

THE PHILOSOPHICAL REVIEW

HUME'S THEORY OF PHILOSOPHICAL RELATIONS

IT IS sometimes said that Hume had no theory of relations. This can hardly mean that Hume failed to advance a theory about relations; for almost anyone who had read the *Treatise* would recall something of the doctrine of relations as natural, and as philosophical. The assertion in question would seem to mean that Hume's theory of relations is such that in our time no one could agree with it, or even use the word "relation" as he did and expect to be understood. That may well be so. Presumably no one who adheres to the theory of relations with which Mr. Russell's name is associated could agree with what Hume said about the matter. But even though this be so, it is also irrelevant to the nature of Hume's own theory of relations.

Hume thought that "in common language" the word relation was always used to designate "that quality, by which two ideas are connected together in the imagination, and the one naturally introduces the other, after the manner above explained—" (13).¹ The nature of this "manner", Hume had explained on a preceding page, is that "of the connection or association of ideas" (10). Thus Hume thought that men ordinarily used "relation" to refer to an association of ideas. But he pointed out another and, as he says, "considerably different" sense of the term. In this sense, "relation" designates "that particular circumstance, in which, even upon the arbitrary union of two ideas in the fancy, we may think proper to compare them" (13). By the word "relation", then, Hume means, on the one hand, any process of association, and, on the other hand, any relation of comparison.

Relations of the first sort he called "natural relations"; presum-

¹ All references that are merely numerical refer to pages in the Selby-Bigge edition of the *Treatise*.