CHAPTER 6

HUME'S CHIEF ARGUMENT

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I Skepticism, Empiricism, Naturalism, and Irreligion

David Hume's philosophy is complex and multifaceted, generating considerable debate over which themes within it should be seen as dominant. Historically, most of his critics have viewed him as a negative *skeptic* who either deliberately sets out to show the weaknesses and contradictions in human reason,[1] or else is driven to do so by following through the logical implications of his philosophical premises.[2] Prominent among these premises is the *concept-empiricist* assumption inherited from Locke, which Hume expresses as his Copy Principle, that *all ideas are derived from impressions* (T 1.1.1.7/4; EU 2.5/19). But this is not in itself a skeptical principle, and some interpreters have seen it as providing the keystone of a more constructive philosophy.[3] Another very prominent theme in Hume's work is his "Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects." In accordance with this ambitious subtitle, the *Treatise* aspires to lay the groundwork of a science of human nature that can explain cognitive operations (such as factual belief and the apprehension of external objects) in terms of the association of ideas, enabling Hume to be seen as an *associationist* or early *cognitive scientist*.[4] Although the associationism fades in his later works,[5] Hume's *epistemic-empiricist* commitment to the "experimental" science of man remains a pervasive theme in virtually all of his philosophy, including the two *Enquiries* and *Dissertation on the Passions*, the essays on politics, economics, and aesthetics, and his various contributions to the philosophy of religion. This strong Humean commitment to moral science is often described in terms of his "naturalism."

Hume is a thoroughgoing *naturalist* in at least three senses of that ambiguous word. First, he aims for a *natural* science of human thought and behavior, appealing to down-to-earth causal mechanisms (such as association) rather than any supposed transcendental insight or psychic powers—this has been called *explanatory naturalism*.

Second, his science of man places us squarely in the natural world alongside the other animals, a point emphasized strongly by his explicit comparisons between humans and animals, and by the prominence of these sections within the *Treatise*.[6] Perhaps the most appropriate name for this is *biological naturalism*.[7] Third, Hume argues vigorously against "invisible intelligent powers,"[8] and shows hostility to all forms of established religion: this is *anti-supernaturalism*. He is also commonly thought to be a naturalist in yet a fourth sense, appealing to the naturalness of certain beliefs or methods of reasoning as *vindicating* them against skepticism—what we might call *justificatory naturalism*. But this is controversial, and it is unclear whether Hume sees the resistance of our beliefs to skeptical attack—where this derives from human inability to resist the blind force of nature rather than from our own rational powers—as the *defeat* of skepticism or rather, its *victory*:

> I may, nay I must yield to the current of nature, in submitting to my senses and understanding; and in this blind submission I shew most perfectly my sceptical disposition and principles. (T 1.4.7.10/269)

Here, at least, Hume presents no *conflict* between his skeptical and naturalist orientations, and is perhaps best understood as intending his analysis of the human intellectual condition to give both skepticism and natural instinct their due, without declaring victory for either of them.

Hume's naturalism—in yet a fifth sense which combines various elements of these others—is enduringly associated with Norman Kemp Smith, who played a major role in challenging the previously dominant trend of skeptical interpretation. Taking his cue from Hume's notoriously provocative claim that "Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions" (T 2.3.3.4/415), he argued that "the determining factor in Hume's philosophy" is "the establishment of a purely naturalistic conception of human nature by the thorough subordination of reason to feeling and instinct" (Kemp Smith 1905: 150). On this reading, instinctive practice dominates theoretical reason, and "our ultimate and unalterable tendencies to action are the test of practical truth and falsity" (1905: 156). The primary concern for Kemp Smith's Hume is *moral* philosophy, and the guiding principle of his system—what we might call *sentimentalist naturalism*—is an extension to the theoretical realm of the moral sentimentalism that he learned from Francis Hutcheson. Just as our natural moral sentiments can provide a basis for moral commitment, so our fundamental commitments to the external world and to objective causality are explained as "natural beliefs" grounded on "the ultimate instincts or propensities that constitute our human nature" and which are "thus removed beyond the reach of our sceptical doubts" (1905: 151, 152). In this way, naturalistic feeling trumps skeptical reason.

Kemp Smith's legacy of naturalistic interpretation was developed further by Barry Stroud, who argued explicitly for the predominance of Hume's naturalism over both his skepticism and his concept empiricism (1977: 76–77, 219–224). And Kemp Smith's influence continues to be evident in the work of more recent scholars, some of whom

(like Stroud) repeat approvingly his improbable speculation that Hume wrote the bulk of *Treatise* Book 3 before Book 1, his philosophical system having grown from the basis of a Hutchesonian moral theory.[9]

It is a shame that Kemp Smith himself—like most who followed his lead—never carefully analyzed his key term "naturalism" or teased apart its various strands to clarify its relationship with "skepticism" (which also, as Hume himself stressed, comes in several varieties). Hume's explanatory naturalism, manifest in his efforts towards a "science of man," coheres closely with his biological naturalism and anti-supernaturalism. But *justificatory naturalism* fits far less straightforwardly with any of these, because treating beliefs as justified in virtue of their naturalness could easily point towards supernaturalism and the view of humans as semi-divine, both of which apparently come quite naturally to us (if cognitive science of religion is anything to go by, cf. Thornhill-Miller and Millican, 2015). Likewise, Kemp Smith's *sentimentalist naturalism*, subordinating reason to feeling, seems positively contrary to Hume's scientific ambitions.[10] For this crucially privileges "the ordinary consciousness"—embracing the two vulgar "natural beliefs" that our perceptions are independent objects and that external objects somehow contain a "feeling of necessitated transition" (1905: 158–159, 161–162)—in such a way as to make these immune to attack, *even when that attack is in the service of Hume's science of man*. Hume himself is clear that the vulgar belief in independently continuing perceptions is *false* (T 1.4.2.45/210–11; EU 12.9/152), while his account of how the mind "spreads itself on external objects" when ascribing necessity to them is the dismissive explaining away of an erroneous objection to his theory, not a central part of it (T 1.3.14.25/167).[11] If Hume really did view these as privileged "natural beliefs" in the way that Kemp Smith claims, then his declared ambition to lay the groundwork of an objective science that might "discover, at least in some degree, the secret springs and principles, by which the human mind is actuated in its operations" (EU 1.15/14; cf. T Intro. 6–8/xvi–xvii) seems fatally compromised. In short, Kemp Smith's sentimentalist naturalism, by systematically elevating feeling over reason, may "defeat skepticism" to the very minimal extent of insulating our vulgar everyday beliefs, but in the more significant battle between scientific irrationalism (e.g., the claim that science has no more rational warrant than superstition) and naturalistic moral science, it is on the wrong side.

We have seen that there are serious dangers of misrepresentation in categorizing Hume as a "naturalist," and it is also far too simplistic to think of his philosophical orientation as involving a balancing act between "naturalism" and "skepticism." Some of his naturalistic aims conflict with certain types of skepticism but at the same time cohere very well with other types, so we must be sensitive to these nuances and avoid the temptation to pigeonhole Hume into crude contemporary categories. If we seek for a more plausible simple label for Hume's philosophy, combining appropriate elements of both naturalism and skepticism, then Paul Russell (2008) has recently suggested *irreligion*, focusing on the hostility to religion which is central to Hume's anti-supernaturalism, and yet which also counts as seriously skeptical from the point of view of Hume's contemporaries and early critics. Russell's interpretation has considerable merit, for as we shall see, there is plenty of evidence that Hume had religious concerns from early in his

life (plausibly providing the main impetus for his interest in philosophy), and much of his writing is either overtly or covertly antitheistic. But "irreligion" is a very broad theme, and my aim here is to capture the *specific* ways in which Hume's philosophy developed and the particular arguments that attracted him. Even though religion is indeed commonly in his sights, he often pursues an independent philosophical agenda of his own, and he is certainly no indiscriminate peddler of anti-religious arguments.

A narrower version of the irreligious interpretation was proposed by Edward Craig (1987), who argued that Hume's primary target is the Judaeo-Christian "Image of God" doctrine or "Similarity Thesis" that man—and most importantly his epistemic faculty of reason—is made in the image of God. Opposition to this thesis nicely combines biological naturalism with skepticism about human reason, and Hume would indeed have been fundamentally opposed to any such assertion of human quasi-divinity. But beyond this obvious point, Craig's interpretation has little solid basis, because although there is a profusion of evidence for Hume's general irreligion, not only in his explicitly anti-religious works but also in the *Treatise*,[12] there are very few of his texts that can plausibly be interpreted as *specifically* targeting the Image of God doctrine.[13] Most of these few, moreover, occur when he is criticizing the Design Argument, whose whole point is to argue for a Deity analogous to the human mind; hence such passages are easily explained by Hume's opposition to that argument without any need to hypothesize some deeper and more general antipathy to the Similarity Thesis. In default of much direct textual support, therefore, Craig's evidence for his interpretation is almost all indirect,[14] but what he supplies looks very insubstantial, especially in the light of subsequent scholarship. Most specifically, he argues (1987: 77–84) that a focus on the Image of God doctrine would naturally lead to Hume's operating with a deductivist conception of reason within the famous argument concerning induction, as was then commonly supposed; but more recent work has convincingly refuted this supposition.[15] Craig goes on to examine three of Hume's other best-known discussions—on the idea of necessary connexion, the two definitions of cause, and personal identity—which he thinks make little sense on the rival interpretation that Hume is an "embryonic positivist" for whom the analytical Copy Principle (rather than the epistemically-focused Similarity Thesis) is of central importance (1987: 121). Again, his case now looks relatively weak in the light of more recent scholarship,[16] and anyway virtually none of what Craig says here points strongly towards the Image of God doctrine: so even if he is right to see Hume's overtly analytical discussions as confused in various ways, his suggestion that the Similarity Thesis lies behind the confusion is mere speculation until backed up with substantial and specific evidence. Meanwhile, we have good reason for distrusting any interpretation that so fundamentally turns on the idea that Hume is muddled in putting such an emphasis on his Copy Principle, a problem which Craig acknowledges:

> it remains obscure what motive [Hume] can have had for being hospitable, even to the extent that he was, to the theory of ideas and impressions, and I am driven to an explanation of the fact in terms of an early enthusiasm for Locke and the "way of

> ideas." Hume never got it out of his system, or realised how little, deep down, it actually meant to him. (1987: 123)

Craig thus follows Stroud in taking Hume's concept-empiricist commitments to be relatively shallow, despite Hume's enthusiastic highlighting of his Copy Principle in the *Treatise*, the *Abstract*, and the *Enquiry*, and his continued defence of it (cf. Section III below). There is a strong whiff of philosophical fashion here, whereby just as commentators in the heyday of positivism were inclined to overstress Hume's concept empiricism, so more recent scholars have been inclined to dismiss it as a mildly embarrassing Lockean legacy. Far more satisfactory than either extreme would be a more balanced view that can explain why Hume was so conspicuously attracted to the Copy Principle, even though his interests indeed seem, on the whole, to be epistemological and anti-religious rather than analytical.

II The Biographical Background of Hume's Philosophy

In attempting to construct a more balanced account of the fundamentals of Hume's philosophy, it will be helpful to start by reviewing briefly what we know of his background and intellectual context, delegating further detail to M. A. Stewart's useful 2005 paper on "Hume's Intellectual Development, 1711–1752." As Stewart illustrates from various sources, Hume's philosophy teaching at Edinburgh University, which he attended from 1721 until 1725 (aged between 10 and 14), would have been traditional and even reactionary, delivered in Latin, thoroughly infused with religion, and generally unlikely to have inspired his interest (2005: 11–16, 19–25). After university, living mainly at the family home at Chirnside (eight miles west of Berwick) and neglecting his intended legal studies, Hume became a voracious reader of classical authors such as Cicero, Virgil, Seneca, and Plutarch (Stewart, 2005: 28–29). These classical interests would have been encouraged by his reading of Shaftesbury's *Characteristicks*, which Hume purchased in 1726 (Stewart 2005: 37–38). At this point his orientation seems to have been broadly Stoical, and it is his efforts towards the introspective Stoic ideal that he blames for the breakdown that followed his enthusiasm for the "new Scene of Thought" which "seem'd to be opened up" to him in 1729 (LET 1.13). Hume's personal experience of the failure of Stoic discipline seems to have encouraged him towards more down-to-earth empirical psychology, in which he apparently made some progress from early in 1731, as he described in his well-known draft letter to a physician of March or April 1734:

> I found that the moral Philosophy transmitted to us by Antiquity, labor'd under the same Inconvenience that has been found in their natural Philosophy, of being entirely Hypothetical, & depending more upon Invention than Experience. Every

> one consulted his Fancy in erecting Schemes of Virtue & of Happiness, without regarding human Nature, upon which every moral Conclusion must depend. This therefore I resolved to make my principal Study, . . . I believe . . . that little more is requir'd to make a man succeed in this Study than to throw off all Prejudices . . . At least this is all I have to depend on for the Truth of my Reasonings, which I have multiply'd to such a degree, that within these three Years, I find I have scribbled many a Quire of Paper, in which there is nothing contain'd but my own Inventions. (LET 1.16)

Perhaps Hume's skepticism towards previous philosophers was also fostered by his reading of Pierre Bayle, who is mentioned in a letter of March 1732 (LET 1.12). Another major factor here seems to have been a loss of religious faith, which we know about principally from a 1751 letter to Gilbert Elliot of Minto and the 1776 deathbed interview recorded by James Boswell. In the letter, which invites Elliot to help in strengthening the theistic arguments of the draft *Dialogues*, Hume tells of having recently "burn'd an old Manuscript Book, wrote before I was twenty; which contain'd, Page after Page, the gradual Progress of my Thoughts on that Head." This began "with an anxious Search after Arguments, to confirm the common Opinion,"[17] while "Any Propensity . . . to the other Side, crept in upon me against my Will," in "a perpetual Struggle of a restless Imagination against Inclination" (LET 1.154). All this suggests that Hume's progressive loss of faith—apparently extending until 1730 or 1731 ("before I was twenty")—was prolonged and difficult, as indeed is typically the case.

In the deathbed interview with Boswell, Hume said that he was "religious when he was young," but that "the Morality of every Religion was bad" and "he never had entertained any belief in Religion since he began to read Locke and Clarke" (Boswell 1931: 76). There is clear irony here, in that Hume lost belief when reading these two *defenders* of theism, and the pairing is suggestive, because both John Locke and Samuel Clarke were prominent advocates of a particular form of Cosmological Argument for God's existence, in which they drew upon the principle that matter and motion alone cannot give rise to thought.[18] This connection is confirmed by the one mention of Clarke in Hume's *Treatise*, in a footnote to T 1.3.3.5/80, which is followed in the very next paragraph by a footnote mentioning Locke. For here Hume attacks their arguments for the Causal Maxim that "*whatever begins to exist, must have a cause of existence*" (T 1.3.3.1/78), which is the other fundamental principle of their Cosmological Argument (e.g., Locke, *Essay* IV x 3; Clarke 1732: 8–9). Although the *Treatise* prudently makes no mention of this irreligious connection, it was not lost on the author of the anonymous 1745 pamphlet to which Hume's *Letter from a Gentleman* was a response: the second "Charge" it lays against him, after "1. Universal Scepticism," is "2. Principles leading to downright Atheism, by denying the Doctrine of Causes and Effects, . . . he maintains, that the Necessity of a Cause to every Beginning of Existence is not founded on any Arguments demonstrative or intuitive" (LG 15).[19]

Hume's interest in Locke and Clarke probably came not from his formal studies (Stewart 2005: 16), but through his friendship with Henry Home, a distant cousin whose family home at Kames was only nine miles southwest of Chirnside. Home—who

later became Lord Kames and is now most commonly known by that name—was born in 1696, and as a philosophically minded lawyer, he seems to have taken young David under his wing at Edinburgh. During 1723, Kames will no doubt have talked to the twelve-year-old student about the debates he was then pursuing through correspondence with Samuel Clarke and Clarke's most prominent Scottish follower Andrew Baxter (who also resided in the Scottish borders, six miles west of Chirnside at Duns). We know from Boswell that around that time Kames also grappled with Locke's *Essay*, of which "The chapter on *Power* crucified him" (Boswell 1932: 273). A particular focus of Locke's chapter, as of Kames's correspondence with Clarke, was the topic of free will and necessity, so it seems safe to assume that Kames would likewise have taken a keen interest in the prominent controversy on this topic between Clarke and Anthony Collins, which had occurred in 1717 through the publication of Collins's *Philosophical Inquiry concerning Human Liberty* and Clarke's responding *Remarks*.[20] Some years later, echoes of this debate came to Hume's own doorstep when, in 1732, William Dudgeon, a tenant farmer residing near Coldstream (eight miles south of Chirnside) published *The State of the Moral World Consider'd*, a dialogue promoting necessitarian optimism which was sharply answered by Andrew Baxter, provoking Dudgeon's prosecution for heresy by the Chirnside Presbytery where Hume's uncle George Home was minister.[21] In opposition, Baxter explicitly champions the views of Clarke, a "great Man" and "the best Defender of Liberty" (1732: 27 n.), and insinuates that Dudgeon is an admirer of "Mr. L—z" and "Mr. C—ns" (i.e., Leibniz and Collins) (1732: 35). It seems certain that Hume would have heard of these dramatic events, and the natural expectation that they would leave some mark on him—then just twenty-one but already moving on from his religious crisis to the philosophical thoughts that would lead to the *Treatise*—is at least corroborated by the similarity of his views on "liberty and necessity" to those of Collins.

Dudgeon's prosecution for heretical views on free will and necessity highlights the religious significance of these topics, which were far from narrowly theoretical.[22] Seeing human behavior as causally necessitated generates tensions with religious belief in a number of ways, not only by favoring explanatory and biological naturalism, but, more specifically, by making it hard to absolve any supposed divine Creator of responsibility for the apparent imperfections of His creation (unless, like Leibniz and Dudgeon, one is prepared to see that creation as actually the best of all possible worlds). We know that Hume had an intense early interest in the Problem of Evil from a recently discovered manuscript fragment which seems part of a much longer discussion (Stewart 1994). Moreover, the Free Will Defence is one of the main topics in his "early memoranda" on philosophy, apparently written at about the same time as the *Treatise* was published. One memorandum, for example, says:

> Liberty not a proper Solution of Moral Ill: Because it might have been bound down by Motives like those of Saints & Angels. Id. [King].[23]

To provide a solution to the Problem of Evil, free will must be such that God—in giving it to his creatures—ipso facto becomes unable to ensure in advance that they will be freely

virtuous (for otherwise, He has no excuse for failing to ensure this). Hume here points out that if "Saints & Angels" can freely act virtuously from good motives (as orthodoxy maintains, especially in respect of the heavenly afterlife), then God cannot be excused from the problem of "Moral Ill" by appeal to "Liberty," because He could have made *all* His creatures such that they likewise freely acted virtuously from good motives. There seems little doubt that Hume had this point in mind when he came to compose *Enquiry* Section 8, with its compatibilist account of free will that makes it impossible to absolve God from the wickedness of His creation (EU 8.36/103).

III Causation and the Copy Principle

So far, we have seen that Hume had strong personal reasons to be skeptical about the classical and Christian moralists on whom he had been raised, and that this skepticism gave him a resolve to make "human Nature" his "principal Study" and to base that study on "Experience" rather than "Invention." Contemporary views of human nature were overwhelmingly bound up with the Christian conception of the universe and man's place in it, but by the age of twenty Hume had rejected religion—probably for both metaphysical and moral reasons—and was seeking a science of man that would be quite independent of it. We have here a strong nexus of influences that provide a promising explanation of many of the general tendencies of Hume's philosophy, from *skepticism* about established orthodoxies, *explanatory naturalism* and *epistemic empiricism* in the quest for an observational science of human nature, and *biological naturalism* both from seeing human nature as a subject of empirical study, and from *anti-supernaturalism* consequent on his loss of faith and revulsion for religious ethics. But more specifically, it is remarkable how this intellectual journey had taken him through such a significant cluster of topics associated with *causation*: the Cosmological Argument, the attempts of Locke and Clarke to establish both the Causal Maxim and the principle that thought cannot arise from matter, Kames's correspondence with Clarke and Baxter and his struggles over Locke's "chapter on *Power*," and the prominent and locally salient debates about free will and necessity. All this, I suggest, does much to explain Hume's obvious preoccupation with the idea of causation in his theoretical philosophy.

Turning now to the shape of Hume's early philosophy as we find it in the *Treatise*, we are struck in the very first section by the prominence that he gives to his Copy Principle "that all our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent" (T 1.1.1.7/4). Hume trumpets this as his "first principle" (T 1.1.1.12/7 cf. T App. 6/626) and later extols its philosophical value (T 1.2.3.1/33; cf. TA 7/648). Moreover, he remains equally attached to it in his later writings,[24] although it does not yet fit neatly into the picture we have been building of his philosophy and its background. As we shall see, however, there is a straightforward and elegant way of integrating it into that picture, if we allow ourselves one undocumented—but highly plausible—speculation. Namely, *that Hume was*

strongly motivated at an early stage by the prospect of applying Locke's concept empiricism to settle the debate over free will and necessity through clarifying and delimiting what could possibly be meant by causal "necessity." Certainly Hume did in fact so apply his Copy Principle, which he acknowledges to be a reformulation of Locke's denial of innate ideas (TA 6/647–8). What remains to be explained is how such an application would naturally have enticed the young philosopher.

Like most of his British philosophical contemporaries, Hume appears to have accepted Locke's concept empiricism relatively uncritically: in both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry* he gives arguments to support it, but they are rather perfunctory and unsatisfactory, evincing little inclination to dig deeper.[25] The attraction of the Copy Principle as a weapon against bogus ideas (e.g., of Cartesian or scholastic souls or essences) is obvious enough, but what really excites Hume is the analytical bounty that he intends to draw from it:

> Our author thinks, "that no discovery cou'd have been made more happily for deciding all controversies concerning ideas . . ." Accordingly, wherever any idea is ambiguous, he has always recourse to the impression, which must render it clear and precise. (TA 7/648–9; cf. EU 2.9/21–2)

We shall probably never know which ideas first came under Hume's scrutiny in this way, although his self-quoted words in the *Abstract* passage above—taken from T 1.2.3.1/33—may reflect the joy of new discovery when analyzing our ideas of space and time, most likely in response to Bayle's discussion of Zeno's paradoxes of infinite divisibility.[26] But at some stage early in his philosophical development, as we have seen, it is very likely that Kames would have drawn Hume's attention to Locke's "chapter on *Power*," which begins as follows:

> The Mind, being every day informed, by the Senses, of the alteration of those simple *Ideas*, it observes in things without; and taking notice how one comes to an end, and ceases to be, and another begins to exist, which was not before; reflecting also on what passes within itself, . . . and concluding from what it has so constantly observed to have been, that the like Changes will for the future be made, in the same things, by like Agents, and by the like ways, considers in one thing the possibility of having any of its simple *Ideas* changed, and in another the possibility of making that change; and so comes by that *Idea* which we call *Power*. (*Essay* II xxi 1)

As Hume points out in both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry*, however, "this explication is more popular than philosophical" (T 1.3.14.5/157) because "no reasoning can ever give us a new, original, simple idea; as this philosopher himself confesses" (EU 7.8 n12/64 n1). Having noticed the flaw in Locke's "explication," Hume would no doubt be keen to develop his own more rigorous account, soon realizing the difficulties involved and the futility of attempting to define *power* using other equally problematic causal terms such as *efficacy*. Ultimately, of course, this led to his now famous analysis in *Treatise* 1.3.14,

which begins by observing "that the terms of *efficacy, agency, power, force, energy, necessity, connexion*, and *productive quality*, are all nearly synonimous" (T 1.3.14.4/157),[27] and which then goes on to identify the source of the crucial idea as an impression of reflection before culminating in Hume's two "definitions of cause" (T 1.3.14.31/169–70; cf. T 2.3.2.4/409–10).

Suppose now that Hume, having contemplated this issue at least in general terms, came to consider the debate between Clarke and Collins, perhaps in the context of the Dudgeon affair. This debate involves a *conceptual* disagreement about the meaning of "necessity," Collins equating this with deterministic predictability and ascribing it to human actions as well as physical events (1717: 110–111).[28] In response, Clarke makes clear that his own conception of genuine necessity is very different, involving not mere predictability but something like *mechanical impulse*, whereas by contrast the "moral necessity" which characterizes human behavior

> is not indeed any *Necessity* at all; but 'tis merely a *figurative Manner of Speaking* . . . But now [Collins] makes *Moral Necessity* and *Physical Necessity* to be exactly and Philosophically the same Thing . . . In which Matter, the Author is guilty of a double Absurdity. *First*, in supposing *Reasons* or *Motives* . . . to make the same *necessary Impulse* upon *Intelligent* Subjects, as *Matter in Motion* does upon *unintelligent Subjects*; which is supposing *Abstract Notions* to be *Substances*. And *Secondly*, in endeavouring to impose it upon his Reader as a thing taken for *granted*, that *Moral Necessity* and *Physical Necessity* do not differ intrinsically in their *own Nature*. (Clarke 1717: 15–16)

Hume sides with Collins and has ample motive for doing so, both irreligious and naturalistic (as we saw earlier). But he also wields a novel and powerful weapon, in the form of his own analysis of causation:

> We may learn from the foregoing [two definitions], that all causes are of the same kind, . . . The same course of reasoning will make us conclude, that there is but one kind of *necessity*, . . . and that the common distinction betwixt *moral* and *physical* necessity is without any foundation in nature. This clearly appears from the precedent explication of necessity. 'Tis the constant conjunction of objects, along with the determination of the mind, which constitutes a physical necessity: And the removal of these is the same thing with *chance*. . . . 'tis impossible to admit of any medium betwixt chance and an absolute necessity. (T 1.3.14.32–3/170–1)

In the *Treatise*, Hume does not immediately point out the consequences for human free will, but quickly presents another fruit of his analysis, namely, confirmation that the Causal Maxim—the main foundation of Clarke's Cosmological Argument—cannot be "founded on any arguments either demonstrative or intuitive":

> If we define a cause to be, *An object precedent and contiguous to another, and where all the objects resembling the former are plac'd in a like relation of priority and contiguity*

> *to those objects, that resemble the latter*; we may easily conceive, that there is no absolute nor metaphysical necessity, that every beginning of existence shou'd be attended with such an object. (T 1.3.14.35/172)

In a similar spirit, he later exploits the same definition to refute that other key principle of Clarke's Cosmological Argument, that matter and motion could not possibly give rise to thought:

> we are never sensible of any connexion betwixt causes and effects, and . . . 'tis only by our experience of their constant conjunction, we can arrive at any knowledge of this relation. Now as all objects, which are not contrary, are susceptible of a constant conjunction, and as no real objects are contrary; I have inferr'd from these principles [cf. T 1.3.15.1/173], that to consider the matter *a priori*, anything may produce anything, and that we shall never discover a reason, why any object may or may not be the cause of any other . . . [W]e find by the comparing their ideas, that thought and motion are different from each other, and by experience, that they are constantly united; which being all the circumstances, that enter into the idea of cause and effect, when apply'd to the operations of matter, we may certainly conclude, that motion may be, and actually is, the cause of thought and perception. (T 1.4.5.30/247–8)

Thus Hume's analysis of causation has the direct implication that causes and effects can be discovered only through experience, delivering both a vindication of empirical science and a devastating blow against a priori metaphysics. But an even more important implication—because hard to establish in any other way—is revealed when he returns to the territory of Clarke and Collins in *Treatise* 2.3.1–2 on the crucial question of "liberty and necessity." Here, Hume's two definitions of cause yield parallel definitions of causal *necessity* (T 2.3.2.4/409–10; cf. T 2.3.1.4/400–1), capturing all that we can mean by the term. Then, because human actions satisfy the definitions, it immediately follows that those actions are as necessary as the motion of billiard balls. Clarke and his allies will object that human actions lack genuine *physical* necessity, but the upshot of Hume's analysis is that they are using terms without meaning: their supposed distinction between *moral* and *physical* necessity (as Hume has already observed at T 1.3.14.32–3) can be consigned to the same metaphysical dustbin as scholastic substances:

> this reasoning puts the whole controversy in a new light, by giving a new definition of necessity. And, indeed, the most zealous advocates for free-will [e.g. Clarke] must allow this union and inference with regard to human actions. They will only deny, that this makes the whole of necessity. But then they must shew, that we have an idea of something else [i.e. whatever it is that characterises "physical" necessity] in the actions of matter, which, according to the foregoing reasoning, is impossible. (TA 34/661)

Hume's application of his Copy Principle to the idea of causal necessity thus both brings human behavior within the reach of deterministic causal science,[29] and

triumphantly solves "the question of liberty and necessity; the most contentious question, of metaphysics, the most contentious science" (EU 8.23/95). We now have a very satisfying answer—firmly rooted in his biography and early writings—to the puzzle of why Hume put such emphasis on his Copy Principle and gave it pride of place as the "first principle" of his philosophy. Through its application to the idea of causal necessity, his concept empiricism turns out to be closely integrated with his other main theoretical commitments and purposes, providing a support for explanatory and biological naturalism, a refutation of causal apriorism in favor of epistemic empiricism, and a further multiple attack on supernaturalism by undermining the principles of the Cosmological Argument and of the Free Will Defence.[30]

In recent years, it has become fashionable to play down Hume's commitment to the Copy Principle, in line with the declining popularity of concept empiricism noted at the end of Section I above. Indeed the "skeptical realist" or "New Hume" interpretation—developed mostly by John Wright, Edward Craig, and Galen Strawson, but since attracting others—centers on the claim that Hume is content to allow meaningful (and potentially truth-apt) thought in the absence of impression-derived ideas. This claim has some textual support in respect of topics such as the external world, where Hume accounts for our thinking in terms of "fictions" that result from associational confusion (rather than bona fide ideas). But in the case of causation, Hume is always very explicit that his analysis delivers both a genuine idea—copied from an impression—and two definitions that are precise enough to yield the host of valuable philosophical results that we have just seen. The "skeptical realist" reading of Hume on causation has, I believe, seemed plausible only because its advocates have systematically avoided addressing those passages where Hume exploits his analysis for philosophical gain, most notably his discussions of materialism (at T 1.4.5.29–33) and "liberty and necessity" (in T 2.3.1–2; TA. 31–4/660–1; and EU 8). If the account just sketched is correct, however, this amounts to a fundamental reversal of Hume's own priorities.[31]

IV The Formation of *Treatise* Book 1 Parts 1–3

Hume's enthusiasm for the Copy Principle explains and structures much of the early content of *Treatise* Book 1. Impressions can arise from either *sensation* or *reflection* (T 1.1.2), with ideas their precise copies (albeit having less "force and vivacity"). It follows that ideas are quasi-sensory and must be determinate; hence thought involving generality requires an appropriate treatment of "abstract ideas" (cf. T 1.1.7.5/19). Combined with Hume's sensory atomism—which provides the basis for his treatment of space and time and his solution to the paradoxes of infinite divisibility—this also means that complex ideas are susceptible of literal division and rearrangement, thus explaining the otherwise puzzling jump from what at first seems like a harmless "second principle, *of the*

liberty of the imagination to transpose and change its ideas" (T 1.1.3.4/10), to a full-blown Separability Principle (T 1.1.7.3/18–9) which is far less innocuous and goes on to play a major role in the Part 2 treatment of space and time (and later generates problems in Part 4).

Interleaved with all this analysis and metaphysics is a more epistemological stream of thought, starting with the association of ideas (T 1.1.4) and a taxonomy of relations (T 1.1.5), in preparation for the treatment of "knowledge and probability" in Part 3. Here Hume saw the prospect for another neat theory, based on the observation that all inferences "from one object to another" rely on causation and are at best *probable*, while *demonstrative* inferences tend to be confined to mathematics. This invited the tempting thought that mental operations can be categorized in terms of the relations involved, with *resemblance, contrariety,* and *degrees in quality* corresponding to intuition (T 1.3.1.2/70); *proportions of quantity or number* to demonstration (T 1.3.1.3/70); *identity* and *relations of time and place* to perception (T 1.3.2.2/73–4); and *causation* to probable inference (T 1.3.2.3/74). With this in mind, Hume (T 1.1.5.2/14) shoehorns the multiplicity of relations that Locke had painstakingly identified (*Essay* II xxv–xxviii) into just seven categories.[32] Later in the *Treatise* Hume twice appeals to this taxonomy, to prove the non-demonstrability of the Causal Maxim (T 1.3.3.2/79) and of morality (T 3.1.1.19/463–4). Sadly this whole theory is seriously flawed, but fortunately the bulk of the *Treatise* is unaffected because Hume mostly relies instead on a far more plausible criterion of demonstrability, namely, the Conceivability Principle. However the theory plays a significant role in shaping Book 1 Part 3, which although entitled "Of Knowledge and Probability," is mainly framed by Hume's analysis of the causal relation informed by the Copy Principle (from T 1.3.2.3/74 to T 1.3.15.11/175).[33] Within this overarching framework, Hume inserts his discussions of the Causal Maxim (T 1.3.3) and of causal inference (T 1.3.4–7), but both are presented as "neighbouring fields" (T 1.3.2.13/77–8) to his main analytical business. His famous argument concerning induction in T 1.3.6 shows that the assumption of uniformity which induction presupposes cannot be established on any independent rational basis, instead being taken for granted through the instinctive operation of *custom* (or habit). But it is striking, in view of this argument's subsequent fame, how cursory and relatively muted it is here, set within a section whose main role seems to be to reveal *constant conjunction* as the key to causal ascription, as another step towards analysis of the causal relation (with T 1.3.6.3 echoing T 1.3.2.11). When Hume reassessed the 1739 *Treatise* in his *Abstract* (composed only nine months or so later), the famous argument was elevated from this humble role to become the centerpiece of his theoretical philosophy, as it remained in the *Enquiry* of 1748 and has been considered ever since. So what we find in *Treatise* Book 1 Part 3, apparently, is an organizational structure that reflects the development of Hume's ideas rather than their maturely considered arrangement. And this strongly corroborates our hypothesis, that he came to his theoretical philosophy predominantly through an interest in the analysis of causation rather than in the epistemological assessment of induction.

When Hume does finally turn explicitly to the assessment of "probable reasonings"—again in a long detour (or series of detours) from his search for the source of the

idea of necessary connexion—his discussion is scientific rather than skeptical in tone. T 1.3.8 provides experimental support for his analysis of belief in terms of the transfer of vivacity by customary association (typically from the impression of a cause to the idea of its experienced effect); T 1.3.9 explains why the vivacity of belief arises from causation rather than from other relations; T 1.3.10 discusses the mutual influence of belief on the passions and imagination; T 1.3.11 explains "the probability of chances" and T 1.3.12 "the probability of causes," both involving the division of force and vivacity where there is a multiplicity of associational links; while T 1.3.13 discusses "unphilosophical probability" prior to Hume's belated return—at T 1.3.14—to his analysis of the idea of causation (on hold, apparently, since T 1.3.6). These intervening sections include numerous remarks describing the various factors that bear on our judgments of probability, many of which can also be construed as normative: highlighting factors that *ought* (or *ought not*) to bear on such judgments. The overall message here is in favor of basing our beliefs on experience, drawing causal inferences through custom in line with the constant conjunctions that we have observed, and assigning probabilities based on statistical regularities. Probable reasoning accordingly merits categorization amongst what Hume will later call the "general and more establish'd" operations of the mind (T 1.4.7.7/267–8), and beliefs thus formed deserve to be called products of "judgment" or "reason," distinguished from trivial and flighty "whimsies and prejudices, which are rejected under the opprobrious character of being the offspring of the imagination" (T 1.3.9.19 n22/117–8 n1).[34] Irrationalities of the latter kind are particularly associated with religion, which encourages stimulation of the imagination by such things as the "mummeries" of Roman Catholicism (T 1.3.8.4/99–100), saintly relics (T 1.3.8.6/100–1), pilgrimages (T 1.3.9.9/110–11), terrifying sermons (T 1.3.9.15/115), and miracle stories (T 1.3.10.4/120).

V Skepticism: Corrosive or Mitigated?

So far, we have seen nothing in Hume's formative ideas that is *corrosively skeptical*, in the sense of undermining his scientific ambitions. Many of his views would indeed have been considered skeptical by his contemporaries, such as his denial of the demonstrability of the Causal Maxim, his treatment of induction as founded on instinctive custom (rather than perception of evidential connexions),[35] his analysis of causation in terms of our own inferential behavior (rather than apprehension of objective necessities), and his various criticisms—either explicit or implicit—of religious claims. But none of this seriously threatens *his own* scientific researches, as long as he is content to accept the deliverances of his faculties in a spirit consistent with his theory. A scientist who accepts that his faculties are fallible and his discoveries less than certain does not thereby undermine them, except by the unrealistic standards of a wishful-thinking dogmatist or extreme skeptic who cannot reconcile himself to working within the limits of what human nature allows.

This attitude is most clearly expressed by Hume in the final section of the *Enquiry* of 1748, where he draws attention to the varieties and different degrees of skepticism before himself adopting a *mitigated* or *academic* skepticism (EU 12.24–26/161–3) which recognizes the fallibility of our faculties and is accordingly modest and undogmatic, accepting that there may be limits to the range of our enquiries. He spells this out in respect of induction, responding to his own argument (EU 4, summarized at EU 12.22/153) that our most important method of reasoning about the world rests on a brute assumption—namely, the uniformity of nature—for which no independent justification can be given. The rationalist and the extreme "Pyrrhonian" skeptic will bemoan this lack and demand a more solid basis for induction, but if none is to be had, then we are faced with a stark choice between giving up induction entirely or accepting "the whimsical condition of mankind, who must act and reason and believe; though they are not able, by their most diligent enquiry, to satisfy themselves concerning the foundation of these operations" (EU 12.23/160). Given this pragmatic situation, even the Pyrrhonian can offer no reason for preferring the negative choice, for "he must acknowledge, if he will acknowledge any thing, that all human life must perish, were his principles universally and steadily to prevail" (EU 12.23/160).[36] The upshot is that as long as our investigations do not *undermine* our faculties by showing them to be unreliable, it is entirely reasonable for us to rely on them by default.[37]

Relying on our faculties by default, moreover, is entirely consistent with refining our use of them on the basis of our investigations. Most importantly, although our general presumption of inductive uniformity may have to be taken for granted as indispensable and incapable of further support, this does not require us to accord equal authority to every individual inductive inference, treating thoughtless superstition (e.g., belief in a "lucky charm") with as much respect as careful, disciplined scientific extrapolation. On the contrary, we find by experience that the former is hopelessly unreliable whereas the latter is highly effective, and it is important to notice that there is nothing viciously circular or fundamentally skeptical about such inductive investigation of our own inductive tendencies (any more than there is about empirical cognitive science in general). Much of *Treatise* Book 1 Part 3 can be understood in this scientific spirit, and indeed Hume there seems almost oblivious to the possibility that he might be thought to be raising corrosive skeptical worries about induction.[38] Only in the *Enquiry* does he explicitly acknowledge that his famous argument raises "sceptical doubts concerning the operations of the understanding," before going on to lay these to rest in the way that we have just seen.

The project of the *Treatise* does run into serious trouble, however, when Hume's cognitive investigations ultimately lead to the conclusion that our thought is irremediably incoherent. As we saw earlier (cf. note 34), in analyzing human reasoning he attempts to draw a distinction between the "general" and "universal" principles of the mind that deserve our respect and the "irregular" or "trivial" ones that do not, most explicitly at the beginning of *Treatise* 1.4.4:

> In order to justify myself, I must distinguish in the imagination betwixt the principles which are permanent, irresistable, and universal; such as the customary transition

> from causes to effects, and from effects to causes: And the principles, which are changeable, weak, and irregular; . . . The former are the foundation of all our thoughts and actions, so that upon their removal human nature must immediately perish and go to ruin. The latter are neither unavoidable to mankind, nor necessary, or so much as useful in the conduct of life; but on the contrary are observ'd only to take place in weak minds . . . (T 1.4.4.1/225)

But once Hume becomes engaged in the skeptical arguments of Book 1 Part 4, this distinction becomes hard to maintain, as he himself laments retrospectively in the concluding section T 1.4.7.[39] First, at T 1.4.1.10/185, we are saved from extreme skepticism not by the "general and more establish'd" principles of the mind, but by "that singular and seemingly trivial property of the fancy, by which we enter with difficulty into remote views of things" (T 1.4.7.7/268). Second, at T 1.4.2.56/217–8, after a long and fraught discussion of our belief in the continued and distinct existence of external objects, Hume concludes that this belief is founded on "trivial qualities of the fancy" and on "false suppositions," including the "gross illusion . . . that our resembling perceptions are numerically the same." Third, at T 1.4.4.15/231, he finds that standard causal reasoning leads to the conclusion that material objects do not resemble our sensory impressions, which in turn makes it impossible for us to form any "satisfactory idea" (T 1.4.4.9/229) of them;[40] thus causal reasoning and the belief in external objects, "tho' these two operations be equally natural and necessary in the human mind, yet in some circumstances they are directly contrary" (T 1.4.7.4/266). Finally, Hume ultimately finds his account of personal identity in T 1.4.6 to be deeply problematic, based on principles that he "cannot render consistent" (T App. 21/636), although this recognition comes only in the *Appendix* to the *Treatise*, published with Book 3 late in 1740. One major source of the trouble here is Hume's Separability Principle, which he takes to imply the extraordinary claim that his perceptions are independent existences that "may exist separately, without any contradiction or absurdity" (T App.12/634; cf. T 1.4.5.5/233; T 1.4.6.3/252; T 1.4.6.16/259–60).

The conclusion of *Treatise* Book 1 exposes the disastrous breakdown of Hume's would-be distinction between the "general" and "trivial" principles of the mind, making it difficult to mount any consistent defence against corrosive skepticism (T 1.4.7.6–8/267–9). In the end, he can do no more than appeal to our natural tendency to ignore skeptical worries and his own inclination towards metaphysical curiosity despite them (T 1.4.7.9–12/269–71). For those who share such curiosity, he suggests that philosophy can at least be recommended above superstition as the "safest and most agreeable" guide (T 1.4.7.13/271), but this defence appears lame given the obvious retort, that on religious principles Hume's philosophy holds far more danger than Christianity, risking falsehood and eternal hellfire in place of divine truth and salvation.[41] If human reason is as hopelessly inconsistent as Hume has portrayed, then any objective assessment is beyond us, and we seem to be reduced to falling back on personal inclination, with selective "carelessness and in-attention" towards skeptical considerations that would upset our equanimity (as at T 1.4.2.57/218). The upshot is that any Christian who

is as attracted towards his faith as Hume is towards philosophy has been given no good reason to reconsider.[42]

From the perspective on Hume's philosophy developed earlier, we have excellent reason to interpret his skeptical despair in the conclusion of *Treatise* Book 1 as entirely genuine: his project has been holed beneath the waterline, and his makeshift defence, by which he attempts to justify the continuation of his investigations, is palpably unconvincing. Hence so far from seeing Hume as a deliberate corrosive skeptic, as so many of his readers have done, there is a lot to be said for Reid's view that he is forced into such skepticism by his own logical rigor and the premises from which he starts.[43]

VI Hume's Chief Argument and His Taming of Skepticism

Barely nine months after *Treatise* Books 1 and 2 were published, Hume was reformulating its "Chief Argument" in the *Abstract*, which was eventually published in March 1740.[44] His choice of topics for inclusion strongly corroborates the account given earlier, whereby it is his views on inductive probability, causation, and free will that are most important to him. He devotes paragraphs 5–7 to the Copy Principle; 8–14 to his argument concerning induction; 15–25 (and 4) to custom, belief, and probability; 26 to the idea of cause (applying the Copy Principle); and 31–4 to free will. By contrast, just one paragraph each is given to skepticism (27), substance and the soul (28), geometry (29), the passions (30), and the association of ideas (35). Hume thus greatly emphasizes the positive aspects of his philosophy, somewhat playing down his skeptical doubts although he seems no closer to resolving them:

> Our author . . . concludes, that we assent to our faculties, and employ our reason only because we cannot help it. Philosophy wou'd render us entirely *Pyrrhonian*, were not nature too strong for it. (TA 27/657)

At much the same time, he was also preparing Book 3 of the *Treatise* for publication, with its *Appendix* bewailing the "labyrinth" into which he had been led by the conundrum of personal identity. So any resolution of the corrosive skepticism of Book 1 Part 4 was still, apparently, some years away.

Such a resolution was finally achieved with the first *Enquiry* of 1748, where Hume puts an even more systematic emphasis on his "chief argument" running from the Copy Principle (Section 2) through induction (4), custom and belief (5), probability (6), causation (7), and free will (8). Section 4 crucially rules out a priori knowledge of the world and thus establishes epistemic empiricism, after which Sections 5 to 8 all strongly support a causal understanding of human thought and behavior. This explanatory naturalism is reinforced by biological naturalism in Section 9 on "the reason of animals,"

followed by anti-supernaturalism in the next two sections, which illustrate how Hume's inductive theory can undermine superstitious beliefs by first revealing their own dependence on induction and then appealing to methodological consistency.[45] In this spirit, Section 10 explains why the inductive evidence against any reported miracle is almost certain to outweigh the inductive evidence for the report's reliability, while Section 11 points out that induction cannot justify any inference from the observed world to a Designer having qualities (notably justice) that are not manifested in what we observe. The *Enquiry* is rounded off by Section 12, whose calm mitigated skepticism we have already discussed.

It is illuminating to see how the balanced scientific naturalism of the *Enquiry*—whose overall epistemological perspective can seem common sense today—avoids destruction on the skeptical rocks that sank the project of the *Treatise*. First, Hume omits the corrosive skeptical argument of T 1.4.1, perhaps recognizing its serious flaws. That argument depended on the idea that rational judgment must always be *reflexive*, in the sense of requiring a further judgment about our initial judgment's reliability (T 1.4.1.5/181–2). But this requirement, which Hume sees as leading to a vicious regress and a continual diminution of probability,[46] is implicitly challenged in the *Enquiry* by his rejection of antecedent skepticism at EU 12.3/149–50. There, he points out that it is self-evidently hopeless to make reliance on our faculties conditional on a logically prior justification of them, for any would-be justification must itself rely on them. Hence, as we saw earlier, it is entirely reasonable to ascribe them default authority from the start, without tying ourselves in reflexive knots.

Second, in the *Enquiry* Hume omits any discussion of identity over time, and hence has no occasion to repeat his allegations from the *Treatise* that our ascriptions of such identity (either to physical objects, organisms, or persons) are radically incoherent and sustainable only by a "fiction of the imagination."[47] It is tempting to surmise that Hume had come to see the error of his ways here, and was no longer taking for granted that *numerical identity* over time necessarily requires *qualitative invariableness*.[48] Recognition of such an error might explain why he never again discusses identity in any of his works—thus the labyrinth of personal identity is completely unmentioned in the *Enquiry*.[49]

Third, in the *Enquiry* Hume treats our belief in external objects as a natural instinct which is potentially true (as long as we are careful to distinguish objects from our perceptions of them), even though we cannot provide any rational argument to support that belief.[50] We risk incoherence if we try to conceptualize the *nature* of external objects in terms of primary and secondary qualities (EU 12.15/154; cf. T 1.4.4), but apparently there is no harm in thinking of them using the merely relative idea of "a certain unknown, inexplicable *something*, as the cause of our perceptions" (EU 12.16/155; cf. T 1.2.6.9/68).

Finally, although Hume in the *Enquiry* retains his beloved Copy Principle (and its vital application to the issues of causal necessity and free will), he no longer treats ideas so simplistically as sensory images that can be literally divided into independent atomic perceptions and rearranged. Accordingly his Separability Principle disappears, along

with the extravagant commitment to the possibility of self-subsisting perceptions which made the metaphysics of the *Treatise* so incredible.[51]

Most of these features of the *Enquiry* involve omission of *Treatise* material, and since Hume does not explicitly disavow what he omitted, we cannot be certain where his editing reflects a genuine change of mind as opposed to pragmatic silence or mere abridgement. In general, the differences seem philosophically well-motivated and hence likely to have resulted from greater maturity and reflection. With respect to the external world, however, the *Enquiry* account is somewhat unsatisfactory in failing to pursue difficult questions raised by the Copy Principle. Part 1 of Section 12 ends by pointing out that if our thinking about external objects is restricted to ideas copied from our sensations, then the merely relative notion that we can have of them as independent entities seems to be "so imperfect, that no sceptic will think it worth while to contend against it" (EU 12.16/155). This subtle phrase, however, is ambiguous, and I suspect deliberately so, reflecting Hume's two minds on the issue. On the one hand, thinking of "the cause of our perceptions" as "a certain unknown, inexplicable *something*" is so pathetically contentless that it hardly qualifies as a thought of a substantial object. But on the other hand, this lack of substantial content perfectly suits Hume's irreligious purposes and his desire to cripple any ambition towards a rival metaphysics based on supposed rational insight into the nature of matter (such as Locke's and Clarke's insistence that matter and motion cannot create thought).[52] Having found a phrase that nicely captures this ambivalence, and without any more satisfactory philosophical resolution to offer, Hume allows his discussion to end here,[53] with a footnote which credits Berkeley for the preceding argument about primary and secondary qualities and observes that such "merely sceptical" arguments typically "*admit of no answer and produce no conviction*" (EU 12.16 n32/155 n1). This observation corresponds with his already-stated pretext for giving so little attention to such arguments: that they "can so little serve to any serious purpose" (EU 12.15/154). Thus Hume apparently wants to rise above extreme skepticism even when he has no satisfactory philosophical answer to it.[54]

VII Conclusion: Hume's Consistent Purposes

If this account is on the right lines, then Hume's philosophy has a consistent underlying core, which probably first started to crystallize when he brought his concept empiricism—the Copy Principle—to bear on a cluster of issues involving causation. But his ultimate aim here was not merely to analyze concepts, and he was motivated more by the valuable corollaries that he saw flowing from his definition of causal necessity: bringing human thought and behavior within the reach of causal science, refuting the supposed apriority of the Causal Maxim, and concluding that causal relations (and hence the properties of matter) can be known only through experience. These results

also struck heavily against Christian orthodoxy by undermining the Cosmological Argument, the Free Will Defence, the immateriality of the soul, and more generally the conception of man as radically distinct from the animal creation. Thus we see Hume's explanatory naturalism, epistemic empiricism, anti-supernaturalism, and biological naturalism all fitting together into a coherent system.

This system is also profoundly skeptical by the standards of Hume's day, most notably in regard to its irreligion and denial of the possibility of a priori insight into the nature of things. But Hume does not intend it to be *corrosively* skeptical, in the sense of posing a direct threat to the possibility of a philosophically respectable human science. Thus the extreme skepticism that arises in *Treatise* Book 1 Part 4 is *not* central to his philosophical plans, but derives instead from what he takes to be the logical following-through of his own principles, compelling him towards conclusions with which he is deeply uncomfortable. On this conception of his project, therefore, the dismay that he expresses in the conclusion of Book 1 is genuine rather than a charade, revealing his intense awareness that he has no adequate answer to the corrosive problems that he has unearthed. This extreme skepticism is no part of his intention, let alone a central theme, and the *Abstract* and *Enquiry* therefore reflect his fundamental purposes far more faithfully than does Book 1 of the *Treatise*.[55] The central line of thought made plain in the *Abstract* was in Hume's eyes the "Chief Argument" of the *Treatise* right from the start. His achievement in the *Enquiry* was to refine it further and thus to show how he could avoid the rocks of Pyrrhonism while steering the apparently "leaky, weather-beaten vessel" (T 1.4.7.1/263) of human reason safely towards the possibility of a fruitful, naturalistic science of man.

Abbreviations of Hume's Works Cited

D *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. In D. Coleman, ed. *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion and Other Writings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

EM *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals: A Critical Edition*. Edited by Tom L. Beauchamp. Oxford: Clarendon, 1998.

EU *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding: A Critical Edition*. Edited by Tom L. Beauchamp. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000.

LET *The Letters of David Hume*, 2 Vols. Edited by J. Y. T. Greig. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1932.

LG *A Letter from a Gentleman to His friend in Edinburgh*. Edited by E. C. Mossner and J. V. Price. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967.

NHR *The Natural History of Religion*. In Tom L. Beauchamp, ed. *A Dissertation on the Passions; The Natural History of Religion*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007.

T *A Treatise of Human Nature: A Critical Edition*. Edited by D. F. Norton and M. J. Norton. Oxford: Clarendon, 2007.

TA *An Abstract of a Treatise of Human Nature*. Reprinted in **T**.

Notes

1. As understood by many hostile critics from Beattie (1770) to Stove (1973), and at least some admirers (e.g., Popkin 1951; Fogelin 1985).
2. A tradition of interpretation begun by Reid (1764) and promoted by Green (1874).
3. Morris (2009), for example, argues that "it is [Hume's] use of [the Copy Principle's] reverse in his account of definition that is really the most distinctive and innovative element of his system."
4. Garrett (1997) interprets Hume's central arguments as contributions to cognitive science.
5. The *Dissertation on the Passions* retains a fair amount of associationism, while the basic principle of *custom*—which Hume sees as *analogous* to the association of ideas (EU 5.20/53–4)—figures strongly in the first *Enquiry*. There is some suggestion in the *Enquiry* (EU 5.9/47) that Hume may have lost confidence in more specific associationist claims, but it seems likely that he continued to think that associationist mechanisms play a major role in human cognition.
6. Three parts of the *Treatise* end with sections on "the reason of animals" (T 1.3.16), "the pride and humility of animals" (T 2.1.12), and "the love and hatred of animals" (T 2.2.12), all of which stress human parallels. Hume ends Part 2.3 without a section on "the will and direct passions" of animals only because, he says, the parallel there is too obvious to require discussion (T 2.3.9.32/448). He also devotes Section 9 of the first *Enquiry* to "the reason of animals."
7. The term *evolutionary naturalism* is tempting, but would be anachronistic as applied to Hume. Darwin's theory of evolution did not appear until 1859, although his notebooks of around 1839 show that he was reading Hume's *Enquiry* section on the reason of animals—published more than ninety years earlier—at the time that he came up with his theory.
8. Hume uses this phrase many times in the *Natural History of Religion* (NHR Intro.1, 2.2, 2.5, 3.4, 4.1, 5.2, 8.2, 15.5); at EU 7.21/69 he talks of "some invisible intelligent principle."
9. See for example Stroud (1977), pp. 186, 251 n. 9, 263 n. 10; Craig (1987) p. 71; Noonan (1999), pp. 18–19; Blackburn (2008), p. 108 n. 15. Quite apart from other objections, it is chronologically very implausible that Hume left for France in 1734 with his moral ideas significantly worked out, composed the bulk of the *Treatise* there within three years, and then on his return delayed publishing Book 3 until twenty-one months after the others.
10. Note that the famous hyperbolic statement about reason's being "the slave of the passions" (T 2.3.3.4/415), which so inspired Kemp Smith, does not really involve any *subordination* of reason to passion, for as Hume has just explained in the same paragraph, the two are not (and cannot be) in conflict. His theory of action is essentially that passion sets the *ends* of our action whereas reason works out the *means*. Without some desire to motivate us, we would not prefer one outcome over another, and hence reason would be inert because it has nothing to aim for, not because it is *dominated*.
11. Hume took the mind-spreading metaphor from Malebranche (1674–5/1997, p. 58), but its vividness and apparent fit with various aspects of Hume's own philosophy has contributed to a widespread enthusiasm for characterizing him as a *projectivist*, especially among those attracted to Kemp Smith's view of him as privileging our sentiments in understanding the world. The point made here should at least give pause to those inclined to speak of "Humean projection," for it is far from clear that his attitude to causation—where he clearly presents such projection as an *error*—is to be assimilated with his attitude to

morality, where he talks apparently approvingly of the mind's "gilding or staining all natural objects with the colours, borrowed from internal sentiment" (EM App. 1.21/294). The complications involved in ascribing projection to Hume are explored by Kail (2007).

12. As documented at length in Russell (2008).
13. Craig's case for seeing the Similarity Thesis as the "dominant philosophy" of the Early Modern period (1987, chapter 1) also seems to me extremely thin. Given that God is understood as an infinite mind, theist philosophers will almost inevitably draw comparisons with the human mind, but unless these are frequent and pervasive (which Craig's limited citations suggest not), they provide negligible evidence of a "dominant philosophy."
14. Craig's presentation of indirect evidence (1987: 75–128) is fifteen times longer than his direct evidence (1987: 71–74), which cites only T 3.1.1.4/456–7 and various passages from the *Dialogues* (on the Design Argument).
15. See Millican (1995) pp. 123–124, 127–129, 136; (2002) pp. 155–156, 161–163; Garrett (1997) pp. 85–88. Since these appeared, support for the "deductivist" and "antideductivist" interpretations of Hume's argument seems to have vanished.
16. See, for example, Millican (2009) §5 (especially pp. 671–674) on the idea of necessary connexion and §4 on the two definitions, and also Section III of the current paper.
17. The "common Opinion" here seems most likely to mean theism in general, rather than anything more specific.
18. Compare Locke's *Essay* IV x 10 with Clarke (1732: 53).
19. The more general connection between Hume's causal topics and irreligion—to be discussed later—is also strongly corroborated by the references made to *Treatise* Book 1 in the "Sum of the Charge": seven are to T 1.4.5, five to T 1.3.14, one each to T 1.3.2, 1.3.7, 1.3.15, and 1.4.1, and one to the entirety of 1.4.7 (in relation to the first charge of "Universal Scepticism"). T 1.4.5 was clearly far more significant in context than it seems to most commentators today.
20. Kames refers explicitly to the Clarke-Collins debate in his *Essays* (1751: 171). Kames's own debate with Baxter concerned the causation of motion, his views on which were later published in the *Essays and Observations* of 1754.
21. For a useful summary account of this affair, see Russell (2008: 42–45), who speculates (p. 45) that it might have played some role in encouraging Hume to leave Scotland two years later. The free-thinking nephew of a Chirnside minister could certainly expect unwelcome attention and intrusion in such an inquisitorial context.
22. For more on this, see Millican (2007a: §§4–6).
23. The forty philosophical memoranda are in Mossner (1948: 500–503), and, for their dating, see Stewart (2000), especially p. 280, and Stewart (2005: 47). Memorandum 23, quoted here, is one of six that concern the Free Will Defence to the Problem of Evil (the others being numbers 19, 24, 25, 26, and 32).
24. See EU 2.9/21–22 and EU 7.4/62. In a letter to Hugh Blair of July 4, 1762, Hume defends himself against Thomas Reid's suggestion that "I had been hasty, & not supported by any Colour of Argument when I affirm, that all our Ideas are copy'd from impressions" by responding that "I have endeavourd to build that Principle on two Arguments," namely those from EU 2.6/19–20 and EU 2.7/20 (Brookes 1997: 257).
25. For a defence of these arguments, however, see Garrett (1997: 41–48).
26. Writing to Michael Ramsay on August 26, 1737, Hume recommends Bayle's article on Zeno of Elea as one of the readings that will help his friend to "easily comprehend the metaphysical Parts" of the *Treatise* (Mossner 1980: 627). Hume remained proud of his treatment

of space and time until at least 1755, when a noted mathematician, Lord Philip Stanhope, dissuaded him from publishing his treatise "on the metaphisical Principles of Geometry" (LET ii 253).

27. For discussion of Hume's assumption that the idea in question is *simple*, and of his insistence that all the various causal terms in his list are "nearly synonimous," see Millican (2007b) §2.2.
28. For further details of the debate, including relevant quotations, see Millican (2010) §II.
29. For the overwhelming evidence that Hume saw causation (and the universe) as deterministic, see Millican (2010).
30. The last and most dangerous of these implications—although perfectly clear in Hume's early memoranda—was prudently omitted from the *Treatise*. It saw the light of publication only in the *Enquiry*, but even there is expressed as a "mystery" rather than as an explicit threat to theism (EU 8.36/103).
31. For much more on this, see Millican (2009) and (2011). It is revealing how little of the New Hume literature makes any mention whatever of Clarke, Collins, moral and physical necessity, or the application of Hume's definitions to the problems of thinking matter and of "liberty and necessity." These issues are now sufficiently prominent in the literature that readers can draw their own conclusion from New Humean discussions that strategically ignore them.
32. Hence Hume's insistence that all of Locke's "natural" and "instituted" relations (*Essay* II xxviii 2 and 3) should be classed as instances of causation (T 1.1.4.3/11–2 and T 1.1.4.5/12 respectively). Comparison of the two accounts clearly reveals the taxonomic motive here, thus undercutting Kemp Smith's influential claim (1941: 245; cf. Noonan 1999: 18) that Hume's citing of blood and duty relationships as examples of causation is indicative of a predominant interest in moral philosophy. For detailed assessment of Hume's theory of relations, see Millican (forthcoming) §2.
33. So much so that the title word "probability" does not even appear in the main text until T 1.3.6.4/89.
34. This footnote was an afterthought, inserted into the *Treatise* while it was going through the press by means of a "cancel" leaf, which I believe accounts for its placement at the end of the section: it really belongs at the end of T 1.3.9.4/108 and should be read as a comment on T 1.3.9.3–4/107–8. Hume presents it as revealing an ambiguity in "the imagination," although more precisely he is drawing a distinction between two types of *principle* that operate on our ideas in the imagination: those that deserve the accolade of "reason" and those that do not. The same distinction is made more prominently at T 1.4.4.1–2/225–6, between the "permanent, irresistible, and universal" principles and those that are "changeable, weak, and irregular." Allusions to the distinction are also evident at T 1.3.13.11–12/149–50 and especially T 1.4.7.6–7/267–8, where its undermining seems to put Hume's entire philosophical project at risk, as we shall see in Section V of the current paper.
35. Compare Locke's suggestion that "Reason . . . perceives the probable connexion of all the *Ideas* or Proofs one to another" in a discourse that involves probable inference (*Essay* IV xvii 2).
36. If he refuses to acknowledge *anything*, of course, then he can present no reason either way.
37. See §1 of Millican (2012) for a detailed discussion of this response to extreme skepticism, which is more substantial than a crude appeal to *justificatory naturalism*: Hume is not *merely* saying that we cannot help reasoning inductively.

38. Later, at T 1.4.7.3/265 and T 1.4.7.5/266–7, Hume does show concern about the skeptical impact of his conclusions that induction relies on the mind's enlivening of ideas and that the impression of necessity is subjective. But until Part 4, the word "scepticism" and its cognates do not appear at all in the *Treatise*, except for a disapproving comment at T Intro.3/xiv.
39. It is puzzling—and perhaps a symptom of Hume's order of composition and haste in publication—that his most explicit presentation of the distinction, which moreover presents it as unambiguously required in order to "justify" his position, comes *after* two sections (T 1.4.1 and 1.4.2) that cast serious doubt on its tenability.
40. The key causal principle, "from like effects we presume like causes," is applied at T 1.4.4.4/227.
41. Indeed the supposed *eternity* of salvation or hellfire invites Pascal's famous Wager: better to "bet" on religion if the stakes are so high (and ignore the theoretical objections to the Wager as "cold, and strain'd"—T 1.4.7.9/269).
42. I am unconvinced by Garrett's appeal (1997, pp. 233–237) to what he calls Hume's "Title Principle" (at T 1.4.7.11/270) as a solution to this problem. It has no clear basis, gives no solid criterion for discrimination, and seems to be a stage in Hume's train of thought rather than a principle to which he gives enduring weight (e.g., it is not repeated in the *Enquiry*).
43. Hume might also have been motivated to seek out and present skeptical arguments because of their irreligious consequences (a case made strongly by Russell 2008), sometimes perhaps to the detriment of his scientific ambitions.
44. The full title is *An Abstract of a Book lately Published, entituled, A Treatise of Human Nature, &c. wherein the Chief Argument of that Book is farther illustrated and explained*.
45. Note again that Hume considers our inductive beliefs to be subject to rational discipline: as pointed out in Section V and note 37 above, his wholehearted support of induction is not simply an appeal to what we naturally believe.
46. The claim of continual diminution seems unjustified: if I mistake the reliability of my own mathematical judgment, for example, that error might require adjustment *upward* rather than downward, and in any case, my mathematical reliability is quite independent of my reliability in assessing my own faculties. Moreover such reflexive thinking, so far from being a rational duty, might well distract me from the mathematics and thus be ill-advised. On Humean principles, the optimal self-monitoring policy is only discoverable by experience, and cannot be a priori.
47. See, for example, T 1.4.2.26–36/200–5, T 1.4.3.2–4/219–20, and T 1.4.6.5–16/253–60.
48. As stated, for example, at T 1.4.2.31/201–2, T 1.4.3.2/219, and T 1.4.6.6/253–5.
49. In the *Dialogues*, Demea asks "What is the soul of man?" and presents something like the Humean bundle theory, pointing out that this is radically at odds with "that perfect immutability and simplicity, which all true Theists ascribe to the Deity" (D 4.2). But there is no suggestion here—nor in Cleathes's response—that change and complexity are incompatible with identity over time.
50. "It is a question of fact, whether the perceptions of the senses be produced by external objects, resembling them" (EU 12.12/153), but as Hume then explains, we have no observational basis for an inductive argument to decide this question (cf. T 1.4.2.47/212).
51. The atomistic *Treatise* theory of space and time, closely associated with the Separability Principle, is reduced in the *Enquiry* to a tentative "hint" at EU 12.20 n34/158 n1, which clearly acknowledges the motivation "to avoid . . . absurdities and contradictions,"

so that "lovers of science" will not "expose themselves to the ridicule and contempt of the ignorant."

52. By contrast, Hume presumably considers that even a minimal and relative conception of objects is enough to sustain the inductive science that he himself favors.
53. The final sentence of EU 12.16/155 was added only in the posthumous 1777 edition, perhaps corroborating my speculation that Hume was in two minds, composing his ambivalent conclusion only when his terminal illness was making clear that he would never personally resolve this.
54. To find an answer, I believe Hume would have had to reject his Copy Principle and crude "constant conjunction" view of inductive inference, countenancing both "inference to the best explanation" and postulation of entities with which we are not acquainted. It is unsurprising, in view of Section III above, that he did not explore this avenue.
55. Hence, presumably, the famous 1775 "Advertisement" in which Hume repudiated the Treatise as a "juvenile work" in favor of the *Enquiry* (and the other pieces in Volume 2 of the *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*).

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