

# THE PHILOSOPHICAL AGE

DAVID HUME  
AND NORTHERN EUROPE



**David Hume**  
(1711-1776)

Коллегиум инновационных исследований университета Хельсинки  
Санкт-Петербургский центр истории идей

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# ФИЛОСОФСКИЙ ВЕК

АЛЬМАНАХ

37

ДЭВИД ЮМ  
И СЕВЕРНАЯ ЕВРОПА



Санкт-Петербургский центр истории идей

Санкт-Петербург — Хельсинки  
2012

The Collegium for Advanced Studies of the University of Helsinki  
St. Petersburg Center for the History of Ideas

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2012

Ответственные редакторы альманаха:  
*Т.В. Артемьева, М.И. Микешин*

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В 37-м выпуске альманаха «Философский век» опубликованы материалы международного научного симпозиума «Дэвид Юм и Северная Европа: к 300-летию со дня рождения», проведенного 3–5 октября 2011 года в Коллегиуме инновационных исследований университета Хельсинки. Особенности восприятия и интерпретации идей Д. Юма были связаны с особыми чертами Просвещения в странах Северной Европы и их философских, культурных и академических традициях. Симпозиум имел междисциплинарный характер и отразил различные аспекты истории философии, истории идей, интеллектуальной истории, интеллектуальных коммуникаций, этики, экономики и т.д.

**Философский век. Альманах. Выпуск 37. Дэвид Юм и Северная Европа** / Отв. редакторы Т.В. Артемьева, М.И. Микешин. — СПб.–Хельсинки: Санкт-Петербургский центр истории идей, 2012. — 166 с.

**ISBN 978-5-905687-88-4**

Компьютерный макет: М.И. Микешин

Санкт-Петербургский центр истории идей  
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## FOREWORD

Celebrations of eminent thinkers' anniversaries are not only reminders of the necessity to (re)examine their heritage, but also occasions to deal with problems and tendencies they started or discussed. The magic of round numbers lends an increasing importance to these issues, marking by centuries the landmarks of intellectual history. The tercentenary of David Hume (1711–1776) not only reminds us of the meaning of his heritage, but also makes us to think about the trajectories of his ideas in time and cultural spaces.

During his life David Hume was known as a historian even more than as a philosopher. His method widened the sphere of sources and allowed to find the causes of events in social and economical patterns, rather than in whimsical decisions of historic persons. He was a great epistemologist, the author of "Philosophical Essays Concerning Human Understanding," a moral philosopher, who wrote "A Treatise of Human Nature: Being an Attempt to Introduce the Experimental Method of Reasoning into Moral Subjects," a political thinker, and economist. Hume was one of the first Scottish *literati* who understood the role of the English language as a means of intellectual communications, the fact that contributed to the international recognition of Scottish thinkers.

Hume's historical and philosophical works defined the modern *Weltanschauung* in many aspects in all parts of the world. The modern level of researches can supply us with a detailed analysis



of receptions of his ideas with respect to national and regional traditions. In particular, it is interesting how Hume has been understood in the region to the north of the 56th parallel, the parallel of his native Edinburgh, that is in the region where we find Helsinki and Stockholm, Copenhagen and Oslo, St. Petersburg and Moscow.

The peculiarities of receptions and interpretations of Hume's ideas were connected with the special features of the Enlightenment in Northern countries and of their philosophical, cultural and academic traditions.

Hume's central concern was to explain and promote human beings' capacity to cooperate. It is always a pleasure to follow him, to bring scholars together and have them profited from fruitful and friendly discussions. Philosophical principles, according to Hume, should first of all describe the human being as the social being that lives inside society. We cannot use any principle that is formulated as if we can make a step out of the human world and take a position 'out there' to see ourselves 'from above', as God does. In this sense we should be empirical, skeptical, accurate and ironic.

Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies and St. Petersburg Center for the History of Ideas organized and held on October 3–4, 2011 in Helsinki the International Symposium **David Hume and Northern Europe: To the Tercentenary of His Birth**. The symposium had an interdisciplinary character and dealt with various aspects of philosophy, history of ideas, intellectual history, intellectual communications, ethics, economy, etc. It collected scholars of various fields from Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Russia, and Sweden.

This collection of papers comprises most of the materials from the symposium.

An electronic variant of this book — exactly as it is printed — is set in the PDF form at the St. Petersburg Center for the History of Ideas' site (<http://ideashistory.org.ru>).

The organizers of the symposium deeply appreciate the invaluable help and resources provided by Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies. The Collegium created a perfect atmosphere for the researches conducted by the organizers who were then fellows of the institution. Our special thanks go to Director of the Collegium Professor Sami Pihlström and Programme Assistant Kirsi Reyes-Anastacio. And the great pleasure for us was to work with our good friend and colleague Professor Vesa Oittinen.

*Tatiana Artemyeva and Mikhail Mikeshin*



**DAVID HUME  
AND THE RUSSIAN ENLIGHTENMENT**

**Tatiana Artemyeva**

The ‘long’ eighteenth century was significant for Scotland and Russia as the age of Enlightenment, when philosophical models, metaphysical patterns and key problems in social thought were being formulated. Moreover, there was a common feeling for history and an interest in social and moral problems. Russian thinkers could say, with Hume: “This is the historical age and we are the historical people”.

But structure of the intellectual elite in both countries was drastically different. In Scotland both clerical and secular intellectuals (*literati*) could be in the same relatively homogeneous social group. William Robertson (1721–1793) for example, was a Presbyterian minister, the Principal of the University of Edinburgh, as well as one of the most important British historians in the 18th century. Thus, he combined functions of a church agent, an important administrator and a well-known scholar. This was impossible in Russia. Administrators (presidents and directors of St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, curators of Moscow University) were

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The research is supported by the RFH grant № 10-03-00667a. I also thank the Helsinki Collegium for Advanced Studies for excellent working conditions provided for my researches.

representatives of the ruling elite, that is the nobility, and they were not professional scholars, nor, of course, clerics. Among them were such persons as favorites of the empress Elisabeth Petrovna Ivan Shuvalov (a co-founder and the first curator of Moscow University, the founder of the Academy of Fine Arts) and Kirill Razumovsky (President of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences), personal friend of Catherine II Catherine Dashkova (Director of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences and the founder and President of Russian Academy), a brother of her favorite Vladimir Orlov (Director of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences) and others. Professional scholars, especially at the Academy of Sciences, were for the most part foreigners invited to the Russian service mostly from Germany, who, because of their denominations, were very far from the clerical circles and because their social origin was far from aristocrats. The Russian theologians and priests lived in another intellectual dimension. Russian universities had never had theological faculties. Clergy and laity received different education, were raised in a different milieu, had no common spaces for communication. Social separation was a reason of involving every intellectual stratum in different intellectual networks.

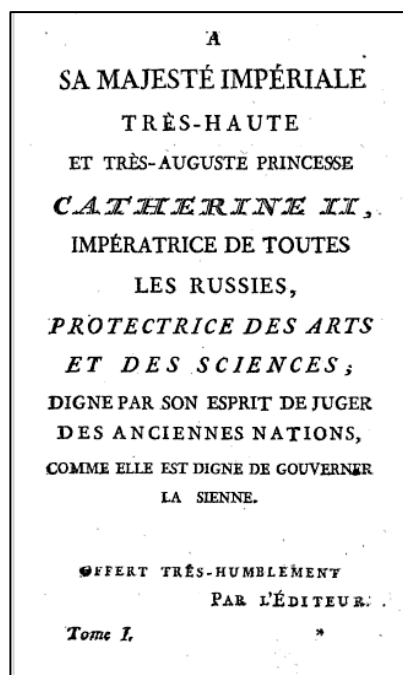
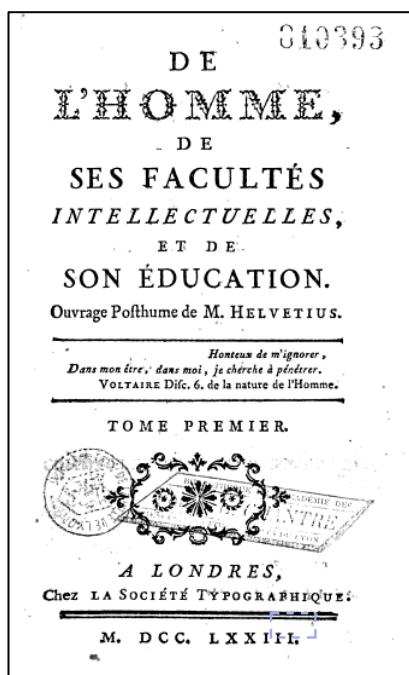
There were no strong and regular connections between those networks, but some marginal spaces, like Masonic lodges, where some members of different networks might meet.

The British thought and the Scottish one, in particular, were popular primarily among the nobility. Partly it was because of the great interest to British thinkers in France. After Voltaire's and Diderot's positive estimations of the British thought, Adam Smith's and David Hume's popularity in Paris, first of all, in Madame Geoffrin's famous intellectual salon, after French translations of their works those thinkers ceased to be alien in Russia.

Catherine the Great was in an intensive correspondence with Madame Geoffrin, and the letters were certainly widely discussed

in her salon which Smith and Hume visited frequently during their stay in Paris.

Another agent of intellectual communication might be Russian nobles travelling or living abroad as, for example, Dmitrii A. Golitsyn. He was a Russian diplomat in Paris, the Netherlands, and Turin. He was a close friend of Diderot, Voltaire, d'Alembert, Victor Riqueti de Mirabeau, and Helvetius. After Helvetius' death Golitsyn bought the manuscript of *De l'homme, de ses facultés intellectuelles et de son éducation* and published it in 1773 with the dedication to Catherine II.



In his work *De l'esprit des économistes ou les économistes justifiés d'avoir posé par leurs principes les bases de la révolution française* (Braunschweig, 1796) he discussed and supported many

Hume's ideas. He often quoted Hume's *Essays II, Of Refinement in the Arts*: "We cannot reasonably expect, that a piece of woollen cloth will be wrought to perfection in a nation which is ignorant of astronomy, or where ethics are neglected".<sup>1</sup>

Princess Catherine Dashkova brought her son Pavel Dashkov to Edinburgh, where he entered the University.<sup>2</sup> A.F. Malinovskii mentioned that it was with Hume that she was going to entrust her son's education<sup>3</sup>, but the thinker died some months before her arrival. Dashkova spent quite a long time (1776–1779) in the Athens of the North, and boasted in her *Memoirs* that she organized an intellectual salon which was visited by William Robertson, Adam Ferguson, Adam Smith, Hugh Blair and others. Hume would undoubtedly have taken his place of honor there. Even before this voyage to Britain, Dashkova published her translation of Hume's *Of the Jealousy of Trade*<sup>4</sup>.

One cannot say that Hume himself was well-informed about events in Russia, although he mentioned 'Muscovites' and Peter the Great in *Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences* and *Of National Characters*. Moreover, he published Manstein's *Memoirs*<sup>5</sup>. M.P. Alekseev links Hume's later interest in Russia with his stay in Paris, where many rubbed shoulders with Russians, cor-

<sup>1</sup> Hume D. *Political Essays*. Cambridge, 1994. P. 107.

<sup>2</sup> See: Woronzoff-Dashkoff A. *Dashkova: A Life of Influence and Exile*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Malinovskii A.F. 'Svedeniya dlya zhizneopisaniya knyagini Ekateriny Romanovny Dashkovoï', in: Dolgova S.R. *Knyaginya E.R. Dashkova i sem'ya Malinovskikh*. Moscow: Drevlekhranilishche, 2002. P. 171.

<sup>4</sup> Hume D. *Opyt o torge g-na Gyuma*, in *Opyt trudov Vol'nogo Rossiiskogo sobraniya pri imperatorskom Moskovskom universitete. Chast' I*. Moscow, 1774.

<sup>5</sup> Manstein C.H. *Memoirs of Russia, historical, political, and military, from the year MDCCXXVII, to MDCCXLIV, with a supplement, translated from the original manuscript of General Manstein*, London: Printed for T. Becket & P.A. de Hondt, 1770.

responded with them, and discussed events of Russian policy and culture<sup>6</sup>.

David Hume was undoubtedly the most authoritative British writer on law, politics and history. Russian thinkers looked with sympathy at his 'scientific' method. Many of them, obviously under the influence of Hume, believed that "politics also could become a science". But in eighteenth-century Russia, as everywhere in Europe, Hume was better known as the author of *A History of England* than of *A Treatise of Human Nature*. His 'science of causes' greatly influenced historiography. His location of the 'natural' origin of society in the family, and of political power in military chieftains, was shared by practically all Russian historians, first of all by M.M. Shcherbatov who in his *History of Russia from the Ancient Times* directly pointed to the "erudite Mr. Hume". Precisely following Hume, Shcherbatov tries to reveal in the historical process the causes and 'secret springs' of political events. He is convinced that 'the science of causes' will give people power over the present and future, because it will reveal how society is arranged and, consequently, how it should be governed.<sup>7</sup>

Hume's historiosophy also directly influenced N.M. Karamzin (1766–1826), state historiographer and author of *A History of the Russian State*. He calls Robertson, Hume and Gibbon the best historians, since they managed to embellish history with the attraction of the novel. After Thucydides and Tacitus, nobody can be compared with "the historical triumvirate" of Britain. In his later years Karamzin showed more and more preference for Hume, and in his *History of the Russian State* he points out that Hume overcame the temptation to theorize excessively about facts and events. We look in history not for abstract truths, but for "actions and characters".

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<sup>6</sup> Alekseev M.P. *Russko-angliiskie literaturnye svyazi*. Moscow: Nauka. 1982. P. 11–12.

<sup>7</sup> Shcherbatov M.M. *Istoriia Rossiiskaia ot drevneishikh vremian*. Vol. 1. St. Petersburg: Pri Imp. Akademii nauk, 1770. *Predislovie*. P. XV.

One's wish to shine with wit or to appear wise is almost the opposite of true taste. The historian deliberates only in the sphere of explanation, where his thoughts complete his description. Skillful narration is a duty of the writer, and a good single thought is a gift: the reader demands the first, and gives thanks for the second, when his demand has been already satisfied. Did not reasonable Hume think like this, being very fruitful in explaining causes, but frugal, even miserly with reflections?<sup>8</sup>

It is remarkable that being in Moscow just before its occupation by Napoleon's army Karamzin reads Hume. He writes to I.I. Dmitriev in August, 1812:

I reside in Count V.F. Rostopchin's house and I am ready to die for Moscow, if God wish it. Our precincts become more and more empty every day: many are away. It is good that we have a clever and cheerful mayor, whom I love sincerely as a patriot loves a patriot. I am glad to ride my grey horse and together with the Moscow daring squad to join our army. I say nothing to you about the feelings with which I let go my invaluable darling and the little ones: perhaps I'll never see them again in this world! I envy you for the first time ever — you are not a husband and not a father! However, my soul is quite firm. I have also said goodbye to my History — the best and fullest copy of it I gave to my wife, another one — to the Archives of the Foreign Collegium. Now without the History and with nothing to do I read Hume about the origin of ideas!!<sup>9</sup>

Reading the great Scottish philosopher's books at a turning point of Russian history forced Karamzin to look differently at the patriotic feelings of a historian who wrote *a history of his Fatherland*. He supposed that only a nationally engaged historian could conceive the psychological motives that moved the people and

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<sup>8</sup> Karamzin N.M. *Istoriya gosudarstva rossiiskogo*. Vol. 1. St. Petersburg, 1998. P. 9.

<sup>9</sup> Karamzin N.M. *Izbrannye stat'i i pis'ma*. Moscow, 1998. P. 180.



“portray actions”. He reproached Hume precisely for impartial narration, the very historian whom he considered to be one of the best. Karamzin writes:

The historian whom we would call the most perfect among the New, if he did not unnecessarily keep aloof from England, did not boast of being impartial and by this did not cool off his elegant work! In Thucydides we always see an Athenian Greek, in Livy we always see a Roman, and we are captivated by them, and believe them. The feeling: we, our enlivens the story — and just as boorish partiality, itself a consequence of a weak mind or a weak soul, is intolerable in the Historian, so in the same manner love for the fatherland gives ardor, strength, and charm to his pen. Where there is no love, there is no soul<sup>10</sup>.

Interpreting Hume as a dry theoretician (“dry, cold, but clever Hume”<sup>11</sup>), Karamzin, nevertheless, understands that maturity of the soul should inevitably be accompanied by rejection of superficial emotions and feelings. “It is better to read Hume, Helvetius, Mably, than in languishing elegies to complain about the languor and inconstancy of beautiful women”,<sup>12</sup> he writes.

Later Mikhail Kachenovskii (1775–1842), Russian historian, translator, literary critic and a publisher of *The Messenger of Europe* (*Vestnik Evropy*, 1805–1830), professor at Moscow University, the founder of a *skeptical school* in Russian historiography wrote about that under the nick-name “Kievan citizen”. He noted that the main peculiarity of Hume’s history is his “wisdom discourse” that gives us possibility to call him philosopher-historian<sup>13</sup>.

In the next generation of Russian historians N.A. Polevoi (1796–1846) already unites Hume and Karamzin as writers of a

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. P. 9.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> [Kachenovsky M.T.] ‘Ot Kievskogo zhitelya k ego drugu’, in: *Vestnik Evropy*, No. 5 Vol. 104. March 15, 1819. P. 48.

passed epoch, concluding that both historians often sacrificed thought to eloquence. Polevoi believes that *real* history is the history of a people, not of the state, which is why he writes *A History of the Russian People* (in six volumes, Moscow, 1829–1833) setting it against *A History of the Russian State*.

In M.N. Murav'ev (1757–1807), a sentimentalist writer, tutor and statesman, Scottish philosophy found not a simple admirer, but a zealous adherent.

Murav'ev's utopian novels *A Suburban (Obitatel' predmest'ya)* and *Emile's Letters (Emilievyy pis'ma)* demonstrate that attention.

Some of the characters in these novels were created in accordance with the ideas of Adam Smith and Adam Ferguson: a merchant Kormilov who kept a volume of *The Wealth of Nations* always at hand, and a young army officer Polosovskii who spent his leisure time reading philosophical books.

Murav'ev's hero expresses the author's respect and interest in British and, above all Scottish thinkers. He writes elsewhere:

English universities are famous for persons of useful and broad erudition. Such persons in Glasgow are deceased ... Hutcheson and Adam Smith, the author of books about the national wealth ... and the theory of moral senses. Such a person is Adam Ferguson in Edinburgh, who blends so successfully together philosophy and civil wisdom. Gentle and indulgent David Hume stands, perhaps, above everybody, as an example of a philosopher in a good society.<sup>14</sup>

These names are mentioned by Murav'ev not at all accidentally, for the ideas of Ferguson, Hume and Smith provide the foundations of his moral theory, which he taught to the Grand Dukes. In *Outlines of Morality (Cherty npravoucheniya)* he writes that

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<sup>14</sup> Toporov V.N. *Iz istorii russkoi literatury. Tom II. Russkaia literatura vtoroi poloviny XVIII veka: Issledovaniya, materialy, publikatsii. M.N. Murav'ev: Vvedenie v tvorcheskoe nasledie. Kniga I.* Moscow: Yazyki russkoi kul'tury, 2001. P. 372.

“Smith’s country, Scotland, now has an advantage in producing men superior in writing and philosophy. It is enough to mention *Hume, Robertson, Ferguson, Reid, Lord Kames* to prove this advantage. Moral philosophy especially has gained new success in their hands”.<sup>15</sup>

Murav’ev agrees with Hume completely that the universal ‘science of man’ should be the basis of other sciences. Murav’ev deduces the main law, which, he believes, should be in the moral world equivalent to the law of gravity: “Man is created for society and must sooner or later reach enlightenment”<sup>16</sup>. Murav’ev constructs his moral science by analogy with natural sciences.

Discussing the foundations of morality, Murav’ev gives preference to Hume. He notes with satisfaction that Hume rejects complicated ‘metaphysical reasoning’, following Hutcheson, Locke and Shaftesbury, and makes utility the criterion of morality. Murav’ev sympathizes with Hume’s utilitarianism and expresses the general tendency of Russian thought which later will be well-disposed to J. Bentham’s doctrine, without accepting it unconditionally. He writes:

Without entering into these metaphysical reasonings, Hume, whose mind delighted in questioning, aimed to simplify the theory of morality, by denying the difference between mercenary and benevolent partialities, and by allocating praise or censure of actions according to the utility produced by them. Virtue that produces no utility ceases to be virtue for him. His opinion found many opponents, among them Beattie and Reid most prominently<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Murav’ev M.N. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii: v 3-kh chastyakh. Chast’ 3*. St. Petersburg: V tipografii Rossiiskoi Akademii, 1820. P. 21.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. P. 5.

<sup>17</sup> Murav’ev M.N. *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii: v 3-kh chastyakh. Chast’ 2*. St. Petersburg: V tipografii Rossiiskoi Akademii, 1819. P. 24–25.

In *Pis'ma k molodomu cheloveku o predmetakh, kasayushchikhsya istorii i opisaniya Rossii* (*Letters to a Young Man about Issues that Concern the History and Description of Russia*) Murav'ev writes: "The history of any people is the best explanation of its mentality"<sup>18</sup>. Like his predecessor M.M. Shcherbatov who, following Hume, aimed to make history a science, Murav'ev wants to use history to construct a science of morality. This leads him to expound history in terms of individuals. He believes that history is created by sovereigns and statesmen, whose acts are examples for posterity. The special role that falls to sovereigns' lot might corrupt common people. The uniqueness of the monarch's situation lies both in his training and in his right by birth.

Murav'ev emerges as an ideologist of the enlightenment of the nobility, revealing a distinction between Russian and European Enlightenment thinking, and in particular a contrast with the Scots. In eighteenth-century Russia knowledge was not *power*, but *luxury*, and the subject of philosophizing was not a professional, but an amateur endeavor. This explains the major transformation of many ideas and social models used by Russian thinkers, such as 'freedom', 'civil society', 'natural law'.

Murav'ev analyzes the theoretical foundations of modern historiography. He notes that historical studies become ever more philosophical; they do not just list ruling sovereigns, but try to investigate the causes and consequences of historical events. While 'composing' history, Murav'ev follows his predecessors among historians and philosophers of history. He cites, first of all, such British authors as Hume, Ferguson, Robertson, Bolingbroke, Gibbon and then Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Condillac. "Men of the highest merit," he writes, "have directed philosophy to study *man in society*... History becomes philosophy in the works of Hume and Robertson"<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid. P. 110–111.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. P. 14–15, 138.

Russian thinkers read Hume, and other British philosophers, not in the original or in Russian translations, but most often in French. French was the caste language of the Russian nobility that formed the main public for Hume, and it was the intermediary language from which translations of British and sometimes German philosophers were made. The first translation of a book by Hume, from the French, was *Of Luxury*<sup>20</sup>, followed by his autobiography and the letter from 'Mr. Adam Shmit' to 'Mr. Stragan'<sup>21</sup>. The main edition used by most of Hume's admirers was *Oeuvres philosophiques de M. D. Hume*<sup>22</sup>.

Russians at that time (as well as nowadays) did not differentiate English, Scottish, and Irish authors. That is why they missed sometimes the important significant of the culture of Scottish Enlightenment what provoked or was a substratum for many productive ideas of the epoch.



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<sup>20</sup> Hume D. 'Nauka k poznaniyu roskoshi', sochinennaya na angliiskom yazyke g. professorom Davidom Gyumom, a s originala frantsuzskogo perevel na rossiiskii yazyk Leib-gvardii Preobrazhenskogo polku furier Imperatorskogo Moskovskogo universiteta student Fedor Levchenkov. St. Petersburg: [no publisher], 1776.

<sup>21</sup> That is, A. Smith to W. Strahan. Hume D. Zhizn' Davyda Gumma, opisanaya im samim: Perevedena s angliiskogo yazyka na frantsuzskii, a s frantsuzskogo na rossiiskii Ivanom Morokovym. Moscow: Pechatana u soderzhatelya F. Gippiusa, 1781.

<sup>22</sup> *Oeuvres philosophiques de M. D. Hume*. Vol. 1–7. Londres: David Wilson, 1788.

## ARE THERE ELEMENTS OF DIALECTICS IN DAVID HUME'S THOUGHT?

**Valentin Bazhanov**

### *Introduction. Contradiction in science and philosophy*

Contradiction always was a challenge to the human mind. Often contradiction was appraised as a construction unconceivable for human mind, in mathematics and formal theories as a sort of monster inevitably destroying every formal system; in contemporary terms contradictory system in classical sense is trivial, i.e. every its proposition will be provable, all formulae will be theorems. This fact is expressed in famous formula of classical logic (ex falso quodlibet): contradiction implies everything  $((A \ \& \ \neg A) \vdash B)$ . Only at the turn of XX century formal logic timidly started to revise its hostile attitude toward contradiction: in 1910 Nicolai Vasiliev from Kazan University in his pioneer “imaginary logic” proposed the formal system tolerant to contradiction (i.e. free of Aristotelian law of contradiction);<sup>1</sup> the same year prominent Polish logician Jan

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Partly supported by the RFH grant № 10-03-00540a and the Federal Grants Program of the Higher Education Ministry of Russia.

<sup>1</sup> Bazhanov V.A. The Fate of One Forgotten Idea: N.A. Vasiliev and His Imaginary Logic // Studies in Soviet Thought, 1990, vol. 39. N 4. pp. 333-344; Bazhanov V.A. Non-Classical Stems from Classical: N.A. Vasiliev's Approach to Logic and his Reassessment of the Square of Opposition // Logica Universalis,

Lukasiewicz severely criticized this law though constructed the type of non-Aristotelian logic only a decade later,<sup>2</sup> and in much weakened form – if compared with N. Vasiliev's system. At present moment we have vigorously evolving paraconsistent, relevant, and other non-classical logics which admit contradiction within their system but nevertheless these systems are not trivial. One of popular schools in paraconsistent logic, namely Australian school (R. Routley-Sylvan, G. Priest) develops so called Dialethism<sup>3</sup> according to which contradiction might be true. In classical logic contradiction should be false.

Dialectical philosophical tradition on the contrary to classical logic treated contradiction as the pivotal element of the discourse or/and ontological entity. If we mean Western philosophical flux of ideas than this tradition goes back to the antique thought. Namely within this period the notions of objective (for example, Heraclitus) and subjective (for instance, Zeno of Elea) types of dialectics were emerged.

Objective dialectics admit existence of contradictions in the real world; subjective dialectics restricts the idea of contradiction by mind though Marxist philosophy adopts both (subjective dialectics just reflects objective).

In Medieval philosophy certain dialectical ideas were in form of contradiction presented as well. These ideas usually were related to the problem how to grasp mentally the concept of God. Due to St. Augustine “if you comprehend God, than it is not a God”; due to Meister Eckhart “you must understand that God is inconceivable”; due to Thomas Aquinas “what God really is will be concealed forever, and the highest knowledge we might have: God is beyond al

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2008, vol. 2, No. 1, pp. 71–76; Bazhanov V.A. The Dawn of Paraconsistency: Russia's Logical Thought in the Turn of XX Century // *Manuscrito — Rev. Int. Fil.*, Campinas, v. 34, n. 1, jan.-jun. 2011, pp. 89–98.

<sup>2</sup> Wolenski J. *Logic and Philosophy in the Lvov-Warsaw School*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1989.

<sup>3</sup> Priest G. Dialethism // <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/dialetheism/>.

we will think of him”; at last Nicolas of Cusa put forward famous principle of “coincidentia oppositorum”,<sup>4</sup> and expressed the key idea of negative theology: “God can be told about only by saying what he is not”. Even these judgments show us that the idea of contradiction was natural within this period of philosophical development as well. Dialectics served here as a tool to demonstrate the inconceivable nature of God and thus has more epistemological background than ontological one.

Dialectics reached the apex in so called German classical philosophy where it founder I. Kant (often considered as the last representative of Enlightenment as well) through his antinomies of pure reason followed negative, antithetic type of dialectics. His goal was to show excessive claim of human mind to comprehend Being as a whole. Antinomies actually were formulated as contradictions, and contradiction here has frustrated character.

On the contrary Hegel, the crown of dialectical mode of reasoning, treated contradiction as a source and background of emergence and development. He generalized the idea of dialectics and to the concept of contradiction (both in ontological and epistemological senses) made its central link and foundation. Hegel’s dialectics might be called positive for contradiction here played not destructive, but absolutely constructive and creative role.

K. Marx enunciated the key problems in his *Das Kapital* in form of contradiction (capital appears and not appeared within circulation; commodities are traded down and not traded down according to their value).

At present moment dialectical ideas are alive in various forms (remind philosophical foundation of paraconsistency in a form of Dialethism) and often expressed implicitly by scientists who at first glance have nothing in common with dialectics. This happens when someone doing its best to comprehend inconsistent situations

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<sup>4</sup> Drago A. The Coincidentia Oppositorum in Cusanus (1401–1464), Lanza del Vasto (1901–1981) and Beyond // *Epistemologia*, 2010, vol. XXXIII, pp. 305–328.



(i.e. related to certain state of affairs). Let us just mention W. Heisenberg's (and his colleagues) analysis of intrinsic structure of atomic physics, and idea of complementarity of N. Bohr (Copenhagen interpretation of quantum theory) expressed in a manner close to dialectical.

### *Hume's traditions in philosophy and contradiction*

This concise overview of dialectical ideas through ages and scholars make obvious that these ideas in various forms and sets always served and have been serving as a tool of understanding the Universe, human mind and the nature of cognition. Hence we may expect to find elements of dialectics in Hume's philosophy though he was not a dialectician in strict sense of this word. Moreover it would be surprising and unnatural not to find these elements in the masterpieces of philosophical thought left by powerful mind of David Hume. Is it possible that Hume reasoning about the nature and essence of human cognition managed without at least some elements of dialectics, or he totally ignored or was not implicitly influenced by ancient and fruitful philosophical tradition?

I dare claim that he did not; we are capable to find elements of dialectics in Hume's philosophical legacy. First of all Hume artfully used the idea of contradiction to justify his philosophical constructions.<sup>5</sup>

Hume often considered as a forerunner of positivism — mainly for his antimetaphysical and, so to speak, antiontological commitments. True metaphysics for Hume means elimination of metaphysics; ontological consideration he reduced to (or replaced by) a type of conceptual empiricism.

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<sup>5</sup> Availability of contradictions in Hume's thought was noticed by: Kuehn M. *Hume's Antinomies* // *Hume Studies*, vol. IX, N 1, pp. 25–45; Fieser J. *Hume's Pyrrhonism: a Developmental Interpretation* // *Ibid.*, vol. XV, N 1, pp. 93–119; Fogelin R. *Hume's Skepticism*. L.: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985.

Almost all positivists were hostile towards dialectics, especially K. Popper (though his colleagues and in certain sense pupils like I. Lakatos and P. Feyerabend were not). Their main pretension for the dialecticians were based on the formal consideration that contradiction admitted by them makes system “empty”, trivial, i.e. system where we may prove everything (thus, the law  $((A \ \& \ \neg A) \vdash B)$  played in positivists argumentation key role).

Despite positivists, who were feed by some Hume ideas, Hume himself, so to speak, respected contradiction as argumentative tool and implemented it without hesitation. The growth of his skepticism apparently correlated with formulation of new contradictions. Hume’s skepticism widened throughout his life. May be it happened due to newly recovered contradictions and thus his mistrust in human reason expanded (but not in sense!).

We know that Hume awakened Kant from his durable dogmatic slumber. What not only attracted Kant in Hume, but stunned him to the degree he launched revolutionary philosophical enterprise? I prone to admit the reason lie in Kant’s admiration of Hume’s contradictions, more precisely in Hume’s brilliant analysis of cognition, treatment, and implementation of contradiction. Though Hume do not confessed existence of a priori concepts which Kant made crucial to his philosophical system and mode of rationality. Kant may be called with certain reservations as an intellectual heir of Hume – if we take into account his study of mechanisms of cognition, human mind, and rationality as a whole. Both thinkers belong to negative dialectics tradition of thought.

Hume and Kant were influenced by Newton’s achievements though in different ways. Hume did his best to introduce to the inquiry of human mind experimental methods. That’s why Hume made significant step towards naturalistic philosophy. Kant assessed Newton’s theory as brilliant sample worthy to be simulated in philosophy as well.

### *The status of contradiction in Hume's works*

Main obstacles on the way of reliable cognition Hume linked to the obscurity of the ideas and the ambiguity of the terms (*An Enquiry Concerning the Human Understanding*, 61). His analysis of cognition made him confident that these features of human mind are inevitable and we are not capable to overcome or destroy these obstacles. They are implied by conflict among the basic mechanism of human mind functioning. Conflicts were manifested through the contradictions.

Hume claimed that false constructions leads to contradiction; what implies contradiction cannot be in its turn conceived (*A Treatise of Human Nature*, 13–14).

Hume considered senses as the most reliable source of cognitive processes. Perceptions are derived from sensations (or from reflections). Nevertheless, imagination is fundamental law due to which ideas are created (another source of ideas is memory). Imagination governs the understanding, and imagination implies habits which are responsible for transfer of present state of affairs into the future. Habits make senses ordered and ontologically meaningful. This mechanism of transfer of present into the future supports the most powerful principle of association — principle of causality. Nevertheless, the result of experience always might be different from the previous one.

Hume claim that people “due to blind and powerful instinct of nature” accept as reality what is only imaginary; they do not support by any reasoning their beliefs and share the standpoint that external world exist and proceed to exist independently of their perception — even if all human beings to disappear at certain moment. Due to instinct of nature they consider images produces by senses as objects of external world, that these images replace the objects. Senses are the channels to convey images but they are not

capable to establish reliable relation between reason and concrete object. Our mind perceives only and only image of the object.

That's why human reason compels us to contradict the instincts of nature and accept reliability of our senses. Nevertheless, external objects principally differ from perceptions (though resemble them). Hence, in the human mind never presented anything except perceptions. Qualitative characteristics exist only within the reason, but never in object itself, and general concepts are creations of our mind; all elements of mind are individual, and just covered but some umbrella concept. Hume's sensualism was filled up by the kind of nominalism.

Senses fight reason, and according to Hume the main goal of reason is to find and indicate contradictions. Contradiction between senses and reason is the first contradiction in Hume's system. It seems that reason raises arguments against itself (*A Treatise*, 267). Contradictions are treated by him as essential and inevitable features of human mind. That's why his attitude toward senses is favorable; Hume to not trust reason, and leaves him the role of tool locating various contradictions. Hence, dialectical tension is (implicitly) proclaimed within mind itself. That's why Hume not trusts reason.

Sensual evidence contradicts the impossibility of its conceptual justification (another contradiction).

We rely upon the habit, but the habit contradicts often generally accepted rule.

Two propositions:

*"We can see external objects"*

and

*"We cannot see external objects"*

cannot be simultaneously true. Here we run into the contradiction of imagination.

This contradiction takes place not only among the propositions but contradiction among the concrete matters of facts, among elements and mechanisms of human imagination.

We can imagine infinite division of space. On the other hand, according to Hume, it contradicts our natural view of space as composed of finite number of particles (*An Enquiry*, 156). The same holds for the time (*An Enquiry*, 157).

No principle of imagination can justify the idea of unified self. Here we have contradiction related to personal identity.

At last our a posteriori reasoning about the matters of facts contradicts the manner we establish connection between two events (the problem of induction). The habit is formed as we observe repetitions of events A and B. But we cannot claim A and B are causally connected for this connection is sensually uncertain. Causal inference rests upon the habit but the habit is not reliable evidence. Hence, forming habits is self-defeating (contradictory).

Basis of human memory, senses, and reason form by imagination. Most dangerous for the reason is the outburst of imagination. Its activity inevitably implies contradictions which are responsible of the disorder of knowledge at the level of reason. Therefore senses condemn to fight, to oppose contradictory constructions of human mind, naturally to emerge due to its essence.

We see that Hume is reasoning about the contradictory phenomena embraced by the mind but these phenomena mutually inconsistent. They form a sort of constructions like antithetical unity.

I do hope the analysis of Hume's scholarly legacy permits us to rather firmly claim that elements of dialectics may be found in his key philosophical works.



## THE PROBLEM OF CULTURAL RELATIVISM IN HUME'S "A DIALOGUE"

**Henrik Bohlin**

On a scale from the most objective to the most subjective, moral judgements seem to fall somewhere between the extremes. Unlike some judgements of taste, statements about moral issues do not just express the peculiarities of the speaker's individual perspective. There can be reasons for and against moral judgements, such reasons can be good and bad, and if the reasons turn out to be insufficient, it makes sense to say that the judgement was mistaken. Unlike statements of physics or astronomy, moral verdicts arguably do not describe characteristics that reality might possess even if no moral thinkers existed, but presuppose a peculiarly human perspective on the world (possibly shared by some animals and extraterrestrials). However, this does not exclude the possibility that they may be valid independently of cultural background and other characteristics which differentiate the perspectives moral thinkers.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See, for instance, Jonathan Dancy, *Moral Reasons*. Oxford: Blackwell 1993, p. 147, Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1983, and Nicholas Rescher, *Objectivity: the Obligations of Impersonal Reason*. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997, pp. 3–8.

One of the most interesting aspects of David Hume's moral philosophy is that it gives an account of why and how the moral perspective is peculiarly human, which idiosyncratic factors make people form contradictory moral views, and how the influence of such factors can be counter-acted so that moral judgements can become less dependent on subjective idiosyncrasies and thus more objective. Vice and virtue, Hume claims, lie in the observer's own sentiments of approbation and disapprobation rather than in the observer-independent qualities of agents or their actions (T 3.1.1.26; SBN 468–469).<sup>2</sup> Since people's sentiments vary with self-interest and cultural background, among other things, moral thought requires the moral subject to adopt a "common" or "general" point of view, the perspective of an impartial and well-informed observer who has compensated for idiosyncratic biases (T 3.3.1.15; SBN 581, EPM 9.6; SBN 272;<sup>3</sup> cf. also T 3.3.1.14; SBN 581, T 3.2.10.15; SBN 563).<sup>4</sup>

This appears to invite cultural relativism, the view that moral judgements are valid only relative to some particular culture or

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<sup>2</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (originally published 1739–1740), ed. David Fate Norton & Mary J. Norton. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000. References to the *Treatise* are given in the text as "T" followed by book, part, section, and paragraph number in the Norton edition, followed by "SBN" and the page number in the earlier edition of the same work by L.A. Selby-Bigge, 2nd ed., rev. P.H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978.

<sup>3</sup> David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (originally published 1751), ed. Tom L. Beauchamp. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998. References are given in the text as "EPM" followed by book, part, section, and paragraph number in Beauchamp's edition, followed by "SBN" and the page number in *Enquiries Concerning the Principles of Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. L.A. Selby-Bigge, rev. P.H. Nidditch. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.

<sup>4</sup> On the common point of view, cf. e.g. Jacqueline Taylor, "Hume on the Standard of Virtue", *The Journal of Ethics*. Vol. 6, No. 1, 2002, pp. 43–62, and Rachel Cohon, *Hume's Morality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, chapter 5, pp. 126–158.

tradition, and thus do not have universal validity; what is right in one culture may be wrong in another. Hume's most thorough discussion of the question whether moral values are universal or culturally relative is in the essay "A Dialogue" (1751), originally conceived as part of the collection of essays that were later rewritten in monograph form and published as *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals*.<sup>5</sup>

As I interpret "A Dialogue", Hume opposes relativism and contends that what appears to be cultural relativity in moral standards will, in each particular case, on closer scrutiny turn out to be something else. Sometimes when traditions conflict, one side can be shown right and the other wrong by arguments from principles which both accept. In other cases, right and wrong is dependent on external circumstances. In these two types of cases, one may talk of integration of conflicting perspectives. But there are also other types of disagreement: the issue in dispute may be genuinely uncertain, or the dispute may concern a morally indifferent matter of taste, or be caused by irrationality on one side or the other.

In what follows, I will first place the problem in the larger context of Hume's moral theory, especially the notion of a common point of view, and then take a closer look at Hume's argument in the "Dialogue".

### *Moral sentiments and the common point of view*

According to Hume, morality is "the object of feeling, not of reason" (T 3.1.1.26; SBN 469). Vice and virtue are known by pleasure and pain, or satisfaction and dissatisfaction, of the particular kind that we feel when contemplating a character or an action (T 3.1.2.3; SBN 471). Perceiving the pleasure and pain of others makes us feel pleasure and pain ourselves because we have the

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<sup>5</sup> Tom L. Beauchamp, "Introduction. A History of the Enquiry on Morals", in EPM, pp. xvii, xliii.



capacity to sympathise with others, to “receive by communication their inclinations and sentiments, however different from, or even contrary to our own” (T 2.1.11.2; SBN 317).<sup>6</sup> Thus sympathy is the source of non-egoistic sentiments, and “the chief source of moral distinctions” (T 3.3.6.1–2; SBN 618–619).<sup>7</sup>

The capacity for fellow-feeling is sensitive to disturbing factors, or circumstances other than the moral qualities of the action or character judged. We are more disposed to sympathise with people who share our customs, character, nationality, or language, and with people who are close to us in time and space (T 3.3.1.14–15; SBN 581–582). Moreover, the disposition to sympathy is affected by “the present disposition of our mind” (T 3.3.1.16; SBN 582), and, perhaps most importantly, by the observer’s self-interest (T 3.3.1.18; SBN 583). Moral thinkers need to be aware of such disturbing factors and compensate for them. To counteract the effects of self-interest, the observer considers the ways in which the action or personality under consideration affects, not himself, but those who are most directly affected by it (T 3.3.1.17; SBN 582). To neutralise the influence of differences in temporal and special distance, he imagines what it would be like *if* he were to perceive the action or person at a closer or otherwise more appropriate distance. Thus, moral thinkers arrive at the right point of view from which to make considered moral judgements: the common, or steady and general, point of view.

It is impossible we could ever converse together on any reasonable terms, were each of us to consider characters and persons only as they appear from his peculiar point of view. In order, therefore, to prevent those continual *contradictions* and arrive at a more *stable* judgment of things, we fix on some *steady* and *general* points of view; and al-

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<sup>6</sup> See, for instance, Geoffrey Sayre-McCord, “On Why Hume’s ‘General Point Of View’ Isn’t Ideal — and Shouldn’t Be”, *Social Philosophy & Policy* Vol. 11, No. 1, 1994, pp. 202–228, 205–207.

<sup>7</sup> For Hume’s view on egoism, see EPM, Appendix 2.

ways, in our thoughts, place ourselves in them, whatever may be our present situation. (T 3.3.1.15; SBN 581–582.)

Thus, although moral judgements are grounded in sentiments, they do not merely express the subjective and idiosyncratic perspectives of individual subjects. Considered moral judgement is based on the sentiments of an observer who has carefully compensated for any peculiarities in perspective which separate him from other observers — generality — and from himself when observing the same thing at other occasions — steadiness. Hume draws an analogy to the extra-moral phenomenon that external objects sometimes appear differently to different observers, and to the same observer at different times (T 3.3.3.2; SBN 603). If each observer spoke only from his peculiar point of view and described external objects as they appeared to him at each occasion, without any awareness of how his point of view influences appearances, then each observer would fall into constant contradiction with others, and with himself at different points of time. Hume's claim is that this holds for judgements on external objects and moral judgements alike. In both cases we need to compensate for differences in points of view, so that each observer strives to express, not so much how things appear to him at any particular occasion, but rather how they appear independently of idiosyncrasies in his individual point of view.

Hume thus at times seems to think that moral judgements, uttered from a common point of view, are as capable of universal validity and objectivity as non-moral statements about the external world. But does not diversity of moral perspectives block any such conclusion? It may be possible within a particular culture or tradition to adjudicate moral issues by adopting a common point of view, but cannot the common point of view in one culture, tradition, or group, be an outlandish and entirely unacceptable outlook in another? Or does the apparent diversity of values in fact conceal a deeper agreement on certain underlying cross-culturally valid

moral principles? In the “Dialogue”, Hume addresses this meta-ethical problem in the semi-literary form of an imagined debate between a cultural relativist and a defender of moral universality.

### *The problem of cultural relativism*

“A Dialogue” begins with a story reminiscent of Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, one of Hume’s sources of inspiration.<sup>8</sup> The narrator’s friend Palamedes describes a journey to the strange country of Fourli, where people are highly civilized and intelligent, but where siblings are allowed to marry, murder and suicide are accepted and sometimes even strongly admired, and it is customary for older married men to have open homosexual relations with younger lovers. The narrator, appalled by the account, questions its veracity and argues that such “barbarous and savage” customs go against human nature (Dial. 12; SBN 328).<sup>9</sup> But Palamedes replies that he has all along only been talking of the ancient Greeks and Romans, using exotic names to disguise well-known historical figures; the suicide of the Fourlian Alcheic is a parallel to that of Socrates, the murder of Usbek to that of Caesar, and so on. The real point, he explains, was to demonstrate the cultural relativity of morals.

I only meant to represent the uncertainty of all these judgments concerning characters; and to convince you, that fashion, vogue, custom, and law, were the chief foundation of all moral determinations. The Athenians surely, were a civilized, intelligent people, if ever there

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<sup>8</sup> Emilio Mazza, “Cannibals in ‘A Dialogue’ (In Search of a Standard for Morals)”, in *Instruction and Amusement: Le ragioni dell’illuminismo britannico*, eds. E. Mazza & E. Ronchetti. Padova: Il Poligrafo, 2005, p. 55.

<sup>9</sup> “A Dialogue” will be cited in the text as “Dial. ”, followed by the section and paragraph number in Beauchamp’s edition of *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (EPM), and “SBN”, followed by the page number in the Selby-Bigge-Nidditch edition of the same work.

were one; and yet their man of merit might, in this age, be held in horror and execration. The French are also, without doubt, a very civilized, intelligent people; and yet their man of merit might, with the Athenians, be an object of the highest contempt and ridicule, and even hatred... How shall we pretend to fix a standard for judgments of this nature (Dial. 25; SBN 333)?

The narrator replies that there is in fact a way to establish such a standard, namely, to identify the more general and fundamental principles underlying the manifold of moral notions among men. The same force of gravity makes the Rhine flows north and the Rhone south because of the different inclinations of the ground on which they run; similarly, people always reason from the same moral principles, but draw very different conclusions from them. Although religion, language, laws, and customs have changed in countless ways since antiquity, “none of these revolutions has ever produced any considerable innovation in the primary sentiments of morals”. Moral views differ because an action or trait can be more valuable in certain external circumstances than in others, and because people sometimes disagree about the degree to which actions and traits have beneficial consequences (Dial. 26; SBN 333, Dial. 36; SBN 335–336).

In periods of war, a higher value is placed on military virtues than in peaceful times (Dial. 39; SBN 337). Politeness is more important in densely populated countries than where the population is sparse (Dial. 49; SBN 340). Inflexible rigour and integrity may be beneficial for society and personal safety in some ages and countries but not in others (Dial. 40; SBN 337). In such cases, variation in moral outlooks only reflects the differences in circumstances, and the fact that some virtues “better suit the circumstances of one age than those of another”. On a deeper level, there is no real conflict of values.

In other cases, there is genuine disagreement, resolvable by argument. That “the principles upon which men reason in morals are always the same” does not imply

that they all reason aright with regard to this subject, more than with regard to any other... It is sufficient, that the original principles of censure or blame are uniform, and that erroneous conclusions can be corrected by sounder reasoning and larger experience (Dial. 36; SBN 336).

Hence, the way to reconcile some moral disputes is to decide the issue by argument, drawing on general principles which both sides accept, showing one side to be right and the other to be mistaken.

There can also be real but faultless disagreement about some matters of value. Hume mentions two kinds of reasons for this. First, moral principles lack sufficient precision to provide determinate answers for all questions to which they apply, and the same principles may provide equally good reasons for both of two opposing views. For instance, although sexual relations between close relatives are generally considered to be wrong, that principle does not specify the precise allowable degree of proximity in family relations, and therefore does not answer the question whether marriage between half-siblings should be allowed. The Athenians may have gone too far in one direction, or we in the other (Dial. 29; SBN 334). Second, there are no universal standards for some aesthetic matters. Despite the general constancy of moral and aesthetic sentiments, Hume writes, there exist “some minute differences”. While few eighteenth century Britons would find a low forehead and joined eye-brows attractive, the former was considered a mark of beauty by Horace and the latter by the Greek poet Anacreon (Dial. 36; SBN 336). These are matters of aesthetic taste, and although Hume does not explicitly say so, the principle *de gustibus non est disputandum* seems applicable to them. How-

ever, the absence of objective standards for the attractiveness of joined eye-brows does not imply absence of objective standards for all aesthetic issues, much less for all matters of value.

### *Aesthetic judgement in ‘Of the Standard of Taste’*

In the “Dialogue”, Hume only hints at the question whether there can exist universal standards for aesthetic judgements. The essay “Of the Standard of Taste”, however, is specifically devoted to this problem.<sup>10</sup> The main tendency of the argument is the same. Hume argues that aesthetic judgement requires the adopting of a special point of view; he searches for general principles or rules “by which the various sentiments of men may be reconciled; at least, a decision, afforded, confirming one sentiment, and condemning another”; he claims that there exist general principles of taste which are uniform in human nature and “whose influence a careful eye may trace in all operations of the mind”; and he maintains that rational argumentation about matters of taste is therefore possible. However, because of differences in individual dispositions and culture “the different humours of particular men” and “the particular manners and opinions of our age and country”, there can also be faultless disagreement in some matters; “a certain degree of diversity in judgment is unavoidable, and we seek in vain for a standard, by which we can reconcile the contrary sentiments” (EMPL, p. 229–239, 243–244).

Like the “Dialogue”, the “Standard of Taste” deals with a problematic test case for the idea of universality in value discourse. The analysis of aesthetic judgement develops the previous discussion in the *Treatise* and “Dialogue” further in several ways. Hume

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<sup>10</sup> David Hume, “Of the Standard of Taste”, in D. Hume, *Essays, Moral, Political, Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller. Indianapolis: Liberty Classics, 1985, pp. 226–249. The *Essays* will henceforth be cited in the text as “EMPL”, followed by the page number in Miller’s edition.

emphasises the importance for proper judgement of making comparisons with other artistic works and of practising one's aesthetic sense to enhance its "delicacy", the capacity to identify and clearly distinguish aspects of a work that are relevant to its assessment (EMPL, p. 238, 241) — a capacity which appears equally important in moral judgement. Perhaps most interesting for our present purposes is the way in which Hume draws attention to what hermeneutic philosophers have later called the fore-understanding, or horizon of understanding, of both the critic and the other (the author, speaker, agent, or artist subject to aesthetic criticism or moral evaluation).

An orator addresses himself to a particular audience, and must have a regard to their particular genius, interests, opinions, passions, and prejudices; otherwise he hopes in vain to govern their resolutions, and inflame their affections. ... A critic of a different age or nation, who should peruse this discourse, must have all these circumstances in his eye, and must place himself in the same situation as the audience, in order to form a true judgment of the oration. ... A person influenced by prejudice, complies not with this condition; but obstinately maintains his natural position, without placing himself in that point of view, which the performance supposes. ... Full of the manners of his own age and country, [he] rashly condemns what seemed admirable in the eyes of those for whom alone the discourse was calculated. ... So far his taste evidently departs from the true standard; and of consequence loses all credit and authority (EMPL, pp. 239–240).<sup>11</sup>

Hume thus emphasises the importance in historical and cross-cultural interpretation of acknowledging differences between interpreter and other in background beliefs and attitudes. This crucial aspect of interpretation and criticism between traditions is less de-

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<sup>11</sup> On Hume as a theorist of interpretation, see Henrik Bohlin, "Sympathy, Understanding, and Hermeneutics in Hume's Treatise", *Hume Studies*. Vol. 35, No. 1 & 2, 2009, pp. 135–170.

veloped in the “Dialogue”, but the core idea is already well formulated when the narrator, having heard Palamedes lay out his argument for cultural relativism, responds by saying “Would you try a Greek or Roman by the common law of England? Hear him defend himself by his own maxims; and then pronounce” (Dial. 18; SBN 330).

### *The problem of “artificial lives”*

Towards the end of “A Dialogue”, Palamedes directs the narrator’s attention to another type of value conflict, which involves the “artificial lives and manners” founded on the extreme teachings of certain philosophers. For example, he claims, Diogenes placed an excessively high value on living in independence of external things and other people, while Pascal valued dependence to an equally high degree; the former was a fierce enemy of superstition, while the latter believed in its “most ridiculous” forms; and so on. Again, Palamedes challenges the narrator to come up with a universal standard of morals, by which to decide conflicts between such teachings or between them and more commonsensical value systems (Dial. 52–56; SBN 341–343).

In his short reply, the narrator admits that there can in fact be no such standard.

When men depart from the maxims of common reason, and affect these *artificial* lives, as you call them, no one can answer for what will please or displease them. They are in a different element from the rest of mankind; and the natural principles of their mind play not with the same regularity, as if left to themselves, free from the illusions of religious superstition or philosophical enthusiasm (Dial. 57; SBN 343).

The notion of “artificial” moral views and sentiments may seem like an arbitrary conceptual device specifically designed to support



the narrator's case by hiding away possible cases of cultural relativity in an amorphous residual category. Let us take a closer look at this notoriously difficult concept, beginning with the question what Hume means by "artificial".<sup>12</sup>

When Hume in the *Treatise* discusses the question whether justice is a natural or artificial virtue, he differentiates three main senses of the word "natural". The natural can be opposed, first, to the miraculous, or super-natural, second, to the unusual, and third, to the artificial, or the result of human invention (T 3.1.2.8–10; SBN 474–475). Justice is a natural virtue in the first and second but not the third sense. Even this, however, can be legitimately disputed.

Mankind is an inventive species; and where an invention is obvious and absolutely necessary, it may as properly be said to be natural as any thing that proceeds immediately from original principles, without the intervention of thought or reflexion. Though the rules of justice be artificial, they are not arbitrary. Nor is the expression improper to call them Laws of Nature; if by natural we understand what is common to any species, or even if we confine it to mean what is inseparable from the species (T 3.2.1.19; SBN 484).

The word "artificial" can thus refer either quite generally to that which is created by humans, or only to that which is humanly invented *and* is not "obvious and absolutely necessary". In the dis-

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<sup>12</sup> On the notion of artificial lives, see Kate Abramson, "Hume on Cultural Conflicts of Values", *Philosophical Studies*, Vol. 94, 1999, pp. 180–183, James King, "Hume on Artificial Lives with a Rejoinder to A.C. MacIntyre", *Hume Studies* Vol. 14, No. 1, 1988, Hans Lottenbach, "Monkish Virtues, Artificial Lives: On Hume's Genealogy of Morals", *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 26, No. 3, 1996, Michelle Mason, "Moral Prejudice and Aesthetic Deformity: Rereading Hume's 'Of the Standard of Taste'", *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, Vol. 59, pp. 59–71, 2001, and Gerhard Streminger, "Religion a Threat to Morality: An Attempt to Throw Some New Light on Hume's Philosophy of Religion", *Hume Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 2, 1989, pp. 277–294.

cussion of “natural” and “artificial” virtues, the latter term clearly has the first, wider sense. It is not entirely obvious which of the complementary senses of “natural” Hume is implying when, in the “Dialogue”, he says that the “natural principles” of the mind in artificial lives “play not with same regularity, as if left to themselves, free from the illusions of religious superstition or philosophical enthusiasm” (Dial. 57; SBN 343). However, when he calls entire moral systems “artificial”, it seems clear that he uses that word in the latter, narrower sense. Thus, “artificial” moral systems are such that are invented by humans in ways that are not “obvious and absolutely necessary”. Unfortunately, this is not a very illuminating distinction in a reflection on cross-cultural moral criticism, since cultures are in general equally artificial and natural even in this sense.

A striking aspect of disagreement due to “artificial” moral views is that, from the viewpoint of a disputant whose natural moral sentiments have *not* been distorted, the “artificial” views seem not only wrong, but morally reprehensible to the degree that they cannot be tolerated as permissible although perhaps regrettable variations in moral outlook; the moral subject whose judgement is uncorrupted cannot resolve the disagreement by argument, and cannot simply accept to live with it. Even more clearly than in the “Dialogue”, Hume recognises the possibility of such thoroughly radical going disagreement in his essay “The Sceptic”.

Where one is born of so perverse a frame of mind, of so callous and insensible a disposition, as to have no relish for virtue and humanity, no sympathy with his fellow-creatures, no desire of esteem and applause; such a one must be allowed entirely incurable, nor is there any remedy in philosophy. He reaps no satisfaction but from low and sensual objects, or from the indulgence of malignant passions: He feels no remorse to control his vicious inclinations: He has not even that sense or taste, which is requisite to make him desire a better character: For my part, I know not how I should address myself to such a

one, or by what arguments I should endeavour to reform him (EMPL, p. 169).

As examples of issues of such radical disagreement today, we may think of religiously motivated repression of women<sup>13</sup> or violent religious fundamentalism—Hume’s category of artificial lives in “A Dialogue”, I believe, has a much larger importance than the teachings of a few eccentric philosophers.

### *Conclusion*

Moral approbation and disapprobation, in Hume’s view, are contingent upon human sentiments, but can nevertheless have universal validity. Morality, he writes, depends on “some internal sense or feeling, which nature has made universal in the whole species” (EPM 1.9; SBN 173). Underlying the superficial diversity of moral outlooks, there are deeper principles, accepted or potentially accepted by everyone except those whose natural sentiments have been distorted, by “artificial” philosophical teachings or otherwise. But those universal moral standards are not necessarily explicitly and generally acknowledged from the outset. They may have to be discovered by philosophical reflection, or by cross-cultural discussion.

It seems to me that Hume in the “Dialogue” in effect lays out a theoretical framework and methodology for such critical and self-critical reflection on other cultures and one’s own. When the moral thinker finds himself in disagreement with others over a moral issue and argumentation back and forth does not seem enough to resolve the matter, he ought to adopt a common, or steady and general point of view, thus imagining himself being in the place of the

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<sup>13</sup> Susan Moller Okin, “Is multiculturalism bad for women?”, in S. Moller Okin, *Is multiculturalism bad for women?*, eds. Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard & Martha C. Nussbaum. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999, pp. 7–26.

people most directly affected, and so on. If disagreement remains, he may ask himself whether the issue is perhaps a simple matter of taste over which there can be faultless disagreement. If not, the disagreement may be taken as indication of a real gap between traditions. He then needs to take into consideration the nature of the other's tradition and his own. What are the background beliefs and attitudes — the “interests, opinions, passions, and prejudices” — of the others, and, by contrast, of his own time, culture, or particular group? Are the other's views or actions justified against that background? If so, are there good reasons for the background beliefs themselves in the external circumstances of the other's conditions of life (their being involved in military contention, for instance)? Are the other's different underlying principles and standards such that on closer scrutiny, the conflict with those of the critic turns out to be a genuinely uncertain matter (such as the exact limits for incest)? If not, can shared principles be identified on a more fundamental level such that on the basis of these one side can be shown right and the other wrong? Or must the other's views be dismissed as the outcome of bad reasoning beyond the point of rational corrigibility?

Hume recognises the possibility that even the best attempts at dialogue and integration may fail because there is no common ground for argumentation with the other, or too little of it. If the issue of disagreement is a morally significant one, then, it seems, we ought to stick to what we after the most careful critical reflection and self-reflection possible find to be right. Thus we do not adopt a stance of tolerance and openness towards superstition, dogmatism, and fanaticism.

A possibility that Hume does *not* explicitly consider in the “Dialogue” is that not only the moral judgements of others but equally those of oneself may be products of distorted moral sentiments. To use somewhat anachronistic examples, sexism, racism, or ethnocentrism can be deeply ingrained in our way of seeing the

world, to the point where we do not even think of them as such. Whether or not Hume clearly recognises the need for such self-critical reflection on one's own perspective and culture, it is in many ways a version of the cultural criticism in which he and other Enlightenment thinkers excelled.

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