



## **The Dogmatic Slumber of Hume Scholarship**

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# The Dogmatic Slumber of Hume Scholarship

*Nicholas Capaldi*

## State of the Art

If one were to enumerate the issues that have received the most attention in Hume scholarship during the last half century, the list would undoubtedly feature the so-called principle of induction, causal necessity, the self, the relationship of fact and value, scepticism, and the argument from design. If one were to ask what is the popular consensus on Hume's position *vis-à-vis* these issues, the answer would be something like the following:

Hume in his *Treatise*, first challenges his reader to produce a single simple idea that is not a copy of a corresponding impression. And he then abandons the inductive pattern of argumentation so as to be free to use his inductively supported principle—the principle that every simple idea is a copy of a previous impression—as the foundation of his deductive arguments that we have no rational title to believe in the existence of causal connexions, objective moral values, continuing selves, or physical processes independent of our experience.<sup>1</sup>

Depending on how they are understood, each of these assertions about Hume could be either false or misleading. We note, for example, that Hume made complex ideas and not simple ideas the centre of his philosophy; that complex ideas are not wholly reducible to simple ideas, and therefore not analysable without remainder into component impressions; that complex ideas were explicated by Hume in terms of the natural relations that spring from the mind's association of ideas (Hume claimed that "the principle of the association of ideas" was his major innovation in philosophy);<sup>2</sup> that the associative activity of the mind is an instance, in Hume, of the self, not its denial; that the positive Humean conception of the self is given in book 2 on the passions, which many never read; that Hume's entire Newtonian programme in the *Treatise* is based on the assumption that there are physical processes independent of human experience; that Hume did not deny causal connections, only the philosophical "necessity" that others ascribe to causal connections, and that he did so in the interest of explicating how

Newton's physics had replaced Aristotelian physics; and, finally, Hume argued for the intersubjective validity of conventional moral values on transcendental grounds. Few, if any, of these positive points made here about Hume are new, most having already appeared somewhere in the secondary literature. Yet these points have had little cumulative impact. The reason for this is that we are all always working under or against a pervasive misrepresentation of Hume.

The thesis of this paper is that despite the best efforts of a number of writers, starting all the way back with Kant and including John Davis, a canonic misreading of Hume continues to haunt textbooks, courses in the history of philosophy and philosophical education in general, journals, endless dreary dissertations, programme committees, and the minds of Hume scholars. We hope that by identifying and spelling out the programmatic nature of the canonic misreading, Hume scholarship will be awakened from its dogmatic slumber.

What is the origin of the present canonic misreading of Hume?<sup>3</sup> Some clue can be gained by noting the kind of unity the misreading quoted above imposes on Hume. The misreading derives all of Hume's positions in neat deductive order from Hume's supposed epistemology. It makes it appear as if every position is the natural logical consequence of Hume's alleged empiricism. The recent origin of this canonic misreading of Hume is analytic philosophy.

### **The Origin of the Canonic Misreading of Hume**

Analytic philosophy has been and remains the dominant school of philosophy in the twentieth century in the English language cultures where Hume is most likely to be read. Analytic philosophy is itself a product of, and the twentieth century voice of, the Enlightenment Project.<sup>4</sup> As an eighteenth century writer, Hume is not only associated with the Enlightenment Project but it is claimed by analytic philosophers that Hume is one of the progenitors of that project<sup>5</sup> and therefore one of the progenitors of analytic philosophy itself. In short, *the present canonic misreading of Hume originates in the analytic misappropriation of Hume to its own version of the Enlightenment Project.*

What is the Enlightenment Project? It is generally said that the Enlightenment replaced authority, faith, and tradition with reason. It is also said that the Enlightenment identified reason with physical science. *The Enlightenment Project is the attempt to define, explain, and control the human predicament through the use of scientific technology.*<sup>6</sup> This project originated among the French *philosophes* during the eighteenth century, among whom the most influential were Condillac, Diderot, La Mettrie, Helvetius, d'Holbach, Turgot, and Condorcet.<sup>7</sup>

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The primary heirs in the twentieth century of the Enlightenment Project are positivism and analytic philosophy.<sup>8</sup> Translated into the terminology of analytic philosophy, the Project encompasses the following philosophical positions:

### Analytic Metaphysics

1. *Naturalism*
  - (a) the world is self-explanatory;
  - (b) *anti-theological* (anti-supernaturalism).
2. *Scientism*
  - (a) science is the whole truth about everything;
  - (b) physical science is the basic science (*physicalism*); the world is to be understood as a mechanical system devoid of purpose and captured within the formulas of Newtonian mechanics;
  - (c) *unity of science* — the social sciences are to be modelled after the physical sciences, because how we understand the world is fundamental and how we understand ourselves is derivative;
  - (d) science is self-explanatory and intellectually autonomous;
    - (i) “metaphysics” understood as the attempt to understand science in terms of something more fundamental than science itself is unnecessary and pernicious (“*anti-metaphysical*”);
    - (ii) theology is pernicious metaphysics;
  - (e) scientific explanations are superior because they
    - (i) refer to an objective (*realist*) structure independent of the observer,
    - (ii) express *necessary* relationships or *connections* within that structure,
    - (iii) are deductively related, and at some point,
    - (iv) empirically verifiable.

### Analytic Epistemology

1. *Epistemic realism* — deductive explanations commence with truths that refer, ultimately and exclusively, to objective structures; hence, to know is to reflect a structure external to and totally independent of the observer.
2. *Empiricist* — in view of the unity of science and epistemic realism, whatever account is given of the physical world supplies a basis for any account of the process by which human beings acquire knowledge. *Experience* is the internal processing of external stimuli. It is through experience that we can gain access to the

truths that refer to objective structures. Our meaningful thoughts (or concepts), thus, either originate in or cash out into experience without remainder.

3. *Induction* — precisely because these experiential truths refer ultimately to objective (that is, real and necessary) structures, these truths are generalizable.
4. *Rejection of a self*
  - (a) the internal processing of external stimuli must be explainable without reference to an autonomous agent; that is, the world consists ultimately only of objects, and a putative subject must be a concatenation of sub-objects.
  - (b) knowledge of the object-like substructure of subjects permits us to overrule the agent's (or author's) interpretation of his own action (or works).

### Analytic Axiology

1. *Primacy of theoretical knowledge* — as a consequence of scientism, theoretical knowledge is primary and practical "knowledge" has a secondary status.
2. *Dichotomy of fact and value*
  - (a) only factual judgements can be true;
  - (b) value judgements are not truths because they do not refer to structures independent of the observer or agents.
3. *Cognition and volition*
  - (a) given the primacy of theoretical knowledge and the derivative nature of the social sciences, there can be a social scientific or factual account of the substructure of the context within which value judgements function. That is, values are a kind of epiphenomena;
  - (b) knowledge of this substructure is what permits social and political planning. *Utilitarianism* (psychological hedonism, no doubt enlightened) is the favoured hypothesis about this substructure;
  - (c) ultimately, reason must be capable of controlling passion, otherwise there can be neither epistemic realism nor rational social planning.

### The Analytic Reading of Hume

Given what we have said above, the following reading is imposed upon Hume in the analytic history of philosophy:

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### Metaphysics:

#### A. positive

1. Hume is a *naturalist*;
2. Hume is *anti-theological*, that is, opposed to supernaturalism (proof bashing);
3. Hume subscribes to *scientism* (Newtonian);
4. Hume has a *derivative view of social science* (science of man);
5. Hume is *opposed to "metaphysics"* (book burning).

#### B. negative

1. the introspective approach leads to *phenomenalism* and idealism, and hence the loss of metaphysical realism and epistemic realism;
2. phenomenalism leads to the *inability to capture necessity* in the analysis of causation.

### Epistemology:

#### A. positive

1. Hume was an *empiricist*;
2. Hume *rejected the existence of a self*;
3. Hume called attention to the problem of induction/confirmation.

#### B. negative

1. Hume *was a sceptic* (that is, he failed to be a consistent epistemic realist);
2. Hume *committed the fallacy of psychologism*—that is, he substituted psychological explanations whenever his conceptual analyses faltered (for example, causal "necessity" is "psychologized").

### Axiology:

#### A. positive

1. Hume *distinguished fact from value*;
2. Hume denied that statements of value could be derived from statements of fact (*no "ought" from an "is"*);
3. Hume was a kind of *utilitarian*; that is, he believed that there is a universal substructure of wants on the basis of which values can be understood and reconstructed.

#### B. negative

1. Hume persisted in asserting that reason cannot, ultimately, overrule passion; this is a further example of the fallacy of psychologism;
2. Hume was a conservative rather than an advocate of technological social and political planning.

## What's Wrong with the Analytic Reading of Hume?

### Metaphysics:

1. *Hume was not a naturalist.* The world does not explain itself, rather *we* explain our relationship to it. All understanding and all explanation must originate in a human cultural context, that is a social and historical context. Hence, Hume could not have subscribed to the Enlightenment Project, rather he was one of its foremost critics. The very essence of Hume's philosophy is that no form of reason can certify itself, and, therefore, custom or tradition must be the court of final appeal. Tradition, on the contrary, is self-certifying because no epistemic or axiological challenge is meaningful or coherent except within some common inherited framework. A "disengaged" observer won't see this point but any engaged/socialized agent will understand it immediately. Hence the true starting point of philosophy must be with the practical knowledge of a socialized agent.

The existence of a common inherited framework requires its own kind of philosophical rhetoric. Among other things, that rhetoric must remind us that the common inherited framework does not have to be explained or justified because there cannot be a coherent challenge of it. Moreover, if the common inherited framework is a practical one, then it follows that theoretical knowledge ("fact") is parasitic upon practical knowledge ("value"). Any attempt on the part of the "disengaged" observer to make theoretical reason self-certifying or the standard for judging practical reason is thus doomed to failure, to being incoherent (that is, a "false metaphysics"). Paradoxically, arguments developed by academic sceptics can be usefully employed to deflate the rationalist balloon; what makes these sceptical arguments useful is that they work *internally* by turning the rationalist position against itself. By the same token, Hume's critique of scepticism is that it, too, is a disingenuous and incoherent form of disengagement. Hume is both consistent and coherent in criticizing both forms of disengagement from within the common inherited framework.

2. *Hume did not subscribe to scientism.* Hume was a great admirer and champion of science but not of scientism. Hume's science of man is an attempt to shift the focus from the physical world to the human/moral world. It is our understanding of ourselves that is to be basic and our understanding of the physical world that is to be derivative. When Hume praised Newton it was largely to borrow certain methodological principles which reflect how science incorporates and reflects common sense procedures. A further look at the methodology of the science of man reveals that it appealed to agency within a social context—"[we shall] ... glean up our experiments in this science from a cautious observation of human life, and take them as they appear in the common course of the world, by men's behaviour in

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company, in affairs, and in their pleasures" (T xix).<sup>9</sup> In his own positive account of the origins of science ("Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences"), Hume pointed to cultural factors as necessary conditions for scientific advance. Hence, it is not science that explains culture but vice versa. Finally, the true import of Hume's epistemology is that science is not autonomous. As Hume frequently reminds us, there are no ultimate or self-certifying principles, so science cannot ever fully explain the physical world let alone the practice of science itself.

3. *Hume was not anti-metaphysical.* Instead, he distinguished between true and false metaphysics. *False metaphysics* attempts either to establish transcendent truths or to legitimate superstition (hidden social/political agendas). Scientism as well as a good deal of theology are examples of false metaphysics. *True metaphysics* is the explication of the pre-theoretical ground of all thought and action. Moreover, no scientific account can be given of these grounds. In short, there is "this impossibility of explaining ultimate principles" (T xviii). If he were around today, Hume would advocate the burning, metaphorically of course, of a lot more than divinity or school metaphysical texts.

4. *Hume was anti-clerical* (although some of his best friends were clerics). He was concerned about the moral-social-political dangers of organized religion when it attempted to operate as an autonomous arbiter of cultural norms (false metaphysics), and he exposed the inadequacy of the pretentious rationalistic arguments for God's existence. However, this does *not* amount to being *anti-religious*. Not only did Hume engage in conventional religious practices, not only did he acknowledge the existence of the deity, and not only did he argue (through Cleanthes) that the proper social role of religion is to reinforce morality, but he conceded a potentially important metaphysical role for religion. In the *Dialogues*, Hume maintained that if there were some ultimate principle of order in the universe it would bear "some remote inconceivable analogy to ... the oeconomy of human mind and thought."<sup>10</sup> What this amounts to is the claim that how we understand ourselves is fundamental and that how we understand the world is derivative; hence, any ultimate explanation, if there is to be one, must be along "mentalistic" lines as opposed to physicalistic lines; and, finally, whatever their other inadequacies, religion and theology at least capture this point in the concept of God. Finally, it was never inconsistent or disingenuous for Hume to recognize the importance of faith and the subsidiary role of reason, especially since Hume was not subscribing to the Enlightenment Project which elevated reason above faith and tradition.

5. *Hume did not espouse the unity of science.* Although Hume was anxious to draw parallels between the practice of physical science and

the practice of social science, he nowhere maintains that social science is wholly derivative from physical science. Both practices reflect more fundamental human concerns. Moreover, Hume maintained that *explanation in the social sciences was superior to explanation in physical science* precisely because how we understand ourselves is fundamental.

We must certainly allow, that the cohesion of the parts of matter arises from natural and necessary principles, whatever difficulty we may find in explaining them: And for a like reason we must allow, that human society is founded on like principles; and our reason in the latter case, is better than even that in the former; because we not only observe, that men *always* seek society, but can also explain the principles, on which this universal propensity is founded. (T 401-2)

We understand ourselves primarily as historical beings. One cannot fail to notice the crucial role of time and temporality in all of Hume's explanations. While the tendency of physicalists is to try to reduce time to space, Hume, on the contrary, asserted that mental states do not exist in space: "*an object may exist, and yet be no where: ... the greatest part of beings do and must exist after this manner*" (T 235). Nor is it a secret that one of Hume's favourite authors was Cicero. Cicero symbolized the rhetorical tradition within which history emerges as *magistra vitae* or the foundational discipline because it is through its history that a community defines itself (that is, the common inherited framework). Hume's increasing devotion to history as he matured is, therefore, no accident.

6. Surely the most remarkable episode in the history of Hume scholarship is the discussion of causation. Hume was the first modern thinker to appreciate fully the transition from Aristotelian physics to Newtonian physics. *When Hume denied "necessity," he did so in consonance with the scientific achievements of Newton.* Within Aristotelian physics, the identity of formal-efficient-final causes established a "necessary" connection so that to know one allowed us to infer either of the other two. It was Newtonian physics that did away with all causes except efficient causes and thereby broke any connection, necessary or otherwise, among formal, final, and efficient causes. The denial of Aristotelian "necessity" is not the denial of efficient causation either in nature or within ourselves. Those who continue to adhere to the belief in "necessary" connection in causation subscribe to Aristotle's analysis of that concept. However, Aristotle's analysis of causation is parasitic upon Aristotle's physics. Once Aristotle's physics is undermined there is no rational support for the

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Aristotelian analysis of causation. This is also why Hume can find no meaning for the notion of determinism (understood in Descartes and Spinoza as the unity of formal and efficient causes only) as physical necessity.<sup>11</sup>

The issue is not whether we are to take science seriously but whether we are to accept certain metaphysical and programmatic presuppositions about what science is supposed to be. According to the analytic paradigm, the supposed superiority of scientific explanations is their alleged reflection of a necessary causal order in nature (nature being presumed to be self-explanatory). In this respect, analytic philosophy has failed to understand science. Hume's philosophy stands opposed to the analytic programme. In this respect *Hume is more consistent with what science tells us than are proponents of the Enlightenment Project who wish to attribute to scientific explanations more weight than they can bear*. It is ironic that when they come to discuss causality many of Hume's readers have an attack of amnesia and forget the references to Newton's physics. Moreover, anyone familiar with scientific discussions in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would know about the debates over the nature of causation that resulted from the transition from Aristotelian to Newtonian (efficient causes only) physics. Analytic readers ignore all of this and treat Hume's diagnosis of the persistent belief in necessity (that is, Aristotelian belief in the identity of formal-efficient-final causes) as if it existed in a phenomenalist vacuum. This is what comes of presupposing that what Hume was doing was anchoring concepts in experience.

Hume's denial of "necessity" had nothing to do with phenomenism or psychologism but with explicating science itself. Rather than dealing with or even seeing Hume's scientifically based challenge to the transcendent metaphysical pretensions of the Enlightenment Project, analytic readers obfuscate this issue by dwelling on the phenomenological account of the alleged feeling of necessity. This secondary literature, focusing on Hume's two definitions of cause is about as exciting or as insightful as the discussion of the missing shade of blue. But it is precisely what comes of reading Hume as engaging in a foundationalist-empiricist reconstruction of ideas instead of as addressing himself to the scientific issues of the day. Ironically, the Humean text is often treated as a phenomenon without causal antecedents, or it is assumed that Hume read only Locke and Berkeley (and that these gentlemen knew no science).

For the record, the discussion of the psychological origin of the feeling of necessity, a feeling which Hume claims is epistemologically irrelevant, has nothing to do with psychologism. The discussion of the psychological origin comes after the (Newtonian) conceptual

clarification and is a response to previous writers who had made desperate and *ad hoc* introspective appeals to buttress their respective and otherwise faulty analyses of causal necessity.

### **Epistemology:**

1. *Hume was not an empiricist* if by empiricist we mean someone who claims that all knowledge comes to us through experience from external stimuli. Nor is Hume an empiricist if by empiricist is meant someone who thinks that all concepts or combinations of concepts can be totally cashed out in such experiential terms. To begin with, only simple ideas have preceding impressions, and even then there is the exception of the shade of blue. Hume was unconcerned about this exception, but his analytic paradigm readers have turned this into a problem which has produced its own industry. We won't even get into the issue of how in Hume some impressions (namely, passions) are produced by ideas.

More importantly, complex ideas are not just combinations of simple ideas. Hence, complex ideas cannot be traced back just to impressions. All of the important ideas Hume examined were complex, hence none of the important ideas examined by Hume could be explicated empirically.

2. The explication of complex ideas required reference to mental processing, and the mental processing by the principles of association was what Hume thought was his great and novel contribution. The mental processing does not reflect any external structure, rather epistemic structures are projections from the subject onto the object. All of this amounts, of course, to a clear anticipation of Kant's synthetic a priori. No view could be more opposed to the Enlightenment Project and analytic epistemology. *Hume was thus opposed to epistemic realism*. Unwilling, to accept such an alternative, subscribers to the analytic paradigm reject this approach as the fallacy of psychologism. By calling it a fallacy, opponents of the Copernican Revolution in philosophy evade having to offer serious arguments in favour of their own positions.

3. Analytic interpreters want to deny the existence of a self, and they want Hume's endorsement for this denial. The denial of the self serves a number of important and interrelated purposes for the Enlightenment Project. Metaphysically it reinforces the claim that the physical world is primary. In a very important sense, the entire Western intellectual tradition prior to the Enlightenment had made self-understanding primary. The denial of a self is a further attack on the theistic contention of a unique volitional being. Epistemologically, the denial of the self reinforces the claim that knowledge is nothing but the grasping of an external structure. Failure to grasp the structure

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cannot be attributed to any act of the will but becomes in principle explainable in terms of further objective structures. This gives a tremendous boost to rationalist optimism. Finally, the denial of the self serves the axiological function of providing for an objective social technology that does not depend upon human attitudes that are not externally manipulable. Put in other terms, intellectual virtue would not depend upon moral virtue, nor could there be a failure of the will, and there would be no problem of freedom of the will.

*Hume did not deny the existence of a self.* What he denied was the existence of a directly introspectible and substantial self. On the other hand, Hume asserts the existence of a self as the agent who acts by means of the principles of association in cognitive activity and is the "object" of the indirect passions in volition. Hence, we do have an idea of the self, a complex idea, but the complex idea of the self is apprehended only in retrospect (history again!). Although he originally considered the possibility of explaining how the self might arise from material parts, Hume admitted his misgivings in the appendix of the *Treatise* about the intelligibility of this prospect. Since the self is never an object it can never be fully conceptualizable.

None of the foregoing is going to make proponents of the analytic version of the Enlightenment Project happy. The presence of an entity that is the ground of conceptualization but is not itself conceptualizable or fully reducible to material parts is incompatible with scientism. There can be no social technology to deal with the cognitive and volitional dimensions of a self that is immune to full conceptualization. Kant, of course, would have understood.

4. Hume did call attention to the problem of induction/confirmation. At the same time, Hume offered a solution to the problem. The solution is the postulation of habits of mind (biological, psychological—synthetic a priori in Kant's sense) upon which conventional principles of reasoning are supervenient. This is not a realist or scientific solution because it says that ultimately *all we can explicate epistemologically is how we think about the world and not the nature of the world independent of ourselves*. So, in addition to not being an empiricist, Hume was not a subscriber to epistemological realism. This solution will, therefore, not be acceptable to analytic philosophers. Instead of confronting the challenge of the Copernican Revolution in Hume and Kant, analytic philosophers respond by accusing Hume, once again, of the fallacy of psychologism. Many scientific readers are perfectly willing to recognize Hume's exposure of pretentious arguments on behalf of the deity, but what they cannot see is that the belief in an innately ordered and potentially technologically benevolent and hospitable world is subject to the identical Humean critique.

5. *Was Hume a sceptic?* No issue has engendered more misunderstanding in Hume scholarship than this one. Here there is a persistent and more pervasive historical misperception of Hume that goes beyond the analytic misreading but which the analytic misreading reinforces. We shall have, therefore, to disentangle the various strands of this misperception.

The answer to the question of whether Hume is a sceptic depends, in part, upon what one understands by "scepticism." Hume said he was a kind of sceptic and even identified the historical sense(s) in which he was. Hume even advocated that his kind of scepticism is a good thing. Hume also spends a great deal of time attacking certain other forms of scepticism. No responsible discussion of Hume's scepticism should fail at least to mention the historical context that was the background to discussions of scepticism in the eighteenth century<sup>12</sup> and what forms of scepticism Hume opposed as well as advocated.

There is a first sense of scepticism. In this first sense, a sceptic is one who doubts certain key beliefs. Hume is often alleged to doubt certain key beliefs: belief in God, the external world, and the self. On the contrary, Hume did believe in God, the external world, and the self. In this sense, then, Hume was not a sceptic.

There is a second sense of scepticism. In this second sense, a sceptic is one who denies that we can *prove* certain things to be true. Hume denied that we can provide an inferential argument either for God or the external world, and he denied that we can directly confirm the existence of the self. However, Hume also believed that traditional rationalistic approaches to these topics are misguided, and he went on to offer a positive alternative account of these beliefs. Rather than being negative or suspending judgement on these beliefs, Hume advocated a different philosophical approach. It is, therefore, highly misleading and a serious misrepresentation of Hume to designate him a sceptic in this second sense.

There is a third sense of scepticism, namely, the denial of a realist metaphysics. Hume was not a sceptic in this sense either. Hume was a metaphysical realist, one who believed that things can and do exist independent of "our" relation to them. Hume would consider metaphysical idealism, understood as the opposite of metaphysical realism, as a misguided philosophical monstrosity. However, Hume, following the developments of modern science, denied the existence of substance (or Kantian things-in-themselves) if by that we mean that there are things (substances) independent of their properties or that properties can be revealed independent of interaction with or in relation to other things. Hence, while things are not necessarily dependent upon us, there is no "thing" that is independent of its relation to all other things. Recall in this context Newton's second and

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third laws where every thing interacts with everything else. Hume did not believe in independent substances, but he believed in a real world independent of "our" consciousness of it.

There is a fourth sense of scepticism, epistemological scepticism. An epistemological sceptic is one who denies that knowledge is the abstraction of an external structure. Calling someone an epistemological sceptic is in effect to characterize that person negatively from within the perspective of someone who asserts that knowledge is an abstraction from a purely external structure. Hume, Kant, and Hegel, among many others, are clearly epistemological sceptics in this very special sense. However, an epistemological sceptic is not necessarily a sceptic in any other sense. Certainly in the case of Hume there is an alternative account of what constitutes knowledge, a version of the Copernican Revolution in philosophy. Moreover, Hume's epistemological scepticism is consistent with Hume's Newtonian realist ontology because if every things interacts with every other thing, then knowledge must be an interaction (with the subject's contribution) as well. Hence, the "epistemological" scepticism of Hume and Kant reflects not a negative doctrine or the absence of knowledge but what the latest science tells us. Hume, and Kant, can thus claim to be more consistent with modern science than those who advocate scientism. Again, it is difficult to see how calling this scepticism clarifies anything.

*Analytic readers persist in confusing epistemological scepticism with metaphysical (ontological) scepticism*, and they do so for the following reason. As epistemological realists, analytic readers lump all opponents of realism together as idealists. Moreover, these readers tend to confuse idealism with phenomenalism.<sup>13</sup> Hence, they are led to argue that someone who denies epistemological realism is an idealist, and since idealists are phenomenologists, anyone who denies epistemological realism must be a phenomenologist. If someone is a phenomenologist, then he must believe that only mental events exist. Hence, to deny epistemological realism is to deny metaphysical realism. Hume emerges once more as the victim of an imposed reading.

What is Humean "scepticism"? It can be defined both negatively and positively. It can be defined negatively as anti-dogmatism. It can also be defined positively as the assertion of a conventional and pre-theoretical frame of reference that is rooted in practice and impervious to conceptualization. The two dimensions of Hume's "scepticism" are related in the following way. All those who maintain that knowledge is the grasp of a transcendent structure independent of our practical projects are dogmatists. The sceptical arguments are weapons to undermine all forms of dogmatism (which would include the scientism of the Enlightenment Project). Hence, the sceptical

arguments function in Hume in order to lay the groundwork for the exposition of a positive alternative.

This positive version of “scepticism” is Hume’s dynamic, historical-evolutionary version of Kant’s synthetic a priori. Keep in mind that Hume was as much influenced by Cicero’s stress on history as he was by classical and modern sceptical literature. But even when all this is said and done, it is not sufficient to note the classical precedents of Hume’s mitigated scepticism without also recognizing the very modern and unique features of Hume’s understanding of custom and tradition. *What differentiates Hume from classical academic sceptics is a modern conception of tradition.* Tradition does not, for Hume, form a fixed external structure. For Hume, traditions, even traditions like scepticism, are fertile sources of adaptation. Hume’s own philosophy is a novel synthesis of several traditions adapted to new challenges. What is novel and important in Hume’s philosophy is precisely the positive Humean version of the Copernican Revolution. The dynamic historical dimension is what distinguishes it not only from classical academic scepticism but from Kant. Finally, if we insist upon calling this position a form of scepticism then the term “scepticism” will have to be extended to other positions like Kant’s or Hegel’s or pragmatism, etc. It is hard to see how this does anything but cloud the issue.

What is important, *vis-à-vis* the analytic misreading of Hume, is what analytic readers mean when they call him a sceptic. When they call Hume a sceptic what they mean is that, (a) Hume denies that we have sufficient (that is, scientific) evidence to substantiate certain fundamental beliefs, and that, (b) Hume appeals to non-cognitive features (for example, custom) to legitimate these beliefs. Analytic readers do not deny (a) and even go so far as to praise Hume for calling our attention to (a). What they deplore is Hume’s holding of (b), and they deplore this “premature” surrendering of epistemic realism precisely because they think it is still possible in some yet unspecified way to obtain scientific legitimation for our fundamental beliefs. The intelligibility of the whole Enlightenment Project depends upon being able to give a scientific conceptualization of everything.

The question we want to raise here is what would happen if analytic readers saw the true nature of the positive and novel version of Hume’s so-called “scepticism.” Hume is not *merely* denying that we have sufficient understanding of certain fundamental features of our world, and he is not *merely* saying that it is difficult or unlikely that we ever shall. Given Hume’s anti-dogmatical orientation, it would not do for him to say that “such and such” is false. Rather, Hume is questioning whether a particular approach to accounting for our understanding as a purely theoretical activity is a coherent one. Rightly understood,

Hume is denying or questioning the intelligibility of the Enlightenment Project, and he is specifically denying or questioning the possibility of the scientific conceptualization of our pre-theoretical frame of reference (which Hume calls common sense or common life). This is not the sort of issue that gets resolved by finding more information or developing new techniques. It is, instead, the sort of issue that requires clarification or explication of the status of theoretical activity itself. That is, it is a philosophical issue.

If that is what Hume is doing, then analytic philosophers will have to come to terms with Hume's challenge to their enterprise. Designating Hume as a sceptic, without qualification and within the context of contemporary discussions, unfortunately, serves the rhetorical function of allowing analytic philosophers to dismiss the Copernican Revolution (often referred to in the secondary literature, charitably, as Hume's naturalism or, uncharitably, as an example of the fallacy of psychologism). Insofar as Hume can be legitimately said to be a sceptic, Hume's position is a positive alternative philosophy that has to be addressed and not evaded or dismissed.

### Axiology:

1. *Hume did not bifurcate fact and value.* On the contrary, he collapsed the distinction between fact and value. Moreover, when he collapsed it, it was to make fact a form of value in order to show that all forms of knowledge were dependent upon the socialized agent/observer or that all forms of knowledge depended upon prior practical norms. What the Copernican Revolution achieves in Hume was the making of practical knowledge more fundamental than theoretical knowledge and making all knowledge dependent upon the practical pre-theoretical context within which we always move. This is much more than a classical form of scepticism.

2. Since Hume does not bifurcate fact and value, and since value is more fundamental than fact, and since all facts presuppose prior agreed upon values, getting from fact to value is not a problem for Hume. Without the inhibition imposed by adopting the analytic reading of Hume, anyone can see from consulting the text that the famous "is"-*"ought"* paragraph never said that we cannot go from "is" to "ought." In fact, the passage isn't about the movement from "is" to "ought" at all. This stands out as *the most egregious misrepresentation of the Humean text.*

3. *Hume does not hold a utilitarian hypothesis* about the hidden structure behind our normative judgements. He holds no hypothesis about hidden structures, nor can his views be recast on game-theoretic grounds. There is no permanent set of truths about our self-interest from which he infers anything about the common or public interest. He

rejects the state of nature because such a doctrine, besides being anti-historical, presupposes that we can talk about what a human being (thing) is independent of its relationships to other persons (things).<sup>14</sup> Utilitarianism is thus inconsistent with Humean ontology, based upon Newtonian physics, in which there are no substances with properties independent of interaction with other things. We are cultural beings whose values are shaped by biology and history and the capacity for sympathetic identification with others. None of this can be understood except from the perspective of engaged social agents, which is, by the way, true of everything else.

4. Since value (the practical) is fundamental and fact (the theoretical) is derivative, neither normative issues nor theoretical issues can be resolved simply by appeals to reason (that is, theoretical reason). *The proper use of reason presupposes the presence of certain norms.* It should now be clear in what fundamental sense reason is the slave of the passions. This does not mean that reason never influences passion, but it does mean that there is no wholly theoretical perspective from which one can independently assess human practices. This, of course, is not what proponents of the Enlightenment Project and analytic "reason" want to hear.

5. Since all forms of thought and practice presuppose prior norms, and since human beings cannot understand themselves in a timeless or contextless fashion, it follows that moral-social-political issues can only be understood and resolved by reference to prior institutional practices and norms. Hume is, therefore, a conservative. His conservatism is modern and therefore dynamic, not static, and is compatible with religion, understood as itself a set of traditional practices, but not derived from any theology (which he would consider an extra-systematic stance). Traditional practices cannot be definitively conceptualized so *Hume is no apologist for the status quo.* Traditional practices evolve but that evolution cannot be conceptualized teleologically as having a built-in closure for that would imply an extra-systematic stance. Hence, *Hume is no inspiration for radicalism. Hume is, thus, useless to those who come to politics with an agenda or who think that there are purely technical solutions to practical issues.*

## Conclusion

There are two standard objections to the idea of a wholly mechanistic-naturalistic world view:

- (a) science is not self-explanatory, and
- (b) mechanistic science renders both human action and cognition unintelligible.

What stands behind these objections? *Two millennia of philosophical literature!* In addition, two centuries of scientific debate had made clear that mechanistic science is not a self-sufficient explanation of either the world or of human nature. It was clear to both Newton and Leibniz that the laws of nature did not explain themselves; it was clear to Descartes that human nature could not be explained mechanistically; it was clear to both Hume and his Scottish critics that without appeal to either divine guarantees or to tradition and custom there was no way to ensure that the human thought process accurately modelled the world; it was clear to both Hume and Kant that the practice and intelligibility of science required a background of assumptions and norms that science itself could not explain; and it was clear to Hobbes, Locke, and Adam Smith that social, political, and economic stability required both some version of theism and some appeal to traditional authority. In short, *it is impossible to read and understand the greatest minds of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and to take seriously the Enlightenment Project.* It is precisely that power of these objections that accounts for the intellectual appeal of *Deism* during the eighteenth century. Hume belongs to the great tradition of Western philosophy which stands opposed to the Enlightenment Project. How did all of this get ignored?

In order to sustain the analytic reading of Hume it is necessary to engage in questionable exegetical practice: (a) it is necessary to claim, without independent support, that Hume was disingenuous about his profession of faith; it is necessary to maintain, again without independent support, that *A Letter from a Gentleman to His Friend in Edinburgh* was written disingenuously and only to get a job; (b) it is necessary to ignore Hume's own statements about his intentions in the *Abstract*, in the introduction to the *Treatise*, and in the first section of the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*; (c) it is necessary to read expurgated editions of Hume's works, perhaps just the first *Enquiry*, or perhaps just book 1 of the *Treatise*; (d) it is necessary to disregard his assertions in the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* that there were errors in the *Treatise* and that the second *Enquiry* represents his mature view, and hence to disregard consideration of progressive modifications of his views by addition and deletion from the *Treatise* through the *Enquiries* and beyond; (e) it is necessary to disregard any and all of his writings on practical/moral/historical topics that do not fit with the epistemological orientation of the Enlightenment Project. What authorizes these exegetical practices is the analytic notion that the unity of science leads *au fin* to the rejection of the agent self and to assuming that there is a knowledge of the object-like substructure of subjects which permits us

to overrule the agent's (or author's) understanding of his own action (or works).

A more honest approach would be to admit that the analytic reading is deliberately ignoring Hume's architectonic for its own purposes. But even here we can protest, for by ignoring Hume's own programme analytic readers are evading one of their most powerful critics. This is not just bad scholarship, it is bad philosophy.

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1. L. Jonathan Cohen, *The Dialogue of Reason: An Analysis of Analytical Philosophy* (Oxford, 1986), 132-33.
2. "Thro' this whole book [*Treatise*], there are great pretensions to new discoveries in philosophy; but if any thing can intitle the author [Hume] to so glorious a name as that of an *inventor*, 'tis the use he makes of the principle of the association of ideas, which enters into most of his philosophy." David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 2d ed., rev., ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1987), 661-62 (hereafter cited as "T").
3. The misunderstandings of Hume by his contemporaries are well documented by E. C. Mossner in his biography of Hume (*The Life of David Hume* [Austin, 1979]). Norman Kemp Smith, in *The Philosophy of David Hume* (London, 1960), characterizes the standard negative view of Hume from the late eighteenth century through the early part of the present century as the "Reid-Green" thesis.
4. For an extended discussion of this thesis, see N. Capaldi, "The Enlightenment Project in 20th-Century Philosophy," in *The Enlightenment: Anglo/French and German*, ed. John McCarthy (Washington, D.C., forthcoming).
5. In 1929, the Vienna Circle sponsored the publication of a manifesto in the form of a pamphlet that spelled out their doctrinal beliefs. Entitled "Wissenschaftliche Weltanschauung der Wiener Kreis," the pamphlet contains an appendix where the Circle defines itself by specific membership and the enumeration of others who are considered as sharing the same spirit. The pamphlet goes on to single out as its precursors: (1) so-called empiricists such as *Hume*, Comte, Mill, and Mach; (2) philosophers of science such as Poincaré and Duhem; (3) logicians such as Frege, Peano, Russell and Whitehead of course, and Hilbert; (4) "sociologists" such as Bentham, Mill again, Comte again, Spencer, Feuerbach, and Marx. The Enlightenment roots are clearly evident and self-proclaimed.

## THE DOGMATIC SLUMBER OF HUME SCHOLARSHIP

6. See Carl Becker, *The Heavenly City of the 18th-Century Philosophers* (New Haven, 1962), chap. 4, for an exposition of the position that the dream of a technological utopia is the common inheritance of liberals, socialists, and marxists.
7. For some indication of the vast differences between Hume and the *philosophes* see Mossner (above, n. 3), 485-86.
8. As Neurath expressed it, the *International Encyclopedia of Unified Science* is the direct counterpart to the *Encyclopedia* begun under the direction of Diderot in the eighteenth century.
9. See also the first section of David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge, 3d ed., rev., ed. P. H. Nidditch (Oxford, 1975).
10. David Hume, *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, ed. Norman Kemp Smith (Indianapolis, 1947), pt. 12, p. 218.
11. Contemporary analytic discussions about subjunctive conditionals, modal logic, possible worlds, *de re* necessity, etc., would all be rejected by Hume as part of the Aristotelian conceptual hangover.
12. See Richard Popkin, *The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes*, rev. ed. (New York, 1964), as well as Popkin's articles on Hume, "David Hume: His Pyrrhonism and His Critique of Pyrrhonism," and "David Hume and the Pyrrhonian Controversy," reprinted in *The High Road to Pyrrhonism* (San Diego, California, 1980).
13. Russel distinguished between idealism and realism in the following way: idealism allegedly asserts that objects exist only when perceived, and realism allegedly asserts that objects exist even when not perceived. This way of making the distinction is epistemological, and it tends to obscure important metaphysical points.

*Idealism*, more accurately, collapses the subject-object dichotomy in favour of the subject; in addition, philosophical idealists assert that to be real is to be a member of a rational system such that the parts of the system can only be understood when the system as a whole is understood. Idealism, in Hegel's sense, can just as easily be construed as a form of metaphysical realism.
14. "[P]olitics consider men as united in society, and dependent on each other" (T 646).