



Jani Hakkarainen. *Hume's Scepticism and Realism: His Two Profound Arguments Against the Senses in An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*

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Jani Hakkarainen. *Hume's Scepticism and Realism: His Two Profound Arguments Against the Senses in An Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*. Tampere: University Press, 2007. Pp. x + 318. ISBN 978-951-44-7105-6, paperback, 28 €.

This academic dissertation presents an extensive overview of the current state of affairs of historical scholarship on the extent and scope of Hume's skepticism. Hakkarainen does a commendable job of juxtaposing all the major exegetical positions on Hume's skepticism, the volume thus functioning as an excellent work of reference on this issue. Hakkarainen follows Richard Popkin and Robert Fogelin in arguing for a version of the "two Hume view," in this case one according to which he was both a skeptic *and* a metaphysical Realist (note the capitalisation). The latter is defined as one who holds the view that entities (said to include substances, essences, properties, and causes) are mind-independent, continuous, and external to the perceiver (xi, cf. 264). Focusing primarily on Hume's two "profound" arguments against the senses (EHU 12.1.7–16; cf. *Treatise* 1.4.2–4), he offers detailed reconstructions of each step of each argument, guiding the reader through their structure, claims, counter-arguments, responses, and further objections, all summarised with helpful diagrams. From here he proceeds to discuss textual and contextual evidence for reconstructing Hume's attitudes towards these arguments before focusing on the "metaphysical implications" of these attitudes in his conclusion. Commentators discussed along the way include not only Popkin and Fogelin but also Donald Baxter, Annette Baier, Don Garrett, Lorne Falkenstein, Louis Loeb, David Owen, Peter Millican, David Fate Norton, David Pears, Paul Russell, Galen Strawson, Kenneth Winkler, John Wright, and John Yolton.

The volume easily surpasses the standard requirements for a Ph.D award and could perhaps, one day, be converted into a stimulating monograph. In its current form the study is replete with repetition (more than half the book consists of abstracts, introductions, preliminaries, reconstructions, overviews, summaries, and various summative conclusions), which is not to deny that ideas worthy of a wider readership reside beneath the jargon and endless recapitulations.

The suggestion that Hume puts aside his philosophical skepticism when engaged in everyday activities (such as the often-quoted example of playing backgammon with his friends) is in itself neither novel nor controversial. By contrast, the claim that his daily, non-philosophical, attitude is that of a metaphysical Realist is both original and intriguing. It implies, among other things, that Hume takes the "vulgar" belief in the external world to incorporate a metaphysical *theory*.

Hume certainly maintains (contra Berkeley, for example) that we naturally take it that the "bodies" that we perceive have a *continuous* and *distinct* existence. But

when it comes to explaining why we think this (in 1.4 of the *Treatise*) Hume goes through great pains to demonstrate that neither the senses *nor* reason can supply us with our pre-philosophical belief which is, rather, the result of *natural instinct* (which combines with the imagination to resolve cases of apparent conflict). Such belief, then, is no more the result of a metaphysical theory than is, say, a dog's belief that its food is in the bag; the ostrich that hides its head when it does not want to be seen is not a Relativist about perception.

If a "two Hume" view is to present us with an account that makes him a consistent thinker, the "everyday" Hume (anti-skeptical on both Hakkarainen's interpretation and the one I offered in its place above) had better not hold any beliefs that directly contradict those of his more skeptical "philosophical" self, for example, that the external world is metaphysically Real.

Hakkarainen's analysis is thought to reveal that Hume claims we have good *theoretical* reason to suspend our judgment on metaphysical Realism. This is not meant to lead to a universal suspension of all judgement, however, since (i) Hume does not believe this is possible given the nature of human psychology and, more contentiously, (ii) even if we could this would not be pragmatic or agreeable, since it would quickly lead to our demise. Hakkarainen takes this to encapsulate Hume's attack on Pyrrhonism. If this is right, then Hume seems unaware of the very obvious problem of insulation, viz. the problem of whether those skeptics who insulate their daily beliefs and actions from philosophical skepticism (and vice versa) can do so coherently. This is a genuine worry since (ii) above assumes all sorts of things the skeptic wishes to suspend judgment on. Any serious defence of the "two Hume" view at the very least requires an argument for why it is not incoherent (as G. E. Moore and Wittgenstein each demonstrated in different ways) for the sceptic to assume that.

It is true that Hume does not recommend that we abandon our belief in external bodies. As Hakkarainen would agree, part of Hume's task in both the *Treatise* and the first *Enquiry* is to show *why* Locke was right to think that we cannot take skeptical concerns seriously for any significant length of time. Skepticism is *psychologically impossible* for it goes against all natural instinct: "nature is always too strong for principle" (EHU 12.23; SBN 160). We consequently have no choice but to ground all our beliefs about matters of fact "entirely upon experience." Hakkarainen is also right to claim that Hume goes further than this, but his argument is not the pragmatic one outlined in (ii) above (which would be incoherent). Rather, it grows out of the suggestion that knowledge can only operate within the empirical bounds determined by our human nature; our brief (yet recurring) moments of skepticism are a kind of *sickness* and our philosophical attempts to fully cure ourselves self-defeating:

This sceptical doubt, both with respect to reason and the senses, is a malady, which can never be radically cur'd, but must return upon us

every moment, however we may chase it away, and sometimes may seem entirely free from it. 'Tis impossible upon any system to defend either our understanding or senses; and we but expose them farther when we endeavour to justify them in that manner. As the sceptical doubt arises naturally from a profound and intense reflection on those subjects, it always increases, the farther we carry our reflections, whether in opposition or conformity to it. Carelessness and in-attention alone can afford us any remedy. (*Treatise* 1.4.2; SBN 218)

But there is no reason to think that either of the two Humes should wish to endorse this malady rather than provide a therapy for it. Unfortunately, Hakkarainen's dissertation does not even *consider* the therapeutic readings of Hume (for instance, by Rupert Read et al). This is an unfortunate lacuna in an otherwise exhaustive study of how to best interpret Hume's writing on skepticism with regard to the external world.

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