

Stanton Lecture 7: The Objectivity of Feeling

By Jon Milbank

Simon Blackburn has suggested that philosophy today finds itself essentially back with the set of problematics enunciated by Berkeley and Hume. This is certainly the case, if we abandon the idea that these two non-English thinkers stand in a line of peculiarly English empiricism. To the contrary, they both rejected Locke's representationalist account of how we verify our thoughts, together with his foundationalist account of how thinking is built-up, step by step, from initial ideas which are direct mental translations of sensory impressions. Nor did they accept the more rationalist side of Locke, deriving from Descartes, which saw the contribution of judgement as clearly deriving from within our own minds, without admixture of anything arriving from exteriority. And so it is clear that, already, both Berkeley and Hume rejected 'the myth of the given'.

But because they were in a wilder sense empiricists, distrustful of any dogmatic claims to given fixities, they also in consequence invoked the spectre of a holism about belief that is entirely fluid. In either case, therefore, it is possible to construe their thought as being as much idealist as it is empiricist. Yet in either case again, both thinkers stepped back from a sceptical mode of idealism through a mode of speculative spiritual realism (and not materialism) that involved some measure of faith and even of religious faith. Berkeley escapes from solipsistic phenomenalism, denial of the reality of matter and scepticism about personal identity through his revival of the Cappadocian view that exteriority consists of finitely imaged mixtures of the divine ideas, or of the divine language. Hume escaped from exactly the same

things through his view that we obscurely feel relational or sympathetic structures that bind the world together and which link the region of material motion to the region of thought. To evade scepticism we have to have belief in these things and this mode of belief is in continuity with religious belief that is required in order to sustain overall coherence for this everyday sort of fidelity.

There is now nothing eccentric about the account I have just given. It is in line with the conclusions of the best and most searching contemporary scholars of both Berkeley and Hume, even if, oddly, they do not always take sufficient notice of each other's work. The conclusions have been reached by a careful reading of all the relevant texts in their original intellectual and cultural contexts. The latter includes the fact, soon lost to sight, that both thinkers were responding to the work of Nicolas Malebranche as much as to that of John Locke, and that they were also influenced by currents of Cambridge and Oxford Platonism which mediated Malebranche to Britain. Yet such was the force in the Enlightenment of the Locke-Newton combination that almost immediately Berkeley and Hume were read in the light of Locke, especially by Thomas Reid. The latter's common-sense philosophy and direct realism without mediation of species, which revives the semi-occasionalist medieval view of the Franciscan Peter John Olivi, has often been taken in the American philosophical tradition, most recently by Richard Rorty, as the first break with the myth of the given, which is ironic, because Reid in many ways far more tries to sustain a Lockean empiricism and pragmatism than does David Hume. Obviously Rorty's mistake here is tied-up with his failure to see that pragmatism remains within the terms of the myth, as I have earlier argued. In the 19th C T. H. Green consolidated the reading of Hume in Lockean terms, reinforced by his attention to a German, post-Kantian legacy which

essentially repeated a sharp Lockean division between the empirically given on the one hand and the rationally given on the other.

British philosophy in the 19th C was perceived by Moore and Russell as having taken a long Continental and therefore linguistic holiday -- a kind of over-protracted grand tour. Yet this is not quite true insofar as the extremities to which F.H. Bradley and J.M.E McTaggart went – respectively a monistic denial of the reality of all relations and the denial of the reality of time – were *not* typically Continental, but rather typically *Insular*, or more precisely, Anglo-Celtic extremities, in the tradition of Berkeley's denial of matter and Hume's questioning of causality. The Continental factor here is rather Bradley and McTaggart's excessive rationalism (often indeed anticipating the analytic turn), which did not allow them to draw back from scepticism in the name of common-sense and ordinary feeling, understood as a faithful sharing in forces that remain to us unknown. The drawing-back in these terms which we find in Berkeley and Hume is far close to the idiom of Platonism and philosophic perennialism, than what we find in the post-Hegelianism of Bradley and McTaggart.

Hence the entire idea, promulgated by J.H. Muirhead, of an 'alternative' British Platonic tradition, lost after John Norris and Arthur Collier, but resurfacing under the influence in Britain of German Idealism, is wrongheaded. For Muirhead said virtually nothing about Platonic influence on Berkeley and Hume, and so failed to grasp the degree to which Platonism and a wilder mode of empiricism can be aligned. Conversely he failed to see that both rationalism and idealism are essentially alien to the spirit of Platonism, and especially its theurgic mode that was more clearly celebrated in 18th C England by Thomas Taylor. The difference consists in the

contrast between a rationalist *a priorism* on the one hand which claims to be able to give an account of the fixed structures of the mental contribution to understanding and, on the other, a genuinely Platonic sense of the fluid and unknowable powers of the mind, which harmonise with those of the cosmos in such a way that one cannot really say where the one begins and the other ends. In these terms one can venture the seemingly outlandish view that, actually, Hume is rather more Platonic than Bradley.

Moreover, the Continental holiday, or the British flirtation with post-Kantian rationalism, did not really end after 1900. It was simply that the favoured vacation destination switched from Protestant Germany to Catholic Austria. And to the extent that this included a return to Hume, it was still Hume as misread (and in these terms rightly rejected for his supposed foundationalism) by T.H. Green. This was an empiricist Hume who could be radicalized to engender logical positivism. Alternatively, an attempt was made, in different ways by Frege and Husserl, to evade Hume's supposed empiricist scepticism in terms of a revived *mathesis universalis*, which tries to extend logic to adjudicate over our perception of reality. But we have seen how the Fregean minimalist attempt to encompass reference fails to avert such scepticism, just as Kantian transcendentalism earlier fails, because it cannot succeed in adjudicating between real and illusory sensory reports, nor in isolating definite objects of knowledge from the temporal and spatial flux.

In the case of Edmund Husserl, we have a far more sophisticated reading of Hume, which indeed provided the foundation, along with his attention to Berkeley, for the break of phenomenology with neo-Kantianism. Husserl, in the wake of Meinong and Brentano, realized that Hume had explicitly abandoned the Lockean way of ideas and

that his 'impressions' were not sensory impressions, but rather mental 'phenomena' in the broadest sense, that result from an always already initiated engagement between mind, body and the external world. From Hume Husserl took in part the crucial idea that the givenness of a phenomenon is identical with the mode in which it is given: 'actions and sensation of the mind' must 'be what they appear', as Hume puts it. (*Treatise*, ed Nidditch, p.190). In Hume and then in Husserl, this principle is combined with the assertion that a phenomenon or an impression is all that we are given, and is therefore identical with the known thing. In line with this assertion in turn, Husserl could also have found in Hume an assertion of intentionality, since every impression is naturally the thought of an object, with no additional 'mark' of 'reference' being given as a note of the idea itself (*Treatise*, ed Nidditch, p.20).

Moreover, Husserl's pupil C.V. Salmon noted that one already finds in Hume the phenomenological method of experimental imaginative variation, carried out in order to determine what is essential and what is not essential to an impression and what the innate tendencies and biases of our imagination appear to be. (But Husserl and Salmon regarded these biases as *a priori* structures, whereas Hume saw them as sediments of natural and cultural habits.) This method for Hume included our ability to make 'distinctions of reason' between say the roundness of a ball and its redness, while still affirming that the integrity of the initial perception requires the blending of both these characteristics. Accordingly, they have to be regarded as linked 'aspects' of a single manifest thing and not as atomically separable items in reality. Qualities for Hume are truly if esoterically linked in their material instantiation, even if they do not inhere in a 'substance' graspable outside this linkage. In this way Hume also

bequeathed to Husserl the notion that we only intend objects in terms of a horizon of unity undergirding various diversely presented perspectives.

However, Husserl still tried to subject Hume to an idealist gloss. For Hume, unlike Husserl, impressions as objects are as much out there in the world as they are inside us: they are our 'feelings' of the external world, with which we are in real relation. But Husserl reduces this to 'objectivity' in the post-Scotist sense of something abiding only in mental space. In order to safeguard this epochal restriction from outright scepticism he then tries to show how we can reduce phenomena to pure objective givenness, now bizarrely extended indefinitely into a kind of infinitesimal calculus of possibilities that can keep pace with the empirical and historical variety of human experience. But for Hume's completely realist phenomenology there could be no such philosophical enterprise, because our feelings about things are always subject to an inexact flux and to an endless doubling of feeling that amounts to an endless revision of judgement as to what exactly is present to us. Thus because what is given for Hume is a process of feeling, it is not possible to trump feeling with a rationalist reduction to something clearly fixed and unproblematically visible. We cannot mentally round upon and 'see' our feelings in the way that Husserl's method seems to presuppose.

For these reasons one can claim both that twin-headed 20th C philosophy was to a degree built upon the misreading of Hume and that, after the breakdown of this philosophy, Hume still stands, in certain ways, ahead of us. In terms of the revision of perennial philosophical realism which I have already recommended, Hume was not only alert to the idea of 'aspects', but also in a germinal manner, though of course far less acutely than Berkeley, to the question of the linguistic character of thought. In

Hume's case this is glimpsed in terms of the necessary mediation of thoughts as feelings via cultural symbol by both communities and individuals. (One could suggest that Berkeley's account of both nature and culture as language could be interestingly combined with Hume's account of both nature and culture as habit, expressed in human beings as feeling and imagination). Hume also gave rudimentary consideration to questions of the *aporias* of number when it comes to questions of identity, as we shall see shortly.

Moreover, it is Hume who bequeathed to Jacobi and Hamann much of the main weaponry that they then deployed metacritically against both Kant and Spinoza. In particular the view that all coherent thinking depends upon unargued belief, and also the view that if one takes a contentless noumenal entity, whether God or the Soul (ie Spinoza's one substance or Kant's apperceived self) as identical with phenomenal modes of that entity, then the entity collapses into the modes and *via versa*, resulting in that mutual abolition which Jacobi named 'nihilism'. In actual fact Hume himself lifted this from Pierre Bayle's entry in his *Dictionary* on Spinoza, where he argues that Spinoza was saying that the Moon, for example, is entirely God, but God is entirely the Moon, by analogy with the absurd assertion that a gold candlestick is entirely the gold it is made of, while the candlestick is the entirety of the substance gold.

But why is it then, that Hume was able to sustain a certain cautious ontological realism, along with intentionality, sign, number and aspect, while resisting both Spinozan infinitist monism and Cartesian (then Lockean, Kantian, Husserlian and Fregean) finitist epistemology, which we have seen to be the two main philosophical

options of modernity? The crucial answer here is his view, which effectively revives that of Aristotle in the *De Anima*, that all reason is only a modulation of feeling, and that we cannot detach even our surety that 1 plus 1 equals 2 from a strength of feeling inseparable from human subjectivity. This can be directly contrasted with the questionable rejection of psychologism by neo-Kantianism that is explicitly perpetuated by both analytic philosophy and by phenomenology. (It constitutes perhaps their most crucial shared founding-assumption, and tends to corral both these philosophical idioms behind a barrier separating rational human existence from matter, life and nature.) As I have already intimated, the mistake here is to suppose that to distinguish a proposition sharply from sensation, feeling and mental mood is to guard against any naturalistic reduction and to defend the realist reference of human thinking. But just to the contrary, thought separated from feeling and sensation, and so from embodiment, is precisely threatened with solipsistic confinement, while equally the more thought can be expressed 'objectively', then the more it can be seen as not to require consciousness and therefore can be regarded as a mere patterning produced by the operation of natural forces.

By contrast to this possibility, the inseparability of thought from *psyche*, and so from motion, sensation and feeling, need not betoken any reductionism, if the soul or mind is itself not materially reduced and if it is seen as in continuity with a nature construed in some fashion as vital, meaningful and even panpsychic. Whether such ideas can be entertained or not, one can claim that they harbour the only possibility of realism, because they make our thinking concur with our bodily interactions with exteriority which is the basic everyday source for common-sense realist assumptions. Only if to think something is to touch an eidetic meaning, in concurrence with the

bodily touch of things, as Aristotle taught in the *De Anima*, can cognitive scepticism be transcended.

It is just this continuity of thought with motion and with physical relationality that was taught by Hume. He did not thereby mean to reduce thought to physical motion, but rather to suggest that, in motion, there was a mysterious connectedness, operating by habit that became reflexively intensified in the case of mind, which likewise does not understand its own operations and therefore should properly remain the slave of passion, as Hume notoriously says. Despite the overwhelming historical and especially English misunderstanding of Hume's *Treatise* -- a work written in France by a Scotsman with family connections to France stretching back centuries, and who held English Whig and Common-Law assumptions in both politics and philosophy in considerable contempt -- there are alternative traditions of at least partial comprehension, which sometimes agree with Hume even more than they know. Thus Maine de Biran perpetuated the Humean views concerning the primacy of habit and the idea that human habits form the best clue to natural habits. And he also blended these ideas with notions taken from Aristotle. He transmitted all three dimensions through to Ravaisson and Bergson and thence to Maurice Merleau-Ponty in the 20th C. Meanwhile, Whitehead's mutation of British idealism into realism involved in effect a recovery of Hume's doctrine of the primacy of feeling in apprehension, even if he did not acknowledge this.

Today then, we can hear the scattered and sporadic cry 'return to Hume'! But there is not much agreement as to what this would mean. For some, like Simon Blackburn and Paul Russell, it implies a return to a naturalist empiricism, combined with explicit

atheism, seen as the secret key to Hume's writings. For others, like Galen Strawson and Stephen Gaukroger, in line with some of what I have said above, it means a recovery of a kind of agnostic realism about cause, matter and individual existence. (It is however odd that Strawson in his own right should reject the thesis of the narrative constitution of identity, since, in Hume, as we shall shortly see, this naturally blend with the idea of causality as a 'secret connexion'.) For Donald Livingston, who is generally regarded as the contemporary scholar who knows most of all about Hume, it means much more emphatically a recovery of such realism undergirded by a religious vision necessary for public virtue. We will see shortly why this second view of Hume in its more radical version is overwhelmingly the more plausible one.

Most crucial for the argument of these lectures is Hume's claim that rationalism generates unlivable absurdities. But given, that for Hume, all reason is really a modulation of feeling, then we have to say that he is reducing rationalism to a certain psychological and cultural mood: one that, in the wake of Descartes, assumes individual isolation and the quest to regard things from a detached perspective as themselves taken in isolation, in order that they can be 'clearly and distinctly' circumscribed. To this is added, also after Descartes, the mechanical philosophy which identifies knowledge with entirely comprehensible and surveyable physical processes. In the third place we have the experimental method, which associated knowledge with control, and finally empiricism which looks for indefeasible atomic foundations in individual atoms of information that possess identity without any repetition. The mood of rationalism assumed by Hume can be summed up then as the attempt to begin with isolation and to end with a mastery of inherently separable items.

In this respect one can validly say that Hume is reckoning with the long-term development of the entire Scotist univocalist and then Ockhamite nominalist current. Can it be plausible to regard one Scottish lowlander as the later nemesis of the earlier, and both as the truly pivotal figures of respectively modern and genuinely postmodern philosophy?

It can, and this is why. Most fundamentally, Hume shows that univocalist cum nominalist isolation and experimental control, while clearly and crucially linked, are also incompatible with each other. From the former point of view, a consistent nominalism must get rid of the fiction of substance to which qualities attach and proclaim the reality of only the succession of qualities which we observe – and so of aspects which are not aspects of anything. The same nominalism has no reason to think that any quality is inherently connected with any other quality, or that any quality is incapable of anything whatsoever. It must conclude to a random blur of individual material items, jostling together through time and space.

This nominalism has no insight whatsoever into cause and effect and yet, upon the registration of the latter, our whole sense of the coherence of reality entirely depends. It is experimental philosophy which seeks to deepen our comprehension of natural causal processes and, ever since Hobbes, to account for even human behaviour in their terms. Thus Hume affirms that it must be motion which engenders thinking. However, when we seek to discover what power is at work in causality, just as when we seek to discover the power at work in the *vis inertiae* assumed by the Newtonian laws of motion or in Newtonian gravity, we reach a blank. At some points actually

translating him word for word (as has now been pointed out), Hume repeats Malebranche's argument that neither matter or mind yields us with any sense of an idea of power, this being why we do not understand how our will is able to lift our arm. We are therefore driven to conclude that the linkage of cause and effect is made merely by mind in the face of constant conjuncture and of the obscure 'feeling' of a connection which this involves for us. But if causality is a phenomenal illusion, then we cannot assume that any of our impressions, whether of secondary or of primary qualities, are effects in any continuity with real material causes. Accordingly we have no reason to affirm the reality of an external material existence of real material things outside ourselves. So an analysis of cause makes nominalist solidity vanish, while nominalist solidity in turn refuses all connectedness. Hence isolation and mechanical efficient linkage cannot be thought together by reason and the entire Whig Lockean-Newtonian worldview has been deconstructed.

But Hume not only raises doubts about the reality of individual items, he also raises questions about the constitution of individuality by saying that 'number and unity' are incompatible with identity. By this he means that only when we have the experience of the repetition of a thing, in other words a certain departure from singularity, are we able to affirm an abiding cohesion. Thus the same thing must persist across the difference of time, even though Hume allows that this slightly compromises sameness. As Donald Livingston has contended, Hume refuses the 'presentism' of normal empiricist thought with regard to evidence, by arguing that we only ever have what can be properly described as a 'narrative sense' of any identity, constituted through a temporal synthesis of remembered past with present moment and expected future – an expectation felt beyond any ground of evidence.

Hume provides a certain thought here of an identity through and despite difference, just as, in the Appendix to the *Treatise*, he says that qualities like, for example, two relatively proximate colours, say blue and Green, can be resembling precisely with respect to their differences and not despite them. So when it comes to identity and degrees of identity, Hume appears to suggest that they are only constituted through analogy, understood in the radical sense that could alone be relevant at least to an individual thing – that is to say, not of graspable shared proportion, but of a paradoxical identity-in-difference, which can only be felt and never really comprehended.

Identity is felt rather than comprehended, and the same thing is true when our perception of the ocean or the sun is for an instant interrupted. We have the sense in this case of a different and yet the same sun or ocean, and Hume argues that pure reason can only resolve this dilemma by postulating an absolutely ‘same’ substantial sun or ocean out there whether or not we are watching it. This idea of a pure substance apart from its aspectual qualities is for Hume a rational delusion, but without it we seem to be left with what he describes as a kind of logical contradiction of an appearance that is at once both different and yet the same. Once more Hume’s implied solution here is that we feel within ourselves an analogical continuity and are warranted in projecting an analogous analogical continuity in physical reality also. The importance of Hume’s admiration for Joseph Butler’s concern with analogy has been underrated and Deleuze was not justified in including him within his own line of univocalist descent. (However, Deleuze crucially grasped the lineage running from

Hume to Bergson, besides the affirmations of both real relationality and teleology in the Scottish philosopher.)

As to the question of how we are able to distinguish a coherent thing that is dreamt or fantasised from a coherent thing that really exists, Hume says simply that reality somehow has a particular unmistakable flavour to it, like a dusty road in the brutal heat, an intensity of feeling quite different from that which accompanies the merely imagined. But this of course means that the difference between reality and imagination cannot be rationally arrived at by finding differences in nature between what is real and what is imagined, since reality, also, is only for Hume accessible by the imagination. Instead when we imagine the real, our fantasy has an unmistakably different tone to it.

Hume, therefore, is only able to rejoin human common-sense, as he seeks to do, and embrace the real unity of material existing things, by abandoning the rationalist mood of detached isolation seeking for mute partners in loneliness, in favour of the mood of sympathetic feeling which experiences unity, not as an initial given, as for Locke, but rather as a synthesised experience of continuity. This means that we cannot know unities just by looking at them but must, as it were, 'think along' with things. Thus to think 'ocean', psychic waves have to pass through our minds; we have to some pond-like degree to reconstruct the ocean imaginatively, if we are to grasp its sublime coherence despite its immensity.

This imaginative feeling 'with' things coheres in some measure with the traditional Aristotelian theory of knowing by identity, since somehow the habitual linkage that

constitutes material things passes over into our minds in a transmuted form. Moreover, in order to think individual things, we must imaginatively feel an obscure internal relation. Equally, in order to think cause and effect, we must imaginatively feel an external relation, even though this is internal and constitutive for the pole that is the effect.

Hume is committed, as we have seen, to an experimental account of mind in terms of natural causality and yet it initially turns out that this causality only resides within the mind, both as the thought of an external cause and as the experience of the succession of passionate feelings within us – the one seeming to engender the next in an ordered process. Nevertheless, it is entirely clear from many passages that Hume affirms the reality of external cause, even though we have no insight into the power at work here. He is only able to advance beyond scepticism to make this affirmation because he considers that our inner experience of both external and mental causation can reasonably be taken as affording the best available clue to how causality works in nature. Thus all goes in a certain circle: Hume tries to explain thought by motion, but thought as a process offers us the best insight into the workings of motion, since we have privy access here to something which we are assuming, according to the experimental method, to be fully natural. But all we know of causality inside us is that it can be felt as a certain sure connection; so all we can do is to posit something remotely analogous to this feeling at work in nature also.

It follows that there is an incipient vitalism, pansensualism, panemotivism and so panpsychism in Hume's philosophy. But things are hermeneutically very complex here: Hume appeals to Malebranche's occasionalism in order to question any too-easy

English tendency, after Cudworth, Newton and Clarke, to speak of ‘active principles’ and so forth, as if we knew what they are. Yet of course he refuses all occasionalism and cautiously sides with the English against the Cartesian denial of any natural energy. What he seems to mean is that we have no reason to think of a kind of ‘virtual’ force operating in any way prior to, or apart from the occult relational links between material things. In the *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, which were posthumously published and written without regard to censorship, Hume openly speaks of ‘sympathy’ in material reality and of shaping forces at work in nature which render it as a whole like a vast ‘animal’ -- what we should today think of as *Gaia*.

One can sum all this up by saying that Hume makes a double movement in relation to the nominalist and experimentalist legacy. On the one hand he thinks this legacy through to the end in the mood of rationalism and shows that it is incoherent. Nominalism reduced Aristotle’s categories to substance plus quality; Hume now shows that it is fatal to even these categories in its own terms. There can be no atomic items and qualities without causal linkages would simply blur or more likely vanish from our intellectual sight. Experimentalism reduced causation to efficiency: Hume shows that the latter is just as obscure as formal, material or final causality.

On the other hand Hume says, in effect, so much the worse for reason and for philosophy. We have to side with ordinary common-sense belief not just pragmatically, and not just because we are doomed to do so by nature. Rather, naturalism itself would suggest that human culture is a natural upshot, and so it is perfectly reasonable to entertain the view that our feelings, rather than our reasons, are disclosive of the real. This suggests a pan-providentialism which indeed Hume

explicitly affirms, while showing nothing but deserved derision for those, like Puritans and Whigs, who claim to be able rationally to discern God's providential purposes in history, whether chiliastic or progressivist. For those perspectives suggest that we can objectively see what God wants and more in some processes than in others. But Hume's position is much more consistent with a traditional Christian view that God works equally in everything and that we are led by him through the touch of grace to ends of which we know nothing whatsoever. For this reason one can read the apparently novel absence of providentialism in Hume's *History of England* at once as scepticism and yet also as an apophatic rebuke to the false rationalist divinity and secularised political divinity of his day. The same goes for his proper refusal of the idea that there is ever any rational evidence for the occurrence of miracles: he rightly affirms that a true miracle is mainly attested by inner assent and felt meaningfulness, because that is itself part of the miracle at work. Hence his famous ironic remark that belief in miracles is the greatest miracle of all conceals a far subtler doubled irony which has to be there, given the entire frame of Hume's philosophy: yes, belief is really *is* the greatest miracle, and what is more, this miracle is required for all our ordinary acts of assent.

In terms of the objective disclosive role of feeling, Hume's philosophy points sporadically back in a traditional realist direction. Substance is real in the sense of an inner analogical consistency of things, and in the sense that any atomism involves a *reductio ad absurdum* which, he argues, would dissolve any reality. Qualities really inhere in substances as endlessly diverse aspects. And efficient causality is restored, against modernity, to the Aristotelian and neoplatonic view that the cause is 'influentially' present in the effect. For it is just not true that Hume fails to think the

simultaneity of cause and effect, as is so often said. This is not the case because Hume thinks that the link of cause and effect can only be thought in terms of a certain obscure conjoining *passage* of cause into effect, which is almost, one might say, like the model of neoplatonic emanation. Equally, he thinks that past evidence of concurrence, as with past evidence of continuity and resemblance, is no rational warrant for assuming consistency in the future. So once more our assumption here has to do with a feeling of a force in nature making for consistency, a feeling whose veracity Hume sees no reason to deny. One could say that Hume newly traces everything back to efficient genesis, but despite his explicit words in the *Treatise* in favour of efficiency alone, in the *Dialogues* it is apparent that this restored sense of efficiency necessarily involves also a communication of formal inherence to sustain the unity of individual things, and also of teleological finality to maintain this consistency into the future. In this light, the bias to efficiency appears to be more to do with Hume's reinforced sense, beyond the perennial tradition, of the habitually derived genesis of all formation.

When it comes to the central issue of concern in the *Treatise*, namely the ontology of human nature itself, then once more one can read Hume's seeming materialism as a actually a refusal of debased divinity. It is clear that, just as he affirms the reality of cause, so he affirms the reality of soul, for he says that only psychic pathologies should be explained materialistically, and he also speaks in completely traditional terms of 'animal spirits' as mediating between soul and body. In refusing the notion of soul as a separate and simply substance, what he appears to have in mind is the idea that this is a Lockean 'punctual' entity separable from the body or hypostasised apart from the relationality of body and the relationality of thoughts. The soul, one might

say, simply is for Hume the connectedness of human motions and of human ideas. This interpretation is strongly borne out by the fact, already alluded to, that Hume compares the usual modern view of the relationship of the soul to the modes of the body and the mind to the Spinozist conception of the relationship of the one divine substance to its modes. We have already seen how he embraces Bayle's deconstruction of Spinoza, and he proceeds to apply this also to the soul. Thus on the modern view a single thought would be the soul and the soul would be a single thought. It therefore follows that Hume is trying to show, with regard to the soul, exactly the opposite of what many commentaries take him to be trying to show. For he is arguing that the soul is after all *more* than the sequence of our thoughts just because it is the mysterious relational linkage which binds them diachronically together. It is rather the view he refuses which would incompetently reduce the soul, against its own intentions, to nothing but the sequence of our felt imaginings.

The same, it would seem, deliberate tricksiness of argument (like a trap set for unwary Whigs) is apparent in Hume's treatment of his opponent's arguments that the soul is spiritual because it is uniquely 'nowhere'. To this he responds that nearly everything in reality is nowhere – because passions are not to the right of other passions, smell to the left of sight and so forth. But the implication of this argument is surely not that therefore there is no soul because it is after all not unique, but rather that our entire human existence is psychic and vaporous and that this character may well therefore extend to the whole of natural reality. One can add here that, if passions are non-locatable, this renders the modern enterprise of neurological reduction simply ridiculous – on a par with a forensic search for fairies.

In this way then, Hume's switch from the mood of isolated detachment to that of sympathy and of 'thinking along' with things, permits him to begin to recover metaphysical realism, as thinkers like Strawson, Gaukroger and Livingston argue. One can validly compare him in this respect to the reflections of Michael Polanyi in the mid 20th C, which anticipated the views of Kuhn and Feyerabend that scientific change is not driven by sufficiency of evidence and which agreed with the later writers that no claim in natural science is ever sufficiently verified or falsified. However, he surpassed their scepticism by suggesting that we have a natural intuitive ability to guess at true natural structures and suggested that in some sense it is nature herself who want us to know her. That suggestion only seems like deranged anthropocentrism if one fails to ask oneself whether human scientific enquiry is or is not part of nature, and does or does not have itself a natural explanation. Answered reductively that question removes science along with reason as an illusion, in line with the rigours of Laruelle. But answered non-reductively, in order to sustain the reality of both reason and science, it allows us to see that our discovering of nature can also be nature discovering both herself to us and ourselves to ourselves.

But just why has Hume been misread as if he were a faded English Lockean spectator and not a vigorous Scottish participant in both natural and cultural life, at home and abroad? One reason is that his perspective becomes far more plausible if one adds to it the mediating role of the body, which he by and large fails to do. But this was supplied by Maine de Biran, who largely took from Hume the thesis that habit cannot be just passive, because it is empirically inexplicable and so must have an active, spiritual component. Maine de Biran suggested that the Humean perspective required to be supplemented by the Aristotelian (and Thomistic) view that

touch, not sight, is the primary integrating sense and the one upon whose wings intellect mounts upwards. For if we incarnate feeling in the body as touch, but without reducing it to corporeal sensibility, then we see how feeling always reaches outwards and that as the Christian philosopher John Philoponus said in late antiquity (against Michel Henry in advance) we never suffer ourselves, but only ever something else affecting ourselves. Touch can only arise if we are touched and so, with respect to touch, we see, as Whitehead later insisted that what we sense is always the experience of something outside us as really affecting us.

In the 20th C, in the acknowledged tradition of Biran, and also with new attention to Aristotle, Merleau-Ponty went further by pointing out how it is the body that is first reflexive, because it can touch itself, and how also the body itself proves the reality of psychic depth because it is only our mental reserve from the body which allows it to act as a medium in sensation, rather as light is the medium of sight. For Merleau-Ponty this psychic depth was nothing but the mysterious invisible solidity of all material things folding back upon itself in embodiment to produce islands of this depth on the fleshly surface of reality. Hence for Merleau-Ponty to touch anything was to touch the depth of things as their very resisting solidity. But this aspectual surface, although solid, is also, as once for Berkeley, an enigmatic sign to be read, and hence every thought is in apparent excess of feeling only as a speculative conjecture. If there is thought within feeling beyond feeling then, one must conclude, with Bergson, that this is precisely the immanent site of the literally meta-physical. However, conjectures are not under our control. *They also* occur to us as felt imaginings. Hence if we accept their promptings they have the force of a revelation

and have to be taken as the participatory showing of the invisible in the visible in that disproportionate proportion which we register as 'beauty'.

Within this third, authentically Humean tradition which I am trying to disinter, one can say that what is 'given' is not empirical items, logical truths or phenomena, but rather a process of feeling in general. This process must be a narrative process that occurs through the synthesis of temporal duration, which feels the unity of things and the coherence of causality, which touches things from the very corporeal outset only with a certain evaluative tone and necessarily experiences the world and itself in terms of enigmatic final purpose.

But is all that a kind of purely natural, phenomenological but realist givenness, as the American Jesuit philosopher James Felt argues in the initial, more cogent part of his little book *Aims*? This would not be a correct or a Humean view. For Hume thinks that, while every imagined thing is felt, that equally every felt thing has to be imagined. There is always for Hume a picture as well as a tone, and the two are inseparable. But imagination is not a matter of merely individual habit, but of historically-produced custom. For while Hume refused whiggish progressivist historicism, he embraced a radically genetic account of all human understanding. This was misunderstood by R.G. Collingwood, who ascribed to Hume an ahistorical view of Human nature. But for Hume the one real constant of human nature is the capacity for sympathy, and this allows him to rule out of the genealogical court any sort of Machiaevellian, Hobbesian or by anticipation Nietzschean cynicist bias that would, against common-sense, claim that the worst human motives are always in charge.

This radical because radically neutral and open historicism in Hume then requires that our fundamental patterns of emotional response to nature, as just listed, are themselves only sustained and balanced by all the artificial processes of language and culture which, nonetheless, nature herself has given rise to. It is indeed only in these terms that Hume has any real account of how feeling can be self-corrective: this works through the modification of sporadic and unbalanced emotions by the long-term influence of customarily instilled habits, even though these habits are themselves open-ended and so traditioned, rather than conservatively fixed in character.

It is just for this reason that Hume is not appealing, against rational philosophy, to some sort of transcendently cultural 'life-world', as with Husserl, but rather to a human culture that has to shore-up the fundamental feelings by an overall feeling of their coherence which is the site of religion, that can be regarded as a spontaneous and collective metaphysics. And just as Hume thinks that reason is only a mode of feeling, so he also thinks that philosophy is only a mode of religion, and indeed that some of the worst damage and the worst absurdities in religion – as, for example, with Protestant pious commercialism and most 18th C 'natural theology' – arise when religion becomes too philosophical in character.

To understand then, how finally Hume regards culturally integrating human feeling and the proper place of philosophy, we need to advert to his history of religion.

Just how does this go? Religion, for Hume, secures our sense of the diversity, order and mystery of life in terms of the polytheistic, the monotheistic, the extra-humanly designed and the apophatic. He argues that the ancient gods were little more than

modern Scottish fairies, and in either case contends that the recognition of such psychic beings may be a perfectly reasonable acknowledgment of psychic forces within nature. Polytheism has the ethical value of sustaining both social tolerance and bravery, as we can more easily imitate the heroism and amorousness of the gods than we can the ineffability of the one God. The regular order of the universe, however, properly elicits monotheistic assent, and morally-speaking monotheism better sustains political unity. Yet pure monotheism, which is specifically *philosophical*, is at variance with human capacities, and therefore must be qualified by the mediation of angels, daemons, saints and sacraments. These, in turn, when they over-proliferate, become superstitiously absurd, and then one gets an event like the Reformation. Not only does this idea of the flux and reflux of polytheism seem akin to Vico's *corso* and *ricorso* between imagination and reason in human religious and social history, it also suggests a kind of Catholic or perhaps Episcopalian balance between the monotheistic and the polytheistic. Hume rejected both what he saw as Papal superstition as proceeding from an excess of melancholy, and Protestant enthusiasm as stemming from an excess of phlegmatic and drily hedonistic commercial success and material well-being (anticipating Weber here!). Yet Part XI of the *Dialogues* implies clearly a still Augustinian and Baylean bias towards the 'Catholic' primacy of melancholia in the face of overwhelming natural suffering and human iniquity: the so-called 'problem of evil' in short.

Thus although Philo defends traditional religion in terms of its mysticism and ontological-cosmological arguments against modern debased attempts to see God as a supreme but extrinsic and ontic designing influence, he still denies against Demea that the 'proofs for God's existence' unambiguously point to God rather than to a self-

designing nature. So if we ‘feel’ the superiority of human habits and aims and suspect their elevation beyond analogous forces in nature, it is finally a certain melancholic refusal of nature and search for salvation which causes to embrace the mysticism and affirm the proofs. As he is clearly represented, Philo is more sceptical than the apophatic Demea only because he is also more fideistic.

So true religion for Hume is a melancholy seeking refuge in the abstract sublime, which nonetheless pulls back from supposed Catholic superstition in the direction of the beauty of this-worldly sympathy and yet then restrains in turn the self-congratulating yearning towards enthusiasm. If this sounds like Anglicanism, then there is no entirely conclusive reason to deny that Hume also thought that it was orthodox Christianity. Indeed, the only explicit Christian doctrine which Hume denied on grounds of faith as well as reason was that of the eternal punishment – objecting that fear of this does nothing to elevate human virtue and that it implies a contempt of the human person. For this reason he seems in the *Natural History of Religion* to endorse his friend the Chevalier Andrew Ramsay’s Origenism.

Thus we can see that Hume’s philosophy situates itself within a certain explicitly *theological* preference for balancing rationalism with naturalism, and naturalism in turn with scepticism -- associating philosophic scepticism with theological apophaticism, but pushing the latter rather more in a sceptical direction than would usually be considered orthodox. And this is just the advice which the supposed author of the *Dialogues*, the pupil of Cleanthes, Pamphilus, has been given by Hume’s *alter ego* Philo: namely to combine Christianity with academic scepticism – in other words with Cicero’s school of very neo-Socratic, ultra-reserved Platonism. This advice

Pamphilus has not taken, as his concluding words show, but there is no reason to doubt that it was seriously endorsed by Hume, for all his clear suspicion of institutional religion, which he thought required the constraint of political establishment. It is simply not plausible to think, with Paul Russell, that atheism is what synthesizes Hume's difficult combination of naturalism with scepticism, as if the scepticism was added to the naturalism in order to refute religious positions, when we have seen how the main brunt of Hume's scepticism is directed precisely against overly rationalist religious positions and still more against an entirely godless nominalism and mechanism.

Rather, it would seem, scepticism in Hume at once tempers what he himself describes as the 'delirium' of both rationalist naturalism and rationalist religiosity in terms of a certain mood of melancholic bias towards transcendence which affirms that not all ends are fulfilled within this world, even though much of Hume's output concerns a *sanguine* counter-refusal of worldly refusal of the present time by both Puritans and whigs, in the name respectively of the *eschaton* and the human future – a counter-refusal of what Livingston appositely calls 'metaphysical rebellion', which is also, however, an attack on the false piety which would seem to denigrate divine providence in the present age and the present moment.

This theology can be intimated from the *Dialogues*. While refusing the mere external imposition of design, Hume still affirms God as the ultimate designer on the basis of something like the view that, since reason belongs to nature, God must be eminently rational as well as eminently generative in the biological sense. He invokes both Malebranche and Plotinus in the course of a truly remarkable – and remarkably

theologically orthodox -- refutation of an idolised God who is a mere infinitisation of human reasoning power. Hence for Hume, if, by virtue of naturalism one must see biological generation as governing thought, and against Cleanthes Philo says it would be more natural to think of the first principle as an unconscious animal than as a knowing God, by virtue of his *scepticism* he has to give a certain cautious epistemological primacy to knowing over generation, since knowing is (a) the generative process into which we have the most insight and (b) the one which, within our own experience, most achieves a spontaneity of origination. Yet it is finally the 'melancholic' mood which tilts the balance in favour of knowledge and transcendence here.

So the most concession to naturalism that Hume's scepticism will allow is not at all an Epicurean or even a Stoic immanentism, but rather an explicitly neoplatonic view that God lies as much absolutely beyond intellect as he does beyond matter, reinforced by Hume's citation in the voice of Demea (whose mysticism Philo avowedly shares) of Malebranche's view that God can be considered to be eminently matter in the same way that he is eminently mind. Thus Hume always affirms transcendence and never merely immanence, just as Philo defends against Cleanthes the (Thomistic) doctrine of the divine simplicity by denying that God entertains 'plans' separate from his own being .

It is partly for these reasons that one should also question Edward Caird's view that Hume is abandoning the notion of the *imago dei*, rather than redefining it in terms of our mimetic echo of the absolutely simply author of both reason and matter by the

operation within us of natural habit in the mode of felt imaginings and imagined feelings.

The Scottish philosopher's reported declaration to a French host that he had never met an atheist, must be linked with his view in the *Dialogues* that everyone must naturally suppose that there is some sort of vital, driving force behind the entire universe and that we must assume that this is somewhat like the different processes found within the universe -- processes which also obscurely resemble each other. Both vertical and horizontal analogy are therefore affirmed by Hume. In this light he would appear to regard the 'atheist' more as a minimal theist who is extremely cautious about these analogies and thereby becomes indistinguishable from a very apophatic theologian. The theist, by contrast, insists more on the likeness, but he can only do so by faith (as Hume stresses), because feelings vary according to degrees of intensity that cannot be strictly measured. One can then argue that Hume sees the dominance of analogy in theological discourse, with its undecidability between 'atheism' and 'theism', as an especially acute manifestation of the indeterminacy of feeling which allows us to shift so easily, for better or worse, from one passionate affirmation to another.

It is this theological vision, presumably felt and believed in, which alone holds Hume's philosophy together, and which positions and judges both modern rational theologies and rational philosophies which delude themselves into thinking that they have escaped religion, just as they have escaped human culture, historicity and habitual feeling.

Astonishing as it may seem, one can validly read Hume as offering a theological critique of all philosophy.