

Hume's Naturalism and Skepticism: An Integrative Interpretation

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David Hume, a preeminent philosopher in eighteenth-century Scotland, was known for his radical skepticism. This image of Hume as an arch-skeptic in early modern Western philosophy continued steadily until the mid-twentieth century. However, Kemp Smith's 1905 epoch-making article and his seminal book in 1941 argued that Hume is a naturalist rather than a skeptic. Since then, the following question has been a subject of much debate in Humean scholarship: *Which is the real Hume, a skeptic or a naturalist?* My answer is neither just one nor the other, but both. This book aims to provide a new interpretation, that Hume is consistently *both* a distinguished naturalist *and* a thoroughgoing Pyrrhonian skeptic.

From Norman Kemp Smith to Don Garret, advocates of *Hume the naturalist* have contended that Hume's skeptical arguments are just his argumentative devices for his true conclusion. According to them, the theoretical point of Hume's skepticism is to show that human nature is so important that we cannot philosophize without it. Contrarily, the proponents of *Hume the skeptic*, including Robert Fogelin, Janet Broughton, and Kevin Meeker, have argued that Hume's skepticism is so radical that his naturalism cannot relieve its destructive conclusion. Scholars of both parties, thus, (sometimes contrary to their ostensible claims) have presupposed that Hume's skepticism and his naturalism conflict with each other. I attempt to repudiate such an assumption. This book is composed of two parts: In Part I, Chapters 1 through 3, I focus on Hume's naturalism, in particular, his naturalistic methodology. In Part II, Chapters 4 and 5, I provide my analysis of Hume's skeptical arguments. We see, in the end, how these two aspects—Hume's naturalism and skepticism—are combined as a consistent whole.

I start Chapter 1, "The Necessary Connexion and Causal Inference," by explaining Hume's epistemological principles based on the Lockean theory of ideas. Hume's central problem is, however, not epistemological but genetic. He is concerned with how a given idea is derived and from what impression(s). Particularly problematic in the case of causation is Hume's discussion on the "necessary connexion," which Hume argues to be the basis of our causal inferences. I defend a "non-representational" interpretation of the impression of causal necessity, according to which the impression of so-called "causal necessity" contains *no* information about the objective necessary connection between cause and effect. I also interpret Hume's two famous definitions of "cause" as describing two distinctive ways of causal reasoning and draw attention to the importance of reflective causal reasoning for the discussion that follows.

In Chapter 2, “A Genetic Interpretation of General Rules,” I offer a novel account of Hume’s “general rules” of causal reasoning from a genetic or developmental point of view. Several scholars have tried to understand general rules in terms of epistemological justification. However, what Hume had in mind was a naturalistic explanation of the origin of general rules. I show that Hume denies a transcendental criterion for justifying general rules and develops a very modern naturalistic view on the origin of the normativity of reasoning.

Chapter 3, “The Experimental Method of Reasoning in Book II,” focuses on how Hume applies the general rules of causal reasoning to his actual explorations. Some scholars have criticized Hume’s experimental method of reasoning for its “total lack” of substance in practice. I defend Hume by taking T 2.2.2 as describing a paradigm case of Hume’s actual “experiments” and comparing Hume’s method to Newton’s “method of analysis and synthesis” in the *Opticks*, which was very influential at that time. I characterize Hume’s method as a prototype of the hypothetico-deductive method, but my point is to understand the role of “hypothesis” and refutation in Hume’s methodology.

These three chapters illuminate Hume’s naturalistic methodology with its foundation and its application. However, the fact that Hume is a prominent naturalist does not mean that he is never a skeptic. On the contrary, Hume not only develops varieties of skeptical arguments in Part 4 of Book I of the *Treatise*, but also speaks in defense of his skeptical attitude. The central focus of Part II in this book is, therefore, how Hume’s skepticism concurs with his naturalism.

In Chapter 4, “Natural Doubts and Human Nature,” I investigate, in detail, two representatives of Hume’s skeptical arguments: one about reason and the other about senses. While some scholars regard these arguments as essentially different kinds, I argue that they have a distinguishable parallel structure. First, both of them are *a posteriori* doubts; the doubts result from Hume’s naturalistic inquiry into our mental faculties. Second, both of these arguments, on the other hand, play a pivotal role in Hume’s inquiry into human nature; Hume gives a naturalistic explanation about why these skeptical arguments do not lead to fatal results in our lives. From these points of view, we can see how thorough Hume’s naturalism is even in his skepticism.

The last chapter, Chapter 5, “Pyrrhonian Meta-Philosophy,” focuses on the concluding section of Book I of the *Treatise*, where Hume reflects on his previous explorations and expresses in high rhetorical tone his true skeptical crisis, that is, skepticism about his philosophical enterprise itself. At the end of the section, however, Hume speaks of his desire to resume his philosophical inquiry. My goal is to give a theoretical interpretation rather than a mere description of what Hume says. I argue, on the one hand, that advocates of *Hume the naturalist* have missed that Hume’s true skeptical crisis is derived

from what I call the “unified skepticism” that synthesizes Hume’s various skeptical arguments presented in earlier sections. This interpretation shows that the “title principle,” which is well-received as Hume’s final solution of his skepticism is, rather, the very cause of his skeptical crisis. I also claim that the supporters of *Hume the skeptic*, on the other hand, have overlooked the Pyrrhonian characteristics of Hume’s skepticism and wrongfully painted Hume as a pessimist or ironist. What enables Hume to continue his naturalistic inquiry is, in fact, his comprehensive Pyrrhonian skepticism about his skeptical convictions. He never resigns his hope for the future success of his philosophical project.

In my “Conclusion,” building upon the discussions of the above chapters, I conclude that Hume harmonizes his naturalism and skepticism with each other. While seemingly paradoxical at first sight, there is no real incompatibility between them. As Hume himself states, his “science of man” is an ambitious project unfinished, and he has handed down his results to us, the future generations of naturalistic minds.