David Hume (1711-1776)

Called the "Great Infidel" by some and "*le bon David*" by others, David Hume was and has remained one of the most important British philosophers, essayists, and historians of the eighteenth century. Though Hume is known today in most circles for his contributions to philosophy, during his own lifetime he was renowned for his moral, political, and critical essays and for his *The history of England, from the invasion of Julius Caesar to the Revolution in 1688* (1762), the vehicle that principally carried his name into the nineteenth century. Hume himself believed his thinking to be important and revolutionary, writing about his first philosophical work, *A Treatise of Human Nature: Being An Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects* (1739), that its principles are "so remote from the vulgar Sentiments on this Subject, that were they to take place, they wou'd produce almost a total Alteration in Philosophy."

Hume achieved the distinction of becoming the first major British writer to support himself independently of patronage or subscriptions, relying instead solely on the proceeds he reaped from book sales. If the philosophical implications of his thought were slowly received, they were nevertheless profound. Immanuel Kant, in whose work so much of subsequent continental philosophy is rooted, credited Hume with awakening him from his "dogmatic slumbers," that is, his adherence to speculative rationalism. Many of the central concepts and terms of criticism characterizing twentieth-century Anglo-American philosophy also find precedent in Hume. Hume's philosophical thought has been influential, especially after about 1925, in epistemology, philosophy of science, philosophy of religion, ethics, social-political philosophy, and aesthetics. The influence of Hume's political works has been more sustained over time, making its mark on not only British intellectuals but also founding figures of the United States, including Benjamin Franklin, Alexander Hamilton, and quite possibly James Madison. Hume's impact on eighteenth-century French social theorists was still more extensive. Yet, for all its influence and for all its indebtedness to contemporary and precedent intellectual strains in the eighteenth century, Hume's thought is also profoundly critical of the philosophical currents of his time. Indeed, in many ways the critical and skeptical dynamics of early modern culture reach their climax in Hume.

Hume was born David Home on 7 May (26 April, old style) 1711, to Joseph Home of Ninewells and Katherine Falconer, probably in their apartment on the south side of the Lawnmarket in Edinburgh, just east of the castle. Hume was the youngest of three children and the second son born to the couple, his siblings including Joseph, the oldest child, and Katherine. Hume's family had achieved moderate wealth and standing amid what would then have been called the middling ranks of eighteenth-century Scottish society. While Hume's adoption of a different spelling for his surname in his early twenties reflected a wish to have its Scottish pronunciation conform to English norms of spelling (and perhaps also Hume's desire to be recognized and accepted by English society), the new spelling is nevertheless consistent with that used by some of his ancestors, for example, his great-uncle Robert Hume of Hutton Hall.

Hume's family in Berwickshire can be traced as far back as 1138, though the estate around which his family centered itself, Ninewells, was established by Robert Hume's brother, George Home, much more recently, in the early sixteenth century. Hume's ancestral line was distinguished in politics and in the military. His paternal grandfather, John Home of Ninewells, was captain of the dragoon and, under banners carrying the family motto, *Jamais arrière* (Never behind), fought in Argyll for William and Mary against the viscount of Dundee. (Later the family took another motto: "True to the End.") Though at least nominally a Presbyterian, John Home was not a religious enthusiast, and he took part

without pause in the prosecution and suppression of rebellious Scottish Covenanters during the late seventeenth century. Hume's more immediate predecessors, however, more often found their principal occupation in the law.

Hume's mother, Lady Katherine Home, née Falconer, was also stepsister to his father, a relationship not considered improper for marriage at the time. Her family hailed from the earls of Kintore, and her father, Sir David Falconer, who was perhaps Hume's namesake, had pursued a successful legal and political career. Dying in 1685, Sir David was buried in the Greyfriars cemetery in Edinburgh.

Joseph Home, Hume's father, lived a life of moderate distinction. Having attended the University of Edinburgh, he became an advocate in 1705 and the next year was made a burgess and a guild brother, *gratis,* by an act of the town council in Edinburgh. Hume, however, little knew this man, who died just five years after his marriage to Katherine and two years after Hume's birth. Lady Katherine never remarried. According to Hume's autobiography, *The Life of David Hume, Esq. Written by Himself* (1777), "My father, who passed for a man of parts, died when I was an infant, leaving me, with an elder brother and a sister, under the care of our mother, a woman of singular merit, who, though young and handsome, devoted herself entirely to the rearing and educating of her children."

The Homes of Ninewells were lowland Scots. Their estate was situated on the outskirts of the small village of Chirnside in Berwickshire, ten miles northwest of the town of Berwick-Upon-Tweed and the often-violated border with England. Hume's family was Whiggish in its sympathies, but on the side of moderate, "Political Whigs" rather than what Hume would have called "Religious Whigs." The Homes, then, were firmly anti-Jacobite (in other words, against the Pretender King James II and his heirs), supported the Revolution of 1688, the parliamentary union of Scotland with England in 1707, and the Hanoverian succession of 1714; but their support was animated by secular concerns rather than religious dogmatics.

Although Hume's mother was devout, the faith and practice of his family would have generally been temperate and resistant to the stridency characteristic of the more radical Presbyterians, or, as they were then often called, "high flyers." The Homes would have had nothing to do, for example, with the prosecution of witches, which continued in Scotland until well into the eighteenth century (the Anti-Witchcraft Act not having been repealed until 1728) or with the theocratic aspirations of the Kirk's general assembly. Rather, their tendencies were, relatively speaking, toward the secular, the moderate, the liberal, and the humane. Hume was to preserve something of this same sensibility throughout his life. He was, apparently, "religious when he was young," going so far as to catalogue the vices set out in the *Whole Duty of Man* (1658), Richard Allestree's popular and influential book of religious didactics, to see how many of them he could detect within himself. Hume also, during those years, seems to have accepted John Knox's Calvinistic doctrines of original sin, the total depravity of human nature, predestination, and election. He was, however, never terribly passionate about such things and appears to have permanently lost his religious conviction (or at least his faith in Christianity) while attending or soon after leaving the university of Edinburgh. Later, as an adult, although Hume remained a consistent and severe critic of religious "enthusiasm" and superstition, regarding its effects to be among the most pernicious elements with which his society had to then struggle, he also maintained affable and even intimate relations with many of the liberal clergy of the Kirk. Like his views on religion, Hume's political philosophy was also simultaneously critical, moderate, and progressive. While he attacked established political norms and produced trenchant criticisms of Whiggish radicalism, the general thrust of Hume's political work was also

in many ways supportive of the new political and commercial order unfolding around him.

Hume's early years seem to have been remarkably bookish. Writing in an important autobiographical letter of 1734, he remarked that "from my earliest Infancy, I found alwise a strong Inclination to Books & Letters." Forty-two years later, in his autobiography Hume describes himself as having been "seized very early with a passion for Literature which has been the ruling Passion of my Life, and the great Source of my Enjoyments." Most likely the young Hume would have been provided a private tutor, probably a young clergyman just out of college, in addition to receiving instruction from his mother and inspiration from his siblings, relatives, and pastor. Efforts would have been made to instruct at least the male children in languages, mathematics, and natural science (or, as it was then called, "natural philosophy"). Being a family of respectable means, many of whose male members typically pursued careers in the law, the household would have been provided with a fairly well-stocked library. Children in the family would have read didactic and religious material as well as, perhaps, fabulous, historical, and classical literature. Books in the library would have probably included works by William Shakespeare, John Dryden, John Milton, Alexander Pope, and assorted classical authors in Greek and, especially, Latin. Since the family would have been interested in fostering socially essential manners and insight in their aspiring sons, copies of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele's influential *Tatler* and *Spectator* periodicals would have also been on hand.

On 27 February 1723, at the age of eleven, "David Home" signed the University of Edinburgh's Matriculation Book under the page set aside for William Scott, professor of Greek. Hume's older brother, Joseph, matriculated under the same professor a few days later. Hume's age on entering the university would not have been terribly remarkable at the time, though perhaps he would have been a year or two younger than the average first-year university student.

Founded in 1582, the University of Edinburgh was located in 1723 on much the same site it is presently, though in Hume's time its situation placed the university at the southern extremity of the city, adjacent to the Potter Row Port in the ancient city wall. The elegant and sturdy eighteenth-century buildings of the New College of the university were unknown to Hume, having not been constructed until 1789, when Edinburgh embarked on a heady program of urban planning, renovation, and construction. Although certainly by his day it had acquired the reputation of being the most important university in Scotland, the physical plant of the university was poor.

Despite its appearance, the university Hume attended was remarkably vital and a different institution from the one that had educated his father twenty-six years earlier. The University of Edinburgh attended by Joseph Home in 1697 was run on a regent system whereby students matriculated under the tutelage of a single instructor and received all (or at least most) of their instruction from him. The leadership of the university, however, was even then exceedingly progressive in its pedagogical views and had been impressed by innovations instituted in the Netherlands at the universities of Leyden and Utrecht. Dutch thought and Dutch liberalism had been particularly influential among the law faculty in Edinburgh, where courses in jurisprudence devoted ample time to Dutch legal theorists such as Hugo Grotius.

In 1708, through the initiative of Principal William Carstares and other progressive figures, Edinburgh discarded its regency and adopted the new and innovative professorial system, under which students received instruction from different professors, each lecturing on his own specialty. An English traveler remarked in the year of Hume's matriculation that "In studying four Years at this College you commence Master of arts: The Scholars are not in Commons, and kept to strict Rules as in the College in *England,* nor wear Gowns; they lodge and diet in the Town, as at the College in *Holland,* and are required to attend

their several Classes from eight in the Morning till twelve, and from two to four." As did the professors, Hume too probably took his lodgings in town, in his case at the family's "land," or apartment, in one of the towering, thin, and crowded tenement buildings of the High Street near the Edinburgh castle keep.

The curriculum offered to students in Hume's time was a four-year program of study. Students' first year was normally devoted to Latin under the direction of Professor of Humanity Laurence Dundas. The *bajan*, or second year, followed a course in Greek under Professor of Greek and Philosophy William Scot. The influence of the Dutch on Scot was particularly pronounced in an abridged edition of Grotius's ethical treatise, *De Jure Belli ac Pacis* (On the Law of War and Peace, 1625), which he edited. Through Scot, Hume may well have been exposed to this text and its ideas. Inasmuch as Hume matriculated under Scot, his three years of attendance likely followed the program of the second through fourth years, an indication that his Latin was already sufficiently competent or that he was receiving training in that language by some other means.

The *semi,* or third year, of the undergraduate program addressed rational and instrumental philosophy, which comprised topics in logic and metaphysics, including philosophy of mind, under the tutelage of Professor Colin Drummond. The fourth-year, or *magistrand,* class was devoted to natural philosophy, which at the time would have been emphatically Newtonian in its cast, under the direction of Professor Robert Stewart. Insofar as skepticism was a central topic of conversations occupying the scientific community of Edinburgh at the time, the fourth-year course would, however, not have been without some measure of anti-Newtonian criticism. Hume entered a subscription to Stewart's Physiological Library in 1724, and among the texts housed in the collection were several addressing skepticism in science, including Joseph Glanvill's important *Scepsis Scientifica or, Confest Ignorance, The Way to Science; in an Essay of the Vanity of Dogmatizing and Confident Opinion* (1665). Since Stewart had begun his academic career a Cartesian, only later converting to Newtonianism, he likely presented Hume not only with the doctrines of the popular Newtonianism but with its Cartesian antecedents as well.

In addition to these four regular courses, the university also offered its students a set of electives including Professor James Gregory's course in mathematics, William Law's course in pneumatical and ethical philosophy, and Professor of Universal History Charles Mackie's course in history. As Stewart required of his students one year of college mathematics, there is reason to believe Hume was exposed to the ideas of Gregory's rather avant-garde Newtonianism. Law's course would have addressed topics such as the immortality of the soul, the nature and attributes of God, natural theology, the origin and principles of government, as well as the ethical writings of authors such as Marcus Aurelius, Cicero, and Samuel von Puffendorf--topics that all later occupied the mature Hume. Mackie's course was remarkable in teaching not only military and political history but also literary and cultural history. Besides proper "courses," regular and frequent public-lecture series were also offered by the university.

A student paper by Hume that survives from this period, "An Historical Essay on Chivalry and modern Honour," may have been written for a class, possibly Mackie's or Law's, or perhaps it served as one of the papers that students were required, under Principal William Wishart, to present and defend in the great hall of the university library. The essay describes and comments on the corruption of classical notions of virtue attendant on the rise of Gothic chivalry. Although his view of history became more sophisticated over time and did so in such a way as to guard him against transhistorical judgments, Hume never fully abandoned the dismissive and critical view of the Middle Ages so common among Enlightenment figures and so powerfully cast by such historians as Edward Gibbon.

Hume's access to books would have come in part through the university library, the thirteen-thousand-volume collection of which, however, was not available for lending. Its reading room opened only two hours a day in winter, four in summer. More probably, Hume would have been exposed to books through friends, private libraries such as that of Professor Stewart's, and bookshops, especially the progressive, well-stocked establishment run by Allan Ramsay in the Luckenbooths. Ramsay's shop, like others in Edinburgh, provided a site for intellectuals to gather, to read, and to converse with one another about the latest periodicals and publications. Ramsay's establishment also supported readers by making it possible for patrons to rent books as well as buy them. Ramsay's son, also named Allan, became an accomplished portrait painter and man of letters as well as one of Hume's closest friends.

Another important source of texts for Hume would have certainly been the Library of the Faculty of Advocates. Established in 1689, the Advocates' Library had become by the eighteenth century the principal library of polite Edinburgh. With holdings approaching thirty thousand volumes, a collection far greater than that of the University Library, the Advocates' Library possessed another advantage that was perhaps more important to a young scholar--it extended lending privileges to its members, members who would have included Hume's friends and relatives.

There were still other avenues of intellectual life in Edinburgh open to Hume during his formative years. Outside of the university programs and the bookstores and libraries, students would have been able to engage intellectual pursuits through private tutors and independent clubs. Clubs and societies organized around intellectual interests began sprouting up in greater and greater numbers in Edinburgh during the eighteenth century. That these gatherings structured themselves according to notions of sociability was no accident but rather reflected a growing conviction that the progress of the intellect was bound up with the cultivation of conversation and manners. As with French notions of politesse, the objective of such cultivation was not simply the production of pleasant affectations, the acquisition of instruments necessary to navigate successfully institutions of power and commerce, or even the advancement of reason and knowledge. Such conventions aimed at nothing short of the restructuring of society itself together with the selves composing that society. In France conversation and society are famous for having flourished in aristocratic salons. In Scotland, by contrast, in the absence of a royal court and with intellectual life centered more around urban rather than aristocratic life, conversation and society developed amid clubs and societies that often held their meetings in taverns, oyster bars, coffeehouses, and restaurants. Indeed, Edinburgh's intelligentsia became affectionately known as the *eaterati.*

Hume himself later joined and founded several such organizations, including the Poker Club, the Select Society, and the Philosophical Society. The society most likely to have influenced the young student Hume would have been the Rankenian Club, whose members included many among the faculty at Edinburgh, such as Wishart, Mackie, and Colin Maclaurin. The society initiated a correspondence with the Irish philosopher, professor at Trinity College, and bishop of Cloyne, George Berkeley, who was so impressed with their inquiries that he later offered the members of the group positions at his projected college in Bermuda. The interests of the group were acutely progressive, and its membership was clearly committed to engaging much of the most avant-garde thought of the day.

Aside from Berkeley's *A Treatise concerning the Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710), intellectual matters in the air during this time would have included John Locke's *Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1689), Lord Shaftesbury's *Characteristiks of Men, Manners, Opinions, and Times* (1711), and Bernard Mandeville's *Fable of the*

Bees (1705-1729). Samuel Clarke's Boyle Lectures of 1704 ("A Demonstration of the Being and Attributes of God") and 1705 ("A Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion") had become central to English rationalistic attempts to prove, in the words of its charter, "the Christian Religion, against notorious Infidels, viz. Atheists, Theists, Pagans." The lectures fortified the aspiration of natural theology, both Christian and deistic, to develop reasoned arguments demonstrating theological claims. Against many such arguments, Hume later advanced devastating criticisms in his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion*, published in 1779 but first written in the 1750s.

Joseph Butler, later Anglican bishop of Durham and clerk of Queen Caroline's closet, had led the secular and naturalistic response to Clarke in a series of letters published in 1713 as well as in his later *Fifteen Sermons Preached at the Rolls Chapel* (1726). Butler argued that philosophers must abandon the rationalistic study of "abstract relations" in ethics in favor of focusing on "matters of fact, namely, what the particular nature of man is, its several parts, their economy or constitution; from whence it proceeds to determine what course of life it is which is correspondent to this whole nature." In 1725 Francis Hutcheson, who later attained the chair in moral philosophy at the University of Glasgow in 1730, advanced the naturalistic project enormously with his *Inquiry into the Original of Our Ideas of Beauty and Virtue* (1725), a text that, like Butler's, attempted to base ethical reasoning on a naturalistic rendering of humanity.

Hume remarked to James Boswell on his deathbed on "excelling his school fellows," and he was likely a successful student. In any case he probably left the university in 1725 after the destruction by fire of his family's land on the Lawnmarket. A tall and somewhat awkward boy, nicknamed "The Clod" by his schoolmates, Hume judged the quality of his education to be rather poor. His schooling, however, must not have been entirely without merit, for as he remarks in the advertisement to the authoritative edition of his *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* (1777), *A Treatise of Human Nature* was "projected before he left College."

After leaving the university Hume returned to Ninewells, where he embarked on an intense and prolonged period of study that lasted for the next eight years. As the second son in a family structured around traditions of primogeniture, Hume was compelled to seek a career of his own. Since the law had figured so strongly in his family's history, and since advocates formed such an important part of Edinburgh's intelligentsia, it was natural for Hume's interest to be turned in the direction of the law. Accordingly, legal studies occupied much of the first four years of this period. Hume attended the Court of Session to learn procedure and studied classical rhetoric in order to acquire the skills necessary to prepare a successful brief and address judicial officials. In this regard his cousin Henry Home, Lord Kames, may have guided him.

Kames, fifteen years Hume's senior and an advocate in 1726, pursued intellectual matters beyond the law and became an active participant in the Edinburgh club scene as well as a popular figure among aspiring students. Kames entered a brief correspondence with Clarke in 1723 concerning topics in metaphysics. He developed a more sustained epistolary relationship, however, with Andrew Baxter, skeptic and author of *An Enquiry into the Nature of the Human Soul* (1733). Kames's correspondence with Baxter principally addressed causation, a topic that became of central importance to Hume. (Kames defended an Aristotelian view while Baxter offered criticisms and defended Isaac Newton's concept of inertia.) Kames remained an intellectual presence in Hume's life and answered his skepticism with *Essays on the Principles of Morality and Natural Religion* (1751). In 1738 Hume reminisced about the "philosophical Evenings" spent with Kames, and in a letter of 13-15 June 1745 he remarked on "the Regret that I shou'd have so little Prospect of passing my Life with you, whom I always

regarded as the best Friend, in every Respect, I ever possest."

In the end Hume found the law unsatisfying, and he became engrossed in philosophical work. Later, in a letter written to a physician in March or April 1734, Hume recalled: "After much study and reflection, . . . when I was about 18 Years of Age, there seem'd to be open'd up to me a new Scene of Thought, which transported me beyond Measure, & made me, with an Ardor natural to young men, throw up every other Pleasure of Business to apply entirely to it. The Law, which was the Business I design'd to follow, appear'd nauseous to me, & I cou'd think of no other way of pushing my Fortune in the World, but that of a Scholar & Philosopher. I was infinitely happy in this course of Life." Sometime in the spring of 1729 Hume abandoned his legal training and immersed himself in a feverish study of literature and philosophy. "My studious Disposition, my Sobriety, and my Industry gave my Family a Notion that the Law was a proper profession for me: But I found an unsurmountable Aversion to every thing but the pursuits of Philosophy and general learning; and while they fancyed I was pouring over Voet and Vinnius, Cicero and Virgil were the Authors I was secretly devouring." Hume found himself drawn to Virgil, the man of letters, rather than Cicero, the man of law and government, and the former's life became "more the Subject of" his "Ambition." The trajectory of his intellectual life at this time was not simply general learning and the passive assimilation of the theoretical work of others, however. He aspired to make a name for himself. While society, conversation, literature, and commerce had been generally embraced as instruments for constructing a new intellectual as well as social order, Hume set himself to do things the hard way. His reading became more and more focused, especially around issues of skepticism, and he began compiling notes and memoranda to be used in the construction of a full-blown philosophical system. His interest in issues of moral philosophy surely would have been piqued by the joint publication of Hutcheson's seminal *Essay on the Nature and Conduct of the Passions and Affections* and *Illustrations Upon the Moral Sense* in 1728.

Apparently at this time, Hume's loss of faith in religion and his skeptical doubts about the capacities of reason and morals began to crystallize. His memoranda indicate that he had been examining the arguments for atheism compiled by the Cambridge Platonist Ralph Cudworth in his *The True Intellectual System of the Universe: The First Part; Wherein, All the Reason and Philosophy of Atheism is Confuted; and Its Impossibility Demonstrated* (1678). Hume may have also read or at least learned the principal arguments of Cudworth's posthumously published sequel, *A Treatise concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* (1731), a text whose announcements and reviews Hume surely would have perused during this time. His memoranda indicate he had been reading William Law's *De Origine Mali* (1702). Pierre Bayle's *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (Historical and Critical Dictionary, 1697) had rocked the intellectual world with its incisive deployment of skeptical reasoning; memoranda and letters indicate that Hume had consulted this text and perhaps Bayle's *OEuvres diverses* (Various works, 1727-1731) by 1732.

Indeed, like Newtonianism, skepticism was a pervasive topic of the time, and it would not have been possible for a vigorous scholar who frequented an intellectual center as fertile and current as Edinburgh to have remained isolated from it. The medical community was even imbued with the issue. Dr. George Young's 1730-1731 lectures at the University of Edinburgh, for example, address the topic "Why Do We Believe the Sun Will Rise?" and exhibit a lively interest in skepticism. Surprising similarities are to be found between Young's lectures and what became Hume's analysis of causation, probability, and practice.

Hume may have also been reading at this time directly from the principal ancient skeptical text

of Pyrrhonian skepticism, Sextus Empiricus's *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* (second century A.D.). Hume was familiar with Pyrrhonism--or at least a caricature of Pyrrhonism--by the time he wrote *A Treatise of Human Nature.* Later, in *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1758), the *Essays and Treatises*, and "On the Populousness of Ancient Nations" (first published in *Political Discourses*, 1752) he quotes directly from this text as well as from Sextus's *Adversus Mathematicos* (Against the Professors), but the character of his references indicate he was using the then outdated 1651 edition of Peter and Jacob Chouet rather than the popular and well-known Johannes A. Fabricius edition of 1718, an oddity that suggests he was using the volume of a private collection. The Chouet text was held by neither the Advocates' nor the university libraries; they did, however, acquire many of the Greek, Latin, and vernacular translations. For example, an English translation of Sextus's *Outlines* could be found in Thomas Stanley's extremely popular *History of Philosophy* (1655-1661). Stanley's text was used as a sourcebook for undergraduates by Professor Charles Mackie during Hume's time at the University of Edinburgh, and both the Advocates' and the university libraries owned copies. Skepticism was also a common topic in the periodical and review literature of the day, and Hume would have encountered it there.

The fame of Michel de Montaigne's *Apologie pour Raimond Seybond* (Apology for Raimond Seybond, 1580) may well have brought Pyrrhonism to Hume's attention through its pages. A large footnote in Hume's essay "The Sceptic" (1742) suggests that he had, at least by the time that essay was written, acquired more than a passing familiarity with Montaigne's work. He may also have been familiar with Peter Ramus's *Dialectique* (1555) or the work of Montaigne's intellectual heir, Pierre Charron, whose *Les trois véritez* (The three truths, 1594) and *La sagesse* (Wisdom, 1601) were enormously popular, as were skeptical texts by François de La Mothe Le Vayer such as *Petit Traité sceptique sur cette façon de parler, n'avoir pas le sens commun* (A Short Skeptical Treatise on Speech Devoid of Common Sense, 1647) and *Discours pour montres que les doutes de la philosophie sceptique sont de grande usage dans les sciences* (Discourse to Show the Great Use of Skeptical Doubt for the Sciences, 1669).

Hume may have also been reading or at least become aware of the provocative work of Pierre-Daniel Huet at this time. In part 1 of *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* he refers to the controversial and highly Pyrrhonian successor to Huet's *Alnetanae quaestiones de concordia rationis et fidei* (1690), *Traité philosophique de la foiblesse humain* (Philosophical Treatise on Human Weakness, 1723). A sensational work, since its author was a Roman Catholic bishop, the text was widely known and discussed. Huet's published works also include *Demonstratio Evangelica* (Demonstration of the Gospel, 1679), *Censura Philosophiae Cartesianae* (A Critique of Cartesian Philosophy, 1689), and *De imbecillitate mentis humanae* (On the Imbecility of the Human Mind, 1738).

Hume's profound immersion into the skeptical dimensions of contemporary literature eventually undermined what religious convictions he retained and produced pervasive doubts about the capacities of reason. In 1751 he wrote to his friend Gilbert Elliot of Minto that "tis not long ago that I burn'd an old Manuscript Book, wrote before I was twenty; which contain'd Page after Page, the gradual Progress of my Thoughts on that head. It begun with an anxious Search after Arguments, to confirm the Common Opinion: Doubts stole in, dissipated, return'd, again dissipated, return'd again; and it was a perpetual Struggle of a restless Imagination against Inclination, perhaps against Reason."

These years of struggle in late adolescence, however, seem to have been extremely productive. Not only had Hume worked out many of his thoughts on religious, epistemological, and moral skepticism; another letter to Elliot in 1751 also indicates that he had

laid the groundwork for and "plan'd" *A Treatise of Human Nature* before he was twenty-one years old. The intensity of Hume's work, however, precipitated a period of physical and mental illness that impaired him for the next four years. As early as 1730 he began to complain of difficulties in eating and digestion, heart palpitations, anxiety, and depression. "I found that I was not able to follow out a Train of Thought, by one continued Stretch of View, but by repeated Interruptions & by refreshing my Eye from Time to Time upon other Objects," he observed in 1734. Hume consulted various physicians and submitted himself to a variety of treatments in order to restore his health, but to no lasting effect. In 1734, in an effort to repair his mind and body through engagement with more practical applications (and perhaps also to escape a paternity claim that was about to be lodged against him), Hume fled Scotland for first London and then Bristol. While in the capital he composed a long, autobiographical, and diagnostic letter that he intended to present to a prominent physician (perhaps John Arbuthnot or George Cheyne) but for some reason apparently never delivered it.

By mid March Hume had arrived in Bristol, the primary British port of the West Indian trade, where he took employment with a merchant, Michael Miller. The principal commodity with which Miller dealt was sugar. As, however, slaving would have been consistent with the normal practices of a sugar merchant of the time, it is likely that Miller--and thereby, at least indirectly, Hume--was involved in the slave trade. Hume's relations with his employer were difficult, and since his health had strengthened through his new mode of life, he resigned his post after just four months. As he records in his *Life:* "my Health being a little broken by my ardent Application, I was tempted or rather forced to make a very feeble Trial for entering into a more active Scene of Life. In 1734, I went to Bristol with some Recommendations to eminent Merchants; but in a few Months found that Scene totally unsuitable to me."

By the midsummer of 1734 Hume had arrived in France, where he stayed for three years before returning to Britain in 1737. Among the philosophical works Hume had been reading over the preceding five years was that of François de Salignac de La Mothe Fénelon, author of *Traité de l'existence et des attributs de Dieu* (Treatise on the Existence and Attributes of God, 1713) and archbishop of Cambray. Fénelon was also a quietist and a well-known skeptical figure in Scotland. In the section of his memoranda he collects under the heading "Philosophy," Hume refers to Fénelon in connection with topics of necessity, metaphysics, and proofs of the existence of God. His connection to the archbishop, however, was more than intellectual, for it was one of Fénelon's most ardent disciples who welcomed him to Paris and with whom he stayed while there.

A Scottish expatriate and cousin of Hume's childhood friend Michael Ramsay of Mungale, the Chevalier Andrew Michael Ramsay was converted from Presbyterianism to Roman Catholicism by Fénelon and later became his biographer and literary inheritor. In 1724, through the influence of Fénelon, the chevalier had been tutor in Rome to the two sons of King James Edward the Pretender, Prince Charles (Bonnie Prince Charlie) and his brother, Henry.

While Hume was his guest, the chevalier was at work on his *Philosophical Principles of Natural and Revealed Religion, Unfolded in a Geometrical Order* (1748), a work exploring topics in the philosophy of religion and Pyrrhonism, which he undoubtedly discussed with Hume. Passages of this text related to Benedict de Spinoza seem especially similar to Hume's later expositions. Ramsay was also the author of the highly skeptical *Voyages de Cyrus* (Voyages of Cyrus, 1727), a work modeled on Fénelon's *Les aventures de Télémaque* (1699). *Voyages de Cyrus* circulated widely and was published in England in 1728 as well as in France during the period of Hume's intensive study. The text, therefore, would quite likely have been a topic of conversation with

Hume's host. While lodging with Ramsay, Hume became interested in the recent miracles claimed to have occurred at the tomb of the Abbé Pâris. The alleged miracles had captured the imaginations of many in Britain as well as in France. Hume discussed the events with people and took notes both on the reports and on assessments of them published in the periodical literature.

Hume was and remained fond of Paris. His dealings with the chevalier and with the French intellectuals to whom he was introduced were warm and stimulating. The allowance he received from his family, however, was relatively small, apparently amounting to something less than £50 per annum. The sum was enough to endow a single male of the middling ranks with a rather humble standard of living, but it was insufficient to sustain Hume in the lifestyle to which he aspired to become accustomed, especially in a city as expensive and alluring as Paris. After a few months in the City of Light, then, Hume sought out a more affordable provincial center possessing a large population of intellectuals and well enough stocked library facilities to allow him to continue his studies without having to engage in paid employment.

Hume settled on Rheims, approximately one hundred miles northeast of Paris in the province of Champagne. The town was then home to nearly forty thousand citizens and the seat of a prominent university. Hume was provided with letters of introduction by the Chevalier Ramsay, and he soon began seeking access to various libraries. In Rheims he may well have become acquainted with Louis-Jean Lévesque de Pouilly, a correspondent of Henry Bolingbroke and a man of Scottish descent. Pouilly, whose thoughts on moral subjects were not far distant from Hume's, later published *Théorie des sentiments agréables* (Theory of pleasant feelings, 1736) an ethical treatise in the tradition of texts by Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, and the Abbé Jean-Baptiste Dubos's *Réflexions et critiques sur la poésie et la peinture* (Reflections and Critiques on Poetry and Painting, 1719).

In Rheims, Hume began composition of *A Treatise of Human Nature.* After about a year in that city, perhaps because of persistent financial frustrations, he left in 1735 for La Flèche in Anjou, nearly 150 miles southeast of Paris. Nestled in the rolling wine country of the Loire valley, La Flèche was then a sleepy town of about five thousand inhabitants. According to local lore, Hume lodged for the next two years at the manor house of Yvandeau on the slopes of Saint-Germain-du-Val.

La Flèche was an attractive spot for an intellectual and writer, not simply for its economy and its tranquillity but also because of its Jesuit college, where René Descartes had studied a century earlier. The college hummed with discussions of Cartesianism and its offspring, and it possessed an exceedingly well-endowed library, housing upward of 40,000 volumes when Louis the XV dissolved the institution in 1762. Hume was now determined to embark on "that Plan of Life, which I have steddily and successfuly pursued: I resolved to make a very rigid Frugality supply my Deficiency of Fortune, to maintain unimpaired my Independency, and to regard every object as contemptible, except to the Improvement of my Talents in Literature."

Hume would have been exposed to texts and conversations concerning Descartes's *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia* (1641; translated as *Meditations on First Philosophy: In Which the Existence of God and the Distinction between the Soul and the Body are Demonstrated*), to which was attached assorted objections to the work from philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes, Antoine Arnauld, Marin Mersenne, and Pierre Gassendi, along with Descartes's replies to the objections. Hume may have also gained there knowledge of Nicolas de Malebranche's *De la recherche de la verité* (Search for the Truth, 1674-1675), a text that deeply informed his theory of mind.

Other texts addressing skepticism of interest to him in France would have included Mersenne's *La vérité des sciences contre les sceptiques ou Pyrrhoniens* (The Truth of Science against the Skeptics or Pyrrhonians, 1625); Arnauld and Pierre Nicole's so-called Port-Royal Logic, properly titled *La logique, ou l'art de penser: contenant, outres les reles communes, plusiers observations nouvelles, propre à former le jugement* (Logic, or The Art of Thinking: Containing, Outside the Ordinary Rules, Some New Observations, Necessary to Form Judgment, 1662); as well as the popular *Examen du Pyrrhonisme ancien et moderne* (Examination of Pyrrhonism Ancient and Modern, 1733) and *La logique ou système de réflexions qui peuvent contribuer à la netetté et l'entendue de nos conaissances* (Logic, or A System of Reflections that Can Contribute to the Clarity and the Understanding of Our Knowledge, 1712) by the Swiss philosopher Jean-Pierre Crousaz. A more popular and accessible work, *La logique* ran through several enlarged editions and appeared in English translation in 1724 as the two-volume *A New Treatise of The Art of Thinking, or a Complete System of Reflections Concerning the Conduct and Improvement of the Mind . . . Done into English.*

Spinoza's Ethica (1677) and *Renati Descartes Principiorum Philosophiae* (Rene Descarte's Philosophical Principles, 1663) would have also been available to Hume in France, as would have Gassendi's *Syntagma Philosophicum* (Philosophical Syntax) together with his Epicurean works (1647-1649). It is likely Hume also encountered the work of Gottfried von Leibniz at La Flèche, where he may have read Leibniz's *Traité sur les Perfections de Dieu* (1686; translated as *Discourse on Metaphysics*, 1953) and his *Essais de Théodicée sur la bonté de Dieu, la liberté de l'homme et l'origine du mal* (Essays of Theodicy on the Goodness of God, the Liberty of Man, and the Origin of Evil, 1710). Hume refers to Leibniz in the "Abstract" of *A Treatise of Human Nature.*

At La Flèche, Hume set himself to "prosecuting my Studies in a Country Retreat," and he completed there most of the remainder of his first and perhaps most magnificent work. By mid 1737 *A Treatise of Human Nature* was largely complete, and he returned to London to secure a publisher. After nearly a year of inquiries, he came to terms with John Noon at the White Hart near Mercer's Chapel in Cheapside, signing articles of agreement with him on 26 September 1738. Noon was a publisher of moderate standing, having issued encyclopedias, sermons, and attacks on Andrew Baxter, Joseph Butler, and William Wollaston. Hume was determined to publish without appeal to patronage or subscription. As an unknown author, however, he was forced to settle for terms of publication not entirely satisfactory to him. Noon would hold all rights to the first edition of *A Treatise of Human Nature* and would issue a run of one thousand copies, for which Hume was to receive £50 in return. On penalty of £50, Hume was prohibited from contracting for a second edition until either Noon had sold all of his copies of the first edition or Hume purchased them from him at the market price. Hume felt uncomfortably hamstrung by Noon's restriction on a second edition, and indeed, although he began preparing notes and corrections, a second edition was never published, Noon's first edition having never entirely sold out.

In the last week of January 1739, Noon published books 1 ("Of the Understanding") and 2 ("Of the Passions") of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, priced at twelve shillings. Hume was at that time still engaged in revising a third book, "Of Morals," which appeared in November 1740 through a different London publisher, Thomas Longman. In accordance with contemporary practice designed to shield authors from ad hominem attacks, political reprisals, and, indeed, shame in the face of failure, Hume published his text anonymously. Locke, Baxter, Hutcheson, Mandeville, and Wollaston had all done the same, although in many instances the authorship was obvious.

The version of *A Treatise of Human Nature* Hume finally released to the world was a somewhat different document than the one he had projected.

He may have become concerned that the contents of *A Treatise of Human Nature* would be too provocative for his intended audience, as well as perhaps the state and ecclesiastical authorities. Hume may have also worried that portions of the text would offend Bishop Butler, whose good opinion he sought. Perhaps Hume was also worried that the epistemological and metaphysical subtleties of the text would be ignored in favor of a blunter and more popular attention to matters of religion. Such concerns would have been well founded in a young author whose first book surfaced amid the turbulence produced by the collected edition of Clarke's Boyle lectures, *A Defense of Natural and Revealed Religion*, published that same year (1739).

In a December 1737 letter to Kames, Hume describes being occupied with "castrating my work, that is, cutting off its nobler parts; that is, endeavouring it shall give as little offence as possible, before which, I could not pretend to put it into the Doctor's [i.e. Butler's] hands. This is a piece of cowardice, for which I blame myself, though I believe none of my friends will blame me. But I was resolved not to be an enthusiast in philosophy, while I was blaming other enthusiasms." Hume enclosed "some *Reasonings concerning Miracles*, " which he "thought of publishing with the rest," but which he was afraid would "give too much offence, even as the world is disposed at present." The essay on miracles did not appear in print until 1748.

Hume's concerns about how to present *A Treatise of Human Nature* to the world also appear to have prevented him from composing an abridgment or summary of the sort commonly used in advertising a new work. The frustration he felt may well have motivated the cryptic motto he included on the title page of the treatise, a motto that seems to invite its audience to read between the lines for what Hume felt he could not state explicitly. He quotes from Tacitus: "*Rara temporum felicitas, ubi fentire, quæ velis; & quæ fentias, dicere licet*" (Seldom are people blessed with times in which they may think what they like, and say what they think). The epigram is similar to the title of the final chapter of Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670), chapter 20: "That in a Free State every man may Think what he Likes, and Say what he Thinks"; and the title of the treatise itself is similar to that of the second volume of Thomas Hobbes's *Elements of Law* (1650), titled *Human Nature*, which Hobbes often referred to simply as his "Treatise of Human Nature." These cues would alert Hume's readers to the secular and antireligious thrust of his work.

Hume famously bemoaned his disappointment with the reception of *A Treatise of Human Nature.* In *The Life of David Hume* he complained that "Never literary attempt was more unfortunate than my Treatise of Human Nature. It fell *dead-born from the press,* without reaching such distinction, as even to excite a murmur among the zealots." (Hume's remark quotes from Alexander Pope, who had written in one of his satirical epistles that "All, all but truth, drops dead-born from the press.") Hume's description of the reception of his work, however, is not entirely accurate. The *Neuen Zeitungen von gelehrten Sachen* published a critical, even hostile review on 28 May 1739 in Leipzig. Similar assessments appeared in the Dutch publication *Bibliothèque britannique, ou histoire des ourvrages des sçavans de la Grande-Bretagne* (1739) and the German *Göttingische Zeitungen* (1740). Favorable announcements were printed in the popular *Bibliothèque raisonnée des ouvrages des savans de l'Europe* (1739) in Amsterdam and the *Nouvelle bibliothèque, ou histoire littéraire des principaux éscrits qui se publient*, from The Hague. One year after its initial announcement, the *Bibliothèque raisonnée* (April-June 1740) published a forty-nine-page review of the treatise, and the *Nouvelle bibliothèque* published a review of forty-six pages. Criticisms of Hume's text properly situated it in the antirationalist tradition of Locke and Berkeley but complained about the obscurity, the inelegance, and even--failing to appreciate the skeptical characteristic of doing so--the first-person "*Egotisms*" of his prose. These assessments

disappointed Hume, for whom matters of rhetoric were of great importance.

Philosophically speaking, however, although critics often got the details wrong, they generally recognized the skeptical implications of his text, especially surrounding matters of necessity and causation. The second account of Hume's text, published in the *Bibliothèque raisonnée*, castigates *A Treatise of Human Nature* for assuming a dogmatic tone while being Pyrrhonian in import. The reviewer aligns Hume's thoughts on causation with those of Sextus Empiricus in the *Outlines* and writes: "I fear that his paradoxes favour Pyrrhonism and lead to consequences that the author appears to disown. . . . There would be a hundred things to remark in our author, whether on the taste for Pyrrhonisms which reigns in his manner of philosophizing; whether on the inconsistency of so many of the singular propositions that he has been pleased to accumulate; whether finally on the pernicious consequences that could be drawn from his principles. What is most offensive is the confidence with which he delivers his paradoxes. Never has there been a Pyrrhonian more dogmatic."

The silence of prominent intellectuals in Britain, together with the critical assessments his text received, provoked Hume to prepare a defensive abstract of the treatise, which he initially intended to submit as an anonymous letter to the editor of the important English periodical *History of the Works of the Learned.* When, however, that journal published, in Hume's words, a "somewhat abusive" review of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, he instead published his abstract in London as a thirty-two-page pamphlet with the title *An Abstract of a Book Lately Published; Entitled, a Treatise of Human Nature, etc. Wherein the Chief Argument of That Book is Farther Illustrated and Explained* (1740). Later, his fury apparently having abated, Hume reissued the pamphlet with a less incendiary title.

Hume's focus in the abstract of *A Treatise of Human Nature* was, as it has been for many of his readers, on book 1. Hume emphasized his theories of causation, necessity, and perception, but most prominently featured are his contentions about what he called the "science of man." Hume advanced the startling notion that "all the sciences have a relation, greater or less, to human nature; and that however wide any of them may seem to run from it, they still return back by one passage or another. Even *Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, and Natural Religion,* are in some measure dependent on the science of MAN; since they lie under the cognizance of men, and are judged of by their powers and faculties." Contrary to Locke, then, for whom philosophy was understood as the underlaborer of natural science, Hume maintains that the science of humanity is logically prior to any other science.

Hume's gesture was, of course, not entirely new. Descartes's revolutionary inward turn, like those of subsequent systems developed by Malebranche and Berkeley, can be understood along similar lines. Indeed, even Martin Luther's insistence on personal religious experience can be seen as having preceded Hume's insight. Two features of Hume's thought, however, distinguish his work from that of his predecessors: his skepticism and his naturalism. Unlike Descartes, Malebranche, and Berkeley, Hume wished to root philosophy in human experience, without appeals to speculative, abstract reasoning and without reliance on metaphysical posits such as "spirit" or "God." In this way Hume understood himself to be following in and extending the naturalistic tradition of Newton, Shaftesbury, Mandeville, Hutcheson, and Butler, as well as the traditions of skepticism.

Hume similarly distinguished his thought from that of the ancients: "I found that the moral Philosophy transmitted to us by Antiquity, labor'd under the same Inconvenience that has been found in their natural Philosophy of being entirely Hypothetical, & depending more upon Invention than Experience. Every one consulted

his Fancy in erecting Schemes of Virtue & of Happiness, without regarding human Nature, upon which every moral Conclusion must depend." His strategy aimed to limit and restrain thought to the world of experience common to all humanity. "When we see, that we have arrived at the utmost extent of human reason, we sit down contented; tho' we be perfectly satisfied in the main of our ignorance, and perceive that we can give no reason for our most general and most refined principles, beside our experience of their reality."

As did the naturalistic moralists and the Newtonian physicists before him, Hume wished to produce a secular and empirically grounded philosophy. This aspect of his thought accounts for the subtitle of *A Treatise of Human Nature:* "Being an Attempt to introduce the experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects." As a skeptic and a philosopher of humanity, however, Hume never lost sight of the fact that nature itself is only grasped through human life and experience, and it remained for him impossible to determine whether or not such experience is able to yield knowledge.

An indication of Hume's rigorous adherence to this position is indicated by the peculiar features of his theory of perception. Descartes and Malebranche had claimed that "ideas," including the constituents of perception, are innately implanted in the mind by their Creator. Berkeley, too, had rooted experience in the activity of God. Locke, following Gassendi and Galileo, had explained experience by appeal to powers in the natural, external world. Hume, in turn, like his predecessors, clung to the notion that experience is presented to a "mind" and that experiences are mental events; indeed, the figures he uses to describe the mechanics of perception are deeply indebted to Malebranche. He departs from other early modern thinkers, however, by attempting to bracket questions concerning the source and root of ideas and deal strictly with perceptions themselves.

Hume divides perceptions into two categories, "impressions" and "ideas." All ideas, whether sensuous or not, must for him be rooted in some fashion in impressions in order to have any meaning and legitimacy: "*All our simple ideas in their first appearance are deriv'd from simple impressions, which are correspondent to them, and which they exactly represent.*" The composition of these simpler elements is the product of the interaction of experience with various principles of human nature. Hume does qualify this position by maintaining the legitimacy of "relative ideas" concerning unobservable entities (for example, the force of gravity) as well as abstract ideas concerning historico-cultural dimensions of life (such as authority, marriage, and justice). Such ideas, however, must also be tethered to public experiences of common life.

Ideas are, for Hume, linked together through various "relations of ideas," principally the natural relations of "resemblance," "contiguity," and "cause and effect." In the delineation of these ordering principles, Hume sees himself as original. Writing in *An Abstract of a Book Lately Published* he remarks: "Thro' this whole book, there are great pretensions to new discoveries in philosophy; but if any thing can intitle the author to so glorious a name as that of an *inventor,* 'tis the use he makes of the principle of the association of ideas." Just as for Newton the motion of all material objects can be explained by appeal to three simple laws of nature, for Hume all mental phenomena are comprehended through a few basic relations of ideas. Just as for Newton all material objects are attracted to one another through the force of gravity, so for Hume all ideas are linked to others through the "gentle force" of the principles of association. Insofar as nature can only be experienced and understood through the mind, the importance of these principles is even more dramatic: "these are the only links that bind the parts of the universe together, or connect us with any other person or object exterior to ourselves. . . . they are really *to us* the cement of the universe." David Hartley further developed associationist psychology in his *Observations on*

Man, His Frame, His Duty, and His Expectations (1749).

Hume's theory of impressions and ideas yields him tremendous critical power. He infuses thought and belief with radical contingency. If all complex ideas can be broken down into simpler ideas, then complex theories and dogmas can be deconstructed and reconstructed in various ways. Ideas are not self-ordering. Rather, they require the external and contingent direction of experience and the principles of association.

Rationalistic philosophy in physics, metaphysics, theology, and morals depends on the capacity of the mind either to intuit or rationally determine intrinsic relations among ideas. Simply by examining and reasoning with ideas themselves--and thereby appealing little, if at all, to experience--rationalists held that thinkers could determine scientific principles, the existence and nature of God, and various moral truths. By rendering, therefore, all relations of ideas exterior to them, Hume undercuts the basis of rationalism and with it the moral, theological, and scientific projects advanced by thinkers such as Descartes and Clarke. Outside of those sciences, such as mathematics, which appeal strictly to naturally founded relations of ideas, all of what goes by the name of knowledge is entirely empirical, or founded on experience. In a famous image Hume boldly asserts: "When we run over libraries, persuaded of these principles, what havoc must we make? If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask, *Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number?* No. *Does it contain* any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion."

One of the most important and best-known instances of Hume's critical philosophy is his theory of causation. For rationalists the idea of fire, for example, entails its causing one to feel heat. For Hume, by contrast, matters are quite different. Since one of the natural relations of ideas is causation, humanity is naturally disposed to experience the world in causal terms. Precisely which causes will produce which effects, however, can only, for Hume, be discovered through experience, not through conceptual analysis. Fire might conceivably just as well produce cold as heat. It might possibly produce flowers or turnips as well as smoke and ash. Indeed, for Hume, it is logically possible that events might occur without any cause, objects appearing ex nihilo, and nature itself might behave in entirely different ways tomorrow than it has today. Reason, Hume contends, cannot by itself inform one what the nature of the world is or what is likely to take place. Only the interaction of mind with the world and the resultant production of various "habits" or "customs" of thought yields belief in such things.

The "necessity" the human mind attributes to an effect following its cause--as well as the belief that things will behave in each successive occurrence as they have in the past--are not matters of demonstration or deduction; rather, they find their basis in the feelings generated in the mind by experience, feelings that are in turn projected upon the world. The mind ineluctably moves, through habit, from a present experience of what has in the past been found to be a cause to expect a subsequent effect. The necessity perceived within the motion of the mind becomes projected, for Hume, upon the event itself.

Hume does not suggest, however, that there are, in fact, no causes or that nature will not continue in its regular course. In 1754, responding to critic John Stewart, Hume emphasized that "I never asserted so absurd a Proposition *as that any thing might arise without a Cause;* I maintain'd, that our Certainty of the Falshood of that Proposition proceeded neither from Intuition or 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 or intuitive Proof. Woud 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."

In a famous example Hume describes the interaction of two billiard balls:

When I see a billiard ball moving towards another, my mind is immediately carry'd by habit to the usual effect, and anticipates my sight by conceiving the second ball in motion. There is nothing in these objects, abstractly considered, and independent of experience, which leads me to form any such conclusion: and even after I have had experience of many repeated effects of this kind, there is no argument, which determines me to suppose, that the effect will be conformable to past experience. The powers, by which bodies operate, are entirely unknown. We perceive only their sensible qualities: and what *reason* have we to think that the same powers will always be conjoined with the same sensible qualities? 'Tis not, therefore, reason which is the guide of life but custom. That alone determines the mind, in all instances, to suppose the future conformable with the past. However easy this step may seem, reason would never, to all eternity, be able to make it.

Hume's conception of the self comprises another important critique of the principal strains of early modern philosophy. The human self, as Hume renders it, is not a singular "I" or *cogito,* as Descartes and other central philosophical figures of the day had imagined: "But setting aside some metaphysicians . . . , I may venture to affirm of the rest of mankind, that they are nothing but a bundle or collection of different perceptions, which succeed each other with an inconceivable rapidity, and are in a perpetual flux and movement. Our eyes cannot turn in their sockets without varying our perceptions. Our thought is still more variable than our sight; and all our other senses and faculties contribute to this change; nor is there any single power of the soul, which remains unalterably the same, perhaps for one moment." In developing his bundle theory--a theory concerning which, it should be said, Hume was not himself entirely secure--Hume was the first major philosopher to abandon claims that there is a non-sensible substance, spirit, or soul beneath or in addition to the experienced perceptions of the mind.

The self is also, for Hume, diverse in another way. The customs and habits that are formed through human experience are not simply private affairs. Contrary to the model produced by Descartes of the solitary philosopher, determining truths about himself, the world, and God without any reference to his body, the world, or society, the experiences into which people are immersed and through which they think are a social, cultural, and historical affair. Integrity and order are brought to the mind through the principles of association, but the mind is also structured through another external source--society. Humans, for Hume, are creatures of custom and habit to the core, but those customs and habits are determined by social history as well as by nature. Thoughts, feelings, desires, and beliefs are molded by social situations as well as by instincts. It is important to see, however, that Hume's acknowledgment of humanity being embedded in society and history in addition to his acknowledgment of the limits of reason not only affords him a new view of the human self; it also offers him a new model of philosophy, as well.

From its origins, much of philosophical thought has aspired to achieve some sort of transcendence. Whether from opinion to knowledge or from the secular to the divine, philosophy has generally attempted--usually through the putative capacities of reason--to escape what Hume calls the "gross, earthy mixture" of "common life." Plato aspired to knowing transcendent forms; Thomas Aquinas and Clarke struggled to understand the divine; Descartes wished to establish the sciences on an unshakable foundation, a *fundamentum inconcussum,* through the action of pure, disembodied reason. Hume, however, like the skeptics and the Epicureans with whom he

associated himself, was a philosopher of finitude. Comparing his predecessors to Sisyphus and Tantalus, he maintained that philosophy must give up its vain quest to grasp objects beyond its reach and instead restrain itself to subjects regarding which its results will be "durable and useful." Ways of thinking that seek to transcend human finitude he identifies as "false" philosophy and religion.

"True philosophy," by contrast, is for Hume content not to seek transcendence or ultimate foundations. Indeed, properly construed, "philosophical decisions are nothing but the reflections of common life, methodized and corrected." In *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* Hume, personifying philosophy as female, characteristically writes: "Happy if she be thence sensible of her temerity, when she pries into these sublime mysteries; and leaving a scene so full of obscurities and perplexities, return, with suitable modesty, to her true and proper province, the examination of common life."

The third book of Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature*, "Of Morals," was published on 5 November 1740. It attracted even less attention than the first two books. Although he maintained that book 3 can be read as an independent text, Hume's philosophy of common life connects this volume with its predecessors. Just as his theory of mind and reason is naturalistic and rooted in common life, so too he constructs a naturalistic moral theory without appealing to the divine or to metaphysical guarantees. Hutcheson and Butler had preceded Hume in developing moral theories based upon an assessment of human nature, Hutcheson centering moral judgments on a natural "moral sense" and Butler appealing to what he described as the natural faculty of "conscience." Fearing the loss of moral objectivity, however, both these earlier thinkers appealed to God to justify the veracity of moral judgments made naturally by people.

Hume, by contrast, makes no such appeal, grounding his moral system instead only on humanity's animal capacity for "sympathy" and on the universalizing "moral sentiment" humans produce through a confluence of moral feeling and natural reason. Adam Smith followed out a similar line of thought in his *Theory of the Moral Sentiments* (1759). As with his theories of perception and causation, Hume's moral theory militates against Christian and rationalistic efforts, including those of Descartes and Locke, to deploy reason or revelation in the establishment of moral norms.

In an influential passage on the grounding of moral judgment, Hume distinguishes facts, which are the provenance of reason and perception, from values, which can only be established through internal feeling:

Nor does this reasoning only prove, that morality consists not in any relations, that are the objects of science; but if examin'd will prove with equal certainty, that it consists not in any *Matter of fact,* which can be discover'd by the understanding. . . . So that when you pronounce any action or character to be vicious, you mean nothing, but that from the constitution of your nature you have a feeling or sentiment of blame from the contemplation of it. . . . I cannot forbear adding to these reasonings an observation, which may, perhaps, be found of some importance. In every system of morality, which I have hitherto met with, I have always remark'd, that the author proceeds for some time in the ordinary way of reasoning, and establishes the being of God, or makes observations concerning human affairs; when of a sudden I am surpriz'd to find, that instead of the usual copulations of propositions, *is,* and *is not,* I meet with no proposition that is not connected with an *ought,* or an *Ought not.* This change is imperceptible; but is, however, of the last consequence. For as this *ought,* or *ought not,* expresses some new relation or affirmation, 'tis necessary that it shou'd be observ'd and explain'd; and at the same time that a reason should be given, for what seems altogether inconceivable, how this new relation can be a deduction from others, which are entirely different from it.

Hume's moral theory also rejects the egoistic naturalism developed by Hobbes in the *Leviathan* (1651) and Mandeville in the *Fable of the Bees.* Maintaining that each individual is generally if not purely selfish, these earlier thinkers were taken to explain apparently altruistic and collectively beneficial actions according to the self-interest of the participants. Hume's strategy, like that of Hutcheson before him, was to accept the naturalistic, sentimental basis for morality developed by the egoists but to mitigate if not wholly undermine it by maintaining that the natural capacity for sympathy and moral sentiment--ignored by the egoists--extends human concern beyond the immediate self. Humans, then, are for Hume not so much selfish as partial. Such partiality, however, is variable and may be attenuated through the action of social customs and conventions so that, at its limit, sympathetic partiality may expand to include the whole of humanity (and perhaps even other animals). In such instances, concern for one's own feelings of pleasure and pain converges with universal regard for others.

What is "virtuous," then, is what is found pleasant or useful to the self and others, while "vicious" actions and characters are those found to be unpleasant and harmful. Some virtues people possess naturally, and--contrary to much of Christian morality-- Hume holds that such qualities are to be esteemed. For Hume it is virtuous to be beautiful, cheerful, proud, and strong. Many virtues, however, are for Hume "artificial" and require the conventions and artifices of society for their existence. Justice is such a virtue. For Hume, what is just is not established independently by reason or revealed to humanity by God. Rather, in the face of human appetites and needs that expand and extend beyond the capacity of people to satisfy them, a society must develop "general rules" for the distribution of goods, services, and resources. Some sets of rules are found, by experience and only by experience, to yield greater human happiness than others.

Conventions of private property, among others, are legitimate because they have been found to secure effectively human happiness. Conventions of justice, accordingly, originate in people's selfish or at least partial efforts to secure their own benefit; but once established, they produce over time artificial sentiments that lead people to act for the benefit of the whole of humanity. In this sense Hume's moral philosophy may be said to prefigure later doctrines of utilitarianism, especially what has come to be known as rule utilitarianism. Hume's emphasis on the attributes of character and deliberation, on the other hand, connects his thought to traditions of virtue in ethics, in particular those of Cicero and Aristotle.

In 1739, probably accompanied by a gift of the first two books of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Hume initiated what became a four-year correspondence with Hutcheson. Hume had returned to Scotland, and the two met in Glasgow during the winter of 1739. Each man seems to have responded warmly to the other, though Hutcheson criticized Hume's treatise for failing to promote virtue strongly enough. Hume dismissed Hutcheson's assessment, replying that he understood himself to be principally an "anatomist" rather than an advocate of virtue. The issue of the reception of his work among the learned, however, was an important one for Hume, and in his next literary project, his *Essays, Moral and Political* (1741-1742), he undertook to render his thoughts in a more pleasing and accessible form. In "Of Essay Writing" Hume dispenses with the portrayal of himself as a scientific anatomist and takes up another persona: "I cannot but consider myself as a Kind of Resident or Ambassador from the Dominions of Learning to those of Conversation; and shall think it my constant Duty to promote a good Correspondence betwixt these two States, which have so great a Dependence on each other."

Essays, Moral and Political was an immediate and popular success. The twenty-seven essays in the two volumes address a wide variety of topics in philosophy, literary and art criticism, politics,

morality, and political economy and indicate Hume's thorough immersion in the common life of his culture. They reveal Hume's developing sentimental, naturalistic, and historicist theories on morals and aesthetics and exhibit his support for the new commercial order developing in Britain and the colonies at the time. A second, corrected edition of the first volume was quickly warranted and was published by midyear. Hume's essay on "A Character of Sir Robert Walpole" attracted perhaps the most immediate attention. Reprinted in many of the leading periodicals of the time--such as the *Gentleman's Magazine*, the *London Magazine*, and the *Scots Magazine*--the essay fell upon an eager public. The British House of Commons was then investigating evidence of corruption in the Westminster election, which had implicated Walpole and soon led to his fall. In contrast to the virulence of the political struggle in which it was situated, Hume's essay portrays Walpole in a moderate, even favorable light. Hume seems to have engaged the editors of the *Newcastle Journal* in an epistolary discussion of the essay. On Walpole's fall and the decline of public interest in the affair, he reduced the essay to a mere footnote in the 1748 edition of the *Essays;* in the 1777 edition it was excised completely.

In 1745 Hume failed to succeed John Pringle to the Chair of Ethics and Pneumatical Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh. His candidacy was attacked by Principal William Wishart and by the body of clergy then called the Ministers of Edinburgh. Hume's candidacy was advanced by his cousin Henry Home and by the Reverend Robert Wallace, among whose sermons may be counted *Ignorance and Superstition a Source of Violence and Cruelty* (1746). Hume's writings, not least of all *A Treatise of Human Nature*, had earned him a reputation for atheism and skepticism, and the opposition to his appointment was furious. Concerning the protests, Hume wrote in a letter to Matthew Sharpe Hoddam dated 25 April 1745 "that such a popular Clamour has been raisd against me in Edinburgh, on account of Scepticism, Heterodoxy & other hard Names, which confound the ignorant, that my Friends find some Difficulty, in working out the Point of my Professorship, which once appear'd so easy." Surprisingly, however, Hume's candidacy was not only opposed by the clergy and by the populace; Hutcheson had also joined the opposition.

From April 1745 to April 1746 Hume served as tutor to the marquess of Annandale, whose manor house, Weldehall, stood near St. Albans in the hill country approximately twenty miles northwest of London. The marquess seems to have been mentally unstable, and Hume fell afoul of both him and the managers of his estate, producing a series of conflicts that culminated in Hume's resignation. If Hume's professional life was fraught with frustration during this time, however, his intellectual life flourished. While in the employ of the marquess he was able to make frequent trips to London and consult various libraries and intellectuals there. His efforts yielded several important works, including *Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding* (published in 1748 and later titled *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*) and *Three Essays, Moral and Political: Never before Published* (1748).

Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding recast book 1 of *A Treatise of Human Nature* in a simpler, more direct, and more condensed form. Although the implications of his epistemological thought are as radical as ever, Hume portrays his work as "Academical" and anti-Pyrrhonian in its cast. The skeptics who had taken over Plato's Academy in ancient Athens--for example Arcesilaus of Pitane (who founded Second Academy circa 250 B.C.) and Carneades of Cyrene--had developed quasi-probabilistic criteria of truth in opposition to claims to epistemological certainty advanced by Stoics such as Cleanthes of Assus and Chrysippus of Soli. (Cleanthes and the Academic skeptic Philo of Larissa appear as voices in Hume's *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion.*)

Although their theories of probability were largely argumentative gambits, not their own positions, and although their views differed significantly from conceptions of probability developed by early modern thinkers, the ancient Academics came to be seen as more moderate and therefore less objectionable skeptics by readers of Hume's time. Much of this vision of the Academic skeptics can be attributed to Cicero's widely read *Academica*, a text that lays out many of the Academics' positions and arguments. In contrast, then, to "excessive" Pyrrhonism (of the sort, for example, engaged by Descartes), Hume characterizes his own brand of skepticism as one that restricts the application of doubt to those speculative ventures that stray beyond the limits of "daily practice and experience" as well as "custom" and "instinct"--in short, beyond "common life."

Hume's letters of the period indicate his dismay over the 1745 Jacobite uprising and invasion of England by the supporters of the Young Pretender, Prince Charles Edward Stuart. More than a year after the event he wrote, in a letter cited by Ernest Campbell Mossner in his 1954 biography of Hume, that "eight Millions of People" might "have been subdued and reduced to Slavery by five Thousand, the bravest, but still the most worthless amongst them." Hume intervened on behalf of his friend Archibald Stewart, Lord Provost of Edinburgh, who in the ensuing backlash of 1747 was prosecuted for surrendering the city too quickly to the Jacobites. In defense of Stewart, Hume wrote an anonymous pamphlet, *A True Account of the Behaviour and Conduct of Archibald Stewart, Esq.; late Lord Provost of Edinburgh. In a letter to a Friend*, (1748).

The oppressive and suspicious climate of the years following the revolt, however, affected Hume in a more direct fashion. His description of the content of his *Three Essays* in a letter of February 1748, shortly before its publication, distances the work from the prevailing political categories of the time: "One is against the original Contract, the System of the Whigs, another against passive Obedience, the System of the Tories; A third upon the Protestant Succession, where I suppose a Man to deliberate, before the Establishment of that Succession, which Family he shou'd adhere to, & to weigh the Advantages & Disadvantages of each." Out of fear of the response of Stuart opponents, "Of the Protestant Succession" was ultimately removed from the final copy, not to appear in print until 1752; it was replaced with another essay, "Of National Characters." In May 1746 Hume received and accepted an invitation from his relative, Lieutenant-General James St. Clair, to accompany him as secretary and then as judge advocate to his forces in a military campaign against the French in North America. The expedition, however, was diverted to France and attacked Lorient, an important center of the French East-India trade, on the coast of Brittany. The attack was a comic disaster, with the town sending out emissaries to negotiate its surrender only to find that the British had evacuated in retreat only hours before. Voltaire lambasted the British for their incompetence in his *Histoire de la Guerre de mil sept cent quarante & un* (History of the War of 1741, 1756). Hume described the event in an unpublished manuscript, "Descent on the Coast of Brittany"; he may have also been author of an answer to Voltaire appearing in the *Monthly Review* (April 1747). In 1747-1748 Hume accompanied St. Clair on another official adventure, a military embassy to Vienna and Turin.

The work Hume published during the period from 1748 to 1762 brought him great wealth and enormous fame among the worlds of British and French letters. Indeed, the 1750s marked the ascendancy of Scottish letters in general. After the publication of *Three Essays* and *Philosophical Essays concerning Human Understanding* in 1748, a reworking of book 3 of *A Treatise of Human Nature* titled *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* appeared in 1751; "of all my writings, historical, philosophical, or literary," Hume observed, it was "incomparably the best." In part 10 of the *Philosophical Essays*, Hume finally published his

critical work "Of Miracles," a text that argues that belief in miracles cannot be rationally justified. As Hume expected, the text attracted a great deal of critical attention and provoked perhaps the greatest number of publications issued against his thought.

Indeed, during the 1750s assaults against Hume's work on religion, in the form of pamphlet literature, had reached a fever pitch, especially in Britain. Among the most widely read of such attacks was the Reverend John Leland's *View of the Principal Deistical Writers* (1755). The *Bibliothèque Raisonnée des ouvrages des savans de l'Europe* (April-May--June, 1740) called Hume one of "the most subtle advocates of unbelief." In 1766 Hume wrote to economist Anne Robert Jacques Turgot: "I cou'd cover the Floor of a large Room with the Books and Pamphlets wrote against me." Among the scholarly replies to Hume could be found publications by the Reverend Thomas Rutherforth of Cambridge University (*Credibility of Miracles defended against the Author of Philosophical Essays*, 1751), William Adams of Oxford (*Essay on Mr. Hume's Essay on Miracles*, 1751), John Douglas, later Bishop of Salisbury (*The Criterion: or, Miracles Examined*, 1752), and James Campbell, principal of Marischal College Aberdeen, who produced perhaps the most elaborate reply (*Dissertation on Miracles: Containing an Examination of the Principles advanced by David Hume, Esq; in an Essay on Miracles*, 1762).

In 1752 Hume published *Political Discourses*, which he identifies in his autobiography as "the only work of mine that was successful on the first Publication." This text, perhaps more than any other, catapulted him into prominence. One of Hume's essays in *Political Discourses*, "Of the Populousness of Ancient Nations," enmeshed him in what was then an important controversy; indeed, in a letter to the Reverend Robert Wallace from 22 September 1751 Hume referred to it as "the most curious & important of all Questions of Erudition." Hume rejected the idea of cultural decline that had been dominant until the seventeenth century, but he also rejected the "modern" idea of progress that had gained favor in his own time. On the question of population he was the first thinker of rank to maintain, albeit cautiously, the greater populousness of the modern world over the ancient. Hume's principal though amiable opponent in the controversy was Wallace, whose *A Dissertation on the Numbers of Mankind in Antient and Modern Times* appeared in 1753.

In 1754 the first volume of Hume's powerful *History of England*, *The History of Great Britain, Vol. I, Containing the reigns of James I and Charles I*, was published; the last volume did not appear until 1762. By the mid 1750s Hume was also famous (or at least infamous) in Italy, so much so that in December 1761 his works were placed on the "Index" of forbidden texts maintained by the Roman Catholic Church. In 1748 the Baron de Montesquieu was so impressed with *Essays, Moral and Political* that he sent Hume a copy of his *Esprit des Loix*, in reply to which Hume returned a copy of the *Philosophical Essays.* In 1758 Edward Gibbon wrote of an exciting event: "I am . . . to meet . . . the great David Hume"; in 1773 Gibbon rejoined a friend in Edinburgh by writing that "You tell me of a long list of Dukes, lairds, and Chieftains of Renown to whom you are recommended; were I with you, I should prefer one David to them all."

In 1751, after the marriage of his brother, Hume moved from Ninewells to Edinburgh, taking residence with his sister on the south side of the Lawnmarket in "Riddle's Land," at the top of the Westbow. In 1753 the two removed to "Jack's Land" beyond the Netherbow in the Canongate, near the Tollbooth prison. Hume apparently kept a study in James's Court, however, on the Lawnmarket. He resided near the Canongate for the next nine years, during which time he composed and published much of the *History of England.*

In the latter months of 1751 Hume was dealt a difficult blow. The death of Thomas Craigie, who had succeeded Hutcheson at the University of Glasgow as professor of moral philosophy in

1746, afforded Hume another opportunity to acquire an academic post. William Mure of Caldwell, Gilbert Elliot of Minto, professor of civil law Hercules Lindesay, and professor of anatomy William Cullen (who later became Hume's physician) supported his candidacy. Adam Smith, who had recently become acquainted with Hume and later became one of his closest friends, was, perhaps because of his concern over the public reaction, less than enthusiastic about supporting him. Indeed, the opposition was fierce, especially among the clergy, and seems to have in part been driven by the political machinations of Archibald Campbell, third Duke of Argyll, formerly the earl of Islay, who was popularly known as the "King of Scotland." In the end the conservative and cautionary forces defeated Hume's candidacy and on 22 April 1752 installed Smith, who accordingly resigned to James Clow his prior position as chairman of logic.

Compensation for Hume's defeat in Glasgow, however, had already been secured in Edinburgh by his election to the post of librarian to the Faculty of Advocates on 28 January 1752, an appointment that gave him unrestricted access to the greatest library in Scotland and thereby immeasurably enhanced the resources available to him in the composition of the *History of England.* In the case of this appointment, the opposition to Hume was also vigorous and determined, being led by the lord president, Robert Dundas, and his son, dean of the faculty. In a letter to John Clephane dated 4 February 1752 Hume wrote: "The violent cry of Deism, atheism, and scepticism was raised against me; and 'twas represented that my election would be giving the sanction of the greatest and most learned body of men in this country to my profane and irreligious principles."

This time, however, popular opinion was mustered in support of Hume. Public demonstrations were organized, and the town became animated on the issue as it had on no other since the trial of Archibald Stewart. On Hume's victory, the elation of many overflowed into the streets; a torchlight parade was staged by the Edinburgh corporation of porters and messengers. In the same letter to Clephane he wrote: "The whole body of cadies brought flambeaux, and made illuminations to mark their pleasure at my success; and next morning I had the drums and town music at my door, to express their joy, as they said, of my being made a great man." Hume retained the office until January 1757, when he resigned the post and it was transferred to the philosopher and historian Adam Ferguson. Hume's tenure as librarian was not entirely serene, however, and after a dispute with the curators concerning the acquisition of controversial texts in 1754 he transferred his salary in the form of an annuity to the poet Thomas Blacklock, whom he continued to support after his resignation.

Displacing Catherine Macaulay's republican *History of England* (1763-1783) and Tobias Smollett's humane *Complete History of England* (1757-1758), Hume's *History of England* (1754-1762) became the chief text on the subject consulted by the literate Anglophonic world until well into the nineteenth century. So successful was it that the text became the best-selling history of any kind to be published in Britain before Gibbon's *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776-1788). Hume's work is remarkable not only because of its enormous scope but also because of the new and critical historiography he developed. Whiggish histories, such as Macaulay's, advocated a progressive view of history, one in which human society had moved from a lower, primitive condition to a higher, more perfect one. For Whiggish historians, the trajectory of history could be charted from the infancy of liberty in the Magna Carta (1215) to the Glorious Revolution of 1688. Although in many ways, particularly in its view of the Middle Ages, Hume's text is consistent with such a view, he takes pains to understand historical events in terms of the participants' self-understandings and resists appealing to a transhistorical narrative to order his account. The result is an historiography more historicist and relatively more sympathetic to the

decisions of historical figures than those of his contemporaries and predecessors.

The curious "Dialogue" (1751), appended to the *Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals*, and Hume's essay "Of some Remarkable Customs" are consistent with this historiography in arguing for the relativity of morals and in portraying an attempt to understand ancient practices (which for those of Hume's time appeared as incestuous and parricidal) in terms of the norms employed by those who had engaged in them. Accordingly, Hume resisted judging Charles I and the Stuarts harshly, and his sympathetic restraint earned him a reputation for conservatism and condemnation from liberal leaders such as William Pitt the Elder.

Liberal criticism retarded the sales of Hume's *History of England*, at least at first, and in a sense such criticism is well founded. While it would be wrong to characterize Hume as a Jacobite or a monarchist, and while he supported an expanding commercial society, advocated the extension of liberty, and criticized the influence of religion on public affairs, he did not embrace the philosophical dynamics of liberal political theory. Book 3 of *A Treatise of Human Nature*, especially his sections on justice, as well as critical essays such as "Of the First Principles of Government" and "Of the Original Contract," aim to undermine liberal efforts to ground the legitimacy of government in an antecedent social contract. Not an adherent to the doctrine of intrinsic or God-given rights, Hume looked instead to custom, tradition, and the natural human capacities for pleasure, pain, and sympathy to legitimate the state, a position that excludes neither monarchical nor parliamentary rule.

Hume also found himself concerned about the enthusiastic excesses to which those committed to a metaphysically or rationalistically based liberalism were often inclined. Such concern, for example, led Hume to condemn John Wilkes and those who fomented the Wilkes riots of 1762. The conservatism of Hume's political theory, then, is a form of philosophical skepticism. It holds that ultimately reason, theology, and metaphysics cannot and should not ground political institutions but that society must accept the finitude of the human condition and rely instead solely on historical practice and natural feeling. The Irish theorist Edmund Burke also attacked Wilkes in *Thoughts on the Cause of the Present Discontents* (1770), and in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790) he criticized what he found to be the excesses that metaphysical liberalism had produced across the English Channel. In his regard for the importance of tradition and custom Burke produced a political theory that, though significantly more partisan, resembles Hume's in important ways. Burke and Hume had met in 1759. Hume had been impressed with Burke's *Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757). Burke seems to have regarded Hume as politically sympathetic, but he disapproved of his views on religion and grew increasingly distant and critical of him.

Aside from his publications, Hume's influence on Scottish letters was also felt through his participation in various scholarly societies. Late in 1751 he was elected to the position of joint secretary of the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh with Alexander Monro. In 1753 Hume was also elected to membership in the Literary Society of Glasgow, a group that had been established a year earlier. In 1754 Hume joined with Smith, Allan Ramsay, Kames, and his good friend Alexander Wedderburn in founding and serving as treasurer of the influential Select Society. The Philosophical Society, established in 1731 to collect and publish essays on medicine and surgery, had expanded in 1737 under the direction of Professor Colin Maclaurin to include arts, science, and letters more broadly conceived. In 1783, through the influence of William Robertson, the group was chartered as the Royal Society of Edinburgh. Under Hume's and Monro's editorship, the society published in 1754 *Essays and Observations, Physical and Literary, Read before a Society in Edinburgh and Published by Them.* In the process of producing this publication Hume

brokered a dispute between Kames and Professor John Stewart on Newtonian physics. Hume's efforts through these societies is particularly significant in having helped religious moderates, such as his friends Robertson and Hugh Blair, supplant conservative elements of the Scottish Kirk.

In conservative churchmen, however, Hume found vigorous and hostile adversaries. The Reverend John Witherspoon--who became the only clerical signatory of the Declaration of Independence--had already attacked religious moderation together with Kames and Hume in his exceedingly popular *Ecclesiastical Characteristics* (1753). Witherspoon was joined in the assault by the Reverend George Anderson, in his *An Estimate of the Profit and Loss of Religion* (1753), and the Reverend John Bonar of Cockpen, in his *An Analysis of the Moral and Religious Sentiments contained in the Writings of Sopho, and David Hume, Esq.* (1755).

The General Assembly of the Church of Scotland considered formally prosecuting and excommunicating Hume and Kames in 1755 and 1756, an act of censure that would render social and professional life not impossible but decidedly more difficult for each man. Supporters of Hume, especially among the moderates, mounted a vigorous defense both in the press and before the General Assembly. The most impressive of these efforts were, perhaps, those of Wedderburn and Wallace, the former arguing that if Hume were in fact an atheist, a Christian body such as the Church of Scotland would have no jurisdiction over him: "Why are you to summon him before you more than any Jew or Mahometan who may happen to be travelling within your bounds? Your *liber*, as we lawyers call it, is *ex facie* inept, irrelevant, and null, for it begins by alleging that the defender denies and disbelieves Christianity, and then it seeks to proceed against him and to punish him as a Christian." The cases against first Kames and then Hume were ultimately dismissed.

In 1757 Hume published *Four Dissertations* with Andrew Millar in London. The original plan of the text was to include a now-lost essay on the metaphysical principles of geometry. Hume also considered including essays on suicide and the immortality of the soul but suppressed them both when, through the agency of the Reverend William Warburton, he was threatened with prosecution. *Four Dissertations* remains remarkable, however, for the presence of *The Natural History of Religion.* Although refusing to suppress it, Hume altered this text in the face of Warburton's threats. Its central thesis, nonetheless, remained intact: religious belief is the natural product of the human mind's confrontation with the natural world, and its progress from animism through polytheism through monotheism can be explained naturalistically. Furthermore, religious beliefs of various forms are liable to bear with them attending moral inclinations. Polytheism lends itself to superstition and moral variation but also to tolerance. Monotheism, although conceptually more sophisticated and more inclined to produce rigorous moral standards, is also given to intolerance. Hume, in *The Natural History of Religion*, not only carries on his social and moral critique of religion while naturalistically challenging the claims of religious dogma; he also uses naturalism to reconceive religion itself.

In October 1763 Hume assumed the position of private secretary to the British ambassador to France, the earl of Hertford. He held this position for a little more than two years, until January 1766, the last six months of which he also served as the ambassador's chargé d'affaires. On arrival in Paris and his presentation to the royal court at Fountainebleau, Hume, whose reputation had preceded him, was bathed in adulation. While in France he was a regular visitor to various salons, becoming personally close to the comtesse de Boufflers.

Hume's immersion in French intellectual life brought him into contact with many important French intellectuals. The *philosophe* Jean le Rond

d'Alembert was among his favorites, and through him Hume became acquainted with the poet, critic, and dramatist Jean-François Marmontel. Georges-Louis Leclerc Comte de Buffon came to know Hume and presented him with a portion of his important *Histoire naturelle, génerale et particulière* (Natural History, General and Particular, 1749-1788). Hume also became familiar with figures such as Denis Diderot, editor and author of *L'encyclopédie* (1751-1776); Turgot; the novelist Charles Pinot Duclos; and the *philosophe* Claude-Adrien Helvétius, whose *De l'Esprit* (1758) Hume had refused to translate and whom Hume had declined to support for membership in the Royal Society in 1763. Hume had earlier engaged Paul Henri Thiry, Baron d'Holbach, in correspondence, and their friendship was resumed during his stay in France. Hume's affiliations with the French were generally pleasant for him, and he considered making permanent residence there. He found himself, however, at times disaffected among the *philosophes,* discovering his skeptical reserve to be as inconsistent with dogmatic atheism and deism as it had been with dogmatic Christianity.

In the latter part of 1765 Hume assisted Jean-Jacques Rousseau, author of *Du contrat social* (The Social Contract, 1762), in fleeing Switzerland and France, where he had been persecuted for sedition and impiety, for the protection of England. Traveling together, the two men embarked from Paris on 4 January 1766, reaching London on 13 January. Rousseau, however, who settled in Derbyshire, came to believe that Hume was in fact a conspirator with his enemies and by July had accused Hume of duplicity, breaking off all connection with him. News of the conflict spread among the intelligentsia on both sides of the Channel, ultimately provoking Hume to produce an account of the event, the pamphlet *Exposé succinct de la contestation qui s'est élevée entre M. Hume et M. Rousseau, avec les pièces justificatives* (1766; translated as *A Concise and Genuine Account of the Dispute between Mr. Hume and Mr. Rousseau*, 1766), edited by D'Alembert and Jean-Baptiste Suard. Hume responded to Rousseau's accusations not with anger or resentment but considered them simply part of a sad and "miserable affair," and Rousseau returned to France in 1767.

In 1767 Hume took up residence in London, having assumed the post of undersecretary of state for the Northern Department of the British government. During this time he was able to circulate through venues of high society in the capital. Although his commission expired in January 1768, Hume remained in London until August 1769. Among the benefits of his connection to members of the government was his acquisition of permission from the Crown to inspect the papers of various government archives, access that assisted him in the continued writing and improvement of his *History of England.* Hume is thought to have authored at this time a letter to the editor of the *Gentleman's Magazine* (volume 39, 1769), accompanied by a translation of the prospectus to the Abbé Morellet's proposed *Dictionnaire de Commerce*, as well as an "Advertisement" for Baron Christof Hermann von Manstein's *Memoirs of Russia, Historical, Political, and Military, from the Year MDCCXXVII to MDCCXLIV.* Returning to Edinburgh in 1769, Hume took up residences in James's Court. In 1771 Hume completed construction on his last place of residence, a house on the southwest corner of St. Andrew's Square in the New Town, the corner of a lane that was soon dubbed "St. David's Street."

Criticism of Hume's thought in his later years centered around what became known as Scottish Common Sense Philosophy. Thomas Reid, professor of philosophy at King's College, University of Aberdeen, and a friendly acquaintance of Hume, had published the influential *Inquiry into the Human Mind, on the Principles of Common Sense* in 1764; Reid was followed by the poet James Oswald and philosopher Dugald Stewart, who wrote *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind* (1792).

The more dramatic *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth; in opposition to Sophistry and Scepticism* (1770) brought common-sense criticism of Hume before the public's attention. Copies began to circulate of an unpublished pamphlet by Beattie, "Castle of Scepticism" (1767), which depicted Hume as the inhabitant of a forbidding castle who lured in the unsuspecting in order to subject them to various (skeptical) tortures. The work was enormously popular and ran through five editions by 1776. Hume never replied to Beattie directly, but in October 1775 he did take the extraordinary step of publishing an "Advertisement" that he instructed his publisher to attach to the second volume of all future editions of *Essays and Treatises.* The advertisement was, he told his publisher Strahan, "a compleat Answer to Dr. Reid and to that bigotted and silly Fellow, Beattie." The advertisement is a curious addendum, for it disavows *A Treatise of Human Nature* as a "juvenile" work that he had sent "to the press too early." "Henceforth," writes Hume about the material in *Essays and Treatises*, including the *Enquiries*, "the Author desires, that the following Pieces may alone be regarded as containing his philosophical sentiments and principles."

Systematic philosophical inquiry of the sort Hume engaged was little known in the British colonies outside of a few private collections and important centers of learning such as Harvard College and the College of New Jersey (now Princeton University), where the former Edinburgher John Witherspoon--a conservative Presbyterian critic of Hume and religious moderation--had become president in 1768 and where Hume's thought almost certainly would have been addressed. On taking office Witherspoon condemned the excesses of Berkeley he found pervasive at the college, advocating in its place Scottish Common Sense philosophy, an alternative that also appealed to Thomas Jefferson.

Copies of Hume's *History of England* were rather common in the North American colonies. They were not, however, received uncritically. The history had acquired a reputation for being pro-Tory and was therefore widely condemned, often by prominent figures such as Jonathan Edwards and Jefferson. Writing to John Adams in 1816, Jefferson remarked that the *History of England* "has done more to sap the free principles of the English Constitution than the largest standing army." The severity of early American disapprobation for Hume's text was in 1771 so severe, in fact, that the colonial reprint publisher Robert Bell was unable to interest booksellers in an American edition. Despite the clamor against his texts, however, the frequency of reference to Hume's thought indicates that his work nevertheless managed to become widely read among political, literate Americans.

Among those devoted to Hume was Benjamin Franklin. The two men became acquainted with one another in 1757 when Franklin was in London. In 1760 and 1771 Franklin traveled to Edinburgh to visit Hume, and a 1760 letter from Franklin suggests that he had for some time been a consistent reader of Hume's work, at least his essays. Franklin wrote to Hume on 27 September 1760 that "I have lately read with great Pleasure, as I do every thing of yours, the excellent Essay on the *Jealousy of Commerce.*" Franklin sent Hume a paper on the lightning rod to be read before the Philosophical Society of Edinburgh, and, interestingly enough, Franklin made use of a rather Humean argument before the Philadelphia Convention of 1787 in maintaining that no high officers in any branch of government should receive a salary. Other colonial figures made use of Hume in advancing arguments on political issues, including whether to have a militia system or a standing army and whether governors or assemblies ought to be invested with the right to set crown officers' fees.

Alexander Hamilton, too, was acquainted with and influenced by Hume's work. The 1780 Committee on Finance in the Continental Congress studied Hume's economic essays, and in the 1787 Philadelphia Congress Hamilton appealed to Hume, perhaps speciously, in

arguing against legally penalizing corrupt officeholders. Hume also apparently taught Hamilton that an expanding commercial order is consistent, even complementary, with a stable republic. In "Federalist No. 85," the last of *The Federalist Papers*, Publius (here Hamilton) quotes directly from Hume's important essay "Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences." Hamilton writes of Hume: "The zeal for attempts to amend, prior to the establishment of the Constitution, must abate in every man who is ready to accede to the truth of the following observations of a writer equally solid an ingenious: 'To balance a large state or society [says he], whether monarchical or republican, on general laws, is a work of so great difficulty that no human genius, however comprehensive, is able, by the mere dint of reason and reflection, to effect it. The judgments of many must unite in the work; EXPERIENCE must guide their labor; TIME must bring it to perfection, and the FEELING of inconveniences must correct the mistakes which they *inevitably* fall into in their first trials and experiments.'"

James Madison's "Federalist No. 10," however, represents perhaps Hume's best-known point of influence on the new American state. Hume's 1752 essay "Idea of a Perfect Commonwealth" in the *Political Discourses* may well have provided the intellectual source and underpinning for Madison's vision. Revising the position developed by James Harrington in *Commonwealth of Oceana* (1656), Hume advanced the then-startling idea that a large, properly constituted republic could be established and made stable. Indeed, the very size of it, Hume asserted, would contribute to its stability by inhibiting the development of faction. This was a highly unusual notion, contrary to then-prevailing contentions supported by Montesquieu and most other political theorists of the time. Madison's defense of the new, relatively enormous American republic in "Federalist No. 10" is astonishingly similar to Hume's account.

Other important colonial figures also apparently drew on Hume's work. Among the most prominent of these may be counted Samuel Adams, John Dickinson, Charles Lee, George Washington, John Randolph of Roanoke, Benjamin Rush, and Robert Carter of Nomini Hall. Those men whom Hume inspired, however, were not always members of the group of colonial figures who have retained widespread esteem. In producing pamphlets and apologetic literature, a number of proslavery authors also drew on Hume's work, specifically on the claims he advanced in a note appended to his essay "Of National Characters," about the inferiority of darker-skinned peoples.

Hume died at approximately four o'clock in the afternoon on 25 August 1776 in his home on St. Andrew's Square in Edinburgh. The apartment was situated on what was first popularly known as and then officially became "St. David's Street." His death was not sudden or unexpected, as he had been aware of himself wasting away through gastrointestinal disorders since 1772. In preparation for his death he drafted a will arranging for his burial on the south side of the Calton Hill Church Yard, overlooking the north side of the Old Town. He also arranged for a privately funded monument to be built over his grave, to be inscribed with only his name and the dates of his birth and death.

Hume made efforts to ensure the publication of manuscripts that had earlier been suppressed for reasons of prudence, as well as a short autobiography he produced in April 1776. Smith, to whom Hume had granted the right to make amendments, published *The Life of David Hume, Esq.: Written by Himself*, with William Strahan in 1777. *Two Essays*, on suicide and on the immortality of the soul, were released as an unauthorized publication the same year, receiving widespread and generally hostile attention for their heterodoxical positions on the subjects. Hume remained intellectually active until shortly before his demise, ordering and reading Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) and Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* in the last months of his life. He apparently also took

comfort in reading Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead* as the end approached. He mused about arguments that others had produced in their attempts to convince Charon that their time had not yet come, but, he told Smith, he could not honestly advance any of them: "he had no house to finish, he had no daughter to provide for, he had no enemies upon whom he wished to revenge himself." According to Smith, Hume then remarked: "I have done every thing of consequence which I ever meant to do, and I could at no time expect to leave my relations and friends in a better situation than that in which I am now likely to leave them: I therefore have all reason to die contented."

In 1779, probably through the agency of Hume's nephew David, the *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* was published. The text, on which Hume had been working since at least the early 1750s, followed the rhetorical format and often the argumentation of Cicero's *De Natura Deorum*, an allusion to which much of its audience would have been alert. Pitting a natural theologian (Cleanthes, who is aligned with Cicero's Balbus and whose name recalls the ancient leader of the Stoa) against a pious and enthusiastic believer (Demea, aligned with Cicero's Vellius) and a shrewdly rational skeptic (Philo, after Cotta from *De Natura Deorum* and Cicero's skeptical eclectic teacher, Philo of Alexandria), the text develops a series of trenchant lines of argument aimed at undermining the aspirations of what has been called "natural theology" or the attempt to employ natural reason in reflecting on the natural world in order to determined truths concerning the existence, nature, and commandments of God. Hume seems to have drawn arguments to undermine natural theology from Butler, Clarke, George Cheyne, and Colin Maclaurin in addition to Cicero and Sextus Empiricus.

Hume's exposition has seemed especially effective against the "argument from design," a line of reasoning pursued by natural theologians, which maintains that the order, beauty, complexity, and coherence of the natural world testify to the existence of an intelligent, purposeful, and supernatural designer. This argument gained significant currency after having been advanced by Newton in his *Philosophiae Naturalis Principia Mathematica* (1687). One of its most popular renditions appeared in Dutch scientist-theologian Bernard Nieuwentyt's *The Religious Philosophers* (1714; five English editions between 1718-1745). For many, *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* has remained the definitive text for subverting the argument from design.

Hume's death had become an important, symbolic event for many, and crowds gathered to see whether or not the so-called Great Infidel would embrace Christianity on his deathbed. James Boswell, who had been corresponding with Hume since 1763, was particularly disturbed by his equanimity in the face of death, calling on him in 1775 and on 7 July 1776, shortly before he succumbed, to interview him about his convictions. The conversation apparently annoyed Hume and left Boswell deeply disturbed. Boswell recounts that he "said he never had entertained any belief in Religion since he began to read Locke and Clarke . . . He then said flatly that the Morality of every Religion was bad, and, I really thought, was not jocular when he said 'that when he heard a man was religious, he concluded he was a rascal, though he had known some instances of very good men being religious.' . . . I had a strong curiosity to be satisfied if he persisted in disbelieving a future state even when he had death before his eyes. I was persuaded from what he now said, and from his manner of saying it, that he did persist. I asked him if it was possible that there might be a future state. He answered It was possible that a piece of coal put upon the fire would not burn. . . . I asked him if the thought of Annihilation never gave him any uneasiness. He said not the least; no more than the thought that he had not been, as Lucretius observes."

Hume seems to have remained a skeptic until the end. In the immediate aftermath of his death and throughout the nineteenth century his influence

seems to have been felt principally in matters of religion and history. Hume's naturalism too retained its vitality and influenced thinkers such as Charles Darwin and Thomas Henry Huxley. John Stuart Mill's inductive logical theory was greatly inspired by Hume. In the early twentieth century Hume's epistemology and philosophy of mind helped to determine the formation of positivism and advances in the philosophy of science. More recently, Hume's sociopolitical work has again attracted serious attention, and studies of his work have broadened from a relatively narrow focus on *A Treatise of Human Nature* and the *Enquiries* to interpretations of the Humean corpus as a whole. David Hume remains a central figure in college and university instruction in early modern philosophy.

Papers: The most significant holding of David Hume's papers is the Hume Manuscripts at the National Library of Scotland. Other manuscripts, journals, and official papers are held at the Huntington Library; the British Library; the British Museum; the Pierpont Morgan Library; the Keynes Library, King's College, Cambridge University; the Public Record Office, London; the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library; the City Chambers, Edinburgh; and the New Register House, Edinburgh.

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