

Candidate 4 evidence

How effective is David Hume's copy principle in today's standards?

David Hume was one of Britain's most influential philosophers, this was due to his work during the Scottish Enlightenment period where it was finally a choice to leave the church, like Hume did. One of Hume's most famous pieces was his book - "a treatise of human nature." Hume was an empiricist which means he thinks all knowledge comes from our sense experience, and an atomist which means he thinks everything is made of atoms. These theories do come up in the copy principle that I will be analyzing in my essay. Throughout my essay I will look at how effective David Hume's copy principle is in today's scientific standards.

To start Hume says all ideas have corresponding impressions. Impressions are things that happen to you in the moment, like burning your hand, these are livelier and more forceful than ideas. Impressions can either be inward or outward, inward impressions are things you feel during that moment, like pain when you burn your hand, and outward impressions are things you see or hear in the moment, like looking at your burnt hand. Ideas, however, are faded impressions, these are the memories of things that have happened to you, like remembering when you burnt your hand. Ideas can either be simple or complex, a simple idea means it can't be broken into any separate parts, like a tree, it is what you see and there's nothing else to it. Complex ideas are ideas that can be broken down into distinguishable parts. These come from your imagination, your imagination can do four different jobs these jobs are, compounding, diminishing, transposing and augmenting. If you compound something you add two or more ideas together, Hume uses the example of the golden mountain and vivacious horse, the golden mountain can be separated into gold and a mountain, same with the virtuous horse it can be separated into virtue and a horse. If you transpose something you change the place of it, like a centaur having the body of a horse and the head of a man. If you diminish something you shrink it, like a tiny elephant and if you augment something you make it bigger, like a giant mouse. This is how Hume explains our imagination, impressions and ideas.

The copy principle is Hume's knowledge theory, he says that it means "all our ideas in their first appearance are derived from simple impressions which are

correspondent to them.” This means that every simple idea that we get is linked to an impression that we experienced. Stanford encyclopedia says, “he concludes that there is a constant conjunction between simple ideas and their simple impressions.” This further shows how Hume’s copy principle works. An example of Hume’s copy principle in action is Isaac Newton discovering the idea of gravity and dynamics not just out of nowhere but by the apple falling on his head. This shows how we come across our ideas and how they don’t happen randomly.

Hume and Renee Descartes disagreed on most philosophical debates. This was due to Hume being an empiricist and Descartes being a rationalist, rationalists believe all our knowledge comes from reason alone. One of their biggest disagreements is over the philosophical problem of the existence of God. Descartes believed fully in God saying that you can only access true knowledge if you have the belief in God, this comes up in his meditation 3, Descartes thought that us as humans are imperfect beings and God is a perfect being therefore things that are less than perfect will never have the total understanding of something that is perfect. Descartes also believes due to him being a rationalist saying that God is an innate idea as well as that he was also a devout catholic. Hume disagreed saying that God is just the built-up ideas of goodness, wisdom and love and people take these compounded ideas to be God that people have mixed up with being an innate idea, innate ideas being ideas we are born with. Hume said that the idea of God is not provable or improvable and that means it is agnosticism, without proof. Hume also openly disagreed with the cosmological argument which says in its first premises that everything has a creator (painting has an artist) therefore us and our world must have a creator, and that creator must be God. Hume said that there's no evidence to prove that everything has a creator and even if we did have a creator why is the only choice that it must be God. Hume was also a sceptic which further explains his choice in following atheism.

The missing shade of blue (msob) is Hume’s own contradictory theory, Hume put forward the idea that if a man with perfect eyesight had seen every shade of blue apart from one and you were to line up all the shades of blue from lightest to darkest missing the one he had never seen, would the man be able to come up with the idea of the missing shade? Hume said the man would be able to come up with the missing shade, even without the earlier impression, but that this scenario is so ‘singular and obscure’ that it is ‘scarcely worth observing’ so Hume doesn’t think this affects his theory at all.

One of Hume's arguments to support his copy principle is the argument of malfunctioning senses. This means that a man who's been blind since birth wouldn't be able to come up with the idea of colour. He's never seen colour so he wouldn't be able to describe it without the earlier impression. This supports Hume's theory that every idea has a corresponding impression.

I will now evaluate the theory of the msob, a lot of philosophers have discredited Hume for this due to him saying that it isn't that big a deal and doesn't affect his knowledge theory because they have found other scenarios which work in the exact same way. Take for instance the notes of a piano, if a man with perfect hearing had heard every note apart from one and you were to play the piano for him from lowest to highest bar the one, using Humes logic the man could come up with the missing note. It works the same for spiciness of food if you were to feed someone spicy food and from weakest to strongest missing the one, the man would be able to come up with the missing flavor. This shows how it can apply to three of the senses and probably more. Modern psychology said that in their 21st century knowledge we can come up with a new idea, proving the msob but denying Humes copy principle, but cognitive science research disagrees saying that we can come up with new ideas but only to a certain extent. Therefore, the modern science world still doesn't fully know if we can come up with brand new ideas.

There are some other minor criticisms of Hume's copy principle one being, Hume's main theory says that all ideas are less lively and less forceful than impressions but is this always true. People who suffer from schizophrenia hallucinate that seem so real and are very forceful, does this disprove that part of Hume's theory? Well, no because Hume does say that the copy principle only applies to the healthy mind so people with schizophrenia don't follow the rules of the copy principle. But people with healthy minds have nightmares and these are much livelier and more forceful than impressions, they leave people sweating and shaking, this shows that not all impressions are more lively and more forceful than ideas. Another criticism of Hume is that he says all ideas come from impressions, but we have some ideas where philosophers don't think that's true, for example beauty no one knows where the idea of beauty standards and yet most people have them, as well as justice this also does not seem to have a corresponding impression. Another criticism of Hume's theory is that mathematicians and scientists use the idea of infinite in much of their work, but nothing on our planet is

infinite, so where did we come up with it? These are all criticisms that disprove on a small level, parts of Hume's theory.

To conclude, overall, I do agree the copy principle can still be used effectively in the 21st century and still holds up well. For a theory made in 1748, 277 years later, it still fits with our scientific understanding of the world. Even though some of the criticisms did nearly sway me, like the missing shade of blue, I do not believe that these are enough to throw the whole theory out. The copy principle still works effectively, and we should still consider it today. There is not another philosopher that I agree with their knowledge theory more and that is why I choose David Hume's to be an effective one that works very well as the criticisms aren't strong enough to get rid of it or even parts of it entirely.

Philosophy National 5 Resource Sheet			
Candidate Name		Scottish Candidate Number	
<p><u>Intro</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Treatise of human nature • Empiricism and atomism • Impressions and ideas - inward, outward, complex ideas - compound ^{Examples} • Isaac Newton copy principle • "All our ideas in their first appearance are derived from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them." • "He concludes that there is a constant conduction..." <p><u>MSOB - evaluation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • contradiction • Pitch/heat • Modern psychology • Cognitive Science <p><u>Descartes</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> God Perfection Atleast/Catholic God = Truth • Cosmological • agnosticism - proof <u>blind men</u> <p><u>criticisms</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • colour • lively and forceful • healthy mind • infinity beauty beauty <p><u>Conclusion</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1748 • effective • criticisms 			