Hume is quite sure that blind persons cannot understand color-words. This is puzzling given his famous concession at II.16 of *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* that it is possible to have an idea of a certain color without having the corresponding impression.¹ It is puzzling because Hume’s reason for thinking that the blind cannot understand color-words is that the blind cannot have color-impressions. His argument is apparently this:

(A) (i) The blind cannot have color-impressions.

(ii) Ideas follow impressions—i.e., one cannot have an idea of *x* (purple, necessary connection, or whatever) without first having a corresponding impression of *x*.²

(iii) Words stand for ideas; a particular word is meaningless to those who do not have the corresponding idea.

Hence, color-words are meaningless to the blind.

On the face of it, this argument is surely threatened by the concession at II.16, for that concession allows exceptions to (Aii): if it is possible to have ideas, and color-ideas at that, without first having the corresponding impressions, how can Hume be so sure, on the basis of (Ai), that the blind have no color ideas?

The problem is put into even sharper focus when II.16 is compared with II.14:

Those who would assert that this position is not universally true nor without exception, have only one, and that an easy method of refuting it; by producing that idea, which, in their opinion, is not derived from this source. It will then be incumbent on us, if we would maintain our doctrine, to produce the impression, or lively perception, which corresponds to it.

¹ The corresponding passage in the *Treatise* occurs at the end of the first section of Book I, part I.

² “Having a corresponding impression” should be understood here in a way which takes account of the simple/complex distinction. The usual gambit is: if the idea of *x* is complex, then we are to understand the principle to require having, at some time or other, an impression corresponding to each simple idea in the idea of *x*. Hume never considers the possibility that a color-impression might correspond to a complex idea. In spite of this, the usual gambit won’t do. I return to this below.
II.16 surely must be read as providing precisely the refutation described here. So (Aii) is refuted, on Hume’s own showing, by failing what Hume specifies as the (only) crucial test!

The doctrine that ideas follow impressions is a crucial cog in Hume’s critical machinery. If we are to properly evaluate Hume, we must understand how this doctrine can perform its function in critical arguments like (A) in spite of acknowledged exceptions. My strategy will be to regard a satisfactory resolution of the puzzle just rehearsed as a constraint on the proper interpretation of the doctrine that ideas follow impressions.

One way to attack this puzzle is to ask what plausible change in (Aii) would insulate it from the concession at II.16. The obvious suggestion is the following:

(iv) It is not possible to have color-ideas unless one is capable of having corresponding color-impressions.

This principle has an obvious generalization to other senses, but I will leave it in this restricted form since our immediate problem concerns only color-ideas.

If available, (iv) would evidently save the argument (A) from the threat generated by II.16, for the subject of the missing shade experiment is, of course, capable of having impressions of the missing shade, whereas the blind are capable of no color-impressions at all. The trouble with this suggestion is that the grounds Hume appears to offer for conceding the exception, namely introspective reports, are potentially exactly as dangerous to (iv) as to (Aii). What if a blind person reports color-ideas?

At II.16 we are told to imagine samples of “all the different shades” of blue arranged in order from deepest to lightest, with one shade missing, a shade our subject has never seen.

It is plain that he will perceive a blank, where that shade is wanting, and will be sensible that there is a greater distance in that place between the contiguous colours than in any other. Hume says about this that the subject can “supply this deficiency” from his imagination and “raise up to himself the idea of that particular shade, though it had never been conveyed to him by his senses.” I will call this The Concession.3

3 It is, perhaps, worth remarking in passing that this concession constitutes an objection to Locke’s claims at II.xxxi.2 and IV.iv.4 of An Essay Concerning Human Understanding. At II.xxxi.2, Locke asserts that all simple ideas are adequate on the ground that they are “nothing but the effects of certain powers

549
What grounds could Hume have for the Concession? Well, one might arrange the experiment and ask the subject whether he can “raise up to himself the idea of that particular shade.” Hume writes as if a “yes” from the subject “may serve as a proof that the simple ideas are not always, in every instance, derived from the correspondent impressions.” But suppose a blind person says he has color ideas? Hume is so certain that the blind have no color ideas, it seems he must be prepared to discount such claims, and of course he is. Yet how can he discount them, and with such confidence, given The Concession?

It might be thought that the distinction required by (iv) can be enforced by recourse to a methodology more sophisticated than simply asking such things as, “Have you an idea of purple?”, “Have you an idea of the missing shade—the shade which would restore continuity?” But it cannot: anything more sophisticated will simply undermine the Concession experiment altogether. For example, we might ask our subject to select among several samples the one that would restore continuity. This is obviously no good because, if he gets it right, he will have seen the crucial shade. And anyway, it is begging the question to suppose he is

in things fitted and ordained by God to produce such sensations in us.” And at IV.iv.4, he makes a similar claim on the ground that simple ideas are such as “the mind . . . can by no means make to itself.” These remarks are plainly incompatible with conceding that the imagination can “supply” a simple idea never “conveyed to the senses.” Lock’s remarks at IV.iv.4 harken back to Descartes’ argument for an external world in the sixth Meditation: “Furthermore, I cannot doubt that there is in me a certain passive faculty of perceiving, that is of receiving and recognizing ideas of sensible objects; but it would be valueless to me, and I could in no way use it if there were not also in me, or in something else, another active faculty capable of forming and producing these ideas. But this active faculty cannot be in me, in so far as I am a thinking being, since it does not at all presuppose my intelligence and also since those ideas often occur to me without my contributing to them in any way, and even frequently against my will.” In spite of incautious expression, the argument in Descartes, unlike that in Locke, does not seem to require an extramental source for every simple idea of sense.

The experiment requires a subject who has never encountered a certain shade. In practice, it would be difficult to identify such a subject. Evidently we cannot show him a sample and ask, “Have you ever seen this shade before?” That would disqualify him for the trial.

Analogously, and more importantly, he is prepared to discount the rationalist’s claim to an idea of necessary connection on the grounds that there is no corresponding impression to be had.
THE MISSING SHADE OF BLUE

able to select the right sample only because he has an idea to "compare" with it. After all, Hume certainly does not suppose we must have ideas of the other shades in order to perceive the continuity in the rest of the array. The array might contain any number of previously unencountered shades. Selecting a sample to fill the blank is evidently just a special case of arranging a whole pack of samples in order. Since this does not presuppose color ideas, neither can the special case.

It seems clear that, if we take the whole business at face value, The Concession can only be backed up by reliance on the subject's reports. But then what of the blind man who reports color ideas? Hume cannot, as Jonathan Bennett puts it, "bow to any fool or knave who claims to have a counterexample (to (iv)), any congenitally blind man who says 'I have an idea of purple.'" If Hume is prepared to adopt The Concession on the strength of a sighted person's claim to have a particular color-idea with no corresponding impression, how can he discount in advance a blind person's claim to have an idea of purple?

Bennett thinks there is a way around this problem, that is, a way of understanding Hume's use of the idea-and-impression language that would explain Hume's confidence in (iv).

To 'produce' an idea one must not merely say but show that one has it; and Hume is confident that his challengers will fail in this larger task, e.g., that the congenitally blind man who says 'I have an idea of purple' won't be able to give us reasons for believing him.

But the blind man might well satisfy us that he is not lying, and then Hume's only retort would be to say that the blind man did not know what 'purple' means. This, I suggest, is the source of his confidence: he is sure that the congenitally blind man would not be able to 'produce' an idea of purple because he would not be able to satisfy us that he knew what 'purple' means. [Bennett, 227]

Bennett sums up his interpretation thus: "Hume's theory is not that ideas prerequire impressions, but that understanding prerequires impressions" (Bennett, 227).

This seems to me to put the cart before the horse. It isn't obvious that the blind do not understand color-words (in fact it is false, of course). What is obvious is that the blind cannot see colors. Hume

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6 For the same reason, no nonlinguistic behavior can settle the question, for it will always leave us wondering whether "having the idea" is a necessary condition of the behavior or not.

ROBERT CUMMINS

is surely trying to use the principle that ideas follow impressions to move from the obvious fact that the blind cannot see colors to the surprising conclusion that they cannot really know the meanings of color-words. Yet, according to Bennett, Hume relies ultimately on the surprising conclusion to support the premise that the blind have no color-ideas. And the one obvious fact—the blind person's inability to have color-impressions—simply drops out of sight as irrelevant.8

Bennett's treatment also leaves The Concession as mysterious as ever: how can Hume be so confident that blind persons cannot understand "purple" while allowing that a sighted person who has never seen purple can? A blind person can talk about the use of color in early renaissance Italian painting without disclosing his blindness by misuse of language, and Hume must have known this. The Concession just is not happily put in terms of understanding linguistic expressions, for then either:

(a) the question concerns the meaning of "the missing shade,"
or
(b) the question concerns the meaning of a name for the missing shade.

It cannot be (a): understanding "the missing shade" cannot even seem to turn on whether one has had an impression of a certain particular shade. Nor can it be (b), for shades haven't generally got standard names comparable to "purple." And even if they had, we could simply re-raise the question thus: Why is Hume so confident that the blind cannot understand "purple," whereas the subject of The Concession experiment can understand w, the name of the missing shade? Indeed, the problem is even harder in this form, for there is no plausible analogue of (iv) which might insulate (A) from The Concession. Under Bennett's interpretation, the analogue of (iv) is this: it is not possible to understand color-words unless one is capable of having color impressions. But the whole point of (A) is to establish this very contention, namely, that those incapable of color impressions—the blind—cannot

8The incapacity for color impressions cannot play a motivated role in establishing that a blind person does not understand "purple" until (Aii-iii) are accepted. If we are not prepared to rule out ideas, hence meanings, in the absence of impressions, an incapacity for impressions cannot, of course, undercut the blind person's claim to understand "purple."
understand color words. If we add this principle as a premise we don’t insulate the argument from The Concession, we simply give up arguing the matter at all.

In fairness to Bennett it should be emphasized that his suggestion was not offered in an attempt to reconcile the critical use of the ideas-follow-impressions doctrine (in arguments like (A) ) with The Concession. I have deliberately lifted Bennett’s remarks out of their proper context and discussed them here because it is important to see that dropping ideas out as middle-men between impressions and meanings will not help us with the problem. It is important because it tends to show that ideas are not, as some may have hoped, an entirely idle part of Hume’s critical machinery.

Hume himself is apparently untroubled by the distinction enforced by (iv) between those who cannot see purple or any other color and those who can but have not. Wherever he is sure the requisite impressions are actually lacking, he is equally sure that the corresponding ideas are lacking as well. His confidence is the same whether (iv) applies or not.

If it happens, from some defect of the organ, that a man is not susceptible to any species of sensation, we always find that he is as little susceptible of the correspondent ideas. A blind man can form no notion of colours, a deaf man of sounds. . . . The case is the same, if the object proper for exciting any sensation, has never been applied to the organ. A Laplander or Negro has no notion of the relish of wine. [II.15. My italics]

The italicized sentence shows how unworried Hume is by the concession he will make in the very next paragraph. The congenitally blind or deaf fall neatly under (iv). But the other cases do not, and yet they are said to be the same. This suggests that (iv), at least taken at face value, cannot be what insulates (A) from The Concession. Yet it seems clear that (iv) or something very like it, is the only insulation available. Either Hume made a mess of things—which is possible but uninteresting—or we have not got the proper handle on the doctrine that ideas follow impressions.

A proper interpretation of the doctrine that ideas follow impressions must explain how that doctrine can mediate the move in (A) while admitting—even forcing—the exception conceded at II.16. Bennett’s suggestion fails to help in this connection because it identifies the conclusion—understanding prerequires impres-
Impressions and Knowledge

Let us briefly examine (iv) in its own right. What has someone got when he has the capacity to have the full range of color impressions? I suggest that the important point here is that such a person has the ability to acquire certain kinds of knowledge. As a first approximation we might say: the blind cannot know whether or not a given thing is, say, purple. This, of course, is much too strong. A better formulation is this: the blind cannot come to know noninferentially whether a given thing is purple. For a blind person might use instruments or ask someone.

One might, however, hold out for the unqualified first pass, as follows. Instruments are ultimately of no use, for instruments must be calibrated and checked for malfunction. How is a blind person to do this? He can check the instrument in question against other instruments, or try it out on things of known color, but this is simply a delaying tactic. The other instruments have to be checked, and the color of a control object must be verified somehow. He might check his instruments against a sighted person’s reports. But how is this different from the previous case? An informant can no more be checked for reliability concerning colors than can a second instrument. The informant’s sincerity can be verified, perhaps, but what if the informant is, without realizing it, color-blind?

Whether or not these considerations should be persuasive, I submit that they would have persuaded Hume, for we have here an argument of the same type as Hume’s most important arguments in the Treatise and the Enquiry. I call arguments of this form No-Independent-Access arguments (NIA for short): they attempt to establish that there is no inferential knowledge of x
THE MISSING SHADE OF BLUE

(the future, Lockean Real Qualities) on the grounds that there is no epistemic access to $x$ other than via some inferential procedure $p$ that cannot be checked for reliability except by appeal to other applications of $p$. Thus Hume argues in "Of Skepticism With Regard to the Senses," (Treatise, IV.ii p. 212) that there is no knowledge of Lockean Real Qualities because the necessary causal inferences cannot be checked except against other causal inferences of the same type. And in the Enquiry, he argues that, though individual inductive inferences can be checked (by waiting, or opening the bag, or whatever), this has only an inductive power to validate inductive procedure, hence no power at all.

For Hume, then, the blind stand to colors as we all stand to Lockean Real Qualities: no alleged justificatory procedure can be validated because there can be no independent check on the results the procedure yields.9

It is easy to see then that an NIA argument leads to the following principle:

(v) It is not possible to have knowledge of colors unless one is capable of having the corresponding color-impressions.

(v) is just (iv) with "color-ideas" replaced by "knowledge of colors." We have seen why Hume is committed to (v), so to understand his commitment to (iv) we need only understand this substitution.

When someone has an "idea of purple," what has he got? At least this: the capacity to recognize purple when he encounters it. And not merely to "recognize purple" in the sense in which a dog recognizes its master. To have an idea of purple is to have a recognitional capacity exercise of which produces knowledge that one is confronting purple. This capacity presupposes the capacity for impressions of purple: to recognize purple is to come to know something of the form "this is purple," and (v) tells us that propositions attributing or identifying colors cannot be known by someone who lacks the capacity to have the corresponding color-impressions. Hence, having the idea of purple presupposes the

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9 "A telescope can be pointed at things which are visible to the naked eye, and this allows one to discover that only apparent size and distance are altered. But to the blind, spectroscopes and informants' reports are like an instrument alleged to reveal genies and only genies and to be the only access to the genies. Such an instrument is a device for altering one's state of mind and nothing more." That's how Hume saw the matter.
ROBERT CUMMINS

capacity for impressions of purple. (iv) is just the generalization of this, so the substitution (of “color-ideas” for “knowledge of colors”) is explained.

Understanding having an idea of purple as having a capacity to recognize purple—as having a concept of purple in short—also allows us to explain The Concession. The capacity to recognize purple doesn’t presuppose an actual impression of purple: the capacity might be acquired without actually having the impression. This is what happens in the Concession experiment. In that experiment the subject acquires a capacity to recognize a previously unseen shade, and Hume expresses this by saying that the subject’s imagination “furnishes the idea.” The difference between Hume’s language and mine is just the difference between someone who thinks color-recognition is a matter of matching the color with a mental image and someone who wishes to remain neutral on the psychological mechanism of color-recognition.

Although it may sometimes be possible to acquire a recognitional capacity without having the corresponding impressions, Hume rightly regards this as exceptional. It is hard to imagine acquiring the capacity to recognize the taste of pineapple without tasting it. 10 In any case, the exceptions can plausibly be limited to cases in which the capacity to have other impressions “of the same type” is present. This leaves (A) intact, and, more importantly, insulates the discussion of necessary connection against threats from this direction. The rationalist isn’t going to get anywhere by pointing to alleged capacities to have other expressions of the same type as an impression of necessary connection. 11

10 Of course, there might be special circumstances. In the dark we are given apple, with which we are familiar, and pineapple, with which we are not familiar, and asked to say which is the pineapple. Here we get it right, but we are not exercising a capacity to recognize the taste of pineapple.

Incidentally, Hume’s choice of taste in the passage preceding the Concession passage helps to explain the insensitivity I noted earlier in that passage to the distinction enforced by (iv). The capacity to recognize a taste probably cannot be acquired without having the “corresponding impression,” unless it’s the only unknown taste of a given kind.

11 It might seem, in any case, that actual knowledge is going to require actual impressions at some stage: one cannot know that this is purple without, at some time, actually seeing purple, and similarly for necessary connection. Hume no
THE MISSING SHADE OF BLUE

This point can be put in another way: suppose someone were to say: “Your discussion ignores a crucial aspect of Hume’s thought: it never occurred to Hume that we might have a complex idea of a simple shade. But once we allow this possibility, the problem simply goes away. Consider this: the idea of the missing shade is the idea of (i) a shade of blue that is (ii) lighter than x and (iii) darker than y (where x and y are the shades neighboring the gap). Since B (i)-(iii) evidently satisfy the ideas-follow-impressions doctrine, The Concession passage involves no serious concession at all.”

The problem does not go away. What, exactly, is the problem? The problem is how to allow for ideas in the absence of impressions without compromising the critique of color-ideas in the blind (and the ideas of “necessary connection” in the rationalist). But this is to state the problem in Hume’s own problematic way. We make no progress simply rehearsing his formulations. If the foregoing is correct, however, we can provide a more revealing formulation: how to allow for some knowledge in the absence of impressions—for some inferentially justified belief—without undermining the NIA argument? Allowing for complex ideas corresponding to simple impressions is—potentially—exactly as subversive as allowing the imagination to furnish simple ideas: in both cases we allow inferential knowledge with no evident way of guaranteeing the possibility of noninferential knowledge of the same (sort of) thing. Hume had ample illustration of the danger. Locke suggested something like this: “An atom is a thing (i) solid, (ii) having no parts (indivisible), and (iii) too small to be perceived.” But the fact that (i)-(iii) satisfy the ideas-follow-impressions doctrine does not and should not (by Hume’s lights) guarantee that the idea of an atom will satisfy it: the possibility of noninferential knowledge of solidity, divisibility, perceivability and relative size does not guarantee the possibility of noninferential knowledge of atoms.

doubt believed this, but I’m not sure he should have. Suppose I verify your color vision with respect to other colors, and you assure me that the sample in the envelope restores continuity to the sequence of samples before both of us? Perhaps the Laplander must taste wine to be able to recognize its taste, but surely, even on Hume’s principles, a normally sighted individual can know that this is purple without having seen purple.
The ideas-follow-impressions doctrine gets whatever life it has from its role in epistemic critiques like (A). Once we make explicit the epistemological significance of the problem generated by *The Concession*, it is clear that the following questions must receive the same answer,

1. When can the imagination furnish a simple idea of sense?
2. When can a complex idea be adequate for a simple sense-quality?

namely, when there is the possibility of an impression corresponding to the idea.

The fact that Hume chose (1) over (2) is both interesting and unfortunate. But nothing really central turns on it. Either way he will be able to argue:

First: that the normally sighted but not the blind can have an idea of the missing shade because the former but not the latter could have an impression of it. This will amount to arguing that the normally sighted but not the blind have inferential knowledge of the missing shade because the former but not the latter can have noninferential knowledge of it.

Second: that there is no idea of necessary connection because there is no possibility of a corresponding impression. This amounts to arguing that there is no inferential knowledge of necessary connection because there is no possibility of noninferential knowledge of it. Hume was wrong, I suppose, to assume that ideas corresponding to simple impressions must themselves be simple. This leaves him with no plausible account of the mechanism of recognition in *The Concession* experiment. But the mistake doesn’t matter much.

An obvious objection to my identification of having ideas with having recognitional capacities is this: A normally sighted person struck blind will surely, on Hume’s view, retain the idea of purple but lose the capacity to recognize purple.

To begin with, Hume nowhere (to my knowledge) addresses this question. Perhaps if he had, he would have been forced to come to grips with the tension between the semantical and epistemological roles he assigns to ideas and his psychological descriptions of them as images or quasi-images—introspectible mental contents of some sort. In the latter context, it seems plausible (because we all have visual images in the dark) to suppose a
THE MISSING SHADE OF BLUE

sighted person struck blind will (or could) retain visual ideas. But in the former context, to allow such people ideas of purple is to allow them understanding of propositions identifying/attributing colors that they cannot know noninferentially, hence (by \( v \)) cannot know at all.\(^2\) Hume plainly does not intend to allow that one can understand unknowable propositions.

If Hume is to retain the connection forged in (A) between understanding and impressions, and retain the view that the connection is mediated by ideas, then ideas are whatever mediates the connection. Since introspectible quasi-images do not mediate this connection, they are not ideas; hence their persistance in one struck blind is nothing to the case. On the other hand, we might argue that ideas are introspectible quasi-images, hence do (or could) persist in one struck blind, hence do not mediate the connection forged in (A). It seems clear that neither of these lines fits the text, though the former is more charitable and more interesting, since it is the connection that matters. Surely the right line to take is that Hume didn’t realize he could not have it both ways, partially because he did not consider such questions as whether a person struck blind would retain an idea of purple.

Another problem arises because Hume says ideas and impressions differ only in force and vivacity. But how can a recognitional capacity differ in force and vivacity from an impression?

As stated, this objection turns on a misunderstanding: my thesis is that having an idea (a “simple idea of sense” anyway) is having a recognitional capacity, not that ideas are recognitional capacities. Hume almost certainly thought of ideas as images (or

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\(^2\) Such a person might, of course, have calibrated and checked out instruments (or informants) before being struck blind. But suppose that, after the tragedy, the instrument (or someone) tells him grass is purple: has grass changed color, or has the instrument (informant) begun to malfunction? For that matter, suppose it tells him grass is green: perhaps grass has changed color but there is a compensatory malfunction? I can’t see how Hume could concede motivated answers to this question without abandoning the NIA argument altogether.

\((v)\) will, perhaps, allow knowledge of some propositions attributing “purple”: one might remember that the first grape one ate was purple, or “reflect” that purple is a color and distinct from maroon. But these are cases in which it would be less than wild (though mistaken) to suggest that one could know these things without “really” understanding “purple.” In any case, pressing this matter will eventually lead us, and would have led Hume, to abandon the connection Hume is after in (A).
something like images—introspective mental contents to which sensory quality words such as “blue,” “round” and “hard” apply), and held that recognition (of simple sense qualities at least) proceeds by image-matching. To say that these images (or whatever) differ from impressions in force and vivacity is not to say that the recognitional capacities they mediate differ from impressions in force and vivacity. The fact that Hume holds that ideas can vary in force and vivacity is therefore no embarrassment to my thesis. Indeed, it is of some importance that my account of the ideas-follow-impressions doctrine as it functions in critical arguments like (A) works with or without the match-the-image model of recognition and the grading of ideas in terms of “force and vivacity” that goes with it. If we assume that ideas are images that, among other things, provide the means of recognizing simple sense qualities on a match-the-image model, then given my interpretation The Concession amounts to the claim that the imagination can supply a sample (image) s such that matching s will count as recognizing the missing shade. Hume gives no account of how the imagination might provide such a sample, but (1) he is sure it is provided, and this can only be because he is sure the recognitional capacity is required, and he infers from this that the means of recognition are acquired; and (2) he is sure it cannot be done in general. Why? Because he knows that recognitional capacities cannot in general be acquired without impressions. Hence, it must be that only changes in degree (or something of the sort) can occur independently of impressions. Shading is a matter of degree: mixing pigments neighboring the gap, or overlaying neighboring transparencies, will produce the missing shade, and Hume might suppose something analogous happens in the imagination. 13 Notice, however, that Hume’s only real grip on what is and isn’t possible here is via the conditions under which recognitional capacities can and cannot be acquired. The ideas-follow-impressions doctrine will be robbed of any serious critical force (and we shall be back to square one) if it is allowed to rest only on metaphorical and uncheckable speculations about what the imagination can and cannot cook up.

13 This sort of thing need not compromise the simplicity of shade-ideas, for experience of the cooked-up shade will not be analyzable into experiences of neighboring shades; we won’t “see” the neighboring shades in the cooked-up shade.
It is important to see that *The Concession* retains its plausibility and its innocuousness even if we discard the match-the-sample model of recognition, that is by identifying ideas and recognitional capacities outright. Compare these two cases. In the first, I’m presented with the taste of apple, with which I am familiar, and with the taste of pineapple with which I am not familiar. I can tell which is the pineapple, but I don’t exercise a capacity to recognize pineapple; I recognize the apple and subtract. In the second case, I’m presented with several fruit tastes as before. In the process, I become familiar with every fruit except pineapple, and knowing this, I simply test for newness. Here I do acquire and exercise a capacity to recognize pineapple, for the test will work quite generally. This is analogous to the situation in the *Concession* experiment in that the subject in that experiment sees all the other shades and the gap and its uniqueness. In future he need only test for newness and blueness, for once the experiment has been run he has seen every shade but the missing one. (If there is more than one gap, he need only ask whether it is new and lighter than $x$ and darker than $y$, where $x$ and $y$ are the shades neighboring the gap.) What this shows is that the identifying having ideas with having recognitional capacities is sufficient as well as necessary to motivate the *Concession* passage.

Of course, if Hume had abandoned the view that ideas are images that mediate recognition, and simply identified ideas with recognitional capacities, he would have had to abandon the grading of ideas in terms of force and vivacity too. But this would have been sheer gain. The relative force and vivacity of ideas is important only in connection with the doctrine that a belief is a vivid idea, and that only becomes important as part of Hume’s desperate attempt to explain how association produces belief. But what he needs is only the claim that association does produce belief: the “how” is philosophically irrelevant. If we keep the claim that observing a regularity causes one to believe it will be extended in the next instance, and reject the claim that the mechanism underlying this is that of idea vivification, we no longer have any need of the doctrine that beliefs are vivid ideas, hence no need to grade ideas and impressions on the (same) force and vivacity scale.
Meaning

I have suggested a way of understanding the principle that ideas follow impressions which explains how that principle can function in (A) while allowing for The Concession, and which exhibits the principle as the conclusion of a form of argument central to Hume's epistemology. It remains to explain the connection between ideas and meaning asserted in (Aiii) using the supposition that to acquire an idea (a simple idea of sense, anyway) is to acquire a recognitional capacity the exercise of which yields noninferential knowledge.

If we understand having ideas as having recognitional capacities, it is easy to see (given (v)) how a lack of color-ideas makes propositions attributing or identifying colors unknowable. And there is at least a familiar tradition which assimilates the unknowable to the meaningless. But (Aiii) concerns words, not propositions: we need to explain the view that a color-word is meaningless to those lacking the capacity to recognize that color. There are, it seems to me, two ways of explaining this, a cheap way and an expensive way.

First, the cheap way. This consists of putting together three facts. (1) As noted earlier on, Hume tends to think of recognition as a matter of matching impressions with images. To have an idea of purple is to have a capacity to recognize purple because it is to have an image of purple with which impressions can be compared. (2) For Hume, to know what w means is to know the meaning of w, that is, to be acquainted with something which is w's meaning. (3) To know the meaning of, say "purple," is, in part anyway, to "know what seeing purple is like." Locke tells a story about a blind man who announces that he understands what scarlet signifies: it is like the sound of a trumpet. (An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, III.iv.11) Locke finds this amusing because seeing scarlet is not like hearing anything. It simply cannot be with a blind person as it is with someone who is seeing scarlet. Hume endorses this line uncritically.

Putting these last two facts together we have this: to know what "purple" means is to know some thing knowledge of which entails knowing what seeing purple is like. Having an image of purple fits the bill nicely. Putting this together with the first fact yields the
result that knowing what “purple” means is having the image required to mediate the recognition of purple.

I call this explanation “cheap” because it requires little in the way of textual “reconstruction,” and because, though it may teach us something about Hume, it teaches us nothing of philosophical value concerning the connection, if any, between knowing what “purple” means and being able to recognize purple. I call the explanation I will offer next “expensive” because, though it does (I hope) teach us something of philosophical interest, it exacts a high price: one must read a good deal between the lines.

What’s wanted is an account of why someone who thinks having an idea is having a recognitional capacity would naturally think of ideas as meanings, that is, an account of why someone holding Humean views on other matters would naturally be led to suppose that words mean recognitional capacities or the ideas that mediate recognition. Consider this:

1. Suppose S lacks the capacity to recognize purple.
2. Then, S cannot know of anything that it is purple.
3. Hence, S cannot know of anything that “purple” applies to it.
4. Hence, S cannot learn the criteria for the application of “purple.”
5. These criteria are not innately known.
6. Hence, S cannot know the criteria for the application of “purple.”

Nothing like this is to be found in the pages of the Treatise or the Enquiry. But what it comes to is this: a blind person can’t find out whether “purple” is the right word on a given occasion (1-3), and hence has no basis for any conclusions about how “purple” is to be applied (4-7). I can’t prove that Hume believed this, but I find the suggestion that he did very plausible indeed, and I think I can show that he would have (or should have) accepted it.

What, exactly, is wrong with the line of thought represented in

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14 That Hume does think something like this seems evident from his claim that what we have when we understand a general term is a habit of applying the term indifferently to things recognized as resembling one another. See Treatise I.I.vii, and, less explicitly, Enquiry XII. 125n.
(1)-(7)? Two things, I think. First, (2) doesn’t follow from (1), since most blind persons know that blood is red, but (v) prevents Hume from allowing this. Second, (4) doesn’t follow from (3): someone might simply tell S what the criteria are—for example, readers of Locke learn (roughly) that something is purple just in case it typically presents a purple appearance. But (v) rules this out too, for how could S noninferentially verify what he’s told? Once again, we find (v) plugging up the holes: the centrality of (v) in Hume’s thought guarantees an obvious and easy path from (1) through (7).

This, I think, is the source in Hume of the doctrine that meaning is cognitive meaning; that knowing the meaning of a statement is knowing its evidence conditions. (Hume, of course, never held the doctrine in this form but it is widely recognized that the doctrine has its roots in Hume.) If we assume that competence with “Gold is yellow” is somehow a function of competence with “gold” and “yellow,” and if we accept (as we should not) Hume’s view that competence with these terms rests ultimately on a capacity to recognize gold and yellow, then competence with the statement must ultimately rest on an ability to discover whether or not gold is yellow. Thus knowing what “Gold is yellow” means requires a capacity to tell whether gold is yellow.

The connection between Hume’s doctrine that understanding “purple” requires the capacity to recognize purple and 20th century verificationism can be illuminated in another way. Suppose one wanted to formulate a doctrine of cognitive meaning for words; how would one proceed? What is needed is a way of factoring out the contribution a word makes to the evidence conditions of the sentences it occurs in. Another way of putting it: what is needed is a way of parsing up the knowledge expressed in a sentence into the knowledge expressed by the words or phrases in it. This formulation seems absurd until we recall that, for Hume, to know what w means is to have a discrete bit of knowledge, namely, knowledge of w’s meaning. If we begin by assuming that knowing what the sentence means is knowing its evidence conditions, and add that knowing what the sentence means is knowing what the words in it mean (ignoring the contribution of syntax), then it seems that knowledge of the meanings of the words in s must somehow add up to knowledge of s’s evidence conditions.
THE MISSING SHADE OF BLUE

Given this requirement, what might word-meanings be? Begin with the easy case: a one word sentence such as "Purple." Assuming this is used to express a bit of knowledge ("Purple here" is the usual formula among latter-day empiricists), what counts as evidence for it is, in Humean language, having and recognizing impressions of purple. (Given (v), we may ignore "indirect" evidence on the grounds that it cannot pack any justificatory punch by itself:) Hence, to be able to understand "Purple," in the sense we are interested in requires the capacity to recognize purple, that is, requires having the idea of purple. Indeed, as I have been understanding it, to have a capacity to recognize purple is to have a capacity exercise of which results in noninferential knowledge that one is confronting purple.15

The next stage would be to suppose that understanding "Purple is more like red than green," is a matter of understanding "purple," "red," "green," and "more like," which is, in turn, a matter of having the idea of purple and the idea of "more like" and so on. This is hopeless, of course. But Hume is committed, via (v), to the view that the capacity to recognize colors and relative similarities is a prerequisite to being in a position to have evidence that purple is or is not more like red than green. Hence, if we ask what stands to words as cognitive meaning stands to sentences, the answer is: recognitional capacities. Now a main contention of this paper is that, on Hume's view, the real test of whether someone has an idea of purple, and is therefore in a position to understand "purple," is whether that someone can recognize purple. So, from the point of view of verificationism, Hume's views about word meaning are just what the doctor ordered.

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15 Hume, of course, has some peculiar views concerning what one knows when one knows this sort of thing. Those who prefer a radically subjectivist interpretation of Hume's epistemology might want to hold that what one comes to know when one exercises the capacity to recognize purple is just that one has exercised the purple-recognizing capacity.