

Hume's Law of Association and Kant's Rule of Association

Before going out to the screen porch I wanted some punch. I looked around, while standing in the kitchen, and as my cup was not in sight, I immediately thought of the office. But it was also not there and already I was walking to the bedroom when suddenly, out of nowhere (it seemed), an image (a memory actually*) of putting the cup into the refrigerator arose, and instantly I remembered that I had put the cup there, contrary to my usual practice, because it was full of punch, when I was having to leave earlier.

* I looked at the current, immediate image as a former reality my own way of looking at appearances. And so what made it a memory was entirely the way that I looked at the image. Looking at the image as now or earlier was my perspective, the way that I look at and consider and treat things. For memories are actually now while being remembered.

There's a lot here, it seems to me, and I want to try to sort it out. In the first place my mind is on Hume and his Law of Association. I saw that my imagination would have leaped first to one of the usual places for my cup, e.g., the office, because that relationship had been ingrained rather deeply due to my very common routine, i.e., as a result of a high repetition of the perceptions. Evidently in its search, my brain came up with a picture which, while infrequent, had the advantage of being recent, namely an otherwise rather weak consciousness, destined to be forgotten, which had a strength in being a recent, and thus more vivid, impression.

Hume has to apprehend such a perception (as I have described) and to reproduce it in his imagination, and has to explain how it is that these representations arise in the human mind. So he must necessarily assume that the appearances/*Erscheinungen* are subject to laws in a universal affinity (either close or remote connection of all appearances), and so this sudden consciousness of a cup at a desk is not a random representation/*Vorstellung* and would not have arisen (theoretically) except upon some cause, which had to precede it necessarily. And then he will have had to conceive of the brain as a sort of sponge, which holds on to impressions to one degree or another according to the intensity of the past perception or its frequency (be that weak and many, or few and strong) and where there was a sort of chain-reaction such that one representation would prompt another representation. It explains all animal behavior (where no thinking is required or assumed) and also all human behavior (at least Hume will have maintained).

In order to conceive of his universal (though merely empirical) Law of Association, Hume will first have apprehended something, and then reproduced and associated it (looking for ways of assembly such that the actual perceived way is necessary) and then conceiving of the object (in this case causation in the objective perception) and recognizing the connection of the appearances, that they are indeed all connected in one way or another.

This may also help explain the first (A) version of the Transcendental Deduction (See [Critique of Pure Reason](#), Appendix I.2, Section 2, Paragraph 2, beginning on or near page 686) concerning the synthesis of the imagination, explaining the wording and presentation.

We know that Hume's Law is indeed a law of our nature. But before Hume could formulate this law he (per Kant) first had to have a *rule* of association. And that means an apprehension of data

and the retention of it in mind to sort of play with it. It seems we are in a game to see if we can come up with a rule, which would take a given perception and make it a *necessary* perception (required of all people [and called a recognition, i.e., an objective perception]) by incorporating it into a general nature. So with Hume we look at the various mental jumps in our head, but this means that we have an a priori (before experience) capacity for holding a manifold in mind and trying to figure out how it is that the manifold appears as it does, and not in some other way. So we are really here with Kant at a stage in human thinking, where we are only taking note of certain regularities in nature. The next step is the retention or reproduction of these as a manifold and to figure out why it is that this manifold exists as it does, e.g., the legs of a table upright between the top and the floor. It could be otherwise, we think, and so how is it that it has to be as it is?*

* The answer will have something to do with the purpose of a table, i.e., that it is a plane surface which is elevated to a height which is convenient for human use in some regard, e.g., eating or writing. Hence a table which is upside down will call for an explanation, e.g., perhaps it is in need of some repair or is being stored.

And so preceding Hume's Law of Association there had to be an a priori synthesis of a manifold which is plucked from the brainarium (projection of the appearances from the eye along the optic nerves into the brain) and which finds its necessitation and unity in the concept of a nature encompassing all appearances, as though to say: there has to be a reason that the representation of the cup at the desk just suddenly pops up in my mind. This manifold then for Hume and for all people is the totality of all appearances in a single nature, a so-called affinity of all appearances, and a consequence of which then is the recognition of the Law of Association.

Reflection. In TDA.II.2 of the [Critique of Pure Reason](#) (on or near page 686) Kant mentions the law of association and then of another condition which is necessary (empirically) in order for him to recognize the Law of Association, namely a regularity in perception (in the nature of perceived things) such that the needed cause, regularity in the flood of the representations (so that something like a prompt might arise concerning a cup on the desk), and then also we had to put this regularity together such that it would lend itself to a necessitation (the manifold being a single thing, a unity). But at this stage that necessity is only anticipated, for we are a priori certain of only one thing, the regularity is no accident or fluke. We observe it due to its regularity, and we know (per the connective make up of our understanding) that it is no accident, and we continue and investigate and conceive of the law of causation in order then to necessitate the associations that take place routinely in us and in all sensing creatures.

The conditions then for the recognition by Hume of the Law of Association are: regularity in the flood of the representations, and then, subjectively conditioned, held together as a single manifold (as yet unidentified) in search of a unification, much as the manifold of a circle traced out in air awaits necessitation, i.e., the manifold must be as it appears because it is the totality of the parts of a single object,* e.g., the circle (a plane and uniform line which encloses a space, or in other words: a plane loop where all points are equal distance from a single point).**

* The object is provided by the connective understanding in order to unify the manifold and maintain a unity in the apperception (the self consciousness).

** See [Circle In Mid Air](#).

This is a difficult section just standing on its own, and Kant warned of the "darkness" that must surround the introduction of the Deduction of the Categories. In a word: Hume had to assume causation as the prompt to even pay attention to the regularity he found in the representations of his mind. It is this goal of unification and necessitation that is the *raison d'être* of the retention and association of the manifold in the first place; perhaps like the goal of the apprehension and retention of the manifold of a spoken or read sentence is the unification of all the words (as representations) in a single thought, a unified consciousness (an apperception).

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