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An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding: The Philosophy of David Hume

David Hume (1711-76) may be best understood as the first post-sceptical [sic] philosopher of the early modern period. . . . Hume was a self-proclaimed sceptic [sic] who consciously developed a philosophical position that is at one and the same time fundamentally sceptical [sic] and fundamentally constructive. (Norton, Cambridge 1)

David Hume was a prolific writer and philosopher whose works are said to have laid the foundation for much of modern empiricism (Copleston 5: 258). This paper will focus on one of Hume's most notable works: An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding (ICHU), written in 1748. First, the epistemological background of Hume's ICHU will be discussed. Second, there will be an examination of Hume's philosophical arguments, along with criticisms from other philosophers and writers. Third, the impact of Hume's ICHU, its place in philosophical studies and its modern position shall be detailed.

The Life and Philosophy of David Hume

David Hume was born in Scotland and was educated at the University of Edinburgh. He was not born into a wealthy family, and as the younger son he attempted the pursuit of law and then business with a Bristol merchant. He abandoned these means of a living and discovered his love of literature. Moving to France, he labored for three years completing his first work, Treatise of Human Nature (1739-40) (Burt 609). Hume notes his disappointment of the

reception of his Treatise: "Never literary attempt was more unfortunate than my Treatise of Human Nature. It fell *deadborn from the press* [sic], without reaching such distinction as even to excite a murmur among the zealots" (Hume 4). Hume admits that he had been "guilty of going to press too early" with his Treatise, and writes, "I, therefore, cast the first part of that work anew in the Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding, which was published while I was at Turin" (5). Unfortunately for Hume, even though the Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding (1748) was rewritten in a style which he felt would be more acceptable to the tastes of the general public. Like the earlier Treatise, the ICHU was received with only limited commercial success.

In light of the apparent disappointment and discouraging results, Hume remained optimistic. He openly admitted to his "love of literary fame" which apparently continued to provide him with the necessary energy and motivation to continue his scholarly pursuits in the midst of criticism. Undoubtedly, Hume felt the impact of his harshest critics. According to Hume, "I wantonly exposed myself to the rage of both civil and religious factions, they seemed to be disarmed in my behalf of their wonted fury" (11).

Further evidence of such harsh criticism of Hume's philosophy occurred when he applied for the position of the Chair of Moral Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh. According to Norton, "He [Hume] was charged with, among other things, universal skepticism, downright atheism, and sapping the foundations of morality by denying the real distinction between good and evil" (Common-Sense 3). Henry Home published a book-length criticism of Hume in 1751 attacking Hume's "moral and epistemological skepticism" (Norton, Common-Sense 3). The harsh criticism of Hume's skeptical philosophy continued through both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and it has not been until more recent times that certain scholars have come to the aid of Hume. Kemp Smith argues that Hume's ultimate goal was positive in nature and that Hume's

intent was to propose a naturalistic theory in which "reason is reduced to an entirely subsidiary role as the slave of the passions" (Norton, Common-Sense 3).

Paradoxically, even though Hume was accused of being an atheist and at the same time was an admitted skeptic who preferred empirical sense data over a priori truth, he remained positive in his overall life outlook. Hume described himself as being "a man of mild dispositions, of command of temper, of open, social, and cheerful humor, capable of attachment, but little susceptible of enmity, and of great moderation in all my passions" (Hume 10). One of Hume's neighbors, Miss Nancy Orde, apparently agreed with his self assessment. Miss Orde labeled the street of Hume's newly built house in Edinburgh, "St. David Street" (Urmson 159).

Here lies the juncture of two interpretations of Hume's philosophy. First, that Hume was a classic skeptic of the Pyrrhonian school of thought, as founded by the Greek philosopher Pyrrho of Elis (360–270 BC). The word skeptic is derived from the Greek word skeptikos which means "inquirer." In modern contexts, it has also been interpreted as "doubter" (Rorty, Schneewind and Skinner 227). According to Geisler and Feinberg, "Skepticism was not only an epistemological position, but it also promised a practical consequence – happiness and peace of mind in everyday activities" (85). This description of skepticism seems to be in harmony with Kemp Smith's position that Hume was both skeptical and positive at the same time, a juxtaposition of values which initially seem to be contradictory. Second, there is the interpretation that Hume was simply a skeptic who lived in a time in which the prevailing epistemological and metaphysical view was both optimistic and theistic – and therefore was not open to Hume's skeptical views.

Which of these two interpretations is most valid? Was Hume a classic skeptic of the Pyrrhonian School, or was Hume's version of skepticism an extension of the empirical

methodology of Descartes and Locke? Were Hume's views of a radical enough nature that they would ultimately lead to a scientific revolution, since it was outside of the boundaries of what Thomas Kuhn refers to as the "normal science" (42)? Kuhn states that normal science is made up of a "strong network of commitments" and that it provides "rules that tell the practitioner of a mature specialty what both the world and his science are like" (42). During Hume's lifetime, a layman might say that Hume was out of step with the scientists and philosophers of his day; whereas, Kuhn might say that Hume was outside of the normal science paradigm of his age.

Discussion of An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding (ICHU)

Hume begins his ICHU by suggesting that certain philosophers before him were inadequate. Hume displays his contempt of Aristotle by stating, "The fame of Cicero flourishes at present, but that of Aristotle is utterly decayed. . . . Addison, perhaps, will be read with pleasure when Locke shall be entirely forgotten" (17). Aristotle and Locke were both known for advancing human reason. Aristotle advanced reason through syllogistic logic and Locke used the tools of empiricism and inductive reasoning. In contrast, Hume rejected reason as a source of ideas. Both Cicero and Joseph Addison were politicians who also wrote extensively regarding philosophy and matters of state. Perhaps this is what Hume desired to be most of all, a politician-philosopher. It is not clear if Hume was envious of Locke's renowned position, and inwardly sought to unseat him, or simply strove to improve upon Locke's empirical methods thereby acquiring literary acclaim. In any case, it seems curious that the title of Hume's work An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding (1748) sounds remarkably close to that of Locke's previous work which was published fifty-eight years earlier titled, An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (1690).

Hume sought to separate what he called "superstition" from modern science and philosophy. He referred to the philosophers of his age as "robbers [who] fly into the forest and lie in wait to break in upon every unguarded avenue of the mind, and overwhelm it with religious fears and prejudices" (20). Hume was both hostile and antagonistic to the prevailing metaphysical view of his time which was characteristically theistic. In opposition to the prevailing scientific paradigm of his day, Hume extended Locke's empiricism in a manner which was devoid of religious faith. While many consider Locke to be the founder of the modern school of English empiricism, it is important to note that Locke's epistemology did not discard religious values. Locke acknowledged God's hand in allowing pain and pleasure as part of the human condition. Locke wrote that true happiness for man is to be found "in the enjoyment of Him 'with [w]hom there is fullness of joy, and at [w]hose right hand are pleasures for evermore'" (278). In sharp contrast to the epistemology of Locke, Hume offers the following thesis as a starting point to his version of empiricism:

The only method of freeing learning at once from these abstruse questions is to inquire seriously into the nature of human understanding and show, from an exact analysis of its powers and capacity, that it is by no means fitted for such remote and abstruse subjects. We must submit to this fatigue in order to live at ease ever after, and must cultivate true metaphysics with some care in order to destroy the false and adulterated. . . . Accurate and just reasoning is the only catholic remedy fitted for all persons and all dispositions, and is alone able to subvert that abstruse philosophy and metaphysical jargon which, being mixed up with popular superstition, render it in a manner impenetrable to careless reasoners and gives it the air of science and wisdom. (21)

Based on the preceding thesis, Hume's intentions for his ICHU are quite clear. Hume sees the scientists and philosophers of his day as being propagators of "religious fears and prejudices" (20). Based upon this presupposition, Hume sets out to separate religious values from science in order to "cultivate true metaphysics." For Hume, true metaphysics is based upon an epistemology which is devoid of religious values. He even goes so far as to mock the philosophers by suggesting that they advance "popular superstition" which presents a pseudo-scientific model, or as Hume puts it, an "air of science and wisdom" (21).

No doubt Hume is aware of the boldness of his claims as he begins to make his arguments. In one sense, Hume baits his reader by challenging him or her not to accept the current epistemology and thus fall into the category of "careless reasoners" (21). This is undoubtedly a clever literary ploy designed to render his work as a page-turner. On the one hand, Hume was interested in furthering his version of what would become a blending of Pyrrhonism and Berkeleyan empiricism. On the other hand, Hume was keenly aware of his passion for publishing and desire for literary success (Lavine 144).

The Nature of Knowledge and Ideas

Sections two and three of Hume's ICHU discuss the origin and association of ideas. This has been a topic that has been debated by philosophers for thousands of years. Hume asserts that ideas basically come from two sources: the senses and experience (27). This was in contrast to the empirical theory of John Locke (1632–1734) who stated that knowledge comes from two sources: the senses through observation of external phenomena, and personal reflection of our observations through reason (Lavine 142). Hume rejects Locke's second premise, of reason as a source of knowledge. Instead, Hume builds his case by suggesting that ideas can also be related to feelings, sentiment, and corresponding impressions. He suggests that the idea of God simply

arises from the "qualities of goodness and wisdom" (28). The idea of a sense-based theory of knowledge and origin of ideas was proposed in similar manner by the Anglican Bishop, George Berkeley (1685-1783) prior to Hume. Berkeley proposed that, "matter cannot be conceived to exist independent of the mind; the phenomena of sense can be explained only by supposing a deity that continually evokes perception in the human mind" (Popkin). While Hume accepted Berkeley's sense-based perception of knowledge and reality, he opposed the Bishop's theistic metaphysical position.

As a true skeptic, Hume proposes an argument to counteract his own thesis that ideas only arise from correspondent impressions. Hume creates the following scenario. If a person is exposed to a light blue color and a dark blue color, it is logically possible to reason that there must be another shade of blue which lies in between the two extremes. Although he offers this proof against his own maxim, Hume (in an almost mocking tone) concludes, "this instance is so singular that it is scarcely worth our observing, and does not merit that for it alone we should alter our general maxim" (30).

Hume's argument (of reasoning shades of color) against his own thesis, that ideas only arise from correspondent impressions, is admittedly weak. Hume hopes that there are not more sound objections to his thesis. Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727) had published prior to Hume, and many of Hume's skeptical stances were in direct opposition to the inductive scientific method which Newton represented (Geisler 87).

In response to Hume's assertion that all knowledge is sense-based, the following example from Sir Isaac Newton, demonstrates that reason can be a means for obtaining knowledge. Newton published Principia Mathematica Philosophiae Naturalis (1686) decades before Hume's Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding. In Newton's Principia, there are three laws of

mechanics, which remain the foundation of the study of motion (as a part of physics) to this day. According to NASA's Glen Research Center, Newton's third law explains both lift in the wing of an airplane and thrust in a jet engine. The third law of mechanics states that "for every action (force in nature) there is an equal and opposite re-action" (Benson). Hundreds of years after Newton published Principia, his laws were tested outside of the earth's atmosphere in space and shown to be true. Newton's theories that were created both by observation and reason, helped to put a man on the moon, and remain a cornerstone of the science of physics.

Hume continues to build his case regarding the origins of ideas and suggests the following maxim: "To me there appear to be only three principles of connection among ideas, namely, *Resemblance*, *Contiguity* [sic] in time or place and *Cause* [sic] or *Effect* [sic]" (32). For Hume, all ideas stem from a resemblance of observed phenomena, a contiguous relationship as in historicity, and causal relationships. Being aware of the religious epistemology of his time, Hume refutes the commonly held idea of revelation, and skillfully suggests that Milton's cosmology of a heavenly rebellion, the creation of the world, and the fall of man, is further evidence of causal relationships which are contiguous in time (38-39).

Hume's thesis that ideas come from the senses and experience, shares some similar values with existentialism, which also stresses experience and direct observation through the senses (Geisler 46-48). In contrast with existentialists such as Kierkegaard and Sartre, Hume continues to rely upon scientific observation, fact finding and numerical data, whereas existentialists reject objective truth, preferring subjective truth instead.

Hume's Philosophy of Causality

In section IV of the ICHU, titled "Skeptical Doubts concerning the Operations of the Understanding," Hume admits that causes and effects can be observed. At the same time, Hume

rejects the inductive method, which was commonly used in the scientific community during his lifetime. Hume states his views, regarding cause and effect:

All reasonings concerning matter of fact seem to be founded on the relation of *cause* and *effect* [sic] I shall venture to affirm, as a general proposition which admits of no exception, that the knowledge of this relation is not, in any instance, attained by reasonings *a priori* [sic], but arises entirely from experience, when we find that any particular objects are constantly conjoined with each other. . . . This proposition, that *causes and effects are discoverable, not by reason, but by experience, will be admitted* [sic] (41-42)

This passage reveals a number of epistemological assumptions whereupon Hume forms his philosophy of knowledge. First, Hume believes that all observed phenomena can be explained by causal relations. Second, Hume rejects a priori reasoning – in favor of experienced based observation of phenomena. Finally, Hume extends his construct to discard reason completely as a methodology for discovery, substituting cause and effect as a superior basis of epistemology.

Hume's first assumption that all observed phenomena can be explained by causal relations, is an epistemology based on determinism. Determinism, which asserts universal causation, is that belief that nothing occurs in the world without an antecedent cause (Geisler 194). Schabas agrees with the interpretation of Hume as a determinist: "Everything is determined. Nothing happens by chance for Hume" (415). In asserting determinism, Hume commits two fallacies. First, he commits the fallacy of infinite regress, which asks the question: If every effect has an antecedent cause, what caused the first cause from which all other effects proceed? Thomas Aquinas similarly argued against a deterministic cosmology in his Summa Contra Gentiles (1261–64), arguing that infinite regress is a fallacy (Martin). The question of

infinite regress clearly has no answer, since it is impossible for any human being to go back in time to observe the first cause. Amazingly, Hume also uses the argument of infinite regress as a justification of his skeptical philosophy, without recognizing that he himself has committed the same error in advancing determinism:

If I ask you why you believe any particular matter of fact which you relate, you must tell me some reason; and this reason will be some other fact connected with it. But as you cannot proceed after this manner *in infinitum* [sic], you must at last terminate in some fact which is present to your memory or senses or must allow that your belief is entirely without foundation. (60)

Secondly, Hume asserts that there is no such thing as a a priori truth. Hunnex notes that causality itself is an a priori assumption about the world, in the deterministic model (29). Universal causation for the determinist must be a priori since (as has been stated) observation of the first cause is impossible. Hume's fallacy is clear. Hume commits the error of rejecting all a priori truth; at the same time, Hume accepts some a priori truth (causality as a basis for determinism). Hume cannot have it both ways, and has thus contradicted himself.

Hume's Rejection of Religious Beliefs

Curiously, Hume apportsions two sections of ICHU specifically to attack religious convictions. Section X of ICHU is titled "Of Miracles" and Section XI is titled "Of a Particular Providence and of a Future State." The two sections criticize religious faith as being both scientifically unfounded and lacking reasonable evidence for religious convictions. According to Gaskin, "Of Miracles" continues to be debated to this day in scholarly circles. He sees Hume's criticism of religion as being in line with Darwinian ontology. Gaskin states the parallels between Hume and Darwin in the following manner:

In effect, Hume is suggesting that given an initial blind force (a big bang?), subsequent random movements of a large but finite amount of matter *could* [sic] produce the stable entities and sequences we now observe in the universe. Laws of nature and inorganic structures, just as much as natural species, could be arrived at by a process akin to that of natural selection. . . . It is, moreover, an attempt which, when fleshed out by Darwin's observations, vastly devalues the teleological argument. . . . (Norton, Cambridge 328)

As Gaskin has pointed out in the passage above, Hume's attack on Christian metaphysics is based on what Hume sees as an imaginary linkage between observed natural phenomena and the assumption of a Creator. This attack is impressively modern in scope, and Gaskin correctly likens it to Darwinism. In this light, Darwin's conclusions seem to be consistent with the earlier hypothesis by Hume, that there is another way to observe the natural order of the world.

Hume proposes a new hypothesis for the formation of the universe and contrasts this with the Christian metaphysical viewpoint which he calls the "religious hypothesis" (148). As evidence, Hume refutes the commonly held belief (during Hume's lifetime) that natural law and an ordered world are evidence of a Creator. This view of the universe as a giant machine, created by God, is also referred to as deism (Geisler and Feinberg 276-277). Hume rejects the deistic stance by arguing: "You find certain phenomena in nature. You seek a cause or author. You imagine that you have found him" (147).

Hume does not rest from his attack on the religious order of his day. He assaults the very foundation of Christian metaphysics – namely the belief in miracles. The result of Hume's arguments is that he postulates, "Upon the whole, then, it appears that no testimony for any kind of miracle has ever amounted . . ." (137). Gaskin interprets

Hume's attack on miracles in this way: "I have suggested that this guarded conclusion should be unpacked as 'The Resurrection [sic] can never be proved in such a way that it can function as a good reason to accept the Christian revelation'" (Norton, Cambridge 329).

It is curious why Hume seems so determined to attack Christian religion. According to Frederick Copleston, Hume was raised a Calvinist but early in life discarded those beliefs. Later he began to form the belief that fanaticism and bigotry were byproducts of unrestrained religious zeal. Copleston concludes that Hume's reactions and criticisms of Christianity were as from a person on the outside (5: 305). Copleston adds this comment regarding the end of Hume's life: "Boswell records Hume's statement at the end of his life that he had never entertained any belief in religion since he began to read Locke and Clarke" (5: 309).

Hume's Skeptical Solution

In section V of the ICHU titled, "Skeptical Solution of These Doubts," Hume proposes his resolution to the apparent paradox of his preceding chapter. At this point Hume hopes that the reader has been convinced that the world is deterministic in function and that there is no such thing as a priori truth which leads to inductive reason. As a solution Hume offers what he calls "Academic or Skeptical Philosophy" (54). Hume summarizes his skeptical view by stating that, "All belief of matter of fact or real existence is derived merely from some object present to the memory or senses and a customary conjunction between that and some other object" (60). This proposed solution is nothing more than a restatement of causation as the foundation for determinism.

According to Hendel, Hume favored the skeptical philosophy as practiced by the Roman Cicero over the earlier Greek skeptic Pyrrho – who was considered the father of skepticism.

Hendel notes that Cicero was standard reading for other philosophers such as Locke and Berkeley (Hume 55). Hume attempts to distance himself from Pyrrho in the following passage.

But a Pyrrhonian cannot expect that his philosophy will have any constant influence on the mind or, if it had, that its influence would be beneficial to society. On the contrary, he must acknowledge, if he will acknowledge anything, that all human life must perish were his principles universally and steadily to prevail. (169)

After distancing himself from Pyrrho, Hume lays out his epistemology which he calls "*mitigated* [sic] skepticism or *academical* [sic] philosophy" (169). His ultimate goal is to separate the sciences from moral reasoning. Hume defines the sciences as "politics, natural philosophy, physics, chemistry, etc., where the qualities, causes, and effects of a whole species of objects are inquired into" (172). Hume states that divinity or theology has its "most solid foundation in *faith* [sic] and divine revelation" (173). Kierkegaard would agree with this assessment as he often referred to the "leap of faith" as a subjective basis for Christian experience (Lavine 323).

De Pierris, in an article entitled "Hume's Pyrrhonian skepticism and the Belief in Causal Laws" comments on Hume's rejection of miracles and preference for mitigated skepticism. De Pierris cites Kemp Smith's interpretation of Hume's skepticism, as allowing for the paradox of accepting natural order at the expense of radical skepticism. De Pierris rejects Kemp Smith's interpretation and states, "In my view Hume is deeply and permanently committed to a theoretical form of radical skepticism" (361). De Pierris sees Hume as clearly having Pyrrhonian skeptical roots, but in a more tempered manner. As such, he does not see Hume's form of skepticism deteriorating into mere existentialist absurdism, as in the case of Camus who believed that all truth is subjective and the human condition is utterly meaningless or absurd (Wyatt). As

Hume puts it, mitigated skepticism maintains scientific value. De Pierris interprets Hume's unique form of skepticism, in the following manner:

Understood in this way, I agree with the view that Humean radical skepticism is a vehicle for opening the way to mitigated skepticism. After entertaining Pyrrhonian skepticism at the theoretical level, now considering the practical value it might have—bracketing out but not erasing its theoretical results—Hume points out that Pyrrhonian skepticism prepares the mind to adopt an attitude of cautious reflection in common life. (361)

Was Hume's goal one of "cautious reflection" as De Pierris suggests, or did Hume have a more radical intent? Hume was so committed to his brand of philosophy which is rooted in skepticism, sense observation, and determinism, that issued the bold challenge to purge libraries of books that are not grounded in his epistemology of mitigated skepticism. At face value it seems that one of the goals of Hume's ICHU is the eradication of organized religion and the institutionalization of a purely secular society and system of pedagogy. Hume concludes his ICHU with the following inflammatory passage which displays his utter contempt for religion and theology in general.

If we take in our hand any volume - of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance – let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* [sic] No. *Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence?* [sic] No. Commit it then to the flames, for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion. (173)

Hume's mitigated skepticism seems to lead to both intolerance and censorship. By dichotomizing between the natural sciences and theology, Hume justifies his intolerant attitude

of radical academic bigotry. To suggest that anyone would go through the libraries of the world and begin to systematically burn books that contain theological or "school metaphysics" is the type of radical fascism that justified the burning of books in Nazi Germany ("Book Burning").

The Impact of An Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding

Hume's Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding is said to have laid many of the foundations of modern empirical scientific thought (Copleston 5: 258). Ironically, Hume's form of mitigated skepticism was not well received during his lifetime. This is evidenced by such harsh criticisms as that published in 1751 by Henry Home who "published a book-length attack on moral and epistemological scepticism [sic]" (Norton, Common-Sense 3). Further evidence of Hume's ideas being out of place during his lifetime is reflected by the fact that his books did not sell well, and that his application for the Chair of Moral Philosophy at University of Edinburgh was rejected on the grounds of universal skepticism and atheism. As a result, Hume never held an academic post during his lifetime. According to Urmson, "The only post of any importance which he [Hume] held was that of secretary to the British Embassy in Paris (1763-1769), where he was for a short time *Charge d' Affaires* [sic]" (158-159). Some scholars believe that Hume was a philosopher whose ideas were published during a time in which the prevailing scientific paradigm embraced a religious metaphysical interpretation of natural law. Hume's views were in conflict to the scholarly paradigm of his day which was not open to his mitigated skepticism and form of naturalistic empiricism.

The reasons for Hume's limited literary and scholarly acceptance are many. First, Hume clearly attacked the prevailing Christian metaphysical view of the world, which was held by the scientific community during his lifetime. Hume was thus outside of "normal science" as Thomas Kuhn would describe it (42). Secondly, Hume was advancing a new model of empiricism, which

went beyond the methodologies of Locke, and those of Descartes and the Cartesian school of thought. Locke and the Cartesians both employed reason and observation. They also, both accepted a belief in God as being a priori – which Hume labeled the religious hypothesis. Hume rejected the empiricism of Locke and Descartes, who both acknowledged the presence of a Supreme Being (Copleston 4: 93, 140).

Finally, it can be said that Hume was outside the practice of normal science in his day, since he stubbornly refused to accept any a priori truth. His philosophy of causation, which was clearly deterministic in nature, was in sharp contrast to the model of creation that was accepted as a priori. A theistic metaphysical model was not only influenced by the religious tradition in Hume's time, but it was also rationalized by the observation of an ordered universe and by reasoning from natural law. Hume was in direct opposition to such notable academics and scientists as Pascal, Leibniz and Newton (Copleston 4: 155, 309; Copleston 5: 154).

Isabel Rivers offers the following observations regarding the conflicting philosophy of David Hume and that of the contemporary society in which he lived:

The case of David Hume presented a real problem for his contemporaries. For Hume, the basis of morality in sentiment meant necessarily that it concerned only human life. Human experience provided no possibility of knowledge beyond the human, of the origin of the universe, its hypothetical creator, his attributes or his relationship with his supposed creation. (675)

Hume's greatest impact seems to have been felt within the more modern times of the last one hundred years. Today, there seems to have been a concerted effort to reinterpret Hume in a more favorable light and to distance him from the label of radical skeptic. De Pierris notes this shift in attitude concerning the interpretation of Hume's philosophy in this way:

The initial reactions to Hume's work by Thomas Reid and James Beattie, and later by T. H. Green, are clear examples of the tendency to ignore Hume's positive endorsement of our belief in the causal laws of nature. Some more recent views invite the opposite emphasis, since they downplay or deny Hume's radical skepticism. In particular, this kind of one-sided emphasis is suggested by the currently popular style of interpretation, initiated by Norman Kemp Smith, which exalts Hume's naturalism. (359)

According to Norton, the reinterpretation of Hume as a common-sense moralist has been a recent development which has been championed by Norman Kemp Smith. Accordingly, Kemp Smith denies that Hume was a skeptic at heart, but rather that "Hume's goal was to challenge the widely accepted assumption that assurance rests on direct insight or evidence. . ." (5). Norton claims that Hume's ultimate goal was not purely one of advancing skepticism, but rather to advance a new positive empirical theory which postulated that the human mind and reason are "reduced to an entirely subsidiary role as the slave of the passions" (Norton, Common-Sense 5).

De Pierris disagrees with Norton and Kemp Smith's interpretation of reason being subjected to human passions. De Pierris explains: "Norton is driven to this overstatement by the fact that Kemp Smith and his followers have themselves overstated their own naturalistic interpretations when summarizing it" (378). De Pierris offers a different viewpoint as an alternative to that of Norton and Kemp Smith: "But, in my view, the most significant case of such an alternative ascendance is that Hume alternatively adopts two standpoints at the cognitive level: the standpoint of the Pyrrhonian skeptic and the standpoint of our natural beliefs" (378).

Was Hume a traditional skeptic of the Pyrrhonian School? Norton and Kemp Smith would agree with this assertion. In contrast, De Pierris would disagree. What is clear is that

Hume rejected a priori truth and that he offered a different version of empiricism, other than that advanced by Locke and Descartes. Hume's empiricism was based entirely upon the senses, which also rejected a priori truth.

Were Hume's views and skeptical position simply out of step with the normal science of his day? Geisler would suggest this to be true: "David Hume (1711-1766) was a skeptic in an optimistic age, the eighteenth century" (86). Has Hume been reinterpreted in recent years by modern scholars that are more open to his skeptical position? The answer clearly is yes (Stanford 399). Scholars such as Kemp Smith, Norton, and De Pierris all agree that Hume has been misinterpreted. Norton addresses the re-shaping of Hume's image in the following manner: "It is only in recent years that there has been a sustained challenge to the time-honored view of Hume as the great destructive sceptic" (Common-Sense 5). Rico Vitz has also re-interpreted Hume in a more favorable light in his recent article: "Sympathy and Benevolence in Hume's Moral Psychology." In that article Vitz refers to Hume as being empathetic to the relationship of sympathy and benevolence (274).

To what can one attribute the reinterpretation of Hume in a more favorable light, in this present age be attributed? One possible explanation is that the world of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is radically different from that of eighteenth-century England. Thomas Kuhn's theory of scientific paradigms offers the explanation that Hume was simply writing and theorizing outside of the normal science of his day.

It can be argued that the Western world today is not as optimistic as eighteenth-century England was. Since the time of Hume, numerous catastrophic events have occurred. Some examples are: The French Revolution, two World Wars, Nazism, Communism, and today, international terrorism. Certain modern theories such as phenomenology seem to be in

remarkable harmony with Hume's mitigated skepticism. According to Littlejohn, "Phenomenology makes actual lived experience the basic data of reality. All you can know, it claims, is what you experience" (185). Hume seems to be much closer today to what Kuhn refers to as normal science. Hume's ideas are just as alive today, as they were when he first his Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding, over 250 years ago. Finally, Hume's harsh attacks on religion seem to be less volatile today, because of the fact that the Anglican Church had far greater influence on eighteenth-century British society, in comparison with most modern Western secular societies today.

David Hume has left an indelible imprint upon modern empirical science by challenging the Newtonian deistic world view, through the advancement of mitigated skepticism. Hume has paved the way for theories such as phenomenalism which stress sense-based data, and to a lesser extent existentialism, which also stresses direct observation and the rejection of a priori truth. Hume has influenced the area of moral reasoning, specifically as a result of his challenges to the ecclesiastical assumptions of his time. As a result, theologians continue to struggle with the criticisms that Hume raised in "Of Miracles" and "Of a Providence and a Future State," in Hume's Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding.

The modern interpretation of Hume's metaphysical view is twofold. First, mitigated skepticism has value in advancing empiricism. Secondly, the causal relationships observed in the natural world are not evidence of deism, but rather, they are observations which support the Darwinian evolutionary ontology. In conclusion, whether one accepts or rejects Hume's mitigated skepticism, the fact that his writings are still discussed in scholarly journals and monographs to this day, is evidence of the contention that Hume's ideas continue to be both influential and controversial.

As controversial as Hume was throughout his lifetime, he somehow maintained certain affection among the people of England. It could be said of Hume that he remained a popular skeptic. Henry Graham comments on the philosopher's final hours:

The historian [Hume] was the most popular man in the city, and as he lay dying his condition was the universal subject of inquiry and interest with high and low. Every one spoke of him with the anxiety of an intimate friend. The crowd that gathered round the door on the day of the funeral was drawn there as much from affection as from curiosity. Among the lowest of the rabble one was heard to say, "Ah, he was an atheist." "No matter," rejoined another, "he was an honest man."
(59)

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