

David Hume (1711-76)

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Biography

David Hume, one of the most prominent philosophers of the eighteenth century, was an empiricist, a naturalist and a sceptic. His aim, as stated in his early masterpiece, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (written and published when he was in his twenties), was to develop a 'science of man' – what would now be called a cognitive and conative psychology – that would provide a philosophical foundation for the sciences, both those that concern human life (such as 'logic, morals, criticism, and politics') and those that are merely investigated by human beings (such as 'mathematics, natural philosophy, and natural religion'). Although the *Treatise* itself received relatively little attention upon its publication in 1739–40, Hume's philosophical views attracted greater attention as a result of *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (1748), *An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751), various essays and his posthumously published *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* (1779). He was also noted as a historian, diplomat and essayist on political and economic topics.

One aspect of Hume's empiricism was methodological, consisting in his endorsement and practice of 'the experimental method' requiring that claims in his science of man be derived from and supported by experience rather than from intellectual ratiocination independent of experience. In this, he saw himself as following in the tradition of Locke and as standing against the excesses of earlier philosophers such as Descartes. But whereas natural philosophers (that is, natural scientists) such as Newton could simply design experiments to answer questions about the behaviour of bodies in particular circumstances, the premeditation of attempts to place the mind in a particular situation could alter the mind's natural operations, he maintained, so that, as he states in the Introduction to the *Treatise*, we must 'glean up our experiments in this science from a cautious observation of human life, and take them as they appear in the common course of the world, by men's behaviour in company, in affairs, and in their pleasures'. Another aspect of his empiricism was conceptual, consisting in his doctrine – itself defended through use of the experimental method – that all ideas, and hence all concepts, must be copied from 'impressions', that is, sensory or internal experiences. He thus also followed Locke in rejecting Cartesian 'innate ideas'.

Hume's pursuit of the experimental method proved, in his conduct of it, to support his methodological empiricism as well; for he claimed to find that all beliefs concerning 'matters of fact and real existence' – as distinguished from pure 'relations of ideas' such as mathematics – depend on the relation of cause and effect, and that relations of cause and effect, in turn, can only be discovered through the observed constant conjunction of events of one type with events of another type. Yet although we (philosophers included) easily suppose that we perceive a 'necessary connexion' binding an effect to its cause in such a way that it would be a contradiction for the one not to follow the other, there is in fact no such contradiction; for a cause and its effect are always two distinct events, either of which can be conceived to occur without

the other. The attribution of a 'necessary connexion' to causes and effects results from the mind's projection onto them of its own feeling of mental determination to make an inference from the occurrence of an event of the one type to an event of the other after experience of their constant conjunction. Such inferences are not themselves founded on any process of reasoning concerning the uniformity of nature, for the denial of the uniformity of nature is not contradictory, and any attempt to defend the uniformity of nature by appeal to past experience would assume what the reasoning was supposed to establish. Instead, they are based on the mental mechanism of 'custom or habit'. While he endorses – and engages in – reasoning, Hume finds that many operations of the mind, including those involved in volition and morals, owe less to reason and more to other features of the mind's operations than might have been supposed.

Hume's naturalism consisted in his determination to treat the human mind as a part of nature, equally susceptible to scientific investigation and equally subject to ordinary causal laws, without invoking either special natural properties or supernatural entities. Indeed, he emphasized the extent to which human mental operations resemble those of animals. He was a determinist concerning both physical and mental events, holding that a given set of circumstances will always produce the same outcome in accordance with uniform laws of nature. Unlike Spinoza, however, he held this doctrine only because he thought it was supported by experience as a likely extrapolation from the successes of scientific enquiry. His naturalism is evident in his treatment of morals, which he explains as deriving from the human 'moral sense' – that is, the capacity to feel a distinctive kind of approbation and disapprobation when considering features of character – that is, activated primarily by natural sympathy with those who are affected by the character traits in question. Virtue and vice acquire their central role in human life primarily through their ability to inspire love and pride, hatred and humility. Hume did not ever explicitly deny the existence of a deity, and he allowed that the hypothesis of an intelligent cause for the universe has a natural persuasive force. However, he forcefully criticized arguments for the existence of God, for religious miracles, for an afterlife with rewards and punishments, and for a deity's moral goodness or moral concern. He regarded religion as being largely pernicious for both enquiry and morals.

Hume did not use the terms 'empiricist' or 'naturalist'. He did, however, call himself a sceptic. His scepticism was the consequence of his discovery, in the course of his investigations, of the many 'infirmities' of human cognitive nature, including its inability to defend by reasoning many of its own most fundamental operations. While he held that intense consideration of these infirmities can produce a state of extreme but temporary doubt and bewilderment, the scepticism that he endorsed and sought to practice was 'mitigated' in degree, consisting in a certain diffidence and lack of dogmatism in all of his judgments. In addition to this general mitigated scepticism, however, he also recommended a complete suspense of judgment concerning matters entirely beyond our experience – such as cosmological speculation concerning 'the origins of worlds'.

1. Life and writings

David Hume was born in Edinburgh on 26 April 1711, just four years after the formal union of England and Scotland that created Great Britain. The influx of Isaac Newton's natural science

and John Locke's philosophy into the Scottish universities paralleled the political union (see NEWTON, I.; LOCKE, J.). Both Newton and Locke were widely seen as championing an empirical approach to knowledge in which observation and experimentation were to drive, constrain and determine theory. This approach stood in broad contrast to the readiness of many continental philosophers of the seventeenth century – such as René DESCARTES, Nicholas MALEBRANCHE, Benedict de SPINOZA and Gottfried Wilhelm LEIBNIZ – to allow high-level theoretical commitments to structure our understanding of the world and to determine the interpretation of sensory observations. Of particular concern to eighteenth-century philosophers were questions about the contents and faculties of the mind, causal reasoning, causal necessity, free will, God, the external world, personal identity, scepticism, motivation, the foundations of morality and political obligation. Hume was to make important contributions on each of these topics.

Hume was the youngest of three children. His mother, Katherine, was the daughter of Sir David Falconer, President of the College of Justice; his father, Joseph Home, practised law and was related to the Earls of Home. (Hume altered the spelling of his surname as a young man in order to aid its proper pronunciation.) The family maintained a modest estate, Ninewells, located in Berwickshire near the English border. Joseph Hume died in 1713, and young David was raised by his mother, a steadfast Calvinist who devoted herself to her children and never remarried. (She reportedly once declared, 'Our Davie is a fine, good-natured crater [creature], but uncommon wake-minded'; the now-obscure final adjective of this famous but perhaps apocryphal remark has been interpreted variously as meaning 'stupid', 'weak-willed' and 'intellectually alert'). Hume greatly admired his mother, but he rejected all religious commitments from an early age.

Between 1723 and 1725, Hume studied at the Edinburgh Town College – now the University of Edinburgh – with his older brother John. Among his subjects of study were Greek, logic, metaphysics and Newtonian 'natural philosophy'. From 1725 until 1734, he resided at Ninewells – preparing for a legal career, although he later allowed (in his *My Own Life*) that he read more philosophy than law. An attempt at a business career in 1734 under the tutelage of a merchant in Bristol ended in disappointment after a trial of just a few months, and the 23-year-old Hume moved to rural France to live cheaply while pursuing philosophy.

After a year in Rheims, Hume settled in La Flèche, site of the Jesuit college at which Descartes had been educated. He took full advantage of the college library as he devoted himself to writing, and in 1737 he moved to London to pursue the publication of the result, which is now regarded as his most important philosophical work. The work was *A Treatise of Human Nature* (cited here as THN), described in its subtitle as 'An Attempt to introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects'. By 'moral subjects' Hume meant not only ethics, but human nature and human affairs more generally; the book's aim, as he described it in the Introduction, was to provide a 'science of man' – that is, what we would now call a cognitive and conative psychology. Because much of human knowledge *concerns* human beings and all of it is *acquired* by human beings using their human cognitive faculties, Hume proposed that such a science would provide 'a foundation almost entirely new' for all of the sciences. Just as Thales'

inauguration of the study of non-human nature was followed by Socrates' inauguration of the study of human nature, he wrote, so too Francis Bacon's application of the experimental method to the study of non-human nature had been followed by the application of the experimental method to the study of human nature by Locke and some other 'late philosophers of England' (see THALES; SOCRATES; BACON, F.). The unstated implication was that, just as Newton had perfected the former, Hume would endeavour to perfect the latter. Book I ('Of the Understanding') and Book II ('Of the Passions') of the *Treatise* were published together in 1739, anonymously; Book III ('Of Morals') appeared, also anonymously, in the following year.

Despite his efforts to obtain a wide readership for the book – he even composed an anonymous review, *An Abstract of a Treatise of Human Nature*, explaining some of its leading points and focusing particular attention on its central account of causal inference in Book I – the book's reception was a great disappointment to him. Although it did receive a few (largely negative) reviews, he wrote later, that the *Treatise* 'fell deadborn from the press, failing to elicit even a murmur from the zealots' (*My Own Life*); and indeed, the initial printing of 1,000 copies did not sell out during Hume's lifetime. Returning to Ninewells to live with his mother and brother, he turned his hand to essay writing, and his *Essays, Moral and Political* (2 vols, 1741–2) were somewhat better received. In 1745, he was considered for a professorship (of 'moral and pneumatical philosophy') at the University of Edinburgh. Although he was friendly with many of the more liberal clergy of Edinburgh, he was denied the chair because of the perceived anti-religious tenor of the *Treatise*. In the course of his candidacy, he wrote a pamphlet, published as *A Letter from a Gentleman to His Friend in Edinburgh*, rebutting theistically motivated objections to the book, including the charge of denying the causal maxim that every event has a cause.

Following the disappointment at Edinburgh, Hume took up a position as a tutor and caretaker to the psychologically troubled young Marquis of Annandale, a post that lasted for a year. There followed several years travelling as an aide and secretary to General St Clair (a distant relative), first on a military expedition – for which Hume's reading in law allowed him to serve in the administration of military justice as Judge Advocate – that was originally projected to be against French Canada but which was ultimately directed against the coast of France (1746), and then on a series of diplomatic missions to Vienna and Turin (1747–8). In 1748 he published *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding* (cited here as *EHU*), which he later described as a 'recasting' of the material of Book I of *A Treatise of Human Nature* in response to his judgment that the poor reception of the *Treatise* had to do 'more with the manner than with the matter' (*My Own Life*) of the earlier work. He did, however, affix an 'advertisement' in 1775 to his collected *Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects* – which included the *Enquiry* but not *A Treatise of Human Nature* – asking that his philosophy not be judged on the basis of 'that juvenile work'. This request was a response to the use of substantial quotations from the *Treatise* made by 'that bigotted silly Fellow, Beattie' (*The Letters of David Hume* 1932, Letter 509) in Beattie's highly critical and largely uncomprehending 1770 work, *An Essay on the Nature and Immutability of Truth* (see BEATTIE, J.).

Whereas the Treatise had aimed at a rich and intricate ‘science of man’, the Enquiry aimed at a more streamlined ‘mental geography’ that omitted many elements and complexities from Book I of the earlier work in order to focus on the explanation of causal inference and its application to a selection of other topics. The often dramatic and sometimes combative tone of the Treatise gave way to a more urbane and conciliatory tone in the Enquiry. For example, in the Treatise the defence of the ‘doctrine of necessity’ against the ‘doctrine of liberty’ concerning the will becomes in the Enquiry, through a simple terminological modification with no change of substantive position, a ‘reconciling project’ between the two doctrines. But while the Enquiry was rhetorically more conciliatory than the Treatise, it was at the same time much more directly subversive, for the three applications of his theory of causal inference on which Hume chose to concentrate – concerning the freedom and necessity of the will, rewards and punishments in an afterlife, and miracles – all had obvious anti-religious implications, and he described the goal of the work in its opening section precisely as that of disentangling philosophy from the grip of ‘superstition’. Indeed the section of the Enquiry devoted to the topic of miracles – a topic that he had cautiously excised from the manuscript of the Treatise – soon became the most notorious piece of writing of his career (see MIRACLES). The year 1748 also saw the publication of his Three Essays Moral and Political; and at the end of the year, he returned from General St Clair’s service to Ninewells.

In 1751 Hume published An Enquiry concerning the Principles of Morals (cited here as EPM), a ‘recasting’ of Book III of the Treatise organized around the question of what constitutes virtue or personal merit, and a work that he later described as ‘of all my writings, incomparably the best’. Anxious for a return to city life, he moved to Edinburgh and set up a household with his sister, Katharine. In the following year, he published Political Discourses (which included essays on topics in what would now be considered economics) and was again passed over for a professorship in philosophy – this time at the University of Glasgow, where his friend Adam SMITH was vacating the Chair of Logic to take up the Chair of Moral Philosophy. Hume was obliged to accept instead the position of Librarian of the Faculty of Advocates’ Library (which developed into what is now the National Library of Scotland) in Edinburgh. The primary advantage of the position lay in the ready access it provided him to the library itself, which he used to write what ultimately proved to be a very popular six-volume History of England, published between 1754 and 1762. While serving as Librarian, he also published, in 1753, Essays and Treatises on Several Subjects, a two-volume collection of his previously published work that enjoyed many editions, and, in 1757, Four Dissertations, consisting of ‘The Natural History of Religion’, ‘Of the Passions’, ‘Of Tragedy’ and ‘Of the Standard of Taste’. (‘Of the Standard of Taste’, devoted to the topic of aesthetic judgment, was written to replace two essays – ‘Of Suicide’ and ‘Of Immortality’, both finally published only posthumously – that Hume cautiously decided at the last moment to suppress. He had first consented to their inclusion, in turn, in order to replace a dissertation on ‘the metaphysical Principles of Geometry’, now lost, that a friend had already convinced him to withdraw from the volume.) After completing sufficient research for his History, he resigned the librarianship in 1757. During the last several years of his term, he had been donating his salary to the blind Scottish poet Thomas Blacklock as the result of a dispute in which the library curators had rejected, on grounds of indecency, three French books that Hume had ordered.

In 1763, Hume was invited to serve as secretary to the British ambassador in Paris, Lord Hertford, and after some hesitation, he accepted. French intellectuals admired him for his philosophical scepticism and criticism of religion, his skill as a literary stylist and his sociable character; he was quickly lionized as 'le bon David' by French salon society. Among his friends were the *philosophes* DIDEROT, D'ALEMBERT and Baron d'Holbach. When Lord Hertford took a new post in Ireland, Hume was left in charge of the embassy until the arrival of a new ambassador. When he returned to Edinburgh in 1766, mutual friends prevailed upon him to take the controversial philosopher Jean-Jacques ROUSSEAU (who was no longer welcome in Switzerland) to Britain with him. Hume arranged on Rousseau's behalf the rental of a country house in England. Rousseau soon grew unhappy and suspicious however, and attacked Hume's motives, publicly alleging (apparently on the basis of a satirical piece written by Hume's friend Horace Walpole) that Hume was trying to ruin his reputation. Hume responded, despite his dislike of literary controversies, by writing and circulating a defence of his conduct in the case.

From 1767 until 1769, Hume held a government post as Undersecretary of State for the Northern Department – a position that, ironically enough, required him to give formal government approval to ecclesiastical appointments in Scotland. He returned to his many friends in Edinburgh in 1769. In 1775, he became aware that he was suffering from intestinal cancer and he died the following year, composing in his final weeks the brief autobiographical essay *My Own Life* ('this funeral oration of myself', he called it) and impressing all those around him with his cheerfulness and good humour in the face of his impending demise. He left behind the completed manuscript of his *Dialogues concerning Natural Religion* – on which he had been working for many years and which he had meant to publish only posthumously – with a request that Adam Smith see to its publication. After Smith declined the request to publish the controversial work, it was published instead by Hume's nephew. Smith did, however, write a moving remembrance of Hume, which he concluded with these words: 'Upon the whole, I have always considered him, both in his life-time, and since his death, as approaching as nearly to the idea of a perfectly wise and virtuous man, as perhaps the nature of human frailty will permit.'

2. The contents and faculties of the mind

Hume calls all of the contents of the mind *perceptions*, which he distinguishes as *impressions* and *ideas*. Ideas differ as a class from impressions not in their intrinsic content or character but rather in their lesser 'force and vivacity': in sensing or feeling, the mind has impressions, while in thinking, it has ideas. (Hume thus uses the term 'idea' more narrowly than do Descartes and Locke, who use the term in a way roughly equivalent to Hume's use of 'perception'.) Perceptions – both impressions and ideas – may also be distinguished as *simple* and *complex*: the former have no perceptions as parts, whereas the latter are composed of simpler perceptions. These distinctions allow the formulation of one of Hume's most fundamental principles: that all ideas are either copied from resembling impressions or composed of simpler ideas that are copied from resembling impressions. He cites as evidence for this principle (sometimes called the *Copy Principle*) the mind's possession of simple ideas corresponding to its simple impressions, the temporal priority of impressions over their corresponding ideas, and the absence of ideas of particular kinds in the minds of those who have

never had the corresponding impressions (THN 1.1.1; EHU 1). This principle plays a role in many of Hume's most important arguments on a wide variety of topics, and it also gives rise to a methodological directive: where the character of an idea is unclear or uncertain, trace it to the more forceful and vivacious impression from which it is derived in order to bestow clarity on the idea. Similarly, Hume argues, if one suspects that a term is being used without a meaning – that is, without standing for any idea – the inability to find a corresponding impression may serve to confirm the suspicion.

Within the class of impressions, Hume draws a further distinction between *impressions of sensation* and *impressions of reflection*. The former, which include impressions of colour, taste, smell, sound, heat and touch, have immediate causes that are external to the mind. The latter, which include the passions, moral sentiments, aesthetic sentiments and other internal feelings of the mind, arise as a result of other perceptions, typically ideas – for example, hatred and anger may arise from thinking of pain or harm caused by another. Within the class of ideas, he distinguishes between those that are *particular* and those that are *abstract*. For although he asserts (against Locke and with George BERKELEY) that all ideas are fully determinate in their own nature, he maintains that an idea can acquire a general signification through its association with a word or term that disposes the mind to 'revive' or 'survey' similar ideas as needed in cognitive operations (THN 1.1.7). Such an idea thereby becomes an 'abstract' idea – what we would call a *concept*.

Abstract ideas, for Hume, may be of kinds of *substances*, *qualities* or *modes* of things, or of *relations* between things. Relations are respects in which two or more things may be compared. While he distinguishes seven general kinds of 'philosophical relations', relations of three of these kinds can also function as 'natural relations' – by which Hume means that the holding of the relation between things can serve as a natural principle of mental association, leading the ideas of the related things to succeed one another in the mind or be combined into complex ideas (such as those of substances). These 'natural relations' are *resemblance*, *contiguity in space or time* and *cause and effect*. Whereas Locke had appealed to 'the association of ideas' chiefly to explain error and insanity, Hume dramatically expands its explanatory role in normal cognitive functioning so as to make it a kind of mental analogue of the fundamental Newtonian attractive force of gravitation, but one operating on perceptions rather than on bodies.

In the course of analyzing the operations of the human mind, Hume discusses a number of cognitive faculties. In addition to *sensation* and *reflection*, which are faculties for having impressions, Hume distinguishes two faculties for having ideas. *Memory* is a faculty for having ideas that retain not only the character but also the order and a large share of the original force and vivacity of the impressions from which they are copied. The *imagination*, in contrast, does not retain this large share of the force and vivacity of the original impressions and is not constrained to preserve their order; instead, the imagination can separate and recombine ideas freely. Because it is a faculty for having ideas, the imagination is, like memory, fundamentally a representational faculty. Such additional cognitive faculties as *judgment* and *reason* are nevertheless functions of the imagination, in Hume's view, because they ultimately constitute particular *ways* of having ideas. This, in turn, is because *belief* itself, in which judgment consists

and which constitutes the characteristic outcome of reasoning, is itself a lower degree of force and vivacity, or 'liveliness', below that of impressions and memory.

Notably absent from Hume's account of cognitive faculties is any further representational faculty of *intellect* of the kind proposed by such philosophers as Descartes, Malebranche, Spinoza and Leibniz – that is, a representational faculty whose representations are not derived from sensory or internal experience and which can serve as the basis for a higher kind of cognition than mere experience can provide. Hume's adoption of the Copy Principle constitutes a rejection of such a faculty, for it commits him to accounting for all human cognition exclusively in terms of representations that are images of sensory and inner impressions.

While Hume uses the term 'imagination' in a wide sense to designate 'the faculty by which we form our fainter (that is, non-memory) ideas', he also carefully distinguishes a narrower sense of the term as well, according to which it is 'the same faculty, excluding only our demonstrative and probable reasonings'. *Demonstrative reasoning*, as he characterizes it, depends only on the intrinsic content of ideas; accordingly, whatever is demonstrated has a denial that is contradictory and literally inconceivable, and the result of demonstrative reasoning is *knowledge*, in a strict and technical sense derived from Locke. All other reasoning – resulting not in knowledge, in this technical sense, but in *probability* – is *probable reasoning*, the investigation of which is a central task of Hume's philosophical project. Given this narrower sense of 'imagination' as excluding reasoning, Hume can and often does ask whether a particular feature or content of the mind derives from the senses, reason or the imagination. One of the most general theses of the Treatise is that the character of human thought and action is determined to a very considerable extent by features of the imagination in this narrower sense.

In contrast to the understanding are the *passions*, which determine much of human conative nature. What Hume calls the *direct passions* – including joy, grief, desire, aversion, hope and fear – arise immediately from 'good or evil, pleasure or pain'; the *indirect passions* also arise from pleasure and pain, but 'by the conjunction of other qualities'. Among the most important indirect passions are pride, humility, love and hatred. Each of these four indirect passions has a characteristic and natural *object* – either oneself (as in the case of pride and humility) or another person (as in the case of love and hate); this object is that to which the passion directs the thought of the person undergoing the passion. These indirect passions arise through a process of conversion (called 'the double relation of impressions and ideas'), whereby a pleasure or pain is transformed into a resembling passion when the cause of the pleasure or pain is closely associated with the object of the passion. Voluntary action, for Hume, is the result of *the will*, or volition, which is itself just another impression of reflection, typically prompted by desire or aversion – which may, in turn, be prompted by other passions. The *moral sentiments* of approbation and disapprobation arise from reflection on traits of character – ongoing motives, dispositions and tendencies – and constitute the source of moral distinctions, much as the sentiments of *beauty* and *deformity* constitute the source of aesthetic distinctions. Indeed, Hume characterizes virtue as a kind of 'moral beauty'.

3. Causal reasoning

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century philosophers offered many different views of the nature and extent of causal power. Descartes, for example, held that causes must contain at least as much 'perfection' as their effects and that the laws of nature can be deduced from God's immutability, while Malebranche followed the suggestion of Descartes' doctrine that God's conservation of the universe is equivalent to continuous re-creation and the implications of the proposition that causes must be connected by necessity with their effects to propose that only God has genuine causal power. Spinoza held that the laws of nature could not have been otherwise and can be discerned by the intellect, while Leibniz denied the possibility of causal interaction between substances. Locke found some but not all kinds of substantial interaction to be unintelligible, while Berkeley held that the only causal power lies in the volition of minds, either divine or finite, to produce ideas.

Of the two kinds of reasoning that he distinguishes, it is probable reasoning, Hume holds, that predominates in human life, yet he finds that it has received relatively little investigation; and it is because it has been so little investigated, he thinks, that there is so much philosophical confusion concerning the nature and extent of 'the efficacy of causes'. All probable reasoning, he argues, depends on the relation of cause and effect: whenever we infer the existence of some matter of fact that goes beyond the content of present perceptions or memories, it is always on the basis of an implicitly or explicitly supposed causal relation between what is represented by a present perception or memory and the conclusion we draw from it (THN 1.3.2; EHU 4). Yet although all probable reasoning is thus also causal reasoning, the causal relation between distinct things or events seems itself difficult to understand: causes precede their effects in time and are spatially contiguous to them (at least when they have spatial locations at all), but we also suppose that causes and effects have a 'necessary connexion' of some kind. In order to understand fully what the causal relation is, Hume holds, we must first understand the nature of the probable inferences that 'discover' it.

Contrary to those who hold that causal relations can in principle be discerned through pure thought alone, by means of the intellect, Hume argues that the attribution of causal relations always depends essentially on experience – in particular, experience that an event of one kind is regularly followed by an event of a second kind, which he calls their 'constant conjunction'. Any event may be conceived to follow any other event (that is, the imagination can form an idea of it), and prior to experience there is no basis to suppose anything about what will actually follow a given event. Although it may well seem that some causal relations – such as the communication of motion by impact central to the 'mechanistic' natural science of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries – are so 'natural' that we could anticipate them prior to any experience of them, this is only because early and constant experience has rendered them so very familiar. A probable inference occurs when, following experience of a constant conjunction of events of one type (such as the striking of a match) with events of another type (flame), an impression or memory of a particular event of the one type leads the mind to form a belief in the existence of an event of the other type. Hume's investigation of the way in which this mental transition occurs is the occasion for his famous discussion (originally presented in the *Treatise* (1.3.6) but repeated with slight variations in the *Abstract* and the first *Enquiry* (4)) of what we now

call *induction* – that is, the projection that what has held true of observed cases will also hold true of as-yet-unobserved cases.

As a ‘scientist of man’, Hume asks how this transition actually occurs. He argues first for a negative conclusion: that the transition is *not* produced – or ‘determin’d’, as he puts it in the Treatise – by reason. His argument for the negative conclusion is as follows. The transition in question spans a gap between what the mind has *experienced* – namely, past constant conjunction between two types of events plus a present impression or memory of an event of one of the two types – and what the mind *concludes*, which is the occurrence of another event of the other type, in conformity to the previously observed regularity. This transition he calls, variously, ‘making the presumption’ that ‘the course of nature continues always uniformly the same’, ‘supposing that the future will resemble the past’ and ‘putting trust in past experience’. If reasoning were to cause this transition, Hume argues, it would do so through an inference to *abief* that nature is uniform, for it is only a conclusion of this kind that could span the gap and so produce the inference. Yet what kind of reasoning could this be? The reasoning could not be demonstrative, for the denial of the uniformity of nature is in every case perfectly conceivable and involves no contradiction. Nor could the reasoning be probable, for, if Hume’s previous account of that species of reasoning is correct, all probable reasoning can proceed only if it *already* makes the presumption of the uniformity of nature – which is the very presumption whose causal origin is to be explained. A probable inference thus cannot be the original cause of this presumption, for the making of the presumption is a precondition for all probable inference; and, as Hume puts it in the Treatise, ‘the same principle cannot be both the cause and effect of another’. Since all reasoning is either demonstrative or probable, and neither demonstrative nor probable reasoning can cause its key transition, probable inference is not ‘determin’d by reason’.

In interpreting this conclusion, it is important to recognize that Hume is not questioning whether probable inferences constitute a *species* of reasoning – as of course they do, by his own classification. Rather, he is questioning whether the key transition in such inferences is itself mediated by a *component* piece of reasoning – in something like the way that Locke regards some demonstrative inferences as mediated by other component demonstrative inferences concerning the relations between their parts – or whether the transition is instead made by some other process. It is also important to recognize that Hume’s negative conclusion is one about the *causal origin*, rather than the epistemic warrant or justification, of probable inferences. Hume’s argument does, however, have important consequences for questions of justification. For if the presumption of the uniformity of nature cannot originally arise from reasoning *at all*, then it cannot be justified by the *way* in which it originally arises from reasoning. Likewise, if the claim that induction will continue to be reliable is a claim of the kind that can only be supported by reasoning that presupposes that induction will continue to be reliable, then any argument intended to justify the claim that induction will continue to be reliable must beg the question, by presupposing what it seeks to establish. Thus, the much-discussed philosophical problem of how induction *can* be justified is rightly traced to Hume’s discussion of probable inference.

Although the mind does not make the presumption of the uniformity of nature by *reasoning to a belief about* that uniformity, it does indeed make the presumption in another way, Hume argues –

namely, through the mechanism of ‘custom or habit’, which is the general tendency of the mind to ‘renew’ a past operation or action without any ‘new reasoning or reflection’. In the case of probable inference, the mind’s experience of past constant conjunctions between two types of events is renewed when the mind, upon the impression or memory of an instance of one type, proceeds immediately, without further thought or reflection, to form an idea of an instance of the other. The force and vivacity of the present impression or memory provides a measure of force and vivacity to the idea as well – and this force and vivacity, or liveliness, constitutes the *belief* that the mind reposes in the existence of the object of the idea and serves to explain its ability to affect the will. This habit-based process – which is a feature of the imagination in Hume’s narrower sense – thus produces a belief in the *conclusion* of a probable inference without any *intermediate* belief or reasoning about the uniformity of nature at all. Hume’s description of this process constitutes his positive answer, complementing his negative answer, to the original question of the nature of the transition.

Hume follows Lockean terminology in characterizing as ‘probability’ every kind or degree of assurance other than the ‘knowledge’ that is based entirely on perceiving relations of ideas, but he recognizes that the assurance derived from inferences from experience can be firm and unhesitating. Accordingly, he goes on to distinguish, within the range of probability in the broad Lockean sense, between *proof*, which is the high degree of belief or assurance that results from a full and exceptionless experience of the constant conjunction of two types of events, and mere *probability* in a second and narrower sense. There are three philosophically-approved species of probability (THN 1.3.11–12) in this narrower sense: the *probability of causes*, in which two types of events have been commonly experienced to be conjoined but not exceptionlessly so or only in a small number of cases; the *probability of chances*, in which there is uniform experience that one of a set of alternatives will definitely occur (such as the landing of a die on one of its faces), but nothing determines the mind to expect one alternative rather than another on a given occasion, so that each alternative acquires only a limited share of assent; and *analogy*, in which belief concerns events that are somewhat similar to, but not exactly resembling, those of which one has experienced a constant conjunction. In addition to these reflectively approved species of probability, Hume also distinguishes several species of *unphilosophical probability* (THN 1.3.13) – that is, ways in which features of the imagination affect the mind’s degree of belief or assurance that, upon reflection, we do not approve. In addition, he specifies a set of ‘rules by which to judge of causes and effects’ (THN 1.3.15), rules that result from reflection on the mind’s own operations in probable reasoning and on the successes and failures of past probable inferences. He thus offers a thorough, and provocative, account of non-demonstrative reasoning as always causal and always based on inductive projection from past experience.

4. Causal necessity

On the basis of his account of causal inference, Hume offers an explanation of the ‘necessary connexion’ of causal relations and provides two definitions of the term ‘cause’ (THN 1.3.14; EHU 7). It follows from the Copy Principle that, if we have an idea of necessary connection, that idea must be copied from some impression or impressions. When the mind first

observes an event of one type followed by an event of another type, however, it never perceives any necessary connection between them; it is only after repeated experience that the mind pronounces them to be necessarily connected. Yet merely repeating the experience of the conjunction of two types of events cannot introduce any new impression into the mind from the objects themselves beyond what was perceptible on the first observation. The impression of necessary connection, from which the idea of necessary connection is copied, must therefore be an internal impression resulting from the respect in which the mind itself changes as the result of experience of constant conjunction. Accordingly, the impression of necessary connection is, Hume concludes, the impression of the mind's own determination to make an inference from an impression or memory to a belief. This impression is often then projectively mislocated in or between the cause and effect themselves, in much the same way that non-spatial tastes, smells and sounds are erroneously located in bodies with which they are associated. Causal relations have a kind of necessity – an unthinkability of the opposite – that is grounded in the psychological difficulty of separating two types of events in the imagination after they have been constantly conjoined in perception, and in the impossibility of believing them actually to be separated. Because of the projective illusion by which the impression of necessary connection is mislocated in the objects, however, we often conflate this causal necessity, Hume explains, with the demonstrative necessity that results from intrinsic relations among ideas. The result, he claims, is philosophical confusion, in which we suppose that we can perceive a necessary connection, amounting to a demonstration, that is intrinsic to causes and effects themselves, and then become dissatisfied when we realize that, at least in some cases, we do not perceive such a connection after all. The dissatisfaction leads to disparate theories concerning how causal powers operate and to restrictions on the range of 'genuine' causal relations. The remedy for this confusion is to realize that we never make probable inferences as the result of perceiving a necessary connection between cause and effect, but rather, that we perceive the (internal impression of) necessary connection precisely because we are disposed to make the inference. Any two types of events are capable of standing in the causal relation to one another – 'to consider the matter a priori, any thing may produce any thing' (THN 1.4.5.30) – and only experience can show that which are actually causally related.

Following his account of causal reasoning and causal necessity, Hume defines 'cause' in the Treatise both as 'an object precedent and contiguous to another, and where all objects resembling the former are placed in like relations of precedency and contiguity to those objects, that resemble the latter' and as 'an object precedent and contiguous to another, and so united with it that the idea of the one determines the mind to form the idea of the other, and the impression of the one to form a more lively idea of the other' (THN 1.3.14.31; see also EHU 7.33). It may well seem that these two definitions do not serve to pick out the same objects as causes; for objects can be constantly conjoined in fact without being observed to be so, and objects can be taken by observers of unrepresentative samples to be constantly conjoined that are not really so conjoined. In fact, however, both definitions are ambiguous, and in parallel ways. The first definition may be understood either in a subject-relative sense (concerned with what has been conjoined in the observation of a particular subject) or in an absolute sense (concerned with what is constantly conjoined at all time and places). The second definition may likewise be understood either in a subject-relative sense (concerned with what is a basis for association and

inference in the mind of a particular subject) or an absolute sense (concerned with what is a basis for association and inference in an idealized human mind that has observed a representative sample of the conjunction in question and reasons in the ways that are philosophically approved). The two definitions then coincide on their subject-relative interpretations – the interpretations that Hume needs when discussing how causal relations constitute a principle of association in individual human minds, which is a matter of what a human mind will *take* to be causally related. The two definitions coincide again on their absolute interpretations – the interpretations that he needs when discussing which pairs of events are in fact causally related. Both definitions are intended to specify the class of ideas of pairs of events that are (either in a particular human mind or ideally) collected under the abstract idea of the relation of cause and effect. If cause-and-effect pairs have something else in common beyond what is captured by these two definitions, it is something inconceivable by the human mind. Interpreters differ on the question of Hume's attitude towards the prospect of such an inconceivable 'something more' – some hold that he rejects it, while some hold that he allows it, and others hold that he assumes it. In any case, however, his conception of constant conjunction as necessary and sufficient for causation is one of the most influential ideas in the history of metaphysics.

5. Free will

The question of whether the human will is free or necessitated is one of the most pressing issues raised by the scientific revolution, one that is central to morality and to the conception of the place of human beings in nature. Hume applies his account of causal reasoning and causal necessity to its solution (THN 2.3.1–2; EHU 8). He holds that his two definitions of 'cause' determine the only two possible requirements for the causal necessity of human actions: (1) constant conjunction with particular types of antecedent conditions; and (2) susceptibility to association-plus-inference. Since human actions of particular kinds are constantly conjoined with particular kinds of antecedent motives, character traits and circumstances, he argues, and since these constant conjunctions clearly can and do provide a basis for inference and association on the part of observers, it follows that human actions are causally necessitated. Hume himself is a determinist, holding – on the basis of induction from the past successes of natural science in finding determining causes for events – that every event results from previous conditions in accordance with exceptionless laws of nature. However, what he calls the 'doctrine of necessity' does not require determinism, but rather only the general predictability of human action. For his primary opponents are not indeterminists, but rather defenders (such as Samuel CLARKE) of a distinction between physical causes that necessitate their effects, on the one hand, and 'moral' causes (such as human motivations) that allegedly do not necessitate their effects, on the other. Since we do not feel the impression of necessary connection when we ourselves deliberate and act, Hume argues, we suppose that our own actions are not necessitated. But this conclusion is belied by the constant conjunction of these actions with motives, traits and circumstances, and by the fact that external observers do feel the impression of necessary connection when they predict or infer our actions.

Because we mistakenly suppose that there are two kinds of causation – necessitating and non-necessitating – we also suppose that there is a kind of freedom or 'liberty' that allows constant

conjunction, thus supporting association and inference, without causal necessitation. In fact, however, this is impossible; and the only kind of 'liberty' that is opposed to necessity is the *liberty of indifference* or *chance* – that is, the absence of causation and hence of predictability. As a determinist, of course, Hume denies that there is in fact any liberty of indifference at all, although he regards this as a conclusion from experience; but he also denies that anyone would *wish* their actions to be a matter of chance, for then one's actions could stand in no causal relation to one's motives, character and circumstances. The kind of liberty that we do have and want, he argues, is the *liberty of spontaneity* that consists simply in the absence of constraint – that is, the power to have one's acting or not acting determined by one's will. Indeed, both causal necessity *and* the liberty of spontaneity are required for moral responsibility, for one cannot be blamed for what is not caused by one's character, nor for what is contrary to one's will. The fact that the human will is causally determined by motives, traits and circumstances that are themselves, in turn, causally determined by other factors not ultimately subject to the will does not, in Hume's view, interfere in any way with the kind of freedom required for moral responsibility. Hume's treatment of the topic of 'liberty and necessity' is one of the best-known defences of *compatibilism* – the view that the kind of freedom required for moral responsibility is compatible with the causal determination of human deliberation and action – and constitutes an important element in his attempt to integrate the study of human nature into the natural world.

In *An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, Hume also considers two 'objections' to religion derived from the bearing of causal necessity and moral responsibility on the doctrine that God is the ultimate cause of the entire universe. The first objection is that this doctrine absolves human beings of responsibility for their crimes, on the grounds that what God causally necessitates must be good; the second is that the doctrine requires us to deny the moral perfection of the deity and to 'acknowledge him to be the ultimate author of guilt and moral turpitude in all his creatures' (EHU 8.33). Against the first objection, Hume argues that we may properly blame human beings for character traits that evoke sentiments of moral disapprobation regardless of their more distant causes. The second objection, however, he pronounces to be beyond the power of human philosophy to resolve – thus, in effect, leaving the objection to stand against theistic cosmology and theodicy.

6. God

In addition to his treatment of free will and divine responsibility, Hume in the first *Enquiry* also draws important consequences from his theory of causal reasoning and causal necessity for the topic of testimony for miracles (EHU 10) – a kind of testimony that, Locke had argued, could provide strong evidence to support claims of divine revelation. Hume first draws from his account of probable inference the conclusion that experience must be our only guide concerning all matters of fact, and that the 'wise' will proportion their beliefs to the experiential evidence. Thus, where there is a proof (in the sense of a widespread and exceptionless experience), the wise place a full reliance; where there is only probability (in the narrow sense distinguished from proof), they repose only a more hesitating confidence. Accordingly, where a proof comes into conflict with a mere probability, the proof ought always to prevail. Hume then applies these

general principles to the specific topic of testimony. Testimony cannot possess any inherent credibility independent of its relation to experience; rather, testimony of a particular kind properly carries weight only to the extent that one has experience of the reliability (that is, conformity to the truth) of that kind of testimony. Finally, Hume applies this principle about testimony, in turn, to the special case of testimony for the occurrence of a miracle, understood as a violation of a law of nature. Since regarding a generalization as a law of nature is to regard it as having a proof (in Hume's technical sense), it follows that to suppose an event to be a miracle is, *ipso facto*, to allow that there is a proof against its occurring. In consequence, testimony for a miracle cannot establish the occurrence of the miracle if there is only a probability, rather than a full proof, that the testimony is reliable. Rather, testimony could establish the occurrence of a miracle only if the falsehood of that testimony would itself be an even greater miracle – and even in that case, Hume remarks, there would be 'proof against proof', requiring one to look for some greater basis for credibility in one proof than in the other (such as might be found in its 'analogy' with yet other proofs) and resulting in at most a very hesitating acceptance of whichever proof was found to be stronger. In effect, then, Hume argues that one should always accept the least miraculous explanation available for the occurrence of testimony for a miracle.

After arguing for this very high general standard for the credibility of testimony for miracles, Hume goes on to consider the quality of actually existing testimony for miracles, the psychological mechanisms that stimulate the offering and acceptance of false testimony of religious miracles, the high proportion of miracle testimony originating among 'primitive and barbarous' peoples and the counteracting effect of testimony for miracles offered in support of conflicting religions. He concludes from this survey, first, that no actual testimony for miracles has ever met the standard required, nor, indeed, has ever even amounted to a probability; and second, that no testimony could ever render a miracle credible in such a way as to serve to establish the claims of a particular religion.

Another application of Hume's account of causation and causal reasoning in the first Enquiry concerns 'providence and a future state' (EHU 11) and is presented in the form of a dialogue between Hume and a 'friend'. Because observed constant conjunction provides the only basis for inferences concerning the unobserved, the friend argues, we cannot infer more in an unobserved cause than we have observed to be required for an observed effect; and hence a dilemma faces those who hold that the reasonable prospect of rewards and punishments in an afterlife provides an essential motive to moral behaviour. For if the present life is not so arranged as consistently to reward the good and punish the evil, then there is insufficient experiential basis to conclude that God will be any more concerned consistently to reward the good and punish the evil in the afterlife. If, on the other hand, the present life is so arranged that the good are consistently rewarded and the evil consistently punished, then the inference to similar rewards and punishments in an afterlife may be reasonable, but the conclusion will be unnecessary to motivate moral behaviour after all – for the present life itself will offer sufficient incentives in its own right. (It might, of course, be suggested that revelation provides a different and independent source of knowledge about the nature of the afterlife; but Hume has also implicitly attacked claims to have trustworthy divine revelation by attacking the credibility of testimony for miracles used to support claims to revelation.) Hume's final remark in the dialogue raises the question of

whether, given the uniqueness of the origin of the universe and our lack of experience regarding it, anything at all can be inferred about its cause.

Dialogues concerning Natural Religion takes up this suggestion in detail, offering an application of Hume's theory of causal reasoning to examine what is often called the 'argument from design', or 'teleological' argument, for God's existence. The character of Demea – representing philosophical theologians such as Samuel Clarke – proposes that the existence of God can be deduced from the need for a necessarily existent being to serve as the cause of the series of contingently existing beings. However, the characters of Cleanthes (a theist who accepts the view that all causal claims can be established only by experience) and Philo (a sceptic who also accepts the view that causal claims can be established only by experience) reject the notion of necessary existence – since anything can be conceived either to exist or not to exist – and agree that a good argument for the existence of God must be based on empirical evidence that the universe is the product of intelligent design. Their dispute concerns the strength of such arguments. Since we have no experience of the creation of universes, Philo argues, we are in a poor position to assess their causes, and explaining the orderliness of the universe by appealing to the activity of an orderly divine mind seems to be an unnecessary step, for the order of the divine mind itself would equally require explanation. If we must speculate, however, there are many hypotheses possible, at least some of which seem to have the advantage over that of intelligent design. Perhaps, for example, the universe arose through a process of animal generation: experience provides many examples of that process giving rise to intelligence, but no examples of intelligence giving rise to the process of animal generation. Furthermore, if we do suppose that the evidence favours the hypothesis that the cause of the universe resembles a human designer, we cannot limit ourselves to the quality of intelligence but will be obliged to treat that cause anthropomorphically – as embodied, gendered, limited and plural, just as we find the designers of complex human artefacts to be.

Yet despite these objections Philo finds himself moved and even confounded by the immediate persuasive power of Cleanthes' statement of the argument from design, despite its 'irregular' character as judged by the standards of proper causal inference. Philo reports himself to be on psychologically stronger ground when he goes on to argue that the existence, nature and distribution of evils in the world renders it improbable that an intelligent cause of the universe, if there is one, is morally good or concerned to foster human wellbeing. None the less, Philo takes a notably conciliatory tone at the end of the Dialogues, conceding that 'the cause or causes of the universe probably bear some remote analogy to human intelligence'. This need not be considered a complete concession to Cleanthes, however, as he has earlier allowed that 'the rotting of a turnip' also bears some remote analogy to human intelligence. While strongly criticizing the pernicious consequences for human society of religious faction and superstition, Philo suggests that the dispute between theists and sceptics is a 'verbal' one, based to a considerable degree on differences of temperament: whereas theists emphasize the admitted analogies between the universe and known products of intelligent design, sceptics emphasize the admitted disanalogies. While commentators continue to dispute the extent to which Philo or Cleanthes can be taken to speak for Hume, it is generally agreed that the Dialogues provide a seminal critique of the argument from design.

7. The external world

The newly mechanistic natural science of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries sharpened the question of what and how one can know of the external world through sensation. One of Hume's aims in the *Treatise* is to investigate 'what causes induce us to believe in the existence of body' (THN 1.4.2), although he remarks at the outset of the investigation that 'it is in vain to ask, Whether there be body or not? That is a point which we must take for granted in all our reasonings'. He analyses the belief in 'bodies' (physical objects) as the belief in objects that have a 'continu'd and distinct' existence: that is, in objects that continue to exist when not perceived by the mind and that have an existence that is distinct from the mind in virtue of existing outside of it and in causal independence of it with respect to their existence and operations. The 'vulgar' – which includes even philosophers, for most of their lives – attribute a continued and distinct existence to some of what they immediately perceive, even though what they immediately perceive are in fact impressions. The opinion that these impressions have a continued and distinct existence cannot itself be an immediate product of the senses, Hume argues, for the senses themselves cannot perceive the continuation when unperceived, or even the distinct existence of what they perceive immediately; nor can the opinion be a proper subject of inference, since reasoning shows instead that what we immediately perceive are not continued and distinct existences, but dependent and perishing impressions in the mind. The opinion in question must, therefore, depend on features of the imagination (in the narrow sense).

How then does the belief in bodies arise? As Hume explains it, some of our impressions (for example, those of colour, sound, taste, smell and touch) exhibit *constancy* and *coherence*. Constancy is their tendency to return despite interruptions; coherence is their tendency to occur in a certain order and to manifest elements of that order at similar times even through interruption. The coherence of impressions plays a role in the tendency to attribute continued and distinct existence to those impressions, since by means of the supposition of such existence the mind can attribute greater causal regularity to them than would otherwise be possible – and once the mind becomes accustomed to looking for causal regularities, it carries this tendency on even beyond what it originally finds in experience. The primary cause of the attribution of continued and distinct existence to what are in fact impressions, however, is their constancy, Hume maintains. The mind easily confuses a 'perfectly identical' – that is, invariable and uninterrupted – object with a sequence of resembling but interrupted ones, because the feeling to the mind is itself similar in the two cases. Accordingly, the mind attributes a perfect identity to some of its interrupted impressions. At times when the mind becomes aware of the interruption, it seeks to reconcile the contradiction by supposing that the very impressions themselves continue to exist uninterruptedly, distinct from the mind, during the moments when they are not perceived. The force and vivacity of the impressions provides the liveliness required for this supposition to constitute a belief.

The vulgar opinion that the very things we immediately perceive have a continued and distinct existence apart from the mind is not, Hume argues, contradictory or inconceivable; but it can, none the less, easily be shown to be false by a few simple experiments. Pressing one's eyeball, for example, doubles one's visual impressions, thereby showing that they are not causally

independent of the mind for their existence or operation, and from this it can be inferred that they do not continue to exist when not perceived. Yet the opinion that there are continued and distinct existences is, Hume asserts, psychologically so irresistible that, far from giving it up, philosophers invent a new theory to reconcile their experiments with it. This is the philosophical theory of 'double existence', according to which sensory impressions are caused by a second set of objects – bodies – that resemble them qualitatively. This theory, Hume argues, has no primary recommendation to the imagination – for the imagination naturally gives rise instead to the original vulgar view that our impressions themselves are continued and distinct. Nor does the theory have any primary recommendation to reason – for causal reasoning can conclude that an object of a given kind exists only if it has been observed to be constantly conjoined with an object of another kind, yet on the philosophical theory, we directly observe only impressions, not bodies accompanying impressions. When he considers intensely the causal origin of the belief in bodies, Hume reports that he loses confidence in the belief, his earlier claim that we must take it for granted notwithstanding. However, this state of doubt is only temporary, for belief in bodies (in one form or other) immediately returns as soon as one's attention is turned away from the question.

A further problem concerning the content of the belief in bodies arises from what Hume calls 'the modern philosophy' (THN 1.4.4). It is a central contention of the modern philosophy that such qualities as extension, solidity and motion really exist in bodies, but that qualities resembling our impressions of colours, sounds, tastes, smells and tactile qualities (such as heat and cold) do not really exist in bodies. This is, for example, Locke's claim concerning what he calls 'primary' and 'secondary' qualities (see PRIMARY–SECONDARY DISTINCTION). Hume judges that there is, among the various arguments of the modern philosophers for this conclusion, one that is 'satisfactory'. It is found that the perception of colour, sound, taste, smell, heat and cold varies with different perspectives and different states of one's body; and hence it follows that bodies cannot have all of the qualities of colour, sound, taste, smell, heat or cold that they are perceived to have. Hence, he argues, from the principle (which is one of his 'rules by which to judge of causes and effect') that 'like effects have like causes', we may conclude that none of these qualities exist in bodies themselves. Yet the qualities of extension, solidity and motion of bodies cannot be conceived without conceiving colours or tactile qualities to fill the extension of the body in which they supposedly occur; hence, it follows that bodies cannot be determinately conceived at all in strict accordance with the modern philosophy. Since this 'satisfactory' argument is a causal one, Hume presents the outcome as a conflict between causal reasoning and 'our senses' – meaning by the latter term, more specifically, the operations of the imagination on impressions of sensation that give rise to the belief in bodies.

8. Personal identity

The second edition of Locke's *An Essay concerning Human Understanding* (1694) offers an account of the nature of personal identity as grounded not in identity of substance but in 'sameness of consciousness' derived from memory. The account stimulated considerable discussion and controversy, and Hume, in the *Treatise*, takes up the question of personal identity that 'has become so great a question in philosophy, especially of late years, in England' (THN

1.4.6). He rejects the proposal that we are constantly aware of a 'self' that is simple and 'perfectly identical' (that is, invariable and uninterrupted) through time. We have no idea of such a self, Hume argues, appealing to the Copy Principle, for we have no impression of it. Nor can we conceive how our particular perceptions could be related to a substantial self or mind so as to inhere in it, for the supposed concept of a substance in which qualities or perceptions inhere is a mere fiction, invented to justify the association-based tendency to think of what is really a plurality of related but changing qualities or perceptions as having something that bestows simplicity at a time and perfect identity through time on them. Instead, Hume finds, we are aware only of the sequence of perceptions themselves; as he famously puts it, 'when I enter most intimately into what I call myself, I always stumble on some particular perception or other, of heat or cold, light or shade, love or hatred, pain or pleasure. I never can catch myself at any time without a perception, and never can observe any thing but the perception' (THN 1.4.6.3). Accordingly, 'the true idea of the human mind' is that of a 'bundle' of different perceptions related by causation in such a way as to 'mutually produce, destroy, influence, and modify each other'. Because memory reproduces the intrinsic content of earlier perceptions, there is also a considerable degree of resemblance among these perceptions. These perceptions come to constitute an 'imperfect' or 'fictitious' identity, Hume explains, because their many close associative relations of causation and resemblance cause them, when surveyed in memory, to be mistaken for a perfect identity. He draws from this a corollary that has negative implications for immortality and the justice of rewards and punishments in the afterlife – namely, that 'all the nice and subtle questions concerning personal identity can never be decided' because such questions are merely 'grammatical', involving relations susceptible of insensibly diminishing degrees (THN 1.4.6.21).

In the Appendix to the Treatise (published with its second volume, containing Book 3), however, Hume expresses dissatisfaction with his previous account of the relations giving rise to personal identity. Because his diagnosis of the problem remains quite general, many interpretations have been offered of the precise basis of his dissatisfaction. One possible source of dissatisfaction is that his own account of causality, as expressed in his definitions of 'cause', entails that simultaneous and spatially unlocated but qualitatively identical perceptions cannot differ in their causal relations, so that two such perceptions could not exist in two different minds if his account of the 'true idea of the human mind' were correct. In any case, he pronounces the difficulty a further ground for scepticism – that is, for entertaining 'a diffidence and modesty in all my decisions'.

9. Scepticism

As the scientific revolution of the seventeenth century brought a decline in the authority of Aristotle, it also brought renewed interest in ancient scepticism (including Pyrrhonism and the scepticism of the later Academy) (see PYRRHONISM; SCEPTICISM, RENAISSANCE), and Descartes' methodological scepticism in the Meditations helped to make a concern with scepticism central to philosophy. Hume's strategy in the Treatise is to complete an investigation of human cognitive faculties, by means of those faculties, before turning to the question of whether the nature of the discoveries made undermines confidence in those faculties themselves.

Thus, at the conclusion of Book I of the Treatise (THN 1.4.7), Hume surveys a number of considerations conducive to scepticism (to which the additional problem about personal identity from the Appendix to the Treatise constitutes an *ex post facto* addition). At the conclusion of the first Enquiry, he again surveys and assesses sceptical considerations, although the list only partially overlaps that of the Treatise.

Of the general sceptical considerations concerning human cognition (beyond personal susceptibilities to error) reviewed at the conclusion of the Treatise, the first lies in the dependence of belief on the ‘seemingly trivial’ quality of the imagination whereby ideas acquire force and vivacity from impressions by means of probable reasoning, memory and the senses. (It is only here, incidentally, long after his famous account of probable or inductive reasoning, that he draws any connection between it and scepticism in the Treatise). The second lies in the ‘contradiction’ between causal reasoning and the belief in bodies, with specific qualities, discovered in connection with ‘the modern philosophy’. The third consists in the illusion whereby the mind supposes that it discovers real necessary connections intrinsic to causes and effects themselves, even though such connections are in fact inconceivable.

The final sceptical consideration depends on an argument that Hume had earlier discussed in a section entitled ‘Of scepticism with regard to reason’ (THN 1.4.1). Since reason is a kind of cause, he observes, of which truth is the usual but not unfailing effect, every judgment, with whatever degree of assurance it is held, may be assessed, on the basis of past experience, for the probability that one’s faculties operated well – that is (presumably), did not produce too high a degree of assurance – in reaching that judgment. Yet even if one concludes with a high degree of assurance that one’s faculties operated well in the initial judgment, one will find at least some low degree of probability that one’s original assurance was too high; and this realization should serve to decrease somewhat the original assurance of the first judgment. Furthermore, he argues, a *third* judgment concerning the operation of one’s faculties in the *second* judgment will likewise find at least some low degree of probability that one’s assurance in making the second judgment – namely, the judgment that one’s original assurance in the first judgment was not too high – was *itself* too high. This realization, Hume argues, should properly reduce the assurance of the second judgment – which should, in turn, again reduce further the assurance of the first judgment. Since this process may properly be reiterated indefinitely, and the amount of assurance available in any judgment is finite, the result should, in accordance with the natural operations of the ‘probability of causes’, be the elimination of all belief.

No such elimination of belief actually occurs, however, even when one aims to employ the probability of causes as scrupulously as possible. Hume explains this phenomenon through appeal to another ‘seemingly trivial quality’ of the imagination – the unnatural ascent to higher levels of reflection strains the mind and prevents the successive reflexive reasonings from having their usual effects. When he first considers the question of reason’s reflexive subversion of belief, he dismisses the question of whether he is himself a total sceptic on the grounds that such scepticism cannot be maintained with any constancy, and instead takes the argument as confirmation for his theory that belief consists in vivacity – for this best explains how the trivial quality of the imagination prevents the annihilation of belief.

Nevertheless, the conclusion that causal reasoning would, unless prevented by a seemingly trivial feature of the imagination, naturally annihilate all belief is unquestionably a disturbing one; and Hume returns to it, at the conclusion of his recital of sceptical considerations near the end of Book 1, in order to formulate what he calls a ‘dangerous dilemma’. The dilemma is this: if we reject the trivial quality of the imagination that saves reason from its own reflexive self-subversion, then we must allow that all belief should be rejected; yet if we accept the trivial quality of the imagination by making it a principle to reject all ‘refined and elaborate arguments’, we cut off much of science (which also depends on elaborate arguments); we must, on grounds of parity, accept all other features of the imagination as well, even those that clearly lead to illusion; and we contradict ourselves, for the argument supporting the need to reject refined and elaborate arguments is itself a refined and elaborate argument. The immediate result of this dilemma, Hume reports, is a state of intense and general doubt.

This intense general doubt constitutes a ‘philosophical melancholy and delirium’ that cannot be removed by argument but is naturally unsustainable. It is naturally succeeded, Hume reports, by a mood of ‘indolence and spleen’, in which an irresistible return to belief and reasoning concerning matters of ordinary life is combined with a disposition to avoid philosophizing, which has resulted in such discomfort. He thus finds himself operating in accordance with the principle (sometimes now called the *Title Principle*): ‘Where reason is lively and mixes itself with some propensity, it ought to be assented to. Where it does not, it can have no title to operate on us’. Yet the state of indolence and spleen itself proves, in turn, to be unstable. For Hume finds naturally arising within him a renewed curiosity concerning philosophical topics and an ambition to contribute to the instruction of mankind and make a name for himself by his discoveries; and his return to philosophy is confirmed by the reflection that philosophy is a safer guide to speculation than is religion. He thus finds that the Title Principle, although originating in indolence and spleen, actually supports philosophical enquiry. Indeed, it avoids the ‘dangerous dilemma’ and provides a principle of belief that he can normatively endorse. For it allows him to discount the ‘unlively’ reasoning of the indefinitely iterated probability of causes that would gradually eradicate belief while nevertheless accepting ‘refined and elaborate arguments’ on topics of interest to him (arguments which thereby ‘mix with some propensity’). His continuing awareness of the ‘infirmities’ of human cognitive nature that he has discovered produce a spirit of moderate scepticism – a ‘diffidence’ in judgment – but he regards those infirmities themselves with diffidence and endorses assent to his faculties (as corrected by reflection), ready to continue the investigations of his science of man into the passions and morals.

At the conclusion of the first Enquiry, Hume distinguishes between *antecedent scepticism* and *consequent scepticism*. Antecedent scepticism, which he identifies with the methodological scepticism of Descartes, is scepticism that occurs prior to the investigation of our faculties. It recommends beginning enquiry with universal doubt, even concerning the use of one’s faculties, until those faculties have been validated by reasoning from a principle that cannot possibly be fallacious. Hume rejects this kind of scepticism on the grounds that no one self-evident principle is more certain than others and that no reasoning from such a principle could take place except by means of the very faculties that are supposed to be in doubt. (He does, however, endorse a more moderate antecedent scepticism consisting simply in antecedent

caution and impartiality.) Consequent scepticism, in contrast, is scepticism that arises from the results of an investigation of our faculties, and Hume's own scepticism is of this kind. The results that he cites concern *the senses*, *abstract* (that is, demonstrative) *reasoning* and *moral evidence* (that is, probable reasoning). The consideration of sensory errors and illusions, he remarks, is a 'trite' topic of scepticism, and shows only that the first appearances of the senses often stand in need of correction. A more 'profound' sceptical consideration is a feature of the belief in bodies previously explained in the Treatise: namely, that the original version of this belief, identifying impressions themselves as continued and distinct existences, can be shown to be false, while the theory postulating that bodies are the causes of sensory impressions cannot be supported by causal reasoning based on observed constant conjunction. A further 'profound' topic, also presented in the Treatise, lies in the 'contradiction' between causal reasoning and the belief in bodies that arises from 'the modern philosophy'. The consideration concerning abstract reasoning lies in mathematical demonstrations of the infinite divisibility of extension, which Hume regards as paradoxical. (He refers in a footnote to the theory of extension he had proposed in the Treatise, according to which finite extensions are composed of finite numbers of unextended minima, as capable of resolving this paradox.) A 'popular' objection to moral or probable reasoning lies in the vast diversity of opinions among humankind. A more 'philosophical' objection, however, lies in the recognition that we have no argument to convince us that what we have observed to be constantly conjoined in our experience will continue to be so conjoined; only a natural instinct leads us to make this supposition. The Enquiry omits discussion of reasoning's reflexive annihilation of belief, and hence also of the 'dangerous dilemma' that it posed. Nor is there any mention of the Title Principle, of the stage of 'indolence and spleen' that gave rise to it, or the role of curiosity and ambition in motivating a return to philosophy. There is, however, a distinction between 'Pyrrhonian' or 'excessive' scepticism, on the one hand, and 'Academic' or 'mitigated' scepticism on the other. Intense contemplation of sceptical considerations naturally produces a 'tincture' of Pyrrhonian scepticism that is useful in moderating dogmatic self-confidence. Were Pyrrhonian doubt to remain constant, however, it would destroy human life by preventing action. Fortunately, however, the sources of belief in human nature are too powerful to allow this to occur, and the natural outcome of reflection on sceptical considerations is a more durable Academic scepticism that consists in a certain diffidence, modesty and lack of dogmatism in all one's judgments plus a determination to refrain from all 'high and distant enquiries' beyond our faculties – such as cosmological speculation concerning 'the origins of worlds' – that have no connection to 'common life'. Hume in the Enquiry recommends and endorses this mitigated scepticism, which he judges to be socially useful, he with a rousing call for the elimination of scholastic metaphysics and theology not based on mathematical or experimental reasoning: 'Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion'.

In order to characterize Hume's scepticism, it is useful to distinguish several different dimensions in which scepticism can vary. One of these is its *scope* – that is, the range of propositions to which it applies. Another is its *character* – that is, whether it consists in actual doubt, in a normative injunction to doubt, in a theoretical claim that a proposition lacks support through reasoning, or in a claim that a proposition lacks epistemic merit. A third is its *degree* – that is, whether it is unmitigated or mitigated. A fourth is its *basis* – that is, whether it is

antecedent to enquiry or consequent to it. A fifth is its *constancy* – that is, whether it is constant or variable. In these terms, all of Hume's scepticism appears to be consequent to enquiry. He both engages in and recommends a mitigated doubt concerning all topics, as well as unmitigated doubt concerning 'high and distant' enquiries. The actual doubt in which he engages with respect to other topics is somewhat variable – potentially unmitigated in rare moments when intensely considering sceptical topics, and sometimes entirely absent in moments of special conviction. He unmitigatedly rejects the claim that the uniformity of nature and the belief in bodies *originate* with support through reasoning. But he is not committed to the view that only propositions produced or supported by reasoning have epistemic merit. On the contrary, as his endorsement of the Title Principle and his preference for 'wise' beliefs over unphilosophical probability indicate, his mitigated scepticism about the epistemic merit of beliefs generally allows him to hold that many beliefs have some degree of epistemic merit.

10. Motivation

Philosophers from PLATO to Spinoza have recommended actions motivated by reason rather than passion. Hume argues, however, that just as reason cannot produce the key transition in probable inference or the belief in an external world of bodies, so too reason alone cannot determine the will to act. His primary argument (THN 2.3.3) is as follows. All reasoning is either demonstrative or probable. Because demonstrative reasoning discovers only relations of ideas – primarily mathematical relations – and does not discover the actual existence or non-existence of things, it cannot motivate any action directly, but affects action only by facilitating the mathematical formulation and application of causal generalizations. Probable reasoning, which discovers causal relations themselves through experience, can serve to direct action by showing the means to a desired end, but cannot alone motivate it. For as long as objects do not affect one's passions (including desire and aversion), the will remains indifferent to their causal relations. Furthermore, since reason could oppose an operation of the will only by providing a contrary motivation, reason can never oppose passion in the direction of the will. Hence, Hume declares, 'reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions, and can never pretend to any other office than to serve and obey them'.

In further support of this conclusion, Hume argues that passions are 'original existences' lacking any representative quality, and hence cannot be opposed to the claims to truth produced by reasoning. Reason can never oppose a passion, but only a judgment accompanying a passion. Where a passion concerns an object judged to exist but which does not really exist, or where action takes particular form due to a false belief that something stands as a causal means to a desired end, the passion itself may be called 'unreasonable', but only in an improper sense, for it is the accompanying judgment that is unreasonable. The appearance that reason and passion can struggle for the determination of the will results largely from the existence of 'calm passions' – such as the general appetite to pleasure and aversion to evil as such – that feel, in their operation, much like the calm operations of reason.

Hume is sometimes characterized as holding a limited conception of 'practical reason': namely, that passions determine one's ends, and that the only form of practical reasoning is the generation of new desires or actions from given ends and beliefs about the means to those ends.

On this view, then, one acts irrationally only when one fails to pursue the means to one's ends. In fact, however, Hume rejects even this limited conception. For him, the outcome of reasoning itself is belief, not desire or action; and although reasoning can, in concert with other aspects of one's nature, contribute to the production of new desires and actions, this process of production is not itself one of reasoning. While Hume regards failing to take the acknowledged means to one's ends as folly and subject to criticism, therefore, it is only in an improper sense 'irrational'.

11. The foundations of morality

Many of Hume's predecessors – like his successor KANT and many others – held that moral distinctions are made by reason. According to Clarke, for example, morality was a matter of relations of 'fittingness' that could be discerned and demonstrated, like geometrical relations, through reason. Hume denies that moral distinctions are derived from reason alone. For this, he offers three arguments in the Treatise (THN 3.1.1). The first argument concerns the non-representational character of the objects of moral evaluation. Reason is a kind of discovery of truth or falsehood, which is a relation of agreement or disagreement that ideas have either to other ideas or to 'real existence and matters of fact'. Because passions, volitions and actions are non-representational, however, they are not subject to such agreement or disagreement, and hence cannot be either contrary or conformable to reason. The second argument concerns the motivational force of moral distinctions. Since morals have an immediate influence on action and affections, while reason alone has already been shown to have no such influence, Hume argues, it follows that morals cannot be derived from reason alone. The third argument involves Hume's familiar strategy of surveying the kinds of reasoning. Moral distinctions cannot be derived from demonstrative reason, he claims, since all demonstrative reasoning depends on four of the philosophical relations of ideas – resemblance, contrariety, degrees of a quality, or proportion in quantity or number. If there is some further relation that can serve as a basis for the drawing of moral distinctions by demonstration alone, it must first be discovered; and, furthermore, it must be shown both how it can be limited to the relations between the mind and external objects (as morality is) and how it can provide motivation to any being capable of demonstrative reasoning (since morality is inherently motivating). Yet moral distinctions also cannot be derived from probable reasoning, for the virtue or vice of an action does not appear merely upon reasoning concerning matters of fact about the action; rather, it becomes apparent only upon turning one's attention to one's own sentiments.

Hume's investigation of the causal basis of the key transition in probable inferences yields first a negative answer – 'not reason' – and then a positive answer: 'custom or habit'. So, too, his investigation of the origin of moral distinctions yields first a negative answer – 'not reason alone' – and a positive answer. The positive answer, in this case, is 'a moral sense'. The moral sense consists in the capacity to feel specific sentiments of moral approbation and moral disapprobation when considering a person's character 'in general' – that is, as it affects persons considered generally, independently of one's own self-interest.

In some cases, a trait may produce approbation or disapprobation immediately, but typically it does so through *sympathy* with those who are affected by it – either its possessor or others, or both. Sympathy is, like probable inference, a mechanism by which perceptions are enlivened. In

sympathy, however, one infers from circumstances or behaviour the feelings and sentiments of others, and this lively idea constituting belief that another person has a given feeling or sentiment is further enlivened by the current impression of oneself, as a result of the associative relation of resemblance between one's idea of the other person and one's idea or impression of oneself. The result is that the belief itself rises to the level of an impression, so that one sympathetically feels the other person's inferred state of mind oneself. Thus, when an individual has a character trait that produces pleasure for the individual or for others affected by that individual, an observer feels sympathetic pleasure, which then causes in the observer the further pleasant sentiment of moral approbation; when an individual has a feature of character that produces pain for the individual or others affected by that individual, the observer feels sympathetic pain, which then causes the further unpleasant sentiment of moral disapprobation.

As these sentiments give rise to abstract ideas, features of character producing moral approbation come to be called 'virtues' and those producing moral disapprobation come to be called 'vices'. Actions, in turn, are considered virtuous or vicious in so far as they are manifestations of virtuous or vicious character traits. Accordingly, Hume offers two definitions of 'virtue' or 'personal merit' parallel to his two definitions of 'cause': virtue is 'every quality of the mind, which is useful or agreeable to the person himself or to others' (EPM 9.12) or 'whatever mental. . . quality gives to a spectator the pleasing sentiment of approbation' (EPM Appendix 1.11). Actual moral sentiments may vary with the strength of one's sympathy, itself partly a function of one's distance, in various respects, from the individual evaluated and to those affected by the individual. In order to reconcile differences of sentiment among individuals and within the same individual at different times, we naturally come to 'correct' for peculiarities of perspective, much as we correct our judgments of sensory and aesthetic qualities. In the case of moral qualities, we do so by taking up imaginatively a 'general point of view' as the proper perspective from which to make moral judgments.

In claiming that moral distinctions are derived from a moral sense and not from reason alone, Hume is not denying that reasoning plays an essential role in the drawing of moral distinctions. Reasoning is required to determine the character traits of others, and reasoning is required in order to determine the likely effects of those traits on the possessor and others. Reasoning may also be required to determine what one's sentiments would be from 'the general point of view' when one is not actually occupying it. Although he is often interpreted as an expressivist non-cognitivist in ethics – that is, as holding that moral judgments express sentiments and are not strictly susceptible of truth or falsehood (see EMOTIVISM), Hume's account of the 'correction' of moral sentiments through the 'general point of view' in the construction of abstract ideas of vice and virtue leaves room for a cognitivist interpretation as well, making the moral sense more closely analogous to senses for other qualities.

For Hume, as for ancient virtue ethicists (see VIRTUE ETHICS), the primary object of evaluation is personal character, rather than actions, and the primary terms of moral evaluation are 'virtuous' and 'vicious', rather than 'right' and 'wrong' or 'good' and 'bad'. Because he maintains that moral distinctions depend on sentiment rather than on reason alone, Hume rejects the ideal of a morality that would have to be accepted by any rational being; and, indeed, he

emphasizes that there is no reason to suppose that an intelligent deity would have the same moral sense as human beings. Morality, for Hume, is inherently motivating, to those who have a moral sense, because the moral sentiments themselves are pleasures and pains, and, as such, they also readily give rise to pride or love (which are further pleasures) and humility or hatred (which are further pains). He fully approves of morality, for the moral sense bestows approbation both on the having of a moral sense and on its own operations. At the same time, however, he treats morality as a natural phenomenon to be understood by the science of man. Indeed, he holds that by understanding the basis of morality in human nature, one is better equipped to reflectively improve one's moral evaluations (recognizing, for example, that the 'monkish virtues' such as celibacy, fasting, mortification and self-denial are not truly virtues) and to recommend morality more persuasively to others.

12. Political obligation

In his Second Treatise of Government, Locke grounds the political obligation to obey and sustain one's government in a social contract, a mutual promise by which individuals pool some of their natural rights in a civil society in order to better protect their property. The obligation to keep promises and to respect property, in turn, together with the basic rules that determine the acquisition of property, are features of Natural Law. While sympathetic to Locke's aim of justifying resistance to tyrannical governments that fail to protect citizens and their property, Hume offers accounts of the political obligation to obey and sustain government (which he calls *allegiance*), the obligation to respect property (which he calls *justice*), the obligation to keep promises (which he calls *fidelity*) and the relations among them, that are very different from those of Locke.

Hume distinguishes *artificial virtues*, which depend on artifice and convention, from *natural virtues* (such as benevolence, cheerfulness, prudence and industry), which do not (THN 3.2). A 'convention' between two or more individuals does not demand an explicit promise; rather, it requires a presumed sense of common interest in a coordinated course of action, and an expressed and mutually understood determination to act in accordance with that coordinated course of action on the condition that others will do so as well. Rights to property and the rules that govern its acquisition are not inscribed in a pre-conventional law of nature, but rather arise as the result of a convention to protect the stability of actual possession (that is, control of goods), a convention that is originally motivated by the self-interest of all those involved. Recognition of the usefulness to the general public of the character trait of abiding by the rules of property, however, and sympathy with all those who benefit from it, causes the trait to be recognized as a virtue (THN 3.2.2). Promise making, too, arises as the result of a convention motivated by self-interest, one that allows the coordination of non-simultaneous exchanges of benefits by instituting a form of words that commits one to perform future benefits on pain of subsequent exclusion from the valuable convention in the event of non-compliance. The character trait of promise keeping, like that of obedience to the rules of property, comes to be approved as a virtue through sympathy with the broad range of those benefiting from the trait (THN 3.2.5) (see PROMISING).

The need for conventions of property and promise keeping in order to provide stable possession and mutual exchange of benefits, respectively, will lead to their invention and institution even within individual families and very small societies, Hume holds. In such circumstances, violators are, for the most part, easily detected and effectively sanctioned. Governments arise – often beginning with deference to a chieftain who has been a leader during war-time – as a convention to maintain the rules of property and promise keeping in larger societies by making it directly in the interests of some individuals to enforce those rules impartially. The convention of deferring to a chieftain for governance may indeed often originate in a promise among the members of a society. However, the obligation of citizens to allegiance is grounded, Hume argues, not in any original promise of the founders of government, nor (as Locke allowed) in a ‘tacit’ promise or consent on the part of current citizens, but rather on the general utility of allegiance, which gives rise to sympathetic pleasure and hence moral approbation (THN 3.2.7–8). Justice, fidelity and allegiance are all artificial virtues, each depending for its existence on a distinct convention, and the virtuousness or moral obligation of each has a similar but distinct basis in social utility. The obligation to allegiance stands on its own, and need not be derived from other obligations that themselves have a similar basis. Where a government becomes so tyrannical that it ceases to provide security and other benefits to its citizens, Hume allows, the moral obligation to obey and sustain the government naturally ceases. Although he has a lively sense – evident in his *History of England* – of the dangers of anarchy and the preferability of even quite imperfect governors to it, he is also a staunch defender of the importance to a society of free thought and expression.

13. Hume’s legacy

Every philosophical generation since Hume has been obliged to understand itself in relation to his philosophy. Scottish common-sense philosophers (see COMMON SENSE SCHOOL) such as Thomas REID read it as a demonstration that Locke’s ‘way of ideas’, according to which we can be directly aware only of the contents of our own minds, led inevitably to scepticism and must be rejected. Kant famously proclaimed that he had been ‘awakened from his dogmatic slumbers’ by the challenge of Hume’s treatment of the concept of causation and took his own transcendental idealism to be the only way to avoid Humean scepticism. Utilitarians took inspiration from his emphasis on the essential relation of morality to what is useful and agreeable. British idealists such as T.H. GREEN and F.H. BRADLEY took Hume to be a prime example of the dangers of an atomistic and sensation-based account of the capacities of mind. The logical positivists of the early twentieth century (see LOGICAL POSITIVISM) saw Hume’s concern to trace the content of concepts to their experiential basis as a precursor of their own methodology – which they regarded as properly purged of Hume’s conflation of philosophy and psychology. To broadly empiricist and naturalistic philosophers of the present era, Hume’s philosophy is a powerful example of the effort to integrate the scientific understanding of human cognitive and conative nature into the scientific understanding of nature itself, to account for the normativity of reason and morals within the structure of that understanding, and to turn that understanding onto the understanding of philosophizing itself. Now widely regarded as the greatest philosopher to write in English, perhaps no philosopher of the early modern period has proven to be of greater relevance or importance to contemporary philosophy than Hume. The best evidence of this is the number of topics – from concepts to causation, from induction to the emotions, from scepticism

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(A fine collection of essays covering the full range of topics in *An Essay concerning Human Understanding*.)

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(The classic biography; enjoyable reading.)

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(A rich account of Hume's metaphysics and ethics in their historical context.)

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(An important analysis of Hume's conception of reason as applied to such central topics as induction, belief in bodies and scepticism, in the context of non-formalist, early modern theories of reasoning; essential reading.)

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(Still one of the very best and philosophically most astute commentaries on Hume's philosophy.)

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(One of the best and most important treatments of Hume's political philosophy.)

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(A seminal early defence of the interpretation of Hume as maintaining the existence of real causal powers in the external world, despite the radical inadequacy of our ideas to conceive them; also emphasizes the influence of Malebranche.)