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1. INTRODUCTION

Recently I decided to re-read Hume. My purpose was to focus on a set of interpretations, usually understood as being 'regular'. It was not long before I told myself: "this can't be so simple". Two different thoughts were running through my mind. The first was that Hume was simply inconsistent. Secondly, I felt that I should not really care what Hume actually thought, but rather concentrate on what he wrote. This approach is clearly Peircian. In semeiotic terms, asking about what Hume thought himself is nothing more than asking about his text. As Peirce writes:

> For, as the fact that every thought is a sign, taken in conjunction with the fact that life is a train of thought, proves that man is a sign; so, that every thought is an ***external*** sign, proves that man is an external sign. That is to say, the man and the external sign are identical, in the same sense in which the words ***homo*** and ***man*** are identical. Thus my language is the sum total of myself; for the man is the thought. [1]

In this paper, I attempt to demonstrate what Hume's universe might look like in terms of Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of sign. The reason is simple. The treatment of impressions and ideas as signs helps present Hume's theory from a different and better perspective. This perspective might appear to be dubious but there are good reasons for adopting it. I will also demonstrate unequivocally the reasons for treating ideas and impressions as signs.

The first part of this paper depicts Hume's intellectual background. It presents his scepticism derived from Cartesian dual reality of what is material and what is mental. Both Descartes and Locke present material reality as being distinct from what is mental. Material reality may only emerge through mental representations. Joseph Ransdell portrays the three main points of the classical theory of perception as follows:

[1] Peirce [1931-1958] 5.314.

> (…) *first*, that all cognition is mediated by ideas or representations; *second*, that the object is always other than the idea of it; and *third*, the consequential proposition that the idea or representation must always be itself an object of knowledge cognized independently of the cognition of the object.[2]

Hume's scepticism arises from the fact that he agrees with the second and third points. However, he does not agree that cognition of an object is possible, and therefore concludes that we can have no knowledge of external reality since the only knowledge we have refers to our own ideas, which in turn differ from things as they actually are. Scepticism arises when Hume agrees that Cartesian transcendentalism is correct; when this happens we have no knowledge about things in themselves. Hume writes explicitly that "external objects become known to us only by those perceptions they occasion" (Hume [1826] p. 96). I understand transcendentalism in a classical sense starting from von Kleist's metaphor of green glasses, consciousness and the world seen as standing on opposite poles, connected in a mysterious way by mental representations. This doctrine had not yet been formulated clearly in Hume's time; it started with Descartes and led to Hume creating his sceptical theory.

Two things may be said about this theory. First of all, Hume had problems in understanding the continuous existence of the world. Secondly, he regarded impressions and ideas as appearing continuously one after another. Hume states that "the appearance of one idea, naturally introduce another" (*ibidem*, p. 27). The reason why he is adopting these two points is simple. He sees no other philosophical approach than Cartesian proto-transcendentalism, and simultaneously concludes that the outcome of his investigations is scepticism about the external. His argumentation is appropriate only if there are no doubts about the starting point of transcendentalism. If we have no knowledge about a transcendental object we have no knowledge about the world itself. Quoting Hume: "Thus to resume what I have said concerning the senses; they give us no notion of continued existence, because they cannot operate beyond the extent, in which they really operate" (*ibidem*, p. 250). Hume's use of the word 'beyond', as I will demonstrate later, causes many problems. This is because what Hume should have actually said was that there is no 'beyond'.

In order to defend Hume's position we should introduce the notion of naturalism as opposed to transcendentalism, the latter being understood in the general sense of the word. Naturalism places thinking in the world, and not beyond it. In

[2] Ransdell [2005] p. 4.

this sense, naturalism introduces something similar to Heidegger's concept of being in the world, as opposed to Husserl's concept of being an observer of the world. When treated from a naturalistic point of view Hume avoids falling into a solipsistic trap. In order to escape from this trap the idea of what is 'beyond' must be abandoned. What this actually means is that we have to accept Hume's dictum that the only 'substance' are ideas and impressions. However, this dictum, must be treated extremely seriously.

There is another way in which we could understand external existence; this was an idea which was introduced against Cartesianism and transcendentalism. Peirce introduces the notion of external existence but does not accept the notion of what is "beyond"; he does not accept the Kantian notion of thing in itself. Peirce expresses this in a very commonsensical sort of way:

> When a thing is in such relation to the individual mind that that mind cognizes it, it is in the mind; and its being so in the mind will not in the least diminish its external existence. For he does not think of the mind as a receptacle, which if a thing is in, it ceases to be out of. To make a distinction between the true conception of a thing and the thing itself is, he will say, only to regard one and the same thing from two different points of view; for the immediate object of thought in a true **judgment *is* the** reality. The realist will, therefore, believe in the objectivity of all necessary conceptions, space, time, relation, cause, and the like.[3]

It is clear that Hume has a strong ally in his struggle against Descartes. However, nothing comes free and Hume is forced to abandon most his sceptical conclusions seen from Peirce's perspective. It is interesting to note that we could keep thinking about the external world in Hume's theory only if we stopped treating it as being essentially different from impressions and ideas. Peirce tells us how to do this.

Thomas Reid was the first to see Hume's mistake. Reid argued that Hume simply confused the two meanings of the terms "idea" and "representation". For him "we use these terms sometimes to refer to mental *operation* or *activity* [mental process, or a particular state of the mind as representational medium] and sometimes to the *object* (…) of that activity" (Reid cited in Perner [1993] p. 17). Generally speaking, Hume confuses these two meanings and for this reason concludes that objects of thought are mental (*in mente esse*). Having understood what it means to be in the world (understood as Reid's critique and Peirce's solution), we can ac-

[3] Peirce [1931-1958] 8.16.

cept that ideas and impressions are in the mind. However, this does not mean that there is something beyond the mind.

The concept of "beyond" (something external) is problematic in itself. This is something which cannot be left unexplained. I will demonstrate that treating impressions and ideas as signs in Peirce's understanding will help us to deal with Hume's inconsistencies.

2. HUME'S SUPPOSED SOLIPSISM

How can I be sure that this is not the first moment of my life? I can only be certain of this through ideas. But the only thing I have is the idea that I had different ideas in the past. I cannot be certain about the real existence of such a sequence of ideas. I see no answer to my doubts when ideas and impressions are something different from signs. This is because signs are always connected, part of a network and never alone. It will not be possible to find an answer if doubt is cast on that most fundamental of rules which states that "the simple impressions always take the precedence of their correspondent ideas, but never appear in the contrary order" (Hume [1826] p. 19). But why is that? What I have recognized is an idea. Of course it could also be an idea of an idea. But in the end the only thing I see is a particular idea. What is needed is *tertium comparationis*; this can only be attained by seeing ideas and impressions as signs.

Hume is also inconsistent when he says that the "faculty by which we repeat our impressions in the first manner, is called the ***memory,*** and the other the *imagination*" (*ibidem*, p. 24). When only ideas are given I have no idea of memory or imagination, I only have a concrete idea which I call a remembered idea. The expressions "I remember" and "I reason" are also problematic. Hume should have said "it is remembered" and "it is reasoned". This is almost reminiscent of Berkeley who could have spoken about the faculties of the soul and about the soul doing something with ideas. But not Hume.

It is convenient to look at Hume's theory from Husserl's perspective. This will allow us to draw similar conclusions to those of Richard Murphy in his book on *Hume and Husserl*: "Radical solipsism characterizes the starting point of Hume's reflection. Not only must the philosopher restrict himself to his own experiences, but to his own mental contents or conscious acts"(Murphy [1980] p. 11). Murphy continues by quoting Husserl: "In truth this Humean psychology is the first systematic endeavour of a science of the pure givenness of consciousness; I would say it is the endeavour of a pure egology, if Hume had not also presented the I as mere fiction" (Husserl cited by Murphy [1980] p. 12). Though it seems that Murphy's account of Husserl's interpretation of Hume is worth considering, I believe that

this account cannot be correct because of Husserl's transcendentalism. It cannot be correct because in effect we would present Hume's philosophy as a solipsism without the pivotal idea of I – which is ludicrous. I have no doubt that Hume gives some clues for this kind of interpretation, but the fact is that even if Hume himself saw his works in such a way this would in no way facilitate the theory.

3. AGAINST CARTESIANISM

The position of experiencing subject in the world where nothing is "beyond" should be considered. When we face subject in the world, consciousness appears simultaneously with signs, or in Hume's language, with impressions or ideas. In the *Cambridge Companion to Peirce* Peter Skagestad states that:

> Peirce specifically targeted Descartes and Cartesianism, and argued that we have no ability to think without signs. This argument presupposes a prior argument that all self-knowledge can be accounted for as inferences from external facts and that there is thus no reason to posit any power of introspection.[4]

However, we have to bear in mind how Peirce understands the external: "For the reality of the external world ***means*** nothing except that real experience of duality"[5]. Signs demonstrate subject. Consciousness is impossible without being embodied. Both Hume and Peirce believe that there is nothing like experience of pure consciousness. In this context I understand "pure" as consciousness without its object. Hume opposes transcendental subject with such force that he looses the opportunity to speak about subject altogether. However, it would appear that this is not the right conclusion.

There is no doubt that Hume does not want to reject the possibility of knowledge about facts. However, while interpreted sceptically, his philosophy faces the problem of justification. A problem arises from scepticism concerning the chain of ideas. The idea of chain, different from any other idea, cannot be given if an idea is not a sign. If it is a sign, different consequences will arise for the entire theory. Justified, true sentences will be possible but truth and justification will never be absolute.

There are a number of arguments for treating ideas as signs. Hume suggests what these arguments are but does not develop them. The first one, according to Bense [1980], is that abstraction is possible only for objects which are of the nature

[4] Skagestad [2004] p. 241.

[5] Peirce [1931-1958] 5.539.

of a sign. It is obvious that abstraction never refers to things. Next, Hume wants to retain the laws through which ideas are associated. If ideas are to be connected they have to have the structure of a sign. The third argument is that if ideas are to be understood as copies of impressions, and if Hume regards this as fundamental, there must be an explanation, rather than a simple statement that this principle is contingently true. The relationship between ideas and impressions can be construed in terms of Peirce's semeiotics, namely the ground and the interpretant. Another thing noted by Hume, but finally abandoned by him, refers to the "missing shade of blue". Although Hume considered this issue as irrelevant it exposes his theory to severe criticism. If Hume did not know how to explain this problem there is still room for a solution. The generative structure of signs will helps generate an answer for the "missing shade of blue" problem.

How is it possible to interpret Hume's theory in terms of Peirce's concept of sign? Sign in the fullest sense of the word consists of three elements: ground, object, and an interpretant. It is important to remember that "the interpretant of the sign is not identical to the interpreter; i.e., the individual mind interpreting the sign is *not* one of the three references that constitute signhood" (Skagestad [2004] p. 244). In order to explain this relation it may be helpful to illustrate connections between ground, object and interpretant as a connection analogous to connection between definiendum, definiens and the object defined. Let us take a simple definition: "square (def.) = a rectangle with four equal sides". This is a correct definition, however none of the parts constitutes a square. A square is an **object** of definition, "square" is the ground, whilst a "rectangle with four equal sides" is the interpretant. Each sign can be distinguished by these three parts.

The possible relations of ground to object of sign are of prime interest. Peirce explains this relationship as follows:

> First. Those whose relation to their objects is a mere community in some quality, and these representations may be called *likenesses* [later, *icons*].
>
> Second. Those whose relation to their objects consists in a correspondence in fact, and these may be termed *indices* or *signs*. [The term 'signs' was soon to be extended to cover all representations.]
>
> Third. Those the ground of whose relation to their objects is an imputed character, which are the same as *general signs*, and these may be termed *symbols*.[6]

[6] Peirce [1931-1958] 1.558.

To understand icon, we have to understand the difference between pure (1.1-2.1) and embodied (1.2-2.1) icon. The difference is ground. Ground of pure icon is qualitative, monadic and referred to by Peirce as qualisign: "An icon proper is always a qualisign – that is, it is always a monadic property of an actually occurring sign" (Ransdell [1997] p. 38). Ground of embodied icon is dyadic, and referred to as sinsign: "Thus, if we are regarding the actually occurring sign *as* something actually occurring, we are regarding it as a sinsign, and as an iconic sinsign in particular, if its iconizing function is what we are particularly concerned with in connection with it" (*ibidem*). Joseph Ransdell's example explains the difference between qualisign and sinsign: "Because of the long religious fast, John was unable to stand fast or even to run fast when the enemy attacked" (*ibidem*, p. 32). Semiotic analysis will show that there is one pure qualisign "fast", there are three appearances of "fast" as sinsignum. There are three inscriptions of one quality, three different embodiments of one quality. The embodied icon is of particular interest in terms of its object; pure icon is something of a borderline case Peirce writes:

> (…) a pure icon does not draw any distinction between itself and its object. It represents whatever it may represent, and whatever it is like, it in so far is. It is an affair of suchness only.[7]

This is how Peirce distinguishes qualisign, sinsign and legisign:

> As it is in itself, a sign [ground, my comment] is either of the nature of an appearance, when I call it a qualisign; or secondly, it is an individual object or event, when I call it a sinsign (the syllable sin being the first syllable of semel, simul, singular, etc.); or thirdly, it is of the nature of a general type, when I call it a legisign.[8]

The distinction between immediate and dynamic object in connection with the iconic function of a sign must also be addressed. The iconic sign, like an idea or an impression, always depicts an object either one way or another. A good way of thinking about a dynamic object is to imagine it as a figure that is always visible fragmentarily. All of its aspects may be manifested but never at the same time. An immediate object is analogous to the phenomenon in the same way as a dynamic object is to a thing in itself. But there is one crucial difference. A dynamic object,

[7] Peirce [1931-1958] 5.74.

[8] Peirce [1931-1958] 8.334.

contrary to a thing in itself, contains nothing that cannot be recognised. Everything is clear, but never in every respect at the same time.

Icons are a special kind of sign. They are the basis of all possible cognition, and there is no cognition without icons. The reason is obvious. An index is not possible without a qualitative part, without this or that quality. A symbol also needs an index, there is nothing like symbol having no index part.

Concerning Hume, I would like to treat both ideas and impressions as signs by demonstrating how ideas and impressions could be treated as icons.

Impressions are given when we look at something, hear something and perceive something. But what happens when we close our eyes? What would semiotic analyses of looking at something and then closing our eyes look like? The question is simple. Impression would be a ground, in which case it would be a sinsignum, a specific appearance of quality and a concrete phenomenon. An object of a sign, which is given *via* an icon, would be a thing as it is in itself, though not in the absolute, Kantian sense of *ding an sich* – a dynamic object, depicted from a specific point of view. It might be given through different impressions but at that particular moment it is given from **that** point of view and not from another. By way of digression, let us suppose that a given impression is identical to its object; when looking at the same thing at two different times, we become acquainted with two completely different impressions, hence two entirely different things. No true statement about any one thing would be possible because there would be two things, one in the beginning and the other at the end. For this reason, the concept of idea in Hume, might be treated as a functional counterpart of the Peircean interpretant. An idea would be a meaning of impression. Impression and its meaning would always be connected. Impression without meaning would be pure, thoughtless feeling, impossible to memorise. That is why impression is always connected with a corresponding idea.

When I think about my room without perceiving it I have an idea of it. In this case idea is a ground. If impression is a ground, its object remains the same. It means that I have an idea of the same thing that I had an impression of. The interpretant changes. The very moment an impression is given, the idea starts functioning as an interpretant. As soon as the idea is given the impression is the interpretant. We should think about this in the following way. Let us take a room as an example. Imagine that we make a reasonably accurate 3D copy of it. Then, according to the 3D plan we draw a plan of the room on a piece of paper. Having these three things, we have to treat this room as an object of a sign. If we take a 3D plan as a ground, the plan on the paper will be its interpretant. If we take the plan on the paper as a ground, the 3D plan will be its interpretant. Now think about idea as

about a plan on a piece of paper, and about a 3D plan as an impression. In order to understand this better try to compare this sketch with the model of a definition understood as a sign, using the example I gave earlier.

Now look for the consequences. We can perceive one and the same thing in a number of ways. There are many possible ideas of one impression and there are many possible impressions that are models for one idea: a 3D plan could be a plan of many rooms, and a paper plan could be a plan of many 3D plans. For most of us this is obvious. But in Hume's theory these points are not obvious. However, if ideas and impressions are signs it is possible to come to the above conclusions.

From this vantage point we should not be worried any more by the "missing shade of blue" problem. Signs have a generative structure, a sign by itself generates a structure so that the missing part, the missing shade, is easy to find. Obviously, the missing shade will never be given as an impression, but it may be given as an idea. The missing shade contains one particular idea, though the shade itself contains many possible impressions. Having the idea we have a feeling that we would recognise this shade if it were given.

What are the conclusions? We can look at Hume as a philosopher who did not regard the external world as unreal. We can look at his philosophy, and interpret it in a way close to our commonsensical idea that the world is here and not somewhere beyond. I believe it is possible to agree with Hume and at the same time not to be sceptical about the existence of the external world. We may think that only impressions and ideas are given to us and that we see how the world is represented in our impressions and ideas. What we see are not representations but things represented in a specific way.

If thought is a sign then object of thought, from the Peircean and Humean perspective, has to be thought itself, but thought does not have to be treated as something essentially internal. It can be in the mind and also external to the mind. There is no paradox in the view that being in the mind is the same as "known to knower"[9]. When we accept this we can claim that my desk is in my mind, in my sight and in my room at the same time.

Even if we cannot help feeling that Hume was sceptical about the reality of the world, we can approach this apparent discrepancy in two different ways. We can demonstrate that his theory in itself is not coherent. But if this were my only ambition it would not suffice: "why are you reading him if there is nothing true in his writings?" one could ask. And, of course, that would be a valid question.

[9] "But to say that an object is in the mind is only a metaphorical way of saying that it stands to the intellect in the relation of known to knower" (Peirce [1931-1958] 8.18).

However, there is also a second possibility. We can take his theory as it stands and ask what should be done about it so to avoid bad consequences. And that is exactly what I tried to do.

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