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1 An introduction to Hume's thought

David Hume (1711–76) may be best understood as the first post-sceptical philosopher of the early modern period. Many of Hume's immediate predecessors, particularly the Cartesians, had attempted to refute philosophical scepticism. In contrast to these predecessors, Hume was a self-proclaimed sceptic who consciously developed a philosophical position that is at one and the same time fundamentally sceptical and fundamentally constructive. His position is sceptical in so far as he shows that knowledge has nothing like the firm, reliable foundation the Cartesians or other rationalists had claimed to give it; his position is constructive in so far as he undertook to articulate a new science of human nature that would provide for all the sciences, including morals and politics, a unique and defensible foundation. For nearly two centuries the positive side of Hume's thought was routinely overlooked – in part as a reaction to his thoroughgoing religious scepticism – but in recent decades commentators, even those who emphasize the sceptical aspects of his thought, have recognized and begun to reconstruct Hume's positive philosophical positions.

I. INTELLECTUAL BEGINNINGS

Hume was born in Edinburgh and divided his youth between that city and Ninewells, his family's small landholding a few miles from the Scottish Borders town of Berwick-upon-Tweed. Little is known of Hume's early childhood. His father died when Hume was two years old, and his early education was in the charge of his mother,

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who reported that young Davie was "uncommonly wake-minded" – that is, uncommonly *acute*, in the local dialect of the period – and this report is confirmed by all else we know of the young Hume. He was himself concerned about his vanity in thinking himself cleverer than his schoolmates,[1] while his earliest surviving letter (HL 1: 9), written soon after he turned sixteen, indicates that he was even then engaged in the writing that was to result in the publication, at age twenty-seven, of the first two volumes of *A Treatise of Human Nature*.

A detailed account of Hume's early reading and education is only now beginning to emerge, but it is clear that by the time he left college (c. 1726) he would have had a thorough grounding in classical authors (especially Cicero and the major Latin poets); in natural philosophy (particularly that of Robert Boyle, whose use of the experimental method obviously impressed Hume) and elementary mathematics;[2] and in logic (including theory of knowledge), metaphysics (including natural religion), and moral philosophy (including moral psychology or the theory of the passions). There is also evidence that he attended lectures on world history, and that soon after leaving college he undertook study of the theory of fluxions (calculus). His early reading also included many of the English poets and essayists of the period – Milton, Dryden, Rochester, Prior, Pope, Swift, Addison, Steele, for example. He reports that in the three years ending about March 1734 he had read "most of the celebrated Books in Latin, French & English," and also learned Italian (KHL). Thus, although Hume's thought has been routinely represented as the outcome of his intellectual engagement with only a few philosophers – with Locke and Berkeley, or Hutcheson or Newton – the fact is that Hume read widely, and that the list of those who had a significant, but not necessarily positive, impact on his early thought must be expanded to include not only the writers already mentioned, but also a great many others, among them such relatively well-known figures as Plutarch, Seneca, Machiavelli, Montaigne, Francis Bacon, Grotius, Descartes, Gassendi, Pascal, Boileau, Pufendorf, Hooke, Malebranche, Bayle, Collins, Shaftesbury, Samuel Clarke, Mandeville, Joseph Butler, Montesquieu, and Bolingbroke, as well as many other figures now obscure. This breadth of study and reading does not necessarily distinguish Hume from other philosophers of his time, but it does suggest that, despite his obvious preference for what he called the "experimental

Method of Reasoning," no single writer or philosophical tradition can be relied upon to provide a comprehensive key to his thought. Readers of Hume should be wary of those commentators who engage in the kind of historical reductivism that claims to unlock the secrets of Hume's thought by reference to one or two authors or one intellectual tradition.

II. PHILOSOPHICAL BEGINNINGS

1. Hume's most often cited works include *A Treatise of Human Nature* (3 volumes, 1739–40); the *Abstract* (1740) of volumes 1 and 2 of the *Treatise*; *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, a collection of approximately forty essays (first published, for the most part, between 1741 and 1752); *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748); *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751);[3] *The Natural History of Religion* (1757); a six-volume *History of England* from Roman times to 1688 (1754–62); a brief autobiography, *My Own Life* (1777); and *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (1778). These works span a wide range of topics, which make them in the end significantly heterogeneous, but they are unified in at least one fundamental characteristic: their author's commitment to the experimental method, or to a form of empiricism that sees both the advantages and the necessity of relying on experience and observation to provide the answer to intellectual questions of all kinds.

In the Introduction to the earliest of his works, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume traces the beginning of the use of the experimental method in the natural sciences to Francis Bacon (d. 1626). The moral sciences, he argues, particularly the foundational science of human nature that he proposes to develop, must also make use of this method: "And as the science of man is the only solid foundation for the other sciences, so the only solid foundation we can give to this science itself must be laid on experience and observation" (T Intro, xvi).[4] A page later he insists that, while we must try

> to render all our principles as universal as possible, by tracing up our experiments to the utmost, and explaining all effects from the simplest and fewest causes, 'tis still certain we cannot go beyond experience; and any hypothesis, that pretends to discover the ultimate original qualities of human nature, ought at first to be rejected as presumptuous and chimerical.
>
> (T Intro, xvii)

Recognizing that moral philosophy cannot make its experiments "purposely, with premeditation, and after such a manner as to satisfy itself concerning every particular difficulty which may arise," he tells us that

> we must therefore 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 company, in affairs, and in their pleasures. Where experiments of this kind are judiciously collected and compared, we may hope to establish on them a science, which will not be inferior in certainty, and will be much superior in utility to any other of human comprehension. (T Intro, xix)

In the *Abstract* Hume "promises to draw no conclusions but where he is authorized by experience" (A, 646). He concludes *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* with the now notorious injunction to commit to the flames any book that contains neither "*any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number*" nor "*any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence*" (EHU 12.3, 165), but not before he has subjected experimental reasoning itself to a severe, experimental scrutiny (EHU 4.2, 32–9).[5] *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* undertakes to discover "the foundation of ethics." As this, Hume says, "is a question of fact, not of abstract science, we can only expect success, by following the experimental method, and deducing general maxims from a comparison of particular instances" (EPM 1, 174). In "Of the Original Contract," an essay first published in 1748, Hume tells us that "A small degree of experience and observation suffices to teach us, that society cannot possibly be maintained without the authority of magistrates," and that, moreover, the "observation of these general and obvious interests is the source of all allegiance, and of that moral obligation, which we attribute to it" (E-OC, 480). "Of the Standard of Taste," first published in 1756, tells us that the "rules of composition" are obviously nothing more than "general observations, concerning what has been universally found to please in all countries and in all ages," and that in this regard their "foundation is the same with that of all the practical sciences, [namely] experience" (E-ST, 231).[6]

Hume presumably felt less need to be explicit about his commitment to experience and observation in his primarily historical

works, the *Natural History of Religion* and *History of England*. The first of these works attempts to discover "the origin of religion in human nature" by extrapolating from present facts (religion and human nature as they are at present found to be) and the historical record of the beginnings and development of religion. This exercise is a *natural* history because the explanation is carried out within the limits of observable, natural phenomena; no supernatural beings or principles are appealed to or presupposed.[7] In short, *The Natural History of Religion* is a manifestation of Hume's commitment to observational empiricism.[8]

Much the same can be said of *The History of England*. Motivated to a considerable degree by the exaggerated claims of Whig and Tory alike – of those who insisted that the political institutions of eighteenth-century Britain should be made to reflect a perfect model found either in the mists of their Anglo-Saxon beginnings (a Whig tendency) or in a timeless, sacred beginning (a Tory tendency) – Hume attempted an impartial history of England, a history free of the essentially metaphysical commitments of both parties. He undertook to produce a history that recorded the *development* of political institutions over time, that treated these institutions not as derivations from pre-existing principles, but as the hard-won and still developing products of centuries of experience and observation.[9]

2. For most of the 250 years since the publication of his *Treatise*, Hume has standardly been interpreted as the philosopher who advanced empiricism to its logical and sceptical conclusion. Hume is better understood as a post-sceptical philosopher. By this I mean to suggest that Hume supposed (a) that the Cartesians (especially Malebranche) and Locke and Berkeley had in fact already taken traditional metaphysics and epistemology to its sceptical conclusions; (b) that these sceptical conclusions had been soundly and validly established; and (c) that the most important remaining task of philosophy, given these well-established and obvious conclusions, was to show how we are to get on with our lives, particularly our intellectual lives. Prior to Hume, one or another philosopher had, often unintentionally, thoroughly discredited the claim of humans to have certain knowledge of the true nature of space, causal relations, external objects, and mind. As Hume put it, even the "rabble," the crowd outside the philosophical hall, can tell, from the noise within, that

the philosophical enterprise is not going well. "The most trivial question escapes not our controversy, and in the most momentous we are not able to give any certain decision" (T Intro, xiv). Time, surely, to start afresh, to provide a new foundation, the science of human nature, on which all other sciences will rest.

But notice where Hume begins: the "elements of this philosophy" are, in the most literal sense, the immediate objects of thought and the relations between or among these objects of the "mental world." The elements themselves are called *perceptions* and are divided into two kinds, *impressions* and *ideas*. Of these, impressions are the more forceful or lively and also causally prior; ideas are complementary in that they are said to be "the faint images" of impressions, and causally dependent on them. In addition, Hume classifies as impressions "all our sensations, passions and emotions, as they make their first appearance in the soul" or mind and then divides this class into two sub-classes, *impressions of sensation* and *impressions of reflection*. The latter sort, impressions of reflection, are "derived in a great measure from our ideas." Impressions of sensation, he says, arise "*in the soul originally, from unknown causes*" (italics added). He then adds that "the examination of our sensations belongs more to anatomists and natural philosophers than to moral; and therefore shall not at present be enter'd upon" (T 1.1.1–4, 1–13). The phrase "not at present" we in time discover means "not in this work," for at no time does Hume take up the task which he has assigned to anatomists and natural philosophers.[10] Indeed, he begins Book 2 of the *Treatise* with much the same disclaimer:

> 'Tis certain, that the mind, in its perceptions, must begin somewhere; and that since the impressions precede their correspondent ideas, there must be some impressions, which without any introduction make their appearance in the soul. As these depend upon natural and physical causes, the examination of them wou'd lead me too far from my present subject, into the sciences of anatomy and natural philosophy. (T 2.1.1, 275–6)

Between these two remarks Hume tells us clearly why he has left to others the task of explaining the origins of impressions of sensation. Such an explanation is irrelevant to the philosophical enterprise in which he is engaged. As he puts it:

> As to those *impressions*, which arise from the *senses*, their ultimate cause is, in my opinion, perfectly inexplicable by human reason, and 'twill

always be impossible to decide with certainty, whether they arise immediately from the object, or are produc'd by the creative power of the mind, or are deriv'd from the author of our being. Nor is such a question any way material to our present purpose. We may draw inferences from the coherence of our perceptions, whether they be true or false; whether they represent nature justly, or be mere illusions of the senses. (T 1.3.5, 84)[11]

But notice, I repeat, where Hume begins: the "elements of this philosophy" are, in the most literal sense, the immediate objects of thought and the relations between or among these objects in the "mental world." And his concern is not to advance from this base in order to deny that there are causes, objects, or minds – his concern is not to make the case for scepticism about objects, causes, or minds. The case for scepticism about these momentous questions was well-known to Hume. He knew those sections of Bayle and Locke that reveal the inadequacy of Descartes's attempts to prove that there is an external world. He appreciated the sceptical force of the objections brought by Bayle, then significantly amplified by Berkeley, against the primary-secondary quality distinction championed by Locke.[12] He saw that philosophers of all kinds were, in the matter of explaining the interaction of mind and body, sceptics in spite of themselves. He saw that the leading Cartesian of the day, Malebranche, had concluded that there are no natural causes of any kind, and that there is no human or natural knowledge of the existence of causes or objects; what we do know of these things is the result of, essentially, an act of divine grace.[13] In short, Hume was satisfied that the battle to establish reliable links between thought and reality had been fought *and lost* and hence made his contributions to philosophy from a post-sceptical perspective that incorporates and builds on the sceptical results of his predecessors.[14]

3. The once-standard reading of Hume credited him with seeing the sceptical implications of the representative theory of perception,[15] and with seizing on these implications in the cause of a destructive scepticism. It seems likely that Hume was fully aware of the sceptical implications of this theory, but, given his expressed disinterest in the connections between impressions of sensation and their possible causes, we must conclude either that he did not adopt the theory, or that he adopted only one part of it. Hume agrees that the immediate objects of mind are always perceptions, but he does not

take these to be, in one cardinal sense, representative of objects – neither impressions nor ideas *resemble* objects.[16]

In fact, Hume gave the "way of ideas" a kind of phenomenological turn. That is, his primary concern in Book 1 of the *Treatise* is with our perceptions, qua perceptions, with perceptions as, simply, the *elements or objects of the mind* and not as *representations* of external existences. Having focused on perceptions as the only objects of the mind, Hume goes on in Book 1 to show how some of these perceptions are interrelated or associated to produce still further perceptions, which are then projected onto a world putatively outside the mind.[17] *Somehow* the mind is furnished with impressions of sensation. On examination, we find that not one of these *impressions* can of itself be taken as an accurate representation of space or time, causal connection, an external object, or even our own mind. We simply do not have sensory *impressions* of space, causal connection, external existence, and so on. But, notwithstanding this fact – and the further fact that all our ideas are derived from impressions – we nonetheless do have *ideas* of space, causal connection, external existence, and so on and are nonetheless irredeemably committed to believing that there are real entities that correspond to each of these *ideas*.[18] The mystery to be explained, given the success of scepticism, is how we come to have these important ideas and, moreover, to believe that they represent, not impressions, but external existences or realities. To put this differently, Hume's greater goal is to show how, despite the success of scepticism, we are rescued from scepticism.

The first book of the *Treatise* is an effort to show how our perceptions "cohere" to form ideas of those fundamental items (space, causal connection, external existence) in which, sceptical doubts notwithstanding, we repose belief and on which "life and action entirely depend." In Book 1, Part 2, Hume argues that we have no direct impressions of space and time, and yet we do have the ideas of space and time.[19] He accounts for our idea of space by appealing to a "manner of appearance" in the following way. By means of two senses, sight and touch, we have impressions that array themselves as so many points related to one another. These particular impressions are by the *imagination* transformed into a "compound impression, which represents extension" or the abstract idea of space itself. Our idea of time is, *mutatis mutandis*, accounted for in the same way. "As 'tis from the disposition of visible and tangible objects we

receive the idea of space, so from the succession of ideas and impressions we form the idea of time." The abstract idea of time, like all other abstract ideas, is represented in the imagination by a "particular individual idea of a determinate quantity and quality" joined to a term, "time," that has general reference (A, 647; T 1.2.3, 34, 38, 35). In short, the imagination, a faculty not typically assigned so significant a role, achieves what neither the senses nor reason can achieve.

Hume's account of our derivation and belief in the idea of causal connection (of "necessary connection," in his terms) follows this same pattern. He is often said to have denied that there is physical necessity and that we have any idea of necessary connection. This interpretation is significantly mistaken. Hume had been convinced by the Cartesians, especially by Malebranche, that neither the senses nor reason can establish that one object (a cause) is connected together with another object (an effect) in such a way that the presence of the one necessarily entails the existence of the other. Hume's own analysis of what we suppose to be experiences of cause and effect reveals only that objects taken to be causally related are contiguous in time and space, that the cause is prior to the effect, and that similar objects have been constantly associated in this way. These are the only perceptible features of such putative causal connections. And yet there seems to be more to the matter. "There is," he says, "a NECESSARY CONNECTION to be taken into consideration," and our belief in that relation must be explained (T 1.3.2, 77). Despite our demonstrated inability to see or prove that there are necessary causal connections, we continue to think and act as if we had knowledge of such connections. We act, for example, as though the future will necessarily resemble the past, and "wou'd appear ridiculous" if we were to say "that 'tis only probable the sun will rise tomorrow, or that all men must dye" (T 1.3.11, 124). To explain this phenomenon, Hume asks us to imagine what life would have been like for Adam, suddenly brought to life in the midst of the world and in "the full vigour of understanding." Adam would have been unable to make even the simplest predictions about the future behaviour of objects. He would not have been able to predict that one moving billiard ball, striking a second, would cause the second to move (A, 650–1). And yet we, endowed with the same faculties, can not only make, but are unable to resist making, this and countless other such predictions. What is the difference between ourselves and this puta-

tive Adam? Experience. We have experienced the constant conjunction (the invariant succession of paired objects or events) of particular causes and effects, and, although our experience never includes even a glimpse of a causal connection, it does arouse in us an expectation that a particular event (a "cause") will be followed by another event (an "effect") previously and constantly associated with it. Regularities of experience give rise to these feelings and thus determine the mind to transfer its attention from a present impression to the idea of an absent but associated object. *The idea of necessary connection is copied from these feelings* (T 1.3.14, 162–6). The idea has its foundation in the mind and is projected onto the world, but there is nonetheless such an idea. That there is an objective physical necessity to which this idea corresponds is an untestable hypothesis, nor would demonstrating that such necessary connections had held in the past guarantee that they will hold in the future. From these considerations we see that Hume does not explicitly and dogmatically deny that there are real causal connections. We have no experience of such necessary connections and hence can be, at best, sceptical or agnostic about their existence. There is, however, an idea of necessary connection, but, although we ordinarily and naturally believe that reality corresponds to this idea, the correct philosophical analysis reveals that the idea is derived from a feeling, or an impression of reflection, and hence this analysis leaves us able to suppose that our belief, however natural, may be mistaken.

Hume's account of our *belief* in future effects or absent causes – of the process of mind that enables us to *plan effectively* – is a part of this same explanation. Such belief involves an idea or conception of the entity believed in but is clearly different from mere conception without belief. This difference cannot be explained by supposing that some further idea, an idea of belief itself, is present when we believe but absent when we merely conceive. There is no such idea. Moreover, given the mind's ability freely to join together any two consistent ideas, if such an idea were available we by an act of will could, contrary to experience, combine the idea of belief with any other idea, and by so doing cause ourselves to believe anything. Consequently, Hume concludes that belief can only be a "different MANNER of conceiving an object"; it is a livelier, firmer, more vivid and intense conception. Belief in certain "matters of fact" – the belief that because some event or object is now being experienced,

some other event or object not yet available to experience *will in the future* be experienced – is brought about by previous experience of the constant conjunction of two impressions. These two impressions have been associated together in such a way that the experience of one of them automatically gives rise to an idea of the other and has the effect of transferring the force or liveliness of the impression to the associated idea, thereby causing this idea to be believed or to take on the lively character of an impression (T 1.3.7, 94–8; A, 653–4).

Our beliefs in continuing and independently existing objects and in our own continuing selves are, on Hume's account, beliefs in "fictions," or in entities entirely beyond all experience. We have impressions that we naturally but mistakenly suppose to be themselves continuing, external objects, but analysis quickly reveals that these impressions are by their very nature fleeting and observer-dependent. Moreover, none of our impressions provides us with a distinctive mark or evidence of an external origin (T 1.4.2, 187–93). Similarly, when we focus on our own minds, we experience only a sequence of impressions and ideas and never encounter the mind or self in which these perceptions are supposed to inhere. To ourselves we appear to be merely "a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement" (T 1.4.6, 252). How, then, do we come to believe in external objects or our own selves and self-identity? Neither reason nor the senses, working with impressions and ideas, provide anything like compelling proof of the existence of continuing, external objects, or of a continuing, unified self. Indeed, these two faculties cannot account for our *belief* in objects or selves. If we had only reason and the senses, the faculties championed by previous philosophers, we would be mired in a debilitating and destructive uncertainty. So unfortunate an outcome is avoided only by the operation of that apparently unreliable third faculty, the *imagination*. It, by means of what appear to be a series of outright mistakes and trivial suggestions, leads us to believe in our own selves and in independently existing objects. The scepticism of the philosophers is in this way both confirmed (we can provide no arguments, for example, proving the existence of the external world) and shown to be of little practical import. As Hume summed up his point:

Almost all reasoning is there [the *Treatise*] reduced to experience; and the belief, which attends experience, is explained to be nothing but a peculiar sentiment, or lively conception produced by habit. Nor is this all, when we believe any thing of *external* existence, or suppose an object to exist a moment after it is no longer perceived, this belief is nothing but a sentiment of the same kind. Our author insists upon several other sceptical topics; and upon the whole 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. (A, 657)

4. Books 2 and 3 of the *Treatise* focus on the remaining element in Hume's mental world, the *impression of reflection*, or "those other impressions . . . call'd secondary and reflective, as arising either from the original impressions, or from their ideas" (T 2.1.1, 276). There are in these two books no questions about the existence of causes, objects, or minds. Having once explained how we form ideas of and come to believe in these entities, Hume simply takes them for granted and pushes on to discuss our principal impressions of reflection: the passions and the will in Book 2, and the moral sentiments, a particular species of passion, in Book 3.[20]

In general terms, Hume can be said to have attempted to rescue the passions from the ad hoc explanations and negative assessments of his predecessors. From the time of Plato and the Stoics, the passions had been routinely characterized as irrational, inexplicable, and unnatural elements which, given their head, will undermine and enslave reason, the essential and defining characteristic of humans. In contrast to this long-standing orthodoxy, Hume assumes that the passions constitute an integral and legitimate part of human nature, and a part that can be explained observationally (although introspectively) without recourse to physical or metaphysical speculation. On Hume's view, the passions can be treated as of a piece with other perceptions: they are secondary impressions that derive from prior impressions and ideas.

When we look at the passions in this way, we find differences between them. They may be divided into two classes, the *direct* and the *indirect*. The *direct* passions – desire, aversion, hope, and fear, for example – are feelings *caused* immediately or directly by pleasure or pain, or the prospect thereof, and take entities or events as their intentional objects, as when I desire food or fear political change. The *indirect* passions – pride and humility, love and hatred – are more

complex. They arise as the result of a double relation of impressions and ideas and take persons as their objects. Their *causes* are, typically, the qualities of persons or of things belonging to persons, while their *objects* are the persons possessing these qualities or things. As Hume explains the matter, the object of pride or humility is always oneself, while the object of love or hatred is always some other person. The important point in the present context has not to do with the details of Hume's account, but with the fact that in giving it he demonstrates his commitment to treating the passions as nothing more or less than an integral part of the natural, mental world. The passions, like the ideas discussed in Book 1 of the *Treatise*, are further products of the observable natural processes Hume undertook to analyze and explain.

At first glance, the third and final book of the *Treatise* may appear to launch Hume on a course entirely different from that followed in the preceding volumes. This book is subtitled *Of Morals* and begins with a discussion of the question, "*Whether 'tis by means of our* ideas *or* impressions *we distinguish betwixt vice and virtue, and pronounce an action blameable or praise-worthy?*" (T 3.1.1, 456). The ensuing discussion seems never to deal explicitly with the apparently more fundamental genetic question, *How do the original elements of the mental world, those original* impressions of sensation, *give rise to the* impressions of reflection *and* ideas *associated with morality?* Hume simply takes it as given that we make moral distinctions, and that our moral discourse is carried out competently. We use a wide-ranging moral vocabulary that includes such terms as *virtue*, *vice*, *motive*, *duty*, *laudable*, *blameable*, *benevolence*, and *justice*, to mention only a few, and we understand one another's meaning – not perfectly, of course – but well enough to be able to spot inappropriate or incorrect uses of these terms (T 3.2.2, 500; 3.3.1, 579). This latter fact means that Hume also supposes that there are relatively clear moral *ideas*, ideas that are referred to by, or (to use his idiom) that are *annexed to*, these moral terms. Pursuing the genetic question about these ideas may give us the clearest and most fundamental answer to the question Hume *does* ask.

Hume appears never to think of renouncing the principle that "all ideas are deriv'd from, and represent impressions" (T 1.3.14, 161; see also 1.3.7, 96).[21] Given that he explicitly tells us that we have no sensory impressions of virtue and vice (T 3.1.1, 468–9), it follows

that the idea of virtue is no more a copy of an *impression of sensation* than the idea of necessary connection is the copy of that type of impression. Hume also tells us that the ideas of virtue and vice are not the products of unaided reason; *reason alone* can no more give us the idea of vice than it can give us the idea of necessary connection (T 3.1.1, 456–68; 1.3.14, 157). And yet he assumes that we can talk as intelligently about virtue and vice as we do about extension and necessary connection (T 1.2.2, 32; 1.3.14, 162). Consequently, we must conclude that our moral terms are not meaningless – which is to say that they are "annexed" to ideas, and that these ideas refer to specifiable impressions. Just as there is an alternative account of the "nature and origin" of the idea referred to by the term *necessary connection* (T 1.3.14, 162), so is there an alternative account of the nature and origin of our moral ideas. Earlier we saw that impressions of sensation give rise, albeit indirectly, to the idea of necessary connection. Now we need to discover which impressions give rise, again indirectly, to the ideas of virtue and vice, and just how this is done. We also need to ask the same questions about our ideas of such particular virtues and vices as justice, injustice, and benevolence, and of such other moral concepts as duty and blame.

When we have answered these questions, we will understand why it is that Hume insists that it is by means of certain *impressions* that we distinguish betwixt vice and virtue. For Hume, to make a moral distinction – to do so competently, so that, for example, Nero is judged to have been vicious – is to apply rightly a moral term (*vicious*) and its annexed idea (the idea of *vice*) to an individual with distinctive characteristics, the observation of which characteristics has given rise to a distinctive and unpleasant feeling (an *impression of reflection*), or a "moral sentiment." If we think of this *kind* of experience as happening only once, it seems likely that there would be little more to it than the felt disapprobation. There would be an observation, and there would be a feeling of disapprobation, but there would be no *idea* of vice. But, because this kind of experience is encountered repeatedly, it gives rise to an idea that serves to "represent" it, or that represents at least its most notable aspect, the feeling of disapprobation. Thus we see not only how it is that moral ideas arise, but why it is that moral distinctions depend on particular impressions, the moral sentiments. Moral distinctions cannot depend ultimately on ideas, not even on moral ideas, because all

ideas derive from, and represent, impressions. If our experience were not such that it gave rise to some distinctive and relevant differences among our impressions of reflection, we would have no distinctive and intelligible *moral* ideas. Just as only a portion of the conjunctions we experience lead us to make causal judgements, so, too, do only a portion of our approvals and disapprovals – and we can specify the features of those that do so – lead us to make moral judgements. In other words, only a relatively small part of our impressions of reflection give rise to, and are represented by, moral ideas.

This account of the origin of moral distinctions serves as an important reminder of another of Hume's points of departure, namely, the assumption that morality is an entirely human affair founded on human nature and the circumstances of human life. Since morality, he wrote as he was revising Book 3 of the *Treatise*, "is determin'd merely by Sentiment, it regards only human Nature & human Life" (HL 1:40). Morality exists only because human beings as a species possess several notable dispositions which, over time, have given rise to it. The tendency just discussed – to feel approbation and disapprobation in response to the motives and actions of others, and to form moral ideas as a consequence – is such a disposition. In addition, we have a disposition to form bonded family groups, another disposition (called *sympathy*) to communicate and thus share sentiments, and also a disposition to form general rules. Our disposition to form family groups results in small social units in which a natural generosity operates. The fact that such generosity is possible provides a foundation for the distinction between virtue and vice. The fact that we respond very differently to distinctive motivations – we feel approbation in response to well-intended actions, and disapprobation in response to ill-intended ones – provides a necessary starting place for the entire moral enterprise. To claim that "Nero was vicious" is to make a judgement about Nero's motives or character in consequence of an observation of him that has caused an impartial observer to feel a unique sentiment of disapprobation. That our moral judgements have this affective foundation accounts for the practical and motivational character of morality. Reason itself is "perfectly inert," and hence there is another ground for concluding that moral distinctions, which are practical or action-guiding, must derive from impressions, and, more particularly, from the sentiments or feelings provided by our moral sense.

Hume distinguishes, however, between the "natural virtues" (generosity, benevolence, for example) and the "artificial virtues" (justice, allegiance, for example). These differ in that the former not only produce good on each occasion of their practice, but are also on every occasion approved. In contrast, any particular instantiation of justice may be "contrary to the public good" and be approved only in so far as it is entailed by "a general scheme or system of action, which is advantageous" in so far as it conforms to one of the general rules we have been disposed to form (T 3.3.1, 579). The artificial virtues differ also in being the result of ad hoc decisions and contrivances arising from "the circumstances and necessities of mankind" (T 3.2.1, 477). In our original condition, we did not need the artificial virtues because our natural dispositions and responses were adequate to maintain the order of small, kinship-based units. But as human numbers increased, so, too, did the scarcity of some material goods lead to an increase in the possibility of conflict – particularly over property – between these units. As a consequence, and out of self-interest, our ancestors were gradually led to establish conventions governing property and its exchange. In the early stages of this necessary development our disposition to form general rules was an indispensable component; at later stages, sympathy enables many individuals to pursue the artificial virtues from a combination of self-interest and a concern for others, thus giving the fully developed artificial virtues a foundation in two different kinds of motivation. Just how these important and complex philosophical claims are to be understood is a matter of considerable debate, but it is clear that for Hume morality is an artifact – the product of an entirely human activity that has enabled the species to organize itself, in response to different and changing circumstances, for an ordered and sometimes propitious survival.[22]

III. RECASTINGS AND CONTINUATIONS

1. Within a few years, Hume came to regret the publication of the *Treatise*. The work was never a commercial success: Hume alleged that it fell "*dead-born from the press*" (MOL), by which he may have meant that the work failed to reach a second edition; indeed, about 1760 nearly 300 copies of volumes 1 and 2, and 200 of volume 3, were sold at auction in two lots, and at cut-rate prices. But

Hume's greater regret was over his own performance in the work, that he had bungled his attempt to introduce a new system of philosophy. Even before volume 3 was published (November 1740), he wrote, "I wait with some Impatience for a second Edition principally on Account of Alterations I intend to make in my Performance" (HL 1:38–9). In March of that year he had published the *Abstract* of the *Treatise*, a short work that attempts "*to render a larger work more intelligible to ordinary capacities, by abridging it,*" or, more accurately, to further illustrate and explain the "CHIEF ARGUMENT" of that work (A, [641, title]).[23] Still not satisfied, he was to include in the third volume of the *Treatise* an appendix in which some passages of Book 1 "are illustrated and explain'd" (T 3, title). Despite these attempts at clarification, Hume was later to say of the *Treatise*: "I was carry'd away by the Heat of Youth & Invention to publish too precipitately. So vast an Undertaking, plan'd before I was one and twenty, & compos'd before twenty five, must necessarily be very defective. I have repented my Haste a hundred, & a hundred times" (HL 1:158).

In 1748 Hume published *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding* (later to be titled *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*), a recasting of materials from, for the most part, Book 1 of the *Treatise*. Of this work he said that he thought it contained "every thing of Consequence relating to the Understanding, which you woud meet with in the Treatise; & I give you my Advice against reading the latter. By shortening & simplifying the Questions, I really render them much more complete. *Addo dum minuo*. The philosophical Principles are the same in both" (HL 1:158).[24]

The recast version of Book 3 of the *Treatise*, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, the work which Hume took to be, "of all my writings, historical, philosophical, or literary, incomparably the best" (MOL), was published in 1751. *A Dissertation on the Passions*, a recasting of Book 2 into what Hume described as one of several "small pieces," was published in 1757. Late in his life Hume grew impatient with his critics for focusing their attention on the *Treatise* rather than his recastings of it, and so in 1775 he composed a short notice which he asked to be affixed to all existing and future copies of his *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*.[25] This "Advertisement" asks that the *Treatise* be ignored.

Most of the principles, and reasonings, contained in this volume, were published in a work in three volumes, called A Treatise of Human Nature: *A work which the Author had projected before he left College, and which he wrote and published not long after. But not finding it successful, he was sensible of his error in going to the press too early, and he cast the whole anew in the following pieces, where some negligences in his former reasoning and more in the expression, are, he hopes, corrected. Yet several writers, who have honoured the Author's Philosophy with answers, have taken care to direct all their batteries against that juvenile work, which the Author never acknowledged, and have affected to triumph in any advantages, which, they imagined, they had obtained over it: A practice very contrary to all rules of candour and fair-dealing, and a strong instance of those polemical artifices, which a bigotted zeal thinks itself authorized to employ. Henceforth, the Author desires, that the following Pieces may alone be regarded as containing his philosophical sentiments and principles.*

(EHU, [3])

Reasonable though Hume's desire may have seemed to him, few if any serious readers have been able to concur with it. For Hume's critics, the *Treatise* is an irresistible target; for those who believe him to have been a profound and constructive student of human nature, the work is too rich to ignore.

2. About the works that are said to represent the *Treatise* "cast . . . anew," two things are obvious. First, as noted in section II.1, Hume's commitment to the experimental method continued unabated in these later works. Second, Hume does not merely, as he suggests, add or improve by subtraction. His recastings include some lengthy and important additions, most notably some attention-getting discussions of matters relating to religion. In an effort to make his views religiously innocuous so that they might be considered calmly and on their philosophical merits, he had carefully excised from the *Treatise* anything that could be taken as anti-religious. This effort failed. The views of the *Treatise* and *Essays, Moral and Political* were too thoroughly secular to pass unremarked in a religious age, and by 1745 Hume had been branded a religious sceptic with atheistic tendencies. He seems in consequence to have decided to challenge openly the rationality of religious belief. In any event, *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* included two of Hume's most provocative forays into the philosophy of religion, "Of Miracles" and "Of a particular Providence and of a future State," while

The Natural History of Religion was denounced as atheistic even before it was published.[26]

These works established beyond all doubt Hume's character as a religious sceptic. Taken together, they challenge the value of religious belief and attempt to curb its excesses by undertaking to show that this form of belief has its beginnings in sources or causes about which we must be deeply suspicious. In "Of Miracles," for example, Hume argues that belief in miracles, a kind of putative fact used to justify a commitment to certain creeds, can never provide the secure foundation such creeds require. He sees that these commitments are typically maintained with a mind-numbing tenacity and a disruptive intolerance toward contrary views. To counter these objectionable commitments, he argues that the widely held view that miracles are violations of a law of nature is incoherent; that the evidence for even the most likely miracle will always be counter-balanced by the evidence establishing the law of nature which the miracle allegedly violates; and that the evidence supporting any given miracle is necessarily suspect. His argument leaves open the possibility that violations of the laws of nature may have occurred, but shows that the logical and evidential grounds for a *belief* in any given miracle or set of miracles are much weaker than the religious suppose. There are and will be those who believe that miracles have occurred, but Hume's analysis shows that such beliefs will always lack the force of evidence needed to justify the arrogance and intolerance that characterize so many of the religious.

"Of a particular Providence and of a future State" (posthumously supplemented by the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*) has a similar effect. Philosophers and theologians of the eighteenth century commonly argued (the *argument from design*, as it is known) that the well-ordered universe in which we find ourselves can only be the effect of a supremely intelligent cause, that each aspect of this divine creation is well-designed to fulfil some beneficial end, and that these effects show us that the Deity is caring and benevolent. Hume argues that these conclusions go well beyond the available evidence. The pleasant and well-designed features of the world are balanced by a good measure of the unpleasant and the plainly botched. Our knowledge of causal connections depends on the experience of constant conjunctions; these cause the vivacity of a present impression to be transferred to the idea associated with it and leave

us believing in that idea. But in this case the effect to be explained, the universe, is unique, and its cause unknown. Consequently, we cannot possibly have experiential grounds for any kind of inference about this cause. On experiential grounds the most we can say is that there is a massive, mixed effect, and, as we have through experience come to believe that effects have causes commensurate to them, this effect probably does have a commensurately large and mixed cause. Furthermore, as the effect is remotely like the products of human manufacture, we can say "*that the cause or causes of order in the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence*" (DNR 12, 227). There is indeed an inference to be drawn from the unique effect in question (the universe) to the cause of that effect, but it is not the "argument" of the theologians, and it provides no foundation for any form of sectarian pretension or even the mildest forms of intolerance.

The *Natural History of Religion* focuses on the question of "the origin of religion in human nature." Hume asks, that is, what features of human nature account for the widespread, but not universal, belief in invisible and intelligent power(s). He delivers a thoroughly deflationary and naturalistic answer: religious belief "springs not from an original instinct or primary impression of nature," not from any universal and fundamental principle of our natures, but from features of human nature that are derivative and whose operation "may easily be perverted by various accidents and causes . . . [or] altogether prevented" (NHR Intro, 4:309–10). Moreover, it is the darker, less salubrious features of our nature that take the principal parts in this story. Primitive peoples did not find nature orderly and reassuring as though produced by a beneficent designer, but arbitrary and fearsome. Motivated by their own ignorance and fear, they came to think of the activities of nature as the effect of a multitude of petty powers – gods – that could, through propitiating worship, be influenced to ameliorate the lives of those who engaged in this worship. Subsequently, the same fears and perceptions transformed polytheism into monotheism, the view that a single, omnipotent being created and still controls the world and all that transpires in it. From this conclusion Hume goes on to argue that monotheism, seemingly the more sophisticated position, is in fact *morally* retrograde, for, once having established itself, monotheism tends naturally toward zeal and intolerance, encourages debasing, "monkish virtues," and

proves itself a danger to society because it proves to be a cause of violent and immoral acts directed against those found to be heterodox. In contrast, polytheism is tolerant of diversity and encourages genuine virtues that improve humankind, and hence from a moral point of view is superior to monotheism. The important point here, however, is that all religious belief appears to derive from fear and ignorance, and, moreover, to foster the continued development of these undesirable characteristics.

3. In a number of respects, Hume's *Essays* and his *History of England* constitute *continuations* of his earliest work. They are, of course, further manifestations of his attempt to extend the experimental method into moral subjects. They are also further manifestations of his attempt to gain understanding by means of an examination of origins or beginnings. Their titles alone indicate, often enough, this interest: "That Politics may be reduced to a Science," "Of the First Principles of Government," "Of the Origin of Government," "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences." Others, with less tell-tale titles, are nonetheless a part of the same project. "Of the Liberty of the Press" traces the unparalleled liberty of the press British subjects enjoy to the "mixed form of government" found in Britain and thus serves as an argument in support of that form. In "Of the Independency of Parliament" Hume draws attention to the fact that the House of Commons could easily wrest all power from the king and lords, but does not do so. He resolves this "paradox" by looking for an explanation that is "consistent with our experience of human nature" and concluding that a fundamental feature of that nature, the self-interest of the individual members of the Commons, acts as a brake on the expansion of the power of Parliament (E-IP, 44–5). "Of Parties in General" looks for the sources, again in human nature, of parties, or those detestable factions that "subvert government, render laws impotent, and beget the fiercest animosities among men of the same nation, who ought to give mutual assistance and protection to each other." (E-PG, 55) "Of Superstition and Enthusiasm" outlines the pernicious effects on government and society of the two types of false religion named in the title of the essay.[27] And so on.

There is at least one additional sense in which the *Essays* and *The History of England* represent a continuation of the project that be-

gan with *A Treatise of Human Nature*: the work for which Hume is remembered is all fundamentally historical. That is, all this work attempts to explain something that we at present believe, feel, say, think or do, to explain some present state of affairs, whether that state be in the mental, moral, or political world, by tracing perceptions, actions, or states – various *effects* – to discernible *causes*. Our experiments in the science of human nature, he said in the often-quoted line, must be gleaned "from a cautious observation of human life," from the "common course of the world, by men's behaviour in company, in affairs, and in their pleasures." Observation of what humans have done, how their minds work, how their institutions have formed: these are *historical* observations of several different kinds.

Hume reveals something more of his view of explanation in one of the essays just mentioned, "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences." Enquiries into human affairs, he says there, require us to distinguish between "what is owing to *chance*, and what proceeds from *causes*." If we say that an event is owing to chance, we are in effect confessing our ignorance, and putting an end to attempts at explanation. But if we suppose some event or state of affairs is the result of causes, we leave ourselves the opportunity of "assigning these causes" and displaying our "profound knowledge." As a general rule, he says, "*What depends upon a few persons is, in a great measure, to be ascribed to chance, or secret and unknown causes: What arises from a great number, may often be accounted for by determinate and known causes*" (E-RP, 111–12). Consequently, explanations of, say, the course of domestic politics or the rise of commerce will be easier to come by than explanations of cultural or artistic development. And yet a cautious enquirer may perhaps show that there is something to learn about this latter subject, may perhaps as a result of careful observation detect regularities between prior conditions and the flourishing of the arts and sciences. In this particular essay, Hume turns his hand to giving just such an explanation. But, more important, the *Essays* taken together, and *The History of England*, are the result of many attempts to push back the frontiers of ignorance or misunderstanding by assigning *causes* to phenomena previously attributed to the workings of *chance*, or what to Hume amounted to the same thing, the workings of providence. The *Treatise* and its several recastings are the result of other such attempts.

IV. REFORM

In August 1776, a few days before his death, Hume was visited by Adam Smith, one of his closest friends. On observing that Hume, who had been seriously ill for some months, was cheerful and apparently full of the spirit of life, Smith "could not help entertaining some faint hopes" of his friend's recovery. "Your hopes are groundless," Hume replied, and eventually turned the conversation onto Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*, and the excuses offered to Charon the boatman for not entering his boat to be ferried to Hades. None of the classical excuses fitted him, Hume noted. He had no house to finish, no children to provide for, no enemies to destroy. "He then diverted himself," Smith continues,

> with inventing several jocular excuses, which he supposed he might make to Charon, and with imagining the very surly answers which it might suit the character of Charon to return to them. "Upon further consideration," said [Hume], "I thought I might say to him, 'Good Charon, I have been correcting my works for a new edition. Allow me a little time, that I may see how the Public receives the alterations.' But Charon would answer, 'When you have seen the effect of these, you will be for making other alterations. There will be no end of such excuses; so, honest friend, please step into the boat.' But I might still urge, 'Have a little patience, good Charon, I have been endeavouring to open the eyes of the Public. If I live a few years longer, I may have the satisfaction of seeing the downfal[l] of some of the prevailing systems of superstition.' But Charon would then lose all temper and decency. 'You loitering rogue, that will not happen these many hundred years. Do you fancy I will grant you a lease for so long a term? Get into the boat this instant, you lazy, loitering rogue.' "[28]

Of the many anecdotes about Hume that have survived, none, I think, better reveals his character. There is, first, the fact that a man, correctly convinced of his imminent death, and equally satisfied that death is simply annihilation, would treat the matter lightly.[29] Serious topics treated at times with nonchalance: this has been enough to lead some of his critics mistakenly to suppose that Hume lacked seriousness of purpose, to suppose that *effect* was to him more important than *truth*. Of course, Hume did treat serious topics lightly, and he did have reservations about claims to have found the truth, but these facts are entirely consistent with his most fundamental and unmistakably serious aim.[30]

In the conversation with Smith, for example, Hume's humour is focused on two topics of genuine concern to him. He was, surely, as he candidly tells us in "My Own Life," concerned with his literary reputation, and seems very likely to have taken pleasure in being recognized as one of Europe's leading literary figures. But it was not merely *fame* that Hume sought; it was also *reputation*. Before he had published anything he said that he "wou'd rather live & dye in Obscurity" than publish his views in a "maim'd & imperfect" form (KHL). With the *Treatise* finally published, he discouraged a friend from pursuing a scheme to increase sales; his first concern was not with commercial success, but with earning the approbation of those capable of judging his writings (NHL, 4). And, as his first excuse to Charon indicates, he constantly revised and altered his *Essays and Treatises*, and *History of England* – indeed, he did so, apparently, on his death-bed – when he had no other reason for doing so than his own inner compulsion to improve them. We can agree that Hume wrote for effect, but we need not conclude from his occasional or even typical lightness of tone that he lacked serious purpose.[31]

Hume's second excuse to Charon reveals much about that purpose. He has, he says, "been endeavouring to open the eyes of the Public" and would like to remain alive long enough to have "the satisfaction of seeing the downfal[l] of some of the prevailing systems of superstition." Hume the *reformer* is only seldom noticed.[32] And yet from early days *reform* was the effect at which he aimed. In the beginning, it was "reformation" of the science of man at which he aimed, a reformation which would, if successful, have the effect of reforming all the other sciences, for these are all – even "*Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Natural Religion*" – dependent on the science of human nature (T Intro, xv). Habit, he says elsewhere, is a "powerful means of reforming the mind, and implanting in it good dispositions and inclinations"; the great value of philosophy derives from the fact that, properly undertaken, "it insensibly refines the temper, and it points out to us those dispositions which we should endeavour to attain, by a constant *bent* of mind, and by repeated *habit*" (E-Sc, 170–1). "Moral Philosophy," he says at the very beginning of *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, "may contribute to the entertainment, instruction, and reformation of mankind" (EHU 1, 5).

Hume had no thought of reforming human nature itself. Human

nature he took to be fixed,[33] and utopian schemes dependent on a changed constitution of humanity he dismissed without qualification. "All plans of government, which suppose great reformation in the manners of mankind, are plainly imaginary" (E-IPC, 514). Reformation, if it is to take place, will affect individuals, and will be in the form of that refinement of temper which results from new habits of *mind*, and, most particularly, from new habits of *belief*. It will be the effect of individuals melding, as Hume melded, the "experimental Method of Reasoning" into an updated version of the "Academic or Sceptical philosophy." This latter species of philosophy has, he says, a clear advantage over all other kinds: by its very nature it protects those who adopt it from the excesses characteristic of other forms of philosophy. The academic sceptic, noting the dangers of hasty and dogmatic judgement, emphasizes continually the advantages of "doubt and suspense of judgment . . . of confining to very narrow bounds the enquiries of the understanding, and of renouncing all speculations which lie not within the limits of common life and practice" (EHU 5.1, 41). Hume's post-sceptical philosophy does not counsel us to suspend all judgement or belief and affirmation. Instead, accepting the basic lessons of scepticism, it attempts to show us how to moderate our beliefs and attitudes. Those who practised his principles would, Hume thought, learn how to avoid that combination of arrogance, pretension, and credulity that he found so distasteful and stifling, so *dangerous* in its typical manifestations, namely, religious dogmatism and the spirit of faction. Hume did not suppose that he would effect changes in human nature, but he did hope that he could moderate individual belief and opinion, and, in consequence, actions and even institutions.[34] A simple but profound goal: "to open the eyes of the Public," and thereby undercut "prevailing systems of superstition."

V. TEN ESSAYS ON HUME'S THOUGHT

Although best known now for his contributions to epistemology, metaphysics, and the philosophy of religion, Hume also made substantial and influential contributions to morals and moral psychology, political and economic theory, political and social history, and, to a lesser extent, literary and aesthetic theory. The essays in this volume approach Hume in this topical way. They introduce readers

to his wide-ranging thought by focusing on ten overlapping areas of interest. The essays themselves are arranged in a pattern that reflects, first, the structural order of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume's earliest and most systematic philosophical publication, and then the pattern of his later publications. Some essays show how Hume's thought may be linked to that of his predecessors and contemporaries. Others are more concerned with links to the twentieth century. Each provides an accessible account of some central aspect of Hume's thought.

The first essay outlines Hume's plans for a new science of human nature, a science that is to serve as the foundation of all the other sciences, moral as well as natural. This science, John Biro argues, has significant affinities to what is at present thought of as cognitive science and offers insights that will be of use to those engaged in this contemporary enterprise. Alexander Rosenberg looks at Hume's views on a set of issues – empirical meaning, causation, induction, and explanation, for example – and argues that it is because he raised these issues, and made significant contributions to our understanding of them, that Hume in the middle of the present century "came to be regarded as the most important philosopher to have written in the English language." Noting that Hume describes the philosophy of the *Treatise* as "very Sceptical," Robert Fogelin attempts to see what this scepticism amounts to, and how it is related to other aspects of his philosophical program. He concludes that while Hume clearly did not recommend a wholesale suspension of belief (he thought this impossible), he is, in so far as he presents us with a thoroughgoing critique of our intellectual faculties, a radical, unreserved, unmitigated sceptic, and that to think otherwise is to miss much of Hume's genius.

Of the three essays that take Hume's moral theory as a point of departure, that by Terence Penelhum considers those elements – the self, the passions, the will, for example -- of Hume's view of human nature that are most intimately related to his objectives as a moral philosopher, but not before he has considered Hume's character and the important questions some have raised about his psychological qualifications for doing philosophy. In the second of these essays I situate Hume's moral theory within a centrally important debate about the foundations of morality. According to Hume, it is because our unchanging human nature is as it is that we are able to mark

genuine differences between virtue and vice, justice and injustice, and other moral relations: morality has human nature as its foundation. Knud Haakonssen argues that Hume undertook to show that most early modern views of society and politics, founded as they were on two forms of false religion,–*superstition* or *enthusiasm*, were philosophically misconceived, empirically untenable, and, often enough, politically dangerous. In contrast, Hume offered a humanistic account of political morality – an account that sees our political institutions as human constructs that depend on human nature and human experience.

With the publication of his *Political Discourses* in 1752, Hume established himself as an important political economist. Andrew Skinner sketches the background of economic theory in which Hume's work appeared, outlines Hume's insightful alternative views, and concludes by noting Hume's influence on the economic writings of, among others, his good friend, Adam Smith. In 1757, with the publication of "Of the Standard of Taste" and "Of Tragedy," Hume provided his readers with the surviving pieces of what he had intended to be a systematic work on "criticism" – a combination of literary theory, aesthetics, and moral psychology. Peter Jones's essay brings together Hume's somewhat scattered remarks on these topics, thus enabling us to see and understand his general perspective on the arts and how it relates to his other views about humanity and society.

Because of the popularity of his six-volume *History of England*, Hume was, and still is, referred to as "the historian." David Wootton examines the motivations – personal, moral, and political – that led to this monumental narrative of social and political circumstance and suggests that it is, to a large extent, Hume's story of the development of the uncommon liberty enjoyed by the English. The last of Hume's major publications, his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, was published only in 1778, two years after his death. In the final essay in the volume, John Gaskin reviews the whole of Hume's critique of religion – a critique that is at least implicit in all of his works, and that, we are shown, is "subtle, profound and damaging to religion in ways which have no philosophical antecedents and few successors."

The Appendix supplies the reader with two brief autobiographies. Hume wrote the first of these in 1734, some years after he had begun work on, but still five years before he published, the *Treatise*. The

second he wrote forty-two years later, only a few months before his death in 1776. A bibliography provides the reader with information about Hume's works, the titles of the principal early reactions to them, and a selection of monographs and articles that discuss his writings.

NOTES

1 Reported by Hume to James Boswell. See "An Account of My Last Interview with David Hume, Esq." (DNR, 76).
2 On Hume's knowledge of the science of his time, and of Boyle in particular, see Michael Barfoot, "Hume and the Culture of Science in the Early Eighteenth Century," in *Oxford Studies in the History of Philosophy*, ed. M. A. Stewart (Oxford, 1990), pp. 151–90.
3 From 1758, Hume's essays and *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, *A Dissertation on the Passions*, *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, and *The Natural History of Religion* were published together as *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects*.
4 For more on this topic, see John Biro, "Hume's New Science of the Mind," Part I, this volume.
5 On Hume's sceptical challenge to experimental reasoning, see Robert Fogelin, "Hume's Scepticism," Part II, this volume.
6 Here again Hume shows that he is aware of the limitations of his chosen principle, for he goes on to add: "But though all the general rules of art are founded only on experience and on the observation of the common sentiments of human nature, we must not imagine, that, on every occasion, the feelings of men will be conformable to these rules. Those finer emotions of the mind are of a very tender and delicate nature, and require the concurrence of many favourable circumstances to make them play with facility and exactness, according to their general and established principles. . . . [I]f any of these circumstances be wanting, our experiment will be fallacious, and we shall be unable to judge of the catholic and universal beauty. The relation, which nature has placed between the form and the sentiment, will at least be more obscure; and it will require greater accuracy to trace and discern it" (E-ST, 232–3). For a discussion of Hume's views on aesthetic and literary matters, see the essay by Peter Jones, this volume.
7 This attitude is made explicit in *The History of England*. In the midst of his discussion of Joan of Arc, Hume writes: "It is the business of history to distinguish between the *miraculous* and the *marvellous*; to reject the first in all narrations merely profane and human; to doubt the second;

and when obliged by unquestionable testimony, as in the present case, to admit of something extraordinary, to receive as little of it as is consistent with the known facts and circumstances" (HE 20, 2:398).

8 For a discussion of Hume's use of a historical, observational method, see Andrew Skinner's essay, "David Hume: Principles of Political Economy," Part III, this volume.

9 On Hume's *History of England*, see David Wootton's essay in this volume. In the process of producing historical work Hume made use of an implicit critical method to decide what the facts of experience had been. For a brief discussion of this method and, more generally, the relationship of Hume's philosophical and historical writings, see my "History and Philosophy in Hume's Thought," in *David Hume: Philosophical Historian*, ed. David Fate Norton and Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis, 1965), pp. xxxii–l.

10 Although Hume wanted nothing to do with a physical anatomy attempting to explain sensation, he does repeatedly describe himself as engaged in *an anatomy of human nature* (T 1.4.6, 263; 3.3.6, 620–1; HL 1:32–3; A, 646).

11 This comment is made in the midst of Hume's attempt to explain how we come to have the idea of, and to believe in, necessary connection. But the suggestion that the explanations of Book 1 are confined to an examination of the "coherence" of "elements" within the "mental world" is repeated in other forms in other places. See, for example, 1.4.2 ("Of scepticism with regard to the senses"), where the discussion is focused on the way in which impressions and ideas cohere to give us, not *knowledge* of, but only *belief* in, external objects; and the Appendix (633), where Hume contrasts theories of the material world with his "theory of the intellectual world."

12 Locke argued that certain ideas (those of extension and shape, for example) caused by what he called the "primary qualities" of objects resemble these qualities in such a way that they provide us with accurate, reliable information about the qualities that cause them. Other ideas (those of colour and taste, for example) caused by what he called the "secondary qualities" of objects fail to resemble the qualities causing them and in fact lead us to attribute to objects characteristics (colour, taste) which they do not actually possess. Bayle suggested, and Berkeley argued – successfully, it is generally believed – that this distinction is epistemologically untenable. See Pierre Bayle, *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, ed. and trans. Richard H. Popkin (Indianapolis, 1965), Article "Pyrrho," Note B; George Berkeley, *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge*, I.9–15. For a helpful account of Berkeley's impact on Hume, see David Raynor, "Hume and Berkeley's *Three Dia-*

logues, Studies in the Philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment" (Oxford, 1990), pp. 231–50.

13 Hume says, for example: "But so little does any *power* discover itself to the senses in the operations of matter, that the *Cartesians* have made no scruple to assert, that matter is utterly deprived of energy, and that all its operations are perform'd merely by the energy of the supreme Being" (A, 656).

14 It does not follow that Hume made no contributions to the arsenal of scepticism. His critique of induction, mentioned in note 5, is one such contribution. For others, see John Gaskin, "Hume on Religion," this volume.

15 This theory maintains that the immediate objects of the mind are *ideas* (in Hume's vocabulary, *perceptions*, or *impressions* and *ideas*), some of which are supposed accurately to represent various kinds of entities outside the mind. The problem was to determine which ideas do represent, and, given that ideas and only ideas are immediate objects of the mind, to find independent evidence that any given idea represents accurately or at all – that it *resembles*. The theory is sometimes referred to as the "way of ideas."

16 Hume repeatedly insists that *ideas* are derived from and represent impressions. Impressions themselves are of two types: impressions of sensation and of reflection. Our senses, he says, cannot represent their impressions as distinct from us and hence fail to represent a crucial feature of external objects. Nor, he says, can any of our sense impressions, not even our impressions of touch, "represent solidity, nor any real object," because there is not the "least resemblance" between these impressions and solidity (T 1.4.2, 190; 1.4.4, 230–1; see also 1.2.3, 34). A passion, Hume says, "contains not any representative quality, which renders it a copy of any other existence or modification" (T 2.3.3, 415). We see, then, that neither type of impression can in this sense *represent* external reality.

Hume's reasons for agreeing that the immediate objects of mind are always perceptions are discussed in Alexander Rosenberg, "Hume and the Philosophy of Science," Part I, this volume. It should also be noted that Hume is not, as another strain of interpretation suggests, a *phenomenalist*, or one who supposes our perceptions constitute objects.

17 Husserl, the founder of phenomenology, himself recognized this feature of Hume's thought. See R. A. Mall, *Experience and Reason: The Phenomenology of Husserl and its Relation to Hume's Philosophy* (The Hague, 1973), esp. pp. 19–28.

18 We remain irredeemably committed to these beliefs in the sense that, while philosophical analysis may on occasion bring us to doubt them,

this doubt cannot be sustained. Even a sceptic must, with rare exception, believe in causes and objects. The sceptic may very well, however, modify the manner or intensity of these unavoidable beliefs. On this latter point, see my "How a Sceptic May Live Scepticism," in *Faith, Scepticism and Rationality: Essays in Honour of Terence Penelhum*, ed. J. J. MacIntosh and Hugo Meynell (University of Calgary Press, forthcoming).

19 It should be understood that Hume is concerned with the source of our most abstract or general ideas of space and time – of space, for example, as something like continuous, unbounded, or unlimited extension in every direction, regarded as void of matter, or without reference to matter (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Of such a space we neither have, nor could have, a direct sensory impression, but from the fact that we can intelligibly discuss the subject, it follows, on Hume's view, that we have an idea of space to which the word "space" refers: "Now 'tis certain we have an idea of extension; for otherwise why do we talk and reason concerning it?" (T 1.2.2, 32).

20 On Hume and the will, see Terence Penelhum, "Hume's Moral Psychology," Part IV, this volume. This same essay also includes a substantial discussion of Hume's theory of the passions.

21 Hume's views on the relationship of ideas to meaning are scattered throughout his writings, but see, for a start, T 1.2.2, 32 and T 1.3.14, 162. See also Alexander Rosenberg, "Hume and the Philosophy of Science," Part I, this volume.

22 For a more detailed discussion of Hume's moral theory, see my "Hume, Human Nature, and the Foundations of Morality," this volume.

23 As it is now clear that Hume is the author of the *Abstract*, this short work can be enthusiastically recommended to those who wish to consider Hume's own account of the chief argument of the *Treatise*. For recent discussions of the question of who wrote the *Abstract*, see David Raynor, "The Authorship of the *Abstract* Revisited," and my "More Evidence that Hume Wrote the *Abstract*," both in *Hume Studies* 19 (1993).

24 In "My Own Life" (reprinted in the Appendix to this volume), Hume was to say: "I had always entertained a notion, that my want of success in publishing the Treatise of Human Nature, had proceeded more from the manner than the matter, and that I had been guilty of a very usual indiscretion, in going to the press too early. I, therefore, cast the first part of that work anew in the Enquiry concerning Human Understanding."

25 See note 3.

26 Hume at one point included "Of Miracles" in the manuscript of the *Treatise* but excised it as part of his program to eliminate religiously

offensive material from that work. Hume's reputation as a religious sceptic, and even an atheist, was instrumental in his failure, in 1745, to be appointed to the chair of moral philosophy at the University of Edinburgh. See *A Letter from a Gentleman to His Friend in Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1745; facsimile reprint, Edinburgh, 1967). On the controversy surrounding the publication of *The Natural History of Religion*, see Ernest Campbell Mossner, *The Life of David Hume* (Edinburgh, 1954), 319–35. Hume's views on religion are the subject of the essay by J. C. A. Gaskin in this volume.

27 For a discussion of these issues as they bear on Hume's political theory, see Knud Haakonssen, "The Structure of Hume's Political Theory," this volume.

28 Letter from Adam Smith, LL.D., to William Strahan, Esq. (DNR, 244–5).

29 A few weeks before his death Hume was able to satisfy Boswell that he sincerely believed it "a most unreasonable fancy" that there might be life after death (DNR, 76–7).

30 For an insightful discussion of this point, see Terence Penelhum, "Hume's Moral Psychology," Part I, this volume.

31 In the letter just cited, Smith went on to add: "And that gaiety of temper, so agreeable in society, but which is so often accompanied with frivolous and superficial qualities, was in him certainly attended with the most severe application, the most extensive learning, the greatest depth of thought, and a capacity in every respect the most comprehensive" (DNR, 247).

32 A recent and important exception is John B. Stewart, *Opinion and Reform in Hume's Political Philosophy* (Princeton, 1992); see esp. chaps. 5 and 6.

33 See "Hume, Human Nature, and the Foundations of Morality," Part III, this volume.

34 On the nature and import of Hume's scepticism, see the essay by Robert Fogelin in this volume and my "How a Sceptic May Live Scepticism," in *Faith, Scepticism and Rationality*.