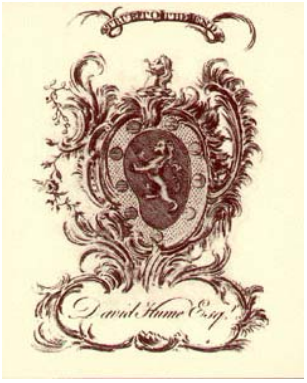

Hume, The Causal Principle, and Kemp Smith
David C. Stove
Hume Studies Volume I, Issue 1 (April., 1975), 1-24.

HUME, THE CAUSAL PRINCIPLE, AND KEMP SMITH

When we say of a proposition that it is possible, we sometimes mean no more than that it is logically possible, that is, consistent with itself. A proposition can be possible in stronger senses than this, but not in any weaker one. For a sense of "p is possible" that did not entail "p is self-consistent," would have to be a sense of "p is possible" which was consistent with "p is self-inconsistent." And it is obvious that there can be no such sense as that.

One of the stronger senses in which a proposition can be possible is this: consistent (with itself and in addition) with every observation-statement. (I mean by an observation-statement, a proposition which, if it were true, could in principle be discovered by experience to be true.)

If a proposition p is contingent, (that is, neither necessarily true nor necessarily false), then its negation (its contradictory) not-p is contingent too; and since contingent, not necessarily false; and since not necessarily false, consistent with itself. So, given any contingent propositions, its falsity is among those propositions which are possible in the first and weak sense mentioned above.

If a proposition p is not only contingent but unverifiable, (that is, not deducible from any observation-statement), then not-p is consistent both with itself and with every observation-statement. So, given any unverifiable contingent proposition, its falsity is among those propositions which are possible in the second and stronger sense mentioned above.

Some stock examples. "Whatever is a raven is black" is contingent, and its falsity therefore possible in the first sense; so too is its contradictory "There are such things as non-black ravens" contingent, and <u>its</u> falsity possible in the first sense. But the latter proposition is not unverifiable, since there are observation-statements from which it is deducible. ("There are such things as green ravens", for example; or "A green raven was in captivity at Taronga Park Zoo in January 31st 1975".) The former proposition, on the other hand, is not only contingent but unverifiable; since there are no observation-statements from which it is deducible. Hence, "whatever is a raven is black" is a proposition the falsity of which is possible both in the first and in the second sense noticed above.

A third and still stronger sense in which a proposition can be possible is the following: p is possible if and only if (p is consistent with itself, every observation-statement is consistent with p, and in addition) p is neither more nor less probable in relation to the conjunction of e and n, where e is any observation-statement and n any necessary truth, than it is in relation to n alone. The last condition may be expressed, symbolically, as "P(p/n.e) = P(p/n) for all necessarily true n and all observation-statements e"; or in Carnap's phrase as, "every observation-statement is <u>initially irrelevant</u> to p."[1]

Some examples will quickly make the idea of initial irrelevance, and its opposite, more familiar; and hence will make the third sense of "p is possible" more familiar. Let n be any necessary truth and e any observation-statement. Now let p be, for example, some necessarily false proposition; then,

since P(p/n) = o = P(p/n.e), e is initially irrelevant to p. Or let p be necessarily true; then, since P(p/n) = 1 = P(p/n.e), e is again initially irrelevant to p. Again, let p be "whatever is a raven is black": then some observation-statements e are initially relevant to p. For if e is "This raven is black," for example, P(p/n.e)>P(p/n); or at any rate, that is what we think if we are not inductive sceptics. Again, if p is "The Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son", it is at least very plausible to say that every observational e is initially irrelevant to p; since there appears to be no observational e such that P(p/n.e)>P(p/n), or P(p/n.e)<P(p/n).

Now, let us call a proposition "unconformable" if and only if it is contingent, unverifiable, and every observation-statement is initially irrelevant to it. It is an obvious but in any case a true principle of probability,that if P(p/n.q) = P(p/n) then P(-p/n.q) = p(-p/n);and hence that if a proposition is initially irrelevant to another, it is initially irrelevant to the negation of that other. Consequently if a proposition is unconfirmable, its negation is unconfirmable too.

It follows that a proposition which is unconfirmable (and hence contingent and unverifiable), is one the falsity of which is possible in the first, the second, and the third of the three senses of "p is possible" which have now been noticed. For its falsity is consistent with itself; also with every observation-statement; and every observation-statement is initially irrelevant to it.

2. "Whatever is a raven is black" is a stock example, as I said earlier, of a proposition which is not only contingent but unverifiable. So almost all philosophers agree, then, in thinking that the falsity of this proposition is consistent both with itself and with every observation-statement; that is, that its falsity is possible in the first and in the second sense noticed above.

About the same number of us would regard "Whatever is a raven is black" as <u>not</u> unconfirmable. There may be a few dissenters on this point. If there are any, they would be inductive sceptics who maintain that, in any inductive argument, the observational premiss is (despite the vulgar prejudice to the contrary) initially irrelevant to the conclusion. Most of us, however, are not such inductive sceptics. We think that, for example, reports of ravens found by experience to be black, make it more probable that whatever is a raven is black, than it is prior to experience, or in relation to necessary truths alone.

Most of us think, then, that the falsity of "Whatever is a raven is black" is possible, in the sense that it is consistent with itself; in the sense that it is consistent (not only with itself but) with every observation-statement; but <u>not</u> in the third sense, of which the additional element was that every observation-statement be initially irrelevant to it.

3. So much for what most of us think. What would <u>Hume</u> think about the same matters?

Neither "Whatever is a raven is black" not its negation, he would say, could ever be "demonstrated", (by which of course he means, deduced from necessary truths). Experience alone, he would say, could ever give us any reason to believe such a proposition. This is Hume in his Baconian vein; a vein which, although of course it is an essential and omnipresent element in his philosophy,is also the least distinctive,or most commonplace, element in it. In short,Hume would regard "Whatever is a raven is black" as we do: that is,as contingent,and hence as a proposition the falsity of which is possible at least in the sense that it is self-consistent.

It is equally obvious that Hume would regard "Whatever is a raven is black" as unverifiable. For of the theses he advances about propositions like this one, the Baconian thesis that only experience can give us any reason to believe them,is only the most obvious and least important. A further, more important, and more characteristic Humean thesis is this: that even experience cannot give us a completely conclusive reason to believe them. No number or variety of ravens all observed to be black, he is always telling us, proves that the unobserved ones are all black too. This is Hume in his vein of 'inductive fallibilism', (as I have elsewhere called it):a vein which we are now constantly and quite erroneously tempted to dismiss as truistic, but which in any case is clearly present and prominent in his philosophy. Hume would, then, again agree with the rest of us,and regard "Whatever is a raven is black" as a proposition the falsity of which is possible, in the sense that is consistent (not only with itself but) with every observation-statement.[2]

But Hume was not only an inductive fallibilist, content to maintain that the falsity of "Whatever is a raven is black"is possible just in the sense that it is consistent with (itself and) every observation-statement. He was also an inductive sceptic, and therefore one who maintained that the falsity of such a proposition is possible in some sense still stronger than that.

In particular,if what I have elsewhere tried to show is true, Hume was an inductive sceptic of the kind mentioned hypothetically at the end of 2 above. The kind, that is, who maintain that the observational premiss of every inductive argument is initially irrelevant to the conclusion.

I cannot of course re-assemble here all the grounds which,in chapters 2-4 of the book referred to in footnote 2, I have given for this view. The most I can do, but what may perhaps suffice with readers especially familiar with the texts of Hume's philosophy, is to remind the reader of two propositions that are always being reiterated throughout Hume's philosophy of the understanding, rather like two bells which "answer" one another.

The first is, that prior to experience, we have no reason to believe a proposition such as "Whatever is a raven is black". (This is of course pure commonplace, as Hume often says it is: a Baconian soporific, intended to unready us for the shocking blow that is to follow.) The second is, that even after experience we have no reason to believe them![3] A thousand ravens all discovered by experience to be black,he would say, are no more reason to believe"Whatever is a raven

is black", than one black raven is; and one, no more reason than none.

Hume admits indeed,or rather constantly emphasises, that a thousand ravens all found to be black do in fact produce, in the minds of men, belief in "Whatever is a raven is black"; as one black raven,or none, does not. But of course Hume was not only a natural-historial of belief-formation, content just to catalogue the kinds of evidence that are in fact satisfactory to the mind. He was also, and much more importantly, concerned to evaluate those kinds of evidence; to ask whether they would satisfy the mind, "if reason determined us". And in the case of inductive evidence, his answer was emphatically that it would not.

If this exegesis is correct,then according to Hume, "Whatever is a raven is black" is no more probable (or less) in relation to e.n,where e is observational and n necessarily true, than it is in relation to n alone, or prior to experience. In other words Hume regards this proposition in just the way that most of us regard "The Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father and the Son"; that is, as unconfirmable.

If so,Hume went even further than the rest of us in maintaining that the falsity of"Whatever is a raven is black" is possible. For the rest of us, as we saw, maintain only that its falsity is possible in the sense that it is consistent with itself and with every observation-statement.Whereas Hume, if I interpret him rightly, maintained in addition that its falsity is possible in the sense that every observation-statement is initially irrelevant to it.

But in order not to rely here on an interpretation of Hume's inductive scepticism which is specifically my own, I do not intend to affirm categorically what I have just affirmed conditionally;but only a weaker thesis.Being an inductive fallibilist, Hume regarded the falsity of "Whatever is a raven is black"as possible in the sense that it is consistent with itself and with every observation-statement. But being not only an inductive fallibilist but an inductive sceptic,he must have regarded the falsity of such a proposition as possible in some sense of "possible"which is stronger than that. Exactly what the additional element in this stronger sense of "possible" is, we can afford in the present context to leave unspecified. I have made clear what I think it is, viz. the initial irrelevance of every observation-statement to the falsity of the proposition in question; but let us waive the detail. The essential point is that Hume regarded the falsity of "Whatever is a raven is black" as possible, in some sense of "possible" stronger than "consistent with itself and with every observation-statement". And this much is certain from his being an inductive sceptic, and not merely an inductive fallibilist, at all.

Of course I do not suggest that Hume, even in his philosophical works,is an inductive sceptic consistently.That is obviously not so. It is not hard to find passages in which he writes as though an unverfiable contingent proposition, "All men must die" for example, is certain, or its falsity impossible. In some of these passages Hume is simple, sometimes avowedly, speaking with the vulgar.[4]If there are others where

this is not so, then these passages must simply be regarded as minor departures from consistency with the main theses of his philosophy of the understanding. For taken as anything else, they would prove Hume to be not only no inductive sceptic, but not even an inductive fallibilist! Whereas he certainly was both.

To recapitulate. Hume regarded the falsity of such a proposition as "Whatever is a raven is black" as possible, in no fewer than three senses. First, in the sense that it is consistent with itself. Second, in the stronger sense that it is consistent (not only with itself but) with every observation-statement. Third, in some still stronger sense.

4. Now consider, instead of "Whatever is a raven is black", "Whatever begins to exist must have a cause of existence". Let us call this proposition 'the Causal Principle'. How did Hume regard it?

First, as contingent; and hence he regarded its falsity as possible at least in the sense that it is consistent with itself.

He wrote, for example, that something which begins to exist without a cause "is so far possible, that it implies no contradiction or absurdity".[5] It would be easy to defend the exegetical thesis just stated, by adding further quotations to the same effect; but surely it is unnecessary to do so. For the thesis is as obvious as almost any in the entire his-

tory of philosophy

Second, Hume regarded the Causal Principle as unverifiable;and hence regarded its falsity as possible in the sense that it is consistent (not only with itself but) with every observation-statement.

This exegetical thesis is scarcely more doubtful than the first one. It hardly admits of doubt that Hume had some opinion as to the sufficiency or insufficiency of observation-statements to entail the Causal Principle. The only question therefore is did he regard the Causal Principle as deducible from observation-statements,that is,as verifiable, like "There is such a thing as a green raven"? Or did he regard it as not so deducible, that is, as unverifiable, like "Whatever is a raven is black?" The former alternative needs only to be stated,for its un-Humean character(not to mention its absurdity) to be manifest. So Hume regarded the Causal Principle as unverifiable.

In case this needs other defence,I defend it thus. It is clear that Hume regarded the Causal Principle in the same way as he regarded the proposition that unobserved instances resemble observed ones, and the proposition that the future resembles the past: the various 'Resemblance-theses' (as I have elsewhere called them), that he so often discussed. So if he regarded the Resemblance-theses as unverifiable, he regarded the Causal Principle too as unverifiable.Now he did regard the Resemblance-theses as unverifiable. For he is always telling us that a Resemblance-thesis could be deduced from observational premisses, only with the aid of another

premiss, (vis. the Resemblance-thesis itself), the addition of which would make the deduction circular.[6] Which implies that a Resemblance-thesis cannot be deduced from observation-statements along; that is, is unverifiable. So he regarded the Causal Principle as unverifiable too.

Now, an inductive scepticism cannot discriminate between one unverifiable contingent proposition and another, but must regard them all in the samy way,as equally unlearnable from experience. Hume's inductive scepticism,therefore, requires him to regard the Causal Principle, (since he certainly regards it as contingent and unverifiable),in just the way he regards "Whatever is a raven is black." And that is, if my interpretation of his inductive scpeticism is correct, as unconfirmable. If that interpretation is correct, then, Hume regarded the Causal Principle as a proposition the falsity of which is possible, not only in the first and second senses noticed above, but even in the third: that every observation-statement is initially irrelevant to it.

Again, however, in order to avoid relying on an interpretation of his inductive scepticism which is specifically my own,I will affirm not all that I have just said but only this weaker thesis: that Hume is required by his inductive scepticism to regard the falsity of the Causal Principle as possible in some sense of "possible" stronger than "consistent with (itself and) every observation-statement".

I do not say,again,that Hume consistently does regard the Causal Principle as unconfirmable. He does not.

Just as there are passages in his works in which "All men must die" is spoken of as though its falsity were impossible, so there are passages in which the Causal Principle is spoken of in the same way. We must, again, regard these passages either as concessions to common speech, or as minor lapses from consistency with Hume's main theses. For taken as anything else, they would prove that Hume regarded the Causal Principle, not merely as confirmable, but as verifiable!

I advance, then, three exegetical thesis.

(1) Hume regarded the falsity of the Causal Principle as possible, in the sense that it is consistent with itself.

(2) Hume regarded the falsity of the Causal Principle as possible, in the sense that it is consistent not only with itself but with every observation-statement.

(3) Hume's inductive scepticism required him to regard the falsity of the Causal Principle as possible, in some still stronger sense.

To deny (3) would require us to hold that, regarding unverifiable contingent propositions such as the Causal Principle, Hume maintained no inductive scepticism at all, but went no further than an inoffensive fallibilist thesis: that the falsity of any such proposition is consistent with(itself and) every observation-statement. To deny (2) would require us to hold that Hume was not even an inductive fallibilist about the Causal Principle, but regarded it either as a verifiable contingent proposition or a necessary truth. To deny (1) would

require us to hold that he regarded it as a necessary truth.

5. I advance these theses about the philosophical works published in Hume's lifetime. Refe: ing to the same works, Hume himself once wrote a private letter, in which he says the following.

> *"But allow me to tell you, that I never asserted so absurd a Proposition as that any thing might arise a Cause: I only maintained, that our Certainty of the Falsehood of that Proposition proceeded neither from Intuition nor Demonstration; but from another Source. That Caesar existed, that there is such an Island as Sicily; for these Propositions, I affirm, we have no demonstrative nor intuitive Proof. Would you infer that I deny their Truth, or even their Certainty? There are many different kinds of Certainty; and some of them as satisfactory to the Mind, tho perhaps not so regular, as the demonstrative kind."*[7]

Greig gives the whole of the letter, and in his footnotes explains the circumstances surrounding it. The essential circumstances are these. The letter was written in 1754 to John Stewart, Professor of Natural Philosophy at Edinburgh 1742-59. Both Hume and Stewart were at the time members of the Philosophical Society in Edinburgh, a body which subsequently became the Royal society of Edinburgh. The Society had published a volume of essays, one of which was an essay by Kames on the laws of motion, and another of which was by Stewart, commenting

on Kames'.In the course of this essay Stewart,with a reference by name to Hume's Treatise, had written, inter alia:

> *"That something may begin to exist,or start into being without a cause, hath indeed been advanced in a very ingenious and profound system of the sceptical philosophy; but hath not yet been adopted by any of the societies for improvement of natural knowledge..."*[8]

The paragraph quoted above from Hume's letter must clearly have surprised Stewart. I think it would equally surprise most readers of Hume's philosophy. At any rate it ought to surprise them. For although Hume was here writing about his own philosophy, almost everything he says is false or a suggestio falsi.

That something might begin to exist without a cause, is evidently equivalent to the proposition that it is possible for something to begin to exist without a cause. That, in turn, is evidently equivalent to the proposition that the falsity of the Causal Principle is possible. Now, as we have seen, Hume did maintain that the falsity of the Causal Principle is possible, in the sense that it is consistent with itself, and in the stronger sense that it is consistent with (itself and)every observation-statement; and he was required, we have seen, by a major thesis of his philosophy, to regard the falsity of the Causal Principle as possible in some stronger sense still. So, despite what he here writes to Stewart, Hume had maintained that something might begin to exist without a cause,in at least two senses of "might; and was required by his inductive scepticism to maintain it in some stronger sense still.

What Hume says in his first sentence down to the colon, could be true, therefore, only if his "might" were equivalent to "it is possible" in some sense of "possible" weaker than even the weakest of the three senses which we have noticed;hence in some sense of "possible" weaker even than "logically possible" or "self-consistent". But as was pointed out in my first paragraph, there can be no such sense as that. Hence what Hume says here cannot be true.

It is true, as far as I know,that Hume never asserted in print that anything might arise without a cause in those very words. But he would be guilty of a very grave suggestio falsi if that were all that he was now saying.For he certainly did maintain in print propositions in which it is an immediate and an obviously intended consequence, that it is possible, in the various senses we have noticed, for something to begin to exist without a cause.

Hume had not "only maintained" that "our Certainty" of the truth of the Causal Principle "proceeded neither from Intuition nor Demonstration; but from another Source" [sc., experience, of course].He had not only maintained that nothing but experience could make any contingent proposition, the Causal Principle for example, certain. That was only his most obvious, Baconian, thesis. He had further maintained, for a start, that even experience cannot make any unverifiable contingent proposition, the Causal Principle for example, certain. That is his inductive-fallibilist thesis.And he had still further maintained that even experience cannot give us any reason at all to believe any unverifiable contingent proposition, for

example the Causal Principle. That is his inductive-sceptical thesis.

Stewart was perfectly entitled to infer that Hume denied the certainty, that is, maintained the possibility of the falsity, of the Causal Principle. So long as by "possible" is mean "logically possible," he could validly infer this even from Hume's commonplace Baconian thesis, that the Causal Principle is contingent. But when Stewart inferred that Hume denied the certainty, that is,maintained the possibility of the falsity, of the Causal Principle, in some stronger sense of "possible," he was not obliged to infer it from the same weak premiss; as Hume, in the third sentence of the paragraph quoted above, implies he was. There were also available to Stewart, to infer it from, the far more strong and distinctive Humean theses of inductive fallibilism and inductive scepticism. In fact Stewart did infer this conclusion, I have no doubt, from one or both of those theses. Most other readers of Hume have done the same. And the inferences is perfectly valid.

There is a strong <u>suggestio falsi</u>, too, in the last sentence of Hume's paragraph. The suggestion, namely, that he was content in his philosophy just to catalogue the different kinds of evidence which <u>as a matter of fact</u> produce certainty in the mind, and the last man to palter if some of these kinds were "perhaps not so regular" as others. As though he never, except perhaps by inadvertence, looked on any kind of evidence, that satisfies other people, with the eye of criticism,"I will not say, scepticism"! The mind of anyone familiar with Hume's

published philosophy reels in the presence of this paragraph. Yet this is Hume on Hume!

There are two propositions which,as I have said, constantly succeed one another in Hume's philosophy of the understanding, like one bell answering another. The first is, that prior to experience, we have no reason to believe any contingent proposition. By its implied rejection of pure reason, revelation, Aristotle, and indeed every authority except the authority of experience, this proposition is one especially well suited to be "adopted by any of the societies for improvement of natural knowledge." Remembering, therefore, the famous simile of "the bell that called the wits together",we may aptly call this first proposition "Bacon's bell." The second proposition is, that even after experience we have no reason to believe any unverifiable contingent proposition. This strikes the distinctive Humean note of inductive scepticism, and a fortiori of inductive fallibilism. It may aptly be called, therefore, "Hume's bell."

Now it is clear that what had happened between Hume and Stewart was this. Stewart, Hume, and every one else, approved of Bacon's bell being rung, (even ad nauseam). But Stewart, a physicist and a member of the Philosophical Society, believed that Hume's bell, if it were attended to, could only have the effect of entirely dispersing the wits again. And it is surely obvious that, in so believing,Stewart was right. For if Hume's inductive scepticism were true,then the most perfect paradigm of wasted effort must be a society dedicated to learning from experience.

Hume's response,quoted above, was to protest that he had rung only Bacon's bell,and never rung his own at all! This protest is incredible on the very face of it, since if it were true, Hume would be a completely insignificant figure in the history of thought. But as we have seen, it is not true.

6. How could Hume write so misleadingly about his own philosophy? When he had so often insisted that "we cannot give a satisfactory reason,why we believe, after a thousand experiments, that a stone will fall or fire burn",[9] how could he say that he had only maintained that from sources other than experience, we cannot give such a reason? When he had so often emphasized the insufficiency of experience to justify certain beliefs, how could he persuade himself or hope to persuade others, that his only thesis had been the 'little one', that experience is necessary to justify them?

Once before when he was trying to evade a charge of "scepticism" against his writings,Hume had performed this same transparent manoeuvre with respect to the Causal Principle. This was in the long paragraph on p.22 (in the original pagination) of A Letter from a Gentleman to his friend in Edinburgh.[10] Now the paragraph immediately before that one is certainly insincere.[11] The possibility naturally suggests itself, there-

fore, that Hume was insincere also in the following paragraph, and again in the above paragraph of his letter to Stewart, which says essentially the same thing. But there is nothing positively to support this hypothesis, and in the case of the Stewart letter, everything is against it.

We are reduced, then, to the hypothesis of error. How then, could Hume err so far?

To some extent he may have been mislead by his own examples. For these, while they lend some plausibility to his protest, are not really what the case requires. That Caesar existed, that there is such an Island as Sicily, are indeed contingent propositions, as they are required to be by the parallel Hume Draws between them and the Causal Principle. But parallelism with the Causal Principle requires them to be unverifiable as well as contingent; which they are not. Indeed. they are themselves observation-statements; and that is why Hume is at liberty to regard them as certain.

Still, some deeper explanation than this seems called for. I think the explanation is to be found in one of those conflicts of intention in Hume which have been well portrayed by Professor Passmore:[12] the conflict, in particular between 'Hume the positivist' and 'Hume the sceptic',(specifically the inductive sceptic). On the one hand Hume is a zealous partisan and defender of empirical science, and even, he hopes an extender of it; while he reserves his scepticism for miracles,the 'mysteries of the Trinity' (the procession of the Holy Ghost, for example). and the like. On the other hand, the impetus of his own enquiry, into the kind of reasoning on which

empirical science relies, carried him to a sceptical conclusion about science itself. This conclusion, however, is so bizarre, and obliterates so disastrously the distinction between scientific sense and religious nonsense, that Hume, whenever he wished to stand forth as a partisan of science, or even as a person of common sense, had a strong motive for forgetting that he had ever arrived at it. And this motive would be especially strong in connection with the Causal Principle: for that is a proposition which is especially deeply embedded in the scientific enterprise, and yet is, qua contingent and unverifiable, as much exposed to his inductive scepticism as even the most peripheral proposition of that kind, such as "Whatever is a raven is black."

At any rate, this is the best explanation I can suggest of Hume's mistake in the letter to Stewart. I doubt whether the explanation is adequate. If not, some one else may be able to suggest a better one. In any case we have one consolation: that even if no adequate explanation is forthcoming, it does not matter much. If a philosopher in a private letter contradicts the whole tenor of his published philosophy, the thing may be puzzling, even inexplicable; but it is not in itself of much importance.

7. The importance of the paragraph quoted above from Hume's letter to Stewart, does not lie in itself, but in the use that

has been made of it by the most influential of Hume's 20th-century commentators, the late Professor Norman Kemp Smith.

The overall impression made by Hume's philosophy on its readers has always been remarkably uniform; and it has been of the kind which they have tried to express by calling it "sceptical", or "negative", or "critical", or "destructive." Hume has appeared to his readers as pre-eminently a subverter of natural or commonsense beliefs. On the Treatise Hume himself wrote in the Abstract that "the philosophy contained in this book is very sceptical;"[13] and no one, I think, before the present century, ever saw any reason to dissent from that verdict. There is, indeed, room and need for a precise account of what his characteristic scepticism consists in. But as to the broad fact, opinion has been uniform and emphatic.

Professor Kemp Smith, however, first in some famous articles[14] and later in his influential book[15], advanced a quite opposite view of Hume's philosophy. On this view of it, his philosophy was intended not to subvert but to endorse our natural beliefs: to allow us to regard them as no less certain then, prior to philosophical reflection they seemed to be.

Belief in the Causal Principle is prominent among those natural beliefs which, according to Kempt Smith, Hume's philosophy allows us to regard as certain.To support his interpretation, therefore,Kemp Smith needs to find passages in which Hume has written as though he regards the Causal Principle as certain, or its falsity as impossible. Such passages do exist, as I have said, and Kemp Smith quotes two of them.[16] But a passage which supports his interpretation much more explicitly,

is the paragraph discussed above, from Hume's letter to Stewart. Kemp Smith accordingly attaches much importance to this letter, and as well as discussing it in his text, in chapter XVIII, gives the letter in full, and will comment, in an appendix to that chapter.

I have already indicated what I think of those passages in Hume's works in which contingent unverifiable propositions are spoken of as though they can be certain: that they are either concessions to common speech, or else minor lapses from consistency with the main theses of his philosophy of the understanding. And in general, I think that the common interpretation of Hume's philosophy, as sceptical, is true; and that Kemp Smith's interpretation, consequently, is false.

I could not, of course, in a short paper, undertake to establish such a general conclusion as that. But I do claim to have shown that Kemp Smith's interpretation, at least so far as it rests on the letter to stewart, is groundless. That letter, indeed, supports Kemp Smith's interpretation. But the published philosophy contradicts the letter.

D. C. Stove,
Department of Traditional and Modern Philosophy,
Sydney University.

FOOTNOTES

1. See Logical Foundations of Probability, (Chicago University Press, 1950), p. 356. My sense of "initial irrelevance" is in fact slightly wider than Carnap's, since he (in effect) requires n to be tautological, not just necessarily true. The 'relevance' terminology in general goes back, of course, to Keynes' Treatise on Probability, (Macmillan, London, 1921.)

2. Of course the boot is really on the other foot: it is we who agree with Hume. For it was he more than any one else who taught us that propositions like "Whatever is a raven is black" are unverifiable. On the whole subject of his inductive fallibilism, see my Probability and Hume's Inductive Scepticism, (Oxford University Press, 1973), especially Ch. 7.

3. Here are five places where Hume uses the expression "even after", to introduce his inductive-sceptical thesis, and to echo, as indicated above, a corresponding 'Baconian' thesis. Treatise, p. 91 and p. 139; Abstract, p.294 and p.297; Enquiry, p.32. (These and subsequent references are to the Selby-Bigge editions in the case of the Treatise and Enquiry; and in the case of the Abstract, to David Hume on Human Nature and the Understanding, ed. Flew, (Collier Books, N.Y., 1962.)

4. For example, Treatise, p. 124, second paragraph, third sentence.

5. Treatise, p. 80.

6. For example, Enquiry pp. 35-36; Treatise, p. 90; Abstract, p. 294.