HUME'S NATURALISM

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1

INTRODUCTION

The scholarly background

The importance of naturalism in understanding Hume's philosophy was first emphasized by Kemp Smith. Kemp Smith's work has been available for more than fifty years[1] but it has not had the influence one might have anticipated. Amongst specialists on Hume, it has certainly had an influence. But amongst philosophers in general, at least until very recently, it has been largely ignored. It is still very common, for example, to find references to 'Humean Causation'. This is the view that causation is identical with regularity or constant conjunction. The implication is that Hume held this view. It is not uncommon to find people who assume that Hume denied the existence of causation altogether. Kemp Smith spent some time in demolishing both those views. My own interpretation of Hume differs from Kemp Smith's but it is greatly indebted to him and it will be useful therefore to consider, first, what interpretation he advanced, and second, why it has not been widely influential.

The interpretation of Hume most commonly accepted in the nineteenth century was advanced by Thomas Reid and, later, by T.H.Green.[2] In his *Inquiry,* Reid argued with great power and clarity that the empiricism of the eighteenth century rested on what he termed the theory of ideas. Roughly speaking, this is the view that our knowledge of objects is derived from the ideas or images which they impress on our minds. It is these ideas or images which are the immediate objects of perception, not the objects in an independent world which they represent. Reid argued that this view led inevitably to scepticism, for unless we already have knowledge of an independent world how can we know that it is represented by our images or ideas? He argued, further, that the whole view rested on a fallacy. The ideas or images, to which the empiricists refer, are really the sensory experience involved in perceiving an object. This sensory experience is that *whereby* we perceive; it is not *what* we perceive. The empiricists confuse the two. Thus the sensory experience involved in perceiving a tree, that *whereby* it is perceived, is identified with the object of perception, *what* is perceived. In effect, the object of perception becomes our own sensory experience, which comes between ourselves and the tree.

The scepticism implicit in this view is not apparent in every empiricist. But that is because not every empiricist is consistent. It is here that we may appreciate the virtue of Hume. Unlike earlier empiricists, he follows the implications of the empiricist view and makes explicit the scepticism it contains. In his philosophy, we are deprived of our certainty not simply in an independent world but even in the reality of the self. The only reality are the ideas or impressions themselves.

For Reid, then, the virtue of Hume lies in his making explicit the scepticism inherent in empiricism, thereby, though unwittingly, reducing it to absurdity. But Reid was concerned not simply to expose the fallacies of empiricism; he wished also to replace it with a quite different philosophy. This was the naturalism which is found already in Shaftesbury but which was developed most clearly by philosophers in the Scottish school, such as Hutcheson, Turnbull, Kames, Reid himself and, later, William Hamilton. The essence of Scottish naturalism is that our knowledge has its source not in our experience or reasoning but in our relations to a world which transcends both our knowledge and ourselves. The power of this view may be illustrated by referring once more to empiricism. The empiricist view is that our knowledge has its source in sense experience. Thus our belief counts as knowledge only if we can justify it. We justify a belief by stepping outside it and comparing it with what we observe in the world. This view overlooks a point of some importance. The power of comparing a belief with the world itself presupposes beliefs about the world. We cannot step outside all our beliefs. This means that we cannot justify our knowledge as a whole, though we may justify one belief by reference to others. 'Belief' said William Hamilton 'is the primary condition of reason, not reason the ultimate ground of belief'.[3] The Scottish naturalists clearly anticipated views which were later developed by Kant. Thus our ideas or beliefs cannot simply be the product of sense experience since without ideas or beliefs our sense experience is blind. The point may be illustrated by reference to our belief in an independent world. On the empiricist view, this belief is justified by an inference from sense experience. But sense experience, being subjective, can give us no idea of an independent world. If we have no idea of such a world, how can we infer it? The inference from sense experience is plausible only if we already have knowledge of such a world. But if we already have such knowledge, it is unnecessary to make the inference. We could never have known an independent world were it not *given* to us in *natural* belief. For it is the *condition* of all our knowledge. It is naturalism in this sense which Reid opposes to the empiricism, as he sees it, of Hume's philosophy.

Now one of the main objects of Kemp Smith's study is to show that Reid's interpretation of Hume is mistaken. He argues that Hume was already aware of the scepticism inherent in empiricism and that the aim of his philosophy was not to advance but rather to counteract that scepticism, on the basis of views which in many respects were similar to Reid's own. As evidence

forthis, Kemp Smith argues that the *Treatise* is misleading in its arrangement, so that to appreciate the flow of its argument one needs, as it were, to read it backwards. In the first book, we are presented with views in epistemology which are empiricist in their tendency; in the last, with views on morals which are plainly influenced by the naturalism of Hutcheson. Kemp Smith argues that the views in the first book are merely provisional; it is the views in the last which are fundamental to the *Treatise* as a whole. Thus Hutcheson had argued that morality arises not through reasoning but on the basis of feelings given to us by nature. In morals, reason is the slave of the passions. The originality of the *Treatise* is that Hume takes this view and applies it quite generally, so that reason is everywhere subordinate to feeling, not simply in morals but even in matters of fact. In all our knowledge, we depend ultimately on natural attitude or belief. What the *Treatise* presents, in short, is not empiricism but a thoroughgoing naturalism. To appreciate the force of Hume's view we may compare it with a view of man which had become common during the enlightenment. The leading thinkers of the enlightenment accepted the Greek definition of man as a rational animal; in other words, they assumed that man is moved primarily by reason, the feelings being subordinate, serving to help or hinder reason in its operation. Hume exactly reverses this view.[4] Reason is always subordinate in its operation to feeling or beliefs, which have their origin in our nature and are not themselves derived from reason. The implication of this view is the opposite of sceptical. The essence of scepticism is that it seeks through reason to undermine our fundamental beliefs. Hume's point is that reason is cogent only when it is subordinate to our fundamental beliefs. Consequently it cannot undermine them. Thus in discussing our belief in an independent world his aim is not to undermine that belief. His point is precisely that reason cannot undermine a belief which is implanted in us by nature. The belief in an independent world, being prior to reason, is impervious to it.

> Thus the sceptic still continues to reason and believe even tho' he asserts, that he cannot defend his reason by reason.... Nature has not left this to his choice, and has doubtless esteemed it an affair of too great importance to be trusted to our uncertain reasonings and speculations. We may well ask, *What causes induce us to believe in the existence of body?* but 'tis in vain to ask *Whether there be body or not?* That is a point, which we must take for granted in all our reasonings.[5]

At the heart of Hume's philosophy in the *Treatise* is his analysis of causality. Kemp Smith supports his interpretation of Hume by a brilliant account of this analysis. It must be taken in two stages. In the first, Hume takes an instance of the causal process, for example, one ball's moving another, and seeks to detect the features essential to it. He immediately detects two suchfeatures,

contiguity and succession. The first ball is in contact with the second (contiguity); the movement of the second follows upon contact with the first (succession). But these features, though necessary to our idea of causality, are not sufficient. A mere succession does not in itself strike us as causal. Hume detects a third feature, constant conjunction. When the process is repeated, the same thing occurs. It is clear, however, that constant conjunction can reveal no feature that is not already known. For it is a mere repetition of the process already detected. That concludes the first stage of the analysis. It is essential to note, first, that Hume has confined himself throughout to what can be detected in the causal process simply by observation or sense experience and, second, that the conclusion is entirely negative. Our knowledge of causality cannot be derived simply from sense experience. In short, the conclusion is the opposite of empiricist. Observation of the external world cannot in itself reveal what is essential to causality. In particular, it cannot reveal what is most essential, namely, its *necessity. What* convinces us that a process is causal is not a mere succession in the events; rather it is the feeling that when the first event occurs the second is *bound* to follow. We feel the events *always* occur that way. The question is how we can detect what will always occur, simply by observing what occurs here and now. The answer is that we cannot.

Hume now moves to the second stage of his analysis. Having considered and found unsatisfactory what we observe in the external process, he next considers what occurs in our minds when we observe that process. What appears in sense experience is insufficient; we must now consider what we may contribute to what appears. Here we have the essentials, it may be noted, of Kant's Copernican revolution.[6] To elucidate our knowledge, it is insufficient to consider what appears in the world; we must consider how the mind takes what appears to it. Thus, on Hume's analysis, there is a tendency, instinctive or natural to the mind, to trust repeated occurrence. Having experienced one event repeatedly follow another, we *feel* on observing the first that the second is bound to follow. Our idea of causality is based on this feeling, which is habitual or instinctive to the mind. What appears in sense experience as constant conjunction is turned by the mind into the form of causality. But the workings of the mind are instinctive or natural. They are not based on any rational insight into the objective nature of the causal process. On a matter of this importance, nature has not trusted to our fallible reasonings and speculations. Thus our reasoning about matters of fact can proceed only when the mind already takes the world in the form of causality, only when it is already adjusted to the causal process. The adjustment itself is prior to reason. It follows that our understanding of the world is based on relations which arise from the workings of nature, not from those of our own understanding.

This takes us to the heart of Hume's philosophy. The aim of the *Treatise* is to draw the limits of human reason, thereby providing the cure both for scepticism and for speculative metaphysics. The speculative metaphysician, assuming an unlimited power in human reason, seeks through its exercise

todiscover the ultimate nature of the universe. But he soon encounters problems, baffling in their nature, which he solves by an exercise rather of his imagination than of his reason. Consequently, what we find in speculative metaphysics is a proliferation of systems, each having as much or as little authority as any of the others. Philosophical scepticism arises as a recoil from this situation. Finding himself perplexed by insoluble problems, the philosopher takes refuge in universal doubt. The cure for both these tendencies is a proper understanding of the nature, and therefore of the limits, of human reason. Reason is cogent only when it derives its power from our natural beliefs, the ultimate causes of which are entirely unknown. Scepticism is dissipated when it is understood that reason, being relative to those beliefs, cannot undermine them. Speculative metaphysics is dissipated when it is understood that reason is inevitably limited by the beliefs to which it is relative. In this respect, the analysis of causality is exemplary. In causality we have a process which enters at every moment into all our affairs. But we have no insight into the nature of the process. It carries us in all our reasonings, but we do not know what carries us. For nature has equipped us to respond to causality, not to understand it. The moral is obvious.

> While we cannot give a satisfactory reason why we believe, after a thousand experiments, that a stone will fall or fire burn, can we ever satisfy ourselves concerning any determination which we may form with regard to the origin of worlds and the situation of nature from and to eternity?[7]

The conclusion of a sound philosophy, therefore, is that we should confine our reasonings to where they may be fruitful, to those aspects of human and physical nature which we are given to understand.

Imperfections

Through a redistribution of emphases, Kemp Smith has turned Hume from an empiricist into a Scottish naturalist. His study belongs amongst those great works of scholarship, through which our understanding of a subject is not simply increased but rather transformed. Why then has his work not been more widely influential? There are various factors. Some of them belong to the circumstances of the time. His work appeared in 1941, when the philosophical world was preoccupied with logical positivism.[8] Kemp Smith belonged to an older generation and was associated with idealism, a philosophy commonly thought to be discredited. The logical positivists had an allegiance to empiricism, of which their philosophy was a development, and they took Hume as one of their champions. The minority who opposed empiricism took Hume at this estimate and were more concerned to criticize than to

understand him. Moreover, Kemp Smith's contrast betweenempiricism and naturalism did not appear to the philosopher of the time as a contrast. The naturalism of the Scottish school was not understood. The only naturalism available was the scientific naturalism of the logical positivists, which was a development of empiricism. At the time, there was no apparent contrast.

But these are factors which belong to the circumstances of the time. The more important factors, for our purpose, are those which arise from certain imperfections in Kemp Smith's own work. There are two such imperfections, and each must be considered in some detail. The first concerns the consistency of Hume's naturalism. As we have seen, Kemp Smith recognizes that the opening sections of the *Treatise* are empiricist in their tendency. He argues, however, that these views are merely provisional and that they are properly understood only when they are supplemented by the views which occur later. The trouble is that empiricism and naturalism, of the Scottish type, are not simply different but incompatible, so that it is difficult to see how one can arrive at the latter simply by supplementing the former. For the Scottish naturalist, the mind is to be understood in its relations to a world which transcends it. For the eighteenth-century empiricist, the world is to be understood through its reflections in the mind. For the naturalist, the relations between mind and world are intentional or teleological. For the empiricist, the world impresses itself on the mind in a manner which is quasi-mechanical. For the naturalist, the mind reveals its capacities precisely in our dealings with an independent world. For the empiricist, the mind is characterized by what is private or subjective. The naturalist has no problem about the existence of the independent world, since the existence of such a world provides the setting for his whole philosophy. The empiricist, having characterized the mind, has great difficulty in showing how it can know an independent world.

It is impossible to combine those views in a coherent philosophy. If there is a philosophy which contains both, we must reject some of its aspects in favour of others. Now Kemp Smith's tendency is to take Hume's philosophy as a whole. Either he is an empiricist, as Reid supposes, or he is a naturalist, as Kemp Smith supposes himself. But one of the most striking features of the *Treatise,* the source perhaps of its enduring appeal, is that it vividly expresses the processes of philosophical perplexity, the condition in which the mind is torn between incompatible views. This is most vividly expressed in the section where Hume himself falls into the scepticism from which at the beginning of the section he had promised to deliver us.

> I begun this subject with premising, that we ought to have an implicit faith in our senses, and that this wou'd be the conclusion, I shou'd draw from the whole of my reasoning. But to be ingenuous, I feel myself *at present* of a quite contrary sentiment, and am more inclin'd to repose no faith at all in my senses, or rather imagination, than to place in it such an implicit confidence.[9]

Overall clarity or coherence is not the most evident feature of Hume's philos ophy.[10] In this, he is greatly inferior to Thomas Reid. Reid's philosophy is based on a systematic criticism of the philosophical assumptions common to his age and, in particular, of the empiricist scheme which Hume adopts at the beginning of the *Treatise.* Hume himself seems never to have considered such a criticism. The scheme was commonly accepted by the philosophers of the age and he took it as established. It allows him some room for manoeuvre. In particular, he makes good use of the distinction between impressions of reflection and impressions of sensation. Impressions of reflection, from which we get our ideas of the passions, are not really reflections of sensory impressions but have an independent power. They are more properly impressions of reaction. In this way, Hume is able to give the mind a more active cast than one might at first suppose. Moreover, since our most fundamental ideas arise from ideas of reflection, rather than from those of sensation, he is enabled in some measure to break free from the empiricist scheme. But the scheme is still quite inadequate to his purposes. The naturalism to which Kemp Smith refers is really present in Hume's philosophy and constitutes its most profound aspects. But empiricism is also present and is incompatible with the naturalism. In consequence the *Treatise* continually presents us with an acute tension between incompatible philosophies.

The point will be illustrated in more detail as we proceed but even at this stage it will be useful to give two illustrations. First, the naturalist view evidently requires an intentional view of belief. Belief takes an object and presupposes a world independent of itself. Hume, following the empiricist scheme, defines belief in purely subjective terms. Thus belief differs from the imagination simply through the greater vivacity of its ideas. Kemp Smith argues that Hume's aim is not to identify belief with vivacity. His aim is simply to indicate one way in which belief may be distinguished from the imagination. However, Hume never says this, which is somewhat remarkable. What is even more remarkable is that he says the exact opposite. 'Thus it appears, that *belief* or *assent,* which always attends the memory and senses, is nothing but the vivacity of those perceptions they present; and that this alone distinguishes them from the imagination.'[11]

Second, Hume treats an idea on the model of an image, which copies an impression. Now the impression which gives rise to the idea of causality belongs to the internal sense, being an impression of reflection. Since an idea is the mere copy of an impression then, strictly speaking, our ideas of causality should represent the workings of our own minds. Moreover there is a passage in which this is what Hume says: 'Upon the whole, necessity is something that exists in the mind, not in objects; nor is it possible for us ever to form the most distant idea of it, considered as a quality in bodies.'[12] Kemp Smith is correct to argue that this passage misrepresents the main drift of Hume's analysis and he holds on this basis that it should be discounted. But in a coherent naturalism the passage would not have appeared at all.

Once the inconsistencies in Hume's philosophy are appreciated, it becomes easy to remove a problem which Kemp Smith himself never addressed. As he recognizes, the philosophy he attributes to Hume is very similar to that of Thomas Reid. On any serious estimate, Reid was a philosopher of great ability and he spent a number of years in studying the *Treatise.* It is remarkable he never notices that its views were very similar to his own. The problem disappears once one recognizes that the *Treatise* involves assumptions which are quite incompatible with Reid's views. As we have seen, those assumptions appear at the beginning of the work. It is natural to read an author in the light of his opening assumptions. Read in this way, the views which appear later in the work seem reconcilable with the earlier ones only by taking them as ironic in expression and sceptical in intent. Moreover, it is very easy to take them in that way. We may illustrate the point by referring to what Hume says about the relation between reason and our natural beliefs. On a close study, these remarks reveal themselves as essentially epistemological. Reason depends in part for its very cogency or power on those beliefs. That is a remark about the nature of reason. But read in the light of the earlier views, the remarks seem merely psychological. As it happens, we cannot help holding those beliefs; nevertheless we have no good reason to do so. Here reason and natural beliefs are in conflict. For Reid the two are in harmony, reason, so far as it is cogent, having its very base in natural belief. We may grant that this also is Hume's view in the *Treatise.* But it is not surprising that even Reid failed to find it there, and that itself testifies to a lack of coherence in Hume's naturalism.

The second imperfection in Kemp Smith's work is that he fails to distinguish between two quite different types of naturalism. The naturalism which appears in the profounder aspects of Hume's work is quite different from the scientific naturalism or positivism which developed much later, during the course of the nineteenth century. But Kemp Smith never distinguishes clearly between the two and sometimes treats them as interchangeable. In this way, he obliterates or renders obscure his contrast between empiricism and naturalism, for scientific naturalism is a development of empiricism. This is a point of vital importance and we must consider it in some detail.

The naturalism which appears in the profounder aspects of Hume's work is the same as that of the Scottish naturalists. This is essentially *epistemological.* It holds that the source of our knowledge lies not in our own experience or reasoning but in our relations to the world, which for the most part pass beyond our knowledge. These relations show themselves in capacities, attitudes and beliefs which are not derived from experience and reasoning. Reasoning is cogent and experience intelligible only so far as they presuppose those capacities, attitudes and beliefs. Thus in all our experience or reasoning we presuppose our belief in causality or in an independent world. These are natural beliefs. They are formed in us along with ourselves and therefore have their source not in our own activity but in the world which has produced us.

Scientific naturalism, or positivism, is a doctrine about the nature of reality as a whole. It is essentially *metaphysical,* though it often takes the guise of an attack on metaphysics. It holds that reality is co-extensive with nature. Nature itself is defined as that which falls under the categories of physical science. Since nature falls within those categories and since it is co-extensive with reality, the whole of reality, in principle at least, may be revealed by scientific inquiry. Science therefore embraces all knowledge. It proceeds by framing laws which are derived from sense experience. The source of our knowledge, therefore, lies wholly within our own experience and reasoning. The doctrine in an extreme form appears in the following definition by John Dewey. According to Dewey, naturalism is the view 'that the whole of the universe or experience may be accounted for by a method like that of the physical sciences'.[13] We may note that for Dewey experience is interchangeable with the whole universe and that the physical sciences provide a method by which it may be wholly revealed.

It should be evident that the above doctrine is not simply different from Scottish naturalism but entirely incompatible with it. Scientific naturalism is an expression of the Sophistic view that man is the measure of all things; Scottish naturalism is a denial of that view, the measure being in nature, not in man. The first naturalism has an unbounded confidence in human reason and experience; the second an awareness of their inevitable limits. The first supposes that belief is measured by reason; the second that reason rests ultimately on belief. The first supposes that the whole universe may be known on the basis of familiar categories; the second that our categories rest on causes which transcend both our categories and ourselves. For the first, the universe is merely an extension of what is already known; for the second, it is ultimately mysterious. The first is secular in spirit; the second, is religious.

The *Treatise,* in its profounder aspects, can be taken as a criticism of scientific naturalism. Thus in his introduction, Hume makes clear that his aim is to cure the disorders of philosophy. The source of these disorders lies precisely in the view that nothing is mysterious but only problematical and that any difficulty may be removed, given sufficient persistence, by human reason. It is this which gives rise to speculative metaphysics and, by a recoil, to philosophical scepticism. Against this, Hume argues that reason is inevitably limited and that a recognition of what we cannot understand is the requirement of a sound philosophy. Only in this way can we provide the cure for philosophical scepticism on the one hand and speculative metaphysics on the other.

The scientific naturalists, it is true, were also hostile to metaphysics. But that is because they thought it unnecessary, having been replaced by science. The metaphysicians had adopted inappropriate methods in their attempt to discover the ultimate nature of the universe. With the development of science, a method has at last been found which is adequate to the purpose. Their view, in short, is that science does the same job as metaphysics but with different

and more appropriate methods. Thus Dewey, as we have seen, takes forgranted that the physical sciences provide a method by which we may explain the whole of reality. In effect, this is to adopt a *metaphysical interpretation of science.*

We may illustrate the point by contrasting the attitude of the two naturalisms to Newtonian mechanics. In the nineteenth century, the Newtonian system was commonly treated, not as a model for understanding certain features of the physical world, but as a definitive picture of the whole universe. It is this view which played a large part in the rise of scientific naturalism. The attitude of Hume and the Scottish naturalists was radically different. They valued Newton because, in contrast, for example, to the Cartesians, he removed from science not simply metaphysical methods but also the metaphysical task. In their terms, he refused to speculate about *ultimate* causes and confined himself to what is *manifest.* This distinction between the manifest and the ultimate, which is reminiscent of Kant's distinction between the phenomenal and the noumenal, is fundamental to their attitude. The distinction appears, in various forms, at innumerable points in the *Treatise.* For example, within a single section, the one on causality, it appears more than a dozen times. The *ultimate* arouses our *curiosity,* which, like any other passion, is remorseless once aroused. Frustrated in one theory, it readily manufactures another and will accept any theory rather than remain unsatisfied. In this way, there arises that proliferation of theories which corrupt science and philosophy alike. The cure is to confine our inquiries to what we are fitted to understand, to what can be made *manifest* to our faculties. This is what Hume and the Scottish naturalists took to be Newton's method. He refused to manufacture hypotheses, to speculate about ultimate causes, and confined his experiments to those aspects of nature which may be made manifest. In his *History of England,* Hume praises Newton for some of his positive achievements. But Newton's supreme achievement he takes to be *negative.* He curbed the vanity of the learned by showing that nature, so far from conforming to their speculations, is ultimately transcendent.

> Boyle was a great partisan of the mechanical philosophy; a theory which, by discovering some of the secrets of nature, and allowing us to imagine the rest, is agreeable to the natural vanity and curiosity of men.... While Newton seemed to draw off the veil from some of the mysteries of nature, he showed at the same time the imperfections of the mechanical philosophy; and thereby restored her ultimate secrets to that obscurity in which they ever did and ever will remain.[14]

In the light of the above passage, it is worth noting that some commentators have taken Hume himself to be a partisan of the mechanical philosophy. Some, indeed, have argued that he hoped by means of the principles of association to institute a thoroughgoing science of human nature, in the manner of the scientific naturalists.[15] In fact, Hume was always clear that the mechanisms of

association were a surface phenomenon. In other words, they belonged to those aspects of mind which can be made manifest. He never supposed that they would enable us to explain the mind in its ultimate causes. Moreover, by the time he wrote the *Enquiries,* he had become convinced that even his earlier estimate of their importance was exaggerated.

Given that scientific and Scottish naturalism stand in such stark contrast, one may wonder how the one could ever have been confused with the other. The answer lies in the increasing domination of scientific naturalism. It is now acquired with the culture and for most intellectuals is the only available faith. Thus although the modern commentator repeatedly misrepresents the profounder aspects of Hume's work and especially the Scottish naturalism which is its base, this is not due to any lack on his part of intelligence or industry. The fault lies with the spectacles on his nose. They turn everything into the positivism or empiricism with which they are tinted.

The point may be illustrated by reference to the work of a distinguished Hume scholar. David Fate Norton's book on Hume is valuable for the attention he gives to the intellectual background and especially to the Scottish naturalists.[16] He has an informative chapter, for example, on little known figures such as Turnbull and Kames. His view is that the naturalism of the Scottish school should be contrasted with that of Hume. The essential difference between the two is that the naturalism of the Scottish school is not thoroughgoing. Naturalists up to a point, they depend ultimately on their religious beliefs. Hence he refers to their view as providential naturalism or again as a 'curious supernatural naturalism'.[17] Thus they do not really hold that our natural beliefs are authoritative in themselves. They hold of course that they are true and must be accepted. But that is because 'they are convinced that our natural faculties are God-given, are a part of the overall design of a Providential nature, and can be trusted implicitly. They believe that what we naturally believe is in fact supernaturally guaranteed.'[18] In other words, the Scottish naturalists justify our natural beliefs by a belief in God. By contrast, no such appeal to God is found in Hume. Moreover, he has himself disproved the inference from the world to God's design, which is implicit in the naturalism of the Scottish school, by showing in the *Dialogues on Natural Religion* that any argument to design is valid only when it is derived from experience.

It may already be apparent that Norton views the Scottish naturalists on the basis of assumptions which belong to positivism or scientific naturalism. Thus, throughout his analysis, he treats their naturalism not as a doctrine in its own right but as a muddle-headed form of positivism. He refers to it, for example, as a curious supernatural naturalism. The view seems to him curious because he assumes that any clear-headed naturalism must be incompatible with a religious or supernatural view. But that is because he confuses *epistemological* naturalism, the view that our knowledge depends on what is given us by nature, with *metaphysical* naturalism, the view that there is no reality apart from

the natural world. It is obvious that the former view does not entail the latter. Consequently there is no necessary incompatibility between naturalism and a religious or supernatural view. Norton thinks otherwise because he identifies every naturalism with the naturalism prevalent in our own culture.

Moreover, though this is the source it is not the sum of his misunderstandings. He holds, as we have seen, that the Scottish naturalists justify our natural beliefs by referring to the existence of God. Such is the force of preconception that he sustains this interpretation whilst repeatedly quoting passages from the Scottish naturalists which prove the exact opposite. Here, for example, is a passage which he quotes from Reid.

> The existence of a material world, and of what we perceive by our senses, is not self-evident according to (modern) philosophy. Descartes founded it upon this argument, that God, who hath given us our senses, is no deceiver, and therefore they are not fallacious. I endeavoured to show that, if it be not admitted as a first principle, that our faculties are not fallacious, nothing else can be admitted, and that it is impossible to prove this by argument, unless God should give us new faculties to sit in judgement upon the old.[19]

In this passage, it is plainly Descartes who attempts to justify our natural faculties by referring to the existence of God. Reid's view is precisely that this is misguided in principle. The authority of our natural faculties cannot be established by argument, for if they have no authority we have no reason to accept any argument. We could justify our faculties in that fashion only if God supplied us with entirely different faculties; only, in short, if we were transformed into entirely different creatures. In this passage, Reid plainly rejects the very view that Norton attributes to him. We may take another example. Norton quotes the following passage from Lord Kames.

> If I can only be conscious of what passes through my mind, and if I cannot trust my senses when they give me notice of external and independent existences; it follows, that I am the only being in the world; at least that I can have no evidence from my senses, of any other being, body or spirit. This is certainly an unwary concession, because it deprives us of our chief or only means for attaining knowledge of Deity.[20]

In this passage, Lord Kames clearly states that our knowledge of the Deity presupposes the authority of our natural belief in an independent world. Plainly, therefore, he cannot hold that the authority of this belief is founded on our knowledge of the Deity. One suspects that Norton misses the point in these passages because he takes for granted that one is not entitled to a belief unless one can justify it. In other words, he shares the empiricist assumption that every body of belief should rest on some form of rational justification.

But that is to miss the very essence of epistemological naturalism. For the Scottish naturalists, justification cannot arise unless we are *already* entitled to certain beliefs. As Reid says, the authority of our natural beliefs must be taken as a first principle. It is not itself justified because it is presupposed in all our justification. Thus our belief in God cannot be the *foundation* of our natural beliefs; it is only *through* our natural beliefs that we can come to a belief in God.

We may note finally, for it is tedious to multiply examples, that Norton's interpretation of the Scottish naturalists is especially ironic in the case of Hutcheson, who was prosecuted by the Presbytery of Glasgow for holding, amongst other things, 'that we could have a knowledge of good and evil, without, and prior to a knowledge of God'.The Scottish clergy no doubt had their faults, but, in this case at least, we may credit them with a clear understanding of the views they criticized.

What is true, as Norton illustrates, is that in developing their philosophy, the Scottish naturalists regularly gave expression to their religious views. But the most obvious reason for this is that they saw no incompatibility between the two. Indeed we may go further. Although religious views cannot *justify* natural belief, they may nevertheless serve to explain or render more *comprehensible* its authority. Assume that the world has a Creator and it is easy to explain that harmony between mind and nature which is exhibited in natural belief. Assume, by contrast, that the world is the product simply of chance or blind causation and that harmony becomes not easier to explain but altogether inexplicable. In this way, the religious views of the Scottish naturalists are not simply compatible with the philosophy of natural belief; in so far as they render the authority of natural belief more comprehensible, they serve to support it.

The above points are expressed by Reid himself, with his usual clarity, in the following passage, where he is discussing our belief in the authority of the senses.

> Shall we say, then, that this belief is the inspiration of the Almighty? I think this may be said in a good sense; for I take it to be the immediate effect of our constitution, which is the work of the Almighty. But if inspiration be understood to imply a persuasion of its coming from God, our belief of the objects of sense is not inspiration, for a man would believe his sense though he had no notion of a Deity. He who is persuaded that he is the workmanship of God and that it is a part of his constitution to believe his senses may think that a good reason to confirm his belief. But he had the belief before he could give this or another reason for it.[21]

Hume's philosophy, then, cannot be fully understood unless we recognize, first, that it contains incompatible elements and, second, that in its profounder

elements it differs fundamentally from a later doctrine which superficially resembles it. Kemp Smith helps us to recognize the second point, but he does not sufficiently appreciate it himself; the first point he hardly appreciates at all. Therein lie the imperfections of his work. These imperfections are even more apparent in his celebrated introduction to Hume's *Dialogues on Natural Religion.* It is noticeable that his introduction to this work has been far more influential than his great study of Hume's whole philosophy. That is not surprising, for it conforms more closely to the assumptions of the culture. In his introduction, Kemp Smith argued that Hume, at least towards the end of his life, had come to accept what is effectively atheism and that the real aim of the *Dialogues* is to destroy the very essence of religious belief. There is some superficial evidence for this view in Hume's admiration for the enlightenment and in his antipathy to organized religion. It is unwise, however, to judge Hume's philosophical views by what he might wish to believe. It is one of his most remarkable qualities, the source of his greatness, that he will allow the philosophical argument to take him where he would not otherwise have wished to arrive. For example, he would have wished to accept the enlightenment ideal of reason. But in the *Treatise,* as Kemp Smith in effect argued, he entirely undermines that ideal. Indeed, as I shall show, in his view of the relation between reason and passion, he conforms much more closely to the Calvinism he detested than to the enlightenment he admired. In his introduction, Kemp Smith attempted a detailed defence of his interpretation of the *Dialogues.* The argument is tortuous, for he is too scrupulous a scholar to suppress any of the evidence. Unfortunately, the evidence, at numerous points, is plainly incompatible with his interpretation. The evidence is overwhelming that Hume never rid himself of his belief in God. Indeed it is evident that he never rid himself of his belief in the argument from design. For at the climax of the *Dialogues,* he affirms a version of precisely that argument.[22] His aim in the *Dialogues,* as I shall argue, is not to destroy but to limit the argument from design, and in particular to show that, so far as it is valid, it provides no support for organized religion. In a recent edition of the *Dialogues,]. C.A.* Gaskin reports the perplexity one of his colleagues experienced on first reading the work. He did not know where Hume stood. His perplexity is easy to understand, for it almost certainly arose from the incompatibility between what he knew to be the accepted view of the work and what he found when he actually read it. Kemp Smith is the person largely responsible for the accepted view.

The foregoing remarks provide us with our theme. It is the tension in Hume's philosophy between his empiricist inheritance and a certain kind of naturalism. To pursue that theme we must turn to a study of his most famous works, *The Treatise of Human Nature* and *The Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion.* Picking up this theme as it appears, we shall be guided through those works and may hope to obtain a clear view of Hume's philosophy as a whole.