

Exercise: De-Jargonization

Due by e-mail: 9 am, Tuesday, February 6th

Goal:

The goal of this exercise is to work on one of the most important skills for any philosopher, and one that is especially valuable when we do historical philosophy: clearly restating another's position. Your objective is to take this passage from Hume's writing, and attempt to restate what he says as clearly as possible, without relying on any technical jargon.

For purposes of this exercise, you need not worry about being concise. If it takes you four to six sentences to get across what Hume says with one, that is perfectly fine. Imagine you are trying to explain what Hume says in this passage to someone with no background in the history of philosophy (or, even someone with no real background in philosophy).

The following passage comes from *Treatise 1.4.4*.

The fundamental principle of that philosophy is the opinion concerning colours, sounds, tastes, smells, heat and cold; which it asserts to be nothing but impressions in the mind, deriv'd from the operation of external objects, and without any resemblance to the qualities of the objects. Upon examination, I find only one of the reasons commonly produc'd for this opinion to be satisfactory, viz. that deriv'd from the variations of those impressions, even while the external object, to all appearance, continues the same. These variations depend upon several circumstances. Upon the different situations of our health: A man in a malady feels a disagreeable taste in meats, which before pleas'd him the most. Upon the different complexions and constitutions of men That seems bitter to one, which is sweet to another. Upon the difference of their external situation and position: Colours reflected from the clouds change according to the distance of the clouds, and according to the angle they make with the eye and luminous body. Fire. also communicates the sensation of pleasure at one distance, and that of pain at another. Instances of this kind are very numerous and frequent.

The conclusion drawn from them, is likewise as satisfactory as can possibly be imagin'd. 'Tis certain, that when different impressions of the same sense arise from any object, every one of these impressions has not a resembling quality existent in the object. For as the same object cannot, at the same time, be endow'd with different qualities of the same sense, and as the same quality cannot resemble impressions entirely different; it evidently follows, that many of our impressions have no external model or archetype. Now from like effects we presume like causes. Many of the impressions of colour, sound, &c. are confest to be nothing but internal existences, and to arise from causes, which no ways resemble them. These impressions are in appearance nothing different from the other impressions of colour, sound, &c. We conclude, therefore, that they are, all of them, deriv'd from a like origin.