidence available to us. Testimonial justification does not have a foundation in *pure*, testimony-free perceptions of the constant conjunctions between the contents of utterances and reality, but neither does history provide ultimate foundations for our theory of human nature, independent of our ongoing experience. History and quotidian experience are, to paraphrase Quine, 'in the same boat—a boat which, to revert to Neurath's figure…, we can rebuild only at sea while staying afloat in it'.[29] History informs our understanding of human nature upon which testimonial trust depends *and* the resultant account of human nature, along with our first-hand experience, guides our interpretation of history: 'What would become of *history*, had we not a dependence on the veracity of the historian, according to the experience, which we have had of mankind?' (EHU 8.18). The reductionist 'Humean' interpretation of Hume on testimony is at odds with Hume's situated view of humanity. It assumes 'some Archimedean point outside the prejudices and customs of common life from which the order as a whole can be judged' (Livingston, 2010, 6), a point from which individuals abstract themselves from the fray, and attain, with their own resources, epistemic authority concerning the reliability of others.[30] Such a point is unattainable. We have no choice but to trust in history and in the testimony of others, perhaps most of the time, only questioning their authority when the stakes are high—in the case of miracles, for example—but, even then, the epistemic resources we bring to bear are infused with knowledge that we have ultimately acquired on trust.

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[29] Quine uses Neurath's metaphor to illustrate his naturalized epistemology in which he sees philosophy as continuous with science and not as providing its a priori foundations: 'There is no external vantage point, no first philosophy' (Quine, 1969, 127).

[30] Fred Wilson has a related reading, contrasting Hume's approach with that of Cartesian foundationalism: '*Descartes gives us the impossible cognitive ideal of the AUTONOMOUS THINKER*; *for Hume the cognitive ideal is that of the RESPONSIBLE KNOWER*' (Wilson 2010, 66).

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