

CHAPTER - VIMemory and Imagination

I do not speak of fools, I speak of the wisest men; and it is among them that the imagination has the great gift of persuasion. Reason pretests in vain; it cannot set a true value on things.

Pascal

Pans'ees

When the mind has received impressions, they can reappear 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.

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 memory and ideas of the imagination in a similar manner. He says : "the ideas of the memory are much more lively and strong than those of the imagination." (Treatise, p. 9) Hume calls it "a sensible difference" between the two sorts of ideas.



sensation and introspection. Price holds that 'memory' covers several different states of mind and only some is acquaintance with the past.

Hume gives another account of the difference between the ideas of the memory and ideas of the imagination. Memory preserves not only simple ideas but also their order and position. Memory is "without any power of variation" and "restrain'd to the same order and form with the original impressions". It preserves "the original form in which its objects were presented". The imagination, however, is not tied down in this way. It can combine simple ideas arbitrarily or break down complex ideas into simple ideas and then rearrange them. In his Enquiry Hume writes, "Nothing is more free than the imagination of man; and though it cannot exceed that original stock of ideas furnished by the internal and external senses, it has unlimited power of mixing, compounding, separating, and dividing these ideas, in all the varieties of fiction and vision" (Section V, Part II) We find here involved the principle that the parts of a complex experience may be imagined as existing separately and the imagination is limited. This limitation is intrinsic, and not accidental. Imagination is coextensive with possible experience.

Besides discussing about the ideas of the memory and imagination in Section III, Part I of the Treatise, Hume resumes the discussion in section V also. He remarks that "the memory is known, neither by the order of its complex ideas, nor the nature of its simple ones; it follows, that the difference betwixt it and the imagination lies in its

superior force and vivacity". (Ibid, p. 85) It is significant that Hume emphasizes the "sensible" difference as matters of immediate experience. For Kemp Smith points out that on the basis of the preservation of the original order and position of the ideas we cannot answer how we recognise memories as memories. The sensible difference is not taken by Hume as constituting the difference, but only as the sensible "sign" by which memories and imagination may, with fair accuracy, be distinguished from one another. Hume points to the case of doubting concerning the ideas of memory, as they become "very weak and feeble". In the cases of memories "weak and feeble" we may be "at a loss to determine whether any image proceeds from the fancy or the memory". Thus it is possible for an idea of the memory, losing its "force and vivacity" to so degenerate as to be taken for an idea of the imagination. And true also would be the fact that an idea of the imagination acquiring "force and vivacity" might come to pass for an idea of the memory.

This leads Hume to argue that a memory is one kind belief. In fact, Hume's account of belief follows his account of memory. An idea of the memory is an idea of belief. It is the characteristic of an idea of belief that it has a marked influence on our decisions and actions, and this is what really distinguishes it from an idea of the imagination. Again to conceive of something and to conceive of it as existing are one and the same operation. In his Treatise Hume remarks, "The idea of existence ... is the very same with the idea of what we conceive to be existent". (Section VI, part 11). For

example, the difference between a real horse and an imaginary horse is not at all the same sort of thing as the difference between a race-horse and a cart-horse. A race horse is not a special kind of horse.

Hume, hence, identifies "force and vivacity" with "belief or assent" the belief or assent, which always attends the memory and senses, is nothing but the vivacity of those perceptions they present." (Ibid, p. 86). To believe is "to feel an immediate impression of the senses, or a repetition of that impression in the memory. "thus, not being tied down by any act of assent or belief, the imagination may be freely used as one might decide. Imagining is impossible without being aware of it. This awareness of the exercise of liberty differentiates "imagining" from remembering". The difference is one of the feeling of belief or assent", i.e., the difference is a difference in attitude of mind.

We have already seen that Hume speaks of the operation of imagination in terms of separating the simple ideas and uniting them "in what form it pleases". The operation of imagination does not become wholly unpredictable because it is "guided by some universal principles, which render it, in some measure, uniform with itself in all times and places". (Treatise, p. 10). Imagination is a more free faculty, and hence the "uniting principle among ideas" in the operation of imagination cannot be "an inseparable connection". Imagination is described by Hume as the "principle" of separation and transposition of idea, but it is also to be considered as uniformly guided in "the union and cohesion" of its images. Church explains that the union and cohesion of distinct images

cannot be regarded as an inseparable one, for an "inseparable connection" is a "real" connection. And a "real" connection is one whose contradictory is inconceivable. Hence the distinct elements of a complex image will be united only by the force of association; a force of attraction which Hume in effect compares to the attraction of gravitation. Association of ideas is "a gentle force, which commonly prevails".

Price remarks that 'imagination' is the key-word of Hume's whole theory of knowledge. Hume shows that our customary transition from cause to effect and vice versa is nothing but an expression of the principle of imagination. Compared with memory, imagination is the faculty of producing less lively and less forceful ideas. And opposed to reason, it becomes the source and ground of the principle of custom, habit and belief. Hence, the epistemological implication of the principle of imagination is of utmost importance in Hume's theoretical philosophy. Custom, habit and belief are synthetic principles, and since they depend upon imagination, imagination becomes one of the constructively creative principles of human nature. Again, as distinguished from phantasy, imagination is the principle of postulation, anticipating an outline of future. Postulation of imagination contains the presuppositions related to matters of fact and existence. Sense-perceptions are transitory and the logical picture of the world is atomic and evanescent. But the world in which we live is permanent and regular. Thus supplementation is necessary in order that the world of perceptions is understood. The supplementation of the characters of permanency, regularity

etc. are the work of imagination. The "supplementative function" of imagination makes the world of experience possible.

Imagination works in a non-discursive manner, i.e., instinctively and subconsciously. It feels the pulse of objects existing regularly and independently. To form an idea of "what has happened, will also happen" is the work of imagination. It goads us to believe not only that the objects of perception will remain regular but will also continue to exist even without their being perceived. Imagination is a mental disposition to make everything continue uniformly. Causal questions cannot be asked about workings of imagination, for it is presupposed in the employment of the causal relation itself. Price compares Hume's view of 'imagination' with Kant's Transcendental Imagination. By 'experience' Kant means our consciousness of the phenomenal world, which includes both material objects and empirical selves. Kant's Transcendental Imagination has both synthetic and supplementative activities, and thereby makes the experience possible. Without the Transcendental Imagination we would be aware only of a stream of sense impressions, not even of the fact that the stream is a stream and has a temporal order.

Price points out that Hume did not distinguish as Kant did, between Transcendental Imagination and Empirical Imagination. The latter's workings can only be discovered inductively, and its function is manifested in the associative processes studied by Empirical Psychology. Empirical imagination is something within the Empirical self. An example of

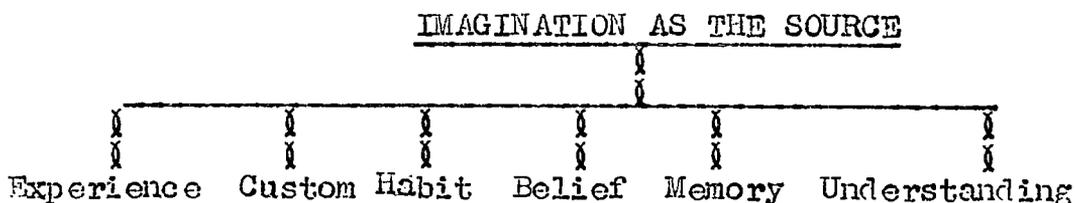
associative process would be the case that a man's name reminds of his face. We can ask causal questions with regard to this sort of imagination. For instance, what causes me to think X's face when I hear his name? Our frequent experiencing X's face and X's name together-would be the answer. But with regard to the Transcendental Imagination Kant remarks that it is "an art concealed in the depths of the human soul, whose real modes of activity nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to discover." (Critique of Pure Reason, B 181). The difference between Kant and Hume lies also in the emphasis they put on the supplementative and synthetic functions of imagination. Hume is more emphatic on the supplementative functions of the imagination, while Kant is on the synthetic one. Kant holds that the synthesis of apprehension is "the transcendental ground of the possibility of all modes of knowledge whatsoever". (Ibid, A 101). According to him experience necessarily presupposes the "reproducibility of appearances" and "the reproductive synthesis is one of the transcendental acts of the mind". It is a kind of unitary consciousness. Synthesis of imagination aims at unity in the determination of sensibility. The reason why Hume could not distinguish the two radically different sorts of imagination is due to his confusion between psychological and epistemological questions. When he, in the Treatise speaks of principles of imagination, which are "permanent, irresistable, and universal" and those which are "changeable, weak and irregular" he comes to closer to Kant. Example of the former principles is the transition from cause to effect and vice versa, and of

the latter, "fictions of substance and accident", derived from "usual conjunction" with the present impression. The "solid, permanent and consistent principles of imagination" are "the foundation of all our thoughts and actions, so that upon their removal human nature must immediately perish and go to ruin." (Ibid, p. 225).

Hume's view that imagination is vital to knowledge had its greatest development in Kant. We give below the gist of Kant's doctrine. Kant thought that the imagination has two tasks to perform in giving rise to knowledge, though it is not always easy to separate them. First it completes the necessarily fragmentary data of the senses: it is impossible to perceive the whole of an object at once, yet we are seldom aware of the partial nature of our perception. For example, we cannot see more than three sides of a cube at one time, but we think of it as having all six sides. This completion of perception is the work of the "reproductive" imagination. It is called reproductive because it depends on prior experience for its operation. Kant contrasted this with the "productive" imagination, which has an even more important role to play. The two names mark different functions of the imagination, rather than imply that it is two fold. The productive imagination gives rise to the transcendental synthesis of imagination, which combines our experience into a single connected whole. Kant called this operation "transcendental" because it is prior to experience, not subsequent to it; without such a synthesis no coherent experience of a world would be possible. So central is the work of the imagination to the first critique that it is sometimes hard to separate from the

understanding. Kant even said in one passage: "the unity of apperception in relation to the synthesis of the imagination is the understanding; and this same unity, with reference to the transcendental synthesis of the imagination, the pure understanding. (op.cit, A 119).

Imagination, for Hume is the faculty which is at work whenever belief is in possession of the mind. Belief is distinguished from 'feigning', which sets the imagination in contrast to sense-perception, to judgement and to memory. It is in thus operative only when principles "permanent, irresistible and universal" are in control. Both in belief and in feigning, it is contrasted with reason, the faculty through which alone the mind is capable, through knowledge both of feigning and belief. Belief is more than merely the enlivening of ideas. It is quite a distinctive attitude of mind. It carries the mind beyond its immediately experienced, perishing states - in sense-perception to independently existing bodies, and in memory to the actual events of past experience. Hume says, "when I oppose it (the imagination) to reason, I mean the same faculty excluding only our demonstrative, and probable reasonings". (Treatise, p. 118, footnote). Thus the genius of imagination lies in its making possible the different epistemological principles of custom, habit and belief. This role of imagination may represented sechematically as below :



Imagination can extend itself, supplementatively beyond the regularity which we actually observe. This extension is inherent in the nature of habit, it "carries on its course like a gally without any new impulse". It is "apt to continue even when its object fails it." (Ibid, p. 198). Thus by virtue of imagination there is in human nature an ultimate tendency to make and persist in our inductive generalisations even in the absence of favourable evidence. This consideration leads price to liken Hume's 'imagination' to Kant's Idea of Reason by which we seek "to approximate the unity that is empiracally possible without ever completely reaching it". (Op. cit., B 596). It contains a certain completeness to which no possible empirical knowledge ever attains.

Some points in connection with Hume's theory of memory may be mentioned. We may speak of remembering how to do something and remembering that something was the case. Remembering how does may or may not involve any act of thinking, for example, riding a bicycle or reciting a poem. But remembering in the second case is a cognitive act of the mind which occurs now and which has for its object an event or series of events belonging to the past. Ayer calls the former "habit memory" and the latter the "memory of events", or "factual memory". Hume does not have much to say about habit memory. He is, primarily concerned with the memory of events or factual memory. Hume's problem is how can we make the transition from the present data of images to the impressions of the past? What is the logic of such a transition? Hume's theory is a

dualist one. He gives us the classical formulation of the Image theory of memory. Dispensibility of images is fashionable amongst modern writers on epistemology who seek to reduce memory of events to habit memory. This is in consonance with the view of analysing the statements about the past on a par with the statements about the future: "the understanding of what it is for an event to be past develops pari passu with the understanding of the use of the past tense". (Ayer, the problems of knowledge, p. 153). Dispensing with the images, it is sought to establish the fact that remembering an event is just a special instance of the sort of habit memory and the restriction of the memory of events to the field of one's past experiences is not logically necessary.

Ryle, in his The Concept of Mind Criticizes Hume in a different vein. According to Ryle, Hume's mistake lies in supposing "that 'seeing' is a species of seeing or that 'perception' is the name of a genus of which there are two species namely impressions and ghosts or echoes of impressions. There are no such ghosts ... " (Ibid, p. 236). Ryle objects to Hume's admitting the existence of both sensations and images. The admission rests on the "bad mistakes" of describing impressions as vivid and using 'vivid' to mean not "life-like" but "intense". Sensations can be compared by their intensity or acuteness, but they can not be so compared with images. There is no clear boundary between impressions and ideas, and simple inspection cannot decide whether a perception is an impression or an idea. Ryle admits the crucial difference to remain and seeks to "correct" it dispensing

with Hume's relation of causation between impressions and ideas. "The only thing that is true in this account is that what I see in my mind's eye and what I hear 'in my head' is tied in certain ways to what I have previously seen and heard. But the nature of this tie is not at all what Hume supposed." (Ibid, p. 257). The same can be, to an extent, be advanced to the case memory as well. Hume does not explain define 'vivacity'. And his meaning of 'vivacity' certainly does not serve as a sufficient mark of memory, and its claim to serve even as a necessary mark is doubtful. An image of the prescribed degree of vivacity does not have any sign of pastness about it. Vivacity as such is no indication that the image stands for some previous experience. Even if it be true that all remembering consists in having lively images, that cannot be all that it consists in. For the lively images to be memory-images they would have to possess some other feature than their liveliness. And it would be this feature having special reference to the past which would mark them out as images of memory.

Again, it is not even true that all memories are lively or that all images of memory are more lively than any images of imagination. It is a common experience of thinking we remember something which in fact never occurred - we are in fact imagining it. Similarly, we often experience of not being sure whether that we are thinking of actually happened or not, i.e., whether what we are doing now is remembering or imagining. Both of these experiences may be influenced by our desire, likes or dislikes. Hume was aware of these cases when

ideas of memory sink in vivacity below those of imaginations, but he did notice the consequence that vivacity is not only not the sufficient mark of memory, but is not even necessary. He seems to have been misled from believing that for most of us ideas of memory are more vivid than most ideas of imaginations into believing that the difference between the two is one of vivacity. The first belief is true, but the second is certainly false. Russell who follows Hume, to a great extent, felt dissatisfied with Hume's account. He finds this talk of vivacity inadequate. In his The Analysis of Mind, he argues that what makes the image an idea of memory is its being accompanied by a feeling of familiarity. A memory image is distinguished from others by a feeling that "this has happened before some-where". (Ibid, lecture IX). The familiarity theory too is not free from objections. In both the cases of Hume and Russell the problem concerns about the notion of pastness. The notion of the past is said to be an empirical concept, and we come across instances of pastness whenever we are aware of a duration of time, which, for Hume, in the manner in which some real objects exist. To say that something is past is to say that it occurred before something else. Thus pastness seems necessary to our having at all the sort of experience that we do have. It is part of the pattern of experience as opposed to any of the elements or contents arranged in that pattern.

Hume seems to have supposed that there were mental images of past mental states - less vivid copies of them. Hume's use of the word 'idea' is sometimes shot through with

a confusion between two senses of the word - the mental image of something, and the exercise of a concept of it in judgment. Now this exercise is in no way dependent on the presence of a less lively replies of the thing judged about. Our use of such words as 'grief' or 'fear' do not arouse in our minds faint reproductions of unwelcome experiences of the past. Any definition of memory is also a means of identifying cases 'memory - mark'. It must make it possible to decide between a psychological and private criterion and a factual, and public one. Without an intrinsic memory-indicator we cannot choose between treating remembering as we treat knowing or treating it as believing. In one case the criterion is factual and public, in another, a particular state of mind. Here, as elsewhere, we find Hume undecided between a psychological description and a logical analysis. It is one thing to say that memory images seem conjoined with past mental states, and it is quite another thing to say that they are connected. Hume would have liked to say the former, but speaks as if he were saying the latter.

---