

HUME AND SMITH ON REASON, POLITICAL ECONOMY, AND THE SPIRIT OF
PHILOSOPHY

by

Erik W. Matson
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Committee:

_____ Director

_____ Department Chairperson

_____ Program Director

_____ Dean, College of Humanities
and Social Sciences

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by

Erik W. Matson
Master of Arts
George Mason University, 2015
Bachelor of Science
George Mason University, 2012

Director: Daniel B. Klein, Professor
George Mason University

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Fairfax, VA

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DEDICATION

To Stephanie.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Note: References in this study marked with a T are to Book, Part, Section, and Paragraph; references marked with EHU or EPM are to Section, Part, and Paragraph; references marked with EMPL are to Page; references marked with H are to Volume and Page; references marked with DP are to Section and Paragraph; references marked with TMS are to Part, Section, Chapter, and Paragraph; references marked with WN are to Page; references marked with HA are to Section and Paragraph; references marked by OES are to Page and Paragraph; references marked with ECHU are to Book, Chapter, and Section in the following works:

T	A Treatise of Human Nature (Hume 2000)
EHU	An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding (Hume 2000b)
EPM	An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals (Hume 1998)
EMPL	Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary (Hume 1994)
H.....	The History of England (Hume 1983)
DP	A Dissertation on the Passions (Hume 2007)
TMS	The Theory of Moral Sentiments (Smith 1982b)
WN.....	An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations (Smith 1976)
HA.....	The History of Astronomy (Smith 1982a, 33-105)
OES.....	Of the External Senses (Smith 1982a, 135-68)
ECHU.....	An Essay Concerning Human Understanding (Locke 1975)

ABSTRACT

HUME AND SMITH ON REASON, POLITICAL ECONOMY, AND THE SPIRIT OF PHILOSOPHY

Erik W. Matson, M.A.

George Mason University, 2017

Dissertation Director: Dr. Daniel B. Klein

This study consists of four chapters that highlight connections between David Hume and Adam Smith's thinking on knowledge, politics, and political economy. The study emphasizes the non-foundational character of Hume and Smith's thinking and its implications for their attitude in philosophy, politics, and political economy. In Chapter One, I examine Hume's dialectical reconfiguration of the faculty of reason in Book I of his *Treatise of Human Nature*. I show how Hume's thinking on reason limits his expectations of the potentialities of human understanding and informs the overarching ethos of his philosophy. In Chapter Two, I present an interpretation of Smith's posthumously published essay, 'The History of Astronomy' (HA). I argue that HA can be read as a rhetorical exercise in Humean epistemology. Throughout the essay, Smith illustrates (1) the sentimental and unverifiable backbone of scientific inquiry in terms of Humean natural belief and (2) consequent reasons for skepticism. HA culminates in an

ironic self-contradiction that illustrates the psychologically ineluctable character of natural belief and the instability of skepticism. Smith's program in HA is to emphasize the deepest-to-date nature of scientific inquiry and the non-foundational character of understanding. Chapter Three, which is coauthored with Colin Doran, explores some striking and heretofore unnoticed textual connections between the famous conclusion to Book I of Hume's *Treatise* and the parable of the poor man's son in Part IV of Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. We show Hume and Smith both inverting the classical relationship between contemplation and action, nesting contemplation within action. Each text shows a narrative development of attitude in philosophy in light of the problems of reason. In Chapter Four, I consider the political and economic implications of Hume's epistemology. Building out of Chapter One, I show how Hume's thinking on reason leads him to the study of human things and speaks to his manner of study in that area. Among the human things, politics and political economy loom large for Hume. In political economy, his attitude translates into two presumptions: a presumption of liberty and a presumption of the status quo.

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

This is a study in the thought of David Hume and Adam Smith. It consists of four chapters, each of which highlights a different aspect of their thinking. The study emphasizes Hume and Smith's non-foundational epistemology and the prudent spirit in philosophy that such epistemology implies. It emphasizes Hume and Smith's classical liberal political attitude in the face of non-foundationalism and epistemological indeterminateness.

Understanding the non-foundational character of Hume and Smith's thinking is especially notable when viewed in relation to their moral and political outlook. Whereas modern non-foundational thinking is typically associated with "relativism," "subjectivism", and "progressivism," in Hume and Smith it is linked to classical liberal political attitudes and a promotion of the virtues of commercial society. Non-foundationalism and liberal political economy are not mutually exclusive in Hume and Smith but seem to be mutually reinforcing. The connection might be briefly stated as follows: If one adopts a pluralistic view of meaning and moves away from the notion of epistemic certainty, it follows that one might incline towards an organization of social and political affairs that best allows for peaceable and tolerant conversations about the loose, vague, and indeterminate nature of meaning and knowledge. Historically, the societies that have best enabled such conversations and have achieved high levels of

prosperity (broadly defined) have been built around the rules of property and a presumption of liberty. Hume expresses something along the lines of this outlook directly in the introduction to his *Treatise of Human Nature*, “So true it is, that however other nations may rival us in poetry, and excel us [England] in some other agreeable arts, the improvements in reason and philosophy can only be owing to a land of toleration and liberty” (T Intro.5).

Exploring the thought of Hume and Smith is a useful and agreeable way to pursue our conversations about knowledge, politics, and political economy.

Chapter Abstracts

Chapter One, “The Dual Account of Reason and the Spirit of Philosophy in Hume’s *Treatise*,” examines how Hume develops his thinking on *reason* in Book I of his *Treatise of Human Nature*. In the *Treatise*, Hume seeks an epistemological foundation for his “science of man” that will enable him to speak with confidence in matters of philosophy. He moves forward in an attempt to illustrate the internal principles of the human understanding. Such an illustration entails considering the constitution and scope of the mental faculty of *reason*, the mind’s inferential faculty that operate on ideas. Yet as Hume proceeds, he realizes that *reason* – as it is traditionally conceived in the Cartesian and Lockean tradition – is unable to verify probable reasoning and causal inferences, things that are commonly associated with a high level of epistemic certainty. Reason in the traditional vein only applies speculatively to matters of intuition and demonstration. Hume uncovers that the thing that is commonly considered to be *reason*,

the inferential faculty that is used in the majority of life, is driven by sensation and unverifiable instinct. Thus, from the perspective of narrow and speculative reason, the wider reason used in the common affairs of life is not reasonable! Hume accepts that assenting to a wide and practical concept of reason is psychologically ineluctable. But his thinking causes him to pause and to radically reflect on the unverifiable nature of philosophy. Reason, as it is commonly viewed, proceeds on the basis of practicality, not rationality. It cannot be proved and must embrace certain contradictions to move forward. Hume learns to take reason on trust, but maintains an attitude of diffident skepticism throughout his thinking. Briefly stated, he feels “where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to” (T 1.4.7.11). But nonetheless, “in all the incidents of life we ought still to preserve our skepticism” (ibid). Hume’s philosophy moves forward to sort better and worse interpretations from the vantage point of common life – the vantage point which recommends the use of common reason – but is reflective of its limitations.

Smith adopts Hume’s thinking on the unverifiable nature of reason and holds a similar attitude of diffident skepticism. In Chapter Two, “Adam Smith’s Humean Attitude about Science; Illustrated by ‘The History of Astronomy,’” I argue that Smith’s posthumously published essay, “The History of Astronomy,” can be interpreted as a rhetorical exercise in Humean naturalist epistemology, which emphasizes the unverifiable nature of the mind’s general framework of belief formation. In HA, Smith begins with something akin to a traditional or narrow concept of reason. He implicitly understands that the belief in the regularity of experience cannot be validated by this concept of

reason. The two pillars of our framework of belief formation – the belief in causation and the belief in the external existence of objects – are *felt* to be true, they aren't (and can't be) rationally determined. Smith accordingly understands that the mind is moved by sentiment in all of its interpretations, scientific or otherwise. He sees the skepticism that might flow from such an understanding. But he rhetorically illustrates the psychological instability of such skepticism and instinctive character of belief. To illustrate his point, Smith intentionally contradicts his express desire to stay himself from final interpretations and ironically slides into a sort of truth-talk or realism concerning science and the faculties of the mind. He shows how even in a direct consideration of the limitations of the faculties of the mind, an acceptance of certain unverifiable beliefs – and a consideration of such beliefs as unquestionable truths – seems all but unavoidable.

Chapter Three, “The Elevated Imagination: Contemplation and Action in David Hume and Adam Smith,” which is coauthored with Colin Doran, illustrates important textual connections between the famous conclusion to Book I of Hume's *Treatise* and the parable of the poor man's son in Smith's TMS. The connections underscore the joint nature of Hume and Smiths' philosophical project and speak to their resolve in the face of indeterminateness. The connections illustrate Hume and Smith moving in parallel fashion through what Donald Livingston (1998) has called the dialectic of true philosophy, a dialectic which dignifies the vantage point of reflective common life in the face of non-foundational paralysis. In their writing, both Hume and Smith (Smith through the character of the poor man's son) begin with an unreflective acceptance of the principles of common life. They examine the underpinnings of such acceptance and are led to

moments of skepticism. From skepticism, they are moved back to a reflective philosophy by nature. Nature impresses upon them the unavoidable character of belief and elevates their imaginations, as it were. They are moved to accept a natural frame of belief formation, but retain an understanding of the process by which belief ascends. The process has rippling implications for their attitudes in philosophy and the things to which they apply their reason. In Hume, this dialectic focuses on epistemology; in Smith it focuses on the meaning and purpose of ambition and the acquisition of wealth.

In Chapter Four, “Hume’s Way of Reasonableness in Epistemology, in Politics, and in Political Economy,” I return to consider Hume’s thinking on reason and consider implications for his attitude in politics and political economy. Again, Hume’s reconfiguration of reason – as elaborated in Chapter One – leads him towards skepticism in that he finds that what is generally considered to be *reason* is an operation on ideas that proceeds on the basis of custom. Despite his skepticism, Hume resolves to presuppose the soundness of reason and to use reason to study things which appear natural and agreeable from the perspective of common life. Hume continues on in the *Treatise* to study human things, among which politics looms large. Hume’s application of reason to politics arrives at a presumption of liberty, which cashes out in terms of policy debates. When choosing between two policy options, the presumption of liberty inclines him towards the option that least impinges upon individual liberty. Hume’s presumption of liberty stems both from his understanding of the usefulness and agreeableness of liberty, the usefulness understood by way of his theory of property and his conceptual developments in political economy. Hume’s reconfiguration of reason leads him to arrive

at a second presumption in politics: the presumption of the status quo. The presumption of the status quo would require reform efforts to bear the burden of proof. The presumption of the status quo in Hume stems from his epistemology, which emphasizes the necessity of prudence in light of the problems of reason, and from his view of the usefulness of political authority more generally. Thus, Hume's way of reasonableness leads him to presuppose the soundness of reason in human matters but to nonetheless tread with care and prudence in reason's application. In politics, his way of reasonableness leads him to two presumptions, presumptions which in fact conflict in cases of reforms that would liberalize social arrangements.

Each of the following chapters has been prepared as a stand-alone essay. But together the chapters serve to highlight connections in Hume and Smith between non-foundational epistemology and their pragmatic, liberal politics and political economy.

CHAPTER ONE: THE DUAL ACCOUNT OF REASON AND THE SPIRIT OF PHILOSOPHY IN HUME'S TREATISE

...allow me to tell you, that I never asserted so absurd a Proposition as *that any thing might arise without a Cause*: I only maintain'd, that our Certainty of the Falseness of that Proposition proceeded neither from intuition nor Demonstration; but from another source. *That Caesar existed, that there is such an Island as Sicily*; for these Propositions, I affirm, we have no demonstrative nor intuitive Proof. Would you infer that I deny their Truth, or even their Certainty? There are many different kinds of Certainty; and some of them as satisfactory to the Mind, tho' perhaps not so regular, as the demonstrative kind.

– David Hume, letter to John Stewart (quoted in Mossner 2001, 260; italics original)

My purpose in this chapter is to explore the conceptual development of the faculty of reason in Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* and to examine the implications that that development has for Hume's manner of practicing of philosophy. My thesis is twofold. First, I argue that Hume develops his thinking about reason dialectically throughout Book I of the *Treatise* by intentionally creating a dynamic between two different concepts of reason: R1 and R2. I call the dialectical account of reason generated by R1 and R2 "the dual account of reason." Second, I argue that the dual account of reason sheds light on the spirit of Hume's philosophy. The dual account of reason in Hume frames just reasoning – the proper practice and application of reason – somewhere between two extremes. Just reasoning lies between skeptical paralysis, which reflects a neglect of reason, and an insufficiently reflective use of reason. The just philosopher should blend agreeable,

humble practicality with a diffident sort of skepticism. Plainly put, “where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to” (T 1.4.7.11). But nonetheless, “in all the incidents of life we ought still to preserve our skepticism” (ibid). The dual account of reason underscores the frailty in human understanding and recommends an ethos of prudence, moderation, and self-awareness to the philosopher.

Interpretive Principles and Influences

In interpreting the *Treatise*, I follow Annette Baier’s (1991) interpretation of the book as a “progress of sentiments.” I agree with Baier that the *Treatise* is an unfolding drama, a staging of Hume’s developmental process. Throughout the *Treatise*, Hume brings the reader along into his own personal process of discovery. The process must be entered into by the reader to gain a proper understanding of the text. Such a reading of Hume dovetails with Donald Livingston’s (1984) interpretation of Hume as a dialectical thinker. As Livingston (1984, 35) puts it: in Hume, “philosophical insight is gained by working through the contrarities of thought which structure a drama of inquiry.” Hume is not a strictly propositional or analytic thinker, but a thinker who relies on style and tension between arguments to convey important ideas and principles.

I depart from Baier in my interpretation of skepticism in Hume. I think that Baier unduly downplays Hume’s skepticism and the extent to which it influences his view of the potentialities of reason. Baier interprets much of Hume’s skepticism – e.g., T 1.4.1 – as only applying to a rationalistic or traditional concept of reason that Hume himself does not believe in. But I feel, as, for instance, Kevin Meeker (2000) has argued, that Hume’s skepticism, even his controversial “Of scepticism with regard to reason” at T 1.4.1, is not

merely marshalled against rationalism. Hume's skepticism thoroughly applies to his own thinking. Indeed, it is his response to his personal feelings and skeptical convictions, his action in the face of skepticism, that characterize his thinking on reason and his style of philosophy more generally.

Hume's Taxonomy of Reason

My basic contention that Hume employs multiple concepts of reason throughout his work is not novel in and of itself. It is widely agreed that Hume has multiple concepts of reason.¹ But there seems to be little consensus as to what these concepts of reason are and how they fit together. My analysis adds to existing literature on Hume's thinking on reason by providing a plausible and textually consistent reading of Hume's taxonomy of *reason* and by relating this taxonomy more broadly to his thinking about the proper practice and spirit of philosophy. Understanding how the different concepts of *reason* fit together in Hume speaks to his dialectical development of *reason*.

¹ For instance, Barbara Winters (1979) argues that Hume employs two concepts of reason: a traditional and a naturalistic concept. Winters interprets the traditional concept of reason as Hume's Cartesian foil and suggests that he works to supplant this traditional reason with a naturalistic, experiential, animal reason. Baier (1991, 66) follows a similar line of argument, contending that Hume abandons "'reason' as the rationalists construe it to the other belief source he has already recognized." Tom Beauchamp and Alexander Rosenberg (1981, 33) take a similar line of interpreting Hume, noting that "his only complaint about induction and causal necessity is that rationalists have misunderstood the nature of causation and inductive inference." Karl Schafer (2008, 190) says that there are three senses of *reason* that are relevant in Hume: *reason* as demonstrative and probable inference, *reason* as inference in general, and *reason* as responsiveness to reasons. More recently, Henrik Bohlin (2014, 33–34) has suggested that Hume uses *reason* (1) to describe the mind's "capacity to gain empirical and non-empirical knowledge by applying intuition and demonstration, observation, and causal inference to their respective objects" and (2) to more narrowly be said to "direct the impulses of the passions by showing how objects...are causally connected to other objects."

I read Hume as using the word *reason* in three senses. The first two senses are distinct concepts of reason: R1 and R2. The third sense is Hume's casual reference to the activity of reasoning, i.e., the verb *to reason* and the practice of *having reasons*.

Hume first uses *reason* to mean R1. R1 is the mind's narrowest inferential faculty. R1 is not a deductive, rationalistic concept of reason – contra Winters (1979), Beauchamp and Rosenberg (1981) and Baier (1991) – but rather stems from Locke. R1 has two proper activities: intuition and demonstration. Following Locke (who follows Descartes), Hume views intuition as the clear perception of the coherence of an idea. He views demonstration as perceiving intuitive links between intuitive ideas (these concepts are further elaborated below). All R1 propositions, which pertain to relations of ideas, are certain by perception and the law of non-contradiction. Hume embraces R1 and the ideas of rational necessity it implies. But he recognizes its limitations. As Peter Millican (1998, 145) and David Owen (1999, 147) have pointed out, albeit in different terms, R1 inferences are decidedly narrow in that they cannot, by definition, account for most matters of experience. R1 is a flat, more mechanical, self-contained sort of reason. Hume uses *reason* in reference to R1 through much of Book I of the *Treatise*.

Hume's second concept of reason, R2, equals R1 plus experiential or probable reasoning. Probable reasoning, according to Hume, is a settled principle of the imagination, a habit of mental association, oriented around the supposition that the future will resemble the past. R2 subsumes R1. R1 can be marshalled to help make R2 arguments, but its narrow proceedings underdetermine R2. For example, the relations of ideas that constitute the science of mathematics speak into matters of engineering but do

not, on their own terms, have rules for their application. R2 does not have the authority, justification, or certainty that R1 does. I might dogmatically assert with justice that a square has four right angles. But I am not authorized, by the construction of R2, to assert with equal confidence that emeralds will be green tomorrow, that the sun will always rise, or that my computer will fall to the ground if I drop it. The interpretations of matters of our experience, the objects of R2, are non-obvious when compared to the objects of R1.

I tend to treat R2 as a matter of sensation that approaches something like a calm passion: experience shapes the mind's interpretation and synthesis of sensory data (see Matson 2017). R2 is constructed of settled imaginary principles and instincts, which parallel what some – e.g., Norman Kemp Smith (2005) – have referred to as natural beliefs. Hume himself draws parallels between R2 and calm passion throughout his work, somewhat blurring the line between the concepts (see, e.g., T 2.3.3.4; EPM 6.1.15; DP 5.2). Such an interpretation of R2 is close to Baier's final interpretation of reason in Hume. Baier (1991, 280) summarizes Hume's progressive development of reason (R2) in the *Treatise*: “‘Reason,’ by the end of the *Treatise* has effectively teamed up with the calm passions it has served within the *Treatise*...Its final status in the *Treatise* is as a very important natural virtue or ability.” But, again, I think that Baier tends to underestimate Hume's skepticism and neglects the extent to which that skepticism steadily influences Hume's view of R2's potentialities and ultimate authority. R2 envelops R1 and teams up with some settled principles of the imagination and some natural human sentiments. But from a strict R1 perspective, R2 will never be *reasonable*.

Hume's third and most general use of the word *reason* means *warrant* or *argument*. He uses *reason* in this sense casually and throughout his work. Sometimes the third use of *reason* appears as a verb, as in *to reason*, meaning *to argue with or respond to reasons*.² Hume univocally refers to the activity of arguing with or responding to reasons as *reasoning*. Arguments might be demonstrative arguments, rendering the reasoning an activity of R1. But there are many ways of practical reasoning, of responding to reasons, that have little to do with R1. It is perhaps fair to say that *reasoning* in Hume is synonymous with *deliberating* or *conscious inferencing*. This more open nature of reasoning in Hume is indicated, for example, when Hume talks of sound or unsound reasoning (e.g., T 1.2.4.24), and just or unjust reasoning (e.g., T 1.3.2.4). In many cases, with perhaps occasional R1 exceptions, the soundness of reasoning depends on the principles by which the mind proceeds and the context in which it operates. Reasoning is more often a matter of judgment and feeling, not ratiocination (see, e.g., T 1.3.2.1; T 1.3.7.5 n20). Our deliberation concerning the weight of certain reasons and the justness of our response to reasons might be understood in aesthetic terms as a matter of cultivating proper taste.³

² The third use of *reason* broadly corresponds to Schafer's (2008, 191) second and third sense of *reason*.

³ Matson, Doran, and Klein (2017, 16-18) point out that Hume invokes a sense of taste in his *Essays* as a way to broadly discern better and worse reason. Also, note Hume's comment on the role of taste in the activity of probable reasoning: "Thus all probable reasoning is nothing but a species of sensation. 'Tis not solely in poetry and music, we must follow our taste and sentiment, but likewise in philosophy" (T 1.3.8.11).

Summarizing the Dual Account of Reason

Hume's overarching development of reason concerns the nature and relationship of R1 and R2, a dialogue between R1 and R2, as it were. The way in which Hume unfolds both R1 and R2 in his text – the R1 and R2 accounts, as I call them – creates a dynamic that underscores his broader understanding of reason and its proper application. One must enter into the dynamic between R1 and R2 to understand Hume's thinking on reason and to apprehend the spirit of his philosophy.

Through the R1 account in the *Treatise*, Hume illustrates the criteria for certainty. R1 conclusions are certain by construction, true by the law of non-contradiction. But as Hume seeks to extend R1, he discovers that R1 cannot account for experiential reasoning and our more general belief-forming mechanisms. Thus, the one hope we might have for thoroughly and convincingly understanding things in an air-tight fashion falls short; the things that matter, our experience of and interaction with the world, cannot be understood by R1. The philosopher who looks to understand things, then, can either (1) embrace total skepticism and abandon his entire philosophical enterprise or (2) can reflectively search for alternative ways of knowing. Total skepticism is coherent on R1 grounds. But it is woefully impractical and cuts against the grain of human instinct. Total skepticism neglects the simple fact that people *have* reasons and make a practice of reasoning. Embracing some broader sense of reason (R2) is useful, agreeable, and psychologically ineluctable. Unfortunately, it is, by Hume's estimation, not reasonable on R1 grounds. The philosopher is then left with a paradoxical choice between “no reason” and a “false reason” (T 1.4.7.7).

The way that Hume navigates the waters between the skepticism implied by R1 and the practical yet not R1-reasonable knowledge implied by R2 is delicate. He recognizes that the universe indeed might be crudely split into things of which we have knowledge and things of which we don't: R1-discernable things and R1-non-discernable things. But he recoils from such a split, deeming it irresponsible and wrongheaded. From the vantage point of common life – which becomes a central vantage point for Hume's philosophy (cf. Capaldi 1989, 22) –, Hume recognizes that within the enormous universe of R1-non-discernables there are better and worse beliefs, better and worse ways to understand the world, and better and worse reasons (*qua* arguments). Hume's R2 account enters the *Treatise* as a touchstone for discerning better and worse. Hume recognizes that some beliefs – like the belief in the uniformity of experience and the belief in the independent existence of an external world – are indispensable and focal to human experience. They prove to be all but necessary over time. These focal beliefs are so settled, so essential to the organization of the mind, that they approach the practical certainty of R1. Practically, they become internal to reason. Hume uses such beliefs to augment R1 and to construct R2. The R2 account serves to practically elevate the belief in experience over other less praiseworthy beliefs.

Yet despite R2's pragmatic status, it is held in check and called to self-reflection by R1. The R1 account checks the extent to which R2 can be applied and speaks to the proper manner and method of its application. Such checking is the basis for the dynamic between R1 and R2: R2 subsumes R1 and prevails out of practicality, out of a candid recognition of the irresponsibility and psychological instability of skeptical paralysis. But

R2, at least in Hume's case, moves forward diffidently upon reflection that it is not R1 and cannot discover its own foundation. The R1 account tells us both what R2 is and *what it is not*. R2 rests atop natural belief; it is experiential and sentimental; it can be subject to lock-in problems, to "false comparisons" (T 1.3.9.17); it is non-verifiable; it is not R1. The use of R2 is authorized by Hume on the grounds of a general sense of practicality. But it is not an infallible dogma and should not be wielded as such. The back and forth dynamic between R1 and R2 characterizes Hume's account of reasoning and recommends a spirit to the would-be philosopher. A proper wielding of R2 is a moderate wielding; a proper philosophy is a moderate, humble, and self-reflective philosophy.

The R1 Account

The best interpretation of R1 – a reading which is supported by each instance of Hume's use of the word *reason* qua faculty until T 1.3.11 – is, as Baier (1991, 60) puts it, of a "faculty of intuition and demonstration...which can discern 'intelligent connections.'" The root of R1 is intuition. Hume takes his concept of intuition from Locke. Locke describes intuition as the mind's "native Faculty to perceive the Coherence, or Incoherence of its *Ideas*" (ECHU 4.17.2). In step with Locke, Hume builds R1 from intuition up to demonstration. Demonstrations show "the Agreement, or Disagreement of two *Ideas*, by the intervention of one or more Proofs, which have a constant, immutable [i.e. intuitive], and visible connection with one another" (ECHU 4.15.1). A demonstration forms a chain of intuitive ideas, where each idea is bound to the next by the perception of intuitive connection. Demonstrations are certain and produce knowledge by construction. "They depend solely on the ideas that make them up. Since they depend on nothing else,

nothing can make them false” (Owen 1999, 97). In illustrating the ideas of intuition and demonstration, Locke gives the example of a triangle (ECHU 4.15.1). We can clearly intuit the idea of a triangle: a closed figure with three straight sides. We can clearly intuit the idea of a right angle as the angle made by perpendicular straight lines. Given the idea of a triangle and a right angle, we can demonstrate – intuitively perceive the connection between a number of intermediate ideas – that the sum of the angles in a triangle equals the sum of two right angles. Such a demonstration is certain by perception; it is not subject to question.

The narrow nature of R1 fits the subject of the first two parts of Book I of the *Treatise*. In Book I, Part 1, Hume lays out his model of the cognitive relationship between mental perceptions, impressions, and ideas, and explicitly introduces several intellectual faculties – although notably not *reason*! In Book I, Part 2, he uses his model, particularly his first principle that ideas come from impressions, to treat the ideas of space, time, and infinite divisibility. His treatment of mathematical ideas and apparent proofs is essentially comprised of the deconstruction of some “pretended demonstrations,” e.g. of the ideas of infinite divisibility and extension (T 1.2.2.10).

Hume speaks to the character of R1 in one of the first significant passages on *reason* in the *Treatise*:

A demonstration, if just, admits of no opposite difficulty; and if not just, ‘tis a mere sophism, and consequently can never be of difficulty... To talk therefore of objections and replies, and ballancing of arguments in such a question as this, is to confess, either that *human reason* [R1] is nothing but a play of words, or that the person himself, who talks so, has not a capacity equal to such subjects. (T 1.2.2.6; italics added)

He clearly associates *reason* here with the act of demonstration, broadly supporting an R1 reading. He proceeds to say that R1 operates upon exact ideas and proceeds by precise maxims (T 1.2.4.17). Demonstrations admit of no opposite difficulty in that they are certain by the law of non-contradiction. Demonstrated conclusions are implicit in the relation of ideas. To dispute the conclusion, for example, that the angles of a triangle sum to two right angles is impossible unless one incorrectly perceives the idea of triangle or of a right angle in the first place.

In Locke, reason is a matter of *perceiving* the relation of certain ideas. Hume's R1 is no different. The subtle implication is that R1 becomes generalizable and communicable only after the ideas relevant to a demonstration are correctly perceived. It is only after the relevant ideas are perceived that R1 becomes uniform and deterministic, like a logical processor, mapping the input of ideas to the output of conclusions. R1, then, is not *strictly* a matter of logic and modern deduction in that it is concerned with the ideas being related in and of themselves, whether or not they are true, false, just, unjust, etc.⁴ It is the terms of a sentence, not its structure, that are paramount. Hence for Hume "there are no demonstrative arguments with conclusions that are possibly false" (Owen 1999, 87). A logically valid argument with a non-intuitive premise and a false conclusion is *not* a demonstration – it is a "mere sophism" and implies no difficulty (T 1.2.2.6). A proper or just demonstration is an intuitive mapping from an intuitively certain idea to a conclusion.

⁴ On this point, see Owen (1999, 87-93). Owen argues that it is historically and conceptually implausible to interpret Hume's use of *demonstrative* to mean *deductive*, inasmuch as *deductive* is interpreted to mean "formally valid according to the rules of syllogism or modern logic" (ibid, 87).

The matter of perception and intuition introduces a bit of slack into R1. Demonstrations hang on intuition, which hangs on perception. But there is no guarantee that perception operates uniformly across different minds. There is no guarantee that I have the capacity to perceive that which you find intuitive. I may not have the capacity to enter into any particular demonstration. The Pythagorean Theorem is surely a just and proper demonstration. But many do not have the capacity to enter into it. A just demonstration requires both a correct perception of ideas and a correct understanding of their relationship.

Hume seems to apprehend one other difficulty with R1 concerning the formulation of intuition. It appears that intuition is somewhat non-linear. As a matter of R1, we can immediately intuit – that is, clearly perceive– large differences in resemblance, contrariety and degrees in quality (T 1.3.1.2). But when such differences are small, like the difference between 100 and 98 degrees Fahrenheit, we can't readily intuit the relationship between them. There is some threshold, past which the relationship of ideas in terms of resemblance, contrariety, and degrees in quality become muddled. The differences between black and white and between hot and cold are clearly perceived. But black and charcoal, hot and very warm, are not so easily distinguished.

The difficulties presented by intuition and the potentials of disjointed perception push Hume to generally limit R1 to matters of logic and mathematics: “There remain, therefore, algebra and arithmetic as the only sciences, in which we can carry on a chain of reasoning to any degree of intricacy, and yet preserve a perfect exactness and certainty. We are possest of a precise standard, by which we can judge of the equality and

proportion of numbers; and according as they correspond or not to that standard, we determine their relations, without any possibility of error” (T 1.3.1.4). He, in fact, seems to downplay intuition in the R1 account in his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.⁵ Hume tends to emphasize the operation of R1 once the perception of ideas is intuited. Once a shared perspective is established, R1 operates without hesitation, mapping input to output. Accordingly, I think it is fair to generally bypass the potential looseness of R1, and to basically caricature it as a matter of logical processing. It perceives relationships between certain and intuitive ideas and methodically maps from inputs to outputs. Once ideas are rightly perceived, discerning the relationship between ideas proceeds deterministically and without hesitation. R1 leads to certain knowledge of its objects.

R1 and Probable Reasoning

Reason has two modes in Locke: demonstrative reasoning and probable reasoning. “For as Reason perceives the necessary, and indubitable connexion of all the *Ideas* or Proofs one to another, in each step of any Demonstration that produces Knowledge: so it likewise perceives the probable connexion of all the *Ideas* or Proofs, one to another, in every step of a Discourse, to which it will think Assent is due” (ECHU 4.17.2; italics original). Demonstrative reasoning pertains to relations of ideas. Probable reasoning pertains to general matters of experience, or to matters of fact, as Hume calls them. To Locke, the inferences that comprise probable reasoning are the same in kind as

⁵ Indeed, if one only reads EHU, it is relatively easy – though still historically anachronistic – to simply read R1 as deductive reasoning in the logically formal sense. R1 is presented in EHU simply as reasoning concerning the relation of ideas. It takes shape most definitely in contrast to R2.

demonstrative inferences. Locke understands the warrant of both demonstrative reasoning and probable reasoning as deriving from acts of mental perception. Like demonstrative reasoning, probable reasoning is comprised of a chain of ideas where the connection between each idea is perceived. The difference is that unlike demonstrations, the links between ideas in probable inferences are “not constant and immutable,” i.e., they are not intuitive (ECHU 4.15.1). The credibility of probable inference in Locke hinges on the perceived “conformity of any thing with our own Knowledge, Observation, and Experience, and with the Testimony of others” (ECHU 4.15.4). For those unequipped with skills of mathematical reasoning, for example, the Pythagorean Theorem might be assessed true on the grounds of probable reasoning, rather than demonstrative reasoning. We might believe the Theorem to be true because we see our teachers, in whom we have faith, demonstrate it.

Hume departs from Locke on the matter of probable reasoning, drawing the bounds of R1. Hume’s R1 is Lockean in that it conforms to Locke’s thinking on demonstrative reasoning. But R1 is non-Lockean in that it excludes probable reasoning (Millican 1998, 145). Probable reasoning is not and cannot be a matter of R1 in Hume. R1 cannot account for the reliance on experience, nor can it interpret or deliberate on the basis of experience.

When Hume turns to consider probability in the *Treatise* (T 1.3.1), he grants that probable inferences from experience are certainly a sort of *reasoning*, i.e., of deliberation and conscious inference, and that people often use experience as a *reason* for doing things. But he is hesitant in attributing to them the title of *reason*. Hume’s semantics on

reason are different than Locke's. From an R1 perspective, probable reasoning is not *reasonable*. That is, there is no R1-reason to make inductive or probable inferences. The word *reason* up until the later part of Book I Part 3 of the *Treatise* quite strictly pertains to the activities of intuition and demonstration.

It is in his famous section on the problem of induction (T 1.3.6) that Hume directly shows that R1 cannot account for probable reasoning. His argument proceeds as follows: Probable inferences, in Lockean terms, hinge on the *perceived* "conformity of any thing with our own Knowledge, Observation, and Experience, and with the Testimony of others" (ECHU 4.15.4). But Hume observes that inferring a connection between a past and a present idea, which is the heart of probable reasoning, always tacitly third idea: the idea of the connectedness of the past and present experience or the uniform procedure of experience. This third idea concerning the connectedness of past and future cannot be verified by R1 simply because we can "at least conceive a change in the course of nature" (T 1.3.6.5). If we can conceive an idea contrary to X, then X is non-demonstrable (see T 1.2.2.6). It is impossible to conceive the contrary of any just demonstration. We can't rightly perceive a triangle and then conceive of a triangle with angles summing to anything but one hundred and eighty degrees. If the proposition that the future resembles the past was a matter of demonstration, we would not be able to conceive of the future not resembling the past by the very construction of those ideas. Since we can at least conceive, for example, of the sun not rising tomorrow, probable reasoning is not a relation of ideas. Probable reasoning and general matters of interpreting

experience, therefore, are not a matter of R1. Probable reasoning is not a matter of *reason*.⁶

There a number of different interpretations of Hume's argument at T 1.3.6. The main camps can roughly be divided into the traditional skeptical interpreters, which Don Garrett (1997, 77) summarizes as claiming "that inductive arguments never provide any real 'evidence' or 'grounds' for their conclusions," and the non-skeptical interpreters, who suggest Hume's skeptical arguments are, in fact, directed at a rationalist philosophical outlook that he himself does not endorse (e.g., Winters 1979; Beauchamp and Rosenberg 1981).⁷ My own interpretation leans more towards the skeptical camp. But I do not think that Hume is arguing that probable inferences are totally lacking in epistemic value. I simply think that Hume is saying *from a strictly R1 perspective*, probable reasoning has no warrant, which contributes later to his thinking about the scope and manner in which R2, his broader sense of practical reason, can be wielded.

My addition to the interpretations of T 1.3.6 centers on Hume's semantics, on his particular use of the word *reason*. Hume is careful in the early sections of Book I Part 3 about his use of the word *reason*. He does not, in fact, refer to reason *qua* faculty at all in the first four sections of Part 3. His avoidance reflects the purposeful structure of his

⁶ Hume most succinctly expresses this argument in the *First Enquiry*: "We have said, that all arguments concerning existence are found on the relation of cause and effect; that our knowledge of that relation is derived entirely from experience; and that all our experimental conclusions proceed upon the supposition, that the future will be conformable to the past. To endeavour, therefore, the proof of this last supposition by probable arguments, or arguments regarding existence, must be evidently going in a circle, and taking for granted, which is the very point in question." (EHU 4.1.19).

⁷ See Garrett (1997, Chapter 4) for a full treatment of the different interpretations of Hume on induction. Garrett methodically goes through three different variants of the skeptical interpretation and four different versions of the non-skeptical interpretation.

argument and his planned *semantic* transition from R1 to a looser yet more practical concept of reason: R2.

If we follow Hume's rhetoric and careful employment of the word *reason*, it becomes clear that the R1 account culminates and centers around the problem of induction at T 1.3.6 and the four subsequent sections of the *Treatise*.

In the course of his treatment the relationship between reason and probable reasoning in T 1.3.6, Hume uses the word *reason* in reference to R1 six times. These six comments about R1 are the most direct and candid comments about reason up to this point in the *Treatise*. The statements fall into three groups of sentences:

- (1) The next question is whether experience produces the idea [that the future resembles the past] by means of the understanding or of the imagination; whether we are determin'd by **reason** to make the transition, or by a certain association and relation of perception. If **reason** determin'd us, it wou'd proceed upon that principle, *that instances, of which we have had no experience, must resemble those, of which we have had experience, and that the course of nature continues always uniformly the same.* (T 1.3.6.4; italics original, bold added)
- (2) Thus not only our **reason** fails us in the discovery of the *ultimate connexion* of causes and effects, but even after experience has inform'd us of their *constant conjunction*, 'tis impossible for us to satisfy ourselves by our **reason**, why we shou'd extend that experience beyond those particular instances, which have fallen under our observation. (T 1.3.6.11; italics original, bold added)
- (3) **Reason** can never shew us the connexion of one object with another, 'tho aided by experience, and the observation of their constant conjunction in past instances. When the mind, therefore, passes from the idea or impression of one object to the idea or belief of another, it is not determined by **reason**, but by certain principles, which associate together the idea of these objects, and unite them in the imagination. (T 1.3.6.12)

The structure of Hume's argument amounts to a stark limitation of R1. He tells us: (1) If R1 could validate probable reasoning, it would do so based on the proposition that the future resembles the past. (2) The proposition that the future resembles the past cannot be

validated by R1; there are no demonstrative arguments to prove the proposition with certainty. (3) Therefore, probable reasoning must be based on something other than R1, on some instinctive principles of association that lead to belief in the uniformity of experience.

The whole argument of T 1.3.6 only makes sense if *reason* throughout the section is understood as R1, the strict faculty of intuition and demonstration. If *reason* extended to include probable reasoning, then Hume's arguments would be redundant. If probable reasoning, as in Locke, were included in *reason*, then there would be no tension to resolve, no problem of induction, as it were. And as a textual matter, Hume gives us no reason to suspect that he has broadened R1, which he employs quite explicitly and narrowly throughout the first two parts of Book I. His equivocation between *reason*, *demonstration*, and *demonstrative reasoning* fits with a strict R1 reading of the section.

I agree with Robert Fogelin's (1985, 39) claim that a central element in T 1.3.6 is a "complex dialectical development that allows Hume to...prepare the way for the triumph of the imagination as the primary faculty for the fixation of belief."

Understanding *reason* in T 1.3.6 as R1 is an important part of this dialectical development. Such an understanding implies that Hume broadens his conception of reason at some point after T 1.3.6 to include probable reasoning, which he undoubtedly treats as a proper activity of *reason* at later points in his work, and, moreover, that this broader understanding of *reason* cannot be *reasonable* from an R1-perspective.

Hume's first step in the move towards a broader notion of *reason* that encompasses probable reasoning is the relocation of probable reasoning into the province

of customary and instinctive association, into the province of belief. Hume tells us that the proposition that the future resembles the past becomes a habit. The mind feels it, believes it, to be true. But it is not a matter of R1. We believe in experience because it is necessary in our interpretations. We *feel* experience to be reliable, we don't prove its reliability. Hume takes such thinking to the limit when he frames probable reasoning as a sensation:

Thus probable reasoning is nothing but a species of sensation. 'Tis not solely in poetry and music, we must follow our taste and sentiment, but likewise in philosophy. When I am convinc'd of a principle, 'tis only an idea, which strikes more strongly upon me. When I give preference to one set of arguments above another, I do nothing but decide from my feeling concerning the superiority of their influence. (T 1.3.8.11)

Probable reasoning is a sensation in that the warrant of its conclusions is a matter of the feeling associated with perception, which corresponds to Hume's definition of belief. The sensory nature of probable reasoning operates subconsciously, "in such an insensible manner as never to be taken notice of" and that "may even in some measure be unknown to us" (T 1.3.8.11). Probable reasoning becomes a habitual interpretive principle. In illustrating the manner by which sensations form interpretive principles, Hume gives the example of a man who comes upon a river. The man's view of the river is formed by the subconscious interaction of his past impressions: "The idea of sinking is so closely connected with that of water, the idea of suffocating with that of sinking, that the mind makes the transition without the assistance of memory. The custom operates before we have time for reflection" (T 1.3.8.13).

Perhaps it is Hume's sensory account of probable reasoning that makes him hesitant to locate it within the proper province of *reason*. The sensory and customary

nature of probable reasoning implies that there are potential lock-in effects of custom on one's deliberation. Custom teaches the mind to associate certain experiences and to view them in a specific context. Custom, through the mechanism of convention, forms the backbone of probable reasoning. But custom can warp interpretation, provide the wrong context, and posit false causality. Custom can lead to bad perspectives, perspectives that are "impossible for us, by all the powers of reason [R1] and experience, to eradicate" (T 1.3.9.17). Hume's concern about granting probable reasoning the status of *reason* appears to come forth in a curious footnote: "In general we may observe, that as our assent to probable reasonings is founded on the vivacity of ideas, it resembles many of those whimsies and prejudices, which are rejected under the opprobrious character of being the offspring of the imagination" (T 1.3.9.19 n22).

The Transition to R2

All of Hume's statements on the faculty of reason in the *Treatise* – excluding some relatively ambiguous passages in the introduction – from T 1.1. up through T 1.3.10 fit a strict R1 interpretation of *reason*. Through the early part of the *Treatise* it is quite safe to say that Hume conceives of reason simply as a faculty of intuition and demonstration, and that he conceives of probable reasoning as a matter of customary association that lies outside the bounds of *reason*. But a broader survey of Hume's use of *reason* in the *Treatise* – and in his other works – quickly reveals problems with a strict R1 reading of *reason*. Whereas in T 1.3.6, Hume says that reason can never show us the connection between one object and another, he says *exactly* the opposite in T 2.3.3.3: "Where the objects themselves do not affect us, their connexion can never give them any

influence; and 'tis plain, that as reason is nothing but the discovery of this connexion, it cannot be by its means that the objects are able to affect us." He reiterates this point again in Book III: "reason, in a strict and philosophical sense, can have an influence on our conduct...when it discovers the connexion of causes and effects, so as to afford us means of exerting any passion" (T 3.1.1.12). Hume seems perfectly comfortable including reasoning concerning matters of fact within the proper province of reason later in the *Treatise* (e.g., T 3.1.1.9), even though he explicitly says earlier that probable reasoning is not determined by the proper faculty of reason (T 1.3.8).

I agree with Barbara Winters (1979) that the only responsible way to resolve the tension between Hume's statements on reason is to read him as employing two conceptions of reason. Any other interpretation simply encounters too many difficulties to solve and attributes him with a considerable amount of carelessness. I find it both more convincing and charitable to interpret the contradictory statements on reason in Hume not as being a matter carelessness, but a representation "of the way he does philosophy" (Livingston 1985, 35).

There is some textual evidence for interpreting Hume as consciously employing two different concepts of reason, evidence that in fact suggests a conscious transition on his part from R1 to R2. The most direct evidence of such a transition comes at the beginning of T 1.3.11.⁸ In a curious passage, Hume says:

⁸ Some less direct but important evidence is presented in a footnote: "'tis very difficult to talk of the operations of the mind with perfect propriety and exactness; because common language has seldom made any very nice distinctions among them, but has generally call'd by the same term all such as nearly resemble each other. And as this is a source almost inevitable of obscurity and confusion in the

Those philosophers [including Locke], who have divided human reason into *knowledge* and *probability*, and have defin'd the first to be *that evidence, which arise from the comparison of ideas*, are oblig'd to comprehend all our arguments from causes or effects under the general term of *probability*. But tho' every one be free to use his term in what sense he pleases; and accordingly in the precedent part of this discourse, I have follow'd **this method of expression**; 'tis however certain, that in common discourse we readily affirm, that many arguments from causation exceed probability, and may be receiv'd as a superior kind of evidence. (T 1.3.11.2; italics original, bold added)

This passage is read by Don Garrett (1997, 85) as an admission by Hume that “he has been following the common Lockean usage” of the term reason. Garrett asserts that Hume goes along with Locke and views the products of reason to be knowledge and probability, corresponding with the demonstrative and probable modes of reasoning. But I read Hume as saying that he has been using the term *reason* in “what sense he pleases,” that is, in an uncommon, distinctive sense that is different from Locke and other philosophers. That sense is R1, which, again, is distinct from Lockean reason in that it excludes the activity of probable reasoning from its domain.

The interpretation of T 1.3.11.2 hinges on what Hume means when he says “I have follow'd this method of expression.” If *this* is meant to refer to (1) the method of expression that Locke and other philosophers have used, then Garrett is correct, and Hume is simply saying that he has been using *reason* like Locke and his other intellectual predecessors. But if *this* is meant to refer to (2) the free-to-use method of expression, as it were, then my interpretation stands. As a textual matter, reading *this* as a reference to (2) seems a more natural reading of the sentence. The *this* more readily reads as reference to author; so it may frequently give rise to doubts and objections in the reader, which otherwise he wou'd never have dream'd of” (T 1.3.8.15n).

the first clause in the sentence – “But tho’ every one be free to use his term in what sense he pleases” – than as a reference back to the first sentence in the paragraph. As a broader interpretive matter, the second reading better squares with the fact that Hume’s use of *reason* up until T 1.3.11 is almost undoubtedly limited to a narrow kind of *reason*.

Interpretation (2) better aligns with the fact that at T 1.3.11.1 Hume has not yet once said that probable reasoning falls under the province of *reason* – and indeed, he says just the opposite in T 1.3.6.

The last sentence of the quoted selection of T 1.3.11.2 perhaps reaffirms my interpretation. Hume says: “’tis however certain, that in common discourse we readily affirm, that many arguments from causation exceed probability, and may be receiv’d as a superior kind of evidence” (T 1.3.11.2). In other words, he can be interpreted as saying that although he has been using *reason* to mean R1, *reason* typically means something more practical in common discourse, some faculty of inference that abstracts from the problem of induction and holds fixed the uniformity of experience. T 1.3.11 signals Hume pivoting from R1 towards R2.

Why would Hume choose to abandon his R1 concept of reason around T 1.3.11? The answer, I think, is a practical one: If he had continued with his narrow R1 account of reason, it would difficult for him to defend or posit the practical superiority of probable reasoning, and hence a reliance on experience and observation, over the other rejected “whimsies and prejudices” of the imagination that probable reasoning resembles (see T 1.3.9.19 n22). Millican (1998, 147) describes such an interpretation: “Having thus done away with the Lockean understanding of reason’s essential nature and its implied warrant

based on mental perception, Hume is anxious to avoid the consequence that probable reasoning is on all fours with the ‘whimsies and prejudices’ that are the imagination’s more typical offspring.” After pointing out that probable reasoning is not a matter of R1, Hume somehow needs to practically defend probable reasoning against some relevant alternative ways of knowing, particularly total skepticism and religious superstition (see, e.g., Ridge 2003, 167). Total skepticism, as Garrett (1997, 232) points out, is psychologically unstable and impractical. And religious superstition – understood as an unreflective faith in the supernatural–, might lead to political instability, violence, and bad social practice (e.g., T 1.4.7.13). Hume needs to illustrate that despite the customary and unverifiable nature of probable reasoning – and experience more generally –, it is more reliable than and superior to the alternatives.

Part of Hume’s practical defense of probable reasoning, I think, is his quiet semantic shift from R1 to R2 in and of itself. Granting the title of *reason* to probable reasoning probably does more to justify its use than any epistemological argument could achieve. As the word *charity* better inculcates the precept “*Be charitable*, than any pretended legislator or prophet” (EMPL 229), so the word *reason* might better inculcates the precept *be reasonable* than any philosopher. Hume understands that semantics matter and uses them to encourage a practical reliance on probable reasoning.

But if Hume employs R2 to convey something about the superior credibility of probable reasoning, we might wonder, why would he bother confining himself to a strict R1 account in the first place? One might argue that Hume sought to make the simple taxonomic and conceptual point that R1 and probable reasoning are different by

constitution. But I think there is a more significant reason for the R1-R2 distinction and the dual account of reason. Again, it is worth recalling Livingston's (1985, 36) contention that philosophical understanding is found by examining the structure of contrarities in Hume. I suggest that Hume conveys an understanding of the proper use and scope of *reason* not by simply elaborating the formulation of R1 or R2, but by dialectically juxtaposing R1 and R2 and some of their corollary ideas. One way to express this juxtaposition is with the following contrarities:

(1) R1 shows us that probable reasoning is not R1-reasonable.

(2) The mind unavoidably relies on probable reasoning. The mind considers such a move to be *reasonable*.

(1) summarizes the R1 account; (2) summarizes the move to R2. Simply apprehending (1) will lead either to deep skepticism or to a substitution into superstition. It will lead to a neglect of R2, which will result in a melancholy paralysis or a thoughtless folding to whimsy. On the other hand, viewing (2) without apprehending (1) might lead to an unreflective use of R2 without understanding the true nature of its authority: practical necessity and agreeable feeling. This might lead to an overreliance on and an abuse of reason to justify, e.g., religious intolerance, unsound moral doctrine, or political persecution. As Hume says later in the *Treatise*: "Nothing is more dangerous to reason than the flights of the imagination, and nothing has been the occasion of more mistakes among philosophers" (T 1.4.7.6). It is only by holding (1) and (2) in balance, by recognizing the hold that each position has, that one can come to a proper understanding of the delicate matter of *reason* and can begin to reason justly.

The R2 Account

R2 is a broader, practical and more casual inferential faculty than R1. It has two proper activities: demonstrative reasoning concerning the relations of ideas and probable reasoning concerning matters of fact. The most direct formulation of R2 is: R2 equals R1 plus probable reasoning and its corollary settled principles of the imagination.

As has been discussed, at T 1.3.11.2, Hume seems to expand R1 into R2 to preserve the integrity of the custom of probable reasoning and to elevate it over other more whimsical imaginary principles. Upon such an elevation, he immediately makes a pragmatic distinction between knowledge, probability, and proofs. He claims that proofs are “entirely free from uncertainty” (T 1.3.11.2). The proposition that the future resembles the past, for instance, comes towards achieving the status of proof in its firm hold of the mind and the pragmatic impossibility of denying it. This proposition amounts to what some have called a natural belief in Hume. Generally speaking, natural beliefs are pillars “against which none of our other more specific beliefs...[are] possible to the mind” (Kemp Smith 2005, 124). Although these natural beliefs clash with R1, or at least cannot be verified by R1, they are *constitutive* of R2. Repeated experiences are firm in the mind, rendering them all but certain. As Hume puts it in his *First Enquiry*, “One wou’d appear ridiculous, who wou’d say, that ‘tis only probable the sun will rise to-morrow, or that all men must dye” (T 1.3.11.1).

R2 envelops the demonstrations and intuitions that are a matter of R1 and stretches to include certain settled principles of the imagination including the belief in

probable reasoning. In the second half of his controversial footnote that weakly associates probable reasoning with whimsy and prejudice, Hume elaborates:

By this expression it appears that the word, *imagination*, is commonly us'd in two different senses; and tho' nothing be more contrary to true philosophy, than this inaccuracy, yet in the following reasonings I have often been oblig'd to fall into it. When I oppose the imagination to memory, I mean the faculty, by which we form our fainter ideas. When I oppose it to reason, I mean the same faculty, excluding only our demonstrative and probable reasonings. When I oppose it to neither, 'tis indifferent whether it be taken in the larger or more limited sense, or at least the context will sufficiently explain the meaning. (T 1.3.9.19 n 22)

This is an important passage for several reasons. It is an important admission on Hume's part of equivocating on his use of *imagination*. Such an admission suggests that he could have used *reason* in multiple senses without directly drawing attention to the fact. Millican (1998, 146) interprets T 1.3.9.19 in such a way. But Hume's comment here also tells us that R2 is a subset of the imagination, comprised of probable and demonstrative reasoning, which constitute more settled or regular principles of the imagination (see Baier 1991, 72). Internal to the probable reasoning mode of R2 are the principles of resemblance and contiguity, which aid inference and enhance belief. As Hume puts it: "resemblance, when conjoin'd with causation, fortifies our reasonings..." (T 1.3.9.13).

The settled principles of the imagination that are internal to R2 stand in contrast to more whimsical principles of the imagination in that (1) they are central pieces of consciousness and (2) operate without disturbing or exciting the mind. In terms of (1), the settled principles of R2 are practical principles of thinking that are constitutive of the mind's interpretation of the world. They proceed despite skepticism. "Thus the sceptic still continues to reason and believe, even tho' he asserts, that he cannot defend his

reason by reason...Nature has not left this [i.e., belief in both the soundness of probable reasoning and the existence of the body] to his choice, and has doubtless esteem'd it an affair of too great importance to be trusted to our uncertain reasonings and speculations” (T 1.4.2.1). Belief in the external existence of objects, of causation, and of the self, are so formative to our thinking that they achieve the status of *proof* and intertwine with our understanding. In terms of (2), the operation-without-reflection element and the sentimental nature of R2 parallels Hume’s thinking on calm passions. R2 and calm passions alike become orientations, lenses through which the world is viewed. Hume even blurs the line between R2 and calm passion in his work, noting that they are often conflated, and even stating in his later *Dissertation on the Passions* that “what is commonly, in a popular sense, called reason, and is so much recommended in moral discourses, is nothing but a general and a calm passion, which takes a comprehensive and a distant view of its object, and actuates the will, without exciting any sensible emotion” (DP 5.2).

R2 is practically superior than the less settled and more whimsical operators in the imagination. The sections that follow T 1.3.11 are, at least in part, aimed at bringing probable reasoning into the fold of *reason*, aimed at establishing probable reasoning as a matter of R2, which Hume considers to comprise “the more general and authentic operations of the understanding” (T 1.3.13.12). Hume continues to sketch general rules that describe how and why we discern better and worse R2-reasoning (T 1.3.15). His treatment of the evolving nature of general rules underscores the fact that R2 stands not in distinction to experience, but in fact is *informed* by subconscious experience and

prescientific consciousness. The mind assents to and leans on R2 *experientially*. This is a large point that Hume drives towards up through Book I, Part 4.

Hume finishes Book I Part 3 by considering R2 analogically. He compares R2 to animal reason. The section is a rhetorical move by Hume to subtly underscore the nature of cognition. In putting R2 on level with the reason of animals – in kind, if not in degree –, not only does Hume show that R2 is not obviously, as Locke has it, “That Faculty, whereby Man is supposed to be distinguished from Beasts” (ECHU 4.17.1). He also reminds of the sentimental makeup of much of our thought life: “*all our reasonings concerning causes and effects are deriv’d from nothing but custom...belief is more properly an act of the sensitive than the cogitative part of our natures*” (T 1.4.1.7; italics original)

His analogical analysis of R2 culminates in the first direct definition of *reason* in the *Treatise*: “To consider the matter aright, reason is nothing but a wonderful and unintelligible instinct in our souls, which carries us along a certain train of ideas, and endows them with particular qualities, according to their particular situations and relations” (T 1.3.16.9). The words *unintelligible* and *instinct* loom in the definition. R2 is an instinct in that it presupposes the uniformity of experience and relies on prescientific consciousness, as it were. It is unintelligible in that it cannot be resolved, proved, by R1.

The R1-R2 Dynamic

There is a kind of back and forth movement or dialogue between R1 to R2. The essence of this R1-R2 dynamic is the spiraling check of R2 by R1, that is, by reference to the non-foundational nature of R2 and uncertainty of its proceedings. The limitations of

R1 and the fact that R2 is not reasonable from an R1 perspective must be apprehended, on Hume's account, to rightly understand what it means *to reason* and to understand the requisite spirit for just reasoning. A neglect of R2 in favor of R1 leads to a neglect of reason and to paralyzing skepticism. But a neglect of R1 and its implications for the limitations of human understanding might lead to an unrestricted and insufficiently reflective use, perhaps an abuse, of R2.

The R1-R2 dynamic unfolds slowly throughout Book I of the *Treatise*. But it can be seen perhaps most clearly and concisely in the famous conclusion to Book I (T 1.4.7; hereafter "Conclusion").

Hume's Conclusion begins reflectively. He stops to consider the disquieting implications of this thinking for the practice of philosophy. Upon reflection, a melancholy overtakes him. He recognizes and is brought low by "the wretched condition, weakness, and disorder of the faculties, [he] must employ in [his] enquiries" (T 1.4.7.1). His thinking leads him to "doubt and ignorance." His deliberations proceed "with hesitation, and every new reflection makes [him] dread an error and absurdity in [his] reasoning" (T 1.4.7.2).

The core of his concern is the frailty and contradictory nature of human understanding. He tacitly recaps his discovery that R1 cannot justify or account for a reliance upon experience, the idea of causation, the existence of external objects, the reliance of sensory data, or even the existence of the self. There is no R1-reason to assent to the conclusion that such ideas are sound. Moreover, some of these propositions even provide a contradiction in terms: the idea of causation, for example, undermines the

reliance upon the senses and casts a shadow on a connection between the senses and the real existence external world (see T 1.4.2). Assent to these propositions of common life is not a matter of R1. It is a matter of customary association and feeling, a matter of belief. As Hume puts it, “After the most accurate and exact of my reasonings, I can give no [R1] reason why I should assent to it [his common and relatively unreflective beliefs]; and feel nothing but a *strong* propensity to consider objects *strongly* in that view, under which they appear to me” (T 1.4.7.3; italics original).

Hume continues past the myriad contradictions by determining to make feeling *a reason*. There is no R1-reason to assent to probable reasoning and its corollary common beliefs. But there is reason (qua argument) inasmuch as feeling itself becomes internal to reason, to some new standard of warrant. There is reason inasmuch as reason transforms into R2.

The move past R1 to R2 is customary and instinctive, driven by feeling (e.g. T 1.3.8.11); it always prevails in the common affairs life. But when considered abstractly, Hume again recognizes that such a move to R2 proceeds “merely from an illusion of the imagination” (T 1.4.7.6). The relevant question is “how far we ought to yield to these illusions?” (ibid). Again, two contrarieties appear in Hume: (1) R1 shows us that probable reasoning and associated common beliefs are not R1-reasonable. (2) The mind inclines to probable reasoning and to R2. Rejecting all but R1 – i.e., simply accepting contrariety (1) – leads to nothingness. “The understanding when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either in philosophy or common life” (T 1.4.7.7).

But blindly accepting R2 – acknowledging (2) without (1) – subverts credibility and can lead to perverse and dangerous conclusions: “For if we assent to every trivial suggestion of the fancy...they lead us into such errors, absurdities, and obscurities, that we must at last become ashamed of our credulity. Nothing is more dangerous to reason than the flights of the imagination, and nothing has been the occasion of more mistakes among philosophers” (T 1.4.7.6).

Hume reflects:

What party, then, shall we choose among these difficulties? If we embrace this principle, and condemn all refined reasoning [i.e., unreflectively accept R2], we run into the most manifest absurdities. If we reject it in favour of these reasonings [i.e., don't move past R1], we subvert entirely the human understanding. We have, therefore, no choice left but betwixt a false reason [R2] and none at all. For my part, I know not what ought to be done in the present case. (T 1.4.7.7)

The tension and the expression of the R1-R2 dynamic culminates in Hume's apparent existential crisis, where he is “confounded with all these questions” and fancies himself “in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environ'd with the deepest darkness, and utterly depriv'd of the use of every member and faculty” (T 1.4.7.8). He is famously rescued from this crisis by “nature herself” (T 1.4.7.9). Nature elevates the imagination and enables it to embrace to a the broader, practical reason of R2, pointing out the insufficiencies of isolated contemplation without action and social engagement (cf. Matson and Doran 2017). In other words, the mind – Hume's included – seems to incline to R2 by constitution, by sentiment, by a lively conception of experience and natural belief.

But it is important to see that Hume characterizes the move to R2 and the rejection of splenetic humor, as it were, as an ongoing movement, not a one-time

decision. The end of Hume's Conclusion shows him moving through different moments of disposition, moments that reflect the things of which he is skeptical and the things to which he determines to apply R2.

After Hume moves past his crisis and accepts R2 and the beliefs of common life, he feels checked again by a skepticism of knowledge: "But notwithstanding that my natural propensity, and the course of my animal spirits and passions reduce me to this indolent belief in the general maxims of the world, I still feel such remains of my former disposition, that I am ready to throw all my books and papers into the fire" (T 1.4.7.10). A shadow of his skeptical attitude looms and he hesitates in moving forward with his philosophy. Yet he resolves to press forward:

But does it follow [i.e. it does follow],⁹ that I must strive against the current of nature, which leads me to indolence and pleasure; that I must seclude myself, in some measure, from the commerce and society of men, which is so agreeable; and that I must torture my brain with subtilities and sophistries, at the very time that I cannot satisfy myself concerning the reasonableness of so painful an application, nor have any tolerable prospect of arriving by its means at truth and certainty. (T 1.4.7.10)

Hume cannot accept the abandoning of philosophizing. He strives against the impulse to unreflective existence. He still feels he must seclude himself from society to a degree and push forward with his philosophy. He feels that despite the fact that the world is not reasonable from an R1-perspective, there are still things that we *can* better explain, better and worse interpretations to be abductively formulated using R2. Beyond the aim of

⁹ David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton changed this sentence to end with a "?" in their 2000 edition of the *Treatise*. But almost all previous editions of the *Treatise* (e.g., Hume 1978) end the sentence with a "." I disagree with the Norton's punctuation change. With a period, the sentence should be read as Hume saying "it does follow," not "does it follow?", a reading that better accords with the structure of the entire paragraph.

foundationalist epistemology there is meaning and potential in philosophizing. He decides to still torture his brain with “subtilties and sophistries.” These “subtilties and sophistries” might be understood as Hume’s subsequent publications and efforts in philosophy: Books II, III of the *Treatise*, his *Enquiries*, his *Essays*, and his *History of England*. He proceeds with “subtilties and sophistries,” i.e., his philosophical inquiry, even though he still feels a shadow of skepticism; he can’t discover any ultimate reason for his subsequent philosophy. He has no hope of arriving at the bottom or discovering a foundation for his “science of man.”

Hume moves from hesitation to resolve, renewing his commitment to R2, although now in a candidly non-foundationalist manner: “If I must be a fool, as all those who reason or believe anything *certainly* are, my follies shall at least be natural and agreeable. Where I strive against my inclination, I shall have a good reason for my resistance; and will no more be led a wandering into such dreary solitudes, and rough passages, as I have hitherto met with” (T 1.4.7.10; italics original). The most succinct expression the R1-R2 dynamic follows shortly thereafter:

In all the incidents of life we ought still to preserve our skepticism. If we believe, that fire warms, or water refreshes, ‘tis only because it costs us too much pains to think otherwise. Nay if we are philosophers, it ought only to be upon sceptical principles, and from an inclination, which we feel to the employing ourselves after that manner. Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate upon us. (T 1.4.7.9)

R1 is insufficient to explain the things that matter. We are not content to say that we simply can’t explain things; total skepticism is psychologically unstable. It pains us not to be able to make claims about things. We feel that we have reason to understand the

world and make claims about it. Feeling pushes us onward to R2. But wielding R2 is responsible – at least from Hume’s vantage point – only inasmuch as the philosopher recognizes the shortcomings of the R1 account and stays from dogmatism and an inappropriate pretense of knowledge. A responsible use of R2 is a reflective use of R2. A responsible use of R2 moves through moments of skepticism and resolve, as Hume illustrates in his Conclusion.

The Spirit of Philosophy

The R1-R2 dynamic speaks to the character of just reasoning and a Humean ethos of philosophy (cf. Livingston 1998, 37). Just reasoning generally must proceed by entering into the R1-R2 dynamic, that is, by understanding both the limitations of R1 and the contradictions internal to R2. The spirit of the philosopher should be self-reflective, moderate, and humble. “Philosophy...if just, can present us only with mild and moderate sentiments; and if false and extravagant, its opinions are merely the objects of a cold and general speculation, and seldom go so far as to interrupt the course of our natural propensities” (T 1.4.7.13).

Understanding the R1-R2 dynamic recommends a candid expression and admission of the relative ignorance in which our reasoning often operates and a continual examination of the grounds upon which we reason. Even R1 doesn’t operate in a vacuum but within the universe of R2. And R2 operates within an even wider universe of convention and passion (see, e.g., T 2.3.3.4). Within a constructed universe, like a scientific model, R1 is certain. But the certainty of R1 operates within a frame of R2-uncertainty and an even wider field of experience. Hume himself is up front with such an

admission of relative ignorance from the outset of the *Treatise*: “When we see, that we have arriv’d at the utmost extent of human reason, we sit down contented; tho’ we be perfectly satisfy’d in the main of our ignorance, and perceive that we can give no reason for our most general and most refin’d principles, beside our experience” (T Intro.9). In his Conclusion, he expresses that one of his goals is to encourage such admission and reflectiveness in philosophers: “For my part, my only hope is, that I may contribute a little to the advancement of knowledge, by giving in some particulars a different turn to the speculations of philosophers, and pointing out to them more distinctly those subjects, where alone they can expect assurance and conviction” (T 1.4.7.14). Admitting the looseness of R2 and the stringent limitations of R1, Hume hopes, will limit the pretense of philosophy and demarcate our expectations of what we can achieve through the understanding. The philosopher is a participant in life, not an external spectator.

Though just reason is checked by skepticism, it cannot not stop with skepticism. The philosopher cannot simply be content with admitting her relative ignorance (see T Intro.1). After Hume’s return to nature, as it were, he says:

I cannot forbear having a curiosity to be acquainted with the principles of moral good and evil, the nature and foundation of government, and the cause of those several passions and inclination, which actuate and govern me... These sentiments spring up naturally in my present disposition; and shou’d I endeavour to banish them, by attaching myself to any other business or diversion, I *feel* I shou’d be a loser in point of pleasure; and this is the origin of my philosophy (T 1.4.7.12; italics original).

The just reasoner should carry on using R2 and applying it reflectively. The simple fact that R2 rests on unverifiable grounds (from an R1 perspective) does not mean that the philosopher should sit still and do nothing. There are still better and worse interpretations

within R2. Hume's entire philosophical enterprise, in fact, is basically an attempt to discern better and worse interpretations within R2. The broad sweep of Hume's career is dedicated to discerning superior interpretations in morals, politics, history, and the passions *given* the nature of R2. And indeed, Hume says it is proper that "we shou'd indulge our inclination in the most elaborate philosophical researches, notwithstanding our skeptical principles" and that we should also "yield to that propensity, which inclines us to be positive and certain in *particular point*, according to the light, in which we survey them in any *particular instant*" (T 1.4.7.15; italics original). Book II and III of the *Treatise*, the *Essays*, and the *History of England* represent Hume's particular instances of reasoning, his forward movements with R2 despite its nature and despite its call to account by R1.

CHAPTER TWO: ADAM SMITH'S HUMEAN ATTITUDE ABOUT SCIENCE; ILLUSTRATED BY "THE HISTORY OF ASTRONOMY"

In this chapter¹, I discuss some significant connections between Smith and Hume's thinking about science or philosophy (terms I use interchangeably) evidenced by Smith's posthumously published essay, "The History of Astronomy." I am not the first to see such connections (see, e.g., Lindgren 1969; Skinner 1974; Raphael 1979; Prasch 1996, 1114). But I feel that they merit further exploration and development.

Some scholars have recently argued that Smith is different than Hume on science. Eric Schliesser (e.g., 2005, 2010) argues that Smith subtly differentiates himself from Hume's philosophy – particularly from Hume's conception of true philosophy – and establishes himself as some sort of moderate realist. Christopher Berry (2006) broadly corroborates such an interpretation and understands Smith as embracing, or at least not opposing, realist formulations. Kwangsu Kim (2012) argues that Smith should be interpreted as a critical realist and that he is different from Hume in his thinking about knowledge.

I propose a reading of Smith on science in terms of Humean naturalism. Ryan Hanley (2010) has recently emphasized the influence of Humean naturalism in Smith's moral philosophy. But such influence has not yet, to my knowledge, been extended to Smith's thinking about and attitude towards science.

¹ This chapter is forthcoming in the *Adam Smith Review*.

Humean naturalism, which is distinct from scientism or a reductionist naturalism, can be summed up as the mind's pragmatic acceptance of its faith-like belief in a general frame of belief formation (cf. Strawson 1985, 11–21). Such faith-like belief formation occupies a central space in human thought despite its loose logical underpinnings and vulnerability to skeptical criticism. Smith's HA demonstrates that faith-like belief formation characterizes the backbone of scientific inquiry. Belief formation in science operates creatively and sentimentally through the imagination upon the theatre of nature. Scientific interpretation to Smith, as Charles Griswold (1999, 161) puts it, is “‘from us’, not as established by nature or the divine.” There is an open-endedness to science and a universe of imagination in Smith that echoes Hume.

HA in its entirety can be read as a rhetorical and pedagogical exercise in the epistemology of Humean naturalism. I break down Smith's undertaking of this exercise into three stages: (1) He begins the essay by recognizing the mind's unavoidable commitment to belief in the regularity of nature. His recognition of this commitment is demonstrated by his sentimental account of the process of scientific inquiry and his implicit treatment in that account of the twin presuppositions, or natural beliefs, that constitute a Humean frame of belief formation: the belief in external existence and the belief in causal relations. (2) He proceeds to recognize the frailty of the underpinnings of such belief formation and to highlight reasons for maintaining a skeptical attitude, reasons which he apparently takes to heart. (3) Finally, he demonstrates the pervasiveness of belief in spite of reasons for skepticism by consciously and ironically contradicting his own apparent commitments to skepticism and sliding into a kind of truth-talk about

Newtonian Copernicanism. Smith shows the reader the process by which the mind naturally gravitates towards belief formation by going through the process *himself*. Smith's move can be construed as a sort of *a fortiori* argument about the deepest-to-date nature of science: If unverifiable belief dominates an investigation into the very principles that directing philosophical inquiry, then such unverifiable belief should be understood to subconsciously dominate the process of inquiry more generally.

In Part 2, I elaborate my understanding of Hume's naturalism. In Parts 3 and 4, I treat Smith's sentimental account of inquiry and his understanding of the presuppositions of Humean belief formation in HA; I provide evidence for interpreting Smith as adopting Hume's outlook concerning external existence and causation. In Part 5, I consider Smith's skepticism and understanding of the indeterminate nature of knowledge in science. In Part 6, I discuss Smith's rhetorical demonstration in HA of the nature of belief in science. Part 7 concludes.

Hume's Naturalism

The early interpreters of Hume, e.g., Thomas Reid and James Beattie, understood Hume as a global skeptic who merely succeeded in undermining faith in existence, causation, the self, and the deity (see Kemp Smith 2005, 3–20). A tradition of similar interpretations of Hume continued into the twentieth century. But interpreting Hume as a dogmatic, negative skeptic is wrongheaded. Such interpretations tend to be overly dependent on Book I of Hume's *Treatise* and, moreover, neglect the subtly and dialectic present *within* Book I (see Baier 1991, Chapter 1; Livingston 1998, Chapter 2; Ridge 2003; Merrill 2015; Chapter 1). When one takes a more holistic view of Hume's writings,

it is clear that his philosophy is not confined to the negative contributions of dogmatic skepticism – although a certain species of “academic” skepticism does loom large in his outlook (see EHU 12; Garrett 2004). Hume does not look to subvert common understanding through skepticism; rather, he constructs a philosophical outlook in light of the observation that belief in the psychological heuristics of common life proceeds *in the face of skepticism*.

One basic point of Hume’s philosophy is that belief is constitutive of human understanding in that the frame of human understanding is comprised of principles that are rationally unverifiable. Norman Kemp Smith (2005) was among the first to offer such an interpretation of Hume. It has come to be known as Hume’s naturalism. In the Humean naturalist outlook, there are two core beliefs, *natural beliefs* as it were, that constitute the mind’s broader frame of belief formation. These two natural beliefs are: the belief in external existence and the belief in causality. These two beliefs instinctively spring to the mind and seem indispensable for engagement with the world. They “provide the context – the frame of reference, so to speak – in the absence of which none of our other more specific beliefs, in the modes in which they are found to occur, could have been possible to the mind” (Kemp Smith 2005, 121).

Despite their indispensability, the logical underpinnings of these two natural beliefs are shaky. To verify the belief in external existence requires navigating the problematic connection between perception and the outside world (see Blackburn 2008, 34–44). One must address the question of the relationship between sensory experience and the world as it exists (if it does) outside of such experience. To verify the belief in

causality requires showing both that experience continues uniformly and that there is a necessary connection between certain empirical observations. The traditional faculty of reason appears to be inept in both cases (cf. T 1.3.6, T 1.4.1., T 1.4.2). The ineptness of reason in these matters is so pronounced that Hume says at one point: “[The] understanding, when it acts alone [i.e., without natural beliefs], and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself, and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either in philosophy or common life” (T 1.4.7.7). Yet the mind persistently clings to its beliefs in the face of skepticism. The classic expression of this persistence appears in Hume’s *Treatise*:

Thus the sceptic still continues to reason and believe, even tho’ he asserts, that he cannot defend his reason by reason; and by the same rule he must assent to the principle concerning the existence of the body, tho’ he cannot pretend by any arguments of philosophy to maintain its veracity. Nature has not left this to his choice, and has doubtless esteem’d it an affair of too great importance to be trusted to our uncertain reasonings and speculations. We may well ask, *What causes induce us to believe in the existence of the body?* but ‘tis vain to ask, *Whether there be body or not?* That is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasonings. (T 1.4.2.1)

It is important to note that Hume’s naturalist position does not preclude skepticism. Rather, it is the flipside of a certain form of skepticism, a skepticism that speaks to the manner in which one should practice philosophy. After Hume’s famous return to nature in his melancholy conclusion to Book 1 of the *Treatise*, he comments on the skepticism that such a return to nature entails: “In all the incidents of life *we ought still to preserve our skepticism*. If we believe that fire warms, or water refreshes, ‘tis only because it costs us too much pains to think otherwise” (T 1.4.7.11; italics added). Pragmatically resolving to accept a general frame of belief formation means carrying on

in the agreeable endeavors of philosophy – in that to not carry on in this endeavor would be disagreeable, painful, and apparently impractical –, but with a certain cautious spirit that eschews dogmatism and unqualified pretensions of knowledge. In the conclusion to his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, Hume says that the sort of “academic” skepticism, as opposed to Pyrrhonian skepticism, implied by his thinking emphasizes the importance of (1) considering counterfactuals and “opposite sentiments” and (2) of limiting inquiry within the bounds of the “narrow capacity of human understanding” (EHU 12.3.24-25). Hume’s skepticism reminds us that the things we know need be checked by *that which we do not know*.

In sum, Hume’s naturalist attitude holds that beliefs in external existence and causality, though unverifiable by reason, pragmatically breach skepticism. But skepticism then redounds upon belief and speaks to the appropriate manner and subject matter of philosophy.

Humean Naturalism in “The History of Astronomy”

Smith develops an outlook in HA similar to the one I have attributed to Hume. Such an outlook characterizes his attitude towards science. Throughout HA, Smith folds inquiry and the operation of the mind into sentiment, which hinges reason in the process of inquiry and checks the scope and the domain of its conclusions. He implicitly argues that the mind is conditioned to a process of belief formation that is borne out by its natural, sentimental orientation. Indeed, the explicit purpose of HA is a consideration of the sentimental constitution of the human mind and the beliefs that arise from such a constitution (HA Intro.7). I suggest that Smith’s treatment of science in HA, like Hume’s,

moves to reorganize discourse regarding its justification and the manner in which it should be pursued. Smith moves to emphasize the endlessness of interpretive possibilities and the implausibility of landing on a final understanding of the world. He encourages good natured inquiry accompanied with humble posturing. His view of the sentimental operation of the mind and the prevalence of natural belief makes him shy away from truth-talk and finality in science.

Smith begins his program in HA by elaborating his understanding of the sentimental operation of the mind. He holds that the mind takes pleasure in regularity and in observing resemblances between different experiences (HA 2.1). The pleasure of observing resemblance reflects the mind's natural curiosity and desire to coherently interpret experience. The pleasure arising from observing the correspondence of experience with interpretation leads to belief in the truth of the interpretation. The mind seeks to organize its experience and to abductively generate a working interpretive framework (HA 1.1). So long as experience fits expectations, the mind rests confirmed in its ongoing set of interpretations. Its interpretations are conditioned by its own internal habits and by external general rules and expectations (HA 1.8, 1.10). Such an understanding is, of course, deeply Humean (e.g., T 1.3.13.11).

The mind is jarred from its habitual mode of interpretation when it experiences surprise. When the mind encounters an experience that is surprising (defined by Smith as unexpected), it falls into an uncomfortable emotional state. Such a state can "...entirely disjoint the whole frame of the imagination, that it never after returns to its former tone and composure, but falls either into a frenzy or habitual lunacy; and such as almost

always occasion a momentary loss of reason, or of that attention to other things which our situation or our duty requires” (HA 1.2). The mind struggles to stretch its interpretive framework to deal with surprises. Smith nicely captures this struggle with the example of a naturalist trying to classify a new fossil:

[The new fossil] stands alone in his imagination, and as it were detached from all the other species of that genus to which it belongs. He labours, however, to connect it with some one or other of them... When he cannot do this, rather than it should stand quite by himself, he will enlarge the precincts, if I may say so, of some species in order to make room for it; or he will create a new species on purpose to receive it, and call it a Play of Nature, or give it some other appellation, under which he arranges all the oddities that he knows not what else to do with. (HA 2.5)

When the mind fails to deal with the irregularity under its current interpretive framework, it arrives at a point of wonder:

It is this fluctuation and vain recollection [of the memory and imagination], together with the emotion of movement of the spirits that they excite, which constitute the sentiment properly called *Wonder*, and which occasion that staring, and sometimes that rolling of the eyes, that suspension of the breath, and that swelling of the heart, which we may all observe, both in ourselves and others, when wondering at some new object, and which are the natural symptoms of uncertain and underdetermined thought. (HA 2.3, 39)

Wonder is the pivot-point towards science. Wonder figures into interpretation of different sorts and is an important sentiment in Smith’s epistemology and moral philosophy (e.g., TMS I.ii.2.3, I.iii.1.13, IV.2.8, VII.iii.3.10). The mind moves from wonder through the imagination to abductively generate new interpretations that better tie together its experience. The abductive leap in Smith’s psychology of science is not unhinged but guided by various epistemic virtues. These virtues are developed sympathetically by way of social standards:

[It] is the great leader in science and taste, the man who directs and conducts our own sentiments, the extent and superior justness of whose talents astonish us with wonder and surprise, who excites our admiration, and seems to deserve our applause: and upon this foundation is grounded the greater part of the praise which is bestowed upon what are called the intellectual virtues. (TMS I.i.4.3)

By Smith's estimation, the Copernican system – and, in fact, the Aristotelian system – originally recommended itself to the imagination not *primarily* by its correspondence with experience but rather by its display of intellectual virtues such as beauty, simplicity, novelty, and unexpectedness (HA 4.34). Likewise, the system of concentric spheres found reception in that it was capable of “connecting together, in the imagination, the grandest and the most seemingly disjointed appearances in the heavens” (HA 4.4)

Besides surprise and wonder, Smith speaks of the importance of the sentiment of admiration in science. Admiration is the sentiment that arises upon beholding something “great or beautiful” (HA 1.1). Of the three sentiments, admiration receives the least amount of attention in HA. But the sentiment of admiration is important in that it (1) at partially motivates inquiry, (2) recommends systems of explanation, and (3) helps the mind form an understanding of intellectual virtue. Admiration can lead to the desire to explain. The admiration and consequent curiosity regarding celestial heavens is pointed to by Smith as one of the universal historical motivations behind the study of astronomy (HA 4.1). The beauty of a system, such as Aristotle's or Newton's, excites our admiration and recommends such systems to our imagination. And admiration of intellectual exemplars – the great leaders of science and taste, as it were – affect the way in which we form our own explanations and interpretations of the world (TMS I.i.4.3).

Smith culminates his sketch of the sentimental operation of the mind with a corresponding definition of philosophy:

Philosophy is the science of connecting the principles of nature... Philosophy... endeavours to introduce order into this chaos of jarring and discordant appearances, to allay this tumult of the imagination, and to restore it...to that tone of tranquillity and composure, which is both most agreeable in itself, and most suitable to its nature. Philosophy, therefore, may be regarded as one of those arts which addresses themselves to the imagination... (HA 2.12)

There are three things about this definition that are worth noting that tie Smith to a Humean frame of analysis. First, Smith tacitly articulates that belief in the regularity of nature is naturally assented to by the mind. Regularity is impressed upon the mind by experience of its own sentimental orientation towards tranquility. The discomfort that the mind feels when it cannot account for an experience implies a sentimental commitment to regularity and a conviction that the world operates according to some sort of general rules. It is not a stretch to say that Smith considers the belief in regularity as a habit of the imagination "...which the constitution of things in this world necessarily impresses on [the mind]" (HA 2.10). He corroborates such an interpretation in Section 3 of HA, where he says that men are *necessarily* led to conceive a chain of connection between the irregularities in nature (HA 3.3).

Second, the regularity of nature that is presupposed by mind seems largely propositional. Philosophy originates in and addresses itself to the imagination; it seeks to "render the theatre of nature more coherent, and therefore a more magnificent spectacle" (HA 2.12). The attempt to render the theatre of nature more coherent and more magnificent is a sentimental endeavor, an endeavor that is successful inasmuch as it allows the imagination to go along with its explanation. At times it *seems* that we really

have been admitted behind the scenes in the theatre of nature. But such admission to Smith is propositional. Philosophy only “pretends [claims] to lay open the concealed connections that unite the various appearances of nature” (HA 3.5). It cannot independently verify such claims.

Smith is with Hume in seeing explanations in science, like explanations in morality, as arising from the imagination. As Charles Griswold (2006, 22) says, “[Smith’s] emphasis on the imagination, and indeed on its creative capacity, unquestionably represents an appropriation of Hume.” To Smith and Hume, the universe lives within the imagination, and is impressed by us on the external world. As Hume says: “Let us chace our imagination to the heavens, or to the utmost limits of the universe; we never really advance a step beyond ourselves, nor can conceive any kind of existence, but those perceptions, which have appear’d in that narrow compass” (T 1.2.6.8, SB 67). Smith makes a similar comment about the imagination in TMS: “[Our senses] never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own perceptions, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations. Neither can that faculty help us to this any other way, then by representing to us what would be our own, if we were in his case. It is impressions of our own senses only, not those of his, which our imaginations copy” (TMS I.i.1.2).

The imagination in Hume and Smith is ever-changing, evolving diachronically along the lines of sympathy and experience. It is “ductile,” and sentimental, “readily [assuming]...the shape and configuration of the imagination of those with whom [it] is familiar with” (TMS I.ii.1.6). This “ductile” feature of the imagination is important. In

science, the imagination operates not only rearrange ongoing interpretations in novel ways and to imitate; it also influences how one practices science: what is considered to be “good” science is determined, at least in part, by the desire for sympathy with intellectual exemplars (see TMS I.i.4.3).

Lastly, systems of philosophy are pragmatic for Smith. He tends towards viewing systems of philosophy in “better or worse” terms, not “true or false” terms. Systems of philosophy are treated based on their various intellectual virtues and their pragmatic values. They are judged by how well they render the theatre of nature coherent and magnificent, and by how easy it is for the imagination to enter into their explanations. Such systems are always couched in language and principles of their time and are subject to reinterpretation along some margins: “Those artists, however, naturally explained things to themselves by principles that were familiar to themselves” (HA 2.12). As in Hume, an understanding of final causes is beyond the reach of the human understanding; philosophy must content itself with deepest-to-date interpretations of efficient causes.

The Presuppositions of Belief

Smith’s account of the sentimental operation of the mind and his attitude towards science shows him to have a Humean attitude about the logical frailties of the presuppositions of belief. These presuppositions, again, are: the belief in external existence of objects and the belief in causal relations. Hume goes to lengths in Book I of the *Treatise* and in his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* to show how these presuppositions lack a decisive foundation but are nonetheless accepted. These beliefs are not *reasonable*, at least from the traditional understanding of *reason* as a narrow

inferential faculty, but are nonetheless used in science (on traditional reason in Hume, see Winters 1979). In Smith, the mind's sentimental development of its interpretations and its illustration of invisible chains of connection universally operates upon these presuppositions. In HA and some of his other philosophical writings, Smith provides evidence that he understands such presuppositions like Hume. Smith sees that the mind develops its interpretations in science sentimentally while presupposing the natural beliefs in external existence and causation.

The Presupposition of External Existence

The presupposition of the external existence of objects is central to the general frame of belief formation in that it moves in tandem with a reliance upon sensory experience in the mind's deliberations. If objects exist outside of the mind's perception of them, then perceptions of objects can communicate a degree of truth about the world. Smith clearly holds that the mind relies on sensory perception and is motivated by such perception in its interpretations. But the belief in the existence of objects, while an indispensable presupposition, is not clearly reasonable; it admits of some logical shortcomings (see T 1.4.2).

Smith doesn't directly treat the issue of external existence in HA. But he does in one of his lesser known philosophical essays, "Of the External Senses." In that essay, Smith intimates a Humean naturalist attitude regarding the reliance on sensory experience and its justification. Smith says:

Whatever system may be adopted concerning the hardness or softness, the fluidity or solidity, the compressibility or incompressibility, of the resisting substance, the certainty of our distinct senses and the feeling of its Externality, or of its entire independency upon the organ which perceives it, or by which we perceive it,

cannot in the smallest degree be affected by any such system. (OES 140.18; italics added)

He holds, like Hume, that the mind maintains belief in the existence of objects no matter the system of philosophy put forth and despite its inability to prove by reason that they, in fact, do exist. The mind is so strongly disposed or conditioned to such belief that when a contrary interpretation on the senses is put forth, as Hume notes, “people imagine they can almost refute it from their *feeling and experience*, and that their very senses contradict [such] philosophy” (T 1.4.2.13; italics added).

Smith further elaborates his naturalistic conception of the belief in external existence and the reliability of the senses throughout “Of the External Senses.” He notes that the suggestion of external existence and the connection between objects and perception seems to be naturally implanted in the mind for survival: “Those sensations [of touch] appear to have been given us for the preservation of our own bodies” (OES 167.86). He notes that the reliance on sensory experience is predicated by the belief in the external and independent existence of bodies: “Before we can feel those sensations, the pressure of the external body which excites them must necessarily suggest, not only some conception, but the most distinct conviction of its own external and independent existence” (OES 167.84).

There is a skepticism in Smith’s view of the belief external existence. He holds that the conviction of external existence and the reliance upon the senses is probabilistic and feeling-based. In OES, his leaning towards external world skepticism pushes him to treat different systems of science in terms of their *probability*, not in terms of their correspondence to truth (OES 147.41). In Humean terms, our idea of external existence is

a matter of experience and cannot lead to certainty, only probability (T 1.3.1). The apparent uniformity of experience leads us to attribute various powers to external objects and to attribute sensations to different objects. Experience and habitual interpretation connect internal sensation and what we perceive to be the external cause of sensation (OES 141.21). Such experience and uniformity increase the perceived *probability* of the idea of external existence in the mind. Over time, the belief in external existence becomes cemented as an interpretive principle of the mind.

The Presupposition of Causation

The evidence for interpreting Smith's naturalist attitude concerning the presupposition of external existence is reinforced by his almost explicit adoption of Hume's understanding of causation in HA. Andrew Skinner (1974) and D.D. Raphael (1979), among others, have emphasized the role of Hume's thinking on causation in Smith's epistemology. Belief in causal relations underscores the conviction that nature operates regularly according to general and discernable principles. Smith builds on the Humean notion of causation and integrates it with his psychology of science in HA.

Hume's theory of causation can be summarized in the following way: Belief in causation arises when the mind sees a constant conjunction of two objects such that the idea of one deterministically transitions the mind to the idea of the other. Hume calls this mental transition the impression of necessary connection. But causal claims hang on the unverifiable idea that experience continues forward uniformly. They are, moreover, constrained by one's experience set: different realms of experience can conceivably lead to observations of constant conjunction and to conviction of different of causal relations.

As deliberations concerning cause and effect are a matter of experience – and hang on the unverifiable assumption of the uniformity of experience –, they give rise to belief, not certainty (T 1.3.1.1, T 1.3.6). There is no guarantee that the causal relations that the mind perceives are, in fact, genuine causal relations.

Belief in causation, although prone to logical criticism, proceeds instinctively; experience is all but indiscernible without the belief in causation. As Hume says, “[The belief in causation]... ‘tis impossible for men in their hearts really to doubt of” (T 1.3.3.1).

Smith adopts Hume’s understanding of causation in HA. He says,

When two objects, however unlike, have often been observed to follow each other, and have constantly presented themselves to the senses in that order, they come to be so connected together in the fancy, that the idea of the one seems, of its own accord, to call up and introduce that of the other. If the objects are still observed to succeed each other as before, this connection, or, as it has been called, this association of their ideas, becomes stricter and stricter, and the habit of the imagination to pass from the conception of the one to that of the other, grows more and more rivetted and confirmed. (HA 2.7)

Smith further corroborates his Humean understanding of causation in OES, where he says:

By the frequency and uniformity of this experience, *by the custom and habit of thought which that frequency and uniformity necessarily occasion*, the Internal Sensation, and the External Cause of that Sensation, come in our conception to be so strictly connected, that in our ordinary and careless way of thinking, we are apt to consider them as almost one and the same. (OES 141.21; italics added)

In HA, Smith talks about particular causal relations being ascribed to experience in order to render the “theater of nature a more coherent, and therefore a more magnificent spectacle, than otherwise it would have appeared to be” (HA 2.12). The mind is so drawn to the belief in causal dependence – that is, to the belief that every event has a cause and

that such causes operate uniformly over time – that it imagines secret chains of connection between observations to cement its interpretations. Where it cannot fit observations into ongoing causal interpretations, it even goes so far as to invoke ‘invisible hands’ to sustain its interpretive commitment to regularity (e.g., HA 3.2).

Recall that Smith defines philosophy as the science of connection, the process that represents the invisible chains connecting events (HA 2.12). Smith’s language in this definition suggests that the invisible chains are invisible in that they live in the imagination. Philosophy, to Smith, merely “*pretends* [claims or proposes] to lay open the concealed connections that unite the various appearances of nature” (HA 3.5; italics added).

The imaginary connection of objects, the construction of invisible chains, is a tendency of the mind that is historically universal. In the first ages of society, irregularities that could not be accommodated within ongoing interpretations were attributed to religious deities (HA 3.2). As society became more civilized and stable, men became less superstitious and consequently less prone to revert to religious explanations of irregular phenomena. Men eventually substituted secular explanations for religious ones. But the sentimental nature of inquiry did not change, nor did the conviction in the necessity of causal dependence: “That some chain subsists betwixt all her seemingly disjointed phaenomena, they [civilized men] are necessarily led to conceive...” (HA 3.3, 50).

Smith's Skepticism Regarding Belief

Hume's naturalism is the flipside of a certain sort of skepticism. Thus, interpreting Smith as adopting Hume's naturalism concerning belief formation suggests that he also adopts its accompanying skepticism. Smith recognizes that the sentimental way in which the mind proceeds, the centrality of the imagination in deliberation, and the fact that the core principles of inquiry are unverifiable by reason are all cause for skepticism. The kind of skepticism evidenced in Smith's thinking on science is, as Griswold (1999) suggests, non-dogmatic. Smith's non-dogmatic skepticism avoids ultimate sweeping judgments of truth and encourages the mind proceeds pragmatically, "guided by various nonphilosophical sources, including natural impulses, laws, customs, knowledge of the arts, and feelings, by how things 'appear'" (ibid., 164).

Such skepticism is evident in HA in at least four ways: (1) Smith's generally Humean attitude regarding belief formation, (2) his avoidance of truth-talk and final interpretations, (3) his conception of how the mind sentimentally interprets experience, and (4) his sociological conception of science.

Smith's attitude concerning the presuppositions of external existence and causal relations implies skepticism. Some of that skepticism has been treated above. Again, Smith notes that the presupposition of external existence is picked up experientially. Such an understanding instantiates Smith's wariness of simple sensory experience. Smith makes some remarks in this vein by speaking of the prejudices of the senses (HA 4.38).

Smith's Humean attitude concerning causation likewise implies skepticism. If perception of causal relations is conditioned by experience sets, there will necessarily be

differences in attributed causal relations and true causal relations: The pagans, for instance, causally attributed lightning to the invisible hand of Jupiter, whereas modern science causally attributes lightning to electron movement. The mind's perception of causal relations between objects is subject to reinterpretations.

Smith recognizes the mind's mode of belief formation is essentially feeling-oriented and rationally unverifiable. We reason and believe not primarily because it is *reasonable* to do so but because we seem to be constituted as such. This sort of recognition implies a certain caution in science. Smith joins Hume in the recognition that our knowledge is deepest-to-date, not final.

Smith demonstrates his reluctance to talk in terms of truth and reality and instead tends towards couching propositions in probability. He treats inquiry as largely a matter of convention. Inquiry is conventional in that different systems of philosophy have long-lasting inertia (e.g., the lasting inertia of Ptolemaic astronomy). Systems of thought are presented in conventional formulations (HA 2.12). In the introduction to his treatment of astronomy, Smith commits himself to treating each system according to various epistemic virtues, not according to its truth: "...let us consider them *only in that particular point of view which belongs to our subject*; and content ourselves with inquiring how far each of them was fitted to sooth the imagination, and to render the theatre of nature a more coherent spectacle..." (HA 2.12; italics added). Smith's conventional sort of epistemology explains his pragmatic lean towards probabilistic formulations. Again, recall that he explicitly refers to philosophical systems in *probabilistic* terms (OES 147.41). Smith tends to supplant talk of truth in HA with aesthetics. The 'truth' is perhaps

charitably understood in Smith, at least in HA, as that which best ties together experience of the world. It is not construed as final interpretation.

Smith's general understanding of the psychology inquiry further instantiates his skeptical sensibilities. He expresses skepticism about knowledge within particular interpretive conventions, acknowledging the modern psychoanalytic issues of confirmatory bias (cf. Matson 2017). The mind is apt, like the naturalist examining fossils, to shoe-horn particular observations into an ongoing set of interpretations rather than recognize such interpretations are, perhaps, flawed:

Whatever, in short, occurs to us we are fond of referring to some species or class of things, with all of which it has a nearly exact resemblance; and *though we often know no more about them than about it*, yet we are apt to fancy that by being able to do so, we show ourselves to be better acquainted with it, and to have a more thorough insight into its nature. (HA 2.3; italics added)

Smith recognizes the tendency of the mind to view its own conduct with partiality in matters of judgment: "So partial are the views of mankind with regard to the propriety of their own conduct, both at the time of action and after it; and so difficult is it for them to view it in the light in which any indifferent spectator would consider it" (TMS III.4.5). If conduct is expanded to include interpretation and the practice of intellectual virtues, the problem of partiality can be understood as extending to science.

Finally, Smith's sociological conception of inquiry evidences skepticism. HA traces philosophical revolutions in astronomy up to Newton. In OES, he says that established systems of philosophy are merely "the [systems] that [are] most in fashion, and most approved of by the greater part of the philosophers of Europe" (OES 140.18). Likewise, he says at HA 4.15 that the System of Solid Spheres "...seems never to have

had the vogue.” By Smith’s reckoning, again, a particular system of philosophy rises to acceptance not solely based on an assessment of its correspondence with reality, but on the ease in which the mind can enter into its chains of reasoning and the associated aesthetic estimation of its merit. Inquiry is a historical endeavor, often capable of being recast into a more coherent, more aesthetically appealing terms that resonate with common understanding. Although every age in history has *supposed* its philosophical outlook to be fact, or truth in a final and definitive sense, history reveals that this is not so.

Smith’s Slide to Truth Talk

There is a gradual progression in Smith’s talk throughout HA that seems to be at odds with the first three sections of the essay and the Humean outlook that those sections imply. Smith begins in Sections 1-3 of HA by sketching something like a Humean naturalist position, where science moves forward upon the presuppositions of natural belief, as canvassed above. He instantiates skepticism and commits to treat systems of astronomy not by their alignment with truth but by their intellectual virtues and practicality. But Smith appears to contradict his intentions by sliding into a sort of truth-talk concerning Newtonian Copernicanism. He suggests that the Newtonian system has been decisively *proved* (HA 4.73). He praises both the epistemic value of Newton’s system *and* its correspondence to reality: “It [Newton’s system] is every where the most precise and particular that can be imagined, and ascertains the time, the place, the quantity, the duration of each individual phaenomenon, to be exactly such as, by observation, they have been determined to be” (HA 4.67).

Schliesser (2005), Berry (2006), and Kim (2012) downplay the tension here. Their view is that Smith's attitude throughout HA is actually closer to a kind of realism than to the Humean position. But I suggest that the tension is real. Smith's surprising attitude towards Newton constitutes a key part of his program throughout the essay and illustrates the unavoidability of belief.

Understanding the tension in HA as a key moment in the development of Smith's outlook squares well with the outlook put forth in Sections 1-3 of HA. Such an understanding nicely fits a larger structural interpretation of the text; Smith's seeming assent to the proof of Newtonian Copernicanism at the end of Section 4 represents an *a fortiori* demonstration of the scope of the natural belief and the sentimental character of inquiry outlined in Sections 1-3. In Sections 1-3 of HA, Smith adopts a Humean-style attitude towards science. Upon embarking on a consideration of various systems of astronomy he progressively slides into truth-talk, against his resolve at HA 2.12. His slide into truth-talk is a rhetorical demonstration of the character and force of the mind's natural drift to belief in science. Smith demonstrates the psychological instability of skepticism, as it were, and the instinctive tendency to slide into belief. The mind seems to slide into a sort of final attitude concerning its interpretations, regardless of its initial intentions. Smith's *a fortiori* argument in HA might be formulated like this: If a slide to truth-talk and a natural dissolution of skepticism occurs in Smith's explicit examination of the principles and psychology of science, it should certainly be expected to ascend subconsciously in science more universally.

As a clarifying point, I do not mean to say that Smith disregarded Newton. He clearly had great admiration for Newton's system and understood the improvements that Newtonian science offered. I claim that HA simply demonstrates our tendency to view deepest-to-date interpretations as final and to suppose, like all other ages of history, that we finally have the right outlook. Smith is cautious of such attitudes, even concerning a system so fine as Newton's.

To understand the broader program of HA, it is first helpful to note the full title of essay: "The Principles Which Lead and Direct Philosophical Enquiries; Illustrated by the History of Astronomy." HA is an illustration of the character of philosophy by way of historical examination. The essay is structured accordingly. The first three sections develop Smith's conception of the sentimental operation of the mind and of the nature of science. Section 1 treats the sentiment of surprise, Section 2 treats the sentiment of wonder and the effect of novelty, and Section 3 treats the universal operation of these sentiments on the mind in history. Section 3, though historical in nature, is an important piece of Smith's epistemology in that it highlights the unchanging nature of the sentimental principles of inquiry. Although character and substance of scientific explanations change over time, i.e., from religious to secular, the psychology of scientific investigation does not (HA 3.3).

The fourth and final section of HA comprises the majority of the essay. As the essay is an examination of the principles of philosophy, the final section should be understood in service to that larger end. The final section should be understood as sitting beneath the first three sections. Smith articulates: "It is the design of this Essay to

consider particularly the nature and causes of each of these sentiments, whose influence is of far wider extent than we should be apt upon a careless view to imagine” (HA Intro.7). The history of astronomy as illustrated in Section 4 should be conceived as fully subservient to Smith’s investigation of the nature of inquiry.

Section 4 is peculiar, as previously mentioned, in that Smith in more truth-talk as the section unfolds. He doesn’t immediately depart from his attitude at the outset of HA. He initially uses historical example to develop his analysis of inquiry in a way much consistent with Sections 1-3. For example, he discusses the role of sentiment in the assent of any philosophical system (HA 4.6). He discusses how the ease with which the imagination can enter into an explanation facilitates its widespread acceptance (HA 4.9). He discusses the role of epistemic virtue in theory, e.g., concerning the Copernican system (HA 4.33). But he seems to depart from his originally expressed attitude in a number of places. The general narrative of the section, coupled with Smith’s own attitude concerning Newton at the end of the essay, conveys an idea of historical progression towards discovering the way things are. Such an idea of science progressing in a linear fashion towards truth is generally in tension with the nature of scientific revolutions (in Thomas Kuhn’s later sense of the phrase). Smith hints at such tension when he foreshadows what becomes his own apparent attitude towards Newton in the beginning of the section 4:

The first systems, in the same manner, are always the most complex, and a particular connecting chain, or principle, is generally thought necessary to unite every two seemingly disjointed appearances: *but it often happens, that one great connecting principle is afterwards found to be sufficient to bind together all the discordant phaenomena that occur in a whole species of things.* (HA 4.19; italics added)

This passage intimates a kind of realist conviction that the phenomena of nature can be explained by simple principles that operate universally in law-like fashion.

His outlook concerning Newton apparently slides further towards truth-talk at HA 4.67. He observes that Newton's system accommodates "all the constant irregularities which astronomers had ever observed in their motions" (HA 4.67). Newton "[joined] together the movements of the Planets by so familiar a principle of connection, which completely removed all the difficulties the imagination had hitherto felt in attending to them" (HA 4.67). The principle which Newton discovered was, of course, gravity. Smith indicates that not only did Newton show that gravity *might* be a universal connecting principle, but that "he endeavoured next to prove that it really was so" (HA 4.67). Smith appears to think that Newton succeeded in his proof. The success was demonstrated by the correspondence of Newton's system with observations and its predictive power (HA 4.72, 4.74, 4.75).

The closing two sentences of the essay show Smith admitting that he, despite his best intentions, couldn't avoid truth-talk regarding Newton's system:

And even we, while we have been endeavouring to represent all philosophical systems as mere inventions of the imagination, to connect together the otherwise disjointed and discordant phaenomena of nature, have insensibly been drawn in, to make use of language expressing the connecting principles of this one, as if they were the real chains which Nature makes use of to bind together her several operations. Can we wonder then, that it should have gained the general and complete approbation of mankind, and that it should be considered, not as an attempt to connect in the imagination the phaenomena of the Heavens, but as the greatest discovery that was ever made by man, the discovery of an immense chain of the most important and sublime truths, all closely connected together, by one capital fact, of the reality of which we have daily experience. (HA 4.76)

Schliesser (2005, 719) says that in this passage Smith demonstrates the inability of the mind to avoid truth-talk. Berry (2006, 124) says that the passage is a kind of self-chiding for inconsistency. I agree that the final passage in HA is indeed a demonstration of the ineluctable nature of truth-talk. But I think, more significantly, that this passage captures the essence of the entire program of HA. Smith's history of astronomy and his treatment of each system should be viewed in service to his exploration and illustration of the principles of philosophical inquiry. Under such a consideration, his treatment of Newton is best understood as an illustration of how the mind proceeds in its inquiry despite the pervasive potential for cognitive or skeptical barriers. Smith shows the deep-rootedness of the mind's involuntary reliance on an unverifiable general frame of belief formation and its tendency to view deepest-to-date interpretations as final. He commits *himself* to belief in a kind of ironic contradiction of his treatment of the early thinkers in philosophy.

An additional peculiarity in HA 4.76 comes when Smith says that we “have insensibly been drawn in, *to make use of language expressing the connecting principles of this one*” (italics added). He means here that he is using Newtonian language of gravity to explain the mind's involuntary slide to realism. His use of the language of Newton's system to explain something unknown, i.e. the psychology of inquiry, hearkens back to HA 2.12 where he speaks of philosophers shoe-horning unknowns into their ongoing interpretative frameworks. There is a subtle skepticism here suggested by the allusion to HA 2.12. By expressing his system of inquiry in the familiar language of gravity he reemphasizes the open-endedness of science. It is as if he is admitting that he is just like the artists who “naturally [explain] things to themselves by principles...familiar to

themselves” (HA 2.12). The familiar principle of gravity becomes “the great hinge upon which every thing [turns]” (HA 2.12). Framing things in terms of gravity instead of in pure terms of numbers like the Pythagoreans leads to a pragmatically superior way of interpreting the world but it is not fundamentally different in terms of its propositional nature and status as belief.

Smith’s Surprise Ending

Schliesser (2005, 699n) suggests that the unexpected beginning to HA seems to be intended to invoke surprise. I suggest that *the end* of HA is likewise intended to induce surprise. The surprise lies in Smith’s admission of his slide to truth-talk the reader’s realization that he has gone along with the slide. HA is designed to pull the reader into Smith’s progression of thought and induce surprise by sparking self-reflection at its conclusion. The fact that HA is book-ended by surprise fits Smith’s program of emphasizing the open-endedness of inquiry. Surprise, by Smith’s understanding, should push us to broaden our interpretations, to “enlarge the precincts,” as it were, of our views (HA 2.5). Smith is gently prodding the reader to broaden their interpretation of his program in HA, encouraging interpretation and reinterpretation along the lines of his non-foundational conception of inquiry. Also notable is the appearance of “wonder” in the last sentence of the essay: “Can we wonder then...” (HA 4.76). As Smith’s essay invokes wonder, new interpretations of his meaning can be imagined.

I have put forth such an interpretation, suggesting that Smith can be understood as pedagogically and rhetorically illustrating a Humean outlook throughout the course of HA. Smith emphasizes the mind’s commitment to a frame of belief formation in spite of

its frail philosophical underpinnings. Belief breaches cognitive and skeptical barriers.

Smith intends to teach us something about the process of inquiry and to encourage self-awareness and prudence in our thinking.

CHAPTER THREE: THE ELEVATED IMAGINATION: CONTEMPLATION AND ACTION IN HUME AND SMITH

In this chapter,¹ we seek to draw attention to some striking and heretofore unnoticed textual connections between Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and David Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature*. We find significant textual parallels between Smith's parable of the poor man's son (TMS IV.1.8-4.1.10; hereafter "Parable") and the famous conclusion to Book 1 of Hume's *Treatise* (T 1.4.7; hereafter "Conclusion"). In what follows, we present and explore the nature of these connections and comment on their significance.

The textual connections that we find between Smith and Hume are significant for two broad reasons. First, the passages in which they occur – what we are calling Smith's Parable and Hume's Conclusion – are independently important passages. The significance of each of these passages has been noted by a number of scholars in the literature.² If these important passages are indeed related, understanding their connection will help us better interpret them individually. Second, the textual connections

¹ This chapter is coauthored with Colin Doran. It is published in *The Journal of Scottish Philosophy* 15(1), 2017: 27-45.

² For different analyses of Smith's Parable see, e.g., Fleischacker (2005, 104–118); Griswold (1999, 182–183); Cropsey (2001, 30–31); Haakonssen (1981, 182–183); Martin (2014). For different analyses of Hume's Conclusion and the importance of its substance see, e.g., Baier (1991, Chapter 1); Livingston (1998, 17); Ridge (2003); Merrill (2015, Chapter 2).

demonstrate Smith consciously and meaningfully engaging Hume.³ Smith was, of course, intimately familiar with Hume's work from a young age. Legend has it that while at Oxford he was chided for secretly reading Hume's *Treatise* (Ross 2010, 71). Hume's thinking influenced Smith's own thought. But the deep level of textual connections in the Parable and the Conclusion makes a strong case not only for seeing Hume's influence in Smith, but for interpreting Smith and Hume as joined in a conversant development and exploration of a particular modern philosophical project. The intimate connection between them that is suggested by our findings has interesting implications for understanding their thought and place in philosophical history.

In exploring the links between Smith's Parable and Hume's Conclusion, we follow a simple program. First, we summarize and provide some brief background information on Smith's Parable and Hume's Conclusion. Next, we lay out the textual and structural similarities between the passages. As the interpretation of each passage is controversial independently, the relationship between the two passages is difficult to decipher. Thus, we largely limit our analysis in this piece to simple comparison. But we do briefly speculate as to the nature of their connection. We suggest that both Smith's Parable and Hume's Conclusion deal with the relationship between contemplation and action in human life. Both passages highlight the mind's escape from the conclusions of inappropriately abstract contemplation, by way of action, through nature's elevation of the imagination.

³ Hume could not have been engaging Smith in his text because the *Treatise*, originally published in 1739, was published well before *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, which didn't appear in print until 1759.

Smith's Parable

The passage that we are calling Smith's Parable falls in the middle of Part 4 of TMS. Part 4 of TMS is perhaps one of the most important moments in Smith's work. The section is curious for a number of reasons. Smith begins by agreeing with Hume that utility is one of the principal sources of beauty and moral approbation (TMS IV.1.1). He further agrees that the utility of an object pleases because it perpetually suggests the pleasure that it is fitted to promote (TMS IV.1.2). But he then seems to depart from Hume. He suggests that the fitness or propriety of any object to achieve any particular end is often more pleasing in and of itself than the consequences it actually has:

When a person comes into his chamber, and finds the chairs all standing in the middle of the room, he is angry with his servant, and rather than see them continue in that disorder, perhaps takes the trouble himself to set them all in their places with their backs to the wall. The whole propriety of this new situation arises from its superior conveniency in leaving the floor free and disengaged... Yet it is this conveniency which ultimately recommends that arrangement, and bestows upon it the whole of its propriety and beauty. (TMS IV.1.4)

The extent to which Smith is actually disagreeing with Hume in the early part of TMS IV.1 is somewhat unclear.⁴ Smith seems, at the very least, to paint a bit of a stylized picture of Hume's idea of why utility pleases. Hume would certainly not have maintained, for example, that "we should have no other reason for praising a man than

⁴ See Raynor (1984) for a comment on Hume's response (or lack thereof) to Smith's comments in his anonymously published Abstract of TMS. Matson, Doran, and Klein (2017) argue that Smith is, in fact, intentionally allowing for a misinterpretation of Hume's thinking on the connection between utility and moral approval. They consider Smith's true position as a clarification and extension of Hume rather than a contradiction and departure.

that for which we commend a chest of drawers” (TMS IV.2.4).⁵ In any event, it is important to recognize Smith’s direct engagement with Hume from the outset of Part 4 of TMS. This engagement, we contend, characterizes the broader sweep of this section of TMS and sets the backdrop for Smith’s Parable. Part IV of TMS can be fruitfully read as a conversation with and extension of much of Hume’s work.

The Parable begins immediately after Smith’s treatment and apparent extension of Hume’s utility theory. There are a number of notable rhetorical features to the Parable. The first curious feature is that the Parable is, in fact, a parable. The story-telling style of the Parable is unusual for Smith and constitutes a notable stylistic departure from the majority of TMS. Secondly, the paragraphs in the Parable are unusually long for Smith; they are among the longest in the entire book.⁶ Given Smith’s sensibilities in his *Lectures on Rhetoric* concerning the connection of style and substance, the structure and the length of the paragraphs could be indicative of important and substantive multilayered content (Smith 1983, 55). And finally, the Parable lies directly in the middle of TMS – and quite exactly in the middle of the 1790 volumes containing the sixth edition. Klein and Lucas (2011) comment on the significance of physical placement in Smith and suggest that central textual placement plausibly implies central substantive importance. The combination of these rhetorical characteristics suggests that the Parable merits special treatment and interpretation.

⁵ In EPM 7.11, Hume separates the immediate agreeableness of an action from its utility. It is only upon *reflection* that the mind perceives the contribution of utility to approbation. Moreover, moral approbation is only applicable to human action in Hume, not to inanimate objects (T 3.1.1.21)

⁶ Especially paragraphs 4.1.8 and 4.1.11.

We contend that Smith's Parable demonstrates a particular dialectic in the mind, a folding of contemplation into action through the elevated imagination. This dialectic unfolds throughout TMS in general but is acutely demonstrated in the Parable. Smith begins the Parable by introducing an ambitious poor man's son: "The poor man's son, whom heaven in its anger has visited with ambition, when he begins to look around him, admires the conditions of the rich" (TMS IV.1.8). The poor man's son ambitiously longs to accumulate what Smith calls "trinkets of frivolous utility" and to transcend the material and social poverty of his upbringing (TMS IV.1.6). As Smith puts this, "[he] is displeased with being obliged to walk a-foot, or to endure the fatigue of riding on horseback" (TMS IV.1.8). He longs for material comfort and convenience, a longing that stems from his admiration of the rich and powerful (cf. TMS I.iii.2). Notably, "[he] does not imagine that they are really happier than other people: but he imagines that they possess more means of happiness" (TMS IV.1.8). In other words, his admiration for the rich comes from the fitness of their wealth for achieving happiness in various ways. Smith thus re-emphasizes one of his core themes of the section - and points of departure from Hume - that the propriety things is more pleasing in and of themselves than the consequences which they actually have.

The poor man's son proceeds to spend his life in pursuit of wealth and convenience. He submits to bodily fatigue and uneasiness of mind in this pursuit. But the inconvenience which he causes himself is greater than that which he would have suffered throughout a whole life of poverty: "To obtain the conveniences which these [trinkets] afford, he submits in the first year, nay in the first month of his application, to more

fatigue of body and more uneasiness of mind than he could have suffered through the whole of his life from want of them” (TMS IV.1.8).

The poor man’s son is successful in his pursuit of wealth. But once he reaches old age, at least in certain moods, he looks back on his life with regret. In economic terms, he thinks that the cost of his pursuit of wealth outweighed the benefit. He feels that social distinctions and wealth are empty:

But in the languor of disease and the weariness of old age, the pleasures of the vain and empty distinctions of greatness disappear. To one, in this situation, they are no longer capable of recommending those toilsome pursuits in which they had formerly engaged him. In his heart he curses ambition, and vainly regrets the ease and the indolence of youth, pleasures which are fled for ever, and which he has foolishly sacrificed for what, when he has got it, can afford him no real satisfaction. (TMS IV.1.8).

Smith pauses at this point in the Parable to comment. He notes how the mind drifts towards a splenetic philosophy upon abstract reflection. The poor man’s son initially perceives value in the pursuit of wealth and in the gratifying of ambition. But upon abstract contemplation he is saddened by the seeming meaninglessness of his ambitious acquisitiveness. Similarly, when we, like the poor man’s son, reflectively consider the world in an abstract and philosophical (contemplative) light, it can seem empty and meaningless. The world looks different from the perspective of solitude than from the perspective of active social engagement.

The tension between abstract reflection and active desire constitutes a particular dialectic in the mind. There seems to be an inherent tension between abstract contemplation and the active inclinations of human nature. Smith suggests that the mind inclines towards natural sentiment, sociability, and action and, moreover, Smith affirms

this inclination. Smith seems to articulate that the conclusions of contemplative reason should only be assented to inasmuch as they are within the bounds of man's active inclination. It is only in overly contemplative solitude, therefore, that the splenetic philosophy ascends. Social engagement with the world lifts the mind from splenetic philosophy. In times of ease, prosperity, and sociability, we dismiss splenetic philosophy. Our imagination is moved, elevated by nature, as it were, to confound the harmony of the social and economic system with the ends which it is fitted to produce. Thus, "[the] pleasures of wealth...strike the imagination as something grand and beautiful and noble, of which the attainment is well worth all the toil and anxiety which we are so apt to bestow upon it" (TMS IV.1.9).

In perhaps the most important moment in the Parable, Smith says at the first line of TMS IV.1.10: "And it is well that nature imposes upon us in this manner." That is, it is well that nature elevates our imagination from the splenetic humor and encourages us to engage with the world, honestly pursue the objects of ambition, and strive for success.⁷ Without this imposition of nature, there would be no human prosperity and no embellishment of human life. It is interesting to consider the notion of "natural imposition" that Smith puts forth here. It seems, in some sense, to be a contradiction in terms. There is room to interpret Smith as rhetorically setting up his argument to convey to the reader that the splenetic humor is actually the real imposition and the so-called imposition of nature is the natural humor and inclination of man. Under this

⁷ We elaborate on what it means to "honestly" pursue the objects of ambition below. In short, Smith seems to endorse a prudent pursuit of ambition within the framework of commutative justice.

interpretation, Smith can be read as affirming action over contemplation, or at the very least placing contemplation within action.

The Parable returns to the poor man's son to demonstrate the importance of nature's imposition. The poor man's son is now implicitly "the proud and unfeeling landlord" (TMS IV.1.10). The unfeeling landlord is driven by ambition to expand his harvest with the thought of increasing his wealth, "without a thought for the wants of his brethren" (TMS IV.1.10). But in the process of pursuing his own convenience and wealth, he is

led by an invisible hand to make nearly the same distribution of the necessaries of life, which would have been made, had the earth been divided into equal portions among all its inhabitants, and thus without intending it, without knowing it, advance the interest of society, and afford means to the multiplication of the species. (TMS IV.1.10)

It seems that although Smith is not fully sympathetic to the motive of the unfeeling landlord (in that the landlord is unfeeling), he embraces the natural end result of his ambition: prosperity and the multiplication of the species. Smith closes by noting that the lordly masters of the earth unintentionally distribute their wealth. He says that those "who seemed to have been left out in the partition [of wealth by Providence]" have the same means to happiness as the masters. In other words: the distribution of wealth which nature makes through the mysterious invisible hand works through the ambition of individuals to distribute wealth in a largely egalitarian fashion.

Smith clearly works to resolve the tension between contemplation and action by endorsing the nesting of contemplation within action. But it is not immediately clear what the overarching moral of the Parable actually is. On the one hand, Smith himself seems to

assent to the splenetic philosophy on its own abstract grounds. He tacitly agrees that power and riches, when viewed in a certain contemplative light, are “operose machines...ready at every moment to burst into pieces, and to crush in their ruins their unfortunate possessor” (TMS IV.1.8). But he simultaneously embraces the honest pursuit of wealth insofar as it promotes the prosperity and multiplication of the species.

It is natural to ask: what the next young poor man’s son will think after he has read TMS and WN, i.e., the body of Smith’s corpus? Thomas Martin (2014) has suggested that the beggar passage that closes the Parable gives us some clue. In the curious beggar passage, Smith maintains: “In ease of body and peace of mind, all the different ranks of life are nearly upon level, and the beggar who suns himself by the side of the highway, possesses that security which kings are fighting for” (TMS IV.1.10). Tranquility is the true means to happiness, and is largely unrelated to material welfare. But, as Martin suggests, the beggar passage does not imply that Smith is rejecting the pursuit of material welfare. Martin argues that the beggar, in fact, is Diogenes the Cynic. Diogenes was a beggar not by necessity but by choice. Under this consideration, we should not understand Smith as arguing against material poverty. Rather, he is articulating the need for a balanced life in which contemplation and action are codependent; neither can stand without the other. The poor man’s son initially swings too far towards active submission to ambition. Smith suggests that such submission should be limited by contemplation and reflection of the true constitution of tranquility and happiness. But at the same time, contemplation should be tempered by action. The

inclination of the mind towards action should be held up as a framework that circumstance contemplation.

Hume's Conclusion

The issues that Smith's Parable presents us with appear clearer in relation to Hume's Conclusion. Like Smith's Parable, Hume's Conclusion is perhaps the most curious moment in all his writing. Hume writes the Conclusion in an informal style, bearing likeness to a personal confession. It is thus a major rhetorical departure from the voice that he employs throughout most of the *Treatise*. He emotionally confesses the radical implications of his epistemology as laid out in Book 1 of the *Treatise*. He admits that he is troubled by the implications of his skeptical philosophical principles. He shows that their consistent application results in troubling conclusions and push towards an epistemological nihilism. The tension in the Conclusion is again an issue of the relationship between contemplation and action.

Hume begins his Conclusion reflectively:

But before I launch out into those immense depths of philosophy, which lie before me, I find myself inclin'd to stop a moment in my present situation, and to ponder that voyage, which I have undertaken, and which undoubtedly requires the utmost art and industry to be brought to a happy conclusion. (T 1.4.7.1)

Hume's launch into the immense depths of philosophy represents his attempt to pioneer a new science of man, a science to be the foundation of all other sciences (T Intro.5). He looks to introduce what he calls the experimental method into philosophy. What his project entails – at least ostensibly – is a radical commitment to empiricism. Hume makes such a commitment to empiricism clear from the first line of Book 1 of the *Treatise*: “All perceptions of the human mind resolve themselves into two distinct kinds, which I shall

call IMPRESSIONS and IDEAS” (T 1.1.1.1). Impressions arise from sensory and reflective experience; impressions are then distilled in the imagination and, when stripped of their liveliness, are conceived of as ideas. Hume consequently extends a simple empirical principle relating impressions and ideas, a principle which he considers to be the first principle of the new science of human nature: “...but as the first ideas are suppos’d to be derived from impressions, it still remains true, that all our simple ideas proceed, either mediately or immediately from their correspondent impressions” (T 1.1.1.11).

Hume attempts to apply this principle thoroughly throughout the course of Book 1. It comes to bear perhaps most importantly on the idea of causation. Hume argues that in order to understand the nature of our idea of causation, and the veracity of causal inference, we need to determine the impression from which that idea is derived. Hume argues that the idea of causation comes from the impression of necessary connection. The impression of necessary connection is developed by habit as the mind observes the constant conjunction and regularity in interaction of certain objects. Over time, the observance of one object deterministically conveys the idea of another to the mind. From this impression arises the mind’s idea of causation (cf. T 1.3.14).

Hume’s treatment of causation has troublesome implications for inductive reasoning. It implies that inference is bound by experience and, moreover, that any causal proposition is at best probabilistic. The epistemological category of knowledge does not come to bear on causal relations (T 1.3.1.2). By relegating notions of truth and certainty to relations of resemblance, contrariety, degrees in quality, and proportions in number

(the relations which Hume considers relations of ideas as opposed to matters of fact), Hume casts a pallor of doubt on the vast majority of human reasoning. This comes to head in T 1.4, where he considers the implications of his rigid empiricism for the veracity of reason and the senses (cf. T 1.4.1; T 1.4.2). He concludes that reasoning and sensory experience are not infallible and are continually subject to reinterpretation and reassessment.

In the Conclusion, Hume recognizes the problems that his principles pose for his new science of man. He reflectively recognizes that the fallibility he has attributed to causal inference, reasoning, and the senses paradoxically rebounds upon his own philosophical efforts. He famously says: “Methinks I am like a man, who having struck on many shoals, and having narrowly escap’d shipwreck in passing a small frith, has yet the temerity to put out to sea in the same leaky weather-beaten vessel...” (T 1.4.7.1). His “vessel” is metaphor for the core principles of his project. He recognizes that his core principles are problematic (i.e., his vessel is leaky) in that they are self-subverting. That is, he cannot show the fallibility in reason without the use of reason itself. He cannot subvert causal inference without reasoning causally. Hume comments accordingly: “For I have already shown, that the understanding, when it acts alone, and according to its most general principles, entirely subverts itself and leaves not the lowest degree of evidence in any proposition, either in philosophy or common life” (T 1.4.7.8).

Hume continues to confess his despair. He despairs because of the paradoxical nature of his rigid empiricism and, moreover, because of his unhinged departure from convention.

Fain wou'd I run into the crowd for shelter and warmth; but cannot prevail with myself to mix with such deformity. I call upon others to join me, in order to make a company apart; but no one will hearken to me. Everyone keeps at a distance, and dreads that storm, which beats upon me from every side. I have expos'd myself to the enmity of all metaphysicians, logicians, mathematicians, and even theologians; and can I wonder at the insults I must suffer? I have declar'd my disapprobation of their systems; and can I be surpriz'd, if they shou'd express hatred of mine and of my person? When I look abroad, I forsee on every side, dispute, contradiction, anger, calumny and detraction. When I turn my eye inward, I see nothing but doubt and ignorance. (T 1.4.7.2)

His despair discourages from pursuing his future inquiries (T 1.4.7.5). As his melancholy builds, he confesses that his principles imply a choice between no reason and a false reason. "No reason" is internally consistent, whereas "reason" is self-subverting and consequently false. The consequence of choosing "no reason" leads to an abandonment of all science and philosophy, an epistemological nihilism. But the consequence of "reason" is conscious self-deception. This unresolvable tension results in Hume's existential crisis. He asks: "Where am I, or what? From what causes do I derive my existence, and to what condition shall I return? Whose favour shall I court, and whose anger must I dread? What beings surround me? and on whom have I any influence, or who have any influence on me?" (T 1.4.7.8).

At the crux of his melancholy, Hume abruptly changes course. He notes that nature provides a remedy. The melancholy and despair that he suffers from is a result of contemplative and splenetic reasoning. Hume says "[these feelings of despair] are the sentiments of my spleen and indolence; and indeed I must confess, that philosophy has nothing to oppose to them, and expects a victory from the returns of a serious good-humour'd disposition, than from the force of reason and conviction" (T 1.4.7.11). Hume turns to active and social engagement with the world and is relieved of his melancholy.

Melancholy delirium is confined to contemplative and solitary reflection; it is dispelled upon engagement with society. Thus Hume pragmatically determines to move on towards what he conceives of as worthy pursuits: morals, politics, and the passions (T 1.4.7.12). The agreeable sentiment he feels in engaging in such pursuits outweighs the splenetic and abstract reasoning which leads him to melancholy.

Connecting the Parable and the Conclusion

There are important parallels between the Parable and the Conclusion. Both Smith and Hume grapple with the tension and dialectic between contemplation and action. In short, the similarities are as follows: the poor man's son and Hume both begin with ambition. The poor man's son longs for wealth and status; Hume longs to pioneer a new science of man. Both embark on the journey of achieving their goals and in the process are subject to inconveniences and pains of body and mind. When the poor man's son successfully accumulates wealth and status he realizes that they were not worth the cost. He curses his former ambition and sees wealth and the pursuit of status as meaningless. Hume arrives at a point in his theory of mind and realizes that it is a point of contradiction. He despairs and regrets his efforts, feeling discouraged from any future inquiry. Smith notes that the poor man's son view of the meaninglessness of wealth is a function of splenetic humor. Hume notes that his conviction of epistemological nihilism is likewise a function of spleneticism and over-reflective contemplation. Smith says that nature provides a remedy for the splenetic mentality; Hume says the same! Smith endorses the pursuit of wealth within the confines of justice in that it produces useful and agreeable results. Hume endorses the pursuit of philosophy within certain bounds and

notes the usefulness and agreeableness of this pursuit. He himself carries on in the development of his project of the passions, morals, and government.

The textual connections are demonstrated in **Table 1**. Although the nature and implications of the connections are not immediately apparent, it is almost certain that Smith is engaging Hume's Conclusion in his Parable. The level of close textual ties is, we contend, clearly not coincidental.

Hume and Smith on Ambition

In Row 1 of Table 1, we show the parallel between the original ambition of Hume and the original ambition of the poor man's son. The poor man's son is ambitious in his pursuit of wealth, status, and convenience, and Hume is ambitious in undertaking his philosophical project. Both are, in some sense, deceived by ambition in their undertakings. The poor man's son is deceived into thinking that riches and status will bring him happiness and tranquility; Hume is deceived by his ambition into undertaking an unwieldy philosophical project. Both are actuated by a particular enlivening of their imagination, or a particular set of desires for sympathies. The poor man's son longs for the sympathy of the masses, and Hume longs to place himself in the line of English moralist by pioneering a new science of man. Ambition leads both to "sacrifice a real tranquility that is at all times in [their] power..." (TMS IV.1.8). Both toil in pain and industry towards that which they mistakenly think will bring happiness.

Hume and Smith show quite similar – and largely mixed – sensibilities regarding ambition throughout their works. In TMS, Smith articulates that *vanity* is the source of ambition, not the expectation of any real increase in pleasure or convenience. We

Table 1: Textual Connections

	Passages in Hume's Conclusion	Passages in Smith's Parable
1	Methinks I am like a man ... has yet the temerity to put out to sea in the same leaky weatherbeaten vessel, and even carries his <i>ambition</i> so far as to think of compassing the globe under these disadvantageous circumstances. (T 1.4.7.1; italics added)	The poor man's son, whom heaven in its anger has visited with <i>ambition</i> ... (TMS IV.1.8; italics added)
2	<i>Whose favour shall I court, and whose anger must I dread? What beings surround me? and on whom have, I any influence, or who have any influence on me?</i> I am confounded with all these questions, and begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, invironed with the deepest darkness, and utterly deprived of the use of every member and faculty. T 1.4.7.8; italics added)	For this purpose he makes his court to all mankind; he serves those whom he hates, and is obsequious to those whom he despises. (TMS IV.1.8)
3	When we trace up the human understanding to its first principles, we find it to lead us into such sentiments, as seem to turn into ridicule all our past pains and industry, and to discourage us from future enquiries. (T 1.4.7.5)	In his heart he curses ambition, and vainly regrets the ease and the indolence of youth, pleasures which are fled for ever, and which he has foolishly sacrificed for what, when he has got it, can afford him no real satisfaction. (TMS IV.1.8)
4	Most <i>fortunately</i> it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds, <i>nature herself suffices to that purpose</i> , and cures me of this philosophical melancholy and delirium... (T 1.4.7.9; italics added)	And it is well that <i>nature imposes</i> us in the manner. (TMS IV.1.10)
5	...my sentiments in that <i>splenetic</i> humour (T 1.4.7.10; italics added)	But though this <i>splenetic philosophy</i> ... (TMS IV.1.9; italics added)
6	The CYNICS are an extraordinary instance of philosophers, who from reasonings purely philosophical ran into as great extravagancies of conduct as any Monk or Dervise that ever was in the world. Generally speaking, the errors in religion are dangerous; those in philosophy only ridiculous. (T 1.4.7.13)	In ease of body and peace of mind, all the different ranks of life are nearly upon a level, <i>and the beggar</i> , who suns himself by the side of the highway, possesses that security which kings are fighting for. (TMS IV.1.10)
7	There is a great difference betwixt such opinions as we form after a calm and profound reflection, and such as we embrace by a kind of instinct or natural impulse, on account of their suitableness and conformity to the mind. If these opinions become contrary, it is not difficult to foresee which of them will have the advantage. (T 1.4.2.51)	Our imagination, which in pain and sorrow seems to be confined and cooped up within our own persons, in times of ease and prosperity expands itself to every thing around us ... We naturally confound it in our imagination with the order, the regular and harmonious movement of the system, the machine or oeconomy by means of which it is produced ... (TMS IV.1.9)

ambitiously seek riches and status not for utility, but from our desire for sympathy. As Smith says, “Nay, it is chiefly from this regard [i.e., that mankind are disposed to sympathize more entirely with our joy than with our sorrow] to the sentiments of mankind that we pursue riches and avoid poverty” (TMS I.iii.2.1). Hume articulates similar sensibilities: “Upon the whole, there remains nothing, which can give us an esteem for power and riches, and a contempt for meanness and poverty, except the principle of *sympathy*...” (T 2.2.5.14). Moreover, Hume notes that “[whatever] passions we may be actuated by; pride, ambition, avarice...; the soul or animating principle of them all is sympathy” (T 2.2.5.15). Our pursuit of wealth and status is accordingly not primarily for convenience or pleasure but is an expression of the striving for sympathy of spectators.

Hume and Smith recognize that the lure of ambition is emptier than it appears. Both consider ambition to be essentially misguided. Smith makes this particularly clear: “For to what purpose is all the toil and bustle of this world? what is the end of avarice and ambition, the pursuit of wealth, of power, and preheminance? Is it to supply the necessities of labor? The wages of the meanest labourer can supply them” (TMS 1.iii.2.1). The empty lure of ambition is demonstrated in the Parable. Smith says that the poor man’s son sacrifices “a real tranquility that is at all times in his power” for the hapless pursuit of wealth and greatness, which end up being nothing more than trinkets of frivolous utility (TMS IV.1.8). Ambition leads to a distorted view of the constitution of happiness. He says that “happiness consists in tranquility and enjoyment” (TMS III.3.30). The mind’s tendency to exalt one life station over another leads to the fruitless pursuit of

the ends of an overzealous ambition. Smith continues that “[the] great source of both the misery and disorders of human life, seems to arise from over-rating the difference between one permanent situation and another” (TMS III.3.31). He does moderate his position slightly, however, noting that some situations are surely preferable to others. Moreover, the prudent pursuit of a moderated ambition can justify the change in permanent situations. This importance of the virtue of prudence in relation with ambition is key in Smith’s move to provide a middling ground between contemplation and action, as we will show.

There is an interesting set of internal textual connections within TMS on ambition that serves to underscore the importance of the Parable. The internal connections show that the Parable is a demonstration of some of Smith’s major themes throughout TMS. At TMS I.iii.2, entitled ‘Of the origin of Ambition, and of the distinction of Ranks’, Smith develops the sympathetic motivation to ambition. He begins by showing that it is out of a desire for sympathy that we are originally drawn to pursue wealth; it is not from convenience. He asks a series of questions that parallel the invisible hand passage at TMS IV.1.10:

What then is the cause of our aversion to his situation, and why should those who have been educated in the higher ranks of life, regard it as worse than death to be reduced to live, even without labour, upon the same simple fare with him, to dwell under the same lowly roof, and to be clothed in the same humble attire? Do they imagine that their *stomach* is better, or their sleep sounder in a *palace* than in a *cottage*? (TMS I.iii.2.1; italics added)

Smith here is directly prefiguring the Parable. The Parable seems to convey the message of TMS I.iii.2 in different form. The poor man’s son “finds the *cottage* of his father too small for his accommodations, and fancies he should be lodged more at ease in a *palace*”

(TMS IV.1.8; italics added). So the poor man's son seems to be one of the "they" that TMS I.iii.2.1 refers to. Moreover, Smith tells us at the end of the Parable that "[the] capacity of [the unfeeling landlord's] *stomach* bears no proportion to the immensity of his desires, and will receive no more than that of the meanest peasant" (TMS IV.1.10; italics added). Again, Smith parallels TMS I.iii.2.1 and shows how the rich really have no more in the way of convenience or sustenance than the poor. The connection serves to show the rich substance of the Parable and how it connects many strands of Smith's thinking.

At TMS I.iii.2 it is interesting to note that Smith seems to approve the pursuit of wealth within the bounds of justice and prudence. The man of ordinary rank who seeks to make a name for himself must do so by the exertion of prudence: "Probity and prudence, generosity and frankness, must characterize his behaviour upon all ordinary occasions" (TMS I.iii.2.5). Smith's seems to endorse such virtuous and honest pursuit of the objects of ambition. This endorsement is corroborated by his comments at TMS II.ii.2.1 where he articulates that the spectator can, to a degree, sympathize with ambition and the pursuit of wealth so long as the pursuer does not violate the rules of justice in the process: The spectator allows that "[in] the race for wealth, and honours, and preferments, [the man pursuing wealth] may run as hard as he can, and strain every nerve and every muscle, in order to outstrip all his competitors. But if he should jostle, or throw down any of them, the indulgence of the spectators is entirely at an end."

Smith's engagement of the themes of ambition and its pursuit, tranquility, and wealth throughout TMS leads us to read the Parable as something of a continuance of the

conversation of Hume's Conclusion. Smith conceptually develops themes that help him in his attempt to resolve the dialectic of contemplation and action that Hume's Conclusion presents us with. Moreover, as a related aside, his themes throughout TMS help inform his position on the pursuit of wealth.

The Cost and Consequence of Ambition

The second set of textual connections that we identify between Smith and Hume demonstrates the sacrifices entailed in, or the consequences of, the pursuit of the objects of ambition. Row 2 of Table 1 shows the poor man's son and Hume sacrificing tranquility and a degree of real happiness in the pursuit of their respective ambitions. "[The poor man's son] makes his court to all of mankind; serves those whom he hates, and is obsequious to those he despises" (TMS IV.1.8). He sacrifices dignity and peace of mind and subjects himself to others in his quest to fulfill ambition. Likewise, Hume, in his ambition, sacrifices the tranquility of acceptance. Hume alienates himself from convention and from other philosophers. He bemoans his alienation: "Whose favour shall I court, and whose anger must I dread? What beings surround me? and on whom have, I any influence, or who have any influence on me?" (T 1.4.7.8). Both the poor man's son and Hume elevate ambition and the perception of some sort of future contentment over present tranquility.

There is a curious asymmetry here between the poor man's son and Hume, despite the textual connections. The poor man's son willingly serves those that he hates whereas Hume knowingly departs from convention in his attempt at constructing a new science of man. In other words, the poor man's son willingly serves and Hume willingly departs.

Both moves constitute a sacrifice of tranquility caused by the pursuit of ambition, but their directions are opposite. The poor man's son fully and somewhat unreflectively submits to convention whereas Hume reflectively attempts to subvert it. These asymmetric swings in the progression of the poor man's son and the progression of Hume figure into the larger complementary dialectics of the Parable and Conclusion. The poor man's son initially embraces a life without reflection and courts the favor of those he hates. He dives into active life, as it were, giving himself over to the pull of his passions, the admiration for riches and trifles of convenience. To the contrary, Hume looks to embrace philosophy without action, that is, overly contemplative and abstract philosophy. Upon reflection, both plunges merit counter-moves. The poor man's son needs to move towards contemplation whereas Hume moves towards action and natural sociability. The resolution of both the Parable and the Conclusion demonstrate the need for contemplation and action to rest in a particular balance, mediated by the virtue of prudence.

The asymmetric swings from tranquility in the Parable and the Conclusion culminate in despair of the poor man's son and Hume. Row 3 of Table 1 shows these textual connections. The poor man's son realizes at the end of his life that he has sacrificed real and solid tranquility in his vain pursuit of wealth. He "curses ambition and vainly regrets the ease and the indolence of youth..." (TMS IV.1.8). Hume's contemplation leads him to paradox and the subversion of his thought. He looks back regretfully on the pain and industry he put into constructing his system. The poor man's

son's despair leads him to realize the true nature of wealth – that it is not but frivolous utility and convenience. Hume's despair culminates in his personal existential crisis.

The Cure of Nature and the Elevation of the Imagination

There is a parallel turning point in both the Parable and the Conclusion. The turning point is illustrated by the quotes in Row 4. Both the poor man's son and Hume are lifted from their melancholy by nature. Nature elevates the imagination from despair and imparts it with an enlivened and more positive conception the world. Nature elevates the mind to view material wealth, the pursuit of inquiry, and existence itself in a more positive light. Importantly, not only do Smith and Hume both notice this effect of nature on the imagination but they affirm it. Smith famously says: "And it is well that nature imposes upon us in this manner" (TMS IV.1.8). Hume comes to the same conclusion (T 1.4.7.9).

The disparaging understanding of ambition that leads the poor man's son and Hume to despair is a function of what Smith and Hume call the splenetic humor (See Row 5 of Table 1). The splenetic humor is an overly abstract or contemplative view of the world that is caused by solitude and reflection. It is an overemphasis of abstract reason and an underestimation of social convention that "depreciates those great objects of human desire, when in better health and in better humour, we never fail to regard...under a more agreeable aspect" (TMS IV.1.9). Splenetic humor leads the poor man's son to realize that wealth and the economy of the great are but trifling conveniences. Splenetic humor leads Hume to the edge of epistemic nihilism and dogmatic skepticism.

But fortunately, as Smith puts it, “we rarely view [things] in this abstract and philosophical light” (TMS IV.1.9). The natural inclination of the mind is to action and sociability. Splenetic humor is overcome by action and engagement with the world. As Hume puts it, “I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hours’ amusement, I would return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain’d, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any further” (T 1.4.7.9). Thus nature elevates the imagination to conceive of, e.g., wealth or inquiry, “as something grand and beautiful and noble, of which the attainment is well worth all the toil and anxiety which we are so apt to bestow upon it” (TMS IV.1.9). Earlier in TMS Smith tacitly embraces this remedy of nature. He notes that engagement in society tempers the splenetic humor. Our natural moral sensibilities are, in some sense, distorted by isolated reflection. Reflection needs to be tempered and guided by an active engagement with society:

Men of retirement and speculation, who are apt to sit brooding at home over either grief or resentment, though they may often have more humanity, more generosity, and a nicer sense of honour, yet seldom possess that equality of temper which is so common among men of the world. (TMS I.i.4.10)

The trajectory of the dialectic of Hume’s Conclusion is quite similar in nature to the conclusion of Smith’s parable. Hume recognizes that once he is drawn out of his solitude into society, his abstract and splenetic reflections no longer carry much weight. He concludes that reason should be assented to only inasmuch as it is useful and agreeable (cf. Ridge 2003). On its own ground, according to Hume, abstract reason is self-subverting and contradictory. The upshot of Hume’s paradox is not that reasoning should be abandoned, but rather that the character and type of reasoning that should be

pursued is reason that is consciously subservient to experience and sentiment. Thus Hume concludes: “Where reason is lively, and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it never can have any title to operate on us” (T 1.4.7.10). Hume’s move in the Conclusion seems to subvert the traditional understanding of the relationship between contemplation and action. He intimates that reason and contemplation should be sensitive to action and sociability. This sensibility is nicely captured in his *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* where he recapitulates Book 1 of *Treatise* and states: “Be a philosopher; but, amidst all your philosophy, be still a man” (EHU 1.6).

The imagination elevates the mind from the splenetic humor in that it is imbued with natural sentiment captured from experience and the lively and positive conception of different objects (see Row 7 of Table 1). Smith, like Hume, articulates that the mind is constituted by nature for both contemplation and action, but that contemplation should be largely subservient to action. Abstract and unbounded reasoning subverts itself and leads to a distorted perspective of the pursuit of ambition. This distortion is apparent in the fact that through the pursuit of ambition – the so-called ‘imposition of nature’ – men are roused to action, to the improvement of material welfare of society, and ultimately to the distribution of wealth through the commercial order. Smith ultimately seems to endorse the poor man’s son’s pursuit of wealth – and consequently the active and social view of life that it implies – as opposed to splenetic reflectiveness. The upshot of both Hume and Smith is a conception of a type of practical reason that is useful and agreeable and that is sensitive to experience. Reason has a place in the common life, not in the abstract realm

of abstruse metaphysics (as Hume might put it). And the reason that should operate common life is sympathetic by constitution: the practice of reason is social, the way in which ideas are related is a function of the sympathetic creativity of the imagination (Matson 2017). Imagination envelops reason in both Smith and Hume; it looms in moral and scientific explanation (Griswold 1999, 162). Smith and Hume generally hold that “[contemplation] is ultimately reflection on prior practice, hence thought is fundamentally ‘conservative’ and not radical. Explanation is not the grasping of an external structure but the subject’s imposition or projection of structure” (Capaldi and Lloyd 2016, 29). This conception of reason, in turn, implies that the contemplative life is not fundamentally different in kind from the active life. Contemplation is (and should be) informed and constituted by action.

There is a final textual connection between the Parable and Conclusion that is worth mentioning. It is demonstrated in Row 6 of Table 1. On Martin’s (2014) interpretation, as we have mentioned, the beggar in Smith’s Parable is actually a reference to Diogenes the Cynic. If Martin’s interpretation is correct, then there is a further parallel between Smith and Hume in that Hume also refers to the Cynics in his Conclusion. The interpretation of this particular engagement on the issue of the Cynics is not immediately clear; but it bolsters the case for reading the Parable and the Conclusion as being intimately linked.

Speculations and Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is largely to demonstrate the textual and substantive connections between Smith’s Parable and Hume’s Conclusion. The scope of the material

covered in these sections is immense. A full interpretation of their significance and meaning would require a full interpretation of the corpus of two very complicated philosophical minds. We do not pretend to offer a definitive interpretation here. But we do think that there are some clear themes and conclusions in the Parable and Conclusion.

It is clear that Smith and Hume are both dealing with the relationship between contemplation and action. Moreover, it seems they both end up in a similar and peculiarly modern place. Whereas ancient philosophy held the Aristotelian notion that contemplation is the highest good and the ultimate pursuit of life, Smith and Hume articulate that contemplation is and should be in a reciprocal relation with action. Hume takes this inversion of contemplation and action so far as to assert polemically that reason is the slave of the passions and can have no power over them (T 2.3.3.4). They do not go so far as to dismiss the need for contemplation, but they understand that contemplation is only useful and agreeable, and, indeed, only coherent, within the bounds of action. Life overflows the boundaries of abstract philosophical contemplation. Hume's understanding and affirmation of the Honest Gentleman corroborates this interpretation, as does Smith's recommendation of social engagement (cf. Merrill 2015, Chapter 2).

Abstract contemplation, undertaken in solitude, leads to conclusions that are naturally repugnant to human sensibilities. The idea that all ambition is futile and that the pursuit of wealth is entirely empty clashes with the mind's natural inclination; the idea that reason is either false or inoperative does likewise (e.g., TMS IV.1.10; T 1.4.7.7). Smith and Hume identify that the sentiments of the mind in these regards should be considered on higher footing than the conclusions of contemplation. Contemplation still

has an important role in human life, but it is a role that is largely subservient to man's social, sentimental, and active inclinations. Smith and Hume should be read as endorsing a balanced life in which the prudential pursuit of wealth within the bounds of justice and the prudential pursuit of philosophy within the bounds of common life are embraced. Contemplative life should be informed by active life.

We don't pretend to have treated the Parable and the Conclusion exhaustively in this chapter. But there is clearly an important relationship between these two passages that merits future scholarly development. The close textual relationships make a case for interpreting Smith and Hume as joined in a particularly modern philosophical project endorsing action and sociability over splenetic contemplation.

CHAPTER FOUR: HUME’S WAY OF REASONABLENESS IN EPISTEMOLOGY, IN POLITICS, AND IN POLITICAL ECONOMY

I cannot forbear having a curiosity to be acquainted with the principles of moral good and evil, the nature and foundation of government, and the cause of those several passions and inclinations, which actuate and govern me.

...*this* is the origin of my philosophy.

- David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (T 1.4.7.12; italics added)

In 1739, David Hume published Books I and II of his famous *Treatise of Human Nature*. A year later, he published Book III of the *Treatise*. The *Treatise* was ill-received, falling, as Hume put it, “*dead-born from the press*” (Hume 1987, xxxiv; italics original). After the disappointing reception of the *Treatise*, Hume moved on to other projects. He became particularly well-known for his contributions to the social studies, becoming a recognized authority in matters of morals, politics, political economy, and history. He was perhaps most famous in his day for his celebrated six-volume *History of England*.

It is a mistake to think, as some have argued,¹ that Hume’s post-*Treatise* career and shifting focus towards the social studies marked an end to his philosophy. I agree with John Danford (1990, 9) that “Hume’s career as a writer and thinker was all of a piece and that the writings for which he was most renowned in his own lifetime are

¹ In their introductory remarks to Volume 3 of the 1889 edition of *The Philosophical Works of David Hume*, T.H. Grose and T.H. Green (1889,75) comment on Hume’s movement from epistemology to social studies, speaking of “the suddenness with which [Hume’s] labours in philosophy came to an end.” Such thinking, although not uncommon among some of Hume’s earlier interpreters, is wrongheaded (see Miller 1987, xviii n18).

neither less important nor, with some qualifications, less philosophical than the works which are studied in philosophy courses.” Hume’s post-*Treatise* developments in social studies should be viewed as a manifestation, reformulation, or revision of the epistemological, moral, and political conclusions reached in that original volume. Hume’s emphasis on the social studies – particularly politics and political economy – should be viewed as an implication of, not a departure from or abandonment of, his conceptual developments in the *Treatise*. Such an interpretation of Hume’s thinking has been articulated by a number of scholars, e.g., Duncan Forbes (1975), Donald Livingston (1984), Eugene Miller (1987), John Danford (1990), and Thomas Merrill (2015).

In the present study, I seek to further elaborate the connectedness between Hume’s thinking in epistemology, politics, and political economy in order to help illustrate the broad continuity of his thought. Understanding the connectedness in Hume nests his epistemological, historical, political, and economic discourse within a wider philosophical framework. I proceed by partly reconstructing a conceptual narrative from the *Treatise*, showing how Hume moves in and between epistemology, politics, and political economy. My thesis, simply put, is that Hume’s epistemological developments in the *Treatise*, through his reconfiguration of the faculty of reason, drive him to study politics and political economy and continue to speak to the prudential manner in which he applies his reconfigured reason in these areas.

Outlining the Narrative

Hume begins the *Treatise* by searching for an independent, epistemological foundation for his ambitious “science of man,” a science which aims to “thoroughly

[acquaint us] with the extent and force of human understanding...and explain the nature of the ideas we employ, and of the operations of our reasoning” (T Intro.4). Hume begins the search in Book I of the *Treatise* by formulating and employing a narrow concept of reason taken largely from Locke and Descartes. As he moves forward with his project, Hume finds that the narrow concept of reason cannot account for our reliance on probable reasoning and our ideas of causation. Narrow reason – or “traditional reason,” as Barbara Winters (1979) has called it –cannot work on matters of experience. Hume’s finding marks a distinct departure from Locke, among others, who articulated a difference between a narrower and a wider mode of reason but neglected to see the major conceptual discontinuity between these two modes. In response to the limitations of narrow reason, Hume seeks to broaden the scope of reason to better align with what reason is practically or commonly understood to be. Hume’s broadening of reason, which includes an important semantic shift in his talk on reason, yields a more experiential and usable concept of reason. But the new version of reason only coheres by presupposing the soundness of the belief in the uniformity of experience. Hume finds that the belief in the uniformity of experience proceeds only on the basis of custom. It cannot be verified from the perspective of narrow reason. Thus, from the perspective of narrow reason, the broader sort of practical reason employed in most areas of life is not reasonable!

Hume struggles concerning the integrity of his new version of reason and leans towards skepticism. But towards the end of the conclusion of Book I of the *Treatise*, he resolves to move forward with his philosophy and apply his new sort of practical reason to things that appear meaningful from the perspective of common life, life outside of the

closet of speculative philosophy. He reflectively accepts the perspective of common life as the only way to move forward in philosophy without collapsing under the weight of skepticism. He determines to “be a philosopher; but, amidst all [his] philosophy, to be still a man” (EHU 1.7). From the perspective of common life, morals and politics emerge as focal subjects on which to reason. Hume decides that henceforth he shall presuppose the soundness of his broader concept of reason, and that he shall use this reason to consider better and worse interpretations and practices in morals and politics.

Hume’s application of reason to politics arrives at a presumption of liberty. Hume’s presumption of liberty cashes out in concrete policy issues. Given a choice between two policy options, the presumption of liberty inclines Hume towards the policy option that least impinges on individual liberty. The presumption of liberty in Hume stems from his thinking on the usefulness and agreeableness of liberty. The usefulness of liberty is illustrated throughout Book III of the *Treatise* in terms of his account of the origins of property and his theory of justice. The usefulness of liberty is further illustrated by Hume’s political economy. In political economy, Hume illustrates the usefulness of liberty by speaking to the spontaneous order that results from private individuals pursuing their interests, showing the mutual benefits of exchange, and elaborating a chain of connection between liberty, industry, knowledge, and virtue.

Hume’s reasoning in politics and political economy arrives at a second presumption: the presumption of the status quo. The presumption of the status quo would require reforms to bear the burden of proof. The presumption of the status quo in Hume is informed by his view of the looseness and uncertainty of his new configuration of reason.

Towards the end of the *Treatise*, in light of such uncertainty, Hume moves to make the intellectual virtue of prudence internal to a just application of reason. Successful reason is prudent reason. Coupled with his understanding of the complexity of the social order, Hume's thinking on the constitution of reason encourages prudence in policy deliberations. He is leery of reforms that could threaten the established political order in that he sees established political order as a precondition for liberty. When considering policy options, one must prudently consider the implications for existing social arrangements and weigh "the general course of things," the long-run implications for liberty (EMPL, 254).

In Section 2, I discuss Hume's epistemological developments in Book I of the *Treatise* in terms of what I call his "dual account of reason." In Section 3, I illustrate how the dual account of reason drives Hume to human things, among which politics and political economy loom large. In Section 4, I speak to the nature of Hume's presumption of liberty which stems from his view of the usefulness and agreeableness of liberty, the usefulness understood by his thinking about property and political economy. In Section 5, I illustrate how Hume's epistemology returns to influence his attitude in politics and political economy by way of the presumption of status quo. Section 6 concludes.

Epistemology and the Dual Account of Reason²

Hume's innovation in his thinking on reason in the *Treatise* does not simply consist in a dividing of the faculty of reason into a narrow concept and a wider concept; such a division has a long history stretching back at least to Aristotle (e.g., 1999, 89).

² This section is in large part a summary of Chapter One.

Hume's innovation, rather, is his *reconfiguration* of the narrow-wide reason distinction. Hume articulates that narrow reason, when properly understood, is almost entirely subsumed by a wide, practical, and experiential kind of reason. Narrow reason cannot work on matters of experience – it is limited to statements and demonstrations of analytic truths – because it has no way of verifying the idea that experience proceeds uniformly, i.e., that the future will resemble the past.

All matters of experience are a matter of some wider sort of practical reason for Hume. Hume's conception of the sort of reason that works on experience is different than that of some others that came before him in that it doesn't seem to contain any rational necessity; Hume's broad concept of practical reason rests upon unverifiable beliefs and a disposition to view one's experience as reliable.

It is Hume's recognition of the (1) dramatic limitations of narrow reason and (2) the non-foundational character of wide, experiential reason that leads him towards skepticism and characterizes the trajectory of his philosophy.

In developing his thinking on reason in the *Treatise*, Hume uses the word *reason* in three ways. These three ways correspond to his narrow conception reason, his wide conception of reason, and the general activity of reasoning, i.e., the activity of deliberation and of having reasons. I call the first use of *reason* "R1." R1 is a narrow inferential faculty that operates logically or demonstratively upon intuitive ideas. I call the second use of *reason* "R2." R2 is a wide, practical faculty that envelops R1 and augments it with a mode of probable reasoning and some settled principles of the imagination of which probable reasoning is comprised. Hume's third use of *reason*

corresponds simply to the general activity of *reasoning*. In the third sense, *reason* as a noun means *warrant* or *argument*; if used as a verb, *reason* in this sense means *to consciously deliberate or infer*. There is a dynamic between these different concepts of *reason* in Hume that is central to his epistemological outlook and his developments in the *Treatise*. I call this dynamic and its implications ‘the dual account of reason.’

Early in the *Treatise*, Hume almost exclusively confines himself to employing the word *reason* to mean R1, argument, or the general act of deliberation. Apart from some passages in the introduction of the work, Hume seems to mean R1 almost every time he refers to *reason* (qua faculty) up until around T 1.3.11.1. Hume’s conception of R1 is largely taken from Locke – although unlike Lockean reason, R1 importantly does not account for probable reasoning (i.e., it does not work on matters of experience). We can look to Locke’s development of reason and his conception of demonstration in his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* to better understand the nature of Hume’s R1 and its limitations.

Locke has one concept of reason with two modes (as opposed to Hume who has two *concepts* of reason): demonstrative reasoning and probable reasoning. R1 corresponds to the Lockean mode of demonstrative reasoning. It does not, again, correspond to the Lockean mode of probable reasoning (see Millican 1998, 145). Demonstrative reasoning in Locke begins with intuitive premises. To Locke, intuition is the mind’s “native Faculty to perceive the Coherence, or Incoherence of its *Ideas*” (ECHU 4.17.2). Lockean demonstrative reasoning then proceeds by perceiving intuitive connections between different intuitive ideas. Demonstrative reasoning forms a chain of

intuitively-connected-intuitive ideas (see Owen 1999, Chapter 3, especially p. 40). As Locke puts it, demonstrations show “the Agreement, or Disagreement of two *Ideas*, by the intervention of one or more Proofs, which have a constant, immutable [i.e. intuitive], and visible connection with one another” (ECHU 4.15.1).

Hume’s R1 leads to certainty in that demonstrations are true by the law of non-contradiction. “They depend solely on the [intuitive] ideas that make them up. Since they depend on nothing else, nothing can make them false” (Owen 1999, 97). The conclusion of a demonstration is presupposed by the very perception of the ideas that make it up. In illustrating the ideas of intuition and demonstration, Locke gives the example of a triangle (ECHU 4.15.1). We can clearly perceive or intuit the idea of a triangle: a closed figure made up of three straight lines. We can intuit the idea of a right angle as the angle made by perpendicular straight lines. Given the idea of a triangle and a right angle, we can demonstrate – intuitively perceive the connection between a number of intuitive, intermediate ideas – that the sum of the angles in a triangle equals the sum of two right angles. Such a demonstration is certain by perception and cannot be subject to question. Hume elaborates R1 in one of the first significant passages on the faculty of reason in the *Treatise*:

A demonstration, if just, admits of no opposite difficulty; and if not just, ‘tis a mere sophism, and consequently can never be of difficulty... To talk therefore of objections and replies, and ballancing of arguments in such a question as this, is to confess, either that *human reason* [R1] is nothing but a play of words, or that the person himself, who talks so, has not a capacity equal to such subjects. (T 1.2.2.6; italics added)

Hume's development of R1 comes to a head during his treatment of the mode of probable reasoning and the idea of causation. In Locke, probable reasoning is one of the two modes of the faculty of reason (see ECHU 4.17.2). Locke's probable reasoning works on matters of experience by probabilistically inferring from past to present experience (i.e., "if X occurred like *that* in the past, X will, under similar conditions, probably happen like *that* in the future"). Hume similarly conceives of probable reasoning. It is probable reasoning that works on matters of experience. But Hume does not call probable reasoning *reason*, nor initially suggest that it is a part of the faculty of *reason*. To the contrary, in the early parts of Book I of the *Treatise*, Hume explicitly notes that probable reasoning cannot possibly be a mode of his working conception of *reason*, R1. R1 cannot possibly explain our reliance upon experience and cannot justify causal propositions. Thus, Hume's semantics on *reason* are different than Locke's.

The basis for probable reasoning – and, moreover, the very idea of probability – is the idea that experience proceeds uniformly, i.e., that the future will resemble the past. But the uniformity of experience cannot be demonstrated; it can't be proven with certainty. As Hume says at T 1.2.2.6, a demonstration does not entail, and cannot possibly entail, objections or counter arguments. It is impossible to dispute the demonstration that a triangle has one-hundred and eighty degrees unless one misapprehends the idea of a triangle or a degree. It is impossible to conceive the contrary of any just demonstration. In other words, if we can conceive an idea contrary to X, then X is non-demonstrable. The connectedness of past and future cannot be verified by R1

simply because, as Hume articulates, we can “at least conceive a change in the course of nature” (T 1.3.6.5).

Hume clearly argues that R1 cannot determine probable reasoning:

Thus not only our reason [R1] fails us in the discovery of the *ultimate connexion* of causes and effects, but even after experience has inform'd us of their *constant conjunction*, 'tis impossible for us to satisfy ourselves by our reason [R1], why we shou'd extend that experience beyond those particular instances, which have fallen under our observation. (T 1.3.6.11; italics original)

Reason in this passage can only be understood as R1, the narrow demonstrative sort of reason partially borrowed from Locke. If *reason* here included probable reasoning, there would be no problem for Hume to address in that probable reasoning by definition operates upon the assumption that the experience will proceed uniformly. In straightforward terms, the problem Hume finds concerning R1 and probable reasoning – which is commonly referred to as “the problem of induction” – can be stated as follows: in order to argue that the future will resemble the past, thus justifying the soundness of probable reasoning, one might say, “the future has resembled the past in my experience.” But such a statement merely pushes the problem back a level, begging the question, “what is the reliability of one’s experience and why should experience predict the future?” Hume makes it clear that one cannot reason *experientially* regarding the reliability of experience. Such a circular mode of argumentation presupposes the thing it is attempting to explain (cf. EHU 4.1.19).

Hume admits that no one actually denies the province of probable reasoning. His point is simply that probable reasoning is not determined by and cannot be justified by R1. Probable reasoning, rather, is a matter of custom or natural belief. The imagination

elevates the mind to assent to the mode of probable reasoning despite its unverifiable nature (unverifiable, at least from an R1 perspective). The mind assents to probable reasoning and, accordingly, to belief in the uniform procedure of experience because it *feels* it to be a just belief. “Thus all probable reasoning is nothing but a species of sensation. ‘Tis not solely in poetry and music, we must follow our taste and sentiment, but likewise in philosophy” (T 1.3.8.12).

Hume does not wish to undermine probable reasoning, or to dismiss all ideas of causation. Thus, he proceeds to envelop probable reasoning into a new broader sort of practical reason: R2. The move from R1 to R2 entails a semantic shift, a shift which Hume makes explicit:

Those philosophers [including Locke], who have divided human reason into *knowledge* and *probability*, and have defin’d the first to be *that evidence, which arise from the comparison of ideas*, are oblig’d to comprehend all our arguments from causes or effects under the general term of *probability*. But tho’ every one be free to use his term in what sense he pleases; and accordingly in the precedent part of this discourse, I have follow’d **this method of expression**; ‘tis however certain, that in common discourse we readily affirm, that many arguments from causation exceed probability, and may be receiv’d as a superior kind of evidence. (T 1.3.11.2; italics original, bold added)

The bolded phrase, by my interpretation, suggests that Hume has been using *reason* in the preceding pages of the *Treatise* “in what sense he pleases.” That is, he has been using *reason* in a sense that differs from Locke and “those philosophers.” That sense is R1, which differs from Locke and the others precisely because it excludes probable reasoning from the province of *reason*. But Hume continues here to say that common sense forcefully tells us that probable reasoning is a superior sort of evidence to other “whimsies and prejudices” of the imagination, which probable reasoning at least partially

resembles (see T 1.3.9.19 n22). The conclusions of probable reasoning have a higher degree of epistemic merit, a merit that can approach a kind of certainty.³ Hume moves to bring probable reasoning into the fold, as it were, and offers a new concept of reason: R2. R1 does not go away when R2 appears. Rather, it is subsumed by R2 (illustrated in **Figure 1**). Simply put, R2 equals R1 plus probable reasoning. As probable reasoning is a matter of habit, stemming from the imagination, R2 is much more a matter of instinct than of strict cognition. R2 reasoning is “*more properly an act of the sensitive, than of the cogitative part of our natures*” (T 1.4.1.8; italics original).

When Hume finally gives an explicit definition of *reason* at the end of Book I, Part 3 – the first explicit definition of *reason* in the *Treatise* –, he speaks of R2: “To consider the matter aright, reason is nothing but a wonderful and unintelligible instinct in our souls, which carries us along a certain train of ideas, and endows them with particular qualities, according to their particular situations and relations” (T 1.3.16.9). R2 is a composite of R1 and probable reasoning, which is itself a composite of some natural beliefs that center on the presupposition of the regularity of experience.

³ In a letter to John Stewart, who attacked Hume for his view on the idea of causation, Hume speaks of different sorts of certainty. He says that the certainty that results from R2 deliberations is more sure than other kinds of certainty, but less sure than the demonstrative kind:

“...allow me to tell you, that I never asserted so absurd a Proposition as *that any thing might arise without a Cause*: I only maintain’d, that our Certainty of the Falseness of that Proposition proceeded neither from intuition nor Demonstration; but from another source. *That Caesar existed, that there is such an Island as Sicily*; for these Propositions, I affirm, we have no demonstrative nor intuitive Proof. Would you infer that I deny their Truth, or even their Certainty? There are many different kinds of Certainty; and some of them as satisfactory to the Mind, tho’ perhaps not so regular, as the demonstrative kind” (quoted in Mossner 2001, 260; italics original).

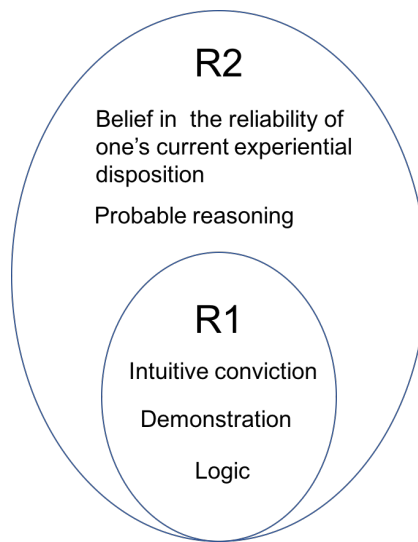


Figure 1: Illustrating the R1-R2 Relationship

The Turn of R2

Hume's acceptance of R2 as a concept of reason is not without difficulty. The difficulty is most clearly expressed in the famous conclusion to Book I of the *Treatise* (hereafter, "Conclusion"). Hume expresses anxiety in the Conclusion on account of the fact that R2 can never be reasonable from an R1 perspective. He comments on his concern regarding the soundness of R2 and voices reservations about using R2 for future inquiries: "Methinks I am like a man, who having struck on many shoals, and having narrowly escap'd shipwreck in passing a small firth [i.e., progressing through his analysis of the understanding in Book I despite his reasons for skepticism], has yet the temerity to put out to sea in the same leaky weather-beaten vessel [i.e., to use R2 for future philosophical inquiries]" (T 1.4.7.1). He understands that R2 is a cornerstone of common

sense but is nonetheless troubled from an R1 perspective: the R1 view of R2 exposes the unverifiable and even contradictory habits and feelings on which R2 proceeds.⁴ Hume finds himself held at an impasse between “a false reason [R2] and none at all” (T 1.4.7.6). R2 corresponds to “a false reason” in that it cannot demonstrate the soundness of the principles of the imagination on which it proceeds. As for R1, it represents “no reason” in that it is limited in application to demonstrations and the statement of analytic truths. Without moving beyond R1, one cannot increase one’s knowledge.

Hume seeks to avoid skepticism and to move beyond R1. He searches for a way to responsibly use R2 to increase the bounds of knowledge through philosophy. In his searching, he feels that a just view of reason must lie somewhere between a total rejection of R2 and an unreflective acceptance of R2. The philosopher should neither (1) “assent to every trivial suggestion of the imagination [including the imaginary principles which constitute the basis of R2],” nor should he (2) “reject all the trivial suggestions of the fancy, and adhere to the understanding [i.e., narrowly to R1]” (T 1.4.7.6). But the just balance of these two positions is unclear: how much weight should one give to (1) assent vs. (2) rejection? Are there circumstances in which assent to the suggestions of imagination should bear a higher burden of proof than does rejection? Are there circumstances in which a rejection of such suggestions should bear a higher burden of proof? What criteria does one have for judgment in such circumstances? In a state of

⁴ When one accepts the soundness of R2 and assents to the practice of causal reasoning, contradictions in common beliefs appear. For example, the idea of the existence of external objects is undermined by causal reasoning, as is the validity of sensory experience more generally (see T 1.4.2; Kemp Smith 2005, 124–28). As Hume puts it, “nor is it possible for us to reason justly and regularly from causes and effects, and at the same time believe the continu’d existence of matter” (T 1.4.7.4).

turmoil over such considerations, Hume moves towards the climax of the Conclusion, towards the peak of his apparent despair: “The *intense* view of these manifold contradictions [between R2 and R1] and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am ready to reject all belief and reasoning” (T 1.4.7.8; italics original). Hume feels he cannot move past the contradictions between R1 and R2 and discover a responsible way forward for his philosophy.

Yet from the peak of despair, Hume suddenly pivots. He finds that *nature* provides a way forward:

Most fortunately it happens, that since reason is incapable of dispelling these clouds [of darkness, of anxiety], 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 the senses, which obliterate all these chimeras. I dine, I play a game of back-gammon, I converse, and am merry with my friends; and when after three or four hour’s amusement, I wou’d return to these speculations, they appear so cold, and strain’d, and ridiculous, that I cannot find in my heart to enter into them any farther (T 1.4.7.9).

When Hume leaves the closet of his study, as it were, he finds that his turmoil resolves itself through immersion in the “common affairs of life,” a phrase he uses throughout his work. Immersion in the common affairs of life is central to Hume’s reconfiguration of reason, to his move from R1 to R2. As Nicholas Capaldi (1989, 22) has formulated the matter, whereas Hume’s modern predecessors, starting with Descartes, treated theoretical questions from an autonomous perspective of an “outside, disengaged, observer” – an “I Think,” perspective, as it were – Hume treats them from an action-oriented, social perspective of “We Do”: “Instead of attempting to scrutinize our thought process in the hope of uncovering principles of rationality which could be applied to directing our

action, Hume reversed the procedure. He began with our practice, our action, and sought to extract from it the inherent social norms” (ibid.).

Hume’s reference to the common affairs of life, and search for social norms therein, inclines him to take R2 on trust, to presuppose R2 as a valid mode of reasoning. From a common-life perspective, Hume observes the acceptance of R2 as a social norm. Humans unavoidably and naturally incline towards a reliance upon experience and a belief in causation.⁵ Nonetheless, the process by which he arrives at his inclination towards R2 has rippling effects on his subsequent philosophy. Although Hume in the end embraces R2, the logic of the dual account of reason speaks to both the subjects of his future inquiries and to the overarching spirit or ethos of his philosophy.

Hume’s Spiral of Disposition

After nature provides Hume with a way forward from melancholy and delirium, after he reorients his perspective from “I Think” to “We Do,” as it were, he pauses in the Conclusion to reflect on the development of his philosophy. In T 1.4.7.10, Hume narrates the spiraling development of his outlook by touching on different moments in the evolution of his disposition and attitude. Hume’s narration illustrates a dialectic between different moments of disposition and reflection. Hume shows how reflection upon a disposition leads to a disintegration, a tension in his outlook, in the form of some kind of skepticism. He then shows how further reflection moves him towards reintegration,

⁵ Thomas Merrill (2015a, 57) expresses Hume’s pivot in this way: “the turning point of [Hume’s] philosophical education is facing up to his kinship with ordinary persons and ‘honest gentleman.’ In facing up to the indispensability of opinion, Hume’s philosophy must forego the ambition or pretension to be an absolutely self-sufficient thinker. He must learn to accept some things on trust.”

towards resolve and a richer, deeper disposition. This spiraling dynamic is illustrated in **Figure 2.**⁶

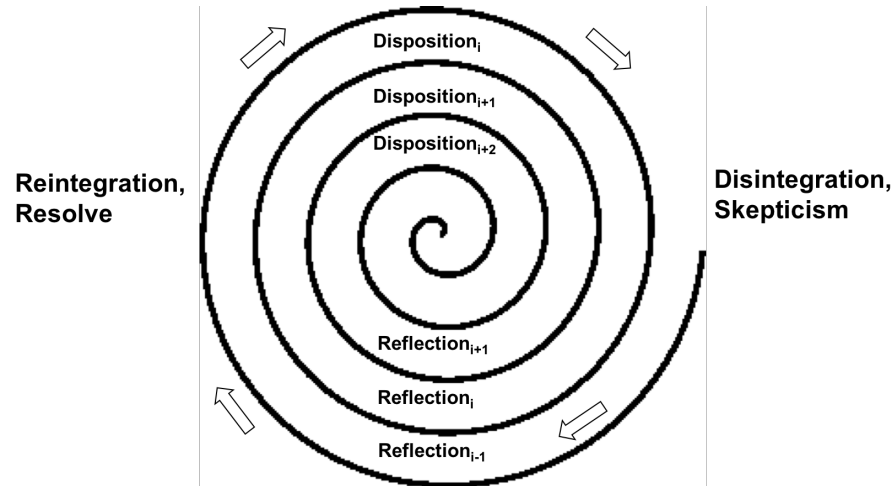


Figure 2: Hume's Spiral of Disposition

Hume begins narrating his spiral of disposition, saying:

Here then I find myself absolutely and necessarily determin'd to live, and talk, and act other people in the common affairs of life. But notwithstanding that my natural propensity, and the course of my animal spirits and passions reduce me to this indolent belief in the general maxims of the world, I still feel such remains of my *former disposition*, that I am ready to throw all my books and papers into the fire, and resolve never more to renounce the pleasures of life for the sake of reasoning and philosophy. For those are my sentiments in that splenetic humour, which governs me at present. I may, nay I must yield to the current of nature, in submitting to my senses and understanding; and in this blind submission I show most perfectly my sceptical disposition and principles. (T 1.4.7.10; italics added)

⁶ For further elaboration of this sort of spiral dynamic, see Klein (2016)

Hume's Disposition_i – italicized in the passage above – represents a total, paralyzing skepticism. Disposition_i is reached by reflection on the internal logic of the understanding and the dual account of reason. Disposition_i is challenged by engagement in the common affairs of life. Hume's engagement in common life leads to Reflection_i, a reflection on the natural instability of total skepticism. The dissipation of total skepticism by engagement in common life and subsequent reflection informs Hume's resolve to press on toward Disposition_{i+1}. Hume resolves to get on with life and to presuppose the soundness of R2 in common affairs.

Yet Hume again feels conflict, particularly as pertains to the potentialities of philosophy. Reflection_{i+1} leads to skepticism, not of all things as in Disposition_i, but of the meaningfulness of philosophy within a mode of common life. Hume arrives at Disposition_{i+2}, where he resolves to throw all his books, papers, etc. in the fire and submit to an unreflective instinct to simply follow the ordinary proprieties of common life, thus abandoning his philosophical endeavors. T 1.4.7.10 continues:

But does it follow [i.e. it does follow],⁷ that I must strive against the current of nature, which leads me to indolence and pleasure; that I must seclude myself, in some measure, from the commerce and society of men, which is so agreeable; and that I must torture my brain with subtilities and sophistries, at the very time that I cannot satisfy myself concerning the reasonableness of so painful an application, nor have any tolerable prospect of arriving by its means at truth and certainty. (T 1.4.7.10)

⁷ David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton changed this sentence to end with a “?” in their 2000 edition of the *Treatise*. But almost all previous editions of the *Treatise* (e.g., Hume 1978) end the sentence with a “.” I disagree with the Norton's punctuation change. With a period, the sentence should be read as Hume saying “it does follow,” not “does it follow?”, a reading that better accords with the structure of the entire paragraph.

Hume is in conflict regarding Disposition_{i+2}. He reflects (Reflection_{i+2}) on the prospect of life without philosophy. He is skeptical of the idea that philosophy is meaningless and should be totally abandoned; he cannot accept such abandonment. Reflection pushes Hume to another moment of resolve, yet another disposition. He resolves to sometimes seclude himself from society to a degree and push forward with his philosophy. Despite the fact that the world is not reasonable from an R1-perspective, there are still things that we *can* better explain, better and worse interpretations to be abductively formulated using R2. He decides to still torture his brain with “subtilities and sophistries,” i.e., subsequent efforts in philosophy.

Under what obligation do I lie of making such an abuse of time? And to what end can it serve either for the service of mankind, or for my own private interest? No: If I must be a fool, as all those who reason or believe any thing *certainly* are, my follies shall at least be natural and agreeable. Where I strive against my inclination, I shall have a good reason for my resistance; and will no more be led a wandering into such dreary solitudes, and rough passages, as I have hitherto met with. (T 1.4.7.10)

The final moment of disposition enumerated in T 1.4.7.10 shows Hume resolving to apply R2 to objects that appear natural and agreeable from his current outlook. Moreover, he even seems to suggest that he will allow himself to inquire into abstruse subject matters *where he has good reason*. He reserves the option, as it were, to apply R2 even to more abstruse matters areas of inquiry where such application overcomes a certain presumption of skepticism of abstruseness, i.e., his “inclination” *against* abstruseness in the passage above. But in such applications, he notes that he will not revisit the “rough passages” that he has “hitherto met with.” In other words, he resolves to pass over the potential melancholy and delirium that potentially stem from abstruse applications of R2

and to cling to the perspective of common life as a sort of grounding. When there is good reason, the presumption not to apply R2 to abstruse and speculative matters might be overcome.

Hume moves on to enumerate things he finds natural and agreeable in his current moment of disposition, the things to which he resolves to apply R2, the things that will, by and large, constitute the subject of his philosophy.

I cannot forbear having a curiosity to be acquainted with the principles of moral good and evil, the nature and foundation of government, and the cause of those several passions and inclinations, which actuate and govern me. I am uneasy to think I approve of one object, and disapprove of another; call one thing beautiful, and another deform'd; decide concerning truth and falsehood, reason and folly, without knowing upon what principles I proceed. I am concern'd for the condition of the learned world, which lies under such a deplorable ignorance in all these particulars. I feel an ambition to arise in me of contributing to the instruction of mankind, and of acquiring a name by my inventions and discoveries. These sentiments spring up naturally in my present disposition; and shou'd I endeavour to banish them, by attaching myself to any other business or diversion, I *feel* I shou'd be a loser in point of pleasure; and this is the origin of my philosophy (T 1.4.7.12; italics original).

Thus, Hume spirals his way to human things,⁸ to thinking about the common affairs of life, by way of epistemological exploration. He appears to intend the *Treatise* as a typical Enlightenment project: he feigns to search for an autonomous metaphysical or epistemological foundation for his “science of man,” a foundation that would be sufficient to “challenge the long tradition of circumspect philosophic writing” and bring philosophy and rational inquiry into the realm of religion, morals, and politics (Danford 1990, 5). But he finds that metaphysics or epistemology cannot hope to provide such foundation. He shows that such intellectual practices are in fact much less certain than

⁸ For more on Hume’s turn to human things, see Merrill (2015, Chapter 3).

their practitioners pretend. Hume discovers that human beings are actuated in all areas of life – including philosophy! – by fundamentally inexplicable principles in their nature. To fulfill his ambition to develop a science of man then, instead of working to rationalize these principles – which he recognizes will inevitably lead to deep skepticism –, he turns to study such principles by observing the arenas in which they are most directly on display: morals and politics. He overcomes his presumption of skepticism in these areas and determines to “yield to that propensity, which inclines us to be positive and certain in *particular points*, according to the light, in which we survey them in any *particular instant*” (T 1.4.7.15; italics original). His positive reasoning, his application of R2, in these areas eventually yields his innovative moral psychology and theory of the passions, but more importantly, his political theory and political economy.

R2 and the Presumption of Liberty

At the outset of Book III of the *Treatise* – which contains the first expression of Hume’s political theory – Hume recapitulates his conclusion reached by way of his epistemological investigation, i.e., the dual account of reason, in Book I:

What affects us, we conclude can never be chimera; and as our passion is engag’d on the one side or the other, we naturally think that the question lies within human comprehension; which, in other cases of this nature, we are apt to entertain some doubt of. Without this advantage I never shou’d have ventur’d upon a third volume of such abstruse philosophy, in an age, wherein the greatest part of men seem agreed to convert reading into an amusement, and to reject every thing that requires any considerable degree of attention to be comprehended. (T 3.1.1.1)

Thus, the study of politics falls under the purview Hume’s philosophy in that it appears natural and agreeable from the perspective of common life. Hume presupposes the soundness of R2 in the investigation of political matters. He turns his mind to politics.

In the universe of human things, Hume attributes prime importance to politics. In his moral philosophy, Hume sees the virtue of justice – the administration of which politics is explicitly concerned with – as the backbone of society. Without justice and its corresponding institution of property, society falls apart, tending towards “that savage and solitary condition, which is infinitely worse than the worst situation that can possibly be suppos’d in society” (T 3.2.2.22). Hume sees understanding the nature and the administration of justice as of fundamental significance for promoting a peaceable, stable, and free society.

Justice admits of a more regular and universal grammar than does the study of most of the other virtues.⁹ The regularity of justice combined with an introspective understanding of human behavior and historical accounts of different sorts of societies allow for the study of politics and the administration of justice to be all but “reduced to a science” (EMPL, 14).¹⁰ Hume thinks that we can and should speak with some confidence about better or worse politics.

In the remainder of this study, I sketch some central features of Hume’s application of R2 to politics. My purpose is not to give an exhaustive account of Hume’s politics. Rather, given that epistemology leads Hume to study politics as part of the

⁹ In EMP, Hume speaks of the difficulty of discerning merit due to the indeterminateness and contextual nature of virtue: “so great is the uncertainty of merit, both from its natural obscurity, and from the self-conceit of each individual” (EMP 3.2.23).

¹⁰ In saying that politics is a science, Hume is simply articulating that there is a connection between political rules and political outcomes. He is not saying that politics is a science in the sense that physics is a science. Politics is not a contained system of scientific laws, but it does admit of regularities and connections between types of governments, constitutions, and outcomes.

human turn of R2, I comment on the character of his politics and show how his thinking in epistemology about the soundness of R2 returns to speak to the manner of his politics.

In short, Hume's constructive application of R2 to politics and political economy arrives at a presumption of liberty. The presumption of liberty largely comes from Hume's view of the usefulness and agreeableness of liberty, the usefulness understood through his theory of property and his conceptual developments in political economy. The presumption of liberty cashes out in terms of debate over concrete issues of policy reform. When choosing between two policy options, Hume's presumption of liberty inclines him towards the option that least impinges upon individual liberty. But liberty bears exceptions in Hume. Liberty operates within the broader frame of Hume's establishment political philosophy, a philosophy that recognizes the meaningfulness and focal nature of the status quo. Hume is wary of rationalism in politics – even a rationalism which propounds liberty –, a wariness that is in line with his understanding of the looseness of reason and the difficulty of establishing and legitimizing political authority. Such thinking in Hume arrives at an additional presumption: the presumption of the status quo. The presumption of the status quo recommends prudence in the application of the presumption of liberty when policy entails departure from current political arrangements. Hume's political outlook unfolds as a balance between the presumption of liberty and the presumption of the status quo.

The Usefulness of Liberty: Property

That Hume values liberty is clear. From the outset of the *Treatise*, Hume speaks to the desirability of liberty: “the improvements in reason and philosophy can only be

owing to a land of toleration and of liberty” (T Intro.7). He exalts the importance of “peace and liberty” in his jurisprudence (T 3.2.10.15). In his essay, “Of the Origin of Government,” he acknowledges that “liberty is the perfection of civil society” (EMPL, 41). He endorses progress in the arts and sciences in part because such progress appears to be “favourable to liberty,” with the “tendency to preserve, if not produce a free government” (EMPL, 277). The theme of liberty and its historical development in England is, moreover, central to his purposes in *The History of England*.

There are different opinions as to what exactly *liberty* signifies in Hume. Many interpreters of Hume have understood liberty to simply mean freedom from *arbitrary* rule within the bounds of positive law. John Vladimir Price (1966, 141) has said that Hume, for the most part, “uses the term ‘liberty’ to cover individual activities and expressions of ideas that are not inimical to the stability of the government.” Duncan Forbes (1975, 153) has equated liberty in Hume with the “security of the individual under the rule of law.” Donald Livingston (1998, 184) says that “the primary sense of liberty for Hume is the rule of law: action uncoerced by the arbitrary will of the sovereign power.” Andrew Sabl (2012, 2) formulates liberty in terms of “restraints on arbitrary power.”

Freedom from arbitrary rule and the enforcement of the rule of law are important facets of liberty. Hume is concerned with protection from arbitrary rule throughout his writing, particularly as it pertains to religious persecution and violence (see Boyd 2004, Chapter 3). But strictly formulating Hume’s conception of liberty in terms of restraints on arbitrariness is insufficient. Liberty in Hume is better understood in something of a natural law sense, following the tradition of Hugo Grotius, as the freedom to do as one

pleases with one's own, insofar as one's activities do not impinge upon anyone else's own.¹¹ Such a conception of liberty is formulated by Hume's contemporary Adam Smith as the flipside of property and the rules of what Smith calls commutative justice.¹² On Smith's account, the duties of commutative justice are abstaining from the possessions of others and honoring contracts; these duties can *almost* be fulfilled by sitting at home and doing nothing; that which does not violate the life, person, or property of others does not violate commutative justice (TMS II.ii.1.9). Liberty is the freedom to do that which the rules of commutative justice do not prohibit.¹³ Hume formulates something like the Smithian conception of liberty – which he refers to as “this noble principle” – in an important passage in *The History of England*.¹⁴

Advantage was also taken of the present good agreement between the king and parliament [James I in 1624], in order to pass the bill against monopolies, which had formerly been encouraged by the king, but which had failed by the rupture between him and the last house of commons. This bill was conceived in such terms as to render it merely declaratory; and all monopolies were condemned, as contrary to law and to the known *liberties* of the people. *It was there supposed, that every subject of England had entire power to dispose of his own actions, provided he did no injury to any of his fellow-subjects; and that no prerogative of*

¹¹ Hume cites Grotius and says that his own theory of property is the same as Grotius' in EPM App. 3.8. On locating Hume's thinking on property in the natural law tradition, see Buckle (1991)

¹² In speaking to the rules of commutative justice, Smith says: “The most sacred laws of justice, therefore, those whose violation seems to call loudest for vengeance and punishment, are the laws which guard the life and person of our neighbor; the next are those which guard his property and possessions; and last of all come those which guard what are called his personal rights, or what is due to him from the promises of others” (TMS II.ii.2.2).

¹³ Smith all but explicitly formulates liberty as the natural implication of commutative justice in several places in his work. In one signal passage in *The Wealth of Nations*, he says: “To remove a man who has committed no misdemeanour from the parish where he chuses to reside is an evident violation of natural liberty and justice” (WN, 157).

¹⁴ Sabl (2009, n 14) suggests we read Hume in this passage as endorsing a “proto-Millian” concept of liberty.

the king, no power of any magistrate, nothing but the authority alone of laws, could restrain that unlimited freedom. The full prosecution of this noble principle into all its natural consequences, has at last, through many contests, produced that singular and happy government, which we enjoy at present. (H 5.114; italics added)

Although this passage is one of the few instances in Hume where liberty is *explicitly* formulated in a Smithian sense, I contend that liberty throughout Hume prefigures such a formulation in that it takes shape as the flipside of property and contract.

Hume first develops his thinking on property in Book III of the *Treatise*. Central to Hume's thinking on property is the idea of convention. Conventions for Hume are explicitly not articulated promises or organized social decisions – “convention is not the nature of promise” (T 3.2.2.10) –, nor are they even necessarily conscious. Humean conventions, I think, can be understood in David Lewis' (e.g., 1969, 42) later use of the word as solutions to coordination games. Such solutions are not necessarily centrally imposed, but can emerge as mutual understandings that evolve (like language). The solutions might also be centrally planned, like when a government determines a country's convention for daylight savings (see Klein 2012, 69). Hume tends to emphasize decentralized, emergent conventions, although the more central sort are not absent from his thinking, particularly on matters of political authority (see Sabl 2012, Chapter 1).

Hume tells a conjectural story of the emergence of the convention of property. Through observation and experience within the family, people become “sensible of the advantages, which they may reap from society” (ibid.). Families group together into larger social groups. Social groups sense the advantages of possession and extend personal ownership sensibilities developed in the family to external objects. Such

sensibilities eventually trickle up into a “convention enter’d into by all the members of society to bestow stability on the possession of those external goods, and leave every one in the peaceable enjoyment of what he may acquire by his fortune and industry” (T 3.2.2.9). The convention of property is a necessary condition for any society; societies that develop and fail to establish conventions of possession quickly fade and are replaced by those that do (e.g., EPM 3.1.21). The convention of property helps people to curb their present expressions of the passion of self-interest.

Implicit in the convention of property are a set of general rules that speak to what can be owned and what constitutes violating someone else’s own. Hume speaks of four principles that contribute to the general rules of property: occupation, prescription, accession, and succession. The rules of property can conceivably change over time and are subject to reinterpretation as new difficulties arise. Yet once the rules are determined, they apply inflexibly: “the convention concerning the stability of possession is enter’d into, in order to cut off all occasions of discord and contention; and this end wou’d never be attain’d, were we allowed to apply this rule differently in every particular case, according to every particular utility, which might be discover’d in such application” (T 3.2.3.2). The convention of property entails “insensible gradations” in its origin, yet “admits not of degrees” in its in-the-moment application (T 3.2.6.8). In the moment, within a particular historical context, “a man’s property is suppos’d to be fenc’d against every mortal, in every possible case” (T 3.2.1.16).

Justice is the virtue that corresponds to the act of respecting the property of others. Property proceed justice. Without the convention of property, Hume thinks that

justice has no meaning: “after this convention, concerning abstinence from the possessions of others, is enter’d into, and every one has acquir’d a stability in his possessions, there immediately arise the ideas of justice and injustice; as also those of *property, right, and obligation*. The latter [i.e., right and obligation] are altogether unintelligible without the former” (T 3.2.2.11; italics original). The enforcement of justice, or the rules of justice, is the enforcement of the rules of property. The rules of justice and the rules of property are synonymous and are used interchangeably in Hume.

Justice is a virtue because of its usefulness. A virtue is considered useful in Hume if it conduces to agreeable things (e.g., T 2.3.10.5; T 3.3.1.30). The virtue of justice is useful because it provides a framework for social cooperation which enables people to overcome the scarcity they face in isolation. It enables them to freely pursue their own interests within so long as they do not violate the property of others. The virtue of justice, which corresponds to the institution of property, demarcates Hume’s conception of liberty.

Hume articulates that the rules of justice are useful, and hence virtuous, because of their certainty. In a community of equals, i.e., a community without an established government, single acts that violate the rules of justice – and appear to benefit some parties by such violations – are subversive to the stability of property and the social cooperation and freedom enabled by that stability:

But however single acts of justice may be contrary, either to public or private interest, ‘tis certain, that the whole plan or scheme is highly conducive, or indeed absolutely requisite, both to the support of society, and the well-being of every individual. ‘Tis impossible to separate the good from the ill. Property must be stable, and must be fix’d by general rules. Tho’ in one instance the public be a

sufferer, this momentary ill is amply compensated by the steady prosecution of the rule, and by the peace and order, which it establishes in society. (T 3.2.2.22)

Once political authority enters the scene, matters change. Hume does not hold that the government ought never to violate rules of justice. Indeed, the very existence of the government is a violation of the rules of justice.¹⁵ Political authority, though it violates a strict adherence to the rules of justice, is useful and a precondition for liberty. But the usefulness, the paramount importance, of strictly adhering to the rules of justice in pre-political society informs Hume's maxims in politics. It provides the core of his presumption of liberty and informs his thinking on spontaneous order within a framework of rules certainty.

The Usefulness of Liberty: Political Economy

Hume's political economy is of paramount importance to his political theory and to his thinking on the usefulness of liberty. Understanding the polemical and controversial nature of Hume's political economy undercuts the credibility of claiming Hume as simply a political "conservative," a thinker with general complacency towards the status quo (cf. Livingston 1984, Chapter 12). Hume's political economy illustrates his

¹⁵ Hume is aware that government is not founded on any kind of social contract, but rather, more often than not, has its root in conflicts of possession between different social groups: "And so far am I from thinking with some philosophers, that men are utterly incapable of society without government, that I assert the first rudiments of government to arise from quarrels, not among men of the same society, but among those of different societies" (T 3.2.8.1). Yet once a government is in place, it takes hold of the imagination on account of some focal principles of association – e.g., hereditary succession, past or present possession of authority (see T 3.2.10) – and comes to be recognized as legitimate. Government is recognized as useful in that it helps people constrain their self-love and "violent propensity to prefer [the] contiguous to [the] remote" (T 3.2.7.6). Government increases the cost of breaking the rules of justice and solidifies the convention of property.

forward-looking presumption of liberty and his confidence in the usefulness of liberty over interventionist alternatives in economic policy in actual policy discussions. His political economy shows his willingness to use R2 against status quo political opinions and formulations, to innovate and to reform. Indeed, as Roger L. Emerson (2008, 26) has put it, in his writings on economics, Hume aims to refute specific economic “shibboleths” of his time with the goal of informing policy decisions and encouraging liberal political reform. Eugene Rotwein (2009, liv) nicely underscores the polemical nature of Hume’s economics, pointing out that “there is relatively little in his political economy that is not discussed within a controversial frame of reference, so that almost every essay reads as a kind of debate in which Hume pointedly seeks to expose and rectify what he regards as the main economic errors of his day.”

Hume’s political economy illustrates the usefulness of liberty and underscores his presumption of liberty in politics in at least three ways: (1) Hume illustrates the unintentional coordination and harmony resulting from individual pursuits of private interest (i.e., a proto-invisible hand vision). (2) Hume illustrates the mutual benefits of peaceable exchange. (3) Hume illustrates the connectedness between liberty, industry, knowledge, and humanity.

Hume’s view of the unintentional coordination of private action is largely influenced by Bernard Mandeville, whom Hume mentions by name in the introduction to the *Treatise* (T Intro.8). Mandeville (1988, 1:37) famously proposed that private vices can translate to public benefit: “So Vice is beneficial found, When it’s by Justice lopt and bound.” Hume’s first expression of this kind of thinking occurs in the context of his

thinking on justice in the *Treatise*. Like Mandeville, Hume admits that self-interest is a strong motivating action in human conduct.¹⁶ It is, again, man's self-interest, man's "violent propensity to prefer [the] contiguous to [the] remote," that makes peaceable social organization problematic in the first place (T 3.2.7.6). Over time, first through the convention of property and later reinforced through the institution of political authority, self-interest becomes sufficiently constrained and channeled within the rules of justice. But such constraint would never arise unless it enabled people to better achieve their private purposes. Hume concludes that it must be self-interest that undergirds the rules of justice. Only the passion of self-interest is sufficient to restrain the more immediate and violent expressions of self-interest. The self-interested constraint of self-interest leads to unintended public benefit. Hume explicitly makes this point in a key passage, a passage that prefigures Smith's invisible hand:

Those rules, by which property, right, and obligation are determin'd, have in them no marks of a natural origin, but many of artifice and contrivance... 'Tis self love which is their real origin; and as the self-love of one person is naturally contrary to that of another, these several interested passions are obliged to adjust themselves after such a manner as to concur in some system of conduct and behaviour. *This system, therefore, comprehending the interest of each individual, is of course advantageous to the public; tho' it be not intended for that purpose by the inventors.* (T 3.2.6.6; italics added)

¹⁶ Importantly, self-interest is not necessarily vicious in Hume as it is in Mandeville. In EMP, where Hume schematically develops his moral philosophy, he denominates a whole category of virtues which are approved of on the grounds that they are useful for the person who possesses them – i.e., they align with the self-interest of their possessor. Such virtues include: "*discretion, caution, enterprize, industry, assiduity, frugality, oeconomy, good sense, prudence, discernment...address, presence of mind, quickness of conception, facility of expression*; these, and a thousand more of the same kind, no man will ever deny to be excellencies and perfections" (EPM 6.1.21; italics original).

Hume further shows sensibility to the coordinating tendency of human behavior *within* the established frame of the rules of justice: “after the agreement for fixing and observing of this rule [the distinction of property] there remains little or nothing to be done towards settling a perfect harmony and concord” (T 3.2.2.12). The arc of Hume’s thinking in political economy, which presupposes a stable polity, might be said to emphasize spontaneous order in human interaction and, moreover, a general harmony between private and public interest (i.e., the interest of the whole of society, not government *per se*). He understands that simple adherence to the rules of justice are often sufficient to leave “every one in the peaceable enjoyment of what he may acquire by his fortune and industry” (T 3.2.2.9). His understanding of the harmony of private and public interest informs the by-and-large case he makes against policies that violate liberty.

In the first of his writings on economics – the essay “Of Commerce” – Hume puts forth the thesis that the wealth of private individuals leads to the wealth of the state. He argues that private industry promotes national opulence: “Now, according to the most natural course of things, industry and arts and trade encrease the power of the sovereign as well as the happiness of the subjects; and that policy is violent, which aggrandizes the public by the poverty of individuals” (EMPL, 260). He sees that what is in the interest of individuals, within the rules of justice, is closely linked to the interest of the public.

Throughout *The History of England*, Hume makes a similar point. In one notable instance, he says:

Most of the arts and professions in a state are of such a nature, that, while they promote the interests of the society, they are also useful or agreeable to some individuals; and, in that case, the constant rule of the magistrate, except, perhaps in the first introduction of any art, is to leave the profession to itself, and trust its

encouragement to those who reap the benefits of it. The artisans, finding their profits to rise by the favour of their customers, increase as much as possible their skill and industry; and as matters are not disturbed by any injudicious tampering the commodity is always sure to be at all times nearly proportioned to the demand. (H 3.135)

Hume's thinking on the harmony of private and public interest, and the unintended coordination brought about by private actors is reinforced by his developments in price theory. He shows recognition of the coordinating power of the price mechanism. On his deathbed, writing in a letter to Smith, Hume briefly indicates a proto supply-and-demand understanding of price determination: "If you [Smith] were here at my Fireside, I should dispute some of your principles [in *The Wealth of Nations*]. 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*" (Hume 2009, 217; italics added). His conception of the price-specie flow mechanism shows an understanding of the connection between money, the price level, and relative demand for imports and exports (see, e.g., EMPL, 286). His understanding of the price mechanism leads him to attack practices such as the "chartering of royal monopolies, wage and interest regulation as well as general price control, restrictions regarding apprenticeship and control of the movement of labour" throughout his political economy (Rotwein 2009, lxxix n2). He clearly articulates his presumption of liberty in this vein:

In order to promote archery, no bows were to be sold at a higher price than six shillings and fourpence... The only effect of this regulation must be, either that the people would be supplied with bad bows, or none at all. Prices were also affixed to wollen cloth, to caps and hats: and the wages of labourers were regulated by law. *It is evident, that these matters ought always to be left free, and be entrusted to the common course of business and commerce.* (H 3.78; italics added).

Hume's understanding of the usefulness of liberty is illustrated by his thinking on the mutual benefits of exchange. Against some of his mercantilist-tending predecessors and contemporaries, Hume understands trade to be generally welfare-enhancing, not zero-sum. Hume's analysis of the welfare-enhancing character of trade stays largely at an international level – the relevant level for policy discussion during his day – and is built upon a view of the character of wealth and the division of labor. In terms of the character of wealth, Hume understands that it is consumable goods and services that make a nation wealthy, not stocks of bullion. He sees that free trade flows expand the division of labor, increasing productivity and enhancing opulence. Protectionism, on Hume's account, reduces wealth and is a blameworthy policy outlook. He succinctly expresses such an understanding in the closing passage of his essay "Of the Jealousy of Trade":

Were our narrow and malignant politics [of trade restriction] to meet with success, we should reduce all our neighbouring nations to the same state of sloth and ignorance that prevails in MOROCCO and the coast of BARBARY. But what would be the consequence? They would send us no commodities: They could take none from us: Our domestic commerce itself would languish from want of emulation, example, and instruction: And we ourselves should soon fall into the same abject condition, to which we had reduced them. I shall therefore venture to acknowledge, that, not only as a man, but as a BRITISH subject, I pray for the flourishing commerce of GERMANY, SPAIN, ITALY, and even FRANCE itself. (EMPL, 331)

Finally, Hume sees an "indissoluble chain" between industry, knowledge, and humanity (EMPL, 271). Given that Hume sees liberty as favorable to industry – in terms of free trade, unregulated price system, relatively hands-off monetary policy, etc. – it is perhaps not a stretch to add liberty to this indissoluble chain. Liberty enables people to discover new uses of their own and encourages industry and exertion. Freedom to industry, on Hume's account, helps people satisfy their desires for action, pleasure, and

indolence, the three looming psychological principles in Hume’s economic psychology: “In times when industry and the arts flourish, men are kept in perpetual occupation, and enjoy, as their reward, the occupation itself, as well as those pleasures which are the fruits of their labor” (EMPL, 270). Industry begets discovery and new knowledge in other areas – “we cannot reasonably expect, that a piece of woollen cloth will be wrought to perfection in a nation, which is ignorant of astronomy, or where ethics are neglected” – leading to an increase in knowledge, virtue, and humanity. Such discovery redounds back to industry and has, to use the language of economics, numerous positive externalities on both private and public life: “industry, knowledge, and humanity, are not advantageous in private life alone: They diffuse their beneficial influence on the *public*, and render the government as great and flourishing as they make individuals happy and prosperous.” (EMPL, 272; italics original).

The Presumption of the Status Quo

There is an important element to Hume’s political outlook that illustrates the lasting impact of the dual account of reason on his thinking: the element of the presumption of the status quo. When choosing between two policy options, the presumption of the status quo inclines one towards the option that least deviates from the status quo. The presumption of the status quo would require deviations from the status quo to bear the burden of proof.

The presumption of the status quo interacts with the presumption of liberty. The presumption of liberty speaks both to reforms that would reduce liberty and to policies that would augment liberty (e.g., trade liberalization). In the first case, the presumption of

liberty and the presumption of the status quo are mutually reinforcing; in the second, they are opposed. As Daniel Klein (2012, 255) has expressed the relationship between the two presumptions in instances of reform: “when the reforms would repeal, abolish, or liberalize existing contraventions, the status-quo presumption obstructs and moderates the liberty presumption.” New contraventions to liberty need bear a high burden of proof in that they run against both the presumption of liberty and the presumption of the status quo. Proposed reforms that would augment liberty bear some burden of proof in that they run against the presumption of the status quo.

The presumption of the status quo looms large in Hume in light of his thinking on the looseness of R2 and in his recognition of the meaningful nature of current political arrangements and conventions. He is averse to policy reforms that might be inimical to the core of political authority. He sees some measure of political authority as precondition for liberty. Moreover, he thinks that efforts to improve the constitution of the polity often go awry even when they sound good on paper (see EMPL, 37-41).

Hume’s dual account of reason implies that R2 proceeds on the basis of custom and a natural belief in the uniform procedure of experience, a belief that cannot be independently verified. Such an understanding of R2 leads Hume to emphasize the importance of the intellectual virtue of prudence. Hume makes prudence a necessary condition for the just application of R2.

In the *Treatise*, Hume’s conceptual emphasis on the importance of prudence is implicitly informed by the dual account of reason in Book I. The nature of the emphasis can be seen by briefly examining the culmination of the drama in the *Treatise*, or as

Annette Baier (1991) puts it, the culmination of Hume's "progress of sentiments." After moving through the dual account of reason in Book I and spilling out into more directly human investigation in Books II and III, Hume returns to comment on the appropriate manner of reasoning. His comments come in the wake of his dissolution of the distinction between the capacity for virtue and the expression of virtue (see T 3.3.4).

Hume's move is to make prudence an internal and focal part of reason, more specifically, of R2, the broad concept of reason that works on matters of experience. To successfully use R2, one must recognize its inexplicable constitution and proceed with due moderation and self-awareness. Prudence is important in view of the non-foundational character of R2 and the experiential construction of our thinking. Indeed, Hume prefigures the necessity of prudence in reasoning in Book I, Part 4 of the *Treatise*: "We must, therefore, in every reasoning form a new judgment, as a check or controul on our first judgement or belief; and must enlarge our view to comprehend a kind of history of all the instances, wherein our understanding has deceiv'd us, compar'd with those, wherein its testimony was just and true" (T 1.4.1.1).

Hume's emphasis on the importance of prudence in the application of reason motivates his presumption of the status quo. We must tread with some caution when deviating from existing traditions and political conventions in that the overall effects of a given policy or reform on the social order are difficult to ascertain and, moreover, given that our mean of ascertaining such effects (R2) is highly imperfect. As Hume puts it in his *Essays*:

It affords a violent prejudice against almost every science, that no prudent man, however sure of his principles, dares prophesy concerning any event, or foretel

the remote consequence of things. A physician will not venture to pronounce concerning the condition of his patient a fortnight or month after: And still less dares a politician foretel the situation of public affairs a few months hence. (EMPL,47)

Whether the presumption of liberty or the presumption of the status quo gets more weight depends on one's situation. Hume seems to put more weight on the presumption of liberty in matters of political economy and more weight on the presumption of the status quo in matters of constitutional reform.

Hume clearly recommends humility and prudence to the political reformer in constitutional matters. Hume says that “to balance a large state or society, whether monarchical or republican, on general laws, is a work of so great difficult that no human genius, however comprehensive, is able, by the mere dint of reason and reflection, to effect it” (EMPL, 124). There is perhaps a stronger presumption of the status quo in reforms that would affect constitutional arrangements than in others in that (1) the scope and trajectory of constitutional reforms – that is, the long-run effects and “consequences, unforeseen” – are more difficult to ascertain than other reforms and simply because (2) constitutional reforms are higher risk in terms of their overall effect on political stability. Hume stresses the importance of the presumption of the status quo in constitutional matters in his essay, “Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth”:

An established government has an infinite advantage, by that very circumstance of its being established; the bulk of mankind being governed by authority, not reason, and never attributing authority to any thing that has not the recommendation of antiquity. To tamper, therefore, in this affair, or try experiments merely upon the credit of supposed argument and philosophy, can never be the part of a wise magistrate, who will bear a reverence to what carries the marks of age; and though he may attempt some improvements for the public good, *yet he will adjust his innovations, as much as possible, to the ancient fabric,*

and preserve entire the chief pillars and supports of the constitution. (EMPL 512-513; italics added)

The strength of Hume's presumption of the status quo in constitutional reforms has led Duncan Forbes to attribute him with an "establishment political philosophy." As Forbes (1975, 91) explains the phrase, Hume's "establishment political philosophy," sought "to give the established regime, the Revolution Settlement, the Hanoverian succession, the respectable intellectual foundation which, in the 'fashionable system', it had not got." This establishment, status-quo bent of Hume's political outlook comes from his recognition of the usefulness of political authority. Hume understands political authority as useful and as a necessary condition for liberal society. As he puts it in his essay, "Of the Origin of Government:

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...it must be owned, that liberty is the perfection of civil society; but still authority must be acknowledged essential to its very existence: and in those contests, which so often take place between the one and the other, the latter [authority] may, on that account, challenge the preference [liberty]. (EMPL, 41)

Hume sees the contest for political authority as a kind of coordination game (see Sabl 2012). As such, it matters most that everyone agrees on *a* political authority – much like it matters most that everyone agrees to drive on either one side of the road or the other. This is not to say that the character of political authority is meaningless, of course, but simply that having most any sort of established political authority is, to Hume's mind, better than having none at all (EMPL, 512). Andrew Sabl (2012) illustrates how Hume's *History of England* tells the story of the development of political authority in England as series of coordination games, the resolutions of which Hume generally seems to embrace

– at least inasmuch as they enabled the establishment of the stable English polity of Hume’s day.

Hume’s view of political authority and its importance for liberty makes him averse to policies that would lead to political revolution and upheaval. That which is inimical to stable, generally liberal, political authority is inimical to liberty in the general course of things. Much like the rules of justice, where we see the usefulness of the whole scheme despite single acts of enforcement that might offend our moral sentiments, we might tolerate established practices that impinge upon liberty in that they are somehow integral to the established political order, which is good for liberty on the whole. Hume frowns on the efforts of the “extravagant projector, who love[s] dangerous remedies, and could tamper and play with a government and national constitution, like a quack with a sickly patient” (EMPL, 509).

Although the presumption of liberty perhaps carries more weight in political economy than in matters of constitutional reforms, Hume is clear that the presumption of the status quo and its accompanying attitude of prudence is nonetheless important in political economy. Hume argues in his economic essay “Of Commerce,” that people have difficulty regarding the “general course of things” and tend towards short run considerations or “particular deliberations” (EMPL, 255). In “Of the Protestant Succession,” he points out that people have the tendency to focus on that which is seen, or immediately obvious in policy, not on the “many consequences, unforeseen, [which] do always, in fact, result” (EMPL, 507). Even philosophers (or economists) are subject to intellectual lock-in and dogmatism, and to extend their models, their “favourite

principles...over the whole of creation, and reduces it to every phaenomenon, though by the most violent and absurd reasoning” (EMPL, 159).

Hume most elegantly expresses his prudential political attitude, in light of the problems of reason, in his essay “Of the Protestant Succession”:

It belongs, therefore, to the philosopher alone, who is of neither party, to put all the circumstances in the scale, and assign to each of them its proper poise and influence. Such a one will readily, at first, acknowledge that all political questions are infinitely complicated, and that there scarcely occurs, in any deliberation, a choice, which is either purely good, or purely ill. Consequences, mixed and varied, may be forseen to flow from every measure: And many consequences, unforeseen, do always, in fact, result from every one. Hesitation, and reserve, and suspence, are, therefore, the only sentiments he brings to this essay or trial. Or if he indulges any passion, it is that of derision against the ignorant multitude, who are always clamorous and dogmatical, even in the nicest questions, of which, from want of temper, perhaps still more than of understanding, they are altogether unfit judges. (EMPL, 507)

Conclusion

As Livingston (1984, 36) points out, philosophical insight in Hume’s *Treatise* “is gained by working through the contrarities of thought which structure a drama of inquiry.” There are many “contrarities” in the *Treatise*, tensions which not only lead the reader to better understand Hume’s thinking, but to inquire and innovate on their own. A looming question that the reader is left with after reading Book I of the *Treatise* is: what should philosophy look like in a world where reason contradicts itself and proceeds on the basis of custom? Put differently, what should a non-foundational epistemology imply about our vision for philosophy? Hume provides a possible answer: philosophy in such a world should entail a diffident acceptance of reason and a prudent inquiry into things that are distinctly human and of inevitable interest from the vantage point of common life. Hume’s thinking after Book I of the *Treatise*, generally speaking, illustrates such

philosophy by way of example. His philosophy emphasizes prudent inquiry into morals and politics. In politics, especially when we turn to Hume's *Essays, Moral, Political, and Literary*, Hume shows himself to be a classical liberal, arriving at a presumption of liberty in his thinking on public policy (particularly economic policy). Yet his liberalism is of a pragmatic bent, recognizing the importance of status-quo social and political arrangements and humbly acknowledging the limits of reason. His epistemology moves him to politics but returns to speak to his manner of applying political principles.

Understanding the connectedness between epistemology, politics, and political economy in Hume's thinking, particularly in the *Treatise*, makes the case for reading him as a unified thinker. His writing and thinking is, indeed, all of a piece. Such an understanding should heighten our estimation of him as a philosopher and, moreover, should inform our own attitudes, dispositions, and conversations in philosophy, whether epistemological, political, or economic.

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BIOGRAPHY

Erik W. Matson received his Bachelor of Science in economics from George Mason University in 2012. He received his Master of Arts in economics from George Mason University in 2015. He has worked as an instructor of economics at The King's College in New York since January 2017. He worked as a graduate lecturer in economics at George Mason University from 2015 to 2017. He taught as an adjunct at Patrick Henry College in 2016. His research on the history and philosophy of political economy has been published in *The Adam Smith Review*, *The Journal of Scottish Philosophy*, and *Society*.