The Unity of Hume's Thought
Joseph Agassi
Hume Studies 10th Anniversary Issue, (1984) 87 - 109.

THE UNITY OF HUME'S THOUGHT

1. Introduction: Hume Today

Hume's works continue to fascinate historians of both philosophy and of the social sciences. The literature on him is expanding and invites some overview, some guidelines. In particular, certain rules of interpretation have to be laid down, certain achievements have to be listed and not allowed to get lost because of negligence, certain trends in reading Hume have to be established, and leading problems put high on the agenda. Of course, each item on such a list has to be open to revision, but consensus nonetheless may be reached, however tentative.

The starting point may well be the works of Fr. Vindig Kruse (1939) and Norman Kemp Smith (1941). The former analyzed Hume's regret at having published his early Treatise. Hume's expressed regret made some authors ignore his Treatise, and others confine their attention to it, ignoring his other works, as the product of -- in his own words -- the "lowly love of literary fame." Kruse found that Hume regretted his impetuous presentation, not the content of the book. This leaves much scope for setting out changes in Hume's views as they unfold, but no author who ignores Kruse's argument deserves serious consideration. Since by and large Kruse's argument was accepted, the problem is this: How is Hume's philosophy in the strict sense related to his other writings -- psychological, political, economic, historical, and aesthetic? Without the work of Kruse the problem would not arise, and without the problem we would not have Kemp Smith's study, the basis of all later interpretations, all variations on his work. This is not surprising, since Kemp Smith was the first to reject the view of Hume's philosophy as a phenomenalism and an extreme

skepticism, the logical continuation of purely epistemological considerations in the tradition of the austere philosophic thought (allegedly) set out by Locke and Berkeley. Kemp Smith ascribed to David Hume a variant of a much more reasonable philosophy, a sort of realism or, to use his own label, 'naturalism.'

The label of naturalism is ambiguous on two counts. First, since it is not the same as materialism or realism, it leaves some room for phenomenalist aspects of Hume's view. What, then, exactly is naturalism and how does it fit with Hume's critique of the claims that substances and causes exist? Secondly, naturalists may endorse either a common sense view of the world, or they endorse a scientific image of the world. But the common sense view of the world seems to conflict with the scientific one. Kemp Smith mentions both Newton's and Hutcheson's influences on Hume. Hume is thus open to two readings -- the British, common sense reading, exemplified by A.H. Basson (1958) and A.J. Ayer (1982), and the scientific reading, exemplified by John Passmore (1952) and James Noxon (1973).

The scientific reading has one advantage over the common sense reading: it ascribes to Hume a view of science which, since the Einsteinian revolution, has not been widely held by commentators -- as a consequence, those commentators have a greater distance from the view they ascribe to Hume than the common sense interpreters do. On this interpretation it is easier to reconcile Hume's skepticism with his scientism -- since both may be erroneous, there is no need to endorse all of Hume's central points as the common sense interpreters try to do. The common sense reading of Hume is meant to present his arguments, in certain modern modifications, as overcoming his own skepticism. Whether this can be done is a matter of

open philosophical dispute.

The common sense school is less historically-minded. Indeed, it identifies its own common sense with that of Hume's. It thus endorses Hume's distinction between the vulgar and the philosophical and with Kemp Smith declares that Hume's sympathy and social writings go with the vulgar and that his skeptical critique is the core of his philosophical ideas.

Since the vulgar endorse causation (yet as Hume philosophically proves, with no rationale but out of habit), the claim that Hume sides with the vulgar despite his unanswerable critique of the vulgar view amounts to the claim of Russell and of Popper that ultimately Hume was an irrationalist; Russell even ascribes to him the position of the initiator of all subsequent irrationalism (History of Western Philosophy)!

In what follows I will suggest the following theses. First, Hume's philosophy in the narrow sense is a part of his philosophy, that is to say, of his science. Second, he deemed the vulgar irrational; in his view humans are irrational -- except for philosophers while they philosophize. Third and last, this view is the heart of the unity of all of Hume's writings; his Treatise on Human Nature contains his principles of the science of man.

But let me stress the problem at hand. The problem of reconciling Hume's philosophy with his other writings has a rich historical background. On the one hand we have David Hume the historian, as he is still characterized in the British Museum catalogue. He is an author in his own right, a social and political writer of great renown whom philosophers barely notice. The exception is Richard H. Popkin, who was impressed by the catalogue mentioned, who studied his histories,

and who noted, together with David F. Norton and other disciples, that Hume's historical method is very much within the skeptical tradition in modern philosophy. Yet, by and large, this Hume of Popkin and his followers is hardly the Hume of the history of philosophy proper.

The tradition of the history of philosophy began with G.F.W Hegel's History of Philosophy, a work devoted to philosophers with systems, where a system for a modern philosopher comprises a theory of knowledge, a related theory of substance, and a subsequent attitude to the mind-body problem. This defines philosophy in the narrow sense. Hegel intentionally ignored other aspects of modern philosophers' works, especially their social philosophy, which we know he disliked intensely because of its individualism and liberalism. His success in this division of labour was immense.

Hegel also influenced greatly our desire to look at ideas in their historical context. The history of philosophy and the history of science have finally caught up with the general trend, and we now wish to see every interesting thinker in his context. We are now trying to put back what Hegel himself pushed aside. Can this be done? In some cases it is not difficult to combine the philosophical and other writings of a classical author; in Hume's case the difficulty is enormous. Hume's other writings are extremely worldly, yet his philosophical works are so quaint that he confessed that contemplating his own philosophy depressed him so much that after an hour of contemplation he needed good food, a game of backgammon and jolly conversation to recover. It is not that he was or was not depressive, but that his philosophy seemed even to him just too incredible, intuitively speaking. This, of course, strengthens the view that

he finally sided with common sense. But even then, the question remained, how did he overcome his arguments against common sense? And if he did overcome them, what was their worth for him?

I consider metaphysics, or philosophy, as offering at best intellectual frameworks for scientific research. If we consider Hume's philosophy as a framework for social science, one designed by intention, then we may assume that he viewed his philosophy and his social studies as a single scientific system -- especially in light of his hostility to all metaphysics.

But my view of metaphysics is not necessary to meet the problem at hand. Hume's works regularly mix philosophy and social studies, though his Treatise has more philosophy and his Essays and Inquiry more social studies. And whenever we want to interpret an author, it is a fruitful rule to use all his works in order to gain an integrated image -- including letters and, when available, also drafts, unpublished or posthumously published works and even his library. We may then try to test our interpretation of an individual's view against our integrated image of the individual person. It is not hard to have an integrated image of Hume the person as long as we ignore his philosophy, an image which well integrates his social studies. Can we have an integrated interpretation of Hume's quaint philosophical writings and his worldly social writings? How?

Concern with the interpretation of Hume need not be purely historical. His critique of causation and of induction is still topical. Bertrand Russell brought Hume's critique up-to-date in his Problems of Philosophy of 1912, where most problems of philosophy were restated with immense clarity, raising the standards of philosophizing in wide circles (see his

self-appraisal in the end of his opening piece in P.A. Schilpp, The Philosophy of Bertrand Russell). Since then, a few simplified versions of Hume's critique of induction appeared, especially in the writings of Russell and of Popper, as still valid and topical material. This provoked two strong reactions. The first concerned the emphasis Hume placed on the scientific character of his contribution: an "Attempt to introduce the experimental Method into MORAL SUBJECTS" (as the subtitle of his A Treatise on Human Nature put it). Hume deemed himself the Newton of the social sciences; Kemp Smith and John Passmore both stressed Hume's application of the Newtonian method to the social sciences. So, later on, did Jeremy Bentham, the disciple of Adam Smith, who himself was the disciple and close friend of Hume, and so still later did St. Simon, Karl Marx, and others. Yet neither Bentham, nor St. Simon nor Marx was a skeptic; Hume was.

The second and quite topical reaction was the intense attention to the following question, then. Could Hume's skepticism and his Newtonianism be at all squared?

Passmore says there is no way to square Hume's skepticism with his naturalism, his claim to have erected a truly scientific -- i.e. certain -- study of human nature. Passmore concedes that Hume had a tremendous local logical acumen, but claims he had no global sensitivity to logic at all. This cannot be right, for Hume, to repeat, felt sick from dwelling on his philosophy but, presumably, not when he wrote his extremely popular Essay, History, etc.! The clash between the global and the local, the philosophical and the quotidian, is well and vividly described by him. Moreover, the secondary literature gives rise to the feeling that the daily (and empirical) is suppressed in

his Treatise and the general (and skeptical) in his Inquiry -- but this is only a matter of emphasis: in his writings they never quite separate! As I think things stand, Hume's philosophy consists of a general framework and a set of empirical observations which fit, according to Hume himself, very well within that framework. But both his phenomenalism and this way of looking at human beings "from the outside" made him sick; he then escaped "into the inside", into the uncontemplative part of the business of living. Hence, the common sense interpretation of his works as a defense, however qualified, of the vulgar views -- by purging the vulgar of metaphysics -- is plainly a misconception -- both of Hume the individual and of Hume the philosopher. Rather, Popkin's and Norton's view of Hume's social and historical studies as excessively critical for normal tastes but well within the skeptical tradition touches a nerve and gets Hume the man more correctly -- except, of course, that Hume was decidedly not a skeptic, as Norton himself explains. The correlation of Hume's critique and his philosophy, however, is still left unexplained by the Popkin school. We need to take Hume's skeptical critique as seriously as possible and see how he squared it with his scientism -- even though Passmore is right in denying that any such squaring may look satisfactory to us.

2. Hume's Critique

Hume's critique is admitted to be of monumental importance. Bertrand Russell, we remember, declared it the seed of all subsequent irrationalism. Hume's critique also scintillates with many facets. Let me mention here only two -- the one belonging to metaphysics, or ontology, or the theory of the building blocks of the universe, the other belonging to

epistemology, or the theory of knowledge. Metaphysically, Hume's critique considers all the theories of causal connections: causes plainly do not exist. Causes are, he says, the cement of the universe; hence, when causes vanish, the universe falls apart, and nothing is left of it but the totality of facts, to use the apt expression introduced in Ludwig Wittgenstein's Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. (The view of the young Wittgenstein as a metaphysical follower of Hume was first proposed by Karl Popper and was then considered outrageous, believe it or not.) Epistemologically, Hume's critique is of all theories of the knowledge of causes: causes plainly cannot be known. Causal connections are, he says, what we claim to know about things; hence when causal connections vanish, knowledge falls apart, and nothing is left of it but habits of thinking.

The two critiques are obviously very closely linked; indeed, it takes effort to separate them. The link is the theory of both Sir Francis Bacon and René Descartes, which Popper has characterized as an 'epistemological optimism' and which is now known by Popper's label -- the theory of truth as manifest or the theory of manifest truth. Truth, we know, is all too often hidden from us; in principle, however, it can always be found, Bacon and Descartes assured us, provided we go about it the right way. In principle, then, the truth is always one way or another within human reach: no truth is in principle beyond human reach. Whatever is in principle beyond human grasp, then, is not permitted by Nature to exist in the first place. Now, obviously, Bacon's theory of truth as in principle manifest and Hume's theory of causality as in principle hidden, together yield the conclusion that causes do not exist in Nature.

How, then, does Hume prove that causality is in

principle hidden? He has a theory of knowledge -- as knowledge by perception or by induction. He has a theory of perception and he has a theory of induction. He deduces from his theory of perception the conclusion that causes can never be perceived. He proves that causal connections cannot be logically deduced from facts. And he proves all inductive inference inconclusive. His result then trivially follows: we can never know causes.

Hume's critique of inductive inference is the height of simplicity: we can never validly deduce from the past any conclusion about the future. A principle enabling us to do so in general would be a principle of induction, and such a principle would be question-begging and so will offer us no proven valid inference. We could, of course, make specific inferences from past to future, but only in specific cases where we possess knowledge of some causal connections. But this precisely is what we do not have as yet. Nor shall we ever have such knowledge.

(Whether this line of reasoning is valid is still contested these days. Russell and Popper endorse the claim as valid. Rudolf Carnap denied the claim (Logical Foundations of Probability). Once C.G. Hempel tacitly moved away from the Carnapian claim, its stock fell drastically.)

Hume offers us a package deal, then, which has entangled ingredients, especially for those who take seriously his good-natured admission that he was merely streamlining the philosophy of John Locke. The three chief ingredients are his metaphysics, his epistemology, and his theory of perception. And, of course, we may question any or all of these ingredients. There are philosophers belonging to each of these categories. We also have those who, with Popper and Passmore, do not endorse the view of the

truth as manifest. How do all these deviations from Hume influence the interpretation of Hume's writings?

The accepted canons of interpretation require that an interpreter should lay aside as much of his disagreement with an author as possible. Yet this is not always as easy as it sounds. Many interpreters both endorse the theory of manifest truth and ascribe it to Hume -- twice rather uncritically. Once we are critical of the theory, we then ask if we should ascribe it to Hume all the same. The answer is in the affirmative, so it looks as if this way no change is effected. Yet this is not the case: it is because the theory of manifest truth is uncritically endorsed that its endorsers deem Hume a skeptic par excellence. Passmore, who like Popper rejects the theory of truth as manifest, can say phenomenalism is not skeptical no matter what anyone says; as a result Hume's skeptical critique is never globally applied by Hume himself.

At least this is how I read the curious fact that in 1941 Kemp Smith could promote the "current" view of Hume as an all-out skeptic because of his phenomenalism, yet as soon as this reading became canonical Hume was deemed not a skeptic at all but a "moderate" or a "mitigated" skeptic, namely one who advocates scientific skepticism à la Bacon and Descartes. Yet Kemp Smith practically ignored Hume's penetrating skepticism and Passmore simply declared him obviously inconsistent and judged him a poor thinker on global matters -- excellent though he was on all the local matters he touched upon.

The canons of interpretation demand that we deem an author consistent when possible, though allowing that inconsistencies may be discovered later. But, in Hume's case we simply do not know how to apply these canons!

To help clarify matters, let me present the

inconsistency found by Passmore in a more or less Popperian fashion. I want to apply Hume's critique to his own views in order to show that Passmore errs in claiming that it is different from his critique of Hume. Hume was not concerned with a critique of his own views; he applied his own critique only to the extent that it could further his own program of scientific research. But I want the critique to turn on Hume himself in order to show that it amounts to Passmore's critique, yet without blaming Hume for an oversight of global matters.

Hume's inconsistency is in his causal explanation of our causal way of thinking. This inconsistency can be resolved, Norman Kemp Smith would say, by viewing it as thinking on two levels. Put on one level, Hume's claim is that he is in the habit of seeing people develop habits of seeing things in a causal way. Yet he rejects the theory of causality on the ground that it is ungrounded while endorsing the theory of habit despite its being equally ungrounded!

This can be elaborated upon in Hume's way. He declares his view of habit as a general fact, yet his own critique will mutatis mutandis destroy his grounds for his claim! Considering causes or considering habits we can follow the same logical pattern!

This is but a standard form of applying an author's critique of his opponents to his own views. It does not demolish his critique, but it does demolish his own views -- and leads to a thorough skepticism. The purpose of this exercise is to propose that when interpreting Hume we need concern ourselves less with questions of his consistency and more with how he deemed his arguments conducive to the goal of erecting a science of man.

3. Hume's Critique versus Hume's Naturalism

The earliest criticism of Hume's philosophy was that of Kant, and Kant really found nothing in Hume except criticism. He blamed him for having deprived the ship of its compass without attempting to replace it with a better compass! Kant's criticism of Hume's views was offered in a round-about way, as a critique of the associationist perception theory in psychology (and of his other social theories, of his ethics and his aesthetics, but let us overlook these for a while). It was only in recent years that Passmore, Popper, and others criticized phenomenalism. It is clear that phenomenalism was traditionally deemed by most philosophers and historians of philosophy to be the peak of skepticism; in 1941 Kemp Smith took this as part and parcel of the "current" reading of Hume.

Smith himself defended the naturalistic reading of Hume by observing that Hume considered belief not a rational judgment but, as a matter of brute fact, an emotion with which it is hardly possible to tamper. The trouble with this reading is that it helps Hume overcome his own critique so successfully that his phenomenalism and skeptical critique of causation and of induction simply drops out of sight. Granted that there is much merit in Smith's naturalist reading of Hume, it still has to be supplemented, if at all possible: our image of Hume should present an integration of his skepticism with his naturalism. Passmore says this cannot be done in a consistent manner. Even if this is so, we want an integration which, we might reasonably suppose, would look to Hume himself as both consistent and integrated.

We may wish to go further. The locus classicus of Hume's skeptical and phenomenological ideas is in his early Treatise on Human Nature -- human nature, not epistemology, ontology, metaphysics. Not only is the

Treatise consistent with the rest of his work -- except for improvements and modifications, of course -- as Fr. Vindig Kruse insisted, but also his Treatise on Human Nature, which is allegedly an attempt to make the study of human nature empirical and scientific, ends up with a most breath-taking program of continuing it so as to cover all there is to cover in the study of man. The project failed, we remember, because the book "fell still-born from the press." In a sense, what we are trying to do is to correct the folly of our ancestors, and attempt to say a bit more about Hume's sketch and how his panoramic picture could look had he painted it as intended; we do what other practitioners of filling gaps do -- we use his other, perhaps lesser, masterpieces as means to envisage the panoramic view which he left unexecuted.

But we are stuck in the very first move: what is the sketch? How did he intend to turn the sketch into a full-blown picture?

The British common sense interpreters of Hume say he was hostile to speculative hypotheses and wanted his studies of human affairs to be as empirical as possible -- fully empirical, indeed. His critique allowed him to resurrect both induction and causation after a fashion, but only when experience is firm, and only to the extent that experience guarantees. This is terribly disappointing not only as a philosophy but also as a sketch. Indeed, the British common sense interpreters of Hume still have no interest in his contributions to the social sciences.

Passmore's critique of the British common sense interpretation is deadly only when we care about the unity of Hume's thought. For, says Passmore, Hume opposed only metaphysical, idle, speculative hypotheses, not hypotheses that could be put to empirical scientific test. Hence, Hume need not and

would not have struck with common sense alone. This conclusion may be important if we do follow Hume's hypotheses within the social sciences and attempt to see them within his plan of study and this plan as related somehow to his famous critique of causation and of induction and of substance. Otherwise it matters little.

Passmore's own position is only slightly better in this respect. He deems Hume's critique, as well as his other contributions, rather as fragments which do not fit: they cannot fit into any framework which Hume could devise in the light of his own critique. He was not much concerned with the global, in Passmore's judgment, only with given specific issues, on which we all know he was magnificent.

The logic of the situation is clear: Hume's critique demolishes, say, the philosophy of Descartes or of Locke, yet we ignore that critique while interpreting these thinkers. We cannot ignore Hume's critique, however, when interpreting the philosophy of Hume himself!

By any canons of interpretation we must grant Hume his perception theory and his critique of causation and of substance. This alone makes him a phenomenalist. If we push Hume's own critique harder, then even that little remaining phenomenalism will crumble. This Hume did not do. Rather, he somehow reverted to an even more naturalistic view of the world, populated not with substances but with real people and real enough objects in the world. It is hard to see what exactly one says when one asserts both phenomenalism and some fairly commonsensical views about people and things. Can the two ways of presentation be reconciled? Never mind what Smith or Passmore or we think about this; what did Hume think about this?

The answer seems obvious enough, and, indeed, everybody seemingly agrees with it: according to Hume the phenomenal level explains the common sense level, the everyday level, thus legitimizing it. But this is not at all common sense -- it is phenomenalism pure and simple, since no phenomenalist, whether Berkeley or Mach or whoever counts as more of a phenomenalist or less, ever denied that apparently people and things do exist.

Hence the explanation that phenomenalism explains everyday events and common appearances is rejected by all except phenomenalists, and, as a reading of Hume, by all interpreters of Hume, except those who deem him a phenomenalist proper. What other option is there?

Let me repeat, and then elaborate: one cannot expect the alternative to be satisfactory, but one would hope it to be satisfactory in Hume's eyes and to link his phenomenalist and skeptical arguments with social studies. More than that: one could expect, a priori, that any reading of Hume which would provide the link in question would seem possibly satisfactory to Hume. For, as I ventured to argue, once we know Hume's general purpose, we may expect his critical acumen to go with it rather than against it. This is not to claim that he was not self-critical -- Popkin and Norton have shown how self-critical he could be -- but that his thinking was still on the move, so he had to channel his thoughts in his own direction rather than against it as long as his direction seemed feasible. One final point: if his plan really was to emulate Newton, and if he had no criticism of Newton, then any idea of his that he might feel was Newtonian he might find easier to accept than any other idea.

The key seems, then, to be Passmore's claim that, like Newton, Hume was willing to employ

hypotheses (in science) despite his great hostility to hypotheses (in metaphysics). The question is, can the employment of hypotheses ever be justified from Newton's and Hume's viewpoints? To this Passmore gives a clearly negative reply, and he may very well be right. But one need not expect Hume to be wanting in comprehensive critical acumen and a comprehensive vision to ascribe to him this view -- any more than one need do so with Newton.

It should be noted that the British common sense interpreters of Hume agree with Passmore: according to Hume no hypotheses should be legitimized. They take Hume's use of hypotheses as a lapse, whereas Passmore sees it as systemic, in line with Newton. The idea has to be pushed further to allow Hume to have a global view of some significance. This was achieved by James Noxon in 1973 (see bibliography).

In order to make room for a naturalistic metaphysics consistent with Hume's critique, Noxon narrows the critique down to "reasonable" size. The outcome is a non-phenomenological Hume. In brief, we have here a reformed reading of Hume, much more so than Noxon explicitly notices.

We take Newton for a model. This is not quite correct, because Newton was guilty of some metaphysics, and he, too, like Locke, needed some trimming. But to say this of Locke was bold enough of Hume; to say this of Newton would be much too bold, especially since Hume's greatest deviation from Newton was his unmentionable atheism.

We take Newton, then. He followed an inductive method, and a valid one. But it excludes both hypotheses and causation. Hypotheses are permitted, on condition that they are never considered scientific. (To confuse hypotheses with science, said Goethe, is to confuse the scaffolding with the building.) Causality

is never permitted since causal hypotheses are for ever metaphysical. The induction of the vulgar is, we remember, linked with causation, and so is never kosher.

Here we see that Russell's and Popper's divorce of Hume's critique of induction from his critique of causation makes the critique much more general than intended. The root of this anachronism is in Kant's reading of Hume. This is historically explicable -- and in the following way. As Noxon argues, Hume's critique of the vulgar is not so much of common sense as of Cartesianism. To support Noxon we may observe that Kant was much more of a Cartesian than Hume, and propose that because of this Kant felt Hume's critique as more forceful than Hume intended. Indeed, considering all the details over which Kant endorses the views of Descartes, and seeing how much of Descartes Kant took for granted (e.g. matter is by definition extension) makes all this clearer.

With this Hume's alleged phenomenalism is gone. The following, then, emerges from Noxon's reading. We give up causation-as-the-cement-of-the-universe, but we do not thereby achieve a Machian-Wittgensteinian universe of freely floating data arbitrarily arranged. Newton's unification of the data with his universal gravity is one thing and his unification with the law of (psychological) association is another.

That Hume puts gravity and association on a par has to do, of course, with the abolition of all substance -- material as well as mental. This is a variant of neutral monism; and Russell and Popper have, indeed, ascribed to Hume neutral monism plain and simple. But if Noxon is right, then this is a misreading: to say that substance is nonexistent is not to say that nothing exists but data; after all, both Russell and Popper denied the existence of

substance -- in the classical, especially Cartesian, sense -- yet Russell was a phenomenalist and a neutral monist only in part of his career and Popper never was!

This is not to say that Hume's idea works, but to put it where it belongs, in accord with his own repeated insistence -- between dogmatism and fully fledged skepticism. If we allow him the claim that things but not substances exist, then this will do the job nicely. It will also vindicate much of what the British common sense interpreters of Hume say about his philosophy.

4. Hume's Program

Once we see Hume's metaphysics as a mitigated or moderate skeptical extension of Newtonianism, then we can see at once that it demands the abolition of all metaphysics and the grounding of all human science in the law of association. Significantly, this perception is rather commonplace: both the idea that science must be purged of metaphysics and the idea that all social studies must be reduced to psychology, and to associationist psychology at that -- these ideas are standard paraphernalia throughout the Age of Reason. But unless we notice this we will not see the point of the enormous innovation in Hume's approach.

First of all, Hume's attack on metaphysics is extreme by any standard, except perhaps that of some twentieth-century philosophers. He demanded the abolition of induction as commonly understood (in contra-distinction with Newtonian induction), the abolition of all causation, and the abolition of all substance, including the substance of the self and of the deity. Whereas the abolition of the self-as-substance does not in the least abolish the self as an object of perception -- indeed Hume invites his reader to introspect regularly -- the abolition of the deity-

as-substance leaves no room for the diety in philosophy, only in religion proper.

The radical onslaught on metaphysics, when it goes so deeply, does violence to common daily endorsed deep convictions. Contrary to the whole philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein, the young and, even more, the old Wittgenstein, and contrary to all other eminently British philosophers, including Hume's British interpreters from Kemp Smith to Ayer (but excluding Russell, Passmore and Popper, of course), Hume deems common sense irredeemably imbued with bad metaphysics.

Beliefs, then, are not given to rational manipulation: introspect and you will see that your own beliefs are sentiments; they are given.

This is not to say that Hume is an irrationalist; on the contrary, as a rationalist he can look at himself from the outside and admit that he himself is infected with chronic and incurable irrationalism. It is no surprise that his philosophy made him sick. The idea that it was his phenomenalism that made him sick of philosophy is questionable: Mach was never sick of it, nor was Russell. But everyone looking at one's own self "from the outside" and seeing the "inside" as irrational can thereby get sick: this is a very well observed phenomenon.

The central ideas of Hume's theory of human nature were two, then: one was associationism, and it was very common, and the other was the view of humanity as irrational. Hence political theory should not be utopian. Hume's liberalism is akin to Spinoza's, and on the same ground: people are irrational and need to learn how to be rational. Not that Hume was a Spinozist; on the contrary, his opposition to Spinoza was recorded by Kemp Smith when he noticed the enormous influence which Bayle had on Hume. Yet, clearly, Hume did not follow all of Bayle's ideas, particularly not

his contempt for Spinoza's (real or alleged) atheism.

The similarity between the liberalism of Spinoza and of Hume is not a new topic. But looking at the unity of Hume's (and Adam Smith's) metaphysics and social philosophy may enable one to look at Spinoza's social philosophy the way Hume (as well as Smith) would have to have looked at it, attempting to modify it to fit Hume's metaphysics. In my opinion this exercise is very worth-while. In order to go into it we have to discuss the liberalism of Spinoza and of Hume. This, however, is quite another project. What needs emphasis here is that the view of human beings as irrational is neither a simple matter nor an insignificant one. For the traditional claim of man as irrational led to traditionalism and other forms of authoritarianism, some of which are utopian. Rationalistic thinking of the Age of Reason demanded freedom from authority in the name of man's rationality, and this alleged rationality led to both scientism and utopianism. There is no doubt that Hume's view, like Spinoza's, was excessive in its scientism. The claim of Russell and of Popper that he was an irrationalist just has no historical foundation. Yet both Spinoza and Hume refused to be Utopians.

This is not to say that they were not Utopians. The Utopianism of classical liberalism, however, such as it was, had the observation of human folly and irrationality as a central consideration.

I wish to conclude, then, with Hume's confession of love of literary fame. The demand that a thinker be humble is traditional, and Bacon's observation that love of fame vitiates research was very popular throughout the Age of Reason. It was Joseph Priestly who said of Hume's philosophy that it was so poor its appearance could only be explained by Hume's love of fame. Years later, when Priestly's

obstinate clinging to phlogistonism was similarly explained, he said, on the contrary, that his obstinacy brought him only disrepute, whereas the conversion of his former partners to anti-phlogistonism brought them fame. Clearly, Hume's confession of love of literary fame is a kind of self-accusation. Yet, the picture will alter if we deem Hume a social reformer, as his friend and chief disciple Adam Smith was. And the picture should alter. Hume's influence on Smith and on Jeremy Bentham has been studied by Elie Halévy and was presented in his magnificent work, The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism. What one need notice here is the remarkable mixture in Hume of liberalism with conservatism. It is worth mentioning here, too, as an illustration, the fact that at the time Dr. Samuel Johnson deplored the political situation in his country as a tyranny of an intolerable proportion, Hume presented Britain as practically a republic!

Once we notice that Hume was a liberal conservative reformer, we may easily see his concern with the literary success of his writings. If we see his metaphysics as the framework, and for him the rationale, of his work in the social and political sphere, then we can see clearly that already his Treatise on Human Nature was an essay in the social and political direction, yet one which was the starting point of a whole program; we can also see clearly that, once he realized that his framework was more of an impediment than a lever, he was willing to play down its significance though not to ignore it. Fr. Vindig Kruse's thesis is only a part of the interpretation proposed here -- an interpretation which is more forceful and more coherent concerning both Hume's philosophy and his conduct. We have here the beginning of an integrated image of Hume the individual person and of his intellectual output and influence on

posterity. Even such documents as Smith's obituary of Hume gain new significance and more coherent meaning within the framework proposed here.

This is not to endorse Hume's liberal philosophy, or his view of his framework for his scientific activity as part and parcel of it, or his hostility to metaphysics. But all that is another matter.

Joseph Agassi
Tel-Aviv University and
York University, Toronto

Bibliography

Agassi, Joseph. "Towards a Canonic Version of Classical Political Theory", in Marjorie Grene and Debra Nails, Spinoza and the Sciences, Boston Studies in the Philosophy of Science, forthcoming.

_____ Towards a Rational Philosophical Anthropology (Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague, 1977).

Ayer, A.J. David Hume (Past Masters Series, Fontana, London, 1982).

Basson, A.H. David Hume (Pelican, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1958).

Halévy, Elie. The Growth of Philosophic Radicalism. (London: Faber and Faber, 1939); (Boston: Beacon, 1954).

Kruse, Fr. Vindig. Hume's Philosophy in His Work A Treatise of Human Nature and in His Essays (Oxford University Press, London, 1939).

Norton, David Fate. David Hume, Common-Sense Moralist, Sceptical Metaphysician (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1982).

Norton, David Fate and Popkin, Richard H. David Hume: Philosophical Historian (Library of Liberal Arts, Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, 1965).

Noxon, James. Hume's Philosophical Development, A Study of His Method (Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1973, 1975).

Passmore, John A. "Explanation in Everyday Life, in Science and in History", History and Theory, 1962, reprinted in G. Nadel, ed., Studies in the Philosophy of History, 1965.

_____ Hume's Intentions (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1952); (Duckworth, London, 1968).

Popper, Karl R. Conjectures and Refutations (Routledge, London, 1962).

Russell, Bertrand. A History of Western Philosophy: Its Connection With Political and Social Circumstances etc., 1945 and many reprints.

_____ Problems of Philosophy. 1912 and many reprints.

Smith, Norman Kemp. The Philosophy of David Hume, A Critical Study of its Origins and Central Doctrines (Macmillan, London, 1941) and many reprints.