HISTORY AS PARADIGM IN DAVID HUME'S SCIENCE OF MAN

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1963

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate College
of the Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of
MASTER OF ARTS
December, 1987

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PREFACE

This thesis is the result of the accumulated experiences of a rich and exciting educational odyssey. Many teachers, books, friends, and helpful individuals have had a part in it. The inspiration for this study came when psychology, philosophy and history courses in three successive semesters touched upon David Hume, his significance and writing. I discovered that this man, now so well known for his theory of knowledge, was even better known in the last century for his multivolume *History of England.* The importance of Hume's *History* to well stocked libraries of the last century is attested to by its low accession number in the Oklahoma State University library which indicates that it was part of the original library collection. I developed an interest in finding the connection between Hume the historian and Hume the philosopher that eventually developed into this paper.

I would especially like to thank the members of my committee, Dr. John Paul Bischoff, Dr. James Henderson, and Dr. Paul Hiltpold, for their help, specific suggestions and patient encouragement. Dr. Elizabeth Williams also assisted the final production by her careful reading and thoughtful comments.

I also appreciate the help and support of my husband Bertil Lennart, and my sons, Jon Steffan and Peter Erland who helped me with the technical complexities of word processing and printing.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

KNOWLEDGE, INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORKS AND DAVID HUME:

Introduction To The Problem

The fundamental questions -- what is knowledge and how may it be known and what is the purpose of human life and how should it be lived-- are at least as ancient as the first recorded philosophy. Through the centuries the answers to these questions have formed for each generation a part of the mentalité or spirit of the age. There also have been cycles of much longer duration which may be characterized by their prevailing optimism that reality and the universe may be known -- as with the early Greek philosophers and the scientists since Newton -- or by a prevailing pessimism and confusion as each new paradigm of knowledge is first eagerly embraced, applied widely and finally found inadequate as an all embracing system of explanation, as was the case of Aristotle's logic for the Scholastics.

From the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries, the intellectual world suffered one of the pessimistic periods, a crisis of confidence about what could be known with certainty as the old paradigms of knowledge and ethics declined and before the new scientific one had been fully accepted. Both Descartes' and Locke's theories of knowledge were meant as answers to the pervasive skepticism that followed from the decline in the authority of the church to define truth, the rise of the

nominalist theory of knowledge, and a newly developing urge to religious and intellectual liberty. But both the Cartesian and Lockean theories of knowledge had flaws which Hume's clear critical eye detected to the dismay of those who were riding the new crest of optimism that reason and science would soon resolve the problem of certainty and answer the riddles of the universe.

The eighteenth century was a time of major change in basic assumptions about knowledge and its most insightful philosopher, David Hume, shared in many of these. But much of the newly developing empirical thought was inconsistent and over-optimistic in its claims. Hume's intention was to clear up the inconsistencies and establish a solid epistemological base for scientific knowledge. He addressed the skeptical crisis of knowledge with a modified, expanded form of empiricism which he referred to as true philosophy. His investigation into human understanding found that what humans know is based on experience in ordinary life operated on by the natural structuring mechanism of mind which gives order and meaning to that experience. Knowledge based on experience is necessarily mind and time dependent. That is, the accumulated store of human knowledge changes through time, and how humans interpret their knowledge also changes as time and conditions change. New challenges appear and new adaptations or syntheses are worked out. Hume proposed a science of man did not promise ultimate truths, but at least "principles as universal as possible", given the limits of human understanding. His "mitigated skepticism" was a standard of reasonable doubt, a method for limiting the scope of inquiry to those questions for which there was evidence to support a belief. It was meant to instill a touch of humility into

reasoning to ward off the dangers of dogmatic and false reasoning.

Objectives of This Paper

The inquirer who begins reading the commentaries on David Hume's philosophy is soon struck by the great difference between the older and the more recent scholarship and interpretations. Because Hume was only half optimistic in an age of inflated expectations that science could provide all of the secrets that humans crave, he made his contemporaries uncomfortable. The philosophers of the Scottish Enlightenment and the later English Hegelians who formed the "old Oxford view" portrayed Hume as the great skeptic, that "worm in the bud of the Enlightenment"[1] who tried to prove that knowledge is impossible. Eighteenth and nineteenth century thinkers operating under different frames of reference and asking other questions missed the subtle depth in his thought.

In the first half of the twentieth century a few scholars began to revise the long established interpretation of Hume's philosophy. Inspired by the early seminal works in the 1930s and 1940s, there followed a renaissance of Hume scholarship in the second half of the century. The number of published studies has increased every decade since the 1940s. In the decade of the 1960s there was a rapid acceleration with a particularly rich burst of new published material in 1976, the bicentennial of his death.[2]

The more recent scholarship has not only demonstrated a clearly historical approach in his political and economic theories and the *The History of England* but also has noticed that the epistemology of the *Treatise* is laid out in a narrative and dialectical way, demonstrating a

developmental approach to learning and knowledge. Hume's long unrecognized contribution to the theory of knowledge is that historical and dialectical thinking are inherent in an empirical concept of knowledge. The implications of such an understanding of knowledge were only beginning to be realized in Hume's century. When knowledge is viewed as the accumulation of facts, and concepts and conclusions are derived from the process of accumulation and assimilation, then the the proper way of describing knowledge is dialectical and narrative in which past information achieves new significance in the light of further developments. The empirical philosopher faces a continuous need to assimilate fact information into the established frame of reference; if the new facts are dissonent with established opinion, then new syntheses are created. In the eighteenth century the theological and prophetic way of interpreting human social morality was giving way to the empirical approach which regarded the facts of history as the key to ethical knowledge. That is why the empirical social philosophers wrote histories.

David Hume was the first of the British philosophical historians. Because his epistemology was psychological, historical and complex, and because he wrote in an easy and popular style, it was not easy to detect the deeper currents of meaning in his writing. Ideas of process, synthesis, cultural and intellectual evolution lay as a substructure to all of Hume's writing. But because these ideas were still in formation in the eighteenth century, the specialized terminology that Kant, Hegel and the romantic historians later provided, did not yet exist. Such Ideas, therefore, had little command over the prevailing intellectual climate. The idea of progress (Hume's term for process and evolution)

of knowledge and culture was new in the eighteenth century. and Hume's interpreters did not understand the part that such ideas played in understanding his philosophy.

The original impulse for the present investigation was to find and understand the real David Hume. Was he the skeptic who thought knowledge wasn't possible, as he was represented in the old view, or the Newtonian scientist of man that he hoped to be. During the course of the study, it became apparent that there were several ways to read his philosophy, and that the predominant interpretation had radically changed in this century. The purpose of this paper is (1) to identify the main frames of reference which have been used for interpreting Hume, to explain why the older Newtonian and Lockean phenomenalist interpretation had such a strong hold for so long, and to outline the development of the modern, more Kantian interpretation; (2) to trace the history of the persistent human questions concerning what is real knowledge and how it may be known, and to find Hume's place in the continuous evolution of answers to those questions; (3) to demonstrate the development of the newer interpretation in which the paradigm for knowledge is neither extreme phenomenalism nor extreme idealism, but a more expanded form of empiricism that synthesizes both and takes history as its paradigm; (4) to find confirmation in Hume's philosophy of knowledge, his social and political philosophy, and his *History of England* that an historical and dialectical approach is a way to find greater meaning in these writings than was possible under the old phenomenalist interpretive framework.

The first issue will be discussed in the remainder of Chapter I. The second is the subject of Chapter II, The Problem of Knowledge.

The third is considered in Chapter III, History and Empirical Science. Chapters IV, V, and VI seek to confirm that an historical paradigm for knowledge can be found throughout Hume's epistemological, social and political philosophy. The conclusion proposes that the paradigm of science is at present in a more mature, less optimistic and less rigidly reductionist phase, which may be why Hume's historical empiricism is receiving more scholarly attention than ever. It also suggests for historians that the attempt to pattern history after the now somewhat shaky models of mathematics and physics may not be the most productive. History, or the narrative order of human experience, objectified as much as possible in the subjective mind of the historian, is itself an irreducible paradigm for knowledge in the social sciences.

Problems Of Interpretation

There are several difficulties in reading Hume that may explain the length of time it has taken to understand the deep interpretive structures that underlie his writing. One set of reasons may be generally categorized as problems with the form of his writing. There is, for example, no one place to turn to for his complete, systematic textbook on the science of man. The *Treatise* was his first attempt. Written as a young man, he later regretted its immaturity and its difficulty of style.[3] It had three divisions, Book I, "Of the Understanding"; Book II, "Of the Passions"; and Book III, "Of Morals." Two projected books on politics and criticism were intended to complete the structure.[4] But the first three books met with so little success that the last two were never written in treatise form. The *Treatise* was

meant to give an empirical explanation that was psychological and historical to the question of how humans know, and to use that base concept of knowledge to construct an empirical social science and ethics. It was so misinterpreted that he later recast it in two shorter versions, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* and *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals.*

These were only a little more successful, so he turned to the essay form to advance his political and economic theories, couched in discussions of the issues of his day. This literary approach, while it converted his philosophy to easier reading, also made it harder to detect the significance that only repeated readings and comparison with the philosophical works began to reveal. Thus his theoretical principles and methods were to be found explicitly stated only in the introductory paragraphs of the essays, and in the appendices of the *History*, as well as scattered throughout as aphorisms. Otherwise his principles lay as a substructure, there but not obvious. Those who have done this laborious search have found an evident continuity of theory behind the *Treatise, Essays* and the *History.* But such comparative exegesis has mostly taken place in this century. Before that, most scholarly interpretation took his political and economic theory, with its grounding in history, to be unrelated to his epistemology which was widely believed to maintain that knowledge wasn't possible in any case.

Economic success was one reason to turn to essay writing, but selling his ideas to a wider readership was even more important. Popularly read literary forms fit Hume's concept of a philosophy that in order to have any intelligible meaning to human beings, would have to get away from the purely theoretical "speculations of the closet" and

out into the world of common life. Conversation and the free exchange of ideas among people, rather than formal logic, were the means of refining and correcting his science. Hume, himself, explained in "Of Essay Writing" that he proposed to be an ambassador between the worlds of learning and the "conversational world" of literate readers.[5] The eighteenth century was, after all, a time of great essayists whose works were read and discussed in polite society. If one wished to promote a revolution in thinking, the essay and history were the media to use.

Duncan Forbes, who wrote a recent and thorough analysis of Hume's politics, said that contemplating all of Hume's writing was like gazing at a "dazzling mosaic" of hundreds of points of light on a glittering sea. The effect is baffling unless one stands well back and achieves a philosophical distance in order to see the repeated patterns.[6]

Nearly a century earlier, Selby-Bigge[7] noticed the same mosaic effect and was the first to mention in the introduction to his 1893 edition of the *Enquiries* that there was a problem about interpreting Hume's texts. Selby-Bigge observed that Hume said so many things in so many different contexts that it is possible to "find all philosophies in Hume, or, by setting up one statement against another, none at all."[8] Selby-Bigge was right that there were some inconsistencies to be found in the entire range of Hume's writing, (although his general concepts remain very consistent). Still there is another insight to be found in Selby-Bigge's statement, though it is not what he had in mind. Setting one concept against another and then trying to find a synthesis is precisely how Hume did philosophy. Such a procedure may be faulty from a logical-analytical viewpoint, but not from a dialectical one. Hume found paradoxes at the core of the great problems of knowledge, morals,

and politics. Philosophic knowledge versus common sense, cosmos versus chaos in causal explanations (i.e. determinism vs. free will or randomness) self versus other, liberty versus authority. Each way of thinking on these issues had some truth in it. Hume's intention was to find moderate, "both/and" [9] solutions that created a synthesis between opposites. On political issues, the moral philosopher should attempt to stand apart from the common clamor of polarized political debate. Viewing the issues with a scientific detachment revealed that there was some truth in both sides of the debate, and encouraged humility and moderation in judgments.

A second type of difficulty in understanding the fuller significance of Hume's philosophy was the frame of reference of his interpreters. Locke's philosophy had such a strong hold on the mind of the eighteenth century, that the most obvious thing that Hume's readers could see was that he had shown some of Locke's theories were untenable. Within the limits of their frame of reference they could not see that Hume expanded Locke's theory of knowledge into a more consistent and inclusive definition of empiricism.

The questions that are asked influence what is observed. The questions being asked in Hume's day were still concerned with how to obtain certain and absolute knowledge, and that very much affected what interpreters saw in Hume. Throughout his lifetime and for at least a century afterward, his philosophy was not fully understood because most tried to read it from a phenomenalist perspective derived from Locke. In the twentieth century, new interpretive frameworks, particularly those with a more Kantian interpretation of knowledge provided fruitful new ways to see more of Hume's meaning.

Conceptual Frameworks

Because the range of Hume's thought is so wide and his conceptual framework sometimes (depending on where one is reading) more implicit than explicit, interpretation is especially difficult for the reader who has covered only a little of Hume and hasn't discovered the more subtle underlying theory. It is useful to have some kind of interpretive model or conceptual "handle" for getting a hold on the subject.

Historically, the most persistent frame of reference for interpreting Hume has been that of phenomenalism which developed in British philosophy out of Locke.[10] It is a form of radical empiricism that interprets all human knowledge as derived from unconnected sensory events sometimes referred to as atoms of phenomena. Phenomenalism developed out of Locke's image of the mind at birth as blank paper and from his physiological explanation for sensory perception as the "motion of particles of matter coming from them [bodies at a distance] and striking on our organs."[11] Though Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* suggested several sources of knowledge including the reflection of the mind on its own ideas and intuitively, rationally deduced moral principles, these seemed to be inconsistent with his physiological sensory explanation. It was the latter to which subsequent British philosophers paid most attention and which they refined into an increasingly physiological, mechanical and phenomenal concept of knowledge that has persistently characterized British empirical philosophy. It is this phenomenalist interpretation -- for which Locke and Hume traditionally have been symbols -- that in the last twenty-five years has undergone significant revision. But it remains in

all the older discussions of Hume, so that the modern reader is likely to run into it often.

After the mid-point of the nineteenth century British philosophy was increasingly influenced by Hegelian thought. The Absolute Idealists, whose thought dominated British universities until the 1920's, opposed empirical philosophy altogether. They were interested in the wholeness of ultimate truth in which there are no divisions into fragmentary bits of empirical phenomena.[12] They had no use for the Lockean system, and considered Hume as the last of its degenerate line. Oxford professor T.H. Green edited an edition of Hume's *Treatise* (London, 1874) in which he wrote a lengthy introduction interpreting it as solely a Lockean phenomenalist document that ended in total scepticism. This viewpoint is often referred to as the "old Oxford view" that perpetuated the Reid and Beattie's Scottish School interpretation which emphasised his skeptical epistemology to the exclusion of all else.[13]

By the 1920's Absolute Idealism began to decline and British philosophy reverted once again to its empirical roots in Locke and Hume. Linguistic analysis developed as a means of examining the overinflated Hegelian language of the Idealists for its meaning. G.E. Moore and Bertrand Russell, suspecting that imprecise language led to fuzzy thinking, began to work out a means to bring a scientific rigor to philosophic language.[14]

Russell and Wittgenstein devised a logical atomism that proposed that reality consists of atomic facts (phenomena) and that language consists only of atomic and molecular propositions, combining traditional phenomenalism with modern developments in logic. Russell devised the syntax of a logically perfect language which he supposed was

the essence of the language we really use. It was soon noticed, however, that the statements which logical atomists made did not conform to the rigor of their own logic.[15]

Contemporary with the later part of Russell's work, the Logical Positivists developed as a group with an organized creed. The Logical Positivists of the Vienna Circle officially recognized Hume as a founder of their philosophy in their 1929 manifesto. They were the first to see Hume not as a destructive skeptic, but as a constructive philosopher. Yet they made the same assumptions as did their predecessors that Hume was to be read as a phenomenalist.[16]

Their creed was appealingly simple and they got much attention for their efforts to establish criteria for scientific and mathematical proofs. Their test for meaning in science was the Verification Principle. But on exactly how this principle was to be defined, they were never able to agree. Generally, they thought that the meaning of scientific statements was to be found directly in the facts of sense experience without an interpreting mind or prior hypothesis. This kind of statement eliminated the possibility of meaning for anything involving metaphysics, morals or aesthetics. There were other complications. Is sensory experience the only kind of experience? Does verification depend only on present experience? If so, as some claimed, history would be eliminated as a category of knowledge. And finally, if verification of atoms of sensory phenomena depended only on private experience, how can there be any public discussion of science/ knowledge? The concept ended in linguistic solipsism. It eventually became obvious that the logic of language could only refer to language; there was no way to connect it to the world of experienced fact.[17] It

is the same problem with other attempts to reduce experience to logical constructs whether Aristotelian logic, Cartesian mathematical reasoning or modern computer models; the experienced flow of particular events (phenomena) does not necessarily conform to a universal logical framework.

Both Absolute Idealism and Logical Positivism were extremist epistemological positions. The one construed the world as purely idea, the construct of the active ordering principles of mind, the other as purely material phenomena imprinting meaning directly on a passive mind. It gradually became apparent to scholars that Hume had worked out a moderating position between these two extremes. Kant is usually given the honor for constructing the bridge between empiricism and idealism, but it is now understood that he built on a foundation laid by Hume. Most of modern interpretation is based on this new understanding of Hume.[18]

Gradually throughout this century, the old phenomenalist frame of reference has given way to two new interpretive frameworks. These are naturalism and empiricism, which are interconnected aspects of Hume's attempt to found psychology and ethics on scientific principles, and will be discussed in turn. Norman Kemp Smith, professor of logic and metaphysics at the University of Edinburgh, pioneered the modern naturalistic interpretation in an article, "The Naturalism of Hume" in the journal *Mind* of 1905.[19] His career-long study of the *Treatise* culminated in a highly influential book, *The Philosophy of David Hume* published in 1941. It was the first important attempt to find Hume's real and unique philosophy beyond the first Lockean and skeptical passages which were long assumed to be all there was. He concluded that

Hume's real intention was to write a new moral philosophy, influenced by Francis Hutcheson's theory of a natural moral sense, and that Book I, (Of the Understanding) refuting the Cartesian and modifying the Lockean theories of knowledge was meant to prepare the way for Books II and III (Of the Passions and Of Morals). These contained Hume's variations on Hutcheson's system of natural moral knowledge in which basic beliefs are located in the passions.[20]

To Kemp Smith, what is central to Hume's theory of knowledge is the reversal of the roles given to reason and passion. Our basic beliefs of a real external world, of cause, of the existence of our selves and other selves are not founded in reason but in the nature of our minds; they are natural beliefs. Nature is ultimate cause and *a priori* in Hume's philosophy.[21] Why do people believe in cause? Because it is a natural instinct. Why do people experience virtuous acts as pleasurable? Because they have a natural moral sense.

When one begins to read Hume for his references to nature, there are numerous confirmations:

> Nature by an absolute and uncontrollable necessity has determined us to judge as well as breathe and feel.[22]
> All these operations [judgment as to matters of fact, appreciation of beauty, estimation of an action as good or bad] are a species of natural instinct, which no reasoning process of the thought and understanding is able either to produce or to prevent.[23]

By 1976, the year of several Hume conferences and many publications on the occasion of the bicentennial of Hume's death, the Kemp Smith naturalism thesis was acknowledged to be the prevailing and the correct interpretation.[24] The most thorough new look at naturalism in Hume's political philosophy, had appeared the year earlier, Duncan Forbes' *Hume's Philosophical Politics.*[25] Forbes reread the social and political

theory in the perspective of the Enlightenment's interest in natural law. The Cambridge Platonists (Ralph Cudsworth, Samuel Clark, and the Earl of Shaftesbury) of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries searched for a natural foundation on which to base non-authoritarian laws and morality, in opposition to Hobbes' pessimistic view of human selfishness that justified authoritarian control. The Platonists assumed such a grounding was obtainable by reasoning based on formal logic. When Hume disproved a rational basis for moral reasoning it was widely supposed that he had, therefore, demolished natural law theory.

Forbes argued that rather than destroy natural law, Hume had changed its theoretical foundation from theological and rational to secular and empirical. Rational natural law theorists postulated an *a priori* God-governed rational body of truth and derived from this a system of human duties, that which ought to be. Hume reasoned the opposite way. In order to derive what ought to be, one observes what is, *a posteriori* from human behavior. People are born into families, and act under social, sexual and self-interested motives that are based in nature and passion, not reason. Hume bracketed off a religious ultimate cause as unknowable and unnecessary from the economy of explanation principle. But he retained a strong social basis for his moral theory which differentiated it from the "selfish system" of Hobbes and the utilitarians. The essential feature of the natural law theory of Grotius, Pufendorf, Cumberland and Hutchenson, which they held in common with Hume, was the social nature of human beings, and the social derivation of institutions to meet human needs. Hume synthesised natural law and an empirical approach to arrive at a naturalistic explanation for human nature and society based on the facts of human

experience. Forbes describes Hume and Adam Smith as adding empirical depth to natural law and were thus its legacies rather than its destroyers.[26]

The second modern conceptual handle for grasping Hume is empirical theory, which is the methodology for studying humanity considered as natural beings. That Hume meant to establish a science should seem obvious given the subtitle of the *Treatise*, *Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects.* But this also went unnoticed until Hume was revived by Kemp Smith and the Logical Positivists early in this century. Mary Shaw Kuypers' *Studies in the Eighteenth Century Background of Hume's Empiricism*, first published in 1930, mentions that in several new works, especially Kemp Smith's, there has been a "new and valuable orientation, and, in general, Hume's empiricism has come to seem more important than his phenomenalism."[27]

Reading the few pages of introduction to the *Treatise* makes clear his intention to establish a system of science on experiential (empirical) ground.

> In pretending therefore to explain the principles of human nature, we in effect propose a complete system of the sciences, built on a foundation almost entirely new. . . 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.[28]

Hume assumed an orderly cosmos of the mind whose general laws of operation could be established by a Newtonian reduction.

> But it is at least worth while to try if the science of man will not admit of the same accuracy which several parts of natural philosophy are found susceptible of. There seems to be all the reason in the world to imagine that it may be carried to the greatest degree of exactness. If in examining several phenomena we find that they resolve themselves into one common

> principle, and can trace this principle into another, we shall at last arrive at those few simple principles on which all the rest depend. And though we can never arrive at the ultimate principles, it is a satisfaction to go as far as our faculties will allow us.[29]

> We have confined ouselves in this whole reasoning to the relation of cause and effect, as discovered in the motions and operations of matter. But the same reasoning extends to the operations of the mind. *30*

But Hume's empiricism, as it has slowly come to be understood, is not the same as the more extremely reductionist British variety. The strict empiricism of the Positivists accepted only present sense data, allowing no past nor construct of mind actively to impute meaning to the data. Part of the difficulty that scholars in this tradition have had in understanding Hume's objective of describing how we know or why we believe in cause and effect in psychological terms is that it is too imprecise for the taste of a strictly reductionist and materialist empirical theory. John Passmore in *Hume's Intentions* expresses this attitude when he accuses Hume of resorting to "a trick of the mind" in explaining why we believe in cause.[31]

Yet the British empiricists were scornful because Hume posed them a quandary which, according to Bertrand Russell, their purely phenomenalist theory has not yet been able to answer. Hume's legacy to Kant and the subsequent course of empirical theory was the understanding that in order to explain how we know, we must search for deeper roots than either of the two prevailing systems (the mathematical/logical or the sensory-phenomena-only form of empirical explanation).[32]

Ernst Cassirer, whose analysis of the eighteenth century development of the theory of empiricism was written from a German and Kantian perspective, proposed that Hume was not to be seen as the dead

end of the Bacon to Berkeley chain. Rather, his empiricism was to be seen as a new beginning, one that developed in linear progression through Newton and the Dutch scientists Huygens and S'Gravesande to the inevitable conclusion, that the phenomenal and mathematical conception of knowledge (the British model) comes to rest on a foundation of psychological certainty.[33] This anchoring in the psychology of the structuring mind is the historical preparation necessary for the German developments in philosophy of science, which switched the interpretation of mind from the passive receptor of sense data to the active creator of meaning for those data.[34]

Both Hume and Kant proposed solutions to the problem of knowledge inherent in the extreme versions of phenomenalist empirical theory. The Hume to Kant connection has long been known through the often repeated statement of Kant's that, "I honestly confess that my recollection of David Hume's teaching was the very thing which many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber, and gave my investigations in the field of speculative philosophy a quite new direction."[35] Both of them believed in the reality of a physical world which our senses represent to us, and that the inferences drawn from that experience result from the structuring nature of our minds. Hume, however, while he foreshadowed Kant, remained in the British tradition of maintaining a firm basis in experience. Kant pushed further in the direction of the transcendent mind, actively creating meaning. His conception of empiricism which he called critical philosophy became the great rival to the British, phenomenalist philosophy of science.[36]

A Kantian perspective has been a very fruitful one for understanding those parts of Hume that seem so perplexing to those reading from a

strictly phenomenalist viewpoint. Perhaps this explains the observation made by Hume's bibliographer that prior to 1925 Hume studies in the English speaking world lay in "suspended animation" while in the non-English speaking world over 100 works were published, primarily in Germany.[37]

Hume's influence in German thought is clear in the work of Edmund Husserl who intended a comprehensive philosophy of science he called phenomenology. Husserl, Hume and Kant were clearly parallel in attempting to explain objective reality in terms of subjective experience. Husserl, however, was critical of aspects of both of his precursors, though he thought that Hume had a better critical facility than Kant.[38] He disliked Hume's emphasis on sensory data, but liked his structuring consciousness in which the object is represented to it as real through the medium of consciousness.[39] Generally, phenomenology is a system of criticism which examines the phenomena of experience as they are experienced in the process and activity of consciousness. Object and subject are not separated but understood to be aspects of the whole process. The methodology is that of philosophically stepping back and critically examining the process of consciousness as it imputes meaning to experienced phenomena.[40] The Hume reader can see at once that this was Hume's way of approaching the questions he considered.

The phenomenological frame of reference for interpreting Hume's texts has had a part in their current re-evaluation. Donald Livingston has observed that rereading Hume in the light of phenomenology's method of examining the contents of consciousness to discover how we construct meanings, revealed new insights. Previously Hume had been read mostly from the British analytical tradition in which only the Lockean and

phenomenalist parts made sense and all the rest seemed mushy and confusing or even contradictory. Read in the new way, the *Treatise* may be seen not as systematic analysis, but as a dialectical, that is, developmental search through Hume's own mind, in which new meanings are found as the search unfolds, and new information is added. Livingston continues that although he does not mean to take up the task of interpreting Hume as a phenomenologist would, he wishes to note that in the early twentieth century, Husserl and his followers had a deeper understanding of Hume than their English contemporaries.[41]

Livingston as well as other modern interpreters, going all the way back to Kemp Smith, however, do have a phenomenological point of view. If they were not directly influenced by that philosophical movement, they at least appreciated the same aspects of Hume that the phenomenologists did, that is, his psychology of knowledge and his introspective method.

A German philosophical perspective undoubtedly also lies behind the modern appreciation for the historicism that underlies not only Hume's politics and history but the epistemology as well. As Livingston has pointed out, with ample documentation, that the *Treatise*, is not an analytical document, but one that proceeds in a narrative, dialectical way as Hume grapples with contradictory issues to arrive at new understandings. Narrative, time ordered thinking is central to all of Hume's writing from the *Treatise* to the *History* as the rest of this paper will attempt to demonstrate.

ENDNOTES

1. Alfred Cobban. *In Search of Humanity* (London: Jonathan Cape 1960), p. 138.

2. Rolland Hall, *Fifty Years of Hume Scholarship* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1978), pp. 60-114. The frequency was calculated from the organization of the bibliography by years. Hereafter cited as *Hume Scholarship*.

3. David Hume, "My Own Life" in Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary*, 2 vols., T.H. Green, T.H. Grose, editors (New York and Bombay: Longmans, Green and Co., 1898), vol. 1, p. 3. Hereafter cited as *Essays*. References where not otherwise specified will be for vol. 1 which contains the political and economic essays. Also in David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, L.A. Selby-Bigge editor, 3rd. edition edited by P.H. Niddich (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), p. 2. Hereafter cited as *Enquiries*.

4. T.H. Grose, "History of the Editions", in Hume, *Essays* p. 25.

5. Hume, *Essays*, vol. 2, p. 369.

6. Duncan Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 135. Hereafter cited as *Philosophical Politics*.

7. L.A. Selby-Bigge in 1888 and 1893 produced new editions of *A Treatise Of Human Nature* and the *Enquiries*. The Selby-Bigge *Treatise* is the standard reference because of its detailed analytical index and comparative tables of contents.

8. Selby-Bigge, introduction to the *Enquiries*, p. vii.

9. A 'both/and" approach is a term used by Jaroslav Pelican. It is the opposite of an either/or approach.

10. Donald W. Livingston, "Introduction" to *Hume, A Re-evaluation*, Livingston and James T. King, editors (New York: Fordham University Press, 1976) p. 11.

11. John Locke, *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Book II,1,2, and *Examination of P. Malebranche's Opinion*, sec. 7-16, in John Yolton, *The Locke Reader* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1977), pp. 130, 133.

12. G.J. Warnock. *English Philosophy Since 1900*, 2nd. edition (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p. 1-6. Hereafter cited as *English Philosophy.*

13. R.W. Connon, "The Naturalism of Hume Revisited", in *McGill Hume Studies*, p. 121. ff.4. Hereafter cited as "Naturalism of Hume".

14. Warnock, *English Philosophy*, p. 14, 26, 112.

15. Ibid. p. 29-33.

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17. Warnock, *English Philosophy*, p. 29-39.

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CHAPTER II

THE PROBLEM OF KNOWLEDGE AND DAVID HUME

From their earliest recorded stories human beings have shown a conscious awareness that they are unique among the animals for their ability to possess knowledge and to think creatively about it. Yet the most persistent and elusive problem has been an understanding of the exact nature and limits of human knowledge. Ernst Cassirer wrote in the introduction to his book, *The Problem of Knowledge*:

> Even in myth and religion all that is distinctive of man is associated with the miracle of knowledge. This miracle reveals the nature of man and his likeness to God, yet in it man also realizes in the deepest and most painful way, the very limitations of his own nature. Knowledge assures him of his divine origin, yet through it he at once sees himself cut off and banished, as it were, from the original ground of all things. He is condemned to a long laborious way of search and research, from which there is no final escape. In the very consciousness that there *is* a knowledge and a truth is the awareness at the same time that the possession of absolute truth is denied to man.[1]

The mystery of human knowledge, which underlay ancient mythology and religion, became the subject of conscious study by the ancient Greek philosophers. Their particular ability was to make the mysteries of the universe the subjects for reason and thought, and to see reality in terms of rational order. Supreme among the Greek philosophers for their influence on the development of western thought were two geniuses, Plato (427-347 B.C.) and Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), who taught and wrote in an overlaping time span.[2]

These two were often thought to be exemplars of two very opposite systems, two different ways to understand knowledge, the mystical-intuitive and the empirical. Yet they were not entirely opposite. Aristotle was a student of Plato's and they shared a number of common assumptions though Aristotles's drifted away from his teacher's mathematical and ideal rationalism toward the biological and observational. For both cognition was not material but spiritual, the highest form of human activity. They opposed Democritus' purely materialistic, atomistic explanation of the world, and opposed skepticism with the belief in a timeless truth that the universe is real, knowable, possesses a design and fulfills a purpose. Reality is truth and beauty, and the good life is the proper goal of human activity.[3]

It was their differences, however, that held the attention of subsequent philosophers. Plato was an idealist for whom the form or universal idea of an object was held to be more real than the particular object of the senses. His paradigm of knowledge was mathematics, universal and abstract logical relationships. He appealed to those who would explain ultimate reality in terms of soul, mind, idea or God -- thus his appeal in Christian theology. His theory of knowledge was based on soul, entirely separate from and superior to the body, which intuits the forms. It was the knowing part, the essence of the person, containing various aspects, sensory, self-assertive and rational which was the highest of all. The soul/mind was godlike, eternal and intuitively able to know the universal Forms or concepts to which the fleeting sensory perceptions belonged. The sensory world of changing and confusing appearances was held to be merely a shadowy reflection of universal and eternal reality which was the idea or the Form. The Platonic social scientist measured life and institutions in terms of

ideal types: just republics, philosopher kings, and heavenly cities.

Aristotle's paradigm of knowledge was biology and the common experience and ordinary consciousness of human beings. To him the human power to know truth and reality was strongest when based on sensory impressions and observation of life, and weakest when considering ultimate truth.[4] Aristotle concerned himself more with the concrete and particular, whereas Plato preferred the abstract and universal. Aristotle's study of biology forced him to consider the changing and unique individual cases in nature, while at the same time remembering that there similarities as well as differences, continuities as well as changes. In his ethics he described existing Greek city states and evaluated human action by internal, human standards.[5]

Aristotle's theory of knowledge differed from Plato's on the theory of Forms. Whereas for Plato reality was exclusively in the supra-sensible idea or form, for Aristotle the thing perceived was just as real as cognition of its form. Soul and body, perceiver and thing perceived, were for him not separate but were different aspects of the same reality. He was particularly interested in explaining the relationship of soul to body, the mental to the physical process. Aristotle's solution was to describe all being which may be perceived by the senses as having dual aspects, matter and form. Matter was the unknowable substratum, the external object. Form was the function of that matter, actual or potential that could be perceived by the senses. Form was the knowable essence which the mind abstracted from the sensory information it received about the external object. Body and soul, therefore, were the matter and form which were inextricably bound together in the individual person as an interactive process. Objects had, as part of their being, the potentiality of being perceived by the

soul. Knowledge was the reciprocal relationship between the knower and the known, the object and the subject. Aristotle assumed what most other people assume: that the world that is represented to us by our senses is the real world. His was a philosophy of common sense.[6]

Both Plato and Aristotle asked the most basic questions that have intrigued thinkers before and since: what is the nature of knowledge and what are its ultimate grounds, how does the cognitive process work, where do our ideas come from, how is body related to mind, and what is the purpose of human life.[7] Each was exemplar of one of two theories of knowledge, the rational/intuitive and the empirical. Neither arrived at a conclusion that was able conclusively to demolish the other. Instead, they asked the questions and suggested the arguments that philosophers in the ensuing centuries have found so fruitful for further elaboration. Each theory has had its confirmed advocates, so that Coleridge could remark that everyone was from birth either a Platonist or an Aristotelian. The fact is, however, that human beings are capable of both kinds of knowledge. As Bertrand Russell observed in the opening lines of his essay on "Mysticism and Logic" some philosophers have depended exclusively on one source, others on the other, but the best of philosophy has attempted to harmonize the two.[8]

Aristotle's genius in describing how humans acquire knowledge has lain as a foundation to all Western and Arabic systems of psychology since he wrote.[9] He identified but did not resolve the issues comprising the "problem of knowledge". From then on the debate centered on whether cognition is a fully passive, sensory receptive function internal to the individual organism or whether it is a fully active, concept creating agent which is either internal or comes into the mind from an external source. Medieval philosophers were particularly interested in the issue

of whether the agent or active intellect was external or internal to the individual human mind. Before Aquinas, most followed the Neoplatonic and Christian doctrine of Plotinus and Augustine that the agent intellect entered the individual by divine illumination from a single external source, the supreme mind of God. In this group were included the earlier Arab philosophers Alfaraby and Avicenna whose commentaries on Aristotle were blended with the Neoplatonic concept of divine illumination. Avicenna was an important transmitter of Aristotle into Europe via Moslem Spain whose two great medieval intellects, Averroës and Maimonides, each peeled away some of the Neoplatonic elements of their predecessors. They presented a more purely naturalistic Aristotle, maintaining that the intellect is capable of passive intelligence only, the higher rational functions belonging exclusively to the external agent intellect.[10]

Until the twelfth century, Western European scholars were isolated from the knowledge of the main body of Aristotle, except the logic, and from the scholarship of the Arab world. Their theories of knowledge were ultimately based in Platonic idealism via Plotinus, Paul and Augustine. Mind-body dualism, prejudice against bodily animal nature in human beings, God as the sole ground of reality, and the otherworldly, immortal soul were the leitmotifs of medieval Christian psychology. The rediscovery of Aristotle's books of nature, psychology and ethics introduced a new store of ideas to Western Europe and slowly a renewed interest in nature and scientific observation began to develop.[11]

The immediate effect was to stimulate stormy controversy among theologians seeking to construct a philosophy that could synthesize the contradictions in the two ways of knowledge. Aristotle's refound books of logic were easily assimilated with those that were already known and

used. The books of natural philosophy were more problematic and assimilated more slowly. Scholastic philosophers from the late twelfth century onward were occupied with the attempt to reconcile nature with the theology of the church. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) produced the most complete synthesis, a moderate realism that comprised a mean between the extremes of idealism and nominalism, based on the principles of cause, reason and order that were shared by both Plato and Aristotle.[12]

Aquinas's theory of knowledge is essentially Aristotle's with some Neoplatonic elements. The mind is at birth a *tabula rasa* which has not only the ability to receive sensory impressions but to abstract from the fleeting and individual impression its essence or enduring concept. The agent intellect becomes an internal feature of the individual mind rather than an illumination from the outside. However, Aquinas, like the Neoplatonists, holds immaterial being and thought to be a higher, more perfect reality. God remains the source of Being, the original cause of the order of nature in which the created individual is a participant. Being and cognition (body/mind) are functions of human participation in the created order.[13]

Human beings are not capable of direct knowledge of ultimate truth or God. Human knowledge is bound by its experience in the natural world; "The mind can perceive nothing that has not previously been perceived by the senses." Therefore, "God is known by His works not in Himself".[14] The effect was to recognize the full dignity and power of human cognition which is capable of the knowledge that the natural world around us is real, just as we naturally and unreflectively assume it to be. There is no double truth of a separate reality (as in Locke's doctrine of primary and secondary qualities), nor is the world a mere shadow of that otherworldly reality. Scientific knowledge has the same

claim to truth as abstract knowledge because the observable creation reflects the orderly and unchanging laws of God.[15]

For conservative theologians any thought of God bound by determined and unchanging laws was too naturalistic and deterministic to tolerate. It was dangerous to the revealed religion as interpreted by church authority. They set their minds against it and condemned any philosophy that tried to synthesize nature and religion or propose an empirical theory of knowledge. In 1277, three years after Aquinas's death, the Pope condemned a list of beliefs and philosophers compiled by the conservative faculty of Paris. The list included Aristotle, Avicenna, Averroës and Aquinas and others whose theories tended to naturalism. The result was to make synthesis impossible and eventually to split the theological explanation of reality from the philosophical.[16]

Conservative theology of the schools clung to the *philosophia perennis*, that ideal goal of a unified, total body of truth which approached knowledge from the metaphysical and rational point of view. As an ideal it was susceptible to criticism because of its exclusive emphasis on metaphysics and logic as the way to knowledge. It excluded human experience in the world, leading to a chasm between thought and life. Cut off from life, thought lost its vitality and withered.[17]

Meanwhile, in England intellectual life was developing along different lines at Oxford, the one university that could rival Paris for its scholarship. From 1100 onward Oxford was more receptive to the Greeks and their Arabic commentators, and therefore developed special strength in mathematics and science whereas Paris specialized in metaphysics and theology. Robert Grosseteste (1168-1253) was the first master of Oxford to have access to the complete body of Aristotle's works, having translated the *Ethics* himself.[18] His lasting influence on

his school was an interest in science which produced a succession of scholars who advanced the empirical way of knowledge: Roger Bacon (1219-1292), Duns Scotus (1266-1308) and William of Ockham (1290-1349).[19] Building on the work of the Aristotelians before him, William of Ockham advanced a theory of knowledge that pushed empiricism to its farthest extreme, by denying any possibility of metaphysical knowledge. All that we may know is the individual phenomena of sensory data. There is no proof that there exists such a thing as an essence or a universal concept outside the mind of the individual knower. "Nothing", he wrote, "can be known in itself naturally save by intuitional knowledge."[20] "Intuitional" in his usage meant sensory perception. The sensory information about an individual thing, such as a rose, impresses on the mind a mental sign which is then given the name which one's language gives to that category of mental image. Being, as such, that is ultimate reality, we cannot know, we only know the signs, or names. Hence the name of the theory, Nominalism.

Nominalism's effect on thought was revolutionary and although Ockham himself was excommunicated and lived the rest of his life under the protection of the Emperor Lewis of Bavaria, his theories spread rapidly in the schools.[21] The ease and rapidity which which nominalism, the *via moderna*, spread attested to the vulnerability of the *philosophia perennis*, and to a climate of opinion unconvinced by the old and ready for the new. Nominalist philosophy did serious damage to scholastic knowledge, based as it was on rational deductions from metaphysical principles, that is, from God downward to particular phenomena. Modern philosophy approached knowledge from the other way, regarded cognition as internal and human, and then discovered that human knowledge could not leap the chasm to ultimate truth. If all that humans may know is

their own subjective perception, then how may it be ascertained whether there is an outer world of objects that causes our sensations or whether belief in an outer world is purely the product of the agent or structuring mind? When the agent intellect was regarded as an external illumination, then an individual's perception of an external world was validated by the external agent, usually defined as God. Once agent intellect came to be regarded as an internal process, the validation of the external world became a problem. This constellation of issues revolving around the wish for certain proof came to be called the problem of knowledge. Reason, as the nominalists defined it, could neither provide proof of the being of the external world, nor of theology's basic tenets: God, immortality or Christian ethics. The way was open to either nonbelief or belief based on authority (for the orthodox) or faith and scripture (for the dissenters).[22]

Nominalism weakened the concept of a single body of knowledge based on a unified logical structure. The unity of philosophy (an ideal that had never been fully realized) was splintered and a time of ferment with competing and conflicting theories followed. From then on philosophy developed along plural and evolutionary lines.[23] Except for the Church, which, by refusing to accept any sort of synthesis with natural philosophy, and by insisting on outdated theories such as earth centered universe, increasingly made itself irrelevant to the intellectual world. Papal authority was already in decline from several broad trends: the rise of national monarchies, the rise of a wealthy and independent-minded commercial class and the increase of learning. Schism, wealth and corruption further eroded the Church's moral authority. Fearing that change would weaken its authority to proclaim truth, it clung to changeless orthodoxy, stagnated and grew corrupt.

Reformers soon appeared who based their appeal to people on faith and scripture alone. While the authority of the Church declined politically, spiritually and intellectually, the authority of science as a means of describing reality increased, reinforced by its practical utility to people's lives.

Knowledge was in crisis. What could human beings be said to know with certainty? What is Truth? From the fourteenth century to the seventeenth and eighteenth, all that had been taken for granted as human knowledge fell under skeptical scrutiny. The crisis was first felt by late medieval theologians and philosophers but through the Reformation became so general as to touch everyone and affect all forms of knowledge. Both Protestant and Counter Reformation scholars used skeptical arguments to undermine the theoretical foundations of the other, to the end that both sides doubted themselves out of any foundation for knowledge at all.

After the Council of Trent the pressure for reform led the Church to adopt a new strategy. A "new machine of war" they called it, but it was, in fact, a revival of Greco-Roman skepticism. It was intended to prove how impossible it would be for Protestants to discover truth in their Biblical and linguistic study. Hervet, the secretary to the Cardinal of Lorraine, retranslated Sextus Empiricus and used the introduction to assert that Protestant claims were hopelessly subjective and could never be proven. Various Jesuit scholars, including teachers at La Fleche during Descartes' stay, pushed nominalist and skeptical arguments to the point of denying that humans, expecially Calvinists, could know anything at all. Therefore, they concluded, the authority of the Church should be accepted as infallible.[23]

The Protestants were quick to turn the "new machine of war" back on

the Catholics. The knowledge of popes, councils, and church fathers was, they pointed out, subject to the same limitations of human knowledge.[24] By the end of a century of debate, every authority and opinion about life, religious, scientific, moral and political was seriously challenged. If all we can know is our own subjectivity and the human comedy around us, how is it possible to fix a firm foundation for any claim to knowledge?

Total skepticism, as Hume wrote a century later, is insupportable. Nature won't permit it. In the face of darkest doubt, people will continue to strive for knowledge as a sort of tropism, the organism reaching toward the light. Thus philosophers persistently pursued a solution to the problem of knowledge. One solution was proposed by Descartes (1596-1650), the first modern philosopher to be influenced by science and Copernican astronomy and to try to establish a firm foundation for both scientific and rational knowledge. He determined to doubt his senses and reason on every point until he reached a fixed point about which he could feel certain, that of consciousness of his own existence. In his conclusion, *Cogito ergo sum*, he based certainty of his own being on his own subjective perception, that is Nominalist epistemology. His proof of the existence of the external world, however, was scholastic. It posited the existence of God as an undeniable first principle, then logically deduced the structure of objective reality.[25] Descartes described a physics that was observational and mechanical, but his ideal of knowledge put more emphasis on the mathematical interpretation of nature -- so that he became the symbol for the rational, deductive approach to knowledge.

Descartes' blend of science and rationalism was an inconsistent synthesis. It contained a methodological dualism which resulted in a

split concept of reality, logic which was convincing to the mind, and sensory phenomena which was convincing to the body, but it had the effect of stimulating redevelopment of two old lines of thought into their modern forms, the empirical/inductive and the rational/deductive.[26] His philosophy of science, however, emphasized the ideal of timeless universals in mathematics and deductive logic rather than the observational and historical methods of empiricism -- though in practice, he developed his optics experimentally with the mathematical proofs added afterward.[27] In continental Europe, Descartes' deductive rationalism was immensely influential, fitting easily into its long tradition of logic and metaphysics. Just as Lock's successors emphasised the material phenomenalism in his diverse thought, so did Descartes' followers emphasised the rational idealism in his dual system. The Germans especially, through Leibniz and Kant to Hegel, developed increasingly in the direction of an extreme idealism that posited the world entirely as a construct of mind.

The English, however, building on their intellectual tradition of Ockham and Bacon, developed the empirical solution in the simultaneous publications of Locke and Newton in 1687. Locke's theory of knowledge was concerned with making the Cartesian logical ideal of knowledge congruent with the observational fact concepts of his scientific colleagues in the Royal Society and with religious doctrine, all of which he expected to work in harmony to reveal the universal laws of nature and morality.[28] This was consistent with the ideas of other seventeenth century philosophers who took it for granted that reason, whether deductive or inductive (the two were often undifferentiated) was the means of certain knowledge capable of yielding ultimate truths and thus proofs of God. The Royal Society's Charter of 1663 declared the

aim of revealing the providential glory of God by studying the works of creation. It was this assumption, that natural science could prove the supernatural which Hume criticised in the following century to the distress of nearly everyone.[29]

Locke intended in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* to record, using the plain historical method of Bacon, a natural history of cognition as a means of putting to rest the controversies of philosophy and religion. He rejected the innate ideas of the Cambridge Platonists and described the mind at birth as blank paper and as an empty cupboard to be filled with the imprints of experience.[30] In some passages he says clearly that the senses are the sources of ideas, "All simple ideas we have are confined (as I have shown) to those we receive from corporeal objects by sensation and from the operations of our own minds as the objects of reflection."[31] In other passages knowledge is defined as the intuitivly certain archetypes of logical relationships but which are not innate.[32] Moral truths particularly are founded on God's Laws which are self-evident to reason, like mathematics, but are also the same as the sensory experience of pleasure and pain.[33]

Locke's *Essay* was a soundboard for the new ideas of knowledge then in vogue. In it he tried them out, clarified them, applied the test of experience to them, accepted some, and rejected others. Though it contained many useful insights, he did not manage to make logical knowledge consistent with observational knowledge. That aspect of Locke's theory of knowledge to which subsequent British philosophers paid the most attention was the sensory and empirical, already a persistent tendency among them.[34] Locke's *tabula rasa* theory of knowledge and Newton's inductive method of inquiry and their implications that knowledge is based on the sensory experience of

external phenomena rapidly won the field as the theory and method of science, fitting as it does with the human intuition that what we experience is what is real. The impact of Locke and Newton on the following century was enormous. They, more than any others, defined the issues and established the vocabulary of science with which the philosophers of the Enlightenment worked.[35]

Scholars of the Royal Society, such as Locke, Grotius and Chillingworth, used the empirical test of experience to work out a standard of "reasonable doubt" that could be used to evaluate evidence in science, legal transactions and in the writing of history. Evidence could be regarded as acceptable if there was no practical or reasonable cause for doubt as opposed to metaphysical doubt.[36]

These developments gave eighteenth century enlightened thinkers the expectation that they now had possession of the intellectual tools needed to put superstition and ignorance behind them, and to explain the true nature of things, to achieve ultimate knowledge. Just at this point when true enlightenment seemed close at hand, the century's greatest philosopher and most discerning critic, David Hume, was born in Edinburgh, April 26 (old style) 1711.

His father, Joseph Home, was related to the Earl of Home and owned an estate in Berwickshire, though he practiced law in Edinburgh. His mother, Katherine Falconer, was daughter of a lawyer who was president of the College of Justice.[37] Soon after David's birth his father died, and his mother moved the family, two sons and a daughter, to their country estate, Ninewells. They returned to the city when it was time for the boys to go to the university. David matriculated in 1723 at age 12, studied a curriculum that was mostly classical languages and left university after two years before taking a degree, all of which was

typical for the time.[38] Since David was a second son, he could expect only a small income from his father's inheritance, and so was encouraged to go into the family profession, law. He studied law privately between the years of 1726 to 1729 which provided him with a good grounding in legal theory. He also discovered that he disliked law books and preferred to spend his time reading literature and philosophy.[39]

By 1729, he had resolved to give up the idea of a law career but was faced with the dilemma of how to reconcile his scholarly and literary ambition with the need to earn a living. This conflict, added to his constant study and reflection as well as overzealous application of character building austerities recommended by the Stoics soon broke his health enough to bring on physical and mental symptoms. Then followed three or four years of a depression and "identity crisis". Gradually his studies began to suggest a system of thinking so exciting to him that he gave up law and determined to pursue philosophy though such a life would necessitate very frugal living on his meager patrimony.[40]

Hume, described this stressful period in his life in an anonymous letter [that was probably never sent] to an unknown physician. It was revealing to later scholars because it pinpointed this time period as that in which his new approach to philosophy first occurred to him. "At last, when I was about 18 years of age, there seem'd to be opened up to me a new scene of thought."[41] He had the exhilarating experience of breaking away from the old paradigms and discovering a new way of thinking about philosophy, though as usual it was not entirely new, being his own synthesis of burgeoning empirical theory. His intensive study of classical and modern philosophy had convinced him that most moral philosophy had the defect of being entirely hypothetical, "everyone consulted his fancy in erecting schemes of virtue and of

happiness without regarding human nature, upon which every moral conclusion must depend. This, therefore I resolved to make my principal study, and the source from which I would derive every truth in criticism as well as morality."[42] He proposed to base his philosophy not on fanciful schemes that ought to be, but on what is in fact observable in human nature (psychology) and experience (history). He determined, in short, to make the study of humans and knowledge about their natural and ethical world into an empirical science.

Hume was not the first to attempt an empirical approach to moral philosophy. In the opening pages of A *Treatise of Human Nature* he credited those philosophers who influenced him most". . .my Lord Bacon and some late philosophers in England (fn. Mr Locke, my Lord Shaftsbury, Dr. Mandeville, Dr. Butler, etc.) who have begun to put the science of man on a new footing. . ."[43] These philosophers were developing an empirical outlook at a time when such a viewpoint was in its infancy, not fully defined and not consistently applied. Hume's difference was the rigor of his reasoning and consistency of his application of empirical method to the science of human nature.[44]

In 1734, young David Hume, his head filled with these issues and still not knowing how to make his way in the world, went off to Bristol to take a job at a sugar-importing firm. The activity seemed to have helped him make up his mind, for only a few months later he had moved on to France to write. After a year at Rheims, he settled down at La Fleche to write his *Treatise*. It is wonderfully symbolic that he chose Descartes' old school to write his critique of rationalism, but that is apparently not why he chose it. His express reasons were that it was cheap and the Jesuit college had a good library.[45] There he stayed until 1737, when at the age if twenty-six, he returned to London to find

a publisher. The *Treatise* was published in two parts in 1739 and 1740.

In the *Treatise*, Hume who wanted to establish as true a science of human nature as we are capable of, had first to deal with the problem of knowledge. How can we know objectively that what we think subjectively is true? This was the problem which Descartes and Locke had addressed with results that did not resolve the inconsistentcy that seemed to leave a gulf between the rational mind and the material, sensory body. Both opposed the logic of the scholastics as having too little relationship to the world of experienced fact, and both attempted to define a scientific rationalism which would unite observational knowledge and logic into one system. Their success was incomplete though they stimulated the ideas of generations who followed, including Hume, who set about trying to resolve the difficulty that the modern philosophy posed.

The first difficulty Hume addressed was the Cartesian assumption that demonstrative reason could give any information about the world of observation and experience. He stated emphatically that it could not. Rational systems have the intuitive appeal of truth, and are more intellectually satisfying because of their apparent timeless universality, but *a priori* statements are so out of the reach of human knowledge or experience that there is no way to determine their truth. If one wrestles long with metaphysical questions one is faced with the choice of dogmatic certainty, the way of the sects, or skeptical uncertainty, the problem of philosophers. Skeptical uncertainty, Hume pointed out, is built into a philosophy that separates its truth from ordinary life as experienced. Pure reason alone cannot supply the wished-for certainty.[46]

Locke's exploration of human understanding likewise contained some problematic aspects. The feature of his *Essay* which attracted the most

attention and which became most characteristic of empiricism was the sensory nature of knowledge. The individual is a blank tablet at birth and knowledge consists only of what sensory experience writes on that page. The implication of this image (which others, but not Locke drew) was that atoms of sensory phenomena are privately experienced in a mind which passively receives the impressions. These atoms of phenomena, or sensations, subjectively experienced, are the building blocks of our knowledge of an external world of real objects which are presumed to be the source of those phenomena, hence the theory's name, phenomenalism (or sometimes sensationalism). Locke assumed the phenomena proved an external reality outside of the subjective perception of it. Berkeley saw that the subjective perception did not constitute proof of external reality so he gave up external reality in favor of the subjective perception which has its illumination in the mind of God.

The modern philosophy of knowledge, as defined by Descartes and especially Locke was essentially the medieval nominalist one. All that individuals could know was their own subjective perception of sensory phenomena. The empiricism that developed out of Locke weakened the aspect of cognition which Aristotle called the agent intellect that actively interpreted the sensory data to form abstract concepts. They assumed that the generalized concept, such as identity or cause was a property of the data rather than a property of the mind that perceived the data.

The weakness of the pure phenomenalist position is revealed when it has trouble explaining two kinds of connection. One is called identity and is the mental connection our mind makes between a phenomenon experienced now and again later and which in our minds assumes an identity as one and the same continuously existing object. This

connecting principle is why we believe that there are objects that cause our perception of them. The second is the necessary or causal connection by which one phenomenon seems to cause a second. The problem for phenomenalism is to explain how minds that are presumed to be only passive collectors of individual bits of sensory data are able actively to connect and structure that data into concepts such as continuous identity and causal connection. The theory excludes an agent intellect at the same time that it requires one to make explanations.

Locke's solution was to propose a system of primary and secondary qualities, a restatement of mind/body, subject/object dualism inherent in Descartes. Locke held that there was a real, primary world of continuously existing objects, but that human minds were not capable of perceiving the primary being of these objects, but only their secondary qualities. These are the qualities that our senses are capable of perceiving, color, taste etc.

The problem for the early philosophers of the new science was how to bridge the theoretical gap between object and subject, primary and secondary qualities. Everyone engaged in science, including Hume, assumed that our subjective perceptions are caused by real objects. Descartes and Locke simply assumed that identity and the causal connection between object and the sensing of it was self-evident, guaranteed by God, and provable by reason. Hume disproved the assumption of provability.[47]

Using impeccable logic Hume pointed to the flaws in the knowledge claims of rationalism and empiricism alike. Formal reasoning (deductive logic) has no application to matters of fact. A logical proof is a closed analytical (to use Kant's term) system and does not have any necessary relationship to experienced events (facts). Formal reasoning cannot be used to verify that cornerstone of knowledge claims, necessary

connection, i.e. that a cause necessarily produces an effect.

Neither can observation and induction, the method of science, prove either external reality or the causal connection. The observer can experience individual events but can only infer their cause based on the experience of repeatedly seeing event A followed by event B. If there were only these means of proving knowledge claims people would be reduced to total skepticism, which is precisely what philosophers had been wrestling with since the coming of the *via moderna*. Thus far, Hume disagreed with Locke; but he did not draw the conclusion that therefore there is no external reality as a basis for causal inferences. On the contrary, he takes it for granted that there is. It is one of our natural, common sense beliefs.

> Tis in vain to ask, *whether there be body or not?* That is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasonings. The subject of inquiry is what causes induce us to believe in the existence of body."[48]

In Book I of the *Treatise*, Hume probed his own cognitive processes searching for an objective standard against which knowledge claims could be verified. He discovered that it was not easy to observe the processes of one's own thinking. The most basic assumptions of our conscious thought -- identity (the idea that there is a continuously existing world of external objects), cause-effect, space, time and self--are not not easily accessible to our own observation or reasoning. As he put it in the introduction, ". . . we can give no reason for our most general and most refined principles beside our experience of their reality."[49] Furthermore, he discovered that too much introspection can lead sound thinking astray into fantasy and "chimera" or into a depression such as he had suffered in his youth while wrestling with the problem of knowledge.

Hume's solution is found in Part IV, (and the corresponding Section XII in the *Inquiry*), which Livingston has correctly identified as one of the keys to understanding Hume's way of doing philosophy.[50] He began with the question of the individual perception of phenomena and whether people actually see (by sensory means) the continued existence of objects and their cause-effect relationships. He set it up in a dialectical fashion as two opposite propositions from which he generated a synthesis, the true philosophy. For Hume the true philosophy is achieved when the thinker has laid out the problem in a developmental, dialectical way, adding new knowledge as it is acquired, critically checking for internal contradictions, and then discovering the standard of coherence which may be used for making future judgments.

> In considering this subject we may observe a gradation of three opinions, that rise above each other, according as the persons, who form them, acquire new degrees of reason and knowledge. These opinions are that of the vulgar, that of a false philosophy, and that of the true; where we shall find upon enquiry, that the true philosophy approaches nearer to the sentiments of the vulgar, than to those of a mistaken knowledge.[51]

The first is the vulgar, unreflective assumption of the ordinary person that the world that we experience in our everyday lives is the real world, and that events have causes. The other is the modern, phenomenalist, philosophical perspective that regards human knowledge as solely a product of sensory impressions. Medieval nominalism or its modern form, phenomenalism, represents a first stage in philosophical consciousness which understands that what we unreflectively assume to be real is in fact only the representations of the senses and may or may not be truly real. The senses sometimes do deceive. But this philosophy has the defect of being unable to prove that there is anything out there that causes those received sensory perceptions. The modern philosophy cannot defend itself against the objections of the

skeptics. Locke's theory of primary and secondary qualities attempts to solve the problem but Hume reveals its inconsistency. He calls it a doctrine of double existence and points out that if humans can only know the sensory secondary qualities, how could the existence of supra-sensory primary qualities be known. There is no Archemedian point outside our own subjective perception from which we can prove the objective reality or the connectedness of those impressions.[52]

Hume calls this the false philosophy because it rejects the common assumption that we live in a real world in favor of the philosophical one that we only think we live in a real world, we actually know only individual bits of sensory phenomena. While the second system rejects the first, it also presupposes it. The subjectivism of the modern philosophy makes objective proof impossible. Yet this is so counter to human intuition and experience that even the philosopher who can find no proof for our common sense beliefs while in study, nevertheless reverts to the assumption that there is an external world upon stepping out into ordinary daily life.[53] "Philosophy would render us entirely Pyrrhonian, were not nature too strong for it."[54]

Hume synthesizes the two into what he calls the true philosophy. It is a third stage of philosophical consciousness which one attains after having wrestled with the doubts inherent to the second stage. Only then does the philosopher understand that the problem of knowledge is really a pseudo problem of second stage thinking which no longer has the power to confound once one has achieved true philosophy. Common sense assumption of reality in fact has a validity that transcends mere sense impressions. People assume the truth of their senses because it is in the nature of their minds to do so. It is internal to our minds to structure impressions, to connect one impression to another to give us

the ideas of identity, continuity and cause. The philosopher should continue to examine meanings from a slightly detached position, while understanding that complete detachment from the authenticity of our ordinary life is impossible. This is what he meant when he wrote in the statement quoted above that the "true philosophy approaches nearer to the sentiments of the vulgar than to those of mistaken knowledge." Hume's true philosophy, like Aristotle's, is a philosophy that assumes the validity of our common sense assumption of a real, external world.

In the *Treatise* Hume vividly described his own problems with skeptical doubt and melancholy in passages that his critics loved to quote.[55] But he finally resolved the conflict and came to a new understanding, a synthesis:

> Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds (of doubt), nature herself suffices to that purpose and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium, either by relaxing this bent of mind, or by some avocation, and lively impression of my senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends. . .[56]

> The great subverter of Pyrrhonism or the excessive principles of skepticism, is action, and employment, and the occupations of common life. These principles may flourish and triumph in the schools, where it is indeed difficult, if not impossible, to refute them. But as soon as they leave the shade, and by the presence of the real objects which actuate our passions and sentiments are put in opposition to the more powerful principles of our nature, they vanish like smoke and leave the most determined skeptic in the same condition as other mortals.[57]

Total skepticism is impossible, it is inconsistent with life as we experience it. No good comes of extreme skepticism, no benefit to the mind or to society. If the pyrrhonism prevailed, all communication and action would cease, the necessities of nature would be unmet and death would follow. Not that there is any danger that this would ever happen. "Nature is always too strong for principle."[58] Natural instinct propels

humanity to life, action and belief in the reality of the world.

Human beings do know; they believe in the reality and continued existence of objects, of ourselves, space, time and in cause and effect. They use inferences based on these beliefs every waking minute to meet the needs of existence. These most basic beliefs are deeply rooted, instinctive habits of inference, that are made without conscious effort. This is why Hume called cause-effect inferences an operation of the passions rather than of reason; and why he wrote that Mr. Locke was wrong to state that there are no innate ideas.[59]

A skeptical attitude, however, has its uses. The limited skepticism of the scientist Hume calls mitigated skepticism. It is a useful tool for examining our beliefs to sort the true from the erroneous. People have a tendency to be dogmatic. A little "tincture of Phyrrhonism" acts as a remedy for this defect by encouraging modesty and humility about the limits to human understanding, a willingness to examine the other sides of issues, and to examine one's own attitudes with a view to discovering inconsistencies and eradicating error.[60]

Another benefit of mitigated skepticism is to teach seekers of knowledge to limit their inquiries to those best adapted to human understanding. Human imagination delights in the sublime, but the true philosopher disregards that which is metaphysical and concentrates on what humans have some hope of understanding, that is the world of common life and experience. A scientific explanation must be one which everybody (or nearly everybody) can agree upon. Therefore it must limit its parameters to the public world of observability and testability, those which will be convincing the the majority of people. Beliefs may be held outside those parameters, but they are more private and subjective. They are not subject to proofs, but are matters of faith.

Knowledge which is beyond the limits of a scientific explanation may well be valid, but it is not suitable subject matter for scientific method. Sublime knowledge is better left to poets, priests and politicians. Far from being dismayed that ultimate knowledge cannot be attained, true philosophers will be satisfied to carry the search as far as possible because, not only is the activity immediately pleasurable, but also there is the satisfaction knowing that their reasonings are firmly grounded in every day experience. "Philosophical decisions are nothing but the reflections of common life, methodised and corrected."[61]

Philosophical humility is what Hume means by mitigated skepticism. It is the careful judgment of the scientist, who checks and rechecks data before making conclusions and tries not to carry them further than the evidence permits. Knowledge of ultimate things is a form of hubris in which the true philosopher does not indulge.

> 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, are produc'd by the creative power of the mind, or are derive'd from the author of our being. Nor is such a question any way material to our 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.[62]

Hume's philosophy of knowledge is a synthesis that moderates the two extremes of the vulgar and the philosophical outlook. As with other paradoxes, each seems true at least part of the time. They are held in dialectic tension, the synthesis of which is to accept some moderated or mitigated form of each.

> From this I am led to think, that the speculative principles of our nature ought to go hand in hand with the practical ones; and for my own part, when the former are so far pushed, as to leave the latter quite out of sight, I am always apt to suspect that we have transgressed our limits.[63]

The significance of such a both/and solution to the problem of knowledge, especially in the years before Hegel brought the concept of dialectic forcefully to the attention of the world, was not really understood. James Beattie and Thomas Reid of the Scottish Common Sense school of philosophy were the first to interpret Hume as a phenomenalist of the Lockean type who, after reducing the theory to absurdity, was then unable to replace it with any positive philosophy.[64]

The Scottish School rose in direct response to Hume's critique of reason.[65] Thomas Reid was a serious philosopher who respected Hume's critique but was anxious to resolve the dissonance it created with the belief that Christian dogma and ultimate Truth were identical. It was on this point that the Scots most differed with Hume. James Beattie, a professor at Aberdeen, was the vulgar popularizer of the school, and produced in 1770 *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth; in Opposition to Sophestry and Skepticism.* In it he quoted all of Hume's skeptical passages out of context, then failed to notice his positive solution to the problem of skepticism. Beattie's philosophic reasoning characterized Hume's work as "Those unnatural productions, the vile effusion of a hard and stupid heart that mistakes its own restlessness for the activity of genious. . ."[66] Beattie's book was popularly successful and was reissued in eleven editions in ten years, contrasted with Hume's *Treatise*, which hadn't sold out its first edition in twenty years.[67]

Beattie's Essay was so popular that it prompted George III to comment to the Archbishop of Canterbury that Mr. Beattie had "cut Mr. Hume up by the roots." Sir Joshua Reynolds memorialized the victory by painting "The Triumph of Truth" featuring the angel of Truth tossing three demons into the pit, one Hume, one Voltaire and one unidentified,

while Beattie looked on, decked out in his doctoral robes, with his *Essay on Truth* under his arm.[68]

Reid and the Scottish school demonstrate the truth of the assertion that the questions that are asked influences what is seen. They were preoccupied with the problem of knowledge, wishing to establish with certainty that the individually perceived phenomena arise from a God-guaranteed outer reality. They were committed to empirical method but wished to use it to prove a Christian final cause, or ultimate reality.[69] Because they were especially concerned with ultimate proofs, they paid closest attention to those sections of the *Treatise* which began with Locke's phenomena but then denied them the ability to prove ultimate reality. They believed that what common sense believes is true, must be true by virtue of God's guarantee. Hume said that what common sense says is true is true because the nature of human minds; "We can give no reason for our most general and most refined principles beside our experience of their reality."[70]

Hume spoke of a natural propensity to believe in an external "ultimate" real world, but did not go so far as to say that what we believe to be true must be provably true.

> There is "a kind of pre-established harmony between the course of nature and the succession of our ideas; and though the powers and forces by which the former is governed be wholly unknown to us. . . this operation of the mind by which we infer like effects from like causes, is so essential to the subsistence of all human creatures, it is not probable that it could be trusted to the fallacious deductions of our reason. . . It is more conformable to the ordinary wisdom of nature to secure so necessary an act of the mind by some instinct or mechanical tendency which may be infallible in its operation.[71]

He made a distinction between psychological certainty and epistemological certainty. While this analogy to nature did not add to the proofs of religion, Hume wrote, "I have at least the satisfaction to

think it takes nothing from them."[72]

Hume described a psychological basis for certainty in a felt determination of the mind based in instinct and nature; but he did not confuse psychological certainty with the epistemological certainty for which the Scottish philosophers wished. They wanted proof that what they believed to be true must be true. In essence, both Hume and Reid were not so far apart. Both based their systems on empirical evidence and common sense, but Hume stopped short of the ultimate religious conclusions.[73] This was the reason for the Scottish philosophers' cries of skeptic. The Reid and Beattie interpretation expressed the dominant criticism of Hume's philosophy that persisted throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth.[74]

Hume's twentieth century interpreters, looking backward over the course of epistemological development since his time, have the advantage of seeing what the Scots could not. They see that the important successor to Hume was Kant whose analysis of pure reason and practical reason drew a similar, but much more highly developed synthesis in favor of the *a priori* structuring principles of mind. Kant's transcendental synthesis added to Hegel's philosophy of history, are important historical preparations for the modern intellectual frame of reference. The idea of dialectical development and historical process has now become so much part of the modern mind that scholars now are finally able to see that such processes form the substructure of Hume's philosophy. Hume's social and political theory contains many examples of syntheses, both/and solutions, which traced through history, become increasingly sophisticated. Some of these will be considered in subsequent chapters.

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CHAPTER III

HISTORY AND EMPIRICAL SCIENCE

> I believe this is the historical age
> and this the historical nation.
>
> . . . the study of history confirms
> the reasoning of true philosophy. . .
> David Hume[1]

The modern mind, said Carl Becker in his influential lectures of 1932 (just short of the *Treatise's* two hundredth anniversary), no longer looks for a logical pattern in the world. Instead, fact is primary, or rather the flow of facts, seen in a historical, developmental way.

> What is peculiar to the modern mind is the disposition and determination to regard ideas and concepts, the truth of things as well as the things themselves as changing entities, the character and significance of which at any given time can be fully grasped only by regarding them as points in an endless process of differentiation, of unfolding, of waste and repair.[2]

Modern thinkers are historically minded in that they no longer ask what something is in its essence, rather they measure it and ask how it developed.

Becker was describing the revolution in thinking that separated the medieval world view, or climate of opinion as he called it, from the modern. The revolution had its roots in the seventeenth century, was greatly accelerated in the eighteenth and thereafter rapidly developed into a triumph for empirical and historical thinking. It was this new way of thinking, this paradigm of knowledge, to which David Hume devoted

his life's work. The new paradigm was the work of many minds. but it was Hume who hastened its coming by revealing the logical flaws in the philosophes "naive faith in Reason" [both inductive and deductive], "that Heavenly City of the eighteenth century philosophers".[3]

The empirical intellectual style, presaged by Aristotle, the Medieval Nominalists and Bacon, was defined by Newton and Locke in the seventeenth century, and reached the popular consciousnesss in the eighteenth, proselytized and popularized by the philosophes. The new climate of opinion turned away from the old, metaphysical, deductive logic and substituted the new rules of logic, inductive analysis, formulated by the English pantheon. Newton's rules of reasoning did not begin with the general principle and deduce the particulars, it worked the opposite way; it called for collecting a body of particular facts and then generalizing a covering law to explain the particulars which might then be experimentally tested. The Newtonian system of inductive analysis, as Ernst Cassirer put it, "in a century and a half conquered all reality."[4] It was eagerly applied to other fields in the natural sciences and to the moral or social sciences as well, as Newton himself had suggested.

Empirical method gave philosophers a new tool of knowledge far more versatile than the medieval theological and rational ideal of the *philosophia perennis*, which strove to make a complete and logical system out of already revealed truth. The new method made it possible to reach out and grasp knowledge actively; to make knowledge where none existed before. It was the idea of limitless potential in the expansion of knowledge that so exhilarated the eighteenth century thinkers. Added to the real material improvements in eighteenth century life, the ferment of idea that Newtonian philosophy created made the sense of progress in

knowledge and in everyday life mutually reinforcing. The way of science was the way of progress, a limitless potential that produced optimistic hopes not only for a better life, but also that the ultimate mysteries of the universe would be revealed.

The conquest of empirical philosophy over the natural world was easily accomplished since the feeling of certainty produced by scientific explanations was virtually undeniable. The moral world, the world of human action and society, was more problematic. Scientific law in the moral world was harder to generalize and produced less certainty of belief. But difficulties aside, it was inevitable that with a fascinating tool like empirical method, moral philosophers would make the attempt.

The most important of these early attempts was David Hume's *A Treatise Of Human Nature*, which exposed the weaknesses of both rational and empirical logic and proposed a "new science of man" based on human psychology and history. Hume's declared intention in his *Treatise* was summed up in its subtitle: *Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects.* The science of man which he proposed would furthermore be the basis for all other sciences, since all human knowledge, even mathematics, natural science and religion "lie under the cognizance of men, and are judged of by their powers and facilities."[5]

Hume's inquiries into human nature and understanding were attempts to fix a foundation of certainty in human knowledge. He concluded that the roots of human knowledge about our physical and social worlds were not found in reason of the formal analytical sort but in informal reasoning, what Hume called moral reasoning. Human reasoning is

inferential, cause-effect learning based on experiences and it is the source of what people believe to be true knowledge. Hume's analysis of the cause-effect relationship has never been successfully challenged.

To analyze why he believed in causal connection Hume searched his own mind. He concluded that when he had many experiences of seeing two events in close conjunction he assumed that they were connected, that the first caused the second. The eye sees no connection but the mind automatically infers that there is one. If people experience the close conjunction often enough they develop the habit of expecting all future cases will be the same. The close connection between the two occurrence feels like determined necessity. Human belief in a causal connection between two events is the result of their constant conjunction in sequence of time combined with an inference of connection made by the deep structuring mechanisms of the mind. Because this customary and naturally instinctive habit of inference takes place unconsciously, Hume calls it an operation of the passions rather than reason.[6]

If people had never seen repetitive patterns in nature, or in the behavior of others, they would never have gotten the idea of necessary connection or cause. But because they have seen the constant and regular conjunctions of events in both the natural and the social worlds, their minds are habituated to infer that the appearance of one thing will be followed by the appearance of the other, that is a cause will be followed by an effect. This is the source of the idea of necessary connection, an idea that has always existed in the minds of humans (and even animals) in all times and places. "It is from past experience that we draw all inferences concerning the future."[7]

> All inferences from experience, therefore, are the effects of custom, not reasoning. . .Custom then is the great guide of

> human life. It is that principle alone which renders our experience useful to us and makes us expect, for the future, a similar train of events with those which have appeared in the past. Without the influence of custom we should be entirely ignorant of every matter of fact beyond what is immediately present to the memory and senses. We should never know how to adjust means to ends or to employ our natural powers in the production of any effect. There would be an end at once of all action as well as of the chief part of speculation.[8]

In the early formative period for the empirical outlook, the relationship between history as accumulated observational data and the new scientific theory of knowledge was very close. Francis Bacon's formulation of empirical method called for the compiling of the histories and tabulation of phenomena, from which hypotheses could later be induced. Locke called this form of scientific method in which hypothesis comes last, historical plain method. Writings of early members of the Royal Society reflected the belief that the first priority for science was to compile histories of phenomena.[9]

The victory of empirical philosophy over the field of knowlege was the immediate cause of the efflorescence of historical thinking and history writing. The eighteenth century was the age of great histories that were written by philosophers - Voltaire, Hume, Gibbon and Robertson - as well as specialized inquiries into law and economics that were historical in nature, written by Montesquieu and Adam Smith.

It was no coincidence that the empirical moral philosophers wrote histories. If the data of science are to be found in particular facts from which causal laws are inferred, the data of moral science are the facts of human experience; and history is the record of that experience. For the eighteenth century, history became the methodological model for the task of placing the moral sciences onto a foundation of experiential fact.[10]

In his essay, "Of the Study of History" Hume made explicit the idea that history supplies the data of experience from which knowledge is created.

> History is not only a valuable part of knowledge, but opens the door to many other parts, and affords materials to most of the sciences. And indeed, if we consider the shortness of human life, and our limited knowledge, even of what passes in our own time, we must be sensible that we should be forever children in understanding, were it not for this invention, which extends our experience to all past ages, and to the most distant nations. . . A man acquainted with history may, in some respect, be said to have lived from the beginning of the world. . . .[11]

Fundamental to both empirical science and history is the fact that they are integral to human experience in the world. History is a trait of all subject areas; it is a means of inquiry, a means of understanding any particular thing in the world. "Everything that is is historical in character and has an existence that can be measured in time. . . [History is] synonymous with knowledge as a whole."[12]

Science and history are related in their deepest linguistic structures. "History" derives from a Greek root meaning learning or knowing by inquiry. "Science" comes from the Latin word for knowledge and "empirical" from the word for experienced. Empirical science is, therefore, experienced knowledge derived from a process of inquiry that is historical in nature. *The Oxford Dictionary*'s fifth definition of history embodies Aristotle's meaning of the word; "a systematic account (without reference to time) of a set of natural phenomena."[13] That is, history in this sense is a scientific explanation, a natural history. Even though the dictionary and Aristotle exclude reference to time in natural history, time is nevertheless built into the meaning of a causal inference, an inference based, as Hume said, on an invariant sequence of experienced events and the memory of the accumulation of these events.

The theory of empirical science contains the same ideal goal as that of rational and metaphysical science. The laws obtained should be universal and timeless in application; that is, they should be true anytime, anywhere under the same conditions. Where these conditions are met, effects may be confidently predicted. This ideal goal has always been a problem to moral philosophers of the past as well as to social scientists of the present. Conditions in different times and places vary widely as does human behavior in different cultural contexts. The complexity of the variables in the social sciences creates difficulties for making general laws that fit the criteria for universality of time and place. The methodological problem of making studies of human beings into a Newtonian science of man was the central theme of all of Hume's writing. But for reasons which will be described elsewhere, much of the subtle depth of his thought went misunderstood and misinterpreted until the twentieth century's renewed interest in reading his philosophy for its previously overlooked substructure of dialectical synthesis and historicism.

In the last half of the twentieth century David Hume's reputation as the philosopher of empiricism is stronger than it has ever been. It is a little odd that few remember that in the eighteenth and ninteenth centuries his reputation and his fortune were made on his essays and his multivolume *History of England.* For nearly a century it was preeminent, appearing in 175 posthumous editions in England and America,[14] until 1849 when Macaulay's history began to offer serious competition.[15]

Throughout the last century, the common opinion was that the *History of England* was entirely unrelated to Hume's philosophy, a sort of

midlife career change. Typical of this view was T.H. Grose, who along with T.H. Green issued a new edition of Hume's philosophical works in 1898, and whose introduction reflects the "Oxford view" of the Absolute Idealists who interpreted Hume as having come to a dead end in skepticism, the last of the bankrupt tradition of Lockean phenomenalism. Grose wrote in his "History of the Editions" that he was struck by the suddenness with which Hume abandoned philosophy. He proposed as explanation that Hume, once he had brought his skeptical philosophy as far as it could go, either had to quit or construct something positive in its place. For this "Hume certainly lacked the disposition, and probably the ability. . ."[16] Anyway, he noted that political essays and history sold better so he turned to these.

By the mid-twentieth century scholars who were writing with a friendlier attitude toward Hume's philosophy nevertheless regarded the *History* as unrelated to the philosophy. For example, H. R. Trevor-Roper wrote that Hume was the greatest British philosopher and the first of the British philosophical historians, yet he had become a historian "almost by accident." In 1752 he was elected to the post of Librarian of the Advocates' Library in Edinburgh ". . . and there, sitting among those 30,000 volumes, he suddenly saw his opportunity."[17]

That Hume suddenly abandoned philosophy for the more profitable writing of history, or that he was suddenly inspired while sitting among the volumes, is unconvincing to anyone who has read much of Hume's philosophy. References to and examples from history are sprinkled throughout his writing. Even in Book I of the *Treatise*, the most purely philosophic of his works, there is a section on how it is possible to believe a fact of ancient history, such as that Julius Caesar once

existed, when the original impression of him is long since faded away; that is, why do we believe an historical document.[18] *The Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding* contains even more historical topics including: the association of ideas in composing historical and poetic narrative, the chapter "Of Liberty and Necessity" on cause in the social sciences, the chapter "Of Miracles", a consideration of the criteria for historical evidence. In fact, the *Inquiry*, which is usually taken to be Hume's epistemology, can just as well be read as his philosophy of history. His understanding of knowledge takes history as its paradigm.

Furthermore, his biographer, E.C. Mossner, noted that he had been making chronologies and writing drafts for a history of England as early as 1745.[19] In a letter of 1747 to his cousin Henry Home,[20] he mentioned his interest in "historical projects" and his intention "in my riper years, of composing some history".[21] The writing of history did not represent an abandonment of philosophy for Hume; history composed the raw material,the very matrix, of his philosophy of knowledge.

Failure to recognize the significance of historical thinking to empirical philosophy in general and the relationship of Hume's history to his philosophy in particular had several sources. One was the common perception that the *History* was little better than a Tory party pamphlet. Another was the persistent misinterpretation of his epistemology as the *reductio ad absurdum* of Cartesian rationalism and Lockean phenomenalism and thus left with nothing but skepticism. This opinion reflected the pervasive strength of the Lockean paradigm on scholarly minds that blinded their eyes to the synthesis Hume was trying to make. It took the competition of its philosophical antithesis, the German idealist-historicist paradigm to bring another way of looking at

reality into awareness. Thus it was not until this century, with Newton and Locke's strength over the interpretation of scientific knowledge a little diminished and Kant's enhanced, that readers were able to see that there was more to Hume's description of knowing than simple Lockean phenomenalism. And finally the ninteenth century romantic-historicist's assertions that Hume (and others of the eighteenth century) were not historically minded was uncritically accepted by subsequent historiographers. Eduard Fueter, *Geschichte der Neueren Historiographie,* (1911); J. B. Black, *The Art Of History,*(1926); J. W. Thompson, *A History of Historical Writing,* (1942); and R.G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History,* (1946), represented Hume and his *History* as lacking a historical conception. The frequency with which this and other stock criticisms of Hume's *History* have appeared suggests that these authorities tended to copy each other. Recent scholarship, based on a more careful reading of the sources, regards the assessments of the earlier historiographers' as inaccurate.[22]

The historicist philosophers of the nineteenth century were wrong in accusing the eighteeenth century historians of a lack of historical mindedness. The Enlightenment historians "forged the weapons" of historicity and the concept of historical culture that the Romantic historians later wielded.[23] Hume was interested in analysing what was common to human nature and what varied because of differences in culture or time, a theme found in parts of the *Inquiry*, in the *Essays*, and all through *The History of England*.

The empirical way of knowing, especially in the social world of human action, has an element of process built into it. The mind accumulates facts, makes inferences from them, assimilates them,

compares and contrasts them with old facts and conclusions. It is a process that implies growth and evolution, in the total amount of fact and in the increasing complexity of the inferences made from them. Hume's idea, quoted earlier, that history is the overall accumulation of the collected wisdom of human experience, without which humanity would be "forever children in understanding" speaks to the evolutionary aspect of fact knowledge.

The concept of historical thinking, inherent in empirical thinking, was finding its first expression in the eighteenth century philosopher-historians, most particularly Hume. The earlier practitioners of historical thinking about culture were not entirely conscious of this process. At least they did not proclaim and label it as Hegel did when in the following century historical thinking became a fully self-conscious method, and a terminology was attached to it.[24] But the structure of dialectic and evolutionary process was in fact there underlying Hume's politics and history. The terminology was different from Hegel's; Hume spoke of progress (in knowledge, manufacturing, the art of government, etc.) and also of the gradual revolutions in society by which he meant what came later to be called evolution. Hume as well as Vico may be viewed as the early prototypes of the philosophy of history.[25]

In the twentieth century, the Idealist philosophy, and its "old Oxford view" of Hume began to decline and empiricism became ascendent again in the form of logical positivism. But the logical positivists who admired Hume made the same mistake as the Idealists who decried him by considering him solely as a disciple of Locke. They, too, looked only at his epistemology, disregarded his moral philosophy, and never

noticed the history. But they made the study of Hume respectable again and slowly new works with new interpretations began to emerge.

Ernest Campbell Mossner is one of several, who, beginning in the 1930's, pointed the way towards re-examining and reinterpreting Hume's philosophy, thereby creating the base for the flurry of scholarly activity of the last 25 years. When Mossner set about to rehabilitate Hume's reputation as a philosophical historian, his title suggests the low regard in which his subject was held, "An Apology for David Hume, Historian." Hume the philosopher and Hume the historian cannot be separated, he asserted. Mossner combed not only the philosophy but the whole *History* for all the statements about meaning and methodology of history and presented them in a systematic analysis that recapitulated the main points of Hume's entire philosophy. History was to Hume's science of man, "the great mistress of wisdom" which taught by example the principles of human action and morality.[26]

By the bicentenial conferences in 1976, it was possible for one of the contributers and Hume historiographer, C.N. Stockton, to say that it was no longer necessary to defend the assertion that the *History* is integral to Hume's philosophy, not an aberration. It was the logical culmination of his science of man; because it was empirical, was necessarily historical in method. The history of human experience was both the source of his general principles, and the means of verification.[27]

Donald Livingston's recent book *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life* is the most insightful and thorough investigation of the element of time in Hume's empiricism. Livingston emphasized that Hume's theory of knowledge makes a distinction between formal reasoning (logic) and

moral reasoning (how humans reason in their ordinary, daily lives). The first form of reasoning is expressed in theoretical language, and is non-temporal, universal and law-like. Those aspects of thinking which are theoretical and tenseless include sensory, logical, mathematical, scientific, ethical, aesthetic and religious concepts. Western philosophy has long regarded timelessness to be necessary for universality, that is for scientific laws. Nevertheless, all of reality cannot be reduced to tenseless, logical concepts.[28] The way humans reason in the common sense world is based on learning by accumulated experience, the present interpreted in light of experience in the past. Hume's moral or informal, common sense reasoning is historical; it is temporal, narrative, and about people.[29]

Hume's paradigm for the science of man is to avoid the metaphysical and thoretical and instead to concentrate on ordinary life and its experiential, moral reasoning. The ideas and language of common life may have some theoretical aspect, but their most important aspect is as story. Human ideas are story (past) laden. They can form abstract, timeless ideas, but those will always have as part of their meaning some of the narrarive content from the memory.[30] Individuals and institutions have memory of the past built into their present. That traditions and past experience are normative to the present is the main axiom behind Hume's theory of human reasoning, his political science and the history of the English constitution.

ENDNOTES

1. David Hume, letter of 1780, quoted in Mossner, *Life*, p. 318. Hume, *Treatise*, III,II,X, p. 562.

2. Carl Becker, *The Heavenly City of the Eighteenth Century Philosophers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932), pp. 19-27.

3. Ernest Campbell Mossner, "An Apology for David Hume, Historian" *Modern Language Association of America, Publications*, vol. 56, pt. 2, p. 664. Hereafter cited as "Apology".

4. Cassirer, *Enlightenment*, p. 9.

5. Hume, *Treatise*, p. xv.

6. Hume, *Inquiry*, pp. 92, 98.
Also in the corresponding section of the *Treatise*, I,III,VIII, pp. 98-106.

7. Hume, *Inquiry*, p. 98.

8. Ibid., pp. 57-8.

9. John W. Yolton, *Locke and the Compass of Human Understanding* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), pp. 4-5, 78.

10. Cassirer, *Enlightenment*, pp. 199-200.

11. Hume, *Essays*, vol. 2, p. 390.

12. John Herman Randall, Jr., *Nature and Historical Experiences* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1958), p.27.

13. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 1933 edition, s.v. "history".

14. David Fate Norton, Richard H. Popkin, editors, *David Hume: Philosophical Historian* (Indianapolis, Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc. 1965), Appendix A is a list of posthumous editions of Hume's *History*

15. Livingston, "Introduction" to *Re-evaluation*, p.1.

16. T.H. Grose, "History of the Editions" Hume *Essays*, vol. 1, pp.75-6.

17. H.R. Trevor-Roper, "Hume as a Historian" in *David Hume: A Symposium*, D.F. Pears, editor, (London: MacMillan and Co., Ltd., 1963), pp. 89-90.

18. Hume, *Treatise*, I, III, XIII, pp. 145-6.

19. Mossner, "Apology", p. 676.

20. Hume's father's name was Joseph Home. The family was a branch of the Earl of Home's which traced its lineage to the 15th century wars with the English. E.C. Mossner found an ancient tombstone with the family name spelled Hume and assumed that David changed his name to the more ancient form. I have never seen anything written by Hume that explains why he adopted the older spelling, though I haven't read the manuscripts nor all of the correspondence. Hume's cousin Henry Home became Lord Kames in 1752. He was also a philosopher and a patron of Scottish scholorship and literature.

21. Quoted in Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment, An Interpretation*, vol. 2, *The Science of Freedom* (New York and London, W.W. Norton & Co., 1969), p. 371.

22. Accounts of the historiography of Hume's *History* are found in: Duncan Forbes, *Hume's Philosophical Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975 pp. 102-3. Hereafter cited as *Philosophical Politics*; Mossner, "Apology" pp. 657-8; Constant Noble Stockton, "David Hume Among the Historiographers" *Studies in History and Society*, vol. 3, No. 2 (spring 1971) p. 14.

23. Cassirer, *Enlightenment*, pp. 197-8.

24. Gay, *Science of Freedom*, p. 381.

25. Donald W. Livingston, *Hume's Philosophy of Common Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), p. 2. Hereafter cited as *Common Life*.

26. Quoted in Mossner, "Apology", p. 666.

27. Constant Noble Stockton, "Economics and the Mechanism of Historical Progress in Hume's *History*" in Livingston and King, *Re-evaluation*, p. 296.

28. Livingston, *Common Life*, pp. 100-1.

29. Donald Livingston, "Hume's Historical Theory of Meaning" in Livingston and King, *Re-Evaluation*, pp. 220-1.

30. Donald Livingston, "Time and Value in Hume's Social and Political Philosophy" in *McGill Hume Studies*, p.194.

CHAPTER IV

THE SCIENCE OF MAN

> 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.[1]

Hume's objective in the *Treatise of Human Nature* and all his subsequent writings was to establish the study of human beings as an empirical science, the science of man. His scope was wide; he wished to investigate everything about human beings, how they reason about their natural and ethical worlds, why they form social institutions and the history of their progress. All of these topics fell under the general heading of moral philosophy in eighteenth century terminology. Today they have been divided into academic categories: psychology, sociology, philosophy of science, ethics, politics, economics and history. In his day, some of these areas did not have differentiated names or methodologies. Of the eighteenth century's pioneer social scientists, Hume was the most critically consistent and the least dogmatic. Even though some of his efforts were immature and rudimentary, it can be demonstrated that each of these fields can trace some of its development in modern form one way or another back to Hume.

Hume's scientific objective was perfectly representative of the attitude of Enlightenment thinkers who wished to shift the basis for

explanations of knowledge from theological and metaphysical categories to secular and observational ones. Empirical theory, which Newton had used so successfully to explain the order of the heavens, was the new wonder-methodology with which social philosophers hoped to bring order to the study of humanity and the improvement of life on earth. Exactly how this new tool should be wielded was the problem around which they worked their programs. Their main paradigms or frames of reference were psychology, biology, and history. Hume's empirical science of man, while it was fully characteristic of the enlightenment objectives, was also purer, more systematically reasoned in its application; its conclusions less preformed and its implications that science may not have all the answers more fearlessly accepted.

David Hume wrote at a time when the adaptation of empirical theory to moral philosophy was in its infancy. His attempt to define the scope and methods for social science reflects a nascent recognition that the features of naturalistic, evolutionary, dialectical and historical thinking are inherent to an empirical way of thinking. His science of man sought to explain human cognition in terms of nature (psychology) and experience (history). It sought to explain the causal inference in the fact world (more problematic because facts are so variable) in terms of probability and a learning psychology of assimilation and adaptation to new or contradictory information (a dialectical approach). And it sought to explain culture, ethics and social institutions in the empirical and evolutionary terms of a natural history of the human mind, as it has worked through the process of coping with the primary duality of self and other (which is the core of the issue of individual and community interest). Each of these topics will be considered at greater length in this chapter.

Natural History And Eighteenth Century Social Science

The sciences of biology and anthropology were products of the epistemological shift to the empirical form of explanation. Living creatures came to be regarded as natural beings, and the study of them became acceptable. The increased activity in the investigation of living things soon uncovered evidences of earlier forms in the fossil records, and relationships between species. These suggested to early biologists such as Buffon that living nature had a history. Buffon's life work was his minute recording of virtually the whole of living nature, a thirty-six volume work entitled *Histoire Naturelle* published between the years 1749 and 1788. His carefully documented natural history of species contained the concepts of process and evolution. With Buffon and empirical biology the role of history in scientific explanation was made explicit. The way was prepared for an explanatory system based on developmental biology rather than the scholastic and Cartesian logic of mathematics. Henceforth natural science as Cassirer put it "no longer seeks to derive and explain becoming from being, but being from becoming." That is, to understand a phenomenon, it is necessary to inquire into its developmental history.[2]

Natural history applied to societies, creating the sciences of sociology and cultural anthopology, also had eighteenth century origins from the same empirical orientation. In this case, the general empirical ferment fed on new experiences. Exploration and trade expanded horizons. Scholars were stimulated to develop a new conceptual ramework to incorporate all the diversity of human cultures of which Europe was increasingly becoming aware. The program for the early

sociologists was to discover what of human behavior could be explained by nature and what by culture. There was also the question of how much could be explained by any cause, and how much was the irrational exercise of human free will. It was an orientation of thought more than a defined school, but there were distinct characteristics, chiefly an empirical and developmental approach to the study of human society.

The history of culture was a study of the progressive development of human intelligence through the medium of language. Human intelligence facilitated by language was an interactive process between physical, mental and cultural factors. The early theorists of cultural anthropology were Montesquieu (1689-1755), Voltaire (1694-1778), and Hume (1711-1776). They each defined a methodology for studying culture and history that was empirical. Each thought of human beings as a product of their culture and human culture as a product of human consciousness, environment and history. For them human sociability was an original condition. Nowhere were there beings who were absolutely savage; even primitive peoples have a culture.

Montesquieu's *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence* (1734) and *De l'espirit des lois* (1748) defined a social science which used historical, cultural and anthropological facts (rather than deductively derived natural laws) to find the empirical laws of politics and society. Intellectual causes (*mentalité* or the climate of opinion) could infuence the course of history as well as physical causes.[3] Voltaire's *Le siècle de Louis XIV* (1751) included social and cultural information about the seventeenth century as well as political and military. *The Essai sur les moeurs* (1756) made explicit his philosophy of cultural history. To make

a science out of the flux of history and the variety of culture, it is necessary to find a fixed point which must be human nature. If human nature is fixed but customs are different, then it follows that custom has an influence greater than nature in forming knowledge and the intellectual spirit of the times.[4]

Hume's theory of cultural variation was much the same and published earlier in his essays "Of National Characters" and "A Dialogue". Hume thought that basic emotions, cognition (cause, identity, time, etc.) and the need for social living remained unchanged everywhere, but the form of expression chould change in different times, places and circumstances. Sociablilty, sympathy, imitation, custom, habit and utility were general principles that Hume's social science abstracted from many and varied particulars of human experience in the world.

When Hume's first Stuart volume of the *History of England* was published in 1754 it contained much cultural and economic detail which he described as essential to make the political events intelligible.[5] The "revolution in manners"[6] and the spirit of the age were included among the complex causes of the events that finally drove the Stuarts from the throne. The similarity of Hume's and Voltaire's concepts of the intellectual component in historical causation suggested to some critics that Hume had borrowed his ideas from Voltaire. Hume's response was that flattering as the comparison was, his history was already largely composed by the time Voltaire's was published.[7] Furthermore, the major themes of Hume's social and political philosophy had already been detailed in Book III of the *Treatise* published in 1740.

Though Montesquieu, Voltaire and Hume each published their major works at roughly the same time, the decades of the 1740's through 50's,

they did not seem to have strongly influenced each other in their initial development. Even Giambattista Vico (1668-1744) working in relative isolation in Naples, developed a social and historical philosophy similar to the others in its broad points. That their anthropological and historical viewpoints were similar was a function of the shortcomings inherent in the intellectual climate. They were each reacting against Scholasticism and its more recent variant, Cartesian rationalism which defined certain knowledge so narrowly that only mathematics fit the criterion; experiential knowledge was no knowledge at all. It is not suprising then that critical minds arose to point out that such a system was untenable, denied as Hume said, by history, human reason and experience.

Hume's theory of knowledge contained several implications latent in an empirical approach. If the fact world of nature, sensory and experiential, is accepted as knowledge, then certain kinds of ideas will follow because they are embedded in an empirical outlook. Fact knowledge, like human nature, is full of variety and contradictions. Because of its variability, fact knowledge belongs to a different category of certainty; it must rely on probabilities. Generalized statements induced from facts, especially in the human sciences, will, therefore, have to synthesise dualities. Human nature is a unity, composed of opposites: the spiritually sublime, rational mind and the mundane, selfish, passion-driven body, partly antisocial and partly prosocial. Knowledge, as human nature constitutes it, is also developmental; it assimilates new fact information and adapts to it by altering behavior and/or the conceptual and institutional framework. It is capable of refinements; it can adjust means to ends and develop new ways to explain experience. It is historical and evolutionary.

Historicism and evolution, the hallmarks of natural history based on biology, were implicit in the work of the eighteenth century empiricist social philosophers. Both concepts became fully explicit in the following century. Darwin's evolution burst upon the popular consciousness as though it had not been foreshadowed since the previous century. Nor did the romantic historians of the ninteenth century understand where they had come from. They accused their predecessors of being unhistorically minded and that assessment stuck until long into this century. But the accusation was untrue as both Cassirer and Peter Gay affirm.[8] The ninteenth century's idea of historical cultures was a direct result of the intellectual ground prepared in the eighteenth.

Hume's empirical science of man was just such a natural science on the biological model. It was perhaps the best example of the eighteenth century's evolution towards a fully developmental approach to social science. He had the eighteenth century's desire to find the general laws of human psychology, sociology and history, but the detachment and realism to admit the difficulties that human complexity posed for making social science a fully deterministic and predictive science. Hume's social philosophy, Cassirer concluded, was as unlike the general trend of the philosophes as his epistemology was. His methodological orientation to fact made him resistent to the hasty generalization.[9] As much as he wished to establish a science, he avoided all-inclusive theories that would reduce all of experience to a few laws by ignoring or reasoning away inconvenient stray facts. His scientific detachment made him free to follow his inquiry wherever it led and fearless in expressing unpopular conclusions. It also saved him from the dogmatism and crusading optimism sometimes present in the French philosophes. As

Peter Gay concluded in the last page of *The Enlightenment, an Interpretation*, "Hume was at the same time the most isolated and the most representative of the philosophes: he was simply the purest, most modern speciman of that little flock."[10]

Empirical Reasoning

> It is from past experience that we draw all inferences concerning the future.[11]

Hume began his discussion of how people reason with the observation that the "other scientific method", the rational logic, where the abstract principle is given and axioms are derived, is too perfect and too inflexible to explain how people actually think, how they form their beliefs about what is real. Logic may be more perfect in itself, but it is not suitable for the study of facts including the fact of imperfect human nature. To try leads to the illusion that true and perfect knowledge exists in some other inaccessible dimension.[12] True thinking must accept the human way of knowing as authentic and stop the hopeless search for seperate philosophical reality.

Hume examined his own thinking process and constructed from it a broader concept of human rationality which he called moral reasoning. Commentators have variously described his approach as informal logic, a system of natural beliefs, or common sense. Moral reasoning or common sense made use of the wisdom of past experience; it was empirical, inferential, and based on probability.

The eighteenth century development of an empirical point of view made apparent the need for a logic that could allow for those stray

events for which the general laws seemed not to apply. Logic needed to include probability reasoning, particularly in the social sciences which were Hume's main interest. Empirical reasoning based on matters of fact requires a different sort of logic than the old deductive logic that proceeds from *a priori* first principles. Facts do not always fit neatly to the framework of theory. Probability is based on a type of analogy that supposes that cause in observed cases will also be the same in unobserved cases all the time, some of the time or only a few times. When the analogy is perfect, we infer perfect certainty of effect from cause. When the analogy is less perfect, we assign a probability proportional to the degree of resemblance.[13]

> Some events are found, in all countries and all ages, to have been constantly conjoined together; others are found to have been more variable. . . so that in our reasonings concerning matter of fact there are all imaginable degrees of assurance. . . A wise man, therefore, proportions his belief to the evidence.[14]

Hume, like Newton, assumed an orderly universe, not only of physical events, but also human-psychological events. Causal inferences about human action, he said, are made in the same way as about events in the natural world. People feel just as certain of their belief in cause when talking of human motives, volitions and actions. Throughout daily life, people use conclusions based on the assumption that there is a general uniformity in human nature. They commonly make causal conclusions on the actions of others by comparing them to their own experience and knowledge of our own motives, temper or situation. They expect that these same factors have an influence on others just as on themselves. If a traveler from a distant country reported that the people who lived there were perfectly selfless and public spirited, others would be as disinclined to believe it as if the reporter claimed

that dragons and centaurs lived there. People likewise proportion their belief in ancient historical accounts by comparing them with what they know of human nature. They expect to see others act in the character they have observed from them in the past, and they expect them to act in routine ways, e.g. that the laborer will go to work, the artisan will find buyers for his wares, and the magistrate will preserve public order.

Exceptions, Hume warned, must be expected. Manners are different in different times and places. The sexes behave differently. Even the same person thinks and behaves differently at different stages in life. The fact of variation is instructive; it shows the force of education and custom in molding character. But even in the face of diversity, still people expect a general regularity in human actions. When there are exceptions they look for causes by carefully examining the mitigating circumstances, e.g. the usually cheerful person, suddenly peevish, has a toothache.[15]

People assume that the author of a history affirms facts, such as the death of Caesar, which they too would affirm, especially in the light of corroborating testimony. They do not assume that others, as a rule, are conspiring to deceive them. Moral reasoning assumes a uniformity of human action and motivation, an assumption which is based on a lifetime of experience, and from introspective knowledge of one's own motivations.

> The same kind of reasoning runs thro' politics, war, commerce, oeconomy, and indeed mixes itself so entirely in human life, that 'tis impossible to act or subsist a moment without having recourse to it. . . Whoever reasons after this manner, does *ipso facto* believe the actions of the will to arise from necessity [cause]. . .[16]

The idea of cause-effect in both the physical and social worlds is not the only idea common to all humans, but so are others such as the persistence of physical objects, time, identity of a self, the passional basis of reasoning and judgments of virtue and vice. Hume's general principles of the mental world resemble Locke's theory of ideas, but with an expanded definition of perceptions. Perceptions arise not only from external sensation, but also internally from the passions, and the structuring principles of mind. Thoughts and ideas are copies of past impressions, and thus weaker. They are preserved in memory and recalled and reflected on, or are transformed and compounded by the structuring rules of association. These are (1) resemblance, (2) contiguity in time or place, and (3) cause and effect. Other structuring rules are compounds of the basic three.[17] These Hume thought of as analogous to Newton's laws of motion.[18]

Because thought and ideas are copies of immediate sensation they are weaker than the originals. Memories or imagined events can almost seem real, but never so real as to confuse any but a disordered mind. Immediate sensation is always stronger than thought. Ideas, especially abstract ones are very faint and easy to misread. That is why philosophical terms that are far removed from experience are so confusing or even contradictory and consequently not to be trusted.[19]

Hume presented his theory of ideas in Book I, Part I of the *Treatise* which was long interpreted to be the most important part because it most resembled the phenomenalism of Locke. But that view led to a failure to understand properly the remaining 600 pages. Hume's concept of human reasoning evolved as his analysis progressed through books II and III to include the psychological inner dimension and social outer

context which form the matrix in which minds impute meaning to the phenomena of experience. [20] Since Kemp Smith's work early in this century the predominant interpretation has become that it is the passional and social bases of human reasoning that are the keys to understanding Hume.[21]

Moral reasoning includes not only the way people form our conclusions about their natural world (physical science) but also the complex world of social interaction. Reasoning in the moral world of human action is more variable, depending on the particular social and intellectual environment of the individual knower, and also on individual experience. Informal reasoning unlike geometric reasoning is not timeless or absolute. It always takes place in emotional as well as historical and social contexts, and is more like legal reasoning in the citing of analogies and precedents than the solving of a geometry problem. The conception of reality in the social world, therefore is an evolving relationship between human minds operating with informal inferential rules and the natural and social world those minds occupy. The knowledge produced by this form of reasoning is cumulative and developmental. How people think about their social world changes as their social, economic and political environment changes, though these changes may happen very slowly.[22] This is the kind of thinking that underlies what Hume called the spirit of the age and has variously been called the *Zeitgeist*, the climate of opinion, or *mentalité*. Historical, dialectical thinking is the framework of analysis in the moral world.

Donald Livingston refers to Hume's concept of moral (empirical) reasoning as "past entailing"; an understanding of what *is* entails an understanding of what has gone before. Some statements about the

present make no sense unless certain other statements about the past are true. For example, he is: a father or a priest or a senator, are past-entailed statements. They cannot be understood only as present-tense statements without additional conceptual information added from memory. The moral (empirical) reasoning process is like collecting a file of story-laden ideas from which we may abstract (generalize) tenseless (timeless-universal) ideas, i.e. scientific laws. But these ideas will always have as a part of their meaning, some of the narrative content from our memory. What people reasoning about their social world will believe is real and true will always be affected by habits and customs of inference derived in past experience. Individuals and their social institutions have memory of the past built into their present. In Hume's moral theory, tradition and custom will always be normative to our thinking about the present.[23]

Determinism and Social Science

> Necessity is regular and certain.
> Human conduct is irregular and uncertain.[24]

The key to establishing a science is the ability to identify a regular order in experience. This has been more problematic in the world of human action than in the physical world. Human and cultural variability, and the complexity of the interactions between human minds and their physical and social environments, makes the generalizing of universal laws far more complicated. Free will (chance or randomness) seems to have as much influence over events as cause (or necessity to use Hume's term).

Enlightenment social philosophers were optimistic that a science of man was possible; it was to be the basis for a perfected social system of the future. Their attempts to demonstrate the feasibility of social science led them to emphasize the uniformities of human nature in all times and places, an emphasis that the romantic-idealist philosophers after them found too rigidly rational and deterministic and lacking in an understanding of historical uniqueness, irrationality, and process.

Hume was in the Enlightenment tradition that expected that a science of man was possible. It was the issue to which he devoted his career. But on the question of how fully deterministic such a science could be he was less optimistic, more qualified in his certainty than his fellow philosophes. He was the bridge, the middle way between the Enlightenment's search for the scientific principles of society and the romantic movement's repudiation of determinism and its exaltation in free will and untamed nature. While Hume was sure that there were general causes of human behavior, he also repeatedly warned that a causal principle could be carried too far. Perfect uniformity does not exist in nature. It is a frequent failing of philosophers, he thought, to try to stretch too few general principles to fit the vast variety of nature.[25]

> When a philosopher has once laid hold of a favourite principle, which perhaps accounts for many natural effects, he extends the same principle over the whole creation, and reduces to it every ph nomenon [sic], though by the most violent and absurd reasoning. Our own mind being narrow and contracted, we cannot extend our conception to the variety and extent of nature; but imagine, that she is as much bounded in her operations, as we are in our speculations.[26]

Human action is neither totally chaotic, nor totally determined; it is a little of both. Both freedom and the expectation of a general regularity are, in fact, essential to human moral action. The extent

and limits of each he discussed in "Of Liberty and Necessity" sections in both the *Treatise* [27] and the *Inquiry*[28] and scattered throughout the *Essays.* In these sections, he asserted that there were general and uniform laws to be found in human nature just as in the motions of the planets. But in human nature one can expect only a "degree of uniformity" which then requires a greater number of general principles to cover all the cases.[29] Some characteristics are common to all humanity and some are peculiar to particular persons and/or in particular cultures, but even in diversity there are general principles to be inferred. If there were no uniformities in human behavior there could be no learning from experience, no action contemplated with a result in mind, no plans laid in expectation that the future would be like the past. Without uniformities people could not generalize or form analogies from one particular event to others like it, they could not infer that one event caused another which would then render science and action impossible.[30]

The history of humankind, on the other hand, makes finding uniformities difficult. It is filled with amazing changes in the manners, customs and opinions. How is the social scientist to find which characteristics and events result from general causes and which from unique situations or chance? Hume identified several areas where one could find constant and uniform characteristics of human nature. He observed that in the civil history of wars, negotiations and politics, there was a much greater similarity between one age and another than there is in the history of learning and science.[31] From this he inferred that human passions: interest and ambition, friendship and enmity, gratitude and revenge exerted a constant influence in human

affairs. These passions are the prime movers of life, the source of all human action. Their influence is strong compared with opinion and knowledge which are easily varied by education and example.[32]

The other uniformities, besides the passions, are the most basic elements of ordinary life, the ones so taken for given that they are not mentioned in books of history. That is, that the sexes are attracted, mate, form families, raise children, live in groups, and concern themselves with material survival.[33] (cf. Braudel's long term and the contemporary concept of social history) Also common to all people is the making of causal inferences about the world of their experiences and learning thereby, to expect a degree of regularity in the course of life. If there were no regularities, there would be no benefit from experience. Another universal fact about people is their sociability. Whereas Locke's theory seemed to presuppose individuals free to make their own contractual arrangements, Hume, from the opening pages of the *Treatise* considered people as "united in society and dependent on each other."[34]

Yet if uniformities and the assumption of causation is an indisputable fact, so is diversity, irrationality, randomness and the inexplicable. In social theory causation is much more complex; combinations of causes, hidden causes (not yet understood), the will of particular individuals, chance events, and the welter of contradictory data in the ceaseless flow of history, all make general principles more difficult to achieve and hardly predictive.[35] He gave as an example, the Harrington thesis which postulated that since the balance of property had shifted to commons by the time of the Civil War, there would never be a monarchy in England again, which prediction was no

sooner off the press than the king was restored.[36] From this, Hume concluded that while property interest had a strong effect on power in government, opinion of the right to sovereignty (based in habit and tradition) was an even stronger effect.[37]

Opinion of right, as well as other speculative principles, learning, wit and taste are dependent on education and environment, and thus are subject to change from one period of history to the next. These more complex behaviors are affected by such factors as historical accident, type of government and other institutions, economic conditions and the influence of neighboring countries.[38]

The general and universal principles of passion, habit, sympathy, sociability and utility, combine with particular historical experience to make culture the variable thing it is -- part fixed and part changeable. Probability is a way to separate cause from chance. Those events that depend on the actions of only one or a few persons can be ascribed to chance, those that occur in many cases may be said to result from causes. Therefore, the causes of a characteristic in a population will be noticeable in many cases, even though not in every case.[39]

"Of all sciences, there is none where first appearances are more deceitful than politics." [40] Perhaps, Hume speculated, the world is too young to have collected enough experience to establish the general truths of politics. Machiavelli, for instance, was a genius, but his principles of politics were only applicable to unstable Italian states. They did not necessarily generalize to conditions in other places.[41] That political opinion and behavior changed as economic and social and intellectual conditions changed was a major theme through Hume's political essays and the *History*. The evolving character of manners and

opinions made finding general laws difficult. Prediction is particularly difficult because there are so many variables. Hume decided that it was easier to account for events after they happen, "from springs and principles of which every one has, within himself", or from observations of the general course of events. But, it is nearly impossible to predict which variables will have a greater effect in a given situation.[42]

After struggling with the issue repeatedly in his political essays, Hume wrote "A Dialogue" as an appendix to the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*. In it he used the dialectical device of a two-party debate to present the issues involved in the consideration of uniformities and variations in culture. A traveler named Palamedes described the ancient Greeks in a way that seemed to make them morally alien to eighteenth century Europeans. He adopted the attitude of a relativist, that "fashion, vogue, custom and law" were the chief foundations of moral differences. How then, he asked, would it be possible to fix a standard of judgment suitable to all cultures? [43]

> Would you try a Greek or a Roman by the common law of England?. . . There are no manners so innocent or reasonable, but may be rendered odious or ridiculous, if measured by a standard unknown to the persons.[44]

The narrator, who was not given a name and may be presumed to be Hume, replied that the answer for the philosopher was to look beyond the confusing first appearances and find the underlying standard of coherence. Trace matters a little higher, he recommended, by examining the first principles on which the culture places its approval or disapproval.

> The Rhine flows north, the Rhone south; yet both spring from the same mountain, and are also actuated, in their opposite

> directions, by the same principle of gravity. The different inclinations of the ground, on which they run, cause all the difference of their courses.[45]

The ancient Greeks and the modern French, for example, put very different emphasis on the virtue of fidelity. The Greeks laid priority on domestic life, the French on social life, which affected the way that each gave expression to fidelity. Their priorities, domestic and social, represent two ends of a scale. Both ends are good but also difficult to reconcile. The customs of some countries incline very far to one extreme, and others to the opposite, but ". . . the principles upon which men reason in morals are always the same; though the conclusions which they draw are often very different."[46] It is not necessary to show that each culture has the right moral solution, but only to show that it reasons from the same basic principles.

Though there have been many changes in religion, law, language and custom since Classical Greek and Roman times, there has been very little change in primary moral sentiments, Hume thought. The ancient Greeks and the modern French hold many values in common: good sense, wit, eloquence, humanity, truth, justice, courage and constancy. These are universal sentiments but may be expressed differently in different places and times. The "one general foundation" of all moral sentiments, Hume thought, is its usefulness to self and others. When the usefulness is the standard of judgment of the virtue or the institution, then it may be put to the test and corrected if necessary by sounder reasoning or further experience.[47] Those moral values which are thought of as universal have endured because time has proven them useful to the needs of social living.

It is the details of circumstances (the contours of the land in the river analogy) -- location, kinds of laws, the ever changing historical situation -- that account for the variations in moral sentiments. Circumstances that pertain in a particular place and time may make some virtues easier or more difficult to attain. For example, magnanimity or integrity are more difficult in war or other hard times. War or peace is the source of the greatest variation in circumstances that affect morals. The degree of wealth also affects what virtues will more likely have expression. Other sources of variation are the degree to which a culture separates women from public life, the form of government, the degree of ignorance or learning and even the age of the population (an older population has a more nearly similar list of virtues based on the lessons that long experiences in life teach). Historical accident is an important source of cultural variety. Particular occurrences acting alone or in combination may make one or another factor more decisive in determining the way a culture develops.[48]

Hume's mind was particularly adept at looking behind confusing surface appearances and abstracting standards of coherence, though even he sometimes sounded doubtful that social science could be made very exact. He recognized that in human nature and history the great number of variables made finding causes a very complicated undertaking. Hume's assertions that this was so and his willingness to find flaws in his own proposed principles, made his science too indeterminate for the mechanical and atomistic models of the later English empiricists such as John Stuart Mill's mental chemistry. In their optimism that a rigorous science was possible which would then solve all mysteries, they tried applying rigidly reductionist standards. Positivism, behaviorism,

economic determinism, various statistical and computer models repeatedly have demonstrated that too much rigor and reduction fails to account for the variety of human experience. As Carlo Ginzberg observed two centuries later, the dilemma for the social sciences is that adopting a strict scientific standard yields very limited results, whereas attaining significant results requires adopting a weak scientific standard.[49] Hume adopted the weak standard, and mixing positive observation with his powers of penetration and intuition, made many generalizations about psychology, sociology and history. Some now sound quaint, some historically inaccurate, but many of them are observations that still ring true, or suggest possible lines of inquiry. This may be one reason why Hume studies are thriving in the wake of declining optimism that social science can be made into a strict Newtonian science.

The psychological uniformities he found in passion and reasoning have already been mentioned. The main standards governing human social evolution, Hume identified as sympathy, the self/other duality and utility. These are the subject of the following section.

Of Morals, The Social Philosophy

> Morality, therefore, is more properly felt than judg'd of.[50]

Parallel to the question "what is the criterion for true knowledge", is the related question "what is the criterion for knowing the right things to do?" This is the realm of ethics, or moral philosophy in Hume's eighteenth century usage. Moral philosophy encompasses the whole

field of human action: politics, economics and history.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the same controversies that shook the foundations of knowledge also affected ethics. Since the church was no longer accepted as the sole arbiter of what was right to do, the question of how to tell good from evil became important in philosophy. The rationalist solution was to shift the foundation from authority to reason. The English rational moral philosophers, Samuel Clark, William Wollaston, and Ralph Cudworth, felt that just as it was possible for reason to discover the natural laws of motion, so was it possible to find natural laws as precise as mathematics to be the basis for a human moral sense.[51] Reason, and the natural law of morality, would provide the criteria against which the confusing array of moral claims made by church and sect or king and Parliament could be evaluated.

Such questions were not idle speculations, but held immediate social significance appearing as they did in the context of the English Civil War and Revolution. The flaw in the logic was revealed when rational religion and rational morality failed to settle any of the century's practical disputes over orthodox vs. dissenting religion and authoritarian vs. libertarian politics. There were too many conflicting opinions about what was right. As much as the natural law theorists hoped to find a science of morality in nature, without recourse to special revelation, their conclusions usually reflected their own theological and political opinions. Bishop Butler, for instance, asserted that the purpose of the human conscience was to remind one of the duty of passive obedience to authority.[52] Teleological assumptions and moral imperatives were mixed into the early theories of scientific morality.[53]

There was another contender, besides reason, to explain how people form their moral judgments - passion. An early expression of the non-rational, passionate nature of humanity was found in Thomas Hobbes' social philosophy. Hobbes political views were shaped in the historical context of the highly passion-laden political ferment surrounding the Civil War period when self-interest versus social order were starkly contrasted. His theory was based on the premise of unmoderated self-love and need for self-preservation which required strict outer controls in the form of a social contract and strong authority in order to hold society together. From this there followed a school of thought which reduced all expressions of virtue and altruism to selfish motives.[54]

A different form of passion-based social theory was the sentimentalist theory of Francis Hutcheson, professor of moral philosophy at Aberdeen. Hutcheson's *Origin of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725) postulated that human nature possessed a naturally benevolent moral sense whose effects were evenly distributed in all social relationships. The natural laws of morality were derived by reflecting on what "our hearts naturally must approve" since benevolent action is the end purpose for which humanity was created. He recommended that the empirical method of observing human nature be the method of moral philosophy, though that goal was inconsistent with his teleological conclusions.[55]

Hutcheson's theory of moral sentiment made an early impression on Hume's moral philosophy. Kemp Smith demonstrated persuasively that reading Hutcheson was the stimulant for Hume's breaking into "a new scene of thought" when he was eighteen. Their two theories were very similar.[56] They approached empirical inquiry the same way by an

introspective examination of their own consciousnesses as well as by observations of the behavior of others. They disagreed on whether an institution such as justice was natural or of human construction, on how far human benevolence extended itself (Hume thought it weakened as social relationships grew more distant from the individual), and the teleological assumption. When the two corresponded after the *Treatise* was published, Hutcheson criticised Hume's moral philosophy for calling justice unnatural. In Hume's reply, he defended it by saying that justice wasn't unnatural, only artificial. By this he meant that the concept of justice was not found in original human nature, but was a human convention which gradually evolved to meet the needs of social living. He added that he disagreed with Hutcheson's definition of natural as resting in final causes. For Hume, the knowledge of ultimate things was beyond the reach of human understanding.

> For pray, what is the End of Man? Is he created for Happiness or for Virtue? For this Life or the Next? For himself or his Maker? Your Definition of Natural depends on Solving these Questions, which are endless and quite wide of my Purpose.[57]

Hume's purpose was to put ethics on a consistently empirical ground. He wished to describe human nature as though he were a moral anatomist observing internal structure of people as they are, not as a moral painter depicting how they ought to be.[58] To limit inquiry to observable human traits was job enough for the scientist of man; to attempt more was to be presumptuous.[59] The empirical moralist made his judgments the same way as the natural scientist, by making causal inferences based on experience, not only of the outer social world, but also on the experience of the inner world of our feeling-based structuring minds.

In Book III of the *Treatise*, which he later rewrote as the *Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*, Hume addressed the question of whether there are empirically demonstrable standards for making ethical judgements. He definitely believed that there are norms for ethical behavior. The very idea of morals implies a sentiment common to all humanity.[60] As with the belief in cause-effect, the question is not whether moral standards are real, but how they are derived. What he disputed was how earlier moral theorists explained the origins of ethical standards. He first argued against the rationalist position, and then against the "selfish system" of Hobbes and Locke, before defining his own position that the moral sense like most of the rest of our practical thinking is a function of the passions.[61]

One of the superb qualities of the human mind is that it is able to imagine metaphysical perfections such as pure reason and perfect virtue of which it has no experience. The disadvantage is that moral philosophers have taken these imagined perfections as a standard in devising their utopian schemes of virtue. They fail to understand the emotional substructure of their minds that constructs beliefs and judgments. Hume proposes to demonstrate how this may be done by reference to feelings people can recognize in themselves, and by language.[62]

One method which Hume recommends for discovering the foundations for ethical thinking is an introspective self examination, an analysis of that "complication of mental qualities", that are called meritorious. It is a technique which Hume used often. The inquirer who wonders about the origins of ethical judgments has all the certainty needed by consulting that "quick sensibility. . . universal among mankind. . .

(The reader) need only enter into his own breast for a moment, and consider whether or not he should desire to have this or that quality ascribed to him. . ."[63]

Hume's second technique is to examine languages, by which people communicate and compare their inner understandings. Every language has a set of terms for the good qualities and another for the bad. The inquirer should list these words, then use inductive reasoning to find what those words have in common. This is the standard of evaluation in ethical questions. It is inductively inferred from experience and is a matter of fact, not abstract speculation.[64]

Utility is the standard that Hume abstracts as the general law underlying all terms and feelings denoting virtue. All such qualities are beneficial to self and others. Discretion, industry, prudence, temperance, cheerfulness, wit, dignity, benevolence and others are approved because of their tendency to beneficial ends: "the happiness of mankind, the order of society, the harmony of families, the mutual support of friends".[65] The more social the virtue, the more it benefits the whole species, the more highly it is regarded.

Social utility is an important foundation for ethical judgments, but it is not the only one. The real source of morality is in the instinctive good feelings that arise when virtuous qualities are exercised. Distinctions of vice and virtue are natural sentiments of the mind.[66]

"Utility is only a tendency to a certain end and were the end totally indifferent we should feel the same indifference toward the means."[67] Reason may be enough to inform us of the beneficial or harmful consequences of a quality or action but it cannot produce the

feeling of approval or disapproval. Human emotion tells us whether it is right or wrong. There is a preconscious propensity of human minds to perceive good actions as pleasure and vice as pain. If there were no antecedent appetite, there would be no pleasure felt.

For Hume, pleasure/pain is not the sole end of action as it was for the later utilitarians. Instead, it is the mechanism that informs people via emotions which qualities and actions feel right or wrong.

> The final sentence, it is probable. . . which renders morality an active principle, and constitutes virtue our happiness, and vice our misery:. . .depends on some internal sense or feeling, which nature has made universal in the whole species."[68]

With this Hume pronounced the same final cause that he faulted Hutcheson for -- that humans were created for the end purpose of benevolent action. Hume would undoubtedly argue that he expressed it tentatively and modestly as a probability, and after exploring many corroborating instances of human attitudes and actions expressed in history, language and common life.

Selfishness is an undeniable fact of human nature, but Hume refused to reduce all ethical judgments to one source in self-interest, as did the Hobbists' "selfish system". This way of thinking tended to view individuals as social isolates, knowing only their personally experienced subjective realities, and who, when they found it necessary to live together, had to have recourse to the legalistic mechanism of a social contract.

It is true that people often can conceal their self interested motives from themselves and imagine that they are more selfless than they are. But to reduce every social virtue to an underlying selfish motive is carrying the argument too far. It is contrary to to common

feeling, common language, and observation. It is against common sense to argue that the selfish person and the benevolent person are motivated at heart by the same self-love. Furthermore people bestow praise on virtuous actions in distant times and places in which they have no personal interest. It is even common to praise the brave and noble acts of an opponent. The convolution of argument necessary to explain every virtue in terms of selfishness also violates the principle of parsimony (economy of cause, known as Ockham's razor and also number one of Newton's rules of reasoning). The simplest, most obvious cause for a phenomenon is probably the true one. A hypothesis of natural sympathy or fellow feeling is simpler.[69] It is also consistent with Hume's perception that many questions pursued to their limits end in paradox in which two apparently opposite conclusions both seem true some of the time. Just as human reason consists of both logic and passion, so are ethics influenced both by selfishness and sociability.

Sociability is, for Hume, a fact of human nature nearly as influential as selfishness. Emphasis on human selfishness can be carried too far.

> Though it be rare to meet with one, who loves any single person better than himself, yet 'tis rare to meet with one, in whom all the kind affections, taken together, do not overbalance all the selfish."[70]

The human heart is never entirely indifferent to the common good. One person's private good may not be like another's, but that person's humanity is like the humanity of everyone. Moral sentiments are social and universal.

> No selfishness, and scarce any philosophy, have there force sufficient to support a total coolness and indifference; and he must be more or less than man, who kindles not in the common blaze. What wonder then, that moral sentiments are found of such influence in life? . . . They form, in a manner, the party of human-kind against vice and disorder, its common enemy."[71]

People are born into families and live their lives in social groups. "The mutual dependence of men is so great in all societies that scarce any human action is entirely complete in itself, or is performed without some reference to the actions of others."[72] People assume that others will be similar to themselves with similar feelings and motivations. Conversely, people know themelves through reflections of the responses of others. "The minds of men are mirrors to one another. . ."[73] This affective social bond Hume calls symapthy.

Through sympathy, the happiness or misery of one are felt by others. A person visiting in the home of a friend cannot fail to be touched by the emotional atmosphere. The conversation conveys a sense of the feelings of the other, whether happy, or troubled by small aggravations or assaulted by dreadful horrors. These excite in the listener a sympathy of feeling. These are the common emotions of humanity, easily shared by those around us and transmitted in literature. Theater, poetry and history provide entertainment by communicating the whole range of human passions. "History. . . would be no entertainment at all, did not our hearts beat with correspondent movements to those which are described by the historian."[74]

Sympathy, not a social contract, is the glue of society. Living and conversing together, soon brings a "similitude of manners" through the imitative and sympathetic capacity of human minds. This accounts for the local similarity of manners in different cultures, rather than physical factors such as air and water which Montesquieu had proposed as

the cause of cultural differences.[75] People will conform their behavior to that of those around them, not only to receive approval, but also to have the advantage of order and regularity.[76]

Some sentiments of good and bad are private ones - such as my enemy, his rival - but others have a more generalized point of view and are held in common with others. Usefulness or threat to the public good is such a common standard, the very foundation of moral judgments. Natural human sympathy or fellow-feeling aided by language and communication are the means of generalizing the viewpoints of individuals into a common sentiment. The language of virtue/vice will be necessarily general because it is molded on the general views of many. Nevertheless, it will refer to the common interests of the community, and will result therefore in a general standard for judging approval or disapproval for actions or character traits. The individual may relate to this standard in a self-interested way, yet as a community standard, it will exert a pressure for pro-social action.[77]

Individual interest and community interest are not fully opposite categories in Hume's social thought. They are interrelated dialectically; each sets limits on the other. Self love is a strong natural passion, but so is the need for individuals to live together for survival and mutual benefit. The rules of social living are the synthesis of the two. People are continuously involved with each other in families and communities, for emotional as well as economic support. The benefits of social living are made obvious and immediate to everyone by the primary social unit, the family. Hume identifies as the "first and original principle of human society. . .that natural appetite betwixt the sexes. . ." and the resulting concern for children.[78]

Social living, the advantage of which is to improve the individual's material well being, at the same time incurs a disadvantage. Those same material goods which make life better, are also scarce and their possession is unstable. They are a constant source for disagreement in a community. There is no original impulse for justice in human nature, no natural law of equity. Such generosity as people feel for those near them, family or friends, does not spread very much farther to strangers. What nature doesn't provide, humans have devised indirectly through reason and judgment to make up what is lacking in our original, natural affections. Hence, education and habits learned in the family make us aware of the benefits of social living, and the need to make stable rules for the possession of goods. Individuals will conform themselves to such social conventions even when when their individual interest is not served, because it is even more in their interest to live among others who agree to the same rules. It allows people to live in confidence of future regularity. Thus the self-interest of possession is better served by the rules of social living, (i.e. justice), than by unlimited individual liberty.[79] Edmund Burke later neatly expressed this concept in the maxim, "The individual is foolish, the species wise."[80]

The rules of justice therefore cannot be said to be laws of nature, that is in original human nature, but are artificial constructs devised by human reason to meet human needs. "Reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions";[81] reason devises means to satisfy the need of people to live together in society. If one looks at the organization of Hume's *Treatise* in a dialectical way, (which Livingson pointed out was a useful conceptual tool[82]) one can see at once, that Book III, "Of

Morals", is the synthesis of the first two, "Of the Understanding" and "Of the Passions". Social conventions and institutions such as justice and government developed from the synthesis of self-interested passion, the need for social living and reason, the deviser of means.

> Human nature being compos'd of two principle parts, which are requisite in all its actions, the affections and understanding, 'tis certain, that the blind motions of the former, without the direction of the latter, incapacitate men for society.[83]

Because the rules for living socially are not original to human nature but develop slowly over time as people learn what works or dosen't work, Hume calls them artificial. If people had a natural affection for the public interest, the rules of justice would never have been dreamed of, because they would not have been needed. If, on the other hand, people only pursued their individual self-interest, their property and lives would be continually at risk. The need for stable, commonly agreed upon rules for social living, impelled the development of the social conventions and institutions. The rules do not pretend to change original selfishness, but devise ways to contain it within bounds acceptable to the needs of living together. Thus the public utility is the key standard for judgments about the conventions and institutions.[84]

Hume's distinction between artificial and natural is not so dissimilar. Human sociability and rationality are as natural as human passion. When rationality devises an invention as obvious and necessary as the social conventions of justice and government,

> it may as properly be said to be natural as any thing that proceeds immediately from original principles, without the intervention of thought or reflexion. Tho' the rules of justice be artificial, they are not arbitrary. Nor is the expression improper to call them Laws of Nature.[85]

These conventions could be regarded as a sort of social contract,

but with a difference. Contract suggested a legal agreement at a point in time. Hume did not suppose that a legal agreement could be made before a concept of justice had evolved. His explanation of social conventions was given in neither metaphysical or legal, contractual terms but in the empirical and naturalistic terms of social-anthropology, psychology and evolution. Conventions developed as a slowly accumulated set of responses to human needs and drives, which in time evolved into a concept of justice. As each innovation in the social conventions lasted long enough to become stable, it became part of our habitual way of reasoning, and thus accepted as natural through long usage. The resulting moral rules were passed along to each generation through the private instruction of parents and public exhortations to civic mindedness.[86]

Language is a social convention just as the rules of justice; both are historically developed sets of common rules.[87] Social norms or conventions gradually evolved as an objective viewpoint so that individuals may communicate about life in the world. The conventions are held together by the rules of language, which developed alongside the norms in order to express them. Because these two conventions developed simultaneously and interrelatedly, it is logically impossible to say that justice is wrong or virtue is bad. Both conventions developed from an unconsciously planned trial and error process, the accumulation of many single instances of negotiations between conflicting parties with no more motive or larger principle than what suited the present convenience. The accumulated experience with many cases gradually revealed the mutual benefit of a fixed point of view against which claims could be compared. This settled point of view

became the community standard of objectivity needed in ethics, language, law, government, complex societies and economies and for science and knowledge in general.[88] The remaining chapters consider Hume's account of how the conventions of government developed through English history and finally fixed in the English constitution the concepts of the rule of law and legal institutions.

ENDNOTES

1. Hume, *Treatise*, p. xvi.

2. Cassirer, *Enlightenment*, pp. 79-80.

3. Ibid., pp. 210-14.

4. Ibid., pp. 216-9.

5. David Hume, *The History of England, from the Invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688*, eight volumes (London: A Millar, 1763), vol. VI, Appendix to the Reign of James I, p. 99. It is customary to give the chapter numbers when citing the *History* because there are many editions, no one standard, with varying numbers of volumes, making page numbers meaningless from one to another edition. Hereafter refered to as *History*.

6. Ibid., vol. VI, chap. XLVIII, pp. 40-1.

7. Mossner, "Apology", p. 615.

8. Cassirer, *Enlightenment*, p. 197-8. Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment, An Interpretation* vol 2, *The Science of Freedom* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1969) p. 372.

9. Cassirer, *Enlightenment*, p. 226.

10. Gay, *The Enlightenment*, vol. I, *The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York, London: W.W. Norton & Co., 1966) p. 418.

11. Hume, *Inquiry*, p. 98.

12. Hume, *Enquiries...Morals*, p. 174.

13. Hume, *Inquiry*, pp. 69-71, 112.

14. Ibid. p. 118.

15. Ibid., pp. 94-9.

16. Hume, *Treatise*, II,III,I, pp. 404-5, also *Inquiry*, p. 99.

17. Ibid., I,I,I-V, pp. 1-13, also *Inquiry*, pp. 26-30, 31-32.

18. Connon, "The Naturalism of Hume", pp. 137-40.

19. Hume, *Inquiry*, p. 30.

20. Livingston, *Common Life*, pp. 119-20.

21. Connon, "The Naturalism of Hume", in *McGill Hume Studies*, pp. 121-2.

22. Nicholas Capaldi, "The Problem of Hume and Hume's Problem", introduction to *McGill Hume Studies*, pp. 5-8.

23. Livingston, *Common Life*, pp. ix, 100-1, 109-10, Also Livingston, "Time and Value in Hume's Social and Political Philosophy", in *McGill Hume Studies*, p. 194.

24. Hume, *Treatise*, II,III,I, p. 403.

25. Hume, *Enquiry. . .Morals*, p. 298; *Inquiry*, p. 95; *Essays*, p. 213.

26. Hume, *Essays*, pp. 213-14.

27. Hume, *Treatise*, II,III,I, pp. 399 ff.

28. Hume, *Inquiry*, pp. 90 ff.

29. Ibid., p. 95.

30. Ibid., p. 99.

31. Hume, *Essays*, p. 176.

32. Ibid., p. 163, *Inquiry*, p. 93.

33. Hume, *Treatise*, III,II,II, p. 486.

34. Ibid., p. xv.

35. Hume, *Essays*, p. 374.

36. Ibid., p. 122.

37. Ibid., p. 112.

38. Ibid., p. 144.

39. Ibid., p. 174.

40. Ibid., p. 397.

41. Ibid., p. 156.

42. Ibid., p. 374.

43. Hume, *Enquiry...Morals*, p. 333.

44. Ibid., p. 330.

45. Ibid., p. 333.

46. Ibid., p. 335-6.

47. Ibid., p. 336.

48. Ibid., p. 337-40.

49. Lawrence Stone, "The Revival of Narrative: Reflections on a New Old History", *Past and Present*, no. 85. November, 1979, p. 21.

50. Hume, *Treatise*, III,I,II, p. 470.

51. Kuypers, *Hume's Empiricism*, p. 89.

52. James Moore, "The Social Background of Hume's Science of Human Nature" in *McGill Hume Studies*, p. 31.

53. David R. Broiles, *The Moral Philosophy of David Hume* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1964), pp. 8-11.

54. Hume, *Enquiry. . .Morals*, pp. 295-302.

55. Forbes, *Philosophical Politics*, pp. 32-41 contains an account of Hutcheson's social theory.

56. Kemp Smith, *Philosophy*, p. 43.

57. Hume, Letter to Hutcheson, 1739, quoted in Forbes, *Philosophical Politics*, pp. 59-60.

58. Hume, *Inquiry*, p. 19.

59. Ibid, p. 111.

60. Hume, *Enquiry. . .Morals*, pp. 272-3.

61. Ibid., pp. 170-2.

62. Ibid., pp. 173-4.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid., pp. 179,181-2.

66. Ibid., pp. 203-4.

67. Ibid., pp. 286.

68. Ibid., pp. 172-3.

69. Ibid., pp. 215-6, 297-9, 301.

70. Hume, *Treatise*, III,II,III, p. 487.

71. Hume, *Enquiries...Morals*, p. 275.

72. Hume, *Inquiry*, p. 98.

73. Hume, *Treatise*, II,II,V, p. 365.

74. Hume, *Enquiry. . .Morals*, pp. 220-3.

75. Hume, *Essays*, vol. 1, pp. 248-9.

76. Hume, *Inquiry*, p. 98.

77. Hume, *Enquiry. . .Morals*, p. 228-9.

78. Hume, *Treatise*, III,II,II, pp. 484-87, quotation on p. 486. Helpful discussions of Hume's social philosophy are also found in:
George Davie, "Berkeley, Hume and the Central Problem of Scottish Philosophy" *McGill Hume Studies*, pp. 43-62.
Sheldon Wolin, "Hume and Conservatism", *Hume: A Re-evaluation*, pp. 239-55.

79. Hume, *Treatise*, III,II,II, pp. 488-9.

80. Quoted in Cobban, *In Search of Humanity*, p. 174.

81. Hume, *Treatise*, II,III,III, p. 415.

82. Livingston, *Common Life*, pp. 38-9, 72.

83. Hume, *Treatise*, III,II,II, p. 493.

84. Ibid., III,II,II, pp. 496-7.

85. Ibid., III,II,I, p. 484.

86. Ibid., III,II,IV, pp. 533-4.

87. Ibid., III,II,II, pp. 490-91, 497-8.

88. Davie, "Berkeley, Hume. . .Scottish Philosophy", p. 52; Livingston, *Common Life*, pp. 65, 70-2, 89.

CHAPTER V

POLITICAL THEORY I: BRITISH POLITICS AND IDEOLOGY

> Extremes of all kinds are to be avoided and tho' no one will ever please either faction by moderate opinions, it is there we are most likely to meet with truth and certainty.[1]

In the closing paragraph of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume repeated his earlier image of the scientist of man as a moral anatomist, who straight-forwardly records human beings as they are found. The moral painter, by contrast, uses imagination to enhance the depiction of the human subject into a more graceful object, what ought to be. Yet the two functions, though different, are not opposite; they have a natural affinity. The anatomist is in a position to advise the painter with exact knowledge of the subject, so that the painter's production may be both elegant and accurate. This is how Hume wished for his study of human nature to be used, as the scientific foundation underlying specific practical applications of ethics in common life that it may be "more correct in its precepts and more persuasive in its exhortations."[2] Such a practical science as Hume envisioned could not be achieved in controlled laboratory experiments but only extrapolated from experience in natural settings, "in the common course of the world".[3]

The early years of eighteenth century England were characterized by intense political ferment. Since the political turmoil of the previous century, the 1688 Revolution, and acts of Parliament such as the Bill of

Right (1689) and the Act of Settlement (1701), the political rules known collectively as the British constitution had changed. The limits to the power of the monarch and the rights of Parliament were now codified into law, "a more regular plan of government" as Hume put it. The details, however, of how such a limited monarchy was to be administered were still unsettled early in the century. The twenty-one years of Whig ministry (1721-1742) under Robert Walpole were a period of transition in which the pattern of modern British administration and politics gradually took form. It was also a period of great political tension since there was inevitably divergent opinion about what the pattern should be. Political issues evoked high passion and hot debate. Abrasive though the debate was, it polished a durable and flexible system, one able to keep a balance in a nation of divided opinion.[4]

As an observer of the political scene during this time of noisy transition, Hume was especially interested in applying his empirical theory to the political aspects of the science of man. The ability of the new constitution to hold a balance between the extremes was not at all so clear at the time. The vehemence and polarity of political debate seemed constantly to threaten instability or worse, civil strife. Dogmatic and intolerant theory, often hiding plain self-interest, was what threatened the constitution, Hume felt. An objective standard for judging political issues was much needed. It was imperative to examine the theoretical positions of all sides with a detached scientific eye to expose the mistaken claims in the extreme positions and encourage a moderate coalition in support of the constitution. Those who write on political subjects, "free from party-rage and party-prejudice, cultivate a science which, of all others, contributes most to public utility. . ."[5]

Accordingly Hume turned his attention to the writing of political essays when he returned to the family estate at Ninewells after the publication of the *Treatise* in 1739 and 1740. The resulting *Essays, Moral and Political*, were published in 1741 and a second volume in 1742.[6] The political context of the essays was the furious public debate surrounding the fall of Robert Walpole's Whig ministry in 1742 after twenty-one years in office. The year of the Jacobite rebellion, 1745, Hume spent in seclusion as the tutor to a non-compos marquis and writing more political essays.[7] "Of the Original Contract", "Of Passive Obedience" and "Of the Coalition of Parties" examined the theoretical and historical claims made by both Whig and Tory, found both to be partly right and partly flawed.

Though Hume's criticism of Whig contract theory attracted the most attention and he was most commonly labeled a Tory, he had no interest in returning to old forms of authority. Far from being a backward-looking apology for absolute monarchy, the philosophical essays were intended, as Forbes pointed out, to be a progressive science of politics in post-revolution England.[8] By close criticism of party theory and by looking at the facts of British constitutional history, Hume hoped to soften the extremes of ideology with that "tincture of skepticism" that proportions belief according to the evidence. He found underlying principles which were flexible enough to reflect current realities without falling into the extremes of reactionism, complacency or fearful suspicion that the gains made after the Glorious Revolution were constantly in danger of being undone.

The political essays repeated and expounded upon themes first mentioned in Book III of the *Treatise*, which were, in turn, enlarged upon with more factual detail in the *History of England*. The first of

these themes, which will be the main subject for this chapter, was Hume's wish to identify the mistakes of political theory based on Cartesian rationalist forms. An incorrect theoretical foundation led to mistaken conclusions about human nature, politics and economics. Mistaken ideology, Hume felt, was responsible for much of the high emotion and fanatacism in the political rhetoric of the day. The polarization of political debate based on dogmatic adherence to false premises threatened the stability of that form of government which, if not perfect, was at least "the most entire system of liberty that was ever known amongst mankind"[9]

The second theme, which will be discussed in the following chapter, was Hume's wish to correct the mistakes of philosophy by making the study of politics more empirical. Hume's science examined human nature as it really is, and human activity as it actually operates in its social and historical matrix. His explanation of political institutions was in the form of a natural history; its two main frameworks of analysis were psychology and history. Human institutions were devised to make compromises between the extremes of human nature. Justice and government developed through a long process of adjustments to the shifting needs of a slowly changing society. The job of the political theorist was to examine the historical development of an institution such as the English constitution and then to infer the underlying standards with governed the process of its development. The keynotes of Hume's political science were naturalism and the historical and dialectical process of assimilation and adaption based on utilitiy.

The specific issues in the political essays were: (1) the ideological nature of parties and what role they play in the mixed

Constitution; (2) whether the origin of the English Constitution was by original contract in the ancient Saxon constitution or by the gradual development of political consciousness and institutions; (3) the dualities of human nature, especially liberty vs. authority; (4) mercantilist vs. liberal economics; free societies produce greater wealth, which rather than bringing corruption and the downfall of republics as in classical theory, Hume reinterpreted to be the source of enlarged intelligence in general and raised political consciousness in particular.

In the preface to the original volume of essays Hume expressed the hope they would dampen "this party rage" and be found acceptable to moderates of either party.[10] Where there was liberty of thought there was sure to follow divergent opinion, and a society devoted to liberty must develop a more tolerant attitude toward dissent. England was not so far removed from the time when to be in opposition to the government (the king) was tantamount to treason. Just as the patterns of the new form of government were still in transition, so was the concept of a loyal opposition. The moderation Hume called for entailed the notion of toleration, that people of opposing views could nevertheless work together in a mixed form of government.

"That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science" was not a quantitative methodology, but some maxims Hume had extrapolated from history to put the Walpole debates in perspective. He began with the general principle that the influence of legal and governmental institutions is so strong and regular that its effects on a society can form a basis for causal conclusions. That is, the social scientist, trying to explain the political events or opinions in a society may point to institutions as

causal factors. The new Constitution had institutionalized the rule of law. This had the advantage of making good administration independent of the will or administrative ability of rulers. If the constitution of a free government has been well formed, with adequate checks and controls, it continues to function even in the hands of bad (self-interested) administrators. The public good does not depend on private virtue, but on good laws. Thus the greatest care should be given to providing a good system of laws for public administration.[11]

An observer, adopting a coolly philosophical attitude, could see past the partisan frenzy and realize that truth, overstatement and hidden motivations could be found on both sides. Hume pointed out contradictions in their arguments. "If our Constitution be really that noble fabric, the pride of Britain, the envy of our neighbors. . ."it could never have permitted a weak or wicked minister to govern for twenty years when opposed by the best minds of the nation who had full liberty of tongue and pen to mold public opinion and influence parliament. On the other hand, if the minister really was as wicked as he was represented, then the constitution must be very faulty and deserve collapse so that a new one could be constructed.[12]

If the opposition party found fault with the existing ministry, they had every right to say so and attempt to unseat it at the next election, but to take uncompromising stands or to fear that the lack of ability or virtue of a minister endangers the constitution carried the argument too far. True public spiritedness would better be demonstrated, not by zealously trying to destroy the opposition, but by understanding what is true and false in the theoretical foundations of both sides and coming to a moderate *modus vivendi*. The English constitution as it had

evolved, was a sturdy and flexible fabric, able to withstand occasional mismanagement, or a change of ministry without crumbling.[13]

Through the rest of the 1740's Hume's correspondence shows he wrote more essays, condensed the *Treatise* into the two *Enquiries*, and began notes for the projected history.[14] He planned for the history to be a scientific inquiry into the origins of the English Constitution, to counteract the strongly ideological party histories that had been the norm since the constitutional turmoil of the previous century. The actual writing began in 1752 when he was appointed Keeper of the Advocates Library in Edinburgh. The same year the *Political Discourses* were published. Of these, seven of the twelve were on economics, and considered such topics as "Of Money", and "Of the Balance of Trade" from the same psychological and historical perspective as his other inquiries. They contained all the features of classical economics as Adam Smith later acknowledged in *The Wealth of Nations*.[15] In 1758 the collected essays were published together under the title, *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary*, which form they have generally maintained since.

The Mistakes of Ideology

Hume's criterion for true philosophical inquiry was knowledge confirmable by experience in the course of ordinary life. The source of mistaken philosophy, he felt, was the Cartesian rational system which took the logic of mathematics for its criterion of reality. Cartesian thinking in the form of such theoretical constructs as natural law, natural rights and an original social contract, was influential in much

of the social theory of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, an influence which Hume hoped to replace with true philosophy, which is empirical. Natural law concepts were based on the idea that the true social and political order is to be found in nature, just as the orbits of planets, and are timeless truths to be deducted by pure reason, independent of any historical process.[16] The theory of both parties had reference to such timeless absolutes, the Tories' indefeasible right, and the duty of obedience as well as the Whigs' natural rights of life, liberty, and property.

History and other categories of fact knowledge were virtually eliminated by pure Cartesian rationalism. Mere facts must be doubted because they could never be as certain as the logical perfection of mathematics. The result for history, as with fact knowledge in general, was inevitably skepticism, as Hume pointed out in the *Treatise*. Historical skepticism was rampant.[17]

The result for political theory was even more dangerously wrongheaded. Hume regarded true political theory to be the law-like generalizations of principle from existing societies obtained by Newtonian induction from the facts of history. Thus existing rulers held authority by virtue of rules and precedents developed throughout the history of that society. Rationalist theory, embraced as it often was by those who wanted to change the rules for determining authority, held that established order was inauthentic. The "real" authority is to be found in rational constructs like Locke's libertarian state of nature which he defined as "Men living together according to reason, without a common superior on earth. . .But though this be a state of liberty, yet

it is not a state of license. . . The state of nature has a law of nature to govern it."[18] In this naturally virtuous state of nature every person, nevertheless had to defend his own rights and property, and therefore found it expedient to band together to form a social contract to protect property.

Cartesianism in politics leads to what Livingston calls "metaphysical rebellion", that is the idea that the existing, historically developed order is inauthentic whereas the rationally perfect ideal order is the real and authentic.[19] Metaphysical rebellion is the ideological basis for actual political rebellion. What Descartes said of the philosophical order can just as well be said for the political order, "I know no better remedy than absolutely to raze it to the ground in order to raise a new one instead".[20] The new order would be rationally perfect, and independent of the old historically developed one. Descartes specifically admonished that his prescription for philosophy should not apply to politics, but so useful a concept was not by-passed by others.

The compelling idea of replacing old philosophy with liberating new ideas was soon translated into English political thought during the tumultuous seventeenth century. Writers such as Milton, Harrington, Sidney and especially John Locke, defined a philosophical liberalism which opposed the hereditary and divine right principle of monarchy and all the accumulated tradition of monopolistic and mercantilist restrictions on commerce. Their political theory postulated that natural law prescribed government by consent of the governed and was founded on an original social contract and the natural rights of man.

Metaphysical principles, in the form of the ideologies of liberty and equality did intrude violently into politics in the great revolutions that followed. Whether ideas caused the rebellions or whether the ideas were invoked because they suited the purposes of the rebels is a debatable issue of historical cause. Hume thought the two were interactive, with the greater weight put on ideas.

> . . . though men be much governed by interest; yet even interest itself, and all human affairs, are entirely governed by opinion . . . The tide has run long and with some rapidity, to the side of popular government.[21]

Besides the Lockean idea of original rationality was another assumption about human nature that was equally unsound -- original virtue. The Glorious Revolution of 1688 and the American Revolution of 1776, according to the liberal or Whig view of reality, were held to be restorations of the natural and ancient right of liberty, understood to be a timeless absolute, but which had been usurped by a corrupt monarchy. Remove the evil of the old irrational and authoritarian order and the authentic, rational, virtuous and autonomous citizen would would be freed from his chains to create the virtuous republic.

The notion of a revolution as the restoration of an original virtue, that has become lost, comes from a second source in the ideology of liberty. The republican theory of the Italian city-states, with roots back to Aristotle's *res publica*, and defined in the Italian Renaissance by Machiavelli and Guicciardini was predicated on virtue. Italian civic humanist theory required a perfect unity of all citizens in the belief that private interest was the same as the public interest. Unity of opinion was necessary to protect the republic from external despotism or internal corruption. To prevent conquest or corruption, each citizen

must put the common good before his particular good as a precondition for all the others to do the same thing. The moral autonomy of the community-minded citizen was at once the source of virtue, and at the same time, dependent on it.[22]

Examine the assumptions of ideology, Hume recommended, by looking at the reality of human nature, the way an anatomist would study it. People are not perfectly rational nor perfectly virtuous, so that ideologies that presuppose such perfection are destined to fail. Locke's libertarian state of nature governed only by the natural law, but in which property nevertheless needs defending in a social contract is inconsistent within itself and with reality. The republic predicated on virtue is likewise unreal. "All Plans of government, which suppose great reformation in the manners of mankind, are plainly imaginary".[23] If, Hume observed, humanity were so perfectly just that they always "abstain from the properties of others"; if they were so wise that they perfectly understood what their real interests were, then there would never have been a need for any governmental authority other than mutual consent.[24] People could live in perfect liberty. But the reality is not like that. The mistake is to consider liberty and virtue as moral absolutes instead of social conventions for mediating the dualities of human nature. Natural humanity is made up of both selfish and social tendencies, reason and passion. Human government is the synthesis which reflects and mediates the dualities.

When the psychological, social and historical origins of political concepts such as liberty, justice, and equality are not understood, Hume observed, it is tempting to suppose that perfect virtue and rationality

might write the rules differently. During the Civil War and Protectorate, religious enthusiasts determined to replace traditional social order with the theocratic principle that dominion is founded in grace, that is the rules of justice would insure that the greatest possession goes to the most virtuous. This sounds like perfection if only people were capable of perfect virtue. But as people really are, the result was dissolution of the bonds of society and the horrors of war and persecution. Exactly what constitutes perfect merit is obscure and the source of conflict, not to mention that self conceit confuses virtue with self-interest.

Utopian communities, for example, in the first blush of their enthusiasm, often experiment with communal property. But experience of disguised self-interest eventually force such "unprudent fanatics" to reinstate the idea of property and justice. Perfect equality in the distribution of property looks very attractive, but is specious. It is impracticable and destructive to society for several reasons: the different abilities of individuals soon make the distribution unequal again; by checking the virtue of industry, the whole society will soon be reduced to indigence; the inquisition necessary to enforce it would require so much authority it would soon degenerate into a tyranny. What looks good at first appearance, Hume concluded, can be unworkable. Rationally perfect libertarian and egalitarian schemes of government are predicated on a rational and selfless perfection that people do not possess. To plan forms of government and write good laws, it is essential to understand human psychology and its cultural and historical context.[25] The less natural the supporting principles of a society are, the more difficulty the legislator will have in cultivating them. It is

better to "comply with the common bent of mankind; and give it all the improvement of which it is susceptible".[26]

For Hume, purely rational thinking, independent of social and historical process is not the way people form their judgments of reality in their moral (social) world. Customary habits of thinking, cultural tradition, and ideological fashion (the climate of opinion) are taken to be just as authentic as mathematical propositions. The standard of judgment in the moral world consists of the custom of the reflective mind making causal judgments based in past experience. It regards the facts of our experience in ordinary life as legitimate knowledge; it is time ordered and narrative. Hume criticised rational constructs such as Locke's perfect state of nature, natural law and social contract, because they failed to understand the historical and social development of political institutions. False premises led to false conclusions. Such faulty reasoning could be found in the theoretical underpinnings of both political parties and produced ideologies that Hume thought could be and were destructive to society, either through alienation from the historically developed order or dogmatic extremism, which is unable to compromise and thus threatens civil disturbance or revolution.

In the essay, "Of Parties in General", Hume divided parties into the categories of interest and principle. Parties of interest, traditionally allegiance to a powerful family, were the oldest type. Parties of principle he regarded as a modern phenomenon which had the potential for being dangerous. When political truths lost their grounding in the social and historical order, then anyone's personal revelation could become the ideology for some fanatical faction.

The road ought to be broad enough for people reasoning from opposite principles to pass each other without undue shock.

> But such is the nature of the human mind, that it always lays hold on every mind that approaches it, and as it is wonderfully fortified by an unanimity of sentiments, so it is shocked and disturbed by any contrariety.[27]

Dogmatism and intolerance, Hume thought, were the sources of religious wars and persecutions throughout history, including the English civil disturbances of the last century.

Hume, himself sometimes caught up in the emotionalism of factional debate, often expressed irritation and concern that factional fanataçism would be the ruin of the new Constitution. Factions are the "weeds of the state" he complained.[28] Yet the objective Hume recognized that parties were not only unavoidable, but the "causes of its [the constitution's] permanent life and vigor."[29] His concept of the socially and historically developed moral conventions required the abrasive of public debate to polish the social conventions into a middle way that could be generally accepted by most people.

The new constitution, predicated on popular participation and a balance between the extremes of absolute monarchy and republic, must necessarily tolerate divergence of opinion. Though interest is very much mixed in with principle in determining party allegiance, Hume also included a psychological explanation: people of mild, peace-loving temperaments will favor the authority of monarchy, and people of bold and ambitious spirits will prefer the liberties of popular government. The balance is delicate between what the republicans would like against what the monarchists want, added to the variety of human passion and prejudice, and makes it inevitable that there will be differences of

opinion on the details of government among even the best of thinkers. Thus parties of principle are necessary to a mixed government.[30]

Yet when it came to the ideological foundations of the actual parties, Hume found much illogic, historical misrepresentation and failure to understand human psychology. If these mistakes of theory could be cleared up, much of their intolerant polarization might be overcome sufficiently that they could work together. The Whig and Tory parties had been operating for seventy years in and out of power, and political discussions were so pervasive that one couldn't avoid constant exposure. Yet Hume, who aspired to a science of politics, confessed that he was hard pressed to understand just what the nature and principles of the parties were. The difficulty "is a proof that history may contain questions, as uncertain as any to be found in the most abstract sciences."[31] Part of the difficulty was that during the long Whig ministry, the opposition Tories began to use the same country ideology that the Whigs had used when they were the minority. Thus the court and country divisions did not correspond to Tory and Whig. Nor did either party exactly fit a division based on landed versus commercial interest.[32]

The conclusion he came to was that the parties were not so far apart in their basic assumptions. Both loved liberty and accepted monarchy with constitutionally defined limits. The difference was one of degree. The Tories placed more emphasis on monarchy, basing their preference for the Stuarts on divine right ideology thus showing "How easily does the worship of the divinity degenerate into into a worship of the idol."[33] The Whigs, whose divinity was Liberty, accepted monarchy, but preferred the Protestant line as more amenable to their

priority of securing liberties. Thus the fundamental difference between the two parties was the issue of authority versus liberty.

If partisans of both sides examined their theoretical and historical claims with a scientific objectivity and gave up their inconsistent and inaccurate beliefs, then the two could find some common ground for coalition. This Hume proposed to help them do. Parties need a framework of principles to give meaning to their actions, but, "The people being commonly very rude builders, especially still, when actuated by party-zeal, it is natural to imagine that their workmanship must be a little unshapely. . . ."[34] The one party traces government to God, making it a sacrilege to change it in any way no matter how tyrannical it is. The other party imagines that government is founded entirely on the voluntary consent of its people to an original contract which they also have the right to revoke if they chose. Each of these positions contains some truth, but not in the extreme form in which the partisans insist.[35] The one places too much emphasis on indefeasible authority, the other on unlimited liberty. The true foundation of government is to be found in the middle way. People need some authority and some liberty. Good government consists of devising institutions to moderate and accommodate both on the middle ground.[36]

> In all governments, there is a perpetual intestine struggle open or secret, between Authority and Liberty; and neither of them can ever absolutely prevail in the contest. A great sacrifice of liberty must necessarily be made in every government; yet even the authority, which confines liberty, can never, and perhaps ought never, in any constitution, to become quite entire and uncontroulable [sic].[37]

Social order and government have been created by people of all countries and ages. That government is a part of God's universal plan and wise purpose cannot be denied. But God cannot be said to have

miraculoulsy intervened to extablish particular governments or royal families. A king may not claim to be His vice-regent. The same claim of right may be made for every jurisdiction of authority in the state from the king to a constable.[38]

The popular party (Whig) on the other hand claims that voluntary consent is the only foundation for government, not only at some conjectured beginning, but even in its full maturity. They further claim that a people's gift of sovereignty to a king is entirely conditional on that king providing satisfactory justice and security. Failure to do so breaks the contract and gives the people the right of revolution. Kingdoms that fit this description, Hume thought, never existed. What one finds in history are kings who regard their subjects as property, suitable for dowries and bequests, along with subjects who, when asked, affirm that they are obligated to their sovereign lord solely because they were born in his jurisdiction. Neither expresses any obligation based on consent.[39]

Granted that the origin of government in primitive groups, under exigency of war, probably involved a voluntary relinquishing of authority to some chieftan, it is preposterous to assume that consent to a contract remained the basis of sovereign authority through all succeeding generations.[40] Modern political authority is derived from established government and power supported by fleets and armies. It is also supported by the sense of utility people feel from the peace and order it provides. Once government is established, the individual citizen ceases to have a choice whether or not to live by the rules of the sovereign authority. Submission to the social order is essential, and for most people accepted by habit.[41]

The obligation to duty and obedience, claimed to be moral absolutes by Tory theory, can be carried too far. All that we know about human nature, history and our own experience convinces us there are exceptions to the rule of duty which allows resistence to the more flagrant cases of arbitrary power. History is full of tyrants and the general moral sense of mankind has always allowed for resistance from the worst cases of oppression.[42] In the case of the English mixed constitution, where the sovereign authority is divided between the king and Parliament, the duty of obedience does not extend to a case where the monarch tries to usurp the whole power of governing. The right of the people to a share of the power cannot be without some remedy in case of the king's encroachment. In such a case the constitution must be defended. [43]

The obligation to obedience rests on society's need for the peaceful possession of property. But this cannot be the ultimate end of government as property must sometimes be sacrificed in extreme emergency as with a scorched earth defense. Thus the more comprehensive end of government must be found in the Roman maxim, "The safety of the people is the supreme law." Resistance to lawful authority may then be justified in extreme cases where it is a peoples' only recourse against violent tyranny. Hume would rather, however, not define too closely just what constitutes such an emergency. It is sufficient to say that if enough people think that conditions are intolerable, they will rebel. There would never be an end to turbulence and disorder if people had the idea that they could rebel every time they disapprove of a ruler's action. In the *History*, in his discussion of Edward II's reign, Hume inserted the maxim that the discontents of the upper class and the volatility of the masses are just as much to be guarded against in a

well regulated constitution as the tyranny of princes.[44] Generally Hume is temperamentally conservative and prefers obedience and order since the social upheaval which follows in the wake of civil war is even more likely ground for violence and tyranny.[45]

History as well as logic fails to support the Whig concepts of social contract and government by the consent of the governed. Most governments now and in history, Hume asserted, were founded by conquerors or usurpers without any pretense of consent. In the continual changes of the map accompanying tribal migrations or the rise and fall of empires, there is found far more force and violence than mutual agreement. If there is any time when the will of the people is least regarded, it is at the point of establishing a new government. Then armed force or political skill decides the matter and the winner takes care to suppress any opposition until eventually the people become habituated to his and his successor's rule. Even where there are orderly elections they are commonly dominated by an elite coterie or a mob following a demagogue, which can hardly be regarded as the only legitimate foundation for government.[46]

The human need for stability and continuity forms another argument against government by consent of the governed as a sole source of legitimacy:

> Did one generation of men go off the stage at once, and the other succeed, as in the case with silkworms and butterflies, the new race, if they had sense enough to choose their government, which surely is never the case with men, might voluntarily, and by general consent, establish their own form of civil polity, without regard to the laws or precidents which prevailed among their ancestors. But as human society is in a perpetual flux, one man every hour going out of the world, another coming into it, it is necessary, in order to preserve stability in government, that the new brood should conform themselves to the established constitution. . . Some

> innovations must necessarily have place in every human institution, and it is happy where the enlightened genius of the age gives these a direction to the side of reason, liberty and justice: but violent innovations no individual is entitled to make: they are even dangerous to be attempted by the legislature:. . .and if history affords examples to the contrary, they are not to be drawn into precedent, and are only to be regarded as proofs, that the science of politics affords few rules, which will not admit of some exception, and which may not sometimes be controuled [sic] by fortune and accident.[47]

The ideology of liberty is very attractive. But Hume warned his readers not to be so enchanted with philosophical origins of government to suppose that the traditional form of sovereignty based on historical precedent must be illegitimate. Any ideology that romanticizes a revolutionary sweeping-away of the old order has little correspondence to the reality of human history and psychology. There is no greater calamity than the total dissolution of government and liberty of the multitudes to establish a new one. The resulting power struggle will be so fierce the masses will never get to choose and soon they will only want to see a powerful general at the head of an obedient army come and save them from their freedom.[48]

This is not to say that the consent of the people has no place as a proper foundation of government. Undoubtedly it is the best. But it has scarcely ever operated it history and so cannot claim the be the only foundation.[49] The ideology of liberty was a modern development. It emerged in the commercial cities of the Italian Renaissance and developed in the modern commercial societies of Holland and England when their material and intellectual conditions had evolved to the point when such concepts were useful. The Whigs' mistake in their historical interpretations was to try to read the ideology of liberty backward in time. To judge the past, when learning was more limited, political

institutions cruder and the constitution irregular and unevenly applied, by the present standard of the rule of law and limited monarchy was to misrepresent the past.

In the essay "Of the Coalition of Parties" Hume proposed to look at the history of the constitutional struggle of the previous century with the same objective moderation as the critique of the ideology. In it were the main outlines of his historical interpretation of English constitutional development so that it may be read as an abstract of the *History*, or at least the political theme of the Stuart volumes. This essay was also an example of the dialectical structure that may frequently be found in Hume's writing, that is, the moderating synthesis of the two previous essays, "Of the Original Contract" and "Of Passive Obedience". Hume did not mean his essays to be polemical tracts aimed at decimating the opposition. They were meant to enhance a spirit of coalition by cooling hot controversy and looking at the issues from a cool philosophical distance. He represented the positions of both sides with eloquence, and also criticised both. That is why, by selective attention, it was so easy to find statements that made Hume look like either a Whig or a Tory, and why partisans of each thought he belonged to the opposition. Hume was trying to find the higher philosophical perspective from which to judge the claims of both parties.

Hume first summarized the viewpoint of the popular party, later called Whig in this way: the rights of mankind are sacred above the rights of authority and that the protection of liberty is worth great sacrifice. Kings will inevitably make every attempt to expand their authority and only the vigilance of people and parliament stand between liberty and tyranny. They also asserted that the move to restrict the

king's authority was not a dangerous innovation, but only the return of rights enjoyed in previous ages under the ancient constitution. It was to this noble vision that England owed its liberty and likely also its learning, industry, commerce and naval power.[50] Though it was more highly developed in the *History*, this condensed Hume's contention that the development of political consciousness and the drive for self-determination in both religion and politics had gradually evolved as the the feudal economy declined and the commercial economy developed.[51] So that as distasteful as he found the fanatacism, turmoil, and bloodshed that resulted in the eventual constitutional changes, he saw them as elements in a longer process and justified in time because they brought about the rule of law and a constitution of divided power.[52]

At the onset of the Civil War the happy consequences that eventually developed were not known and the royalists had some equally reasonable arguments in support of their side. They could argue that reason is too uncertain and open to controversy to be a stable base for government; besides that the only basis traditionally known to humanity is authority and precedent. Dissolve these and you dissolve all social bonds and permit the unlicensed pursuit of self interest. Innovation is always dangerous, no matter how attractive the expected result appears.[53]

Hume disapproved of the rather crude and polemical way the Whigs represented history to justify that outcome, suggesting he observed, that deep down they knew that their innovation was dangerous and needed the idea of return to ancient practice to give it legitimacy.[54] The Whig historians did themselves no honor to pretend that royal prerogative had never had legitimacy. Hume thought that the facts of

English history sufficiently established that the Whig vision of legally limiting the royal authority was well founded, even though there were arguments to be made for the other side which the historian should have the honesty to point out.[55]

The English constitution, Hume thought, like all human institutions had always been in a continual process of change. He identified four main periods prior to the modern mixed constitution: ancient (Briton and Saxon), Norman feudal, the medieval charters, and the Tudors.[56] Though the English always had a concept of limited royal authority, there is no evidence that in early times the idea of limits were supported by regular and legal institutions. Prior to the Magna Carta there was little likelihood that a house of commons existed at all; it certainly had no check that protected the people from royal tyranny. What checks there were on kings were far more dependent on conditions and the varying political and military abilities of the kings in their struggles with the barons.[57]

What had been irregular excercises in prerogative by the medieval kings, the Tudors were able to consolidate into a very strong authority by expanding their administrative and legal jurisdictions. Yet it was precisely because of the extension of the royal system of justice (though it was arbitrary) which provided the measure of peace and uniformity that provide the conditions necessary for commerce.[58] In turn, the developing the commercial economy gave strength to the developing commercial class which had its representation in the Commons. In time, the commercial interests began to feel the need for freedom from arbitrary practices, especially in the granting of monopolies, and the spirit of liberty began to rise.[59]

The Stuarts inherited the throne, and also they thought, the same prerogatives the Tudors had practiced. But they were foreigners, "less dreaded and less beloved" and did not perceive that political skill was a large part of the Tudors' power.[60] They also did not perceive that the ideological climate was changing. The Stuarts ruled when opinion of what the constituion should be was changing. Had they been politically astute and flexable, they could have given in on some points of their prerogative in order to save the rest, but they thought in absolute rather than pragmatic terms.[61] Meanwhile, the old rules that the Stuarts were trying to live by were not serving the needs of a growing portion of the populace, and the clamor for change eventually became overpowering.

> The utmost that could be inferred is that the constitution of England was, at that time, an inconsistent fabric, whose jarring and discordant parts must soon destroy each other and from the dissolution of the old, beget some new form of civil government, more uniform and more consistent.[62]

While the old rules were being rejected and the new ones not yet established, the Stuarts had neither the wit nor temperament to negotiate and compromise in the formation of a new constitution.[63] Hume's characterization of the evolution of the constitution was not as the Whig historians had it, a continuous battle between good and evil, liberty and authority as absolutes. Instead it had the character of a dialectic of history, each age developing it's own equlibrium between liberty and authority, building up one or the other until it pushed to an extreme and began to swing the other way.

During the century when the old constitution was declining, and a new one taking form, there was discordance and discontinuity in the way people understood their political experience. It is little wonder that

parties formed, the royal party devoted to the old way of thinking about authority, and the popular party advocating the new. Hume himself thought it would have been difficult at the time to decide which was right. The popular party had the opinion of right on their side, based on the ideology of liberty and an interest in freeing the restrictions on their form of worship and on commerce. The other side had the legitimacy of established practice in its favor. The only rule of government known in the past was present practice, which meant that at the time the royal party appeared more solid and legal.

It was experience of the consequences that made it possible for Hume to look back and decide that the experience of the last one hundred years proved the arguments of the Whigs better founded. The libertarian movement, first of religion and then of civil government, though it was an innovation at first and its legitimacy therefore questionable, had been justified by subsequent events. The spirit of liberty, Hume felt, had done much to enlarge toleration and encourage humane sentiments without overstepping the limit of proper respect to monarchy, nobility and ancient institutions.[64]

The accession of William of Orange to the throne, though it generated much controversy at that time, had with the succession of three more princes acquired sufficient authority to be accepted as lawful. Long possession was Hume's first rule of lawful authority, and success in maintaining it for long enough time, conveyed legitimacy backward.[65] Hume concluded that now the authority of present practice belonged to the constitution and Settlement and that fact should be accepted by all. Acquiescence to the present establishment and a sprit of coalition between the parties would be far better served if both

parties moderated the ways they represented events of the past.[66]

Hume's political science was directed at what he regarded as the primary practical issue of his time, the need for a stable coalition in support of the mixed constitution to prevent further rebellion. The political essays, therefore, emphasized the role of the confrontation of principles and parties, more than economic and social factors. In the later economic essays (discussed in the next chapter) and the *History* economics joined political institutions as a powerful causative force in civilizing the mind. The need for order in a commercial society taught people to curb their excessive passion and live within limits, and thereby determining the direction that the flow of English history took.

A scientific and dispassionate study of history, Hume thought, was the antidote to party polemics and the method for abstracting the true science of politics from the facts of human existence. He was much influenced by Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique*, and continuously worked to establish empirical criteria for historical fact at a time when the usual standard was prophetic revelation and Biblical truth or party apology.[67] He revised the *History* throughout his lifetime as new documents were made available (he applied for admission to the British Museum reading room, two months before it opened in 1759).[68] He also recognized that his own assumptions were Whiggish as he reported in a letter while making revisions that he was trying to get past the "plaguy prejudices of Whiggism."[69] This statement was usually taken to mean that that Hume had turned Tory. It is more likely that Hume was trying to recognize, examine, and objectify his own assumptions.

Hume's effort to make a moderate and dispassionate critique of

political issues and party doctrine were not viewed by his critics as objective or scientific. The doctrinaire seemed to have little concept of a detached philosophical viewpoint above party. Though his critique was directed to both parties, it was the Whigs, whose ideology had attained the status of unquestioned orthodoxy, who complained the loudest that Hume had laid hands on their sacred cows. He was known for little else than his critique of Whig social contract theory. He was labeled a Tory skeptic and for over a century thereafter his political theory was dismissed on the automatic assumption that it was negative and destructive.[70]

Attempts to categorize Hume by party label are tricky and probably should be avoided. The exact meanings of Whig and Tory, court and country, were difficult to pin down, and shifted over time. Furthermore Hume made statements defending some and attacking other parts of each of these positions. His economic theory, for example, defended a commercial, free market economy which could make him seem "court" but then he was adamant in his opposition to public credit and also spoke of the virtue of a house, a bit of land and a family, which made him seem "country." In his *History*, he had a sympathetic understanding (if not always approving) of the motives of historical figures; It was an understanding based on his acceptance of the realities of passion and self-interest and the need to balance them with their opposites, reason and institutional authority. For those who took liberty to be an absolute value, any talk of limits seemed Tory. On the other hand, Hume's attitude toward ideas and events was wholeheartedly in favor of legally secured civil liberties, freedom of inquiry, limited regal authority and the Protestant Settlement. He said of himself, "With

regard to politics and the character of princes and great men I think I am very moderate. My views of things are more conformable to Whig principles; my representations of persons to Tory prejudices."[71]

He was temperamentally very conservative and one could wonder if there would be a modern constitution if Hume's sort of moderation, respect for precedent, and distaste for violence had prevailed in the previous century. There is lacking in his version of the right of revolution, a good analysis of just why or when a person ceases to be a passive follower of precedent and decides actively to change the conditions that no longer suit needs. He made it purposely vague because too much sedition was as bad as too much repression, and in his time, he thought conditions had gone too far in the direction of liberty bordering on sedition. Yet he never advocated turning back, and he fully supported the liberties that had taken so much trouble to accomplish.

What he wanted was equilibrium, the balance between freedom and order. In the particular decades in which he wrote, the victory of the Whig ideology of liberty meant that to achieve equilibrium, he thought, required leaning in the direction of order and authority. A century before or a century after, his principle of equilibrium might have led him to put more emphasis on reform. In any case, his attitudes of moderation and pragmatism were suited to the needs of his time, rather than to the issues of the previous century, and the details of his political theory really must be studied in that context.

Yet while the details of his theory are historically dependent on the political conditions of his day, the underlying principles he used for making political judgments, have an ability to generalize beyond

his particular moment in history. Processes that he saw underlying constant flow of events that exert a continuous effect are: the dualities of human nature, the formation and evolution of institutions based on the dialectic of liberty and authority, and the evolution of the mind through assimilation and adaptation of new ideas and facts guided by utility. Prime among the fixed points of his social science is the tendency of human reasoning to be based on the narrative order of experience in life (because the causal inference is based on past experience). The power of historical precedent over human minds has been demonstrated at every revolution which has sought to replace custom with rational schemes of perfection, and found it necessary to rewrite history (or try to eliminate it by eliminating those who remember). Even Jefferson, the spokesman for enlightened toleration, when the French Revolution and the Terror began to stimulate a conservative backlash, called for censorship of Hume's *History* at the University of Virginia. He sensed the ideals of the American Revolution were in danger and denounced the *History* for spreading "toryism" in the land. Jefferson's belief that history was to be used to inculcate salutary myths in people's minds was quite different from Hume's use of history as a methodology to find the general political principles that people reason by.[72] Hume wished to be a philosopher above party, advocating those social and natural sentiments that formed the "party of humankind" against vice and disorder.

Hume's Whig critics failed to understand that the pleas for objective criticism and moderation of dogmatic stands were meant to protect the consitution and settlement from further rebellion. The essays were written specifically in the context of the Jacobite

rebellion of 1745. The ideologies of both parties were out of date, still enmeshed in the previous century's religious, political and dynastic issues. Hume's message to his readers was to quit looking backward to some imagined time of perfection and instead face forward. Accept the present constitution as the best that exists anywhere.[73] The present realities of Britain's political and economic development needed moderation, toleration, a scientific and pragmatic outlook to deal with the modern world.

An appreciation of Hume's philosophical detachment in writing about the politics and history of the seventeenth century did not develop until this century and the decline in the long dominant Whig paradigm. Mossner, in his 1941 rehabilitation of Hume as historian, emphasized the forward looking aspect of his economic essays and the theme of political evolution and economic progress in the *History*. These formed an apology for and the first history of the rise of modern capitalism, the foundation upon which Adam Smith later built his *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations.*[74] Donald Forbes wrote *Hume's Philosophical Politics*, in 1975, one year short of the bicentennial of Hume's death. In it he defended the novel thesis that Hume's political science was moderate and progressive, which had not been noticed in all that time, despite Hume's many statements urging moderation of extremes, and dealing with present realities of political and economic change. Forbes characterized Hume's own political position as "scientific Whiggism" as contrasted with the doctrinaire Whiggism of party rhetoric.[75]

In a letter of February 1746 to his cousin Harry Home, he wrote that he was working on the essay "Of the Protestant Succession", "where I

treat that subject as coolly and indifferently as I would a dispute between Caesar and Pompey. The conclusion shows me a Whig, but a very skeptical one."[76] One of the problems of the casual reader is that Hume often uses the term skeptical. Those not familiar with his philosophy of mitigated skepticism seem to assume that he means it in the nihilist sense. Hume considered pure skepticism an impossibility; the human mind could not support an opinion so contrary to the consciousness of experience. What Hume advocated was a specialized, mitigated form of skepticism, that suspended belief while weighing the evidence. It was the method of science that proportioned belief to the evidence. Reasoning in this way discouraged dogmatic belief and encouraged moderation and toleration. When Hume called himself a skeptical Whig, he meant a scientific one. In the following chapter the historical, dialectical, and evolutionary themes of Hume's empirical science of politics will be considered.

ENDNOTES

1. Hume. *History*, vol. VIII, chap. LXXI, pp. 312-13.

2. Hume, *Treatise*, III,III,VI, p. 621. Also *Inquiry*, p. 19 refers to the same image.

3. Ibid., p. xix.

4. R.K. Webb, *Modern England From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, second edition (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), pp. 46-8.

5. Hume, *Essays*, p. 156.

6. Grose "History of the Editions" p. 40. Mr. Grose reports the 1741 edition was revised and reissued in 1742 along with vol. 2. Mosner in *Life* pp. 139-40, gives the date of publication as 1742.

7. Mossner, *Life*, p. 179.

8. Forbes, "Hume's Science of Politics" in *Bicentenary Papers*, pp. 49-50.

9. Hume, *History*, vol. VIII, chap. LXXI, p. 310.

10. Grose, "History of the Editions" p. 41.

11. Hume, *Essays*, pp. 98-105.

12. Ibid., pp. 107-9.

13. Ibid., pp. 108-9, 464.

14. Grose, "History of the Editions", pp. 47-8.

15. Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, there are twenty-four citations to Hume in the index.

16. Livingston, *Common Life*, p. 7.

17. Cassirer, *Enlightenment*, p. 201.

18. Locke, quoted in Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, p. 625.

19. Livingston, *Common Life*, p. 278.

20. Ibid.

21. Hume, *Essays*, p. 125.

22. J.G.A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975), pp. 74-5, 184.

23. Hume, *Essays*, p. 480.

24. Ibid., p. 450.

25. Hume, *Enquiry...Morals*, pp. 194-5.

26. Hume, *Essays*, p. 292.

27. Ibid., p. 131.

28. Ibid., p. 127.

29. Hume, *History*, vol. VI, chap. XLVIII, p. 46.

30. Hume, *Essays*, pp. 133-4.

31. Ibid., p. 138.

32. Ibid., pp. 140-3.

33. Ibid., p. 141.

34. Ibid., p. 443.

35. Ibid., pp. 143-4.

36. Ibid., p. 116.

37. Ibid.

38. Ibid., p. 444.

39. Ibid., p. 446.

40. Ibid., pp. 115-6.

41. Ibid., p. 445.

42. Hume, *Treatise*, III,II,IX, pp. 551-2.

43. Hume, *Essays*, pp. 462-3.

44. Hume, *History*, vol. II, chap. XIV, p. 373.

45. Hume, *Essays*, p. 460-1. also in *History*, vol. VII, chap. LIX, pp. 154-5.

46. Hume, *Essays*, pp. 447-8, 450.

47. Ibid., p. 452.

48. Ibid., p. 448.

49. Ibid., p. 450.

50. Ibid., p. 565.

51. Hume, *History*, vol. III, chap. XXIII, pp. 317-19.

52. Ibid., *Essays*, p. 470.

53. Ibid., pp. 465-6.

54. Ibid., p. 446.

55. Hume, *History*, vol VIII, Chap. LXXI, p. 313.

56. Ibid., vol. V, chap. XLIV, fn. p. 407.

57. Hume, *Essays*, pp. 467-8.

58. Ibid., p. 468.

59. Hume, *History*, vol. V, chap, XLV, pp. 533-5; chap. XLVI, p. 561.

60. Ibid., p. 532.

61. Ibid., vol. VI, chap. LIII, p. 283.

62. Ibid., vol. VI, chap. XLVIII, p. 13.

63. Ibid., p. 48-9; vol. VII, chap. LIX, p. 151.

64. Hume, *Essays*, p. 470.

65. Long possession is the first rule of legitimacy, but there are others: present possession, right of conquest, inherited right of succession, or legislated right of succession. *Treatise*, III,II,X, pp. 554-566.

66. Hume, *Essays*, pp. 469-70.

67. Richard H. Popkin, "Hume: Philosophical Versus Prophetic Historian"

68. Mossner, *Life*, p. 395.

69. Quoted in Grose, "History of the Editions", *Essays*, p. 73.

70. Forbes, "Hume's Science of Politics" in *Bicentenary Papers*, p. 39.

71. Quoted in Mossner, *Life*, p. 311.

72. Craig Walton, "Hume and Jefferson on the Uses of History" in *Re-evaluation*, pp. 389-90, 400.

73. Hume, *History*, vol. III, chap. XXIII, p. 321.

74. Mossner, "Appology", p. 678.

75. Forbes, *Philosophical Politics*, pp. 42, 139-40.

76. Grose, "History of the Editions", *Essays* pp. 47-8.

CHAPTER VI

POLITICAL THEORY II: THAT POLITICS MAY BE REDUCED TO A SCIENCE

The Natural History of Government

> Nor is this reasoning merely chimerical; but is founded on history and experience.[1]

Hume aspired to a scientific description of the reality of politics as it is experienced by real people in ordinary life. His account of the origin of government was not based on philosophical constructs such as social contract and natural rights. Instead his description was in the form of a natural history of political consciousness. The history of human social organization was the product of continuous adjustments between the two extremes of human nature: self-interest and community-mindedness. The two were continuously held in a dialectic tension, the synthesis of which was the social institution of a particular community at a given time. The forms of governmental institutions developed gradually as people learned which accommodations were useful by process of trial and error, assimilation and adaptation to changing conditions. The political history of England mirrored this process of institutional adaptation. It was the record of progressive development of the constitution from an irregular and inconsistent jumble of practices to the present one with legal definitions of rights and limits. Social,

intellectual and economic progress made the defects of the old constitution apparent and a more "more enlightened age" deemed a freer and more regular plan of government necessary to meet the needs of a rapidly changing commercial society.

With Hume the idea that humankind is biological and culture is developmental and subject to naturalistic explanations, became fully explicit and consistently applied. His explanation of human reasoning was no longer religious and metaphysical, but psychological.[3] Likewise his description of the origins of government did not deduce it from a metaphysically *a priori* natural law like Locke's. Hume's laws of nature in politics were induced from observations in actual experience, present and past. The moral standards underlying political conventions could not be known without knowing their history. The social scientist was a historian, whose principles were discovered in the narrative order, a product of an ever shifting dialectic tension between interests, institutions, and the climate of opinion. The *History of England* was expressly written to trace the evolution of English political institutions through the developing awareness of the principles of civic living. The Constitution was not an abstract legal structure, but a historical one, a product of the human mind adapting to new situations with new ways to meet its needs.[4]

The origins of government were so far back in time that they were beyond the reach of the historian. Yet there was comparative information available about the social systems of the American tribes so that it was possible to guess at a naturalistic explanation. The kind of natural history explanation offered by Montesquieu, Hume, Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson for the development of government was labeled by

Dugald Stewart, a second generation Scottish philosopher, as "Theoretical or Conjectural History". This was a melding of philosophical history and philosophical sociology which extrapolated ideas of social and conceptual development from known cases. This kind of theoretical history of social development *was* the beginning of sociology, as Peter Gay emphasized.[5]

A device like a social contract is too sophisticated a concept for primitive humanity to have thought of, Hume wrote. Government began much more "casually and imperfectly."[6] The benefits of social order had to be learned by the experience of many generations, maintained by habit and changed when change was useful. The idea of a social contract in Hume's theory is at most a sort of fiction, a way of describing an interval between very primitive small groups and the first civil governments. In fact, it isn't necessary at all.[7]

The real reason that government was instituted was utility; it served human needs. Individuals are full of needs and must cooperate with each other to fill them.

> Man, born in a family, is compelled to maintain society, from necessity, from natural inclination, and from habit. The same creature, in his farther progress is, engaged to establish political society, in order to administer justice; without which there can be no peace among them, nor safety, nor mutual intercourse.[8]

A look at American tribal societies suggested how government began. Tribal groups had social organization and concepts of justice even before their groups were large or rich enough to require as complex an institution as civil government. Central authority in the form of a chief probably began in time of war. Experience in the advangage of established authority could then be applied when increased possessions

and trade made it important to have an authority to maintain internal peace and justice. This process took many generations to develop and only the increase of riches and the need for developing conventions for the peaceful settlement of property claims induced people to develop more complex social forms.[9]

It is the weakness of human nature that it may stray away from justice in pursuit of a self-interest that may be very frivolous or immediate. Therefore it is necessary to arrange society to make up for this shortcoming. Laws and magistrates are instituted to make people immediately sensible of the need to live by the rules of equity. Thus from justice arises a new obligation, obedience, as people discover the advangage of peaceful possession that social order brings. Once the habit of obedience is established, magistrates can coax or require individuals, who are often shortsighted about what their less immediate interests are, to cooperate on projects of benefit to the whole:

> Thus bridges are built; harbors open'd; ramparts rais'd; canals form'd; fleets equiped; and armies disciplin'd; every where, by the care of government, which, tho' compos'd of men subject to all human infirmities' becomes by one of the finest and most subtle inventions imaginable, a composition, that is, in some measure, exempted from all these infirmities.[10]

Dialectic and Synthesis: The Harmony of the Whole

An empirical science of politics based on the realities of human nature must necessarily deal with paradoxes and diversity. Many issues of human knowledge are paradoxical, they contain within them two contrary principles, both conceivable in the mind and neither able to

destroy the other. Hume's clear grasp of philosophical issues uncovered several such dialectical antitheses. He once wrote of himself, "My enemies, you know, and, I own, even sometimes my friends, have reproached me with a love of paradoxes."[11] The mind-body issue in the problem of knowledge is one such, the one Livingson identified as the "grand dialectic" of the *Treatise*. Hume's synthesis was mind and body: the philosophic mind must necessarily have a grounding in common consciousness and experience.[12] This is the kind of synthesizing explanation that incorporates an unreducable duality into a both/and explanation rather than an either/or explanation which requires ignoring part of experience.

A grand dialectic may similarly be identified in Hume's social philosophy: self/other, and the related liberty/authority. This dialectic lies as a substructure in every discussion of human nature. His discussion of marriage and divorce for example contains this passage:

> If it be true, on the one hand, that the heart of man naturally delights in liberty,. . .it is also true on the other, that the heart of man naturally submits to necessity, and soon loses an inclination, when there appears an absolute impossibility of gratifying it. These principles of human nature, you'll say are contradictory: But what is man but a heap of contradictions?[13]

Contradictory principles, he continued, do not cancel each other out, but are always held in a kind of tension, one or another dominating as circumstances allow. The same theme of liberty versus authority in perpetual struggle is the heart of his theory of parties and the balance of the constitution. It also is a major theme in the *History*. English political consciousness, reflected in the constitutions of the various

ages, developed through the interplay between the desire for liberty and submission to authority, which rose and fell in a shifting balance that changed as circumstances changed.[14]

It is the interaction between prosocial versus antisocial human nature that produced social institutions from the beginning. "The common situation of society is a medium between these extremes".[15] Government is a device to convince citizens to identify their private, short term interests with the common, long term good; it is an edifice of reason built on a foundation of human passion. The moderation of extremes and the creation of working coalitions such as he recommended for the parties, was more than a plea for political calm, it was his way of doing philosophy. The moderate compromise was the solution to antitheses that could not otherwise be reasoned away. It is also the only way a plural society of individuals each wanting self-determination can live together.

How to form a stable government balancing republican liberty with monarchical authority was the political problem of the age in England. The received theory of republics made two mistakes. It took liberty to be an absolute, rather than relational quality derived from human nature and history. It also predicated the success of republican government on the utopian virtue of its citizens to give up their own interests for a perfectly homogenous public interest (c.f.Rousseau's General Will). The history of real republics, however, added to observed political behavior during the century of English constitutional turmoil, created a more pessimistic impression on some social philosophers. Much of the century's debate over virtue and corruption was the expression of anxiety, over how the darker side of human nature could be reconciled

with the wish for liberty and self-determination.

The solution to this paradox was found in two concepts which were beginning to be be seen in the eighteenth century in the works of Montesquieu, Bernard Mandeville and Pope's "Essay on Man". One was that it was possible to form a good government without presupposing perfect individuals. The second was that the method of counterpoise, the balance of competing interests, was the way to accomplish this.[16] Hume made use of the counterpoise of interest when he discussed the issue of whether Parliament has lost its independence. In judging forms of government where power is distributed, one must look at whether the division of power carefully balances the interest of each power-holding group. Hume argued that the the crown, which had lost much of its prerogative, needed to have some influence with Parliament to keep the balance. This influence could be called whatever one pleased, including corruption and dependence, but some degree of interdependence was essential to the everyday working of mixed government. Total independence was not possible. Parliamentary dependence was not in every degree an infringement on liberty.[17]

The counterbalance of opposites appeared in several forms in Hume's theory of republics. He began the "Idea of the Perfect Commonwealth" with the contrast between change and continuity. The wise magistrate "will bear a reverence to what carries the marks of age; and though he may attempt some improvements for the public good, yet will he adjust his innovations as much as possible to the ancient fabric. . ."[18] In planing a republic, it was necessary to expect that people will behave in a self interested way and devise a structure that will balance out the diversity of interest. His most startling assertion, contrary to

the classical theory, was that a large state will form a more stable republic than a small one, since there will be wider diversity of competing interests, thus making it more difficult for any one group to predominate. The ideal republic will be governed by Senators and magistrates filtered through several layers of assembly, (parish, county and district) each to elect from their number the representative to the next highest. This distributed power widely and on several levels which worked to produce a more refined voice of the people and the necessity of compromise to produce a centering balance.[19]

> All free governments must consist of two councils, a lesser and a greater; or, in other words a senate and people. If the people debate, all is confusion: If they do not debate, they can only resolve; and then the senate carves for them. Divide the people into many separate bodies; and then they may debate with safety, and every inconvenience seems to be prevented.[20]

Progress and Refinement in the Arts

Half of each of the main dualities that Hume sought to unite into holistic explanations, mind/body and self/other, were considered by a largely Christian society to be morally inferior. The result was a tendency to repress and deny those stigmatized aspects of the sensory, self-interested body, and to emphasize rational and virtuous other-mindedness. This was also true of another set of opposites, luxury versus austerity. Rapid commercial development was giving rise to public anxieties that revealed themselves in the debate over agrarian values (community-mindedness) versus commercial values (individualism) represented respectively in the country and court viewpoints.

The classical Italian model of statecraft, which was incorporated into Whig/Country political theory, held that luxury was the enemy of civil society, making the citizen too indolent to fight, too soft and selfish to work for the public good. That classical/Whig ethical corollary, the Protestant work ethic, contained within it a moral quandary and a dialectical process; the very virtues of industry and thrift that created good republican citizens also created the wealth and luxury that led to their destruction. The dread of corruption expressed so frequently in the eighteenth century contained an element of existential fear of individualism. Because the Country advocates thought that the morally autonomous citizen required a land-based society, they tended to see history as moving away from the virtue of agrarian independence toward the corruption of commerce which only heroic intervention could reverse. In its vocabulary of corruption and return to first principle (i.e. the ancient constitution), the language of the Country outlook was that of the Italian Civic Renaissance.[21]

Hume, then Adam Smith, Adam Furguson and others of the Scottish school, helped to bring the repressed passion of self interest, the sensory love of luxury and the need for commerce into consciousness and re-evaluate them in more positive terms. Instead of seeing economic growth in terms of an inevitable apocalypse of corruption and decay, they thought in terms of a dialectic. Societies are always in a process of progress or decay, always in transition, never in perfect balance. The Scots were not dismally apocalyptic, nor unrealistically utopian. They accepted duality and creative tension between reason and passion, authority and liberty, land and commerce, conservation and progress. These contradictions of a plural world could be made to accommodate each

other through social institutions. Though a final harmony could not be achieved, they thought in terms of progress. As the human mind gathered and assimilated more experiences, it got smarter at coping with its needs.[22] Progress in commerce, intellect and social institutions working interactively form the thesis of the economics essays, and are the main interpretive framework to the *History of England*.[23]

In the *Enquiry Concerning The Principles of Morals*, Hume first redefined luxury, to "regulate anew our moral as well as political sentiments." Any luxury was long thought to be a vice, a source of corruption, the cause of faction, civil war and the loss of liberty. Rather, he proposed, that luxury be regarded as a "refinement on the pleasures and conveniences of life."[24]

The effects of luxury and trade were improved material and psychological well-being. Commerce enlarged peoples' minds by giving them more objects, activities, and challenges to feed upon. Intellect, economy, and social institutions developed interactively, each one contributing to the progress of the others. This development is the theme of the essays "Of Commerce" and "Of Refinement in the Arts", the first presenting a psychology of economic activity and the second a natural history of the progress of manufacturing and intellect.[25]

The move from hunting and gathering to agriculture and manufacturing allowed the creation of surplus goods which could be used either privately to make life easier or publicly to maintain a military society. "Here therefore seems to be a kind of opposition between the greatness of the state and the happiness of the subject".[26] The ancient republics of Sparta and Rome maintained an unusually high level of public spirit by maintaining a constant state of alarm through frequent

warfare. The public and military spirit of the classical age restricted commerce and luxury. What caused their decline was not the gradual slide into luxury and sloth, it was bad institutions.[27] Modern sovereigns would be hard pressed to require as much self denial as the classical republics did. Rather than trying to deny human nature, the modern sovereign authority or legislator would serve public needs better by following the "natural course" and harnessing self interest in a both/and sort of synthesis. "Industry, arts and trade increase the power of the sovereign *and* the happiness of the subjects"[28]

Hume explained his psychology and sociology of economic activity in this way: "Everything in the world is purchased by labor; and our passions are the only cause of labor".[29] Give people the means for satisfying their passion by allowing the manufacture of goods and the result will be, not only more goods, but also encouragement of habits of industry. In peacetime the produce of labor can go to consumer goods, and a portion can be taxed for the common defence. Manufacturing is a sort of storehouse of labor some of which may be diverted to the use of the state, without depriving the populace of necessities, which increases both the power of the state and allows material comforts to the people.[30]

The alternative to the commercial city is the military one, such as ancient Sparta, in which the citizens are so full of military zeal that they are willing to suffer great hardship for the public good. But to try to govern by principles that work against self-interested passion is too difficult to support for long. To force the laborer to work for the state for anything above subsistence is a "violent method," but "furnish him with manufactures and comodities, and he will do it of himself."

Then the surplus can be taxed for public needs since the worker is already rewarded with a more comfortable living.[31]

Hume's solution to the guns or butter dichotomy is the moderate compromise, the synthesis. If a society allows a little avarice, it serves as an incentive to industry, and as by-product, the public benefits from the surpluses produced. "The harmony of the whole is still supported; and the natural bent of the mind being more complied with, individuals, as well as the public, find their account in the observance of these maxims."[32]

This is not to say that a total absorbtion in gratification of the senses with luxury is fine. It is not. Such excess is a vice. But to eliminate all luxury in preference to austere living is to invite the opposite vice such as prevailed under the feudal system: sloth, indifference and stupidity, which diminish industry. "Let us, therefore, rest contented with asserting, that two opposite vices in a state may be more advantageous that either of them alone; but let us never pronounce vice in itself advantageous."[33]

Hume's economic, just like his political principles, were inferred from the narrative line of European history. Just as the political essays formed an outline of the interpretations he made in the *History*, so do the economics essays. In the political essays, political institutions seemed to predominate as important factor in commercial development. In "The Rise of the Arts and Sciences", he proposed as a general principle that it is "impossible for the arts and sciences to arise at first, among any people unless that people enjoy the blessings of free government" because the rule of law is necessary to secure property, and intellectual freedom.[34] And similarly, in "Of Civil

Liberty" he states a rule that commerce flourishes best in a free government.[35] In the economics essays, it was the rise of manufacturing and commerce that expanded minds, and stimulated the drive for civil liberty. Put all together in the *History*, it was an interaction of these processes that led to the development of British liberty. Political and social institutions, manners, learning, morality, commerce, arts and technology were each included as factors accounting for the improvement of English society. Economic change brought new social behaviors (industry, civility, curiosity) that caused further economic development while also transforming culture, morality and politics. Each progressive step built on the developments of the others.

From the very beginning of Hume's analysis social order and economy were linked; justice developed when there were sufficient surpluses of goods to need protecting.[36] Brought to modern times it was England and Scotland's economic development that had created the conditions for the development of political liberalism. As the feudal economy declined, the commercial economy rose and gradually allowed a development of greater personal freedom and finally civil liberty.[37] Progress in the arts grew alongside the civil spirit of liberty. Increased wealth benefited peasant as well as aristocrat, and nurtured the development of a middle class, "who are the best and firmest basis of public liberty."[38]

The increase of manufacturing and commerce produces a refinement in the liberal arts "The spirit of an age affects all the arts. . . The same age which produces great philosophers and politicians, renowned generals and poets usually abounds in skilful weavers and ship

carpenters"[39] Commercial society creates an intellectual fermentation that affects all parts of society. The more the arts are refined, the more tempers and behavior are refined, as people learn to be more social and humane. The market for luxuries improved social morality by encouraging industry and middle class civility. Better, as Stockton put it, an industrious merchant than the idle retainer of a lord.[40] Industry, knowledge and humanity are linked together ". . . and experience shows us, are found in the more polished and luxurious ages."[41]

The economic interpretation in Hume's primarily political history was cited by his good friend Adam Smith in his primarily economic history, The *Wealth of Nations*.

> Mr. Hume is the only writer who, as far as I know, has hitherto taken notice [of the fact that] commerce and manufactures gradually introduced order and good government and with them, the liberty and security of individuals.[42]

The similarity of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, to Hume's moral philosophy and his principles of political economy to Hume's essays is not surprising considering their long friendship. Smith stayed with Hume on his trips to Edinburgh; they corresponded and exchanged manuscripts. They were both influenced by Francis Hutcheson who was interested in economics and power (the Harrington thesis) and developed an early economic liberalism. It was he who first defined utility as the "greatest good for the greatest number." Adam Smith was his student at Glasgow University, and succeded him to his chair in moral philosophy.[43]

In 1776, when Hume's health was in its final decline, Smith sent him a copy of his about to be published *Wealth of Nations*. Hume returned it with his compliments and added,

> If you were here at my Fireside, I should dispute some of your Principles. I cannot think, that the Rent of Farms makes any part of the Price of the Produce, but that the Price is determined altogether by the Quantity and the Demand. . .[44]

thus anticipating Ricardo's law of supply and demand. Smith was not the only one who found Hume's essays a take-off point for further development. Malthus cited Hume, Wallace, Price and Smith as contributors to the ideas in his theory of populations. Hume's essay "Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations" noted the tendency of humans to proliferate, which if it were not checked by scarcity and necessity, would double the population every generation.[45]

Citations to Hume's economics essays are also found in Marx's *Das Kapital.* Hume's economic mechanism of moral and political development is vaguely reminiscent of the dialectic of history, though Marx completely missed the point of basing theory on human nature not ideology. Hume could have told him that there was as much chance for the perfectibility of socialist man as for the Saints of the protectorate. Furthermore, the whole concept of communal property, Hume had criticized on the grounds that it was contrary to human nature, and the historically developed conventions of justice and property. Such experiments would either fail in a short time or require tyrannical coercion to maintain.

Neither did Hume's philosophy of history have the air of a predetermined march of progress frequently found in the French Enlightenment and later in Hegel and Marx. Hume's historical causation is much more complex; the economic and social context is an important determining factor, but not the only one. There are also contingent

factors of chance and the freedom of individuals to act rationally or irrationally, morally or immorally. The characters of Hume's history act for conscious (and unconcious) reasons which the reader may compare with her own understanding of human nature and what would have been reasonable under the circumstances. Livingston calls this a moral cause explanation; it is an explanation that is understandable to other minds but not necessarily predictably determined.[46]

The issue of chance versus cause, (or liberty and necessity as discussed in the *Inquiry*) came up again in the essay, "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences". The finding of cause in history depended a lot on the ingenuity (and subjectivity) of the scholar, but Hume thought a general rule could, nevertheless, be applied: "What depends on 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."[47] Thus, those causes which operate on many people are the larger, less easily changed effects of institutional structure than the delicate and accidental effects of personal fancy. Thus the "domestic and gradual revolutions of a state" are more subject to causal reasoning than particular actions of the will of single characters.

The history of the English constitution was such a case of gradual revolution (i.e. evolution). Institutional development was a long process of adjustments to the gradually changing needs of society. Steps in the process were not made in order to fulfil some predetermined grand plan, but were made with no further plan than what suited present convenience. Each decision made, however, was based learned experience, the assimilation and adaptation to years of trial and error learning.

Decisions based on utility formed a sort of "invisible hand" or a "natural selection" that determined the course of social, intellectual and institutional development. Hume used neither of these terms, but they show the direction that others took using the concept of utility.

It is only afterward that the historian sees the direction that many small decisions were taking, for example in England, toward greater personal and civil liberty. In the *History*, Hume saw both the Protestant Reformation and the Puritan struggles to limit the powers of the king as important steps in developing civil liberties. But the long-term consequences in the development of individual liberties and toleration were not foreseen nor intended at the time. The participants in those great events had no further thought than their immediate need to have their own forms of worship and church administration accepted. This slow, and largely unconscious evolution of a concept such as liberty gives the historian, looking backward, a fated sense of perception, as though this progress were inevitable. But history can also teach us to be judicious, Hume concluded, as he finished the writing of his long inquiry into the origins of English liberty. It teaches us what a "great mixture of accident which commonly concurs with a small ingredient of wisdom and foresight, in erecting the complicated fabric of the most perfect government."[48]

After Hume, British social theorists dropped social contract theory, and replaced it with utility as the foundation of government and the mechanism underlying its continuous evolution.[49] Utility had been associated with science as early as Bacon, Descartes and Locke, all of whom justified science on the basis of its usefulness to humanity. Progress and science were to the Enlightenment the learning of ever

better ways of living. Soon there developed a school of thought that self-consciously applied utility as a criterion for judging social institutions and proposing reforms. Jeremy Bentham, who cited Hume as his inspiration, systematized utilitarian thought in England.[50] But the Utilitarians carried their program of democratic reform and calculations of the pleasure or pain of individuals to lengths that would have made Hume uncomfortable. Hume saw utility behind a mostly unconscious process operating in history, but consciously to carry it forward as a reform program was fraught with dangerous unintended consequences. Not that Hume was opposed to reforms, but that he thought that they happened more by gradual evolution than by rational plan. Neither did Hume think, as Bentham and Mill did, that the good of society was the sum of the pleasures of individuals; rather he felt that individuals gradually learned that a consideration for the good of the whole created the stability that made the enjoyment of their individual goods possible.[51]

The utilitarian social thought closer to Hume was better represented by Edmund Burke. This was the more conservative strain, which Coban described as "historical utilitarianism" and which was more in keeping with Hume's cautious temperament. Historical utility may be inferred from the long survival of an institution. Absolute monarchy had outlived its utility, and was changed, but the fact that monarchy lived on was proof that it had an emotional utility as well (based on the comfortable predictability of habit), a use that is not easily uncovered by rational inquiry.[52] Burke observed in the French Revolution all of the horrors that Hume had described in the English Civil War period: the dissolution of government, the breakdown of social morality, the reign of terror, the unsuccessful attempt to establish a republic of virtue

and finally the military coup. And he concluded, like Hume, that the popular opinion of legitimacy is deeply rooted in precedent and tradition.

Where Burke parted company with Hume was over the latter's secular attitude. Burke reported to Boswell that he spoke to the infidel Hume only to be polite.[53] Burke felt that tradition represented God's "divine tactic", and that to try to make society rational was to interfere with Providence. Hume limited himself to the observation that custom is the great guide of humankind and that rational schemes of perfection were not likely to work out as expected.

Exactly what Hume's influence was on the developing liberal and conservative lines of thought seems to be as problematic as the question whether he was a Whig or a Tory. He doesn't fit neatly into either category. From his point of view on the philosophic high ground he called their good and bad points as he saw them. His inquiries into causation, reason, moral judgement and the foundations of government, worked to undermine the rationalist base of Whig contract theory, (liberal ideology), by pointing out the fact of human passion and the authority of habit and tradition. Yet he resembled the developing liberal theory in its respect for liberty, property and the free market. The utilitarians who followed in the liberal line openly cited his influence though they carried the call for an active and rational program of reform further than he would have.

On the other hand, Hume resembled the developing conservative attitude in its sense of community, respect for custom and distrust of reason. But they were uncomfortable with his religious skepticism and kept their borrowings from him quiet. In the wake of the French

Revolution, they carried custom and sentiment to a romantic extreme that left little room for reason, which Hume would have thought also went too far in the other direction.[54]

That both lines of thought found useful ideas in Hume's philosophy demonstrated the success of his middle way, where he was certain that truth could be found. Reason and passion, authority and liberty, self and other; the unity that we long for is to be found in accepting that diversity exists, and may be held in a creative tension. The resulting synthesis incorporates the best points of both ways of thinking, the both/and solution. Britain eventually worked out the conventions of party government in a limited monarchy and the concept of a loyal opposition. The working coalition of parties that Hume had called for, divided on issues, but agreeing that disagreement is acceptable under the constitution, gradually came about in the century that followed.[55]

Moderation and the American Constitution

In America the same issues that motivated the court and country debates in England, land versus commerce, authority versus liberty, self versus community interest, took a different course since there was no long established court to counterbalance the predominantly republican climate of opinion. In America the main issue was which vision of republican society should be pursued: the Lockean idealized version of liberty, as represented by Jefferson, the Declaration of Independence and the Whig paradigm, or in the moderate version represented by the

Constitution and the *Federalist Papers*. The authoritarian extreme of a monarch or very strong executive had fewer adherents and their more extreme points were moderated by compromise in the Constitutional debates. That the American Constitution, which represented the moderate synthesis between liberty and authority, was eventually accepted as the pattern for the American republic was the greatest monument to Scottish common sense social philosophy in general and Hume's in particular.

When Hume was asked to write an appeal for tighter control of the American colonies in 1775, he refused, replying, ". . . I am an American in my principles, and wish we would let them alone to govern or misgovern themselves as they think proper. . ."[56] He knew one American personally. Benjamin Franklin met with him and was a guest in Hume's home on several of his diplomatic tours to Britain.[57] Their contact seemed to have been mutually beneficial. Hume hoped to have Franklin's help getting his work published in America where he hoped it would be better received than it was in England. Franklin had Hume's help getting his paper on lightning rods accepted by the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh and found political inspiration in their discussions. The two articles that Franklin proposed in the Constitutional convention of 1787 were both inspired by Hume's essay on the perfect commonwealth.[58]

Gordon Wood, in *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787*, described a sense of crisis as American political thinkers met to rework the Articles of Confederation in order to correct the difficulties that the early republican experiments had exposed. The problem was that these early attempts to found republics based on the ideologies of Lockean liberty and the classical republics of virtue pointed up how

unrealistic the ideologies were, just as Hume had said. The rhetoric of the American revolution was heavily influenced both by Locke and natural rights as well as the Whig version of classical republican thought. In simplest terms this outlook equated king, executive power, commercial wealth and corruption on one side and the People, liberty and agrarian virtue on the other. After the revolution, when the king and corruption were overthrown, the expectation was, according to this view, that republican government would itself become an instrument of reforming human nature. The ideology held that virtuous citizens would know their common Good, who their natural leaders were, and would turn from trade, luxury and individualism to agriculture, frugality, and community-interest. When this utopian vision failed to materialize, the discrepancy between the ideology and the reality forced the founders to rethink their theories of government.

Hume's last essay, "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth", seemed to be written for the Americans, though it had been published in the 1750's. He offered it circumspectly as an intellectual exercise. There was no talk about razing anything to the ground since "the common botched and inaccurate governments seem to serve the purposes of society". Who knows, "but, in some future age, an opportunity might be afforded of reducing the theory to practice, . . . by the combination of men to form a new [government], in some distant part of the world?" The first constraining factor in divising a republican constitution was human nature. "All plans of government, which suppose a great reformation in the manners of mankind, are plainly imaginary."[59] Hume's solution was to accept selfish human nature as a legitimate reality but also to build an institutional structure which would mediate its extremes.

Liberty is desirable, but must have limits. The substance of the essay, which was discussed earlier, dealt with self interested human nature by counterbalancing interests over a large territory and and dividing power into several levels of assembly.

Hume was standard reading at late colonial American colleges, as were Francis Hutcheson, Adam Smith, Lord Kames (Hume's cousin Harry Home) and Adam Ferguson. Their ideas as much as Locke informed the political thinking of the educated. James Madison in particular made insightful and creative use of Scottish thought, especially Hume's, in the Constitutional debates and in his contributions to *The Federalist Papers*. Historian Douglas Adair found a "parallel march of ideas" and a similarity of phrasing between Madison's writing in *The Federalist* and Hume's political essays. For example, Hume's critique of natural law: if men had so inflexible a regard for justice that they never touched the property of others, they would always have remained absolutely free with no political society,[60] became in Madison's *Federalist* 51 the elegant phrase, "If men were angels, no government would be necessary." *Federalist* 10 was particularly close to Hume's essays on parties and the "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth."[61]

Another contributor to the *Federalist Papers*, Alexander Hamilton, found useful ideas in Hume's essays. Hamilton was the major proponenet of a commercial America and a strong executive, which fit well with Hume, though Hume was more distrustful of public credit. The closing page of the last *Federalist*, number 85, Hamilton answered citicism about ratifying the Constitution before it had the Bill of Rights amended to it with a quotation from Hume's essay "The Rise of the Arts and Sciences" to the effect that a constitution is never completely final.

> To balance a large state or society, whether monarchical or republican, on general laws, is a work of so great difficulty that no human genius, however comprehensive, is able, by the mere dint of reason and reflection, to effect it. The judgements of many must unite in the work; experience must guide their labor; time must bring it to perfection, and the feeling of inconveniences must correct the mistakes which they inevitably fall into in their first trials and experiments.[62]

This century's historiographical debate on the issue of why the framers of the Constitution made the national government stronger and less purely democratic has gone through several phases of explanation. Most of them are predicated on the idea that the framers were an elite who shared in traditional hierarchical assumptions of the landed gentry and that the elite were less self-interested than the raucus rabble in the legislatures and therefore, more fit to govern in the community interest. This view holds the Constitution to be a victory of an elite over popular democracy. It also partakes of the same ideological mindset that assumes that if only an obstructive elite authority were out of the way, the people would have the liberty to govern their republic with thought only to the public interest. It is an assumption that Hume and Gordon Wood would say has been disproven by experience.

While the attitudes of the founders, and even Hume, surely were shaped by pervasive elitist assumptions, the real strength of the Constitution was that it divided and limited all powers, on the assumption that everybody was subject to self interest, and that the interests of all classes and regions had a legitimate place in "the harmony of the whole". The carefully balanced institution, not the virtue of individuals or classes, was primary in Hume's political theory. The institutional balance of all interests was the cornerstone of his commonwealth. There was no mention that an elite was more fit to govern, nor is fitness to govern even a criterion. On the contrary he

observed that while democracies are more turbulent, aristocracies, though more peaceful, are also more oppressive.[63] Free governments, he thought must have two councils, a senate and the people. He would have the senate elected by "men of fortune and education", but balanced them by giving them "small power" and making their judgements subject to a court of competitors, a sort of watchdog agency over accounts and with impeachment powers.[64] The common people, he thought, were good enough judges of their local representatives, but thought them not suitable to judge of candidates for high office because "their ignorance gives the grandees an opportunity of decieving them", hardly an idealized view of the gentry.[65]

In an earlier essay, Hume had more to say that cast doubt on the idea that eighteenth century political thought had as a primary assumption that elites were more suited to ruling in the public interest. He wrote that it was an establisted political axiom that in creating the "checks and controuls of the constitution, every man ought to be supposed a knave," that is to have private interest as a primary purpose. To this Hume observed that men are more likely to be honest in their private than in their public life. "Honour is a great check upon mankind: But where a considerable body of men act together, this check is, in a great measure, removed." Because the majority interest will always prevail, the whole senate always "acts as if it contained not one member, who had any regard to public interest and liberty."[66]

The Federalist theory of republics, like Hume's, is predicated on the idea that self-seeking individuals can work for the public good, by structuring the constitution of government so that the many competing

interests balance. The Constitution is not the idealist document of Whig historians, nor the elitist conspiracy of the Progressive historians. It is a document based on a realistic human psychology which assumes that everyone is self interested, but that reason and experience can in the process of time devise institutions that moderate the extremes of human nature. That concept is the Constitution's foundational strength. The Constitution of the United States is also the empirical confirmation of Hume's science of politics.

ENDNOTES

1. Hume, *Essays*, p. 290.

2. Hume, *History*, vol. VI, chap. XLVII, p. 13; chap.XLVIII, p. 40; chap. L, p. 142.

3. Cassirer, *Philosophy of the Enlightenment*, p. 62.

4. Livingston, *Common Life*, pp. 247-9.

5. Gay, *The Enlightenment*, vol. I, p. 34; Also in Wightman,"Adam Smith and the History of Ideas", in Skinner, *Essays on Adam Smith*, p. 49.

6. Hume, *Essays*, p. 115.

7. Ibid., p. 445.

8. Ibid., p. 113.

9. Hume, *Treatise*, III,II,VIII, pp. 540-1.

10. Ibid., III,II,VII, p. 539.

11. Hume, *Essays*, vol. II, p. 440.

12. Livingston, *Common Life*, p. 41.

13. Hume, *Essays*, p. 238.

14. Hume, *History*, vol. III, chap. XXIII, pp. 319-20.

15. Hume, *Enquiry...Morals*, p. 183.

16. Arthur O. Lovejoy, "The Theory of Human Nature in the American Constitution and the Method of Counterpoise", in Jack P. Greene *The Reinterpretation of the American Revolution, 1763-1789* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), pp. 470, 475-7.

17. Hume, *Essays*, pp. 119-20.

18. Ibid., p. 480.

19. Ibid., pp. 482, 487, 492.

20. Ibid., p. 487.

21. Pocock, *Machiavelian Moment*, pp. 463, 486.

22. Ibid., pp. 494-5, 503-4. Also in Forbes, *Philosophical Politics*, p. xi.

23. Forbes, *Philosophical Politics*, p. 297.

24. Hume, *Enquiry...Morals*, p. 181.

25. Eugene Rotwein, *David Hume, Writings on Economics* (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1955), pp. xxii-xxiv.

26. Hume, *Essays*, pp. 289-90.

27. Ibid., p. 305.

28. Ibid., pp. 291-2.

29. Ibid., p. 293.

30. Ibid., p. 294.

31. Ibid., pp. 294-5.

32. Ibid., p. 295.

33. Ibid., p. 308.

34. Ibid., pp. 177-8.

35. Ibid., p. 159.

36. Hume, *Treatise*, III,II,VIII, pp. 540-1.

37. Hume, *History*, vol. III, chap. XXIII, pp. 317-9.

38. Hume, *Essays*, p. 306.

39. Ibid., p. 301.

40. Constant Noble Stockton, "Economics and the Mechanism of Historical Progress in Hume's History", in *Re-evaluation*, p. 314.

41. Ibid., pp. 301-2.

42. Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, p. 385.

43. Caroline Robbins, *The Eighteenth Century Commonwealthman*, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1959) p. 191. landed gentry

44. Quoted in Mossner, *Life*, p. 271. A supply/demand description is also in the *History*, vol. III, chap. XXIX, p. 32.

45. Hume, *Essays*, p. 398.

46. Livingston, *Common Life*, pp. 222, 229-30. The whole chapter on Hume and cause in history, "Historical Understanding" is excellent.

47. Hume, *Essays*, p. 175.

48. Hume, *History*, vol. III, chap. XXIII, p. 321.

49. Forbes, *Philisophical Politics*, p. 76.

50. Cobban, *In Search of Humanity*, pp. 127-8, 173-4.

51. Ibid., p. 175-7. Also Kuypers, *Eighteenth Century Background*, p. 133.

52. Cobban, *In Search of Humanity*, p. 174.

53. Mossner, *Life*, p. 394.

54. Wolin, "Hume and Conservatism" in *Re-evaluation*, pp. 239, 243, 254.

55. Ibid., p. 250.

56. Quoted in Craig Walton, "Hume and Jefferson on the Uses of History" in *Re-evaluation* p. 389.

57. Mossner, *Life*, pp. 571-3.

58. Charles Hendel, editor, *David Hume's Political Essays* (New York: Liberal Arts Press, 1953), p. liv.

59. Hume, *Essays*, pp. 480-1.

60. Ibid., p. 450.

61. Douglass Adair, "That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science: David Hume, James Madison, and the Tenth *Federalist*" in *Re-evaluation*, p. 406-8, 413.

62. Hume, *Essays*, p. 185.

63. Hume, *Essays*, p. 492.

64. Ibid., p. 488.

65. Ibid., p. 487.

66. Ibid., pp. 117-9.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION: SCIENCE AND HISTORY TWO HUNDRED YEARS AFTER HUME: A PARADIGM'S PROGRESS

Adam Smith in a letter to the publisher William Strahan wrote about his last conversation with David Hume. As Hume lay dying he amused himself with excuses he might give Charon, the ferryman of mythology who delivered the souls of the dead across the River Styx, why he should delay his journey a while:

> Have a little patience good Charon; I have been endeavoring to open the eyes of the Public. If I live a few years longer, I may have the satisfaction of seeing the downfall 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.[1]

Hume certainly understood that it would take a long time to accomplish the revolution in thinking requisite for understanding his philosophy. He had redefined human rationality to include not only formal reasoning but also informal reasoning founded on passion and heavily influenced by habit and experience. "Habits, more than reason, we find to be the governing principle of mankind",[2] he wrote in his *History* to explain why neither king nor parliament had the vision to change their habits to fit present needs during the conflicts of the first two Stuart reigns. He did not mean, however, that people cannot learn better ways of coping with problems. Instead he meant that such changes will not take place because of an intentional application of Reason, the hoped for panacea of the seventeenth and eighteenth

centuries. Changing habits of thinking are not accomplished by a sudden coup but by a gradual and complex process of largely unconscious adaptation to the changing social and economic environment. The expansion of the human intellect, the evolution of social institutions and the development of the economy are all interrelated in Hume's analysis of social change in his natural history of society. Developmental process, learning by accretion, and adaption based on utility, is a main theme that runs through Hume's epistemology, moral philosophy, his political and economic essays and all through *The History of England.* Hume's philosophy was not built on the idea of sudden revolutions of thinking.

Neither did the public reception of Hume's philosophy encourage him to hope for a quick acceptance of his way of looking at human knowledge and institutions. The first reaction to the *Treatise*, published in 1739 and 1740, was no reaction at all. As Hume wrote in "My Own Life", "It fell deadborn from the press, without reaching such distinction, as even to excite a murmur among the zealots."[3] The reaction built slowly. The *Treatise* was unlikely to have a wide readership, but it was read among some opinion leaders -- academics and clerics who mostly missed its point. Its reputation, however, gradually spread mostly through denunciations of the skepticism it was held to advocate.

For those who hoped that reason and science would guarantee the ultimate truths of the revealed religion, Hume's contention that belief in cause-effect is psychological, not rationally provable as "real", was intolerable. Their aim was to disprove him which proved impossible, or at least to discredit him as a godless, nihilistic skeptic. The disquiet Hume caused the philosophical community was reflected in two

kinds of response. One was a serious effort to build a philosophy that would resolve the difficulty as Thomas Reid and later Kant tried to do. The more difficult this proved to be, the more emotional grew the appeals to prejudice and character assassination, most prominently, Beattie's *Essay on Truth*. William Warburton, a contemporary clergyman wrote to Hume's publisher, "there are vices of the mind as well as of the body; and I think a wickeder mind, and more obstinantly bent on public mischief I never knew."[4] Two centuries of writings about Hume were filled with both approaches but until the mid-twentieth century, the latter predominated. Appealing as his critics did to the popular prejudice, they sold far more widely. Hume's philosophy was so little read that it was his detractors who established his reputation.

Adam Smith felt the sting of the public outrage when at Hume's death in 1776, he wrote an account of his last days containing praise of his character, which appeared with Hume's "My Own Life" in later editions of the *Essays*. Ten years later Smith was still upset by the reaction. "A single, and as I thought, a very harmless sheet of paper, which I happened to write concerning the death of our late friend, Mr. Hume, brought upon me ten times more abuse than the very violent attack I had made upon the whole commercial system of Great Britain."[5]

It is no exaggeration to say that the one common thread of the Scottish philosophy was that its subject matter was Hume. Writers of this school were constantly quoting, interpreting and criticizing Hume, especially for his "skepticism".[6] While decrying Hume, the Scots incorporated many aspects of his philosophy: that excessive skepticism is "corrected by common sense and reflection"[7], that mental experience constitutes empirical fact [8], that mind makes inferences instinctively,

prior to reason, and based on experience [9], and that facts of our mental experience combine to form complex ideas not randomly but through rules of association (resemblance, contiguity in time and place, and cause-effect).[10] So that while statements about Hume from the mid eighteenth century through the nineteenth were mostly negative of the nihilist skeptic sort, the main lines of his philosophy lived on in their work.

The work of Hume, especially the politics and *History*, and the others of the Scottish Enlightenment, was, furthermore, widely disseminated in colleges and seminaries in England and America. In America Hume's reputation was split in the same way it was at home. He was regularly decried from the pulpit, but his political and economic theories were were cited and discussed so that his influence was considerable even though his reputation wasn't.

The Scottish philosophers, using Hume's principles of association and introspective approach, laid down the beginnings of modern psychology as an empirical science[11], as well as adding refinements to Hume's empirical theory, economics and sociology.[12] In 1838, Sir William Hamilton, one of the schools later philosophers, wrote that:

> Hume. . .is author, in a sort, of all our subsequent philosophy. For out of Reid and Kant, mediately or immediately, all our subsequent philosophy is evolved; and the doctrines of Kant and Reid are both. . . attempts to find for philosophy deeper foundations than those which he had so thoroughly subverted.[13]

Hume's great legacy has indeed been his never-surpassed analysis of empirical knowledge, but his legacy to science (like his legacy to social philosophy) took two different paths. Hamilton identified the two directions with two names, Reid and Kant. It would also be possible to identify them broadly as British and German, representing respectively the phenomenalist (passive mind) and transcendental-critical (active

mind) approaches to knowledge. [Though it should be noted that Reid and the early Scottish school thought in terms of the common sense of an active mind. After Hartley British psychology took an increasingly physiological and mechanistic, passive emphasis] This paper has defended the thesis that Hume's philosophy of science is most meaningful from the Kantian perspective in which the phenomena of experience are given their order and meaning by the structuring mind which operates by informal rules in passional and historical contexts. So that while the phenomena of experience and the formal rules of mathematics and logic are important parts of human knowledge, knowledge is not reducable to either of those. The constructing mind actively creates order and intelligibility in the ceaseless flow of events. Such order, though subjectively experienced, is also objectified in the public world of language, literature, education, discussion, professional societies, etc. where the conventions of the theoretical explanations, whether scientific, political or historical, are continually polished and adjusted in a dialectical process. But for a very long time it was only the Germans who read Hume in this light. The Anglo-American tradition, having its roots in Locke and Newton, long tried to interpret Hume, either approvingly or disapprovingly, as a strict phenomenalist.

By the time John Stuart Mill wrote *A System of Logic* (1843), nineteenth century Britain's great empirical theory, British thought had moved progressively, through David Hartley and Thomas Brown, in the direction of a science that reduced knowledge solely to the material, and mechanical sensation of phenomena. Mill was educated by his father in the Scottish philosophy, and published a review at the age of eighteen which included this assessment of Hume.

> Hume possessed powers of a very high order; but regard for truth formed no part of his character. He reasoned with surprising acuteness, but the object of his reasonings was not to obtain truth, but to show that it was unobtainable."[14]

This statement has been quoted by several contemporary authors as an indication of the nineteenth century's perception of Hume. It was certainly true of the common perception, but Mill himself changed his mind. By the time he began to formulate his great exposition of empirical theory, he concluded that his father's reasoning was too rational/deductive.[15] In *A System of Logic*, Mill built on Hume's empirical foundation[16] with its subsequent Scottish refinements, especially Thomas Brown's statement of cause as invariable sequence (which had its roots in Hume).[17]

But British empirical thought had become increasingly materialist in that it shared the Newtonian and naive assumption that in science the hypothesis or meaning of the facts was a function of the phenomena and not of the mind. Mill, for example, engaged in a debate with William Whewell, a follower of Kant, on the question of whether Kepler had formulated the hypothesis of elliptical planetary orbits before he "saw" it in the data or not. Whewell and Kant maintained that the mind forms the hypothesis first, and looks for confirmation second.[18] Current philosophies of science concur with the hypothesis-first conception as being more consistent with what scientists actually do as opposed to what classical inductive theory calls for.

The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were optimistic about science in the same way that the seventeenth had been naively optimistic about reason. Encouraged by the many and useful discoveries which made life easier and conveyed a sense of progress, scientists were optimistic that their theories explained, or were on the verge of explaining all

reality. But philosophers had a more difficult time pinning down a theory of science that explained what it was that scientists were doing. This was especially true the farther removed science got from actual observation.

For over two centuries, Newtonian mechanics based in physics and mathematics was the supreme paradigm for science. Even social science strove for results as rigorous and deterministic as physical laws, with results not nearly so satisfyingly regular and predictable, as Hume and many others have since discovered. One of the reasons that Hume disturbed the scientific community was his readiness to point out the weaknesses of his own attempted science of man, and by extension, other science as well. The more science emphasised knowledge as reduction to phenomena, the more unsatisfactory Hume and his structuring mind seemed. David Fate Norton, for example, writing from the perspective of the scientific historians pronounced Hume's Newtonian program a failure because his science of history contained an unsatisfactory element of subjectivity.[19] Subsequent developments in physics suggest, however, that it was the Newtonian and Lockean paradigms that were faulty and that Hume had pointed the way beyond them to a more inclusive empiricism precisely by his belief in the active structuring mind.

Meanwhile by this century, new things happened in the theory of science which began to shake faith in those two pillars of objective and certain truth, Newtonian physics and mathematics. Modern, post-relativity physics, exploring a theoretical world of quantums, quarks, etc. has stayed far from Newton's rules of induction from the data and toward imaginative hypotheses. Einstein, for instance, cited Hume as an inspiration in his break-through thinking on the relative rather than

absolute character of time.[20]

Newtonian mechanics, the most deterministic of the models for physics, now has two new rivals that are less deterministic. The more recent is called deterministic chaos after a book of the same name written by Heinz Georg Schuster.[21] According to this model, many complex systems, such as physiological, chemical, laser (and certainly human psychological and cultural ones, though not mentioned in the book) are determined in a chaotic way, that is their behavior forms complex patterns. Small changes in the initial conditions lead to small changes in outcome. That is in many repetitions over time, what appears to be chaotic is actually determined by the small variations in conditions. But predicting what comes next in the pattern is not possible unless the observer knows exactly which conditions predominate at a given point and where in the pattern the observation has taken place.

The great rival in this century, however, is quantum theory in which light has two fundamentally opposite characters both a wave and a particle. This is especially interesting in light of Hume's both/and strategy for explaining opposites which both seem true. Quantum theory has two correlaries which also have interesting implications for knowledge in general. One is the uncertainty principle in which there is an intrinsic physical limit to how much can be known because to gain information along one dimension is to loose it in the other. The other is the role of the observer, in which the observer's choice of what to look at affects what he/she sees.

In these developments, one can look back to Hume and see that his reservations about inductive science as an ultimate answer, made by simply observing the workings of his own mind, seem to forshadow the

decline of Newtonian paradigm. At the close of his *History*, he described some of the important people at the time of the Glorious Revolution. Of Newton, he wrote,

> In Newton, this island may boast of having produced the greatest and rarest genious that ever rose for the ornament and instruction of the species. . . While Newton seemed to draw off the veil from some of the mysteries of nature, he showed at the same time the imperfections of the mechanical philosophy; and thereby restored her ultimate secrets to that obscurity in which they ever did and ever will remain.[22]

Mathematics has experienced a similar shake-up since the discovery that there are other logically consistent geometries than Euclid's. From the time of the Greeks Euclid's geometry had reigned as the foundation of metaphysical, timeless and nonmaterial philosophy, the bedrock of the concept "eternal truth". After the shocking discovery of other geometries, there followed a search for some other absolute foundation for mathematics. Bertrand Russell's *Principia Mathematica*, and others attempted to find formal rules of mathematics, based not on whether a proposition was true or not, but whether its terms were consistent and contradiction free, (i.e.logical, a new rationalism). Mathematical Formalism, like logical atomism, attempted to express itself in formal symbolic statements which could be mechanically proven. This proved to be an unattainable ideal (as is was for logical atomism in language), which did not correspond to how mathemeticians actually proceed. Instead, the creative frontiers of mathematics have been expanded through creative hypothesizing, guesswork, and intuitions just as it has in other fields of knowledge.

One recently published answer to the question of whether mathematics corresponds to an objective reality proposed that Euclidian geometry exists, but neither in the Platonic nor material sense. It exists in

the same way that Homer's *Illiad* exists in our common historical and cultural inheritance. Mathematics is a part of our consciousness and our accumulated knowledge and thus is one of the humanities. The mathematician (like the physicist, psychologist or historian) creates the object of study which, like other human studies is neither infallible nor inviolable, but is both correctible and meaningful in the common culture.[23] This view turns the traditional view of mathematics as eternal truth on its head and makes it a dialectical and historical science as well. No wonder Carl Becker could say of the modern paradigm of knowledge that we no longer ask what something is in itself, but only how it developed.

Hume's revolutionary concept of a science of man (which was bedrock to all knowledge because everything humans can know is "judged of by [human] powers and faculties"),[24] founded on a paradigm of human psychology and history appears to have been gradually confirmed in the theoretical physics of this century. But less so in the social sciences which still seem to be striving for the Newtonian mechanical-determinist ideal. Just as the Newtonian inductive revolution came more slowly to the social sciences in the eighteenth, the new theoretical developments in physics have come more slowly to the social sciences in this century. Psychology, for example, labored through the middle years of this century to establish behaviorism on a rigorous material model which reduced human learning to a mechanical reflex to the stimuli of phenomena, in which mind, thought, attitude and other non-material concepts were eliminated altogether. Strict behaviorism however was so unsatisfactory as a total explanation of mental life that it has largely been replaced with cognitive psychology which explains more but at the

cost of modifying rigid determinism.

History, which has striven for empirical objectivity since the Enlightenment, has never entirely agreed on a model. One model has been what R.G. Collingwood called the Covering Reason approach, the historicist concept of *verstehen* , or intelligibility in history (very similar to Hume's). But generally American historiography has aimed at the British ideal of deterministic, mechanical laws, the Covering Law approach. In history, the economic-material model as sole causative mechanism seems to be declining in favor of more inclusive and elusive ideational motivations for human action, just like behaviorism has given way to cognitive learning theory.

The shift is expressed by Lawrence Stone in a historiographical essay, "The Revival of Narrative".[25] In it he describes the various phases that the search for scientific history has taken: (1) the early scientific Marxist model; (2) the Annales school which tended to emphasise geography and economic data as the independent variables that matter (though there were exceptions like Le Febre who was interested in mentalit); (3) the American "cliometricians" who try to run the universe through a computer and use abstruse methodologies which they can't agree on, nobody else understands, and can't be replicated. Stone sees a trend away from such single variable attempts to base historical inquiry exclusively on the model of the physical sciences, with its tendency to insist on quantification and mathematical models; and a trend toward narrative history which certainly uses the results of the geographer and economist quantifiers but sets them into a narrative context which also pays attention to the part that ideas, values and customs plays on the course of events.

Le Roy Ladurie's often quoted statement, "history that is not quantifiable cannot claim to be scientific" reveals the limits of the paradigm of physics for the study of human beings. Stone contrasts the two paradigms as to what is the central subject of history in this way: Le Roy Ladurie entitled a section of his essays "History Without People" to symbolize the attempt to bypass the chaos of particulars by looking at the long term, more deterministic influences of geography and economic conditions; whereas 50 years earlier Lucien Febvre wrote "my quarry is man" symbolizing the ideological approach to history.[26]

In order to pattern itself after physics "scientific" history has needed to try to eliminate variablility and irrationality in human action, or at least make it predictably determined by economics or geography. It also has had to detach history from the flow of events to make it timeless. Attempts to make history fit the model of physics have been artificial and generally correspond to the formalist fallacies in logic and mathematics in which the ideal is not what the practitioners actually do. Attempts to make history highly deterministic lead to an unfortunate split between the structural variables and the social and intellectual which are independent variables themselves but harder to quantify. Stone thinks that the ideal is a two-way interaction between these variables, not a one-way hierarchy. All should be woven together into a single web, in other words, another manifestation of a both/and solution. Historians, Stone concluded, "are therefore forced back upon the principle of indeterminacy, a recognition that the variables are so numerous that at best only middle-range generalizations are possible. . ."[27] It is the same conclusion that Hume came to when he concluded that human action

was neither entirely chaotic nor entirely determined, but a little of both. It is also why the deterministic chaos model of science has such interesting implications to social science. David Hume whose announced intention was to introduce empirical analysis which was mind and time dependent into the science of man, and who sought to find his principles and verify them in *The History of England*, would have agreed with Febvre that his quary was to understand the complexity of humanity more than it was to force it into an overly restrictive scientific model.

That it took nearly two hundred years for Hume's philosophy to be read in more receptive light is partly that it created so uncomfortable a dissonance with received opinion, either religious, rational, political, or scientific. The human mind, always searching for knowledge and meaning in the continuous flux of events, looks for congruence between idea and experienced reality. It is constantly assimilating new information, assimilating it into its conceptual scheme, and adapting old theoretical explanations to fit new experiences and needs. New discoveries in the world of nature require adjusted explanations, new events in the political world require revised theory, as Hume discovered when he tried to pin down party ideologies. "The heart of man is made to reconcile contradictions" said Hume in an early expression of what this century's psychologists call cognitive dissonance.

The history of philosophy, the search for knowledge, is a record of continually adjusting theory to meet new challenges. This paper began with the medievals trying to assimilate Aristotle and nature with church dogma. The medieval synthesis between thought and nature (mind and body) did not succeed and the result was a polarization of religion and science, which lasted as long as the church tried to deny nature. The

same issues, never satisfactorily resolved, were, in the early modern period, still problems which Hume hoped to resolve with his theory of knowledge. Hume's solution was to incorporate both valid and irreducible ways of thinking into a holistic synthesis, mind and body, object and subject, reason and passion, liberty and authority.

It took two centuries gradually to soften the prevailing paradigms, or superstitions as Hume called them, the Lockean, the Newtonian and the Whig. Each of these were mind-sets that prevented readers from recognizing the subtle and complex dialectical structure and historical meaning behind the easy facade of Hume's writing. That the re-evaluation of Hume has taken place in this century reflects a new willingness to examine old assumptions. This is at least partly because there is now an element of pessimism or at least confusion about the knowledge claims of traditional science. There has been throughout the twentieth century a general re-evaluation of what knowledge, science and history are. Human knowledge, whether in the world of nature, or the world of human action, will always continue to strive for objective truth. But the seeker after knowledge, must nevertheless, attain the third stage of the dialectic which holds objectivity and subjectivity in tension, and understands that complete objectivity is not possible. The mind of the observer, the questions asked, the hypotheses formed, will always affect what is observed.

Hume's paradigm of knowledge is empiricism with a mind and time-dependent, narrative. It is a paradigm that the philosophy of science has given renewed study to in the last quarter century. It also deserves closer study by historians in their further quest for a method of scientific history, suggesting as it does that history may be its own paradigm of knowledge.

ENDNOTES

1. Adam Smith, "A Letter to William Strahan, Esq." November 9, 1776. reprinted in Hume, *Essays*, vol. 1, p. 11.

2. Hume, *History*, vol. VI, chap. L, p. 183.

3. Hume, "My Own Life", reprinted in *Essays*, vol. 1, p. 2.

4. Quoted in Livingston, "Introduction" to *Re-evaluation*, p. 1.

5. Mossner, *Life*, p. 605.

6. Daniel Sommer Robinson, *The Story of Scottish Philosophy* (New York: Exposition Press, 1961), p. 15.

7. Hume, *Inquiry*, p. 169.

8. Ibid., p. 24.

9. Ibid., pp. 67-8.

10. Ibid., p. 10.

11. Murphy and Kovach, *Historical Introduction to Modern Psychology*, pp. 33-5.

12. Robert Brown, editor, *Between Hume and Mill, An Anthology of British Philosophy, 1749-1843* (New York: Modern Library, 1970), pp. ix-x. Hereafter cited as *Between Hume and Mill*.

13. Quoted in Livingston, "Introduction" to *Re-evaluation*, p. 2.

14. Ibid., p. 1.

15. John Stuart Mill, *Autobiography*, *Collected Works*, vol I. edited by John M. Robson and Jack Stillinger (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1981), pp. 165-7.

16. John Stuart Mill, *A System of Logic*, *Collected Works*, vol. VII, p. 623; vol. VIII, pp. 769, 839, 1119, 1150.

17. Brown, *Between Hume and Mill*, pp. 306-7.

18. Boruch Brody, and Nicholas Capaldi. *Science: Men, Methods, Goals* (New York and Amsterdam: W.A. Benjamin, 1968), pp. 93-5.

19. David Fate Norton, "History and Philosophy in Hume's Thought", introduction to *David Hume: Philosophical Historian* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Co. Inc., 1965) p. xliv, xlix.

20. Mossner, *Life*, p. 5.

21. Heinz Georg Schuster, *Deterministic Chaos*, (Weinheim, FRGer: Physik-Verlag, 1984), preface.

22. Hume, *History*, vol. VIII, chap. LXXI, p. 323.

23. Philip J. Davis and Reubin Hersch, *The Mathematical Experience* (Cambridge, Ma: Birkhauser Boson, 1980). See especially the chapter "Lakatos and the Philosophy of Dubitability", pp. 345-59.

24. Hume, *Treatise*, p. xv.

25. Stone, "The Revival of Narrative", *Past and Present*, no. 85 (Nov. 1979), p. 3.

26. Ibid., p. 21.

27. Ibid., p. 13.

28. Hume, *Essays*, p. 139.

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