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THE UNITY OF HUME'S SKEPTICISM



LA UNIDAD DEL ESCEPTICISMO HUMEANO

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RESUMEN

Los intérpretes han dividido la filosofía de Hume, su “lógica”, en dos partes: la destructiva, compuesta por sus análisis filosóficos, su crítica del racionalismo y sus momentos escépticos; la constructiva, que contiene su asociacionismo psicológico, su ciencia empírica de la naturaleza humana y sus momentos naturalistas o realistas. Mi intención es cuestionar cualquier interpretación que suponga esa dicotomía, y mostrar que Hume realiza ambas tareas al mismo tiempo, en etapas sucesivas. Muestro la unidad de su filosofía en tres tópicos: un examen de la articulación entre el principio de la copia y los principios de asociación; un análisis de la estructura de los argumentos de Hume una crítica de los supuestos momentos escéptico y naturalista.

Palabras clave: D. Hume, escepticismo, naturalismo, asociación de ideas, copia, separabilidad.

ABSTRACT

The interpreters divided Hume's philosophy, his "logic," into two parts: the destructive part would be composed of his philosophical analyses, his critique of rationalism, and his skeptical moments; the constructive part would contain its psychological associationism, its empirical science of human nature, and its naturalistic or realistic moments. My intention is to question any interpretation that involves that two-part dichotomy and instead suggest that Hume performs both tasks at the same time, in successive stages. I show the unity of his philosophy in three topics: an examination of the articulation between the principle of copying and the principles of association; a demonstration of how Hume performs different tasks in two distinct stages, one negative and one positive; and a critique of the supposed skeptical and naturalistic moments.

Keywords: skepticism, naturalism, principle of association of ideas, principle of copying, principle of separability.

The alleged “great divide” in Hume’s philosophy

The question about the relationship between Hume’s skepticism and his naturalism goes back at least to Kemp-Smith’s deservedly famous book. Kemp-Smith formulates the problem that was taken to be the most important one for decades:

How, we may now ask, does this naturalistic teaching stand related to the more skeptical attitude which Hume defines and eulogises in the closing sections of Book I of the *Treatise*? Which is more fundamental in his thinking, the naturalism or the skepticism? And are they compatible with one another?(129)

The subsequent history of the interpretation of Hume’s philosophy is mostly a series of attempts to answer this question in different ways.¹ This duality has taken many different forms, but some forms seem more important. Though it has begun long ago, one or another form of duality is still with us.

Kemp-Smith offers a summary of his answer:

It is Nature, through the beliefs to which it gives rise, which acts as arbiter. It defines the conditions of health, and the regimen suitable for its maintenance. Scepticism serves as an ally, but in due subordination, not as an equal (132)

Hume’s skepticism would be nothing but a first step, to get rid of the rationalist tradition, followed by a second step, in which he would display his own positive doctrines. One thing is to reject that our beliefs are justified by reason, another is to show their origin in human nature. Many followed Kemp-Smith in his naturalist interpretation, improving on its details, like Stroud (*cf.* 1977).

Some, however, were strongly opposed to this naturalist interpretation. For them, the skeptical part of Hume’s philosophy was not to be relegated to a subordinate role. Popkin (*cf.* 126-132) argued that, at the very least, Hume would successively alternate, as a pendulum, skeptical moments as much as naturalist moments. Fogelin (*cf.* 1985 146-151) modified slightly Popkin’s interpretation, for Hume would go through some causal steps in his philosophy, in which the skeptical step plays a decisive role as much as natural instincts. Norton tries to combine these two parts in an original way: whereas the skeptical part dominates Hume’s “logic”, his naturalism or realism would be congenial to his morals. Some argued that it is impossible to combine two parts into a coherent whole; Passmore (*cf.* 1980 2) condemns Hume as

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1 For a general presentation of this question, see Broughton.

incoherent, for “the inconsistencies in his philosophy cut too deep to be dismissed as unimportant”.²

There are, however, other forms in which the duality was explored. Some, for instance, distinguished Hume’s philosophical criticism from his psychological theories. One way to develop this form of division is to point out the differences between Hume’s uses of the copy principle and his uses of the principles of association in the imagination. Though their interpretation is dead and buried since Noxon’s (*cf.* 1973) and Stroud’s (1977) criticism, one may note that positivists famously followed this line of interpretation, seeing in Hume a precursor of verificationism, who destroyed metaphysics and erected in its place a scientific philosophy. For instance, Hume would have developed the Theory of Ideas to a dead end,³ in order to build his own philosophy in a new direction (*cf.* Stegmüller 137; Robinson 1976 23-26). In a different vein, some have tried to separate what was his truly philosophical contribution, i. e., his showing that some “metaphysical” terms lack meaning, from what appeared as a psychological contribution (*cf.* Noxon 124-152). It has also been said that there is an “analytical” side in contrast to a “synthetic” side. Here, what matters is the maxim of separating ideas wherever we perceive a distinction between them as distinguished (as a way to destroy metaphysics) from the principles of association that unites them in the mind (as a way to explain some of our beliefs) (*cf.* Wright 161).

More recently, this dichotomy assumes two different forms. The so called “New Hume Debate” seems to present a new challenge for the interpreter, where realism is substituted for naturalism (*cf.* Read and Richman). The main question is whether Hume’s skepticism can be combined with his realism, or how one should properly understand his skepticism in the light of his realist remarks, or even whether there is such a thing as Hume’s skepticism. This new debate derives chiefly from Wright (1983) and G. Strawson (1989). I am not entirely sure how “new” is this new debate, but, even if it is new in some aspects, from our perspective the novelty seems to be a variation of the duality. The title of Wright’s book suggests an original combination of the duality here pointed out: Hume would assume realism, but show our incapacity to know reality in an adequate way.⁴

Finally, some scholars reframed the question, saying that any general interpretation of Hume’s philosophy must explain the “tension”

2 See also Jones (8) and Flew (52).

3 See Ayer (21-24) and B. Russell (1972 659). The origin of such an interpretation is Thomas Reid. See Reid (1969 20; 1970, 18, 33, 87, etc.).

4 For a presentation of the debate, see Kail.

between two parts and that interpretations can be distinguished by their different ways of understanding Hume's philosophy in terms of its "stability".⁵ Though the question of stability does not amount to the balance between skepticism and naturalism or realism, it is at some points a very similar question. P. Russell (2008), to go back to a recent example, proposes the "irreligious hypothesis", according to which one could explain how naturalism and skepticism can be reconciled.⁶ Even those who also think in terms of "stability" are still concerned with explaining a basic divide in Hume's logic.

Thus, though there are so many radically conflicting interpretations, it seems to me that all of them share a common presupposition: the distinction of a negative, critical part and a positive, constructive part. The purpose of this paper is both an ambitious one, and a modest one. The ambitious purpose is to reject this widespread presupposition that consists in a "great divide" in Hume's philosophy, introducing a distinction where none exists and creating many exegetical problems that are real only for the interpreter, not to the philosopher. I would like to maintain that any interpretation along these lines is deeply wrong. In my view, it is not correct to say that Hume's philosophy has two parts, as if each carried out its task independently of the other, for instance, one of destroying reason, another of showing the role of sensation in our beliefs. In fact, I will suggest, Hume will realize both tasks *at the same time*, or better, that the very same (and unique) task is at once both negative and positive.⁷

The modest aspect is that I do not intend to formulate a "new question" on Hume, not even to offer a detailed solution which shows the unity of Hume's logic. I only want to sketch one possible solution to it.⁸ I will try to show the *unity* of Hume's logic through four kinds of

5 Loeb; Russell (2008 3-11) and Ribeiro (2009) focus on the question of the stability between two sides: radical skepticism and nature. In Ribeiro's view "This stability-seeking orientation shapes many interpretations of Hume's relation to scepticism" (233n4).

6 See, for instance Russell (*cf.* 2008 137ff.).

7 I do not mean that every interpretation is vitiated by this presupposition. I do not think, for instance, that Garrett's (1997) or Owen's (1999) interpretation admit it. Though Stroud (1977) accept it, Stroud (1991) does not rely on it. Schmitt begins his book by saying that "David Hume's *A Treatise of Human Nature* alternately manifests skepticism, empiricism, and naturalism in epistemology. In the present book I attempt to explain these apparently conflicting manifestations by tracing them to a unified underlying epistemology of knowledge and probability" (2014 1). That is my point: the conflict is merely apparent; and I go on to suggest how, in fact, they are unified in Hume's logic. Concerning the "stability" problem, I agree with Schafer (*cf.* 2013 5-6n19), while Ribeiro's (2009) developmental interpretation seems wrong to me.

8 Not all commentators presuppose the duality I mentioned. Exceptions include Smith (1990, 1995), Stroud (1991), Garrett (1997), and Owen (1999).

considerations. First, I will examine the articulation of the copy principle and the principles of association. Then, I will discuss whether there is an “analytic” moment distinct from a “synthetic” moment. Thirdly, I will go on to see whether Hume pursues two different tasks in two separate phases of his analysis, a negative one and a positive one. Next, the focus will be on the allegedly skeptical and naturalist moments: focusing on the alleged contradictions, first, between his science and his skepticism and then between his everyday life and his skepticism.

Philosophical analysis and psychological empiricism.

A not uncommon assumption is to distinguish, in Hume’s philosophy, two different kinds of principles: some methodological principles in his philosophical analyses, and the descriptive principles that explain psychologically how we come to have our basic beliefs. Thus, the copy principle allows Hume to analyze concepts *philosophically* and show their meanings or, even better, that many are meaningless.⁹ For instance, Hume shows that the concepts of substance and cause have no empirical origin and, therefore, lack sense. Though also a principle of the human mind, the copy principle is mainly a kind of philosophical tool enabling Hume to destroy traditional metaphysics as being meaningless. Since the concepts of causation and of substance have no origin in our senses, they are meaningless. In this sense, the copy principle has a special status among other principles of the human mind. On the other hand, Hume discovers principles that associate ideas in the mind. These principles of association display some *psychological* knowledge of the human mind. Hume develops his empirical science concerning the human mind, raising hypotheses as to how our mind really works. Now, what should we think of this distinction? Does it help us to understand Hume’s philosophy?

First, I would like to remember what Stroud¹⁰ said against this kind of interpretation: it tells more about the prejudices of the interpreter

9 Noxon says that “the copy principle is not a psychological law, but a methodological rule. It does not serve, as the principles of association do, as an axiom of the science of man. Its function is to provide clarifications of philosophical concepts, not explanations of psychological events. It is neither a definition nor a hypothesis used in the construction of psychological theories. It is a maxim to be followed in the course of philosophical analysis” (148-149).

10 After explaining the objection to Hume’s psychologism, Stroud says that “the view behind it is that since philosophy is not an empirical discipline, but is rather a priori study of meanings or the logical relations among concepts, then is no far as Hume is a philosopher that is what he is doing[...]I think this roughly positivistic conception of what Hume the philosopher is, or must be, doing is responsible for much serious misunderstanding of his intentions, and therefore of his work as a whole[...] But it is

than about Hume's philosophy. This distinction between a philosophical *a priori* analysis of concepts and a scientific *a posteriori* knowledge of the world belongs to twentieth century philosophy, more specifically, to positivist philosophers, not to Hume.¹¹ For Hume, such a distinction makes no sense. Quite on the contrary, for Hume philosophy is a kind of empirical science; in his case, a science of human nature. Thus, this interpretation is anachronistic and sheds no light on Hume's philosophy. However, more critical comments on it may help us to understand some aspects of Hume's philosophy.

Second, it is noteworthy that the copy principle is a principle of the human mind discovered by Hume's empirical science of human nature as much as the principles of association. From this point of view, there is no important difference between them. As Hume's analysis of the human understanding progresses, he discovers those principles that shape our understanding. As far as I can see, all such principles are, for Hume, empirically discovered and an integral part of his philosophy. The distinction in kinds between principles may rather obscure his thought. They all equally belong to his description of the mind. It is true that the copy principle may have a further use, however from this use it does not follow that we find two kinds of principles and, consequently, two kinds of analyses in Hume's thought, one philosophical, one psychological.

Third, and most important, it seems wrong to me to attribute to the copy principle a mainly critical role concerning "metaphysical" terms, as if it were a weapon against rationalism and dogmatism, leaving to other principles the positive role of explaining whatever meaning other words may have. Both kinds of principles, if one may speak so, are intertwined in Hume's philosophy. The copy principle sets a task to Hume: he (or anyone else) must find the original impression from which an idea was copied. The result of such a task may be that we do not have an original impression and, therefore, no idea attached to a name. More specifically, it is usually the case that "metaphysical" terms do not have an idea associated with them or, at least, their supposed idea does not originate in our senses. This is, certainly, a destructive result stemming from the copy principle. But this critical function does not exhaust its use, nor is its main one. The truth is that typically Hume finds an original impression (or a group of associated impressions) and, thereby, explains to us the proper meaning of a word. This is the case both of

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 worth pointing out here that the objection rests on the questionable assumption of a clear and recognizable distinction between *a priori* and empirical investigations" (1977 7).

11 Noxon (1973, 150) cites Ayer as an eminent positivist that saw Hume under these lights and Stroud (1977, 6-8) attributes this view to the positivists.

the “metaphysical” notions of substance (*cf.* T, 1.1.6.2; SBN 16) and cause. There is in most cases, if not always, some empirical basis for our terms (even if their correspondent ideas come to be called by Hume fictions of the imagination). In this sense, the copy principle is at the base of all Hume’s doctrines, whether negative or positive. More than a negative task of criticizing metaphysical concepts, so to speak, the copy principle helps to determine the meanings attached to all words.

Moreover, when Hume tries to explain the origin of our ideas, he has recourse to those principles of the mind discovered by him. In fact, all his explanations concerning the origin of our ideas depend on his hypothesis concerning how the imagination links together our impressions. Typically, in Hume’s description of the workings of the human mind, he finds many fictions, errors, contradictions, and so on. Based on such a bad, lamentable working of our minds, Hume has no other option left but to become a skeptic. The so-called negative result is achieved not exclusively via the copy principle, but also, and perhaps mainly, by carefully describing the inner workings of the mind and realizing how defective they are. It is the so-called positive part that brings up his skepticism and shows that those “metaphysical” terms lack the meaning that “metaphysicians” attach to them.

Thus, we see, on the one hand, that the copy principle has also a positive role and that those other principles of the understanding may have also a negative role. Above all, what we see is that the copy principle and the other principles of the understanding alike perform a role in Hume’s logic. Trying to explain the meaning of a term sets Hume in the task of describing and raising hypotheses concerning the mechanisms of our understanding from the impression (or group of impressions) to the correspondent idea: this enterprise is carried out by all these principles together. There is only one analysis going on.

The structure of Hume’s arguments.

One could perhaps insist that there is a duality in Hume’s philosophy by saying that Hume’s arguments must be divided into negative arguments and positive arguments. The negative argument would conclude that we do not have the beliefs that rationalists and metaphysicians claim we have and that reason cannot justify the beliefs we do in fact have. The other kind of argument would reveal to us the causes of the beliefs we do have. The aim of this kind of argument is to show how our imagination may lead us to those beliefs we have. Here, the point is not so much to solve a tension between both kinds of argument, for there may be no tension (in fact, those commentators who hold this interpretation do not see any tension at all), as to wonder whether this distinction really captures what Hume is doing, or the structure

of his arguments and thought. The question is: is it true that there are two different kinds of argument in Hume's philosophy?

Hume seems to point out explicitly in that direction, for instance, when he distinguishes the "skeptical doubts" concerning causation and the "skeptical solution" (*cf.* EHU 4 and 5).¹² Accordingly, one could say that this is the pattern for most of the arguments we find in Hume's logic. This pattern is supposed to be present even in Hume's morals: first he proves reason cannot justify our beliefs in relation of ideas, bodies, and in our selves. Then, he goes on to say that sentiment plays a vital role in our epistemological beliefs. Reason cannot even lead us to form moral judgments (*cf.* T 3.1.1; SBN 455-470), and were it not for our sentiments, we wouldn't be able to judge morally (*cf.* T 3.1.2; SBN 470-476).

However, I do not think this is a proper reconstruction of what Hume is doing. Instead of divorcing Hume's arguments into two kinds, one negative and one positive, one should try to follow how exactly Hume carries out his task of discovering the principles that determine our basic beliefs. In fact, when we do that, we realize that the texts do not contain these two kinds of argument. This is perhaps a very important point, so let us pay close attention to it.

First of all, we should notice that Hume is not always worried in showing that reason is not the source of a belief. Concerning our belief in bodies, for instance, the senses are the more promising source (or cause) of our belief in bodies, though in the end they must be rejected as possible source of the belief in bodies (*cf.* T 1.4.2.3-13; SBN 188-193). Hume spends only one paragraph to show we cannot get this belief from reason, as a kind of appendix to his discussion about the senses (*cf.* T 1.4.2.14; SBN 193). In the case of personal identity, Hume does not consider reason as a possible source for this belief, but memory could be what determines us in having a notion of the self (*cf.* T 1.4.6.20; SBN 261-262). From the point of view of discovering the faculty that determines our beliefs, reason has no special priority over other faculties. What matters is to find out which is the faculty at the origin of our beliefs; and even if reason is one of the alternatives, it is not always the main one. It all depends on the belief we are talking about. Depending

12 Stroud says that "it is very important to keep clearly in mind the presence of two distinct aspects or phases of Hume's overall task" (1977 14-15). A typical example of splitting Hume's arguments into two distinct parts is his analysis of causation, where chapter III is entitled "Causality and the Inference from the Observed to the Unobserved: The Negative Phase" and chapter IV is entitled "Belief and the Idea of Necessary Connection: The Positive Phase." Another example of this dichotomy is Bennett (chapters 11 and 12). Allison (*cf.* 119-134), though more nuanced, seems to think about inductive inference in terms of the basic opposition between skeptical and non-skeptical (mostly naturalist) readings of Hume.

of the kind of belief whose causes Hume wants to discover, the senses or memory are clearly more important than reason: his target, so to speak, is to show that the senses or memory do not give rise to the belief in question. That is why Hume says that “memory, senses, and understanding are, therefore, all of them founded on the imagination, or the vivacity of our ideas” (T 1.4.7.3; SBN 265) Thus, I conclude that it is a misrepresentation of Hume’s (so called negative) arguments that he is above all considering reason as his main target.

Now, one may object to this point, saying that in each case there is a faculty of mind that is assumed to be the epistemically respectable candidate for knowledge of a given type and that in each case this faculty turns out not to be responsible for generating our beliefs and that instead these beliefs are generated by the imagination, which is not thought to be an epistemically respectable candidate. If that is so, my first argument misses the point. In my view, this objection is partially correct and helps me to sharpen my point. One could construe “reason” also in broad sense, i.e., meaning our faculties working properly. Thus, one has to ask whether the senses, if they are working properly, justify or causes in a correct way our belief in bodies, or whether memory, if it works properly, is able to produce correctly an enlivened idea of a personal identity. Even if we think that the senses or memory could be “reasonable” in this broad sense, the fact is that they do not work properly, once we discover how they in fact work. This leads me to the second, more important point.

Second, it seems to me much more adequate to see Hume’s arguments as going on through *multiple levels*, one deeper than the other, all of them *at the same time negative and positive*. With differences in detail, I propose that some crucial Humean arguments have a similar form: they are *disjunctive syllogisms* (A or B; \sim A; therefore, B). In such a syllogism, one has to set aside a possibility A (reason, the senses, memory) in order to infer something positive B (the imagination). In his inquiry into the principles of the understanding that cause our beliefs, we find this kind of syllogism operating at important points. A disjunctive syllogism is at the same time negative and positive, for in the same reasoning we both reject one alternative (or more) and embrace the remaining one. If that is correct, we should not try to identify to different arguments, but only a single one. This unique argument is what allows Hume to identify what he is looking for: the principle of the human mind responsible for our beliefs.

Let me give the perhaps two most important examples, causation and bodies, because they are usually taken as the best examples for the distinction between two kinds of arguments, the negative and the positive.

How does Hume proceed in the case of the notion of cause and effect? We find in the texts different levels of inquiry, each one guided by a question. As Hume answers this question, he moves to another level, with a different question, raised by the previous answer. So, in level 1, his concern is about knowledge in general. He develops what came to be called "Hume's fork", i.e., he distinguishes between two kinds of knowledge: one concerning relations of ideas, one concerning matters of fact (*cf.* T 1.3.1; SBN 69-73; EHU 4.1-2; SBN 25-26). Now, once we have distinguished two basic kinds of knowledge, we may go on our inquiry and ask: How do we reason in each sphere of knowledge? Thus, level 2 has a ramification. Relations of ideas are based both on the content of the ideas related and on the principle of non-contradiction (*cf.* T 1.3.2; SBN 73-78; EHU 4.1; SBN 25). What about matters of fact? Only causal reasoning takes us beyond present impression or memory (*cf.* T 1.3.1.1; SBN 69-70; EHU 4.4; SBN 26-27).

Now we come to the point I want to make. With these results in mind, Hume can raise a new question at level 3, the one that will be an important step towards the discovery of a crucial principle of the human understanding: he asks whether we come by this causal relation through reason alone (A) or based on experience (B). Having argued that *a priori* reason can't infer an effect from a cause (or the other way around) ($\sim A$), he concludes that experience must be part of what determines us to think so (B) (*cf.* T 1.3.1.2-7; SBN 70-73; T 1.3.6.1-9; SBN 86-91; EHU 4.5-13; SBN 27-32). The structure of the argument is quite obvious: A or B; $\sim A$; therefore B.

By now, we know that experience, not *a priori* reason, is responsible for our causal reasoning. However, Hume moves to a new level. At level 4, he asks whether this empirical inference is caused by reason (A) or depends on the imagination (B). Now, since even if with the help of experience reason cannot determine us to make causal inferences ($\sim A$) (*cf.* T 1.3.6.10-11; SBN 91-92; EHU 4.18-27; SBN 32-39), it must be the imagination (B) (*cf.* T 1.3.6.12-15; SBN 92-93; EHU 5.2; SBN 41-42). Exactly the same logical form is employed by Hume: A or B; $\sim A$; therefore B. Levels 3 and 4 are crucial, for they are usually divided into a negative argument ($\sim A$) and a positive one (B). But one can easily see that there aren't two independent arguments, but only one. The argument for B uses as premises both 'A or B' and ' $\sim A$ '.

Hume arrives at the last level of his inquiry: since it is imagination that determines us to think of the effect (or cause) having perceived or remembered the cause (or effect), one may wonder which principle of the imagination is responsible for that transition. That is the question of level 5. Hume raises his hypothesis: it is habit or custom (*cf.* T 1.3.7.6; SBN 97; EHU 5.5; SBN 42-43). Here, what we find is not a disjunctive

syllogism, but a hypothesis based on analogy: since what we do according to previous experience without thinking about it is due to habit, then it is plausible to conjecture that when we infer causally according to previous experience without thinking this causal inference is due to habit as well. This is positive, but also negative, for it rules out other possible principles, whatever they might be. Habit is an important principle in human life; if the principle of the imagination responsible for this inference were not so important, then perhaps we should rely less on it.¹³ As I hope it became clear, Hume's arguments proceed in layers that go deeper and deeper, till they reach a level in which he can conjecture about the principle of the imagination that determines our causal beliefs.

The case with belief in bodies is not essentially different, though perhaps more complex in its details. Concerning our purposes, however, disjunctive syllogism is still doing the main work that allows Hume to focus on the principles of the imagination. We believe in bodies, that is the fact that needs explanation by Hume's empirical science of human nature (or of the understanding). What causes this belief? Here are three possibilities in level 1: the senses (A), reason (B), or imagination (C). However, neither the senses ($\sim A$) (cf. T 1.4.2.3-13; SBN 188-193), nor reason can cause such a belief ($\sim B$) (T 1.4.2.14; SBN 193); therefore, it can only be the imagination (C) (cf. T 1.4.2.14; SBN 193). Though a bit longer, what we find is once again a disjunctive syllogism: A or B or C; $\sim A$, $\sim B$; therefore C. As before, we do not find an argument for C independent or different from the arguments to reject A and B. In fact, the arguments against A and B are one of the premises (together with the disjunction A or B or C) for concluding C.

Once it is discovered that the imagination is responsible for this belief, Hume moves to the next level and raises a new question. Just like in the case of causal reasoning, in level 2 he enquires into the principles of the imagination that give rise to our belief in bodies. Thus, the question in level 2 is: by which principles does the imagination engender this belief? Hume has a complex theory which advances a highly subtle hypothesis concerning the production of belief in bodies (cf. T 1.4.2.15-43; SBN 194-210, though abandoned in the first *Enquiry* (cf. EHU 12.7; SBN 151). He even includes philosophical beliefs in bodies as part of this causal explanation (cf. T 1.4.2.44-55; SBN 210-217; EHU 12.7-12; SBN 151-153).

Not all of Hume's arguments fit in disjunctive syllogism, for not all levels use this kind of argument. The main point, however, is to point

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 13 The importance of habit or custom for life is decisive for the normative aspect of our causal reasoning.

out that there are levels of inquiry, instead of a negative and a positive phase. Moreover, in those levels in which Hume shows that reason (or the senses) is not the cause of our beliefs, it is important to realize that he has but one argument that is simultaneously negative (in one premise) and positive (in its conclusion). One may insist that level 5 in causal beliefs and level 2 in belief in bodies are different from earlier levels. That is correct as far as it goes, for they are different levels. But it does not follow that the distinction between these levels and the earlier ones are to be interpreted in terms of 'negative' and 'positive'. On the contrary, they are all mainly positive, for there is always a positive conclusion enabling Hume to move deeper in his inquiry.

In order to confirm the above interpretation, we could look for more examples in Hume's philosophy. In this sense, it could be shown, for instance, that this is also the case concerning personal identity and moral judgments. In the case of personal identity, Hume proceeds by elimination of alternatives to discover the faculty which generates the belief in need of (causal) explanation. Once this faculty is discovered, he tries to reveal the principles (causes) that govern our way of thinking. Thus, he first shows reason cannot justify a belief in personal identity (cf. T 1.4.6.1-7; SBN 251-255); then, by explaining how we arrive at the belief in identities (cf. T 1.4.6.8-14; 255-258); according to this explanation, the imagination must be, once again, the faculty that causes this belief. And then, in the next level, he offers a hypothesis concerning the mechanism through which we come by such a belief (cf. T 1.4.5.15-22; SBN 239-243), showing also that memory cannot give rise by itself to such an idea of personal identity (cf. T 1.4.6.20; SBN 261-262).

Let us now turn to moral judgment. The case here is more complex, since the way Hume argues in the *Treatise* may not entirely match the way he argues in the second *Enquiry*, though the doctrine is basically the same. Moreover, in the case of moral judgments, there is one peculiarity, for the disjunctive premise in both books is not exactly 'either A or B', where A and B stand for only one faculty. In the *Treatise*, Hume argues thus: it is either by an idea or by an impression that we distinguish virtue and vice (cf. T 3.1.1.3; SBN 456); it is not through an idea (cf. T 3.1.1.5-26; SBN 457-469); therefore, it must be due to an impression (cf. T 3.1.2.1; SBN 470). In terms of faculties, one could say that this is slightly more complex: it is either reason alone (A alone) that makes us judge morally, or our moral judgments depend also on sentiment (A with B) (cf. T 3.1.1.3). Well, reason alone could never lead us to a moral judgment (cf. T 3.1.1.5-26; SBN 457-469) (~A). Therefore, were it not for our sentiments we would never make any moral judgment (or have moral beliefs) (cf. T 3.1.2.1; SBN 470). Since it is not A alone, then A with B (cf. T 3.1.2; SBN 470-476).

In the second *Enquiry*, we also find the following disjunction between reason and sentiment: “either A or B” (cf. EPM 1.3-4; SBN 170-171). Since you have good arguments for both A and B (cf. EPM 1.5; SBN 171-172), a third alternative (A/B) must be the correct one (cf. EPM 1.9; SBN 172-173). He does not reject the former alternatives with a negative argument, but by being aware of their strength he concludes that both must be right to a certain extent (and, so, both must be wrong to a certain extent). However exactly we reconstruct the argument, the point is that, once again, we have two levels. The first one concerns the faculties; the second is about the principles that govern our moral judgment with a new question: How do reason and sentiment combine to allow our moral judgments? (cf. EPM 1.10; SBN 173-175).

There is no need to go into details or to give more examples. What matters here is that, once we lose from sight this unified theory of progressive levels in Hume’s explanations of the inner workings of human mind, we tend to misunderstand his philosophy.

In sum, what is usually called his “negative phase” is nothing but one of the premises in this disjunctive syllogism; it is not an autonomous, previous part of his philosophy, but it is integrated to his empirical science of human nature. Thus, there is no autonomous, negative argument against reason (or the senses, or memory); the only argument Hume offers us is precisely this disjunctive argument, which is at the same time negative and positive. And Humean hypotheses concerning the works of the human mind are not independent, positive arguments, unarticulated with the previous level. Quite the contrary, Hume does not propose his hypothesis concerning the principles of the imagination (habit, the vulgar system) before identifying the imagination as the faculty which is at the origin of the beliefs under examination, but as a necessary next step in his empirical investigation of the human mind. The question it tries to answer is raised by answers to previous questions in a successive way. Thus, his “positive” phase complements an analysis that, from the beginning, was already positive.¹⁴

The opposition of science and everyday life to skepticism.

Some introduce another way of distinguishing Hume’s philosophy into two parts, since one may well speak of a skeptical moment distinct from a naturalist moment: a moment, when, under the impact of his skeptical analysis, he abandons all beliefs and suspends judgment about everything, and when, recovering from this “deplorable condition” (cf. T 1.4.7.8; SBN 269), nature imposes his everyday beliefs on him again. Since he cannot avoid both living (cf. T 1.4.7.10; SBN 269)

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14 For a similar view of Hume’s unified inquiry, see Garrett (1997).

and philosophizing (cf. T 1.4.7.12; SBN 270-271), he turns into a skeptic whenever he dedicates his time to deep thinking in his “chamber” (cf. T 1.4.2.56; SBN 217-218), and he becomes a normal man as soon as he leaves this “deepest darkness” (cf. T 1.4.7.8; SBN 269) and is cured from “this philosophical melancholy and delirium” (cf. T 1.4.7.9; SBN 269).

This new dichotomy may take two forms. One form opposes Hume's science to Hume's skepticism; the other form opposes Hume's ordinary life to Hume's skepticism. Let me begin with the conflict between science and skepticism. Some, like Passmore (1980) and Flew (1986), think that Hume's skepticism threatens his empirical science. It may be said, as did Passmore, that these “skeptical arguments” could go beyond Hume's control and have an unexpected impact on Hume: “Hume could not succeed in the impossible – a science founded on skepticism no degree of ingenuity can successfully construct” (151). The result of Hume's empirical science of human understanding is a form of skepticism; now, this skepticism undermines the very science that led Hume into it. If our understanding does not function properly, how can we build a science upon it? Thus, given its disastrous results, Hume should also give up his empirical science. It is not possible for Hume to hold at once both his empirical science and his skepticism.

But did the so-called skeptical arguments ever go out of control? Hume's style in the conclusion of the *Treatise* may look as if they did, just like in the end of the section on the senses. Hume, however, never thought that, on the basis of his showing that the understanding is so imperfect, his analyses of the understanding were wrong or unreliable. One evidence of his confidence in his science is that he never really changes his mind, except, perhaps, what he said concerning personal identity. Though we can detect some changes in the matter, and not only in the manner, between the *Treatise* and the first *Enquiry*, contrary to what Hume suggested in his *My Own Life*, it is nonetheless true that, from a general point of view, his philosophy is throughout his life basically the same. His so-called skeptical doubts were *never* a reason to change his description of the mind or his hypotheses concerning the principles that govern the mind. Skeptical doubts never targeted his own doctrines, they were never intended to shake his empirical science. In this sense, there is a “stability” in his views.

Hume was confident about the achievements of his own empirical science of the understanding or, in general, of human nature. If skepticism was a result of his empirical science, it was only because he was very confident in his explanatory hypothesis about the causes of our beliefs. That is a point that it seems worth stressing. Contrary to what may appear at first sight, instead of undermining his science of the understanding, Humean skepticism was not only a result of his science,

but also a *confirmation* that we cannot reason in any other way than in an empirical way (besides mathematics). If Hume began by assuming that the only starting point is experience, in the end he was justified in saying that we cannot but proceed empirically. Were he to justify empirical science by using empirical science, he would be guilty of circularity. However, the result of his empirical science about the understanding is that we are bound to go on doing empirical science *and nothing else* (besides mathematics).¹⁵ Far from undermining empirical science, Humean skepticism was a way of explaining how we reason causally and how we have many beliefs, but also why we cannot reason in any other way. What his skepticism undermines is, so to speak, metaphysics as traditionally understood and superstition. Hume can go on with his project on the basis of his skeptical principles.¹⁶

The other important form of dichotomy tries to show that Hume both suspends his judgment while doing philosophy and believes in his ordinary life. Whereas Kemp-Smith and Stroud thought skepticism had a subordinate role to play, preparing the stage for naturalism, Popkin thinks not only that both phases are equally important, but also that a coherent Pyrrhonist would sometimes be a skeptic (when doing philosophy) and sometimes a dogmatist or naturalist (in ordinary life).¹⁷ Hume's philosophy is, in the end, a perpetual oscillation or an alternation between these moments opposed moments, almost like Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde.¹⁸

Against such a division of Hume's logic into two irreconcilable moments, one should remember that, in fact, Hume never really abandoned the most basic beliefs. Even in those moments of intense reflection, he said only that he was ready to give up all beliefs, not that he had actually given them up. This is the case concerning belief in bodies. Hume says he feels "*more inclined to repose no faith at all in my senses, or rather*

15 We can see here how the normative aspect results from the descriptive aspect: Hume's empirical science of the understanding shows that nothing but empirical research is possible to us, according to the ways he described. On the one hand, nothing else is possible to us; on the other, if we want to investigate the world, this is what we can and should do.

16 What I say here is compatible with Garrett's (1997) analysis of the "title principle".

17 This is how Popkin closes his classic paper: "The picture of the two, the dogmatist and the sceptic, is a picture of the perfect Pyrrhonist in his two moods, his split personality. In one mood, the difficulties overcome him, in another, the necessities do. Only by being both can one be a philosopher, and live according to nature" (132). In the important end note, Popkin equates dogmatism with naturalism: "Hume, the naturalist who subverts all reason to emotion, was just Hume the Pyrrhonist in his dogmatic mood. Hume the reasoned was Hume the Pyrrhonist in his skeptical mood".

18 Many have followed Popkin's "schizophrenic" interpretation (n132). See, for instance, F. Strawson (1985 ch. 1). I say "almost like" because, if Mr. Hyde hides himself, Dr. Jeckyll is ill; so, both split personalities seem disastrous.

imagination, than to place in it such an implicit confidence” (T 1.4.2.56; SBN 217; my italics) And, in the conclusion of the *Treatise*, he says that “the intense view of these manifold contradictions and imperfections in human reason has so wrought upon me, and heated my brain, that I am *ready to reject* all belief and reasoning, and can look upon no opinion even as more probable or likely than another” (T 1.4.7.8; SBN 268-269; my italics) One must note how careful Hume is in choosing his terms: “more inclined” and “ready to reject”. It is true that he says that opinions do not appear one more probable than another; but that does not necessarily imply abandoning beliefs, for he may hold some beliefs, even if he does not take them to be more probable from a rational point of view. He does not say that in fact he no longer believes in bodies or that he has rejected all his beliefs. That would be to go too far. He relies, in the case of bodies, on “carelessness and inattention” (T 1.4.2.57; SBN 218) and, in general, nature and the necessities of life will impede a universal suspension of judgment (cf. T 1.4.7.9; SBN 269). Thus, I think it is not correct to say he alternates moments in which he has no beliefs at all and moments in which he has all ordinary beliefs. There is no moment at all in which Hume has no belief at all.

Even if there is, as some might insist, it is not the case that, while doing philosophy Hume will suspend judgment. As we just saw, he never suspends his judgment about his own hypotheses concerning the principles of the human nature: he has no doubt whatsoever that simple ideas are copies of simple impressions; he certainly believes that habit or custom is the principle that leads us to reason causally; he thinks that moral judgments depend both on reason and sentiment etc. It is simply not true that, despite perhaps one quick moment of despair in the *Treatise*, supposing it occurs, Hume, the philosopher, suspends his judgment. On the contrary, Hume, the philosopher, is very confident of most of his theories about human nature.

Moreover, it is not true that reason is entirely negative in Hume's philosophy.¹⁹ Hume's goal in displaying those “skeptical” arguments is not to bring about suspension of judgment, but to make us sensible of his hypothesis that belief is more properly speaking an act of the sensitive part than of the cogitative part of our mind. One could think that a “skeptical argument” may have two uses: one of them is the use made by the excessive skeptic, to induce suspension of judgment; the other use is to establish some hypothesis concerning the workings of the human mind, for instance that belief depends on feeling, not on reason (cf. Smith 2011). In this sense, there is no need for Hume to alter

19 For a detailed analysis of Hume's concept of reason in its historical context, see Owen (1999) and De Pierris (2015). For the idea of a skeptical reason, see Smith (2005).

or oscillate between two moments, since he never used such arguments in order to suspend judgment. This is not to deny that “skeptical arguments” do play a role in Hume’s own thinking, for Hume does have a use for them. For instance, he uses one such argument in order to prove one of his doctrines concerning the workings of our mind, namely, his doctrine of belief (*cf.* T 1.4.1.8; SBN 183-184).

This is not to deny also that these skeptical arguments do have an impact on many beliefs. Skeptical arguments, though they may not induce total suspension of judgment, will certainly destroy many beliefs.²⁰ That is why it is wrong to say he oscillates between no beliefs at all and natural beliefs: once these arguments have an impact on him, not all beliefs return after doing philosophy; in fact, many beliefs are shaken and put aside by those skeptical arguments, like superstitious beliefs and religious beliefs. But there is no oscillation at all here: those beliefs destroyed by skeptical arguments do not come back in ordinary life. In the final position reached by Hume we do not see an oscillation between two poles, but a stable one.

Fogelin takes up Popkin’s interpretation and improves on it. According to him, there is, for sure, two successive causes in his path towards a more mitigated skepticism. He says that “the mitigated skepticism that Hume recommend is the causal product of two competing influences: Pyrrhonian doubt on one side, natural instinct on the other. We do not argue for mitigated skepticism; we find ourselves there. In this way Hume’s skepticism and naturalism meet in a causal theory of skepticism itself” (*cf.* 1985, 150)²¹ Thus, according to Fogelin, Hume’s mitigated skepticism is a *causal* result from two opposed factors, which appear to be irreconcilable in their contents, but lead causally to a stable position.

While I do agree that Hume’s final position is achieved by the combination of these two factors, I do not agree that their relation is that of cause and effect or of incompatible stages that cannot be reconciled, so that their combination must be thought of in terms of a causal relation. Therefore, I do not think that Fogelin’s interpretation is an adequate description of Hume’s philosophy. For one thing, it is not worthy of a philosopher to accept a doctrine as a mere causal product

20 Fogelin (1985) correctly insists on this point: not all beliefs come back after going through excessive skepticism.

21 In a new book on Hume, Fogelin (2009) downplayed the role of skepticism in Hume’s philosophy, thereby giving more attention to his “naturalist” moments. In the Preface (ix), he explains that, in the 80’s, it was important to stress, against the naturalist interpretation, the importance of Hume’s skepticism, but that in the new millennia this need disappeared. For our purposes, though he presents a more complex case, in which he discerns four different voices, Fogelin still makes a distinction between those two parts in Hume’s philosophy, as the Introduction (3-7) makes clear.

of previous steps of his thinking. There must be a *reason* to accept it. Instead of causal factors, we should understand Hume as pondering about these forces that act on the human intellect. By *reflecting* on skeptical arguments, Hume may come to adopt a position in which he will still retain many beliefs (like in bodies and selves or that fire produces smoke), while avoiding other beliefs (dogmatic, religious or superstitious beliefs). Though reason may seem to throw away all beliefs, when used immoderately by the excessive skeptic, a balanced reason (one which will use “skeptical arguments” properly, i. e. not for suspending judgment, but to show our whimsical condition and the nature of our beliefs) will not.

In my view, there is a kind of second order reason, a reason that reflects upon the skeptical arguments (reasoning). This reflective reason may, of course, correct the excessive use of skeptical arguments, since it notes that it is impossible to withhold judgments all the time about everything and, if it were possible, it would destroy life. Accordingly, this reflective reason proposes another use for skeptical arguments. This moderate use of skeptical arguments is integrated to Hume’s investigation into the understanding.²² By stepping back and adopting a broader perspective, i. e., reflecting on what he has achieved, Hume is not conscious of two irreconcilable steps that causally leads to a further step, but becoming aware of both the weaknesses of the understanding and the inevitability of some beliefs he consciously construed a unified philosophy.

One might say that skeptical arguments are more powerful than what I suggest. For instance, T 1.4.1 (*cf.* SBN 180-187) concerns not only knowledge, but also probability and, if Hume’s argument is correct, then *all* probability reduces to zero. Didn’t the skeptical arguments go out of control? There is something right about this objection. That is why there is a “tension” to be explained. But, I think, it has to be explained away, for in the end Hume finds a solution to the tension. Moreover, I think the tension is worse in the *Treatise* than in first *Enquiry*. For one reason, in EHU Hume disarms most skeptical arguments without appealing to nature, whereas in T nature is much more important.²³ For example, those arguments in the EHU that Hume uses against reason do find an argumentative solution. There is no need, in this case, to invoke nature. But even in the *Treatise*, I think, the very consideration that nature is too strong for principle has to be considered an “argument”, though perhaps not in a traditional sense, or a “consideration”. This

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22 See Smith (2011) for a detailed account of Hume’s two uses of skeptical arguments. See Stroud (1991).

23 See Smith (1990).

consideration leads Hume to use skeptical arguments with a different goal. That is the key to the interpretation being offered here: the idea of different uses of the same skeptical arguments. The excessive skeptic uses the skeptical argument to induce total suspension of judgment; but this is not the only use one can make of them: one can use them to highlight the importance of the sensitive part in belief or just to avoid superstition and bad philosophy (but not all belief). Thus, the objector is right in saying that skeptical arguments are more threatening than I suggested above, for in fact they can be used to reject all belief (and the excessive skeptic may even succeed for a short period of time. Nonetheless, as I suggested, this does not imply that one can tame or domesticate them by coming to be aware that they are ineffective in life and, therefore, even in philosophy.

In sum, it seems to me that skeptical arguments never went out of control, since Hume never used them in such a way as to induce total suspension of judgment. Since skeptical arguments were not used to induce total suspension of judgment, but only to highlight the sensitive nature of belief and the inevitability of some beliefs, there is no conflict at all between these two factors. In fact, they are integrated in a single perspective. Once again: Hume characterized the philosophy that insists that belief is sensitive, that points out the role of habit or custom in our causal reasoning etc. as “very sceptical” (*cf.* T *Abs.* 27). He later came to call it a mitigated form of skepticism (*cf.* EHU 12).

One consequence of this interpretation is that those who emphasize the normative aspect above the descriptive aspect are wrong. Since there has been some recent discussion on the topic,²⁴ it may not be amiss to say a few words concerning it without any intention to put an end in it. I do not wish to deny that there is some normative aspect in Hume’s philosophy, but only that its normative aspect is dependent on the descriptive one. One evidence that the normative is not the key to understand Hume’s philosophy is that the rules laid down in the *Treatise* (*cf.* T 1.3.15; SBN 173-176) not only comes after the so-called descriptive part, but also simply disappears in the first *Enquiry*. Moreover, it is not entirely correct to say that Hume’s philosophy is “descriptive”. For one thing, Hume distinguishes between an initial level, in which we describe the items of the mind and their obvious relations, and a deeper level, in which we make hypotheses concerning the principles of the human mind, just like we can describe the motions of the planets (*cf.* EHU 1.8) and posit gravity as a principle that governs these movements (*cf.* EHU 1.9).

24 See, for instance, Allison (2008, 132) and De Pierris (2015).

I think that Hume begins as an empiricist and, as such, he not only describes the human mind (like describing the movement of the planets), but also raises some hypothesis as to the principles that govern our minds (like the law of gravity), going beyond mere description. As an empiricist, Hume bases his theories on observation and experience (whatever exactly that means) and, this, for him, as a sort of Newtonian, is to do induction, i. e., to correlate phenomena with phenomena under regularities, which are explained by some postulated principle. So, from the very start, constant conjunction is accepted - by all hands - as a legitimate procedure in science; what is not accepted by all hands is that we have intuitions about essences or first principles etc. - such a conception of science or knowledge has to be argued for or justified. Now, as Hume proceeds, he comes to realize how defective is our mind and so this allegedly other kind of science (that goes beyond experience, empirical correlation and hypothesis about the principles that organize and explain these correlations) is not available to us or beyond our capacities. There is nothing else for us to do than empirical science as Hume (and Newton) has been doing from the very first sentence of the *Treatise*. Is this normative? I think it is, and in two different senses: 1) In a negative sense: it is normative in the sense of saying what one ought *not* to do; 2) in a positive sense: it is not only what we do, but also what we *have* to do: both to a) survive and b) improve our knowledge in a methodic and organized way. 2b is the normative in the sense some commentators talk about. Now, one can in this methodic and organized way describe how the mind works - that's what Hume did in the "descriptive part"- and this can be the base for some norms or rules for a systematic investigation of the world. But he was not searching these rules, he was open to find other rules (maybe Descartes was right; or it could turn out that Malebranche was right etc.), but the fact is that Hume found out that we are confined to those procedures he started with. So, I do not think that there is a second, independent element, the normative, beyond the descriptive, because the descriptive is at the very base of the normative and the normative makes sense only within the context of description and our incapacity of going further of what has been described.

Conclusion.

What emerges from all these considerations is a more coherent, integrated view of Hume's philosophy. He describes the contents of the mind, makes some basic distinctions, and asks how impressions and ideas are related. The latter are copies of the first. The copy principle sets a task to him: he must try to find out the original impressions from which our ideas are copies. To explore this connection is essential to his

science of the understanding. Since our basic beliefs are highly enough complex ideas, the task is not an easy one. He then tries to describe the mechanism through which the mind produces such beliefs or enlivens our ideas. Now, the principle of separability, i. e. that the mind can easily separate two ideas wherever it finds a difference, plays an important role in many of these descriptions, but it plays only a partial role in them. Searching the principles of the human understanding, Hume, through different levels, goes deeper and deeper in his analyses. Usually by a disjunctive syllogism, he identifies the faculty responsible for our beliefs; then he proposes a specific hypothesis as to how the imagination works. When, in the end, he looks back and realizes that our understanding is very imperfect, he cannot but become a skeptic. It is important to note that his skepticism does not threaten his empirical science of the human understanding; rather, his skepticism is based on it. With the notable exception of personal identity, Hume never rejects what he has said concerning his hypotheses. It is because he is extremely confident that he has discovered the main principles of our understanding and has shown all its defects, all the fictions it produces, all the fallacies it commits, all the contradictions involved in its mechanism that he has no option but to become a skeptic.²⁵ He was not a skeptic in the beginning, but just an empiricist; but in the end he became a skeptic. But he became a moderate or mitigated skeptic, i. e., reflecting back on the imperfections of the human understanding does not make him suspend all judgment, just some judgments. And, therefore, becoming a skeptic, he did not reject his empirical science, not even empirical science in general, but he rejected only other kinds of “knowledge”, such as “knowledge” promoted by philosophers like Descartes, Malebranche, and Berkeley.

Perhaps the unity of Hume’s logic should be emphasized. Interpreters tended to reduce his skepticism merely to a rejection of rationalism, dogmatism, or metaphysics; so, they had to invent a label for his “positive” part. They invented Hume’s “naturalism”. Nowadays it is a common place to refer to “Hume’s naturalism”, as if it were obvious that there is such a “naturalism” in Hume’s philosophy. But if the above interpretation is correct in its general lines, “naturalism” excludes the so called “negative” part, so it is not an apt label for Hume’s logic. It is time to stop asking how one should integrate two different parts in Hume’s logic, such as: how are skepticism and naturalism combined? What interpreters called “naturalism” (an anachronistic word; for example, a “naturalist” was, still more than a hundred years later, Darwin) is only

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 25 As Singer (2000) points out, “Hume casts nature in an equivocal and troublesome role” (230) and “nature, operating in its best and most regular way, contradicts itself” (233).

part of what Hume himself called skepticism. One has to remember that Hume calls this blind submission to nature and following natural propensities a form of skepticism.²⁶ Hume does not equate skepticism with mere rejection of all beliefs. Quite on the contrary, in the *Abstract*, he goes on to describe all his philosophy as “very sceptical” (τ *Abs.* 27), including in his skeptical philosophy all topics commentators attribute to his “naturalism”, such as the role of sentiments and nature in our lives, among other things. In sum, by misunderstanding the unity of Hume’s philosophy and the nature of his skepticism, interpreters arbitrarily split his philosophy into two parts.²⁷ It is similar with other labels, like “empiricism” or “realism”. In general, it has been asked, and it is still seen as a main problem to ask: are the “negative” part and the “positive” part compatible? Which comes first? Shall we stress Hume, the destroyer of metaphysics, or should we praise the scientist (or say, the historian)? How could Hume have written on the passions and on morals if his skepticism devastated (or seemed to devastate) everything? Such questions arise only when interpreters have previously introduced into Hume’s philosophy two different parts, reduced his skepticism to the negative part, and cut it out from the whole. As Berkeley said: first we raise the dust and then complain we cannot see.

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26 Thielke says that “Hume’s skepticism in the *Treatise* is *complicit* with naturalism [...] This skepticism *follows* from a ‘natural’ feature of the mind” (63-64). In my view, one should go further and say that what Hume calls his skepticism is identical with what commentators call his naturalism. Moreover, properly speaking, skepticism follows from his empirical science of the human nature, when this empirical science shows how imperfect our understand is, not from a natural feature of the mind.

27 Penelhum (1975, 18) points out that “the scientific naturalism (emphasized by Kemp Smith) and the skepticism about the powers of reason (emphasized in Hume’s own times by Thomas Reid in particular, and since by almost everyone else) are not, in Hume’s eyes, at odds with one another. It is not as strange as it looks to suggest that if one is not previously committed to some understanding of what skepticism is that rules out such a combination”. Penelhum is surely right in identifying a preconceived notion of skepticism as the source of so much misunderstanding.

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